

ULUS IRKAD

THE UNFORGOTTEN LEADER, DR IHSAN ALI

Dr. İhsan Ali was born in Vretcha village, near Panayia and Kilinia in Paphos District. After having served as an elementary school teacher for a couple of years, he left Cyprus for University studies in medicine in Geneva. After his return to Cyprus as a practicing Doctor of Medicine, he became well known not only to Paphians, but also to many other Cypriots who, especially after the inter-communal incidents in 1963, read his articles in the press, his open letters to İnönü in Turkey, his letters to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, his calls upon the Turkish Cypriots, or listened to his interviews on the television. His efforts were all directed towards achieving harmonious, friendly relations between the communities in Cyprus(1).

In 1920s as an elementary school teacher in Paphos he believed in the liberation of Cyprus from the British Rule. During the liberation war of Turkey he was one of the volunteer followers of Turkish Modernist nationalism of Atatürk . Sometimes a group of the military elite controlling a military regime can name themselves as the Kemalists but in fact despotic and oppressive military elits can't be regarded as democrats. Although there are many discussions on Kemalism in Turkey it should be accepted that some of the groups who joined the coup in 1960 named themselves as Left-Kemalists and because of these the ideas of İhsan Ali at that time were so similar with this group. Also before the coup İhsan Ali and his followers had arguments in Cyprus with the sympathisers of Menderes government. It is absolutely clear that Dr İhsan Ali's tendency was a real left-Kemalist(We can also regard left-Kemalism as a kind of social democracy) and had no dogmatic thoughts because he was defending the cooperation with the Greek Cypriot Community while condemning partition of the island. We can find out this reality from his memories, letters and political articles:

“Without exception, the whole world admitted that Atatürk was only a courageous and brave soldier but also a great revolutionary and statesman. With his policy “peace at home, peace in the world” he won the love and the respect of all mankind. On the occasion of his death, I suggested the hoisting of the Turkish flag at half mast at our club as an indication of mourning. I was reminded of the law. I was told that according to the law this was prohibited; in other words, the colonial administration forbade both Greeks and Turks to hoist any flag other than the British flag. So the club remained without a flag.”(2)

Also his arguments with the Menderes supporters were reflected in his “ My Memoirs” like this:

“I shall never be able to forget how much I suffered psychologically from these stupidities. During those critical days of 1955-59, I was the chairman of the largest Turkish Club in Paphos. Even though I had this position since 1940, I decided to abandon it and withdraw because I could not listen to such stupidities. The insistence of some of our members to place photographs of Menderes and Zorlu in our Club gave me the pretext to resign. I opposed their proposal saying: There have been many other Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, much more capable, but we have not put up the photographs of any of them. It would be ridiculous to hang up the photographs of Menderes and Zorlu.”(3)

In his letter that he sent to İnönü dated on the 6th of August 1964 he explains how he advocated İnönü against the Menderes supporters(4):

“... Yes , my Pasha, the Menderes' Radio Station continually praised Menderes heroism and accused You of being traitor, but the lapse of time proved who was a hero and who was a traitor. When you were insulted over the Radio, I suffered a nervous crisis and due to this, none of my family nor I listened to any broadcasts for many years. But now, when the Station is under Your Minister's responsibility, I express my sorrow at hearing that the very same putrefied tongue uses the same imputations against me.

However, whatever Your Radio's nasty tongues may broadcast, I shall never hesitate from expressing my belief that the two communities can live in harmony as in the past. I assure You that the Turks will be happier and more prosperous in a neutral and independent Cyprus than ever before during the colonial administration."

Although his ideology emanated from the modern Turkish Nationalism at the end Doctor İhsan Ali turned his face to Cypriotism and in 1950s he became the defender of this consciousness . Dr İhsan Ali was seemed that he was aware about the principles of the Left Kemalists. He was definitely anti-imperialist and was supporting the EU membership(Even many politicians were not aware about the existence and norms of EU). He knew that with this membership Cypriots would have won democratic norms and that would have promoted their civilisation. As it is known the new left Kemalists in Turkey don't support the EU membership. However the founder of Turkey Ataturk had admitted that he was following the ideas of French Revolution done in 1789. Also there are many discussions in Turkey that nationalism came out from Europe and the source is Europe and why on earth the Turkish nationalists are against EU membership. İhsan Ali's position should be considered by them as a very revolutionary and civilised stance in order to develop and integrate the other cultures and communities of the world.

In his letter that he sent to Mr İnönü on the 6th August 1964 he predicts the situation like this(5):

"...Whereas, in reality, the partition of Cyprus or the federation will be destructive for both the Turks and Greeks, it will be disastrous especially for the Turks.. At a time when the Common Market has been established and all the countries of Europe try to join it, what will be the benefit if the one hundred thousand of Turks separate from the unity of the whole population? It is in the light of these realities that I have done my best to warn the Turks of Turkey and of Cyprus not to fall into the trap of the ambitious..."

