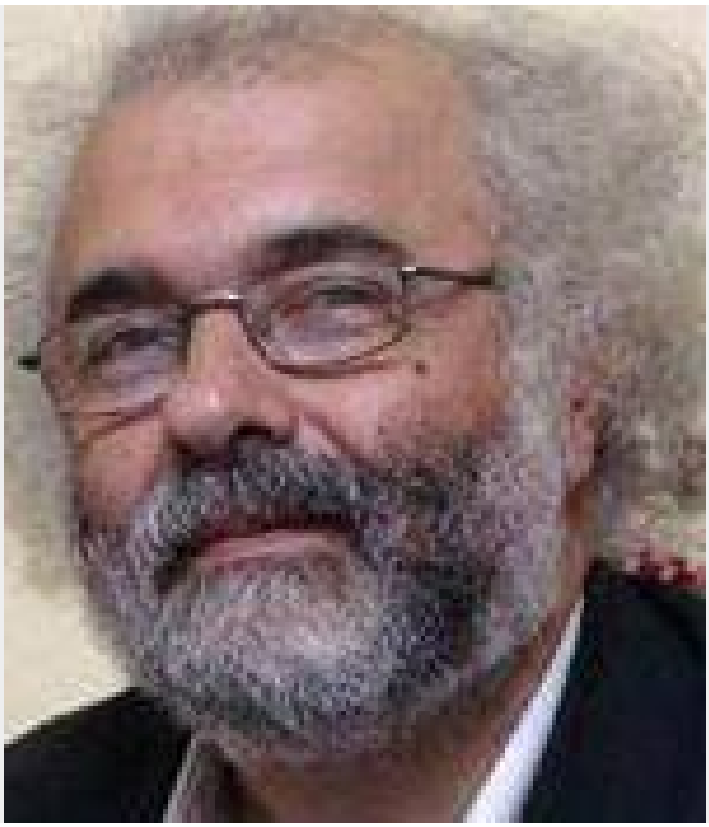
FREE ZARAKOLU AND HIS COMRADES-IN-LETTERS

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Category: Opinions

And Human Rights Campaigners in Turkey

Prof. Khatchatur I. Pilikian, 23 November 2011, Houses of Parliament, Parliamentary Offices at 1 Parliament St.

> *Solidarity with Prisoners of Conscience in Turkey*
> *Kurdish Federation UK, KNK, Peace in Kurdistan Campaign*
> *Meeting Sponsored by Michael Connarty MP*
> ***To Support Ragip Zarakolu***
> *Detained by the Turkish State in a High Security Prison*

How well John Seeley, the Scottish historian, has said: **"History is past politics, and politics present history."** To grasp well the motives why the valiant intellectual and human rights publicist Zarakolu is now one of the latest victims of the oppressive Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, we have to appreciate the historical background of oppression, the oppressive rulers and their governments' terror of the truthful word.

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The truthful word is indeed the main target of every anti-democratic authority anywhere, and in all ages. What Shakespeare portrayed about the censorship of Art is surely relevant of Truth too, because **"Art made tongue-tied by authority"** gratifies the vanity of the grotesque actors of power

politics. No wonder when censorship, which in essence is bureaucratic vandalism, eventually fails, the oppressor decides to physically eliminate the author who acts with intellectual dignity to enliven the awareness of reality.

Once upon a time there lived one of the great poets of the East, named Sarmad, thought to be on a par with Khayyam and Hafez. Sarrmad's outspoken verses of social and moral criticism angered the supreme authority of the Mogul Empire, Shah Aurengzeb. Aurengzeb had deposed and imprisoned his own father, Shah Jahan of the Taj Mahal renown. Ruling over 150 million people, counting nearly one fourth of the entire world population in the 17th century, Aurengzeb was unable to confront let alone accept the truth uttered by his own poet laureate, Sarmad. Failing to silence him, the Shah ordered the beheading of the poet in 1661. Aurengzeb's own biographer, Ali Khan Razi, wrote down Sarmad's last verses. Here they are:

Dark was it all
All around me,
When from deep slumber
I opened my eyes anew
I saw the entire world
Engulfed in darkness.
Thus tired of it all
I closed my eyes anew.

Sarmad was not a revolutionary poet. No matter. When his words truthfully reflected the reality of the world he was living in, that frightened the hell out of the oppressor, the most potent ruler of the Mogul Empire of 17th c.

During the first quarter of the 20th c., a revolutionary leader in the Middle East founded a new republic -- Turkey. Albeit, the founder potentate was unable to face the truth uttered by a revolutionary poet, Nazim Hikmet, the poet laureate of the Turkish people. On June 1st, 1933, Mustafa Kemal, the President of the new Republic, ordered the poet's arrest and sent him to prison to face the death penalty. Why? The poet himself had the answer:

They want to slaughter my songs
And quench the blazing flame of my wrath.

Meanwhile, just few months later, on October 29, 1933, Mustafa Kemal, in pomp and circumstance and accompanied by Stalin's official envoy, Voroshilof, inspected the Republican Army.

Sentenced in 1938 to 28 years imprisonment, the poet was kept in Bursa prison in 1942, the year Nazi Germany's Fuhrer restored to Turkey,as a gesture of good will, the ashes of Talaat Pasha. Mind you, it was Talaat, the Young Turk's Interior Minister, who had telegraphed the genocidal order to the Governor of Aleppo, on September 15, 1915, saying:
"The Government has decided to exterminate entirely all the Armenians living in Turkey Without pity for women, children and invalids without heeding any scruples of conscience, their existence must be terminated."

