

Avetis Mikaelian

An Inspiration Source for the Proletariat



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Stalinism was not part of the evolutionary trend of the October Revolution, but its gravedigger. Stalinism celebrated its victory on the ruins of the October Revolution and on the bones of communists whom it had beaten to death. In the name of communism, Stalin threw to the ground the most honourable and the most cherished communists, the creators of the October Revolution. No single dictator has trod the communists into the soil as much as Stalin. Only after a generation of communists had their blood spilled was the counterrevolution able to stabilize itself. One of the most prominent of these was Avetis Mikaelian (Sultanzadeh) whose views and thoughts were also the source of inspiration for the proletariat and internationalist communists.

Avetis Mikaelian was born in 1889 in Maragheh, East Azerbaijan, Iran, to a poor Armenian family. His father was a carpenter and his mother was a laundry worker. His parents soon separated after his birth. He went to school in Maragheh for five years; but, since his mother did not have the ability to finance his education, he was sent to a school attached to the Armenian Church near Yerevan from the age of 13. After completing religious science school, he joined the Caucasian Labour Movement and, in 1912, became a member of the Bolsheviks. In a questionnaire he filled in for the Bolsheviks, he described himself as a “professional revolutionary and a child of a laundry woman”. During the October Revolution, he was in St Petersburg in 1917, which allowed him to take an active part in the October Revolution. Avetis Mikaelian chose the name of Sultanzadeh to remember his father, as well as act as a pseudonym for political reasons; he is also more known by this name.

He was the founder of the Justice Party in 1917. Subsequently, he played an active role in attracting new members to the Red Army in Central Asia. He also played an active role in forming the first Communist Party of Iran in June 1920 at the Bandar Anzali Congress, the first party congress, and led the left wing of the party; the right wing was led by Haydar Khan Amo-oghli [1]. The party politics and documents of the First Congress were formulated by Sultanzadeh who was elected as the party’s first Secretary at the same congress. He and several others participated as delegates at the Second Congress of the Comintern. In 1921, Sultanzadeh was elected as an adviser to Lenin as Head of the Near East at the Commissars for Foreign Affairs.

Due to his capability and Marxist knowledge, Sultanzadeh was able to become a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. In the documents of the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, we can find one called “Worker’s Revolution and the Communist International”, in which it is emphasized that the Comintern is the global workers’ Revolutionary Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was signed by Sultanzadeh, along with Lenin, Trotsky, Bordiga, Panchurch and so on.

At the Second Congress of the Communist International, in discussions on one of the most sensitive topics of the Congress, the national question and colonies, Sultanzadeh, the delegate

of the Iranian Communists on the left wing of Congress said during the fifth session of Congress:

“Just imagine that the Communist Revolution has begun in India. Could the workers in this country, without the help of a revolutionary movement in Britain and Europe, resist an attack against the bourgeoisie? Naturally not...the revolution that has begun in the West has also prepared the background in Iran and Turkey and has given power to the revolutionaries. The era of World Revolution has begun....The issue is that, unlike the bourgeois-democratic movements, a true Communist movement must be created and be kept on foot. Any other assessment of the realities can lead to unfortunate results.” [our translation]

A few months after the first congress of the “Communist party of Iran” in early 1920, in a coup attempt by the Bolsheviks, 12 of the 15 members of the central committee elected by the first congress of the party, including Avatis Sultanzadeh, were dismissed from the leadership of the party. The reason for this was the non-progressive evaluation of the national bourgeoisie in Iran by Avatis Sultanzadeh, because he believed that direct communist struggle and attempts towards World Revolution should be the main priority. This opinion was not supported by the Political Bureau of the Caucasus and Azerbaijani Bolshevik; they had illusions about the progressive role of the national bourgeoisie.

The ambiguities of the Comintern with regard to the national bourgeoisie strengthened Reza Shah [2] in Iran and Atatürk in Turkey. In 1924, the Comintern referred to Reza Shah as “the leader of Iran’s revolutionary-national movement, a man who succeeded in securing Iran’s independence”.