In his book and in his speeches he criticized the policies of imperialist countries. As we read in his memories he accused British policies because of her wrong attitudes against the Cypriots(6):

"With the outbreak of hostilities, the British colonialists found an opportunity to turn the Turkish Cypriots against the Greek Cypriots and apply the policy of "divide and rule."

We must accept that besides the left-Kemalism there was a Panturkist-Kemalism beginning to be instilled in people. İhsan Ali was against this idea. In the same paragraph in his book he criticizes the attitudes of Turkish Cypriot chauvinists(7):

" Chauvinism reached such a point that the Turkish Cypriots changed the names of those villages which had always had Greek names...."

It was an antidote to ENOSIS and had the underhand support and sympathy of the British. This is all well, but what purpose could nationalist ideology serve on the island of Cyprus, which was outside the borders of Turkish National Borders, and had experienced a different history than Turkey, as well as having economic and sociological formation.

In his memories and speeches İhsan Ali was questioning the nationalisms in Cyprus. Did the historical and sociological conditions exist, which were essential for its existence and sustenance in Turkey? No. Just as ENOSIS is an ideology created by the bourgeoisie without taking account of the internal dynamics of Cyprus, this "nationalist ideology", which only remained in the people's consciousness because it could not respond to the sociological, historical and cultural developments of our country, has been one of the main factors in the birth of alienation from the Cypriot identity. It seemed charming for the Turkish Cypriots but because of its adverse effects İhsan Ali started to defend Cypriotism for both of the communities.

This is all very well, but what else could the Turkish Cypriot elites have done, without a historical heritage and social formation, enabling it to create a political ideology? In addition the British Colonial Administration was quietly supporting our imported nationalisms.

It is obvious from a telegram sent by the High Commissioner of Cyprus, Lord Palmer, to his government in 1936, that the British were well aware of what they were doing(8),

“...the conception of Cypriot Nationalism which, when Enosis becomes an outworn creed, is certain to supervene, shall be relegated to as distant future as possible. At present it hardly exists. The Cypriots are either “nationals” of their District, or Greeks or Turks(CO 67/271/1 Secret message from Palmer, to W.G. Ormsby Gor, 23.10.1936)”

In his book of My Memoirs İhsan Ali describe his opinions like this:“As a matter of fact, since 1878, when Turkey ceded Cyprus to Britain for a nominal rental fee, Turkey had never and in no way taken an interest in the Turkish Cypriots. On the other hand, when in 1914 Britain officially declared Cyprus a crown colony and unilaterally abrogated the 1878 agreement, the Greek Cypriots intensified their activities for Enosis. The Turkish Cypriots remained faithful servants of the British. They were supposedly against Enosis but in reality they supported by all means the colonialists.

Soon after the First World War, some Turkish Cypriot intellectuals decided at a meeting to send a delegation to England to ask, with a memorandum, for the return of the island to Turkey. This action may seem ridiculous. Not even in his dream could anybody think of the return of Cyprus at a time when Turkey and its allies were defeated in the War and the Treaty of Sevres threatened Turkey with partition into various states. The same mistake was repeated by the Greek Cypriots in the Second World War. While Greece was under German occupation, the Greek Cypriots did not stop asking for Enosis.

Even after the war, and with so much destruction and ruin caused by the civil strife in Greece, the Greek Cypriots were not interested in anything else but Enosis. If we compare the activities of the two communities then, we can say that those of the Turkish Cypriots look like “bubble” and those of the Greek Cypriots like a “mirage”.(9)

During the establishment of Cyprus Republic İhsan Ali was criticising the London and Zurich Agreements. According to him These agreements created the phenomenon of a state. It was very difficult for the communities to collaborate in harmony within such a state, with a constitution that had no parallel anywhere in the world. Three years after the inception of the Constitution the first bloody incidents broke out, known as “the 1963 incidents”. In his opinion, both Turkey and Greece had committed a big historic mistake by approving the Agreements and helping in imposing them on the Cypriot people.

The separate municipalities was the basis of the division of two communities. Also, as the proportion of public servants was not based on justice, it could become a source of conflict and disturbance between the two communities. Good relations could not be developed. On the contrary, a cold political atmosphere would prevail on both sides. The presence of the Turkish and Greek forces was totally inadmissible and unprecedented, because they would be the cause of clashes between the two communities, as was in fact the case later. What is more important, the presence of foreign troops was not in harmony with the nature of an independent state.

Another incomprehensible point was the guarantees of Turkey, Greece and Britain and the recognition of the right of those three countries to intervene. They could intervene with the slightest pretext and create inadmissible conditions, as indeed it has happened. The fate of the Greek Community was being determined by the Greek Government and that of the Turkish Cypriots by the Turkish Government. The United Kingdom always remained apathetic and indifferent to what was happening.

With the break-up of the Cyprus Republic in 1964, the Turkish Cypriots gathered in the closed settlement centres. During this period the Turkish Cypriots were sustained on “beliefs”. They elevated Turkey to the level of a religion. They lived on the aid provided by Turkey and were closed to the rest of the world. They were transformed into a military society with the grey-wolf symbol of arms. The Turkish Cypriot rulers established a “General Committee” and ruled the Turkish Cypriots like a primitive community. Not according to the laws, but judgments based on regulations and detentions without court appearances. Dr. Küçük, in the 7 October 1967 edition of the Halkın Sesi newspaper, defines the years 1963-1966 as full of incidents which would embarrass history and would cause eternal shame to humanity. The Turkish Cypriots

had de facto emigrated from the island during this period. They moved to a military world. While looking for physical and emotional security there, they sought protection from Turkey as from a tribal God. Under the Greek Cypriot chauvinist attacks and the oppression of the Turkish Cypriot rulers.

In 1963-64 Dr İhsan Ali was in conflict with the Turkish Cypriot Leadership because of his policy and ideas. In Turkey also the left- Kemalists who supported the independence of Cyprus State like him were all passified and dismissed from their jobs and responsibilities in the state. Even the first ambassador of Turkey to Cyprus Mr Dirvana was knocked out and complained to Turkey. Then he had to leave Cyprus. Turkish Deep State was successful to implement her partitionist policies for Cyprus. When I visited Dr İhsan Ali in Paphos in 1975, I remember that I asked why he stayed in the Greek Cypriot Sector in Paphos in 1964. He answered me immediately: "They would have killed me". I think he had summarized his position in 1964 very simply.

In his book he defines this situation like this(10):

"I hope that the reader will understand why I refused to co-operate with that leadership. I foresaw that those efforts could only serve foreign interests, and it was not therefore possible for me to be misled into that disgusting game. That was the reason why I stayed in my house which, like the houses of many of my compatriots, is located in the Greek neighbourhood. I did not leave that house not even when all the other Turkish Cypriots had been terrorised by their leadership, I was accused of being a traitor, by those who wanted to conceal their own treason.

Even some Greeks regarded my action as strange because their fanaticism and chauvinism did not allow them to realise that I was facing the situation as a Cypriot and was concerned about the interest of the people of Cyprus as a whole. They could not appreciate this line of thought, and I wonder how could the Cyprus State continue to exist if the Cypriot people are not able to realise that first of all they are Cypriots."

In his letter dated 12 May 1964 he describes the bad conditions that the people met in 1964 like this(11):

"Both Greek and Turkish citizens do not feel safe to travel. Because, it is said that recently Greeks and Turks have been abducting each other. These incidents are really very bitter. It is, therefore, an indispensable obligation of the State to give an end to such disappointing incidents. Under these circumstances, a general disarmament is essential. In my opinion, the United Nations Peace force has an important role to play as its task to that end. And, it is to be recorded with surprise and regret that the United Nations Force has so far failed to fulfill this important task. Unless they succeed in securing the disarmament, the innocent people will not get rid of the evils of the terrorists and other irresponsible persons. Every peace-loving person in the Country is expecting impatiently the Government and the United Nations Peace Force in to carry out the process of disarmament."

As a Paphian I remember that even his family was under the oppression of the Turkish Cypriot fanatics in the Turkish Cypriot Sector in Paphos. In 1964, when I was 7 years old, I heard some women's screams in Mutallos, the center of Turkish Cypriot Sector. When I reached there Mr İhsan Ali's close relatives were being beaten by these fanatics. I have never forgotten this painful event in my life. It convinced me that if Dr İhsan Ali had come to the Turkish Cypriot Sector he would have been killed. In addition after this event some of his relatives and his friends left the Turkish Cypriot Sector and started to live in the Greek Cypriot Sector because of these cruel tortures. When the Turkish Commander(Sandjactar) came to Paphos in 1967 these people turned back to their homes again.

Because of Dr. İhsan Ali's conciliatory efforts in the intercommunal relations, President Makarios appointed him as his Special Political Adviser. Unfortunately, the well-known circumstances did not permit the realization of his hopes. Moreover, he was attacked by extremists on both sides. Turkish Cypriot extremists blamed him for collaboration with the enemies (Greek Cypriots), while his duties and salary were questioned in at least one Greek Cypriot newspaper. He promptly replied to all of them.

Despite many rumours, I didn't meet any ordinary Paphian who spoke against him. According to the general idea he was an honest politician, a founder, a good organizer, a good leader and a progressive

person. Most of the Paphians loved him. During the meetings he was the only person in Paphos addressing the people very effectively. Although his teaching took a very short time he was recognized as a very successful and respectful elementary teacher around Paphos. I was told that in 1922 when he was an elementary teacher he organised a demonstration against the British Rule and after that he was arrested. By the help of old Paphians he was released.

My late grand father, Hamza Erdogan, was a very good friend of his. They met at the end of 1920s and they continued their friendship till we left Paphos, 1975. I remember when he heard his death news in 1978 he cried. My late grand uncle, Ahmet Hamdi Kılıç who ran the cafeteria of Ulku Yurdu Football Club in Paphos was one of his students during his childhood. He was a very open minded person and was always talking about his effective teaching in the classroom. After his medical education İhsan Ali came to Paphos as a doctor in 1930s and he participated in lots of the commissions and committees serving for the benefit of Paphians and that's why Paphos was modernised in a short time. His effect was seen in education and also in Municipality. He was a chairman of the Turkish Secondary Schools Commission of Paphos. Early 1950s he helped his nephew Özdemir Özgür to establish and become the chairman of the cultural and sports "İnkilap Club". On many occasions did he address audiences at cultural and sports events and ceremonies.

In 1930s there was a group of Cypriot intellectuals in Paphos who were good friends of his and during their spare times they met and discussed about politics and daily problems about Cyprus in Ulku Yurdu Sport Club or in Birlık Club. Among these people Talat Tasher, Suleyman Shevket and Hamza Erdogan were the famous ones. Talat was a very famous writer, writing articles in Halkın Sesi but unfortunately he was exiled in 1953 by the British Rule. He was a very effective writer and because of his critics against the British Rule he was accused of getting Turkish citizenship without informing the British Government. Suleyman Shevket was a friend and a relative of İhsan Ali but unfortunately he died in the fateful traffic accident in 1936. He was one of the prospective leaders and a successful lawyer of the Turkish and the Greek Cypriots. My grand father was a road forman in the district administration in Paphos and an intellectual who shared many things with İhsan Ali. For me, the sharing of political views and the historical events they faced together stimulated Dr İhsan Ali's vision for the future. The dinamism that Dr Ali showed in his life was a real Cypriot and democrat attitude which drew a good and correct line in the Cyprus history and can't be ignored.

I have grown up with the stories about Dr İhsan Ali, told me during my childhood. He was my doctor. I don't remember him at that time because I was a little child at the end of 1950s. My late father always told me that he was a good organizer and a speaker. Especially his great ability in addressing the masses was excellent. I was told that in every ceremony he was the only person in Paphos talking to the audiences very emotionally. Nobody can deny his effectivity on the Turkish Cypriot community. The old Paphians told me that he was the pioneer of cultural activities performed in Paphos in 1930s. The plays that he improvised on the stages with the youth of Paphos were never forgotten. He was the founder of the new generations, new hopes for Cyprus and the new Paphos as well. Dr İhsan Ali with Barrister Ayhan Hikmet and Ahmet Gürkan in the late 1950s organised a political Party, Halk Partisi. It is well known Ayhan and Muzafer Gürkan were murdered in 1962 by the Turkish Cypriot underground organization because of their opposition to policies of separatism in inter-communal relations. Dr İhsan Ali often wrote in the newspaper Cumhuriyet which was published by the two aforesaid victims. Earlier, Dr. Ali used to write in Söz where for a certain period he even used to write the leading articles. He was deeply interested not only in politics but also in cultural affairs. The Turkish Cypriots of Paphos surely remember his lectures on poetry and literature.

In 1974 after the painful events he was against the restrictions put on the Turkish Cypriots for travelling. He proposed to the Greek Cypriot leaders to permit the Turkish Cypriots to travel to the North. For him the ones who would have observed the conditions in the North would not have accepted the partition and would have come back to the South again. Unfortunately he was not listened to. After 31 years we see that he was absolutely right in his pragmatic proposals that he was proposing the Greek Cypriot leadership. When I was in Paphos he wrote an article in one of the Greek Cypriot newspapers criticising the way of preventing the freedom of Turkish Cypriots living in the South in 1975. According to him, such restrictions would have realised real partition. He never hesitated to criticise either Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot leaderships. His dream for a united and reconciled Cyprus was shattered after the 1974 events. He was

hoping that the United Nations might restore the situation. After he heard that not much should be expected from the United Nations, he was distressed by the developments.

The message that we received from him has never changed :

I quote:

“Greeks and Turks wish to live brotherly in this country as they did in the past. Both Greece and Turkey should help them in this respect instead of doing the opposite and victimizing the Cypriot people. We think that it is not difficult for one to realise how great and historic their responsibilities are”(12)

May the spirit of Dr. İhsan Ali enlighten and guide the young generations of Cyprus.

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