

ZIYA GÖKALP ON SOCIETY AND ECONOMICS IN TURKEY

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October 25, 1974 was the 50th anniversary of the death of Ziya Gökalp, the influential intellectual leader of the Turkish Renaissance. There is no doubt that the half century which has elapsed since his death has made some of Gökalp's contentions and views obsolete. But as Turkish society indulges in serious discussion to chart the future course to be followed there may be some use to refresh our memories of some of the main issues with which Gökalp dealt. They are the sort of topics which can stand the test of time and retain currentness. In the confines of this paper, an attempt will be made to analyze Gökalp's views on some select social and economic issues. Most of what Gökalp had to say on social and economic matters later found expression in the twin Republican principles of populism and etatism. Populism was used by the Republican leaders to preserve social harmony and etatism to foster state-sponsored economic development. However, before Gökalp could address himself to more specific issues like populism and etatism, he had to deal with the more basic issue of how to accommodate non-Western cultures (like the Turkish culture) with Western civilization. So, before taking up Gökalp's views on society and economics, we shall briefly dwell upon his contentions on the interaction of Turkish culture and Western civilization. But, first a word about the man and the type of influence he exerted on republican Turkey.

Ziya Gökalp (1876 – 1924) was one of the main intellectual leaders of the Turkish Renaissance and the reason his views and thinking have been singled out is his considerable influence over the Kemalist action program. Here, 'considerable influen-

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ce' should not be taken to be only on a personal basis; that is Gökalp influencing Mustafa Kemal or other top leaders personally, because of frequent personal contact with them. But rather, it is a matter of the Turkish leaders, including Mustafa Kemal, being intellectually nurtured in an atmosphere, to which Gökalp's contribution was significant. Gökalp, who led a secluded life, was extremely shy and introversive. He lived almost in privation and did not assume responsible public office for long; nor had he any political ambitions. Judging by various accounts of his life¹, he was not a man of action. Yet, he had an exceptional charismatic power over the youth of Turkey and even over Young Turk politicians. He was the type of intellectual not infrequently found in the East: a spiritual guide, a "mürşit" (an inspirer)².

We do not know quite how Kemal was influenced by Gökalp's ideas, except that he read Gökalp's writings regularly; particularly his contributions to *Yeni Mecmua* (The New Magazine), which Gökalp edited in the capital city of İstanbul, between 1917 - 1919³. It was only in the early 1920 s that Kemal and Gökalp met, had a number of discussions, and Gökalp went on extensive tours of Anatolia, propagating the nationalist cause as well as giving support to Kemal in *Küçük Mecmua* (the Little Magazine), which he published in his home town, Diyarbakır, in south-east Anatolia. Just before his death, upon Kemal's suggestion, Gökalp briefly represented his native Diyarbakır in the National Assembly, and it was during this time that he worked as a member of the committee preparing the 1924 Turkish Constitution⁴. Thus, he was able to leave his imprint on the document which constituted the source of future reforms to come in the Turkish Republic.

1 For well-documented accounts of Gökalp's life and his writings, see: Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism* (London, 1950); Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, Niyazi Berkes, editor and translator) (London, 1959); and Cavit Orhan Tütengil, *Ziya Gökalp Hakkında bir Bibliyografya Denemesi* (A Bibliographical Study of Ziya Gökalp) (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Yayınlarından, No. 13, 1949).

2 Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, *Op. Cit.*, translator's introduction, pp. 13-15.

3 A lifelong associate of Mustafa Kemal, the prominent journalist, Falih Rifkî Atay, disclosed that Kemal and some of the future nationalist leaders used to read this publication quite regularly. (The author's personal interview with Falih Rifkî Atay, 27 March 1970).

4 Heyd, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 11-13.

The main trends of the Turkish Republic which Gökâlp seems to have influenced, or where there was a convergence of his ideas and the Kemalist practice are the issues of nationalism and the nation-state, Westernism, political and economic national independence, and solidarism and populism. The only major deviation in Kemalist practice from Gökâlp's thinking was over the issue of religion. Whereas Gökâlp's secularism aimed at adjusting Islam to Turkish life and re-arranging its institutions accordingly (including the Caliphate), Mustafa Kemal abolished these institutions and attempted to replace Islam with a completely new set of values. As a result of this divergence, Gökâlp both during his lifetime, and later, came under attack and criticism, but Mustafa Kemal maintained his friendly attitude towards him, until Gökâlp's death⁵.

The recurrent theme in Gökâlp's writings was the question of how the Turks should adopt Western Civilization, and how this effort should be harmonized with the Turks' two historic traditions; their Turkish and Islamic backgrounds, or, in other words, what the Turks as a nation and Islam as their religion would look like under the conditions of contemporary civilization⁶.

Gökâlp believed that the three ideologies of Islamism⁷, Westernism⁸, and Turkism⁹ were not, in reality incompatible with one another and that they would be even complementary

5 Gökâlp, *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

7 Islamism surfaced as an ideology at the end of the 19th century and became the subject of extensive discussion until the Republic. Islamists believed that the Ottoman Empire's regression had been caused by deviation from its original Islamic foundations. This deviation consisted in the acceptance of Western ideas and institutions alien to the spirit of the Empire. They claimed that a return to the doctrine of original Islam was the sole means of revitalizing the Empire, but that this did not preclude borrowing technology from the West, for Islam was adaptable to science and progress.

8 Westernism had gained ground in Turkey since early contacts with Europe. Westernists advocated that in order to attain the West's level of development and gain its recognition and respect, it was essential to imitate Western models in all fields. To Westernists modernization was an inescapable necessity and they believed that the State had a major responsibility both in carrying out reforms and defending them against the old order. Although some of them were anti-clerical, Westernists believed in Islam as a faith and in its universal values.

9 Turkism and Pan-Turanism constituted an early form of nationalism, not based on the concept of a nationstate but a new Empire uniting all the Turks in all parts of the world under the Turkish banner, based on cultural affinity and living in the legendary great country, the Turan.

to each other within the framework of the modern nation. According to Gökalp, Westernization was not only compatible with Turkey's national culture, but was even indispensable to its flourishing. A full-fledged national culture could come into existence only when its raw material, still on an ethnic and folk level, was worked with the fresh techniques of a civilization to which many nations had contributed. Similarly, there was no incompatibility between Western civilization and Islam, according to Gökalp. In order to defend this thesis, Gökalp had to refute two contentions of the Islamists which were shared by many Europeans and were a constant sore point and dilemma for the Westernists: he rejected the idea that Islam was a civilization and that Western civilization was synonymous with Christianity. Therefore, the acceptance of contemporary Western civilization had nothing to do with either nationality or faith. The confusion on this point was due to a confusing of culture with civilization¹⁰. Gökalp, with these assertions, was, in fact preparing the ideological ground for later Turkish borrowings from the West. Turkey, according to Gökalp, could borrow not only a technology, but also various institutions without a conflict situation arising with indigenous cultural element. At this stage, Gökalp did not obviously see secularization as a possible solution to this dilemma. Instead, he went on to show that the cultural background of the Turkish people was conducive to receiving contemporary Western civilization.

Most of his contemporaries thought that it was not. Gökalp, on the other hand, wanted to demonstrate the contrary. By using a dubious interpretation of history based on bold generalizations, he proclaimed that the basic Turkish national characteristics were not those salient features of the so-called Oriental institutions which were regarded as contrary to modern civilization. The real, genuine cultural heritage of the Turk was embedded in the pre-Islamic days in the steppes of Central Asia. (Later on in the 1930 s, this theory was revived by Mustafa Kemal in his efforts to de-throne Islam and instil a new set of values in the Turkish people.)

In matters of political organization Gökalp was strongly affected by Durkheim's collectivist philosophy, which seemed

¹⁰ Gökalp, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

to coincide with the Islamic tradition of fraternity and equality among believers. He had defended, until 1913, the idea of a multi-national state, but afterwards, accepting the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire as inevitable, he advocated the one-nation state and applied Durkheim's ideas to it. The 'society' of Durkheim became the 'nation' of Gökalp. The 'nation' was the source of all ideas, the supreme moral authority, the highest ethical arbiter of conduct. These views of Gökalp were in line with the Islamic tradition of the omnipotence of the State as was the case in the Empire and influenced the attitude of the Republicans over the preponderance of the State. The individual, for Gökalp, had one main reason for existence; to serve the purpose of the group or community. He denied the individual's freedom of will, for the individual unwittingly obeyed the ideals of his society. Individualism for Gökalp was a source of despair and frustration, the end of ethical principles¹¹. This idea that the individual's happiness lies in emotional subservience to the group became nationalism's chief feature in Republican Turkey and was used to justify paternalistic yet arbitrary rule 'for the people but not by the people.'

Gökalp believed that one of the main pillars that a modern nation-state rested on was its economy. He devoted a good of his articles appearing in *Yeni Mecmua*, to the subject of economics. According to Gökalp, the modern state was based on large-scale industry. New Turkey, to be a modern state had to develop a national industry. In this process, techniques (technology) and policies could be borrowed from the more advanced countries as long as they could be modified to suit local conditions. But he thought that previous governments had borrowed indiscriminately and without making the requisite modifications. He was very critical of the Manchester School which he thought had dominated Turkish economic thinking far too long:

"Everybody knows that Manchester economics is not at all a cosmopolitan doctrine, that it is nothing but the national economics of England, which stands for big industry and, thus, derives only benefit from the freedom of exchange abroad and suffers no loss from it. It was the American economist John

11 Kemal Karpat, *Turkey's Politics* (Princeton, 1959) p. 26.

Ray and the Germany economist, Friedrich List, who discovered this truth; each developed a theory of national economy for his own country. The economists of other nations followed them. It was only we poor Turks who remained slaves of British economic theory, just as we still blindly imitate other nations and fail to free ourselves from cosmopolitanism in morality, in law, and in literature"¹².

The 'solution' lay in abandoning the 'wrong' policies of economic development which made everyone believe that "... the state is incapable of building industries; that it cannot encourage and protect national industry, that the municipal administration is unfit for economic enterprises and that economic enterprises are expected to be carried out only by individual and private companies."¹³

Gökalp believed that the main aim of building large scale industry could not be realized by private enterprise, at the early stage. Central and local government 'entrepreneurship' was needed. Gökalp had nothing against private citizens in business *per se*, for he advocated that once the State-established plants and industries became going and profitable concerns, then "... if private citizens, as individuals or as companies, want to buy them, they may be sold to them and new ones can be opened by the government."¹⁴

Gökalp was in matter of fact advocating the Japanese pattern of development where the government established and ran industrial concern which were 'privatized' as soon as they became profitable¹⁵. The similarity between Gökalp's views on economics and the actual practice during the 1920 s and 1930 s is striking. First of all, the main aim was the same: industrialization and establishment of large-scale industry. Secondly, Gökalp was of the opinion that this aim could not be accomplished in Turkey by private enterprise at the early stage. Kemalists arrived at the same conclusion after the experience of the 1920 s, and adopted etatism. Thirdly, neither Gökalp nor the Kemalists

12 Gökalp, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

13 Ziya Gökalp, "İktisadi Mucize" (Economic Miracle) *Küçük Mecmua*, No. 23 (Diyarbakır, 1922) p. 13.

14 Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish, Nationalism, Op. Cit.*, p. 309.

15 Ignacy Sachs, *Patterns of Public Sector in Underdeveloped Economies*, (Bombay, 1964) p. 86.

were prejudiced against private enterprise, and Gökalp advocated and the Kemalists took measures to enhance it. There were even two abortive attempts, the first in the 1920 s and the second in the 1950 s to sell public concerns to the private enterprise, as Gökalp had suggested. Gökalp was of the opinion that Turkey should rely on her own resources for development and that is precisely what the Kemalists did, although they were not, as such, prejudiced against foreign capital. Gökalp's views on the role of the State in economic matters found an echo in etatist practices. He suggested one more reason to crown all the rest, why the State in Turkey should be assigned the main role in industrialization and development. He asserted that this was "... because Turks are temperamentally 'etatists'. They expect the State to take the initiative in everything new and progressive. Social changes are introduced through the State in Turkey, and it has been the State which has safeguarded social changes against the forces of reaction. Even revolutions are organized by the State in Turkey!"¹⁶

Gökalp's economic and social views seem to have been influenced by two sources: the German system of 'nationalist economy' and French 'Solidarism'.

According to Osman Tolga, he came into contact with German views on 'nationalist economy' through Friedrich List, who advocated state involvement in capital accumulation and investment¹⁷. Germany under Bismarck, after 1870, had made great strides in industry and a large class of workers had come into being. In the settlement of industrial disputes and the general direction of the economy, economists were in favour of more active state involvement, and at a meeting in Eisenach in 1872, the Manchester School of economic thought was severely criticised and the state was asked to assume responsibility to enable 'the bulk of the population to benefit from the fruits of civilization'. Towards the achievement of this goal and to study the problems involved, a society (Vereinfür Sozial Politik) was formed, in which List was an active member¹⁸.

16 Ziya Gökalp, "İktisadi İnkilâp". (Economic Revolution) *Küçük Mecmua*, No. 23 (Diyarbakır, 1923) p. 9.

17 Osman Tolga, *Ziya Gökalp ve İktisadi Fikirleri*, (Ziya Gökalp and his Economic Ideas) (İstanbul, 1949) p. 11.

18 Ekrem Özelmas, *Devletçilik ve Sümerbank* (Etatism and Sümerbank) (Ankara, 1963) p. 10.

According to Tolga, the views of List and other members of this Society, on 'nationalist economy', were introduced to the Turkish intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century, mostly through Turkish students returning from their studies in Germany¹⁹. Tolga further asserts that the "milli iktisat" (nationalist economy) policy of the Young Turks, attempting to create and encourage an indigenous bourgeoisie, was, in fact, a modified version of the 'nationalist economy' of the Bismarck period²⁰. So, it is quite possible for Gökalp to have blended his views on economics with views and ideas from Germany.

The second source of Gökalp's ideas was French solidarism which led him to expound views of populism. Solidarism was the main plank on the platform of the Radical-Socialist Party in France at the turn of the twentieth century. This party, which became the pivot of the political life of the Third Republic, provided the rallying point of all those who, in the economic sphere, were prepared to use the power of the state and encourage the activity of trade unions and co-operatives, to further educational and friendly societies; in other words, to transform a political into a social democracy.

Although the rise of Socialism in the late nineteenth century in France overshadowed this doctrine, Solidarism still could play a major part in galvanizing and rallying the protagonists of state intervention and voluntary association, uniting them in the task of building, by a series of piecemeal reforms, what has come to be known as the 'Welfare State'.²¹

Turkish society at the turn of the century was radically different from the French society for which Solidarism was being prescribed. Gökalp, nevertheless, advocated that the small, unorganized, and insignificant occupational groups in Turkey should be strengthened with State help to form the skeleton of a 'healthy' society²². For Gökalp, the Turkish version of solidarism meant the eradication of all clan, caste, class, race

19 Tolga, *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

21 J.E.S. Hayward, "The Official Social Philosophy of the French Third Republic: Leon Bourgeois and Solidarism" *International Review of Social History*, VI (1961) p. 19.

22 Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (Principles of Turkism) (İstanbul, 1939 edition) pp. 37-38.

differences in favour of close-knit occupational groupings, enjoying equal rights²³. He likened society to an organism in which occupational groupings constituted the living limbs. As societies progressed, the division of labour became more pronounced and the occupational groups exhibited more unity and gained more importance. This process was not, though, necessarily to result in a 'welfare state', as envisaged in France, whereby the individual were to reach new and higher levels of tangible and intangible consumption. But the strengthening of occupational groups would lead to the creation of a more powerful society, in which, the individual, still, would be of secondary importance²⁴. These views of Gökalp provided justification for a ruling system of theoretically 'of the people, for the people, but not by the people'. Nevertheless, the people, whose misery and complaints Gökalp understood, were to be protected by the State and he appealed to the intellectuals to "go to the people" and to bring Western civilization to the Anatolian villages²⁵. The sympathy that Gökalp had for the 'common villager' constituted the basis of his populism. The core idea of the Turkish version of populism, which Gökalp advocated, was the belief that there were no social classes in Turkey but only occupational groups, whose interests did not clash²⁶. All occupational groups were worthy of the support of the State and all should be provided for according to their needs²⁷. This all-providing, egalitarian, and 'neutral' concept of the State constituted the core of Republican social policy through the 1930 s and 1940 s.

Gökalp's solidarism reinforced the already prevalent belief of the supremacy of the State and the subservience of the individual to the higher ideals of the State. The solidarist view coupled with Gökalp's ideas on economics provided an ideological justification for etatism. The practice of etatism, parallel to Gökalp's ideas, was conducted in a way to enhance the power of the State rather than provide for the welfare of the individual.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

24 *Idem.*

25 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Gökalp may be criticised for not being 'original' and his views on social and economic policy may be considered simplistic and perhaps even quite naive. But he was still, as Professor Berkes has put it, "... the best intellectual formulator of the main trends of the Turkish Republic: Nationalism, Westernism, etatism and even his version of secularism. Although, in actual practice, there have been deviations from some of his contentions, it is still his style of thinking with regard to the basic issues which has intellectually dominated the modern reforms in Turkey"²⁸. Gökalp's contributions to and influence over various policies adopted by Kemalist Turkey have also been recognized by others. Webster takes this view when he states, "Gökalp's theories have become the policies of Kemalist Turkey"²⁹. Bernard Lewis called him "the outstanding theoretician of the Turkist movement and one of the architects of Republican Turkey"³⁰, and Hershlag asserted that, "... an extensive echo of Gökalp's ideas in the socio-economic sphere may be found in the general and economic policies of Republican Turkey"³¹.

Gökalp was a bridge between the intellectual environment of Europe and Republican Turkey; a very important one too.

28 Niyazi Berkes, "Ziya Gökalp: His Contribution to Turkish Nationalism", *The Middle East Journal*. (Autumn, 1954) p. 376.

29 Donald E. Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk* (Philadelphia, 1939) p. 141.

30 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, 1968) p. 350.

31 Z.Y. Hershlag, *Turkey: The Challenge of Growth* (Leiden, 1968) p. 14.