Talaat Pasha was, in fact, articulating his government's ongoing actions.
On April 24, 1915, in Istanbul, around 300 Armenian intellectuals, of all professions, were all arrested and deported, and soon nearly all of them were butchered. Until mid May, 1915, the Armenian civic population was practically depleted of its intellectuals; 196 writers, 575 musicians, 336 doctors, 176 teachers and college professors, 160 lawyers, 62 architects, 64 actors...all arrested, deported, disappeared for good... The culminating act of the genocidal scheme was thus set in motion. Having also depleted the Armenian nation of its able-bodied male population by conscripting Armenians before the First World War broke out, Talaat's Young Turk government ordered out what remained of the Armenian population of Asia Minor -- the elderly, the women and the children -- southward towards the deserts of Northern Syria. Vandalism, rape, extortion, sadistic torture, starvation, murder raids and all ad infinitum. The rest is the scream of humanity at its most infernal…

Let me confess, both of my parents, who dared outlive the Genocide of 1915, never entertained any sentiment of hatred towards the Turkish people. And I feel serenely proud of that ethical heritage.

Lo and behold, Ataturk's Turkish Republic is now honouring the remains of Talaat Pasha, as the 'fallen hero', on the Hill of Liberty in Istanbul. Perhaps it is hoped, ideally with NATO's blessing, to enshrine, in the mausoleum, the remains of other 'Young Turk heroes'… After all, on his 50th birthday, in 1939, a year after Ataturk's death, speaking to some Turkish generals, Hitler had eulogised, in memory of the first President of the Republic of Turkey who once was a Young Turk comrade, by saying: ***"Ataturk has two great students in this world--Mussolini and me."***

And Nazim Hikmet continued to be imprisoned even in 1948, the year of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights,** and also, most tellingly, of **The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**. The Turkish people's poet, the comrade-in-Arms and in-Lettres of Aragon, Mayakovski and Pablo Neruda, continued writing twelve volumes of verses, considered among the best in world literature, while in prison for nearly one third of his entire life. The poet warned his beloved people
Your own hands hold this world
Oh my working people

They feed you lies
While you are starving to death.

Nazim Hikmet's voice rang loud and clear in mid 20th century.

What is happening now in the 21st century is that an outspoken admirer of the poet Hikmet is raising his voice in support of the national minorities of his homeland, Turkey. Furthermore, Ragip Zarakolu is denouncing, among others, the fascistic styled article 301, as if remembering what John Milton, the revolutionary republican poet, had once declared in his Apology of 1648: ***"they who have put out the peoples eyes, reproach them of their blindness".***

Here is what the Canadian Action has recently written on the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey**:**
"Since 1993, over four thousand Kurdish villages have been destroyed and more than seventeen thousand killings of innocent Kurds have been carried out by The Turkish Special Forces. Following the March 29, 2010 municipal elections, fifteen hundred politicians, intellectuals, elected representatives, mayors and human rights activists have been jailed to date. As unacceptable as it is, hundreds of Kurdish children have been killed by The Turkish Security Forces since 1993 and today, about three thousand Kurdish children (aged 6 to 17) are in jail."

What the Canadian Action describes is nothing less than a latter-day enactment of the new Republic's genocidal massacre in Dersim between 1937-1938, when the Turkish army, its land and air force, annahilated 80 thousand mostly Alevi kurds, icluding women , children and the elderly.

It is obvious, and sadly so, that the Turkish government relentlessly continues its undeclared war, yet again, against its own citizens, but failing, nevertheless, to "put out the people's eyes", particularly in this case, the Kurdish people's eyes, or, for that matter, the Turkish people's eyes too, as I tend to believe, having met personally the humanist and couregeous Turkish intellectual, Ragip Zarakolu, here in London, sharing with him a platform at the House of Commons in memory of Hrant Dink, Zarakolu's comrade-in-letters, assassinated by a fascist thug in 2007.

Here is an Appeal just circulated on November 17, 2011, addressed to the Arab World, Europe and International Public Opinion**,** by the Armenian Assembly of Europe:

"**Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoghan is increasing his pretensions to the role of judge in regional issues. Erdoghan reached the peak when he called on the Syrian regime "not to massacre" people, adding that "otherwise history will always remember it as sanguinary".**
Mr. Erdoghan has no right to teach morality to others unless he listens to the appeals of the European leaders and comes to terms with the dark pages of Turkish history. Turkey is urged to abolish the notorious medieval Article 301, the latest victim of which became the publicist Zarakolu,

who used to voice about the sufferings of national minorities -victims of the Turkish discriminatory policy. "

Let us remember how dignified and emphatic the intellectual giant Bertrand Russell was in his Closing Address to the Stockholm Session of the 1967 War Crimes Tribunal on Vietnam, saying among others:

"The long arduous struggle for decency and for liberation is unending. A Tribunal such as ours will be necessary until the last starving man is fed and a way of life is created which ends exploitation of the many by the few. Wherever men struggle against suffering we must be their voice. We will be judged not by our reputations or our pretences but by our will to act."

It is good to know that such an act was forged and an international committee was created in Paris, presided over by the poet Tristan Zara, to campaign for the release of the imprisoned writer Nazim Hