



Learning from Metin Çulhaoğlu (1947–2022)

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METİN ÇULHAOĞLU PURSUES A QUESTION from the thirtieth page of his 1997 book *Binyıl Eşiğinde Marksizm ve Türkiye Solu* (Marxism and Turkish Left on the brink of the Millenium), which I read when I was a university student: “Does attachment to a certain collectivity necessarily limit the intellectual?” Or in other words of Hilmi Ziya Ülken, whom he criticizes in his book, “Does engagement in social action impairs the intellectual maturity of a thinker?”

If you ask me “Who is Metin Çulhaoğlu to you?”; first of all, he is “the answer to this question he asked himself.” We are talking about a revolutionary who did not fall out of organized politics for a single day from his early youth until his last breath, and a Marxist intellectual with the ability to deepen even the most everyday and basic issue he analyzed by infusing it with theory, art and science. His writings on even mundane matters cannot fail to include a brilliant political inference. Nevertheless, I think Çulhaoğlu’s life is not limited to proving the “possibility” of the coexistence of collective action and intellectual depth. Beyond that he has a life that shows that an intellectually equipped person can become a “teacher” only when he connects with a community that transcends his individuality and does not isolate himself from political action.

“Teacher” was one of the words most frequently used by his acquaintances, comrades, followers and even political opponents who expressed their feelings in remembrance of him on the day of his death. This word also describes Çulhaoğlu’s influence on me as one of his friends and comrades and an intellectual follower. Metin represented neither the mission of an “educator” by pulling the other down with “information” and preaching the “truth” from above, nor a position of a “narrator” satisfied with synthesizing and presenting already mature theoretical and conceptual approaches. He was more of a “teacher.” A “teacher” who specifically selects the issues on which the minds are extremely confused, presents his thesis

on them, but explains his thesis by pointing out how he reached them in an intellectual sequence.

In this case, “learning” did not arise as a result of Çulhaoğlu's initial intention/goal to teach, but naturally and necessarily out of his effort to integrate his brilliant mind and vast knowledge with political and social action. And what was “learned” in the end? What was learned was neither the pure information, nor the final word on the disputed issue, i.e. the slogan, nor the incorrigible fallacy of the opponent. (This corresponds to “educating” in the context of this article). What was learned was the Marxist method of reasoning and reaching a conclusion on any social/political issue. By placing even the most “specific and topical” issue in a general historical context, by treating even the most “concrete and practical” problem with the abstract categories of Marxism, Çulhaoğlu was “teaching” how any person interested in politics could properly mature, substantiate and defend an idea in a sophisticated manner. In this respect, in his writings and speeches, Metin was exposing the art of applying Marian dialectics to the concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

Yes, he would be in a position to present his own theses, but he would not impose them as a doctrine, nor would he present them only to a small community of intellectuals. By presenting his theses with all the steps of reasoning and factual bases behind them, he created a field of discussion open to their fundamental questioning. Thus, learning and teaching became two facets of the same process for him. The “passion of listening and reading” about him that even those who oppose him the most acknowledge is, in my opinion, precisely related to this invitation to think together. Such a system of thinking and narration is of course a prerequisite for a mature, rich and improving intellectual debate. But the attitude it brings also has a “political and strategic” value: it is only through such intellectual maturity and openness that the bigoted organizational fetishism and vicious intra-left rivalries could be avoided, and thus the possibility of a genuine struggle together, could be possible.

Those familiar with Metin Çulhaoğlu's writings and speeches will acknowledge what I have said so far about his intellectual “teaching.” As someone who shared some “leisure” time with him, became more aware of his personality and knows what he had experienced during the turbulent and difficult political periods of the last ten years, I cannot pass without mentioning something else that I “learned” from him. As one of the leading and ambitious figures of the fragmented Turkish socialist movement, Metin received harsh political/theoretical criticism throughout his life of

struggle, some of which he acknowledged; this was inevitable and “teaching” at the same time. Metin took these criticisms seriously in his writings and personal conversations and try to enrich his thinking with them. Metin loved and paid attention to genuine criticism. What is really “teaching” for me is this: He never fell into the trap of "personally" discrediting any of his political opponents, because they were not in the same political position as him, and he remembered all of them, including those who attempted to do this to him, “with kindness and beauty.” A person can reach such a level of maturity only when he has a life practice that combines his intellectual depth with a revolutionary will. There is much to learn from this, not only about politics but about being human in these dark times.

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Metin Çulhaoğlu was born in Balıkesir in 1947. In 1970, Çulhaoğlu graduated from Faculty of Economics, Middle East Technical University (METU) and worked as an executive member of METU Socialist Idea Club in 1968-1969. Çulhaoğlu took part in the first and second Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP) and worked as a writer and editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Yürüyüş* between 1975 and 1978. After the split at the Congress of 2nd Workers’ Party of Turkey, he started publishing the magazine *Sosyalist İktidar* in September 1979 with Yalçın Küçük, İlhan Akalın and Mesut Odman (Odabaşı). The monthly magazine was published for a total of 11 issues. Çulhaoğlu was the editor-in-chief of this magazine. The magazine's publication life was ended with the September 12, 1980 *coup d'état*.

Between 1983 and 1986 Metin Çulhaoğlu was imprisoned, and in 1986 he led the establishment of the *Gelenek* (Tradition) magazine collective. This movement later became a party and took its place on the political scene as the Socialist Turkey Party (STP). Çulhaoğlu left the party in 1993 and started publishing the magazine *Sosyalist Politika* (*Socialist Politics*). The *Sosyalist Politika* group took part in the founding of the United Socialist Party (BSP) and the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), respectively.

In 2001, he left the ÖDP with the *Sosyalist Politika* group, reunited with the *Gelenek* movement and joined the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP). He served on the party’s Central Committee from then until 2014. Metin Çulhaoğlu took part in the establishment of the People’s Communist Party of Turkey (HTKP) following the split in the TKP in April 2014, founded on November 7, 2017. Çulhaoğlu served on the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP) and was a member of the TİP Party Assembly.

He wrote columns in many daily newspapers such as *BirGün* and *soL*. Since August 16, 2014, his articles have been published in *İleri Haber* on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Metin Çulhaođlu made some implicit but very significant contributions to the development of this journal, Marxism and Sciences by taking part and gave talks in the seminars, conferences and workshops that preceded and informed this journal initiative.

His most important works include:

- Tarih Türkiye Sosyalizm [History, Turkey and Socialism.](Gelenek, 1988; Doruk, 1996; Yazılama, 2012).
- Sovyet Deneyinden Siyaset Dersleri [Political Lessons from the Soviet Experience.] (1989, Gelenek).
- Binyıl Eşiğinde Marksizm ve Türkiye Solu [Marxism and the Turkish Left on the Brink of the Millennium] (1997, Sarmal Yayınları; 2002, YGS; 2015, Yordam Kitap).
- İdeolojiler Alanı ve Türkiye Örneđi [The Domain of Ideologies and the Case of Turkey.] (1998, Öteki Yayınevi).
- Doğruda Durmanın Felsefesi: Seçme Yazılar 1970-2000 [The Philosophy of Standing on the Right Side: Selected Writings 1970-2000.](YGS, 2002).