Sultanzadeh seriously opposed this policy of the Caucasian and Azerbaijani Bolsheviks and through the texts exposed the destructive consequences that this policy would have in the Iranian Political milieu and the class movement of the proletariat. Considering the valuable role of Sultanzadeh in the Bolshevik Party and the October Revolution, in January 1922 he was again accepted as a delegate of the Communist Party of Iran in the Comintern.

From 1920 to 1927, Sultanzadeh did not play a significant role in guiding the party, due to the fact that he was “respectively” forbidden from secretly returning to Iran by the Comintern, and was preoccupied with other things. During this period, he was more involved with the work of the Comintern and party activities in Europe, worked as an economist for the Soviet Union, and played a significant role in establishing the Soviet Banking Institute; he was also Head of the Secretariat of the *Soviet Banking Magazine*. Sultanzadeh wrote at least seven books (one of his books was recently translated into Persian) and played an important role in translating Marxist works into Persian.

The incorrect policies of the Comintern in relation to the national bourgeoisie, and specifically Iran and Reza Shah, first as Prime Minister, and then as the King, created serious

problems for the labour movement and the organization of labour protests. This creation of an illusion by the Comintern, in its own way, caused the massive repression of communists. Following this, the possibility of the legitimate return of Sultanzadeh to Iran was eliminated and he entered Iran with a false passport in order to attend the Central Committee's Plenum. Sultanzadeh, with ability, even fooled the British, who, at that time, controlled the Iranian oil industry. The British invited him as a representative of a Czechoslovakian company and showed him all the oil companies in Abadan. He told his comrades jokingly that, "*Even though you are living in Iran, you are not able to go to places where I went in the oil industry*".

At the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Sultanzadeh was involved in a heated debate with Hilferding and Bukharin (Stalin's advocates) over the nature of financial capital, revolutionary movements and the role of the proletariat in colonial countries. The Comintern led by Stalin and Bukharin did not publish the proposed positions of Sultanzadeh in the final congress draft.

After Reza Khan became the King, he refused to tolerate communist activities, while, in 1928, Reza Shah called for the Soviet ambassador and proclaimed its protest against the activities of communists. Stalin's agents also ordered the cessation of any activity against Reza Shah.

There is speculation that the role of the communists in organizing labour protests and strikes, and in particular the famous strike by South Iranian oil workers, had been in repressing those "Iranian" communists who had remained in Russia and had not obeyed Stalin for some years.

Since December 1931, the fall of Sultanzadeh was accelerated. Stalin's followers claimed that Sultanzadeh was responsible for all the failures and announced that, by abandoning "collective leadership", he had assumed individual leadership and did not allow the growth of truly communist groups. From this date, Sultanzadeh did not allow the publication of his comments.

In 1932, Sultanzadeh was accused by the Stalin government of opposing Lenin, and the Communist Party of Iran was dissolved. He continued to criticize Comintern policies. The political life and activity of Sultanzadeh from this date to the moment of his arrest are in a state of ambiguity. The exact date of the arrest of Sultanzadeh is unknown. On 25 July 1938, this great theoretician of the proletariat was shot the communists' murderer (Stalin) on charges of "spying for Germany" in Moscow. Recently, a video has been published on social media [3] showing an inscription that someone had inscribed as a memorial to Sultanzadeh at the last address he was living at.

With the counterrevolution pulled to the ground and thrown on the soil, this red star shined in the proletarian political milieu, but still continued his critique of the counterrevolution from a

communist position. At that moment, he was beaten to death; his blood was spilled as an internationalist. Bowing down in front of such stars, such internationalists, should not be just about paying tribute; rather, we must continue to fight because of the positions they have shed their blood for. Insisting on the proletarian principles that he believed in and struggling with the barbarity of the capitalist society which he fought could be the best tribute to the memory of Sultanzadeh.

Firoz Akbary
8 June 2019

Notes:

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haydar_Khan_Amo-oghli

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reza_Shah

[3] The aforementioned video is in Russian, and recognizing the identity of those leaving memorials is not possible for us as we lack a familiarity with Russian. But we think that at least one of them is the grandson of Sultanzadeh.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQUGMSfqSWc>