

Establishing the Active Unity of the People Against the Islamist Political Movement is a Historic Duty^[1]

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1. What Is Happening?

The pro-*Sharia*^[2] Welfare Party (RP – *Refah Partisi*) has gained 25% of the votes in Istanbul, and 15% throughout Turkey. It has thus emerged as a real threat in the political arena of the country. It is necessary above all to identify and to characterise this Islamist Welfare Party. Two aspects bear great importance in correct identification and characterisation: Firstly denomination, secondly the degree of characterisation.

DENOMINATION. Writers in numerous countries have been trying for years to find a suitable name to movements striving to establish an Islamic state, a state based on Sharia. Three names have come to the fore as a result of these attempts: Radical Islam, Islamic Fundamentalism, and Islamist Political Movement. The first two do not fully explain the phenomenon. The third, since it does not affront Muslims and Islam as a whole, and since it underlines primarily the political aspect of the movement, seems to be more correct.

DEGREE OF CHARACTERISATION. If we consider the Welfare Party, that is to say the Islamist Political Movement, as a phenomenon confined to the borders of Turkey, then we commit a serious error. The Islamist Political Movement is a worldwide, international menace. Therefore, not only the causes of development of the movement should be sought in domestic as well as international events, but also the measures of prevention should be perceived at national and international levels.

2. The Causes of Development of the Islamist Political Movement in Turkey

First of all, one point should be emphasised: the Islamist Political Movement is a political movement. It strives to mould religion and state as a single entity. Viewed from this particular characteristic, we see that the roots of the movement go back to the Middle Ages. However, this has no further use apart from historical information. The Islamist Political Movement, the concept of the state based on *Sharia*, are products of a Middle-Ages mentality, relics of that period. However, the causes of their development, though, should be sought and discovered **in the present**.

We should consider the causes of development of the Islamist Political Movement in two ways: internationally and domestically.

In all Muslim societies throughout the world today, an important reactivation is being observed in the Islamist Political Movement. However, it is essential we understand a point which will reveal to us the chain of causes on an international scale: the Islamist Political Movement is essentially a very serious threat in countries going through the process of transformation from a peasant society into a modern industrial society. The new economic order throughout the world and neo-liberalism have produced a certain economic growth at the periphery, and a huge increase in the expectations of the masses. The popular classes in these peripheral countries have nothing but unemployment and poverty. Yet a small minority of these societies have

begun to enjoy extraordinary and exaggerated wealth. The result of these circumstances today, when progressive ideology and politics have endured a terrible, nonetheless temporary defeat, on the workers has been a rise in the sensitivity to this situation and to the traditionalist reactions against the West, regarded as the 'source' of this situation.

With the collapse of the Soviet state-bureaucratic socialist system, Marxism, the only consistent progressive ideology capable of responding to the aspirations of the workers throughout the world, has received a terrible political shock. A huge vacuum has been created worldwide. The eruption of religious ideology in under-developed and middle-developed countries that we are observing today takes advantage precisely of the existence of such a vacuum. Since the Muslim religion is widespread in such countries, it has benefited from the largest share of this eruption. The rising Islamist political movement in these countries is generally reflecting the reaction of the petty bourgeois masses against the established order. However, it is not channelling this reaction against capitalism and imperialism in a progressive direction, but in a reactionary one. One should not be duped by the 'anti-establishment' rhetoric of this movement, nor should one have any illusions about establishing an order profitable to the working masses. The pro-*Sharia* movement is the greatest danger facing Turkey as well.

Apart from the fact that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxism, the only way for emancipation of the working people, has lost, though temporarily, its appeal, bourgeois-capitalist ideology too has been for a long time gripped by a deadly crisis. Not even the temporary difficulties endured by Marxist ideology have been capable of reviving capitalist ideology. Moreover, in Muslim societies, such an ideology is represented by an already feeble bourgeoisie. When compared with its counterparts in the West, the bourgeoisie is weak, ruthless, crude and vain in such countries; where, worldwide conjuncture aside, the working class and its ideology are powerless too.

Irrespective of reaching considerable quantitative levels in certain countries, this fact persists. This weakness finds its root causes in the short history of the working class, in its poor tradition of organisation, and in the downward tendency in the mean level of class consciousness due to rapid swelling of its ranks from the countryside.

Consequently, we may speak of a '**hegemony vacuum**' on social and political levels in those societies where the Islamist Political Movement looms as a threat. With their economy trapped within a chronic 'bottleneck-crisis-progress' cycle, and the positioning of the working class and the bourgeoisie as mentioned above, the only, truly functioning organisation, having a long past and covering every corner in these countries, is the religious organisation: mosques.

Coming now to the domestic causes of the strengthening of the pro-*Sharia* movement in Turkey, we note that some of these are reflections of causes with a worldwide relevance, whereas others are the results of developments specific to our country.

The economic development of Turkey (which cannot be underestimated) has been achieved to a large extent at the expense of the toiling masses. Having no external colonies in its possession, the bourgeoisie of Turkey has at every stage secured the accumulation of capital by impoverishing its own people. Consequently, a truly rapid and powerful industrial development has been accompanied by unbelievable levels of **unemployment, poverty, and lack of confidence** in the future throughout the society.

Since the process of transformation into a modern industrial society has not been carried out according to a specific plan and programme in Turkey, economic life for large masses in the agricultural sector has collapsed, the population has slumped, and many villages have been abandoned. The development of cities, on the other hand, has been deprived of any plan or programme, with masses of concrete devoid of any aesthetic appeal surrounded by shantytowns with an excessively concentrated population. The invisible and incomprehensible strength of capital has scattered people about like autumn leaves. Toilers do not have the least bit of control over their lives or the destiny of their families. The value of money drops by 30% overnight, and the dollar goes up by 50% the next day. ‘Who’ is doing this, and why? This invisible and awesome power of capital is contemplated as a metaphysical perception, as a ‘fate’.

We should fit into this picture some current political facts too. Following the military take-over of 1980, the ensuing political reshaping has split the centre-right and the centre-left into five parts. This artificial splitting has increased the relative importance of those parties having little support in society, such as the Welfare Party and Nationalist Action Party (MHP)^[3]. The revolutionary left, the only true alternative to the corrupt order, has become marginalised.

Following these developments, it became possible to speak about a ‘vacuum of hegemony’ in Turkey.

We must also emphasise in particular the incompetence of the bourgeois politicians since the times of the Democratic Party^[4]. Apart from Ismet İnönü and Erdal İnönü, all the politicians have striven to utilise religion for their own political interests. They paid their respects to and encouraged such advocates of a pro-*Sharia* state as the followers of the *Nakshibendi*, *Nurcu* and *Suleymancı*^[5] sects, as well as a long list of others. They vigorously pursued construction of mosques and Imam-Hatip schools^[6], and setting up Koran courses^[7] to serve their political interests.

The purpose of doing this was not to let religion prevail over the state, but rather to let religion favour their politics. A large majority of them were ‘secular’ politicians. Nevertheless, with the arrogance of the braggart bourgeoisie and with its pathological class blindness, they just could not see that utilising religion for political purposes would sooner or later end in **the use of politics and the state for religious purposes**. Or even if they did see, they did not bother for the sake of their short-term interests. If the obscurantist pro-*Sharia* Welfare Party has become a real threat to Turkish society, the main political responsibility lies with bourgeois politicians past and present.

Consequently, if the pro-*Sharia* party and the Islamist Political Movement are posing as a real threat to our society and our country, the reasons are not ‘divine’!

3. We Must Identify Precisely the Islamist Political Movement

The Welfare Party received 18% of the votes in the local elections. Nevertheless, taking into account the votes received by the Nationalist Action Party too, **today** 75% of society is against a state based on the rule of *Sharia*. In other words, the question is not, as some members of the intelligentsia mumble, whether to be afraid of the Welfare Party or not. We must, however, identify precisely the enemy before us. If we commit an error at this point, then the day to be really afraid will come. As regards the Islamist Political Movement, we must draw lessons from our own history as well as from developments in the world. The history of the Ottomans alone, from

the Chaldiran campaign of Yavuz^[8] to the War of Liberation^[9], cannot tell us what sort of hideous adversary society and the state are facing. The Islamist Political Movement is the enemy of all progress, and is the main historical obstacle holding back the liberation of the Anatolian people from backwardness.

Apart from Ottoman history, events in Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan and Iran today illustrate clearly how we are up against a movement totally hostile to democracy in every respect. Blood flows freely wherever the Islamist Political Movement enters. In those countries where timely precautions are not taken, together **with the people**, and in an efficient manner, even the armies are split, and society falls helpless under its dark control.

In order to study the general characteristics of the Islamist Political Movement, it might be useful to divide them into two parts, namely 'in opposition' and 'in power', as well as examining its world-wide repercussions.

Characteristics of the Islamist Political Movement in Opposition

1. Whatever is written in the party programme, the aim of the Islamist Political Movement is to establish an 'Islamist state', that is, a 'state based on *Sharia*'. It wants to unify religion and the state, to subordinate the state to religion.
2. It is an anti-secular movement. Secularism is regarded as an insult, as infidelity. As can be observed throughout the world, by increasing social tension, by creating conflict at every level of society, and by aggravating this conflict, it splits the whole of society into the secular and the religious.
3. In order to be able to survive, this movement is a mortal enemy of class reality. Since it splits the society into believers and infidels, it overshadows class reality, suppresses it and diminishes class potential.
4. It splits and dismembers democratic organisations and institutions at every level of society. Hence, it once again overshadows class reality and diminishes class potential.
5. Who are organised by the Islamist Political Movement?
 - a. Those 'rootless' people who break away from the traditional lifestyle and congregate in cities, but cannot participate in production;
 - b. Simple commodity producers, tradesmen and artisans; in other words petty bourgeois producers;
 - c. The real invigorating force of the movement and its leading cadres are small businessmen, small capitalists, in other words the *non-monopoly bourgeoisie*.
6. Therefore, the class content of the Welfare Party is small capitalists, i.e. **non-monopoly bourgeoisie**, and to a certain extent small tradesmen.
7. This movement is totally against such notions as 'enlightenment', democracy, secularism and individual liberties.
8. This movement is against not only the reality of class, but the reality of nation as well. It defends the notion of religious community. It does not recognise national boundaries. It is perfectly aware of the fact that, if its march is halted at some point, if it cannot conquer the entire world, then it will collapse.
9. Precisely for these reasons, it will not accept the legal framework of any state. State laws are simply elements of evil to be abolished.

10. It is anti-democratic in the real sense of the word. It cannot be otherwise.
11. It does not recognise the notion of 'citizen' in society. All social units other than the family are also rejected.
12. It is a *jihad*^[10] movement. It has to wage war against and shed the blood of everybody who is not on its side or made a part of it. By definition and due to its structure it cannot be a peaceful movement. When Erbakan^[11] says 'we are coming to take revenge for the past fifty years', this is what he means.
13. It politicises without fail the whole of society. (This may seem a good thing to some, but the real consequences appear only after it seizes power. We will come back to this shortly.)
14. It cries out for culture, morals and justice, but at every step it engenders lack of culture, immorality and injustice.
15. Right from the beginning it blunts and lowers society's potential for reflection. It replaces wisdom, enquiry and logic with the acceptance of the 'absolute', and absolute obedience. Apart from the great harm this causes to society, the organisational advantages that it thus conceals are enormous. Compared with its adversaries, it is extremely disciplined. 'An order cut through iron.'
16. It engenders a cult of violence and denunciation throughout society. As has been observed concretely in Iran, small children through ignorance denounce their parents in the name of Islam.
17. It is a totalitarian movement right from the beginning. It brings order to every aspect of social life by attempting to squeeze everything into a single 'right'.

Characteristics of the Islamist Political Movement in Power

In Social and Political Life

1. The modern, secular state is overthrown and replaced by a state organised according to the canonical rules of Islam.
2. The structure of state authority is modified. Ideological (religious) sections assume the highest importance within the new authority.
3. A form of state that is in permanent crisis emerges. This crisis originates from the permanent conflict between the capitalist infrastructure and the superstructure (the new state).
4. In a similar manner a society living under permanent crisis and tension emerges. The excessive politicisation that it creates while in opposition gradually exhausts society and creates its antithesis. An apolitical society gradually develops. The persistent fall in the ratio of participation in Iran's elections is a proof of this fact.
5. It destroys the entire political system, and replaces it with the organs of the Sharia, canonical rule of Islam.
6. It monopolises political power in the hands of a religious 'eminence' or a small religious caste (a group of *hodjas*^[12]). This too has a very important reason. The social base, which supports it in opposition and carries it to the power consists of antagonist classes and strata. Since the tension created by the antagonism in this social base and power bloc is permanent, political centralisation in the hands of a small group or a single person becomes necessary.

7. The state, as an instrument of this centralisation, is enlarged in every possible direction and encroaches into every sphere. What finally emerges is an absolutist, **totalitarian** state.

8. Erbakan speaks of 'safeguarding national interests on the basis of justice in the Balkans, in Cyprus and in the Caucasus'. The Welfare Party, against imperialism in words, is itself a form of expansionism in the colours of Islam. "*The lawful order of the Welfare Party is a contemptible order which will exploit us, grind us down in wars, and will force us to acquire illegally and seize the hard work of other peoples*" (Emine Engin, "RP Won the Election Not the Struggle", *Kervan*, issue 36, April 1994, page 7.)

In the Economic Sphere

1. The fundamental duty of the state is to provide the external conditions of production. Whereas the emerging totalitarian anti-democratic state based on the canonical laws of Islam, because of its own ideological formation, creates on the contrary fetters on the external conditions of production.

2. The working of the law of value in the economy is restricted. The exchange of goods is not based on value; it depends on arbitrary decisions. In addition to this, some parts of the economy are developed or obscured according to the view taken by religious ideology. Consequently, in the Islamic state, a sort of anarchism develops in production and exchange.

3. Small capitalists, who make up the driving force and the leadership cadres of the Islamist Political Movement, change once they seize the economy and the state, promoting themselves into a big bourgeoisie. (This is what has happened in Iran.)

4. The Islamic State in Iran froze the minimum wage for ten years, and then was obliged to increase it by 300% on the fifteenth anniversary of its rule. On the other hand prices went up by 1,000-3,000%. As a consequence, the intense exploitation of labour and accumulation of capital are taking place. Observing similar tendencies in other countries, we may say that the freezing of wages through an intensive inflationary policy is a characteristic of the Islamic State.

5. But the denial to society of an objective judicial framework and the widespread sentiment of insecurity due to the permanent dispute within the ruling bloc is hampering the employment of this accumulation for long-term investment. The potential for economic development is declining.

6. The burden of an overbearing state on the economy is growing. The state has become more and more of a consumer, and public investments have declined at the same time.

7. The Islamist government has never been able to enforce monetary or legal measures efficiently. As a result of attempting to govern an industrialising or capitalist contemporary society with a 1300-years-old legal code, the Islamist bourgeois government is weakening the bourgeois state.

Crying out for morality, culture and justice while in opposition, the Islamist Political Movement drags the country, where it seizes power, back into the darkness of the middle ages. We will give three examples.

According to the figures released few months ago by the Iranian Ministry of Internal Affairs, in 1993, the number of persons buying a daily newspaper in a society of 60 million is less than 700,000. (In Turkey, this figure is around 4 million.)

According to official figures, in Horasan, a province with a population of less than 6 million, 4,000 people committed suicide in 1992. In the same year, the figure for the whole of England, with a population ten times bigger than that of Horasan, was only 600.

Hocatul Islam^[13] Mohammed Gazavi, an Islamic scholar and judge of the Shehriray district in the southern suburbs of Tehran, made a statement in September 1993 at the end of a trial. He stated that he found two brothers guilty of kidnapping a man and burning him to death, but he would not send them to prison because they were Muslims, whereas the murdered man was a religious pervert, a Bahai. He added that no compensation would be paid to the victim's family. Here is the culture, morality and justice of the state under the Sharia, canonical law of Islam!

4. What is the Correct Approach to the Islamic Political Movement?

As has been clearly demonstrated in recent months, people in Turkey are today very muddled. In particular those we call the intelligentsia, because of their spinelessness, seem to be very confused. Some 'democrats' say, 'I will vote for the Welfare Party'. Certain communists say, 'It is necessary to wage ideological struggle against these people'. But our intelligentsia in general (regrettably some class conscious workers join them) consider the question of the Welfare Party as that of freedom of faith, a question of democracy.

What sort of an understanding of 'democracy' is this? It is precisely the 'abstract', supra-class concept of democracy of the petty bourgeois intellectual that is completely out of contact with reality. No freedom, no democracy is without bounds. Every freedom has a framework and 'reference point' that determines it. If these do not exist, then there is no freedom either.

To attempt to consider the question of the Welfare Party from the point of view of freedom of faith or as a question of democracy is an error right from the beginning. It is above all a methodological error. To discuss the subject from that point of view is precisely what the religious political movement wants. Aren't they the ones who moan on every occasion about 'freedom of the believers' and 'our democracy rights'?

The only correct approach to the problem of the pro-*Sharia* party is not one that bases itself on the freedoms and democratic rights of the Welfare Party, but **the principles of the modern secular democratic state**.

A firm ideological struggle should be waged against the Welfare Party; lucid replies should be formulated; the hypocritical nature of this deceitful movement should be exposed. We all agree on these points. These should be pursued at all costs. However, the main theme of this struggle, its starting and finishing point, should be the secular state. The separation of religion and state: religion as well as the state should keep their hands off education. When religion becomes a political factor, we all have to discuss politics, the political terrain, that is to say the state. Politics is the terrain where classes and the state are in contact. The formulation of every problem is in a sense its solution. Therefore, the problem to be formulated by contemporary people is about politics, and what concerns the state is the question, 'What is a secular state, and what is not?' All rights and freedoms are shaped precisely within the framework of the answer given to this question.

To recapitulate, the correct approach to the Islamist party is based not on individual and palliative rights and freedoms with their ambiguously defined criteria. The framework for the existence and maintenance of freedoms and all democratic rights, the defining criterion is the modern, secular democratic state.

We stated above that the formulation of a problem is its solution; however, when discussion starts after a correct formulation of the problem, we encounter three distorted attitudes. Therefore, the word secularism appears in the question we posed above, but still that is not enough for the correct formulation of the question. (Among these three distorted attitudes two are deliberate, and that of the intelligentsia is the consequence of their cowardice that can be summed up by the proverb ‘The snake that does not touch me can live a thousand years for all I care’).

Let us now briefly deal with these three distorted attitudes.

1. The Welfare Party considers, on the one hand, that secularism is an insult, and views it as a profanity of imperialism, but, on the other hand, as the occasion arises in the press or on TV to exploit feelings, it cries, ‘What sort of secularism is this? The state is meddling with the religion of the believers, seizing our headscarves and oppressing us.’ By using such demagoguery, it is not discussing secularism, but identifying secularism with its own ‘rights’. It is reducing it to the ‘freedom of belief of believers’.
2. Our intellectuals do not consider secularism as a social and legal framework within which all the democratic rights and freedoms are realised. They consider freedom and democracy to be without bounds or limits. They reject the relationship between ‘necessity and freedom’ from a philosophical point of view, even if they are not aware of this fact. Their cowardice leads them to the understanding of a kind of ‘absolute’ freedom, to some sort of anarchism.
3. The third distorted attitude is the common attitude of the bourgeois politicians, irrespective of the political party they belong to. What we have lived through over the last few years in particular have shown us all that these politicians, these state officials, are far from being capable of drawing the line between religion and secularism, between the state and the mosque. If one is to be consistent, then either one should forbid the mixing of religion with politics at all levels, or one should allow religion to mix with politics as it wishes. There is no middle road. You are either secular or anti-secular.

However, our dwarf politicians, who are totally incapable of becoming statesmen, can identify themselves with neither one of these consistent extremes. Forbidding the mixing of religion with politics at all levels? Bourgeois politicians do not want that. Because what they want is not a situation where state and politics rely on free will in the true sense of the word, but rather on the acceptance in general, with the support of religion, of the existing situation by society. The full-scale, even fanatical, interference of religion with politics and the state? Our bourgeois politicians do not want that either. They rather want religion to support the superficially secular state as it exists today. But the state should not find itself in a situation where it becomes dependent on religion.

However, our blinkered politicians are incapable of seeing that, once you mix religion with politics (no matter how little!), requiring that religion should decide in a ‘secular manner’ how to react to political issues, now that is truly the biggest treachery, ‘infidelity’ and cruelty. If by religion one does not understand believing in one’s own political identity, then whoever uses (however little) religion in politics

should know well that one must necessarily give to religion the determining role in all issues. We may adapt an expression, used in a different context, here too.

“Using religion a little bit is like being a little bit pregnant!” The baby is born sooner or later. And that means counter-revolution, a state based on the canonical codes of Islam.

5. What is a Modern Secular Democratic State?

The Welfare Party is a party founded on lies. It distorts the notion of secularism as well. It strives to define secularism only as the “freedom of belief of the believers”, hence making a one-sided definition.

Secularism has three fundamental principles:

1. The foundation stone of the philosophy of the modern secular-democratic state is the total **removal** of religion from inside the state. Moreover, religious organisations must not receive a single penny from state funds.
2. The state, on the other hand, must interfere in no way with the freedom of belief of the believers.
3. The state as well as religion must be kept out of education to the same extent. (On the other hand, those communities of believers may form their own schools out of their own funds.)

These three fundamental principles were developed in particular by the great bourgeois thinkers and philosophers of the “Age of Enlightenment” due to the necessities imposed by social progress, and thus the notion of secularism came into existence. All the civilised countries have accepted the notion of secularism. However, to what extent these principles have been put into practice in each country has been determined by the struggle between, on the one hand, the reactionary classes and strata, and, on the other, the classes and strata representing progress. Moreover, in each country this class struggle has marched in tune with the historical and economic realities of the country.

If we look at Turkey in the light of what has been expounded above, we can immediately say two things. Firstly, the Republic of Turkey, immediately after its foundation, adopted the principle of secularism. However, under the pressure of the historical realities of the country, the application of this principle has been crippled. Kemalists^[14], anxious to keep under control the clergy (*ulema*)^[15], who are a historic impediment to the development of our society, acted wrongly despite basing their actions on sound analyses: namely, they organised religion **within** the state, in the form of the “Directorate of Religious Affairs”. The harmful consequences are evident today. This was not the way to struggle against the clergy. Much more efficient options, not detrimental to the principle of secularism, were available. They still are today.

Secondly, on the point of keeping the state and religion at a distance from education, the republic once again assumed a different attitude for historical and economic reasons, and until recent years has been in charge of the whole education system. We too understand the necessity of this. Considering the first 30 years of the Republic, it was evident that, within the balance of power at that time, had the education system remained outside the control of the secularist, the Kemalist cadres of the state could have only produced *molla – melle*.^[16] Moreover, Turkey was a country with very modest economic development and means. She still has not overcome her problems

today. Not even today would it be conceivable for the state to completely withdraw from education. If it does, then education will fall into the hands of Islamists, but also mostly to the education enterprises providing “services” to the children of rich people. However, the state’s overseeing of education does have important detrimental impacts. Consequently, without forgetting the economic realities of the country at this point too, there are plenty of precautions and steps that can be taken in order to consistently apply this principle of secularism.

Let us close here the parenthesis on Turkey and return again to the theory of secularism. Now we will consider, with the help of several quotations, the modern secular as described by Marx and Engels. Anti-communists will always find a pretext to attack whatever we say, but let us nevertheless emphasise that the citations you are going to read below are not ideas specific to Marxism or “Communism” but constitute a complete and consistent consideration of the notion of secularism, which has become institutionalised since the Great French revolution of 1789. Marx and Engels summarise the notion of secularism, developed by the classical philosophers, in this way:

“Complete separation of the Church from the state. All religious communities without exception are to be treated by the state as private associations. They are to be deprived of any support from public funds and of all influence on public schools. (They cannot be prohibited from forming **their own** schools out of **their own** funds and from teaching their own nonsense in them.)” (A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891, *MESW*, v. 3, p. 437.)

“‘**Elementary education by the state**’ is altogether objectionable. Defining by a general law expenditure on elementary schools, qualifications of teaching staff, branches of instruction, etc., and, as is done in the United States, supervising the fulfilment of these legal specifications by state inspectors, is a very different thing from appointing the state as the educator of the people! Government and Church should rather be equally excluded from any influence over schools. Particularly, indeed, in the Prusso-German Empire (...) the state needed, on the contrary, a very strict education of the people.” (Critique of the Gotha Programme, *MESW*, v. 3, p. 28)

Religion will be excluded from the state, members of the clergy will return to their private lives, and will earn their living through the donations of believers. All educational establishments will be open to the public and will consequently be saved from the assault of religion and the state. Thus the sciences too will be rescued as far as possible from class prejudice and governments persecution.

“(...) Just as the state emancipates itself from religion by emancipating itself from **state religion** and leaving religion to itself within civil society, so the individual emancipates himself **politically** from religion by regarding it no longer as a **public** matter but as a *private matter*” (Marx–Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism*, Progress Pub., Moscow, 1980, p. 138)

“Just as **industrial activity** is not abolished when the **privileges of the trades**, guilds and corporations are abolished, but, on the contrary, real **industry** begins only after the abolition of these privileges; (...) just as *trade* is not abolished by the abolition of *trade privileges*, but finds its true realisation in free trade; so religion develops in its **practical** universality only where there is no **privileged** religion (cf. the North American States).

“The modern ‘*public system*’, the developed modern state, is not based (...) on a society of privileges, but on a society in which **privileges have been abolished and dissolved**, on developed **civil society** in which the vital elements which were still politically bound under the privilege system have been set free. Here **no ‘privileged exclusivity’** stands opposed to any other exclusivity or to the public system. (...)

“[In] *the democratic representative state* (...) **law** has here taken the place of **privilege**.

“It is therefore only here, where we find no contradiction between free theory and the practical validity of privilege, but, on the contrary, the practical abolition of privilege, **free industry, free trade**, etc., conform to ‘free theory’, where the public system is not opposed by any privileged exclusivity, (...) – **only here is the fully developed modern state to be found**. (...)

“The [modern] state declares that religion, like other elements of civil life, only **begins** to exist in its full scope when the state declares it to be **non-political** and therefore leaves it to itself. To the dissolution of the **political** existence of those elements, as for example, the dissolution of [the political existence of – RY] **property** by the abolition of the **property qualification for electors**, the dissolution of [the political existence of – RY] **religion** by abolition of the **state church**, to this proclamation of their civil death corresponds their most vigorous life, which henceforth obeys its own laws undisturbed and develops to its full scope.” (*Ibid.*, pp 143 –145)

“The truly religious state is the theocratic state; the head of such states must be either the God of religion, Jehovah himself, as in the Jewish state, or God's representative, the Dalai Lama, as in Tibet, or finally, as Görres rightly demands in his recent book, all the Christian states must subordinate themselves to a church which is an “infallible church”. For where, as under Protestantism, there is no supreme head of the church, the rule of religion is nothing but the religion of rule, the cult of the government's will.

“Once a state includes several creeds having equal rights, it can no longer be a religious state without being a violation of the rights of the particular creeds, a church which condemns all adherents of a different creed as heretics, which makes every morsel of bread depend on one's faith, and which makes dogma the link between individuals and their existence as citizens of the state. (...)

“There exists a dilemma in the face of which ‘common’ sense is powerless.

“Either the Christian state corresponds to the concept of the state as the realisation of rational freedom, and then the state only needs to be a rational state in order to be a Christian state and it suffices to derive the state from the rational character of human relations, a task which philosophy accomplishes; or the state of rational freedom cannot be derived from Christianity, and then you yourself will admit that this derivation is not intended by Christianity, since it does not want a bad state, and a state that is not the realisation of rational freedom is a bad state.

“You may solve this dilemma in whatever way you like, you will have to admit that the state must be built on the basis of free reason, and not of religion. (...)

“In the political sphere, philosophy has done nothing that physics, mathematics, medicine, and every science, have not done in their respective spheres. Bacon of Verulam (...) emancipated physics from theology and it

became fertile. Just as you do not ask the physician whether he is a believer, you have no reason to ask the politician either. (...) Earlier, however, Machiavelli and Campanella, and later Hobbes, Spinoza, Hugo Grotius, right down to Rousseau, Fichte and Hegel, began to regard the state through human eyes and to deduce its natural laws from reason and experience, and not from theology. In so doing, they were as little deterred as Copernicus was by the fact that Joshua bade the sun stand still over Gideon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. Recent philosophy has only continued the work begun by Heraclitus and Aristotle. (...) Of course, the ignorance (...) regards these ideas of history as having suddenly occurred to certain individuals overnight, because they are new to it and reached it only overnight; it forgets that it itself is assuming the old role of the doctor of the Sorbonne who considered it his duty to accuse Montesquieu publicly of being so frivolous as to declare that the supreme merit of the state was political, not ecclesiastical, virtue. (...)

“Whereas the earlier philosophers of constitutional law proceeded in their account of the formation of the state from the instincts either of ambition or gregariousness, or even from reason, though not social reason, but the reason of the individual, the more ideal and profound view of recent philosophy proceeds from the idea of the whole. It looks on the state as the great organism, in which legal, moral and political freedom must be realised, and in which the individual citizen, in obeying the laws of the state, only obeys the natural laws of his own reason, of human reason.” (K. Marx, The Leading Article in No. 179 of the *Kölnische Zeitung*, *MECW*, p. 184.)

A Secular State is the Only Solution to Stop Religious, Sectarian and Creed Conflict in Turkey

For instance a community of more than 22 million Alevis lives in Turkey. The enmity between Alevis and Sunnis in history as well as today is at its sharpest in the form of **confessional** antagonism. How can this confessional antagonism be abolished?

Since no one will give up his system of beliefs and rights, this antagonism can only be abolished by making it impossible. Then the obvious question is: How can one make confessional antagonism impossible? **By abolishing religion from the state.**

We cannot expect people belonging to different faiths and religions to grasp and assimilate easily the following truth: different faiths or religions are nothing other than **different stages of the development of human wisdom**. Had humans grasped this truth, then the relation between a Muslim and a Christian or between an Alevi and a Shafi would cease to be **religious**, and would become **a scientific** and human relation. Their unity would be secured by science and would naturally be resolved by science itself. Conflicts would vanish altogether in their final form. Since this cannot happen in our world today, the only way to abolish the religious conflicts within the existing socio-economic system is to establish a truly secular state.

Let us try to make our point clearer: for instance, the question of Alevis in history has assumed different forms, depending on the kind of state under the rule of which the Alevis lived. The Ottoman state was not a **political** state, but a religious one. The head of the state was Islam's Caliph. Therefore the question of Alevism in the Ottoman state was a completely **theological** question. An Alevi person living under the rule of the Ottoman state used to find himself in religious conflict with a state, which admits as its foundation Sunni Islam.

The Republic of Turkey is a **political**, constitutional and secular state. However, as we have noted above, the secularism of the Republic, because of various reasons pertaining to class as well as history, is a crippled secularism. Liberation of the state from religion, in other words **political liberation**, is incomplete and inadequate. Since complete secularism has not been realised, the beliefs, opinions and the lifestyle of Alevi society are still largely met with religious opposition.

Only in a state, which has become truly secular in all its principles and institutions in Turkey will the question of Alevism lose all theological meaning, and become a truly secular question. When the state becomes a political state in the true sense of the word, that is to say when it stands as a state against religion, when religion is removed from all its dealings and relations, will conflict between Sunnis and Alevis cease to exist.

Is Secularism Atheism?

Would the total exclusion of religion from the state, namely a complete liberation from religion, be harmful to religion? The Islamist Political Movement strives to portray secularism as impiousness. But when we look at countries such as Sweden and United States, where secularism is fully implemented, we notice not only that religion survives, but it also enjoys a lively and active existence. This fact alone is the best reply to the lies of the pro-Sharia movement.

Therefore, as the state becomes more and more fully secular, as it becomes a more democratic state, the consequences of these developments pose no threat whatsoever to religion.

If we remember the examples given by Marx in the quotations cited above, for instance the abolition of the condition “to possess property” which was required in the past in order to have the right to be elected, this means, from the state’s point of view, the exclusion of this condition from state affairs. It is evident that the exclusion of the notion of property from state affairs does not abolish private property within the society. On the contrary, its existence is taken for granted.

Similarly, the modern state has removed from the state apparatus such distinctions as profession, education, the family one is born into and social status. It has reduced them to “non political” distinctions which will always exist in society. In so doing, the state has rendered equal in its eyes people having many differences in civil society as well as their private lives. In so doing, the state has become a political state and has been able to proclaim its **general** nature in front of these thousands of differences. Only by rising above such categories as religion, belief, race, language, birth, profession and rank can a state declare itself to be the state of the **entirety** of that society, as well as its general nature.

It can be seen from what has been said above that political independence from religion does abolish privileged religion, but does not touch or interfere with religion itself.

A Last Word on Secularism

The secular state, that is to say the political state, political liberalisation, is a giant step forward in the development of humanity, It is not the final form that we shall see in the liberation of human beings, but it is indeed the final form of human liberation under capitalism.

The secular state is not the final form of human liberation because the fact that the state declares its independence from religion does not mean that human beings liberate themselves from it. Therefore, you may live under the authority of a secular state in the real sense of the word, you may have completely politically liberated yourself from religion, but for this to happen you do not have to have denied it. Consequently, political independence from religion, secularity, is not the totality of human liberation.

6. Lessons of the Last 25 Years (What Needs to be Done?)

Nowhere in the world has it been possible to fight against the Islamist Political Movement by attacking Islam. In Turkey too, a struggle waged along those lines can only strengthen the hands of the enemy. The reasons for the development of this movement are not 'divine'; therefore counter-measures taken against it should not be 'divine' either.

As world events of the last 25 years show, once it seizes power it will be extremely difficult to get rid of the Islamist Political Movement: as we shall be up against a **totalitarian** state, which does not allow any opposition whatsoever, and is brutally intolerant of the slightest criticism of religion, it is necessary to wait for it to exhaust its own means of subsistence (along with the people and the productive forces of the country).

Nevertheless, by waging a wise and consolidating, yet flexible and dynamic struggle, which also makes use of the lessons drawn from world events of the last 25 years, it is possible to eradicate the lifelines of this darkness of the middle ages, and to annihilate the threat it poses.

What should we do to achieve this?

1. The leadership of the Islamist Political Movement (the Welfare Party in our country) is autocratic in the true sense of the word. Leaving aside demagoguery and hypocrisy, it does not truly reflect the demands of the people, nor does it raise these demands. It is us who should be doing that.

In our country the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. We must put forward a programme which would not only undermine this tendency by redistributing what already exists, but would also increase and spread wealth.

2. This movement is an enemy of freedom, democracy and human rights. We should be the defenders of them. But the democracy that we defend should in every aspect be different from the democracy that the liberal bourgeois politicians waffle about. Our democracy should defend not just the casting of votes once every four years, but active mass democracy, participation at every echelon of the state and society.

We must defend full social and political justice and liberties within the framework of the modern, secular and democratic state.

3. We must keep our people informed down to the tiniest detail about what is going on in countries where the power has been seized by the Islamist Political Movement. We must show everybody that "the Hell is here, right now!"

4. We must study secularism in depth. We should explain thoroughly the separation of state and religion, the separation of religion and education, and why they are inseparable from democracy.

Let people wear what they want: the turban, the caftan. But where? At home, in private life, in faith associations, or while pursuing one's business affairs in state offices. But a state employee at work, or a schoolteacher, a student in school should not be able to wear these. This demand is not an infringement of democratic rights but a consequence of secularism, the cornerstone of modern democracy. It is a democratic demand.

On the other hand, everybody should be able to engage in acts of religion without the police meddling in such activities.

5. We should form a widely based secular democratic movement starting from today. Participation in this broad bloc or front must not be based on any ideological preconditions other than the principles of the modern secular democratic state. Muslims who defend secularism, Alevis, trade unions, professional organisations, democratic associations, the pro-Ataturk^[17] movement, social democrats, communists, and the centre-right parties provided they defend secularism should all be united within it.

6. The enemy we are confronting is an international movement. We too must base ourselves on international solidarity and co-operation.

7. The fundamental slogan of this movement for a "Secular-Democratic Turkey" should be "**The pro-Sharia Welfare Party must be banned!**" We respect everybody's religion and belief. However, there is no "democratic right" to work for religion to prevail over the state. Nor does anybody have any right to grant such a "freedom", in the name of anything whatsoever. Those attempting to make religion prevail over the state acting against all liberties, all democratic and human rights. Is there a freedom to kill people? Is there a freedom to steal? Are the fascist parties free in democratic countries? Therefore, this demand is a democratic one. Moreover, to implement legal measures against them is **legitimate** and **democratic**.

8. It is essential, however, that, such a ban must come about through huge popular support. Since a bureaucratic ban, based only on a majority vote in parliament, will not have convinced the people, the damage it will cause will be greater than its benefits. Therefore, we must work to ensure that the slogan "**The pro-Sharia Welfare Party must be banned**" is raised from every corner of the country.

A serious struggle must be waged against those who will interpret the campaign around "**The pro-Sharia Welfare Party must be banned**" as a *jihad* against religion. We, as the secular democratic forces of society have respect for our people's beliefs.

9. We should distinguish those labouring people who have voted for Welfare Party and keep it apart from the Welfare Party identity.

10. An intensive educational campaign on secularism, freedom of belief and the modern state through evening courses, conferences, educational activities in the trade unions and associations should be started.

11. Imam-Hatip schools should be taken out of the education system of the state. Only those Imam-Hatip schools, which are supported by the believers, may keep open.

7. Conclusion

Experience from all over the world shows that during the process of Islamist Political Movement's arrival to power there is lots of bloodshed. After it has seized control of

the state, a very long time is inevitably necessary before it is toppled from power as a result of its own internal contradictions and the consequent tendency to become weaker. Once again a lot of blood is shed. However, despite this, it can be observed that the Islamist Political Movement to a great extent weakens the state throughout its period of power. All the productive forces, and first and foremost the people, are oppressed. Such countries become more and more divorced from modern world standards. In other words, these regimes do everything possible to force their “just” order down society’s throat. The country will collapse if they seize power. And what a collapse it will be!

However, this should not be what is aimed at. Communists in particular would never wish such a course. Socialism, which is a system synonymous with justice, freedom, democracy and freedom from exploitation, will be achieved not by the destruction of the country, but by its development. Therefore we must swiftly eliminate all the economic, social and political factors, which offer the Islamist Political Movement the chance to seize power. For that purpose, first of all, ways and means must be found to unite, or to form a bloc or a front at every level and in every sphere of activity with all the secular-democratic forces.

Such a front will carry out basic work in working class neighbourhoods and quarters, in factories and schools, work based on concrete reality, enlightening and clarifying without “revolutionary” brouhaha or petty arrogance. Expel the pro-*Sharia* party out of the system with the co-operation of the people’s movement, solidarity and a functional division of labour among the publishing organs participating in this struggle.

The nation of the modern secular-democratic state - originating with Heraclitus and Aristotle, enriched with the ideas of Machiavelli, Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and the Great French Revolution of 1789, and of Hobbes, Spinoza and Hegel, put into practice in the Paris Commune of 1871 - is part of the experience and cultural heritage of humanity.

The Islamist Political Movement and the pro-*Sharia* state, on the other hand, truly breed on philistine ignorance. To wage an extraordinarily energetic struggle using every appropriate means against this ignorance is absolutely necessary and an historic duty. Otherwise, we fear that this evil will be the cause of many more tragedies!

[1] This article was written by the late General Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkey, comrade R. Yurukoglu, and was published in the Turkish monthly “*Kervan*” (The Caravan), in May 1993, issue 37, pp. 4-9. The article was the evaluation of the Islamist political movement from the perspective of the communists of Turkey, following the success of the Islamist political movement in the guise of Welfare Party (RP) in the local elections held in 1993.

When this article, ending with the warning “*we fear that this evil will be the cause of many more tragedies*”, was published, the *Al Qaida* organisation of blind supporters of *Sharia* was yet to be splashed across the front pages, and atrocities such as the 11 September attack on the World Trade Centre and the Bali bomb were yet to come.

The *Sharia* supporters of Sunni Islam were yet to burn 37 democrats and intellectuals to death alive in the hotel they sought refuge escaping from a chasing right-wing mob in Sivas, Turkey. When that massacre took place in the summer of 1993, world public opinion conspicuously remained silent.

In our estimation, this evaluation of the Islamist political movement, that is the movement aiming to establish the domination of *Sharia*, is very important, as it has reminded us some of the basic tenets of Marxism that have tended to be forgotten nowadays, and since it has been the only crisp Marxist evaluation against the lack of wisdom of many intellectuals by evaluating the radicalisation of Sunni Islam as a “pseudo agenda”.

Since this article was written the Welfare Party was banned, and the Virtue Party (FP) was formed in its stead. The latter was also banned, and two more parties were formed in its place. One of those parties, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won a two-thirds majority in the Turkish parliament in the November 2002 elections.

In our opinion, the AKP is masterfully disguising its aims and misguiding the public opinion, which is a well-known practice of Islamist political movements (*Taqiyah*), as has been seen in almost every Islamic country.

The liberal intellectuals may have allowed themselves be deceived by this thin disguise, however we, the communists of a country under the domination of Sunni Islam, feel under an obligation to enlighten the progressive public of the non-Islamic countries, and to expose the real intentions of the Islamist political movement. In this regard, we consider this article a very timely and important contribution.

We hope that the progressive public of the world may draw lessons from the experiences of communists in the struggle in Islamic countries, and benefit from their evaluation. - Web site editor, November 2002

- [2] *Sharia* is the canonical fundamental law of Islam which is actually in force in a group of countries from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan to Sudan, Nigeria and Malaysia, etc. - Tr
- [3] The MHP was the political organisation of the infamous Grey Wolves, the ultra-chauvinist fascist militia. - Tr.
- [4] The Democratic Party was the government party between 1950-60 and was toppled by a junior officers' coup in 1960. Some leaders were executed and many banned from participating in political life for years. After a few years its remnants re-emerged, under the guise of the Justice Party (AP) headed by Suleyman Demirel, as the government party again. - Tr.
- [5] These are mainly Sunni Islam orders. -Tr.
- [6] *Imam-Hatip schools* are secondary schools for training religious personnel. - Tr.
- [7] *Koran courses* are out-of-school set-ups for teaching Koran mainly to the primary education age group. - Tr.
- [8] Yavuz Sultan Selim (Selim the Grim) was the Ottoman Sultan between 1512-20, and Chaldiran was the battlefield during the war between Ottoman and Persian armies in 1514, which resulted in the brutal persecution of followers of Shia Islam in Ottoman lands, and followers of Sunni Islam in the remaining Persian lands. - Tr.
- [9] The War of Liberation was waged by the remnants of the Ottoman army and Anatolian people mainly against the Greek occupation forces between 1919-23 and led to the formation of the present day Republic of Turkey. - Tr.
- [10] *Jihad* means waging the holy war
- [11] Necmettin Erbakan has been the leading figure of the Islamist Political Movement for the last four decades. He has been banned from participating in the political life by a court ruling - Tr.
- [12] *Hodja* originally meant 'teacher' but later came to mean the religious leader. - Tr.
- [13] Teacher of Islam, a quite high rank in the Islamic hierarchy of Iran. - Tr.
- [14] Followers of the ideas of the military-statesman Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the War of Liberation and the founding father of the Republic. - Tr.
- [15] *Ulema*, literally the learned ones, refers to the 'estate' of religious leaders, one of the four 'estates' of the Ottoman state. - Tr.
- [16] '*Molla*' and '*melle*' refer to students or graduates of a religious school. - Tr.
- [17] *Ataturk*, literally the father of the Turks, is the surname adopted by Mustafa Kemal after the promulgation of the Law on Surnames in 1928. - Tr.