

THE IDEOLOGY OF SOCIALISM AND THE ARMENIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Abstract

The article covers the manifestations and peculiarities of the ideology of socialism in the social-political life of Armenia at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. General characteristics aims and directions of activity of the political organizations functioning in the Armenian reality within the given time period, whose program documents feature the ideology of socialism to one degree or another, are given (Hunchakian Party, Dashnaktsutyun, Armenian Social-democrats, Specifics, Socialists-revolutionaries). The specific peculiarities of the national-political life of Armenia in the given time period and their impact on the ideology of political forces are introduced.

Keywords: socialism, ideology, Armenian national parties, Hunchakian, Dashnaktsutyun, Social-democrats, Specifics, viewpoint, worldview.

Introduction

The ideas of human freedom and social justice have been crystallized in the public consciousness in the process of the development of human society. They have been manifested by the condemnation of private property and the preaching of social and equality of property in the Antic era, and the form of national uprisings in different countries during the feudal period. These ideas are present in the prominent figures of the Renaissance and the Reformation (J. Hus, T. Müntzer, T. Campanella).

In Armenian reality, the ideas of human freedom and social justice were raised in early Middle Ages and were expressed through social movements (Anapatakan, Borborites, Mtsghneakan movements) against the ideas preached by the official Church. These movements, sectarian in nature, contained rebel against the regime,

which was especially emphasized in the 8th-9th centuries, during the period of Paulicianism.

During the period of the development of capitalistic relations, these ideas are reflected in the work of European utopian-socialists: Saint-Simon, Ch. Fourier, R. Owen.

In the 18th-19th centuries, during the bourgeois revolutions that erupted in Europe, these ideas constituted the fundamental principles of the propaganda of revolutionary leaders, and were more vividly displayed in the slogan of the 1789 French revolution; “liberty, equality, fraternity”, becoming one of the driving forces behind the social development of European nations.

In the middle of the 19th century, the idea of a free and fair society was put on a scientific basis by Karl Marx, who put forward the issue of the historical necessity of overthrowing the capitalistic system by way of revolution and creating a new, socialist system. The need for political

and economic transformations in the European countries ignited by revolutionary movements was turning into the demand of public life. This fact contributed significantly to the spread of socialist ideas. It is no coincidence that the first political parties were formed both in Europe and Russia, as well as in the Armenian reality within the above-mentioned period.

The following peculiarity should be underlined here: the priority issues of the political parties formed in the highly-developed Western European countries had mainly social and economic content alongside with the political one. The Armenian reality was characterized by the fact that the ideas of human freedom and social justice were mixed with the issue of national liberation. This article attempts to represent the whole spectrum of the manifestation of socialist ideology in the Armenian social and political life.

Social Democrat Hunchakian Party

The first organization in Armenian reality bearing this ideology was the Hunchakian Party, founded in Geneva in 1887. The Hunchakians claimed the socialist organization of the society to be their ideal, which was fixed in their program (program-maximum)¹. The socialism of the Hunchakian Party was a unique mix of the ideas of Russian Narodnichestvo, European social-democracy and Marxism. Alongside with this, they strived for the achievement of their closest (minimum) aim, i.e. the liberation of Western Armenians, through the propaganda of the national liberation struggle. However, the Hunchakian socialism was dogmatic. The class-based struggle was promoted in countries which lacked factory production and working-class. The ideas of so-

cial justice and friendship among nations were spread among Western Armenians who lived under Turkish-Kurdish terror, ignoring the environment as well as the subjective and objective circumstances that prevented the success of the liberation struggle – the political fragmentation of the Armenian people, geographical dispersion, savage nature and religious intolerance of dominating nations, the servility rooted in Armenians for centuries, etc. It is no coincidence that later, some Hunchakian leaders admitted that there were no favourable conditions for the propaganda of socialism in Turkey (Tamatean, 1985, p. 88). It is natural that socialist propaganda could have no effect under such circumstances. The leaders of Western Armenians, who were facing the problem of existence, M. Khrimyan, A. Arpi-aryan², M. Tamatyan, H. Chankyulyan (1913, p. 6) and others, did not and could not perceive these ideas: although deeply humanistic, they seemed alien to Western Armenians and of transnational content.

The ideological dualism of the Hunchakians and their failures in practical activity resulted in the great split of 1896. The Western-Armenian Hunchakians, who rejected the socialist propaganda, disunited to create a separate party of solely national nature, which was named “Reorganized Hunchakians”. These shifts were reflected in the new program of the old Hunchakians, faithful to the ideas of socialism, in 1897. Here the priority was given to the liberation of Eastern or Russian Armenians from the domination of tsarism instead of the issue of the liberation of Western Armenians (Hovhannisyanyan, 2012, p. 124). Besides, the presence of major working-class centres in Transcaucasia (Baku, Tiflis, Batumi) created a favourable environment for so-

¹ Hunchak, Geneva, 1889, N 1.

² Mshak, Tiflis, 1908, N 35.

cialist propaganda.

In this period, the members of Hunchakian party took an active part in the international socialist movement and joined the Second International, the international Proletariat organization.

The impact of revolutionary movements of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century led to the rapprochement of the Hunchakian party with Russian social-democrats³. Many of Eastern Armenian Hunchakian leaders (R. Khanalat, A. Nazarbek, G. Vardanyan) tended to the idea of dividing the party into two parts, according to which national liberation struggle was to be continued in Turkey, while in Russia and the Caucasus they were to cooperate with the RSDBP and carry out social-democratic activity only⁴.

Although the party maintained its unity in the Paris meeting in 1905, the fact that the Hunchakian organizations of Transcaucasia were starting to give priority to the social-class factor, while the Hunchakians from abroad, who formed the majority of the party, continued to see national liberation as the main objective of the party, became more and more visible.

Hunchakian activity in Russia and Transcaucasia ended after the establishment of Soviet order, i.e. at the beginning of the 20s.

Armenian Revolutionary Federation
(Hay Yeghaphokhakan Dashnakcutyun)
Party

Socialist ideology was manifested in a unique way in the activities of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party, founded in Tiflis, in 1890. This party, created for the political liberation of Western Armenians, bore the influence of Russian Narodnichestvo at first. Although social-

ist principles were fixed in the 1892 program of the party too, in general the party abstained from adopting the practical policy typical of a socialist party (Karapetyan et al., 2003, p. 86). Unlike the Hunchakians, the ARF did not concentrate on socialist ideology and accepted it as the principle behind the social organization of the Armenian people after achieving national and political liberation. This position and mode of practice adopted by the ARF became the target of criticism for its rival political forces. Addressing this issue, M. Varandyan, a party theorist, considers the criticism against the ARF not serious and unjust, believing that the party leaders (Ch. Miqayelyan, S. Zavaryan, Rostom) were not willing to mimic Russian revolutionists and “to adorn their propaganda for the liberation of Western Armenians with socialist phraseology” (Varandyan, 1992, p. 106).

Eastern Armenian intellectual leaders of the ARF were the ones who bore the socialist ideology, while the central part of the party remained incommunicable to it. The first Russian revolution of 1905 created favourable conditions for the activation of socialist elements within the party. The issue of reviewing social-economic problems was raised alongside with national-political issues. The necessity of bringing socialist ideology to life was announced. The new conditions were reflected in the “Caucasus project” adopted in the Vienna meeting of 1907, according to which the ARF was to continue the national liberation struggle in Western Armenia, while in the Caucasus it was to carry out socialist activities, i.e. to take part in all-Russian social-democratic movements, together with activities of national nature. This ideological discord led to the formation of groups supporting from extreme nationalism to the adopting of a purely socialist mode of conduct. Although with difficulty, the

³ Hunchak, London, 1906, N 3.

⁴ National Archive of Armenia, fund 1456, list 1, case 94, pp. 2-4.

ARF managed to prevent the ideological and organizational split of the party.

After the adoption of the “Caucasus project”, the party became a member of the Second International, but even after this, its socialist nature was mainly visible in terms of theory. The unsolved problem of the liberation of Western Armenians, the deepening of interethnic conflicts in Transcaucasia and the necessity of national self-defence made the ARF adopt a moderate position towards movements of social-democratic nature in terms of practical activity.

Extreme nationalists (group leader Mihran and others) were expelled from the party, and extreme socialists (L. Atabekyan, A. Mravyan, etc.) joined Russian social-democrats in the end.

The ARF was criticised continuously by socialist parties for its moderation. Addressing this issue, M. Varandyan shows that even in economically developed countries the socialist parties left the maximum demands of the socialist program aside, and concentrated their powers on carrying out the minimum of the socialist program, which, was the credo of democratic parties. The circumstance mentioned above was especially emphasized in the case of Russia, which was deprived of objective conditions for building socialist order, where “pure” socialists, ignoring the reality, were striving to teach a lesson not only to European socialists, but also to the whole world, and create the socialist paradise as quickly as possible (Varandyan, 1992, p. 418).

Thus, despite its socialist thesis, the ARF practically remained a national party. Starting from the beginning of the 20th century it gradually became the main force of Armenian social-political life and had a decisive role in the restoration of Armenian statehood.

Armenian Social-Democrats

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the social-democratic movement evolved in Transcaucasia under the influence of Russian labour movements, and the local committees of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, where Armenians formed a significant number, were created in large labour centres. Although proclaimed in 1898, the RSDLP was de facto created in the London conference of 1903 where Armenian social-democrats (B. Knunyants, A. Zurabyan) took part as well. The RSDLP was a party of emphasized Marxist ideology. The manifesto of the “Armenian Union of Social-Democrats” founded in 1902 announced that the Union, as a branch of the RSDLP, “was unanimous with it, and would direct its activities towards the protection of the interests of the Russian proletariat in general and the Armenian proletariat in particular” (Lenin, 1983, p. 4). Lenin, welcoming the manifesto, specified the program of Russian social-democrats, believing that the main objective of social-democrats, regardless of nation, should be the demand for political and civil freedom and equality. Although the RSDLP protected the principle of self-determination of nations, it was apparent that Lenin and his fellows prioritized the class interests of the proletariat, while national, agrarian and other issues were subordinate to it. Armenian social-democrats also protected the internationalist principle of the organization of the proletariat. Subordinating the national ideology to the socialist one they believed that the triumph of the revolution in Russia would liberate Western Armenians as well, and thus regarded the struggle of national Armenian parties for the liberation of Western Armenians as aimless (Kara-

petyan et al., 2003, p. 148).

However, the RSDLP was not firm enough in terms of ideology. Disagreement in questions regarding the revolution and the socialist order emerged in the period of the first Russian revolution, after the crystallization of which Bolshevik and Menshevik streams were outlined.

G. Plekhanov, the ideological leader of Russian Menshevism, unlike Lenin, had a negative attitude towards revolutionary extremism. He believed that a social revolution would be possible only in the stage of capitalism when production would reach a high level, and the working class would make up the majority of the population. This is why he had a negative attitude towards the October revolution of 1917.

Plekhanov warned that the seizure of power by one class, moreover, by one party, could lead to the greatest misfortune. According to him, the forcible implementation of socialism would result in a civil war and the collapse of the country's economy.

Developing this idea, Kautski, the well-known theorist of socialism, rightly states: "In fact, Russian communism turned into a barracks socialism... it was Bolshevism that won in Russia, socialism was defeated there" (Leyst, 2006, p. 492-493).

Armenian Menshevik leaders, A. Zurabyan, A. Yernkyan, G. Gharajyan, opposing the Bolshevik principle of self-determination of nations, defended the idea of cultural-national autonomy within socialist Russia⁵. They distinguished between Eastern and Western Armenians and did not approve of one side intervening with the issues of the other. M. Varandyan observes that Armenian social-democrats "hiding behind Marxist phraseology and slogans, were striving to free themselves as much as possible from the

complicated and torturous concerns of the Armenian Cause..." (Varandyan, 1992, p. 400).

Regarding the agrarian issue, the Mensheviks, unlike the Bolshevik project of land nationalization, or, in fact, making it state property, defended the idea of the municipality of handing the land over to the local self-government bodies⁶. Menshevik activities ceased in the 1920s, after the establishment of one-party Bolshevik order.

Social Revolutionaries

The Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) founded in Russia in 1902 had the ideological colouring of socialism. The Armenian organization of this party, as a branch of the Russian party of the same name, was formed in Transcaucasia during the first Russian revolution. Unlike national parties, the SR party prioritized the issues of overthrowing tsarism and defending the interests of the peasantry. Terror had a primary role in the practical activities of the SR party. The SR party collaborated with national and socialist parties for the sake of the triumph of democracy and the solution of the agrarian issue and took an active part in the fight against tsarism.

The Socialists-Revolutionaries bore the ideology of Russian Narodnichestvo, and following their example, they saw the embryo of socialism in maintaining and developing the rural community. The principle of land "socialization", by which the land was to be handed over to rural communities with an equal right of usage, occupied a primary role in their program. The SR party focused on the peasantry in the struggle of the working class for their rights, based on their being far predominant in quantity (Karapetyan et

⁵ Payqar, Tiflis, 1917, N 238.

⁶ Payqar, Tiflis, 1917, N 240.

al., 2003, p. 138). The SR perception of socialism was limited within the framework of the agrarian issue. The party continued its activities until the establishment of Soviet order in Transcaucasia.

Specifics

One of the forces professing the socialist ideology in Armenian social-political life was Armenian Social Democratic Labour Organization. It was formed during the years of the first Russian revolution (1905-1907). The organization had a Marxist worldview. The main peculiarity of the organization was that it brought forward the idea of a national, not a class principle of the political organization of the society. The party ideologists believed that the Armenian people had its specific peculiarities of life (geographical and political division, Armenian issue, etc.), which distinguished them from other nations. Besides, according to the party ideologists, Armenian working-class people, in order to stay away from the powerful influence of the national movement, needed a specific organization, which would be a part of the RSDLP through a federative principle. It is for this fact that the party received the name “the specifics”⁷. D. Ananun, an ideologist of the “specifics” believed that the national interests of the Armenian people coincided with the interests of Russia. Therefore the solution of the Armenian issue was linked to powerful Russia⁸. Unlike the RSDLP, “the specifics” rejected the right of nations to self-determination and supported the idea of the cultural-national autonomy of the Armenian people within Russia (Davit Ananun, 1926, pp. 94-95). Their program was close to the Mensheviks in its na-

ture. “The specifics” considered the idea of a socialist revolution in Russia to be unreal, since they believed that the working class formed a tiny part of the Russian population, and the Bolsheviks did not even represent the whole of this working class⁹. They did not accept the cosmopolitanism and internationalism of the Bolsheviks and believed that the Armenian working class was to focus on its national interests and the solution of its national problems only (Melikyan, 1997, p. 245).

Unlike national Armenian parties, “the specifics” prioritized social and class issues, and therefore, despite its ethnic composition, in terms of ideology, this party must be classified as a non-national, social-democratic, Marxist organization (Karapetyan et al., 2003, p. 186).

Not long after the establishment of Soviet order, the activities of “the specifics” were stopped.

Conclusions

The other political forces functioning in Armenian reality: the Armenakan, Reorganized Hunchakian, Constitutional-Democratic and Armenian National parties, although accepted the progressive nature of the socialist ideology, considered the adoption and implementation of its principles as untimely, and harmful in terms of priority national issues. For this reason, the programs of these parties were based on purely national and democratic ideology.

Thus, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the penetration of socialist ideas into Armenian reality and their mixing with national issues had various theoretical and practical manifestations in the national-political sphere.

⁷ Banvor, Baku, 1917, N 2.

⁸ Gorts, Baku, 1917, N 9-10, p. 183.

⁹ Gorts, Baku, 1917, N 11-12, p. 198.

Summing up, let us emphasize the facts that during the period in question non-national parties with their socialist slogans could not create a solid social basis in the Armenian people, which continued to prioritize mainly purely national ideology.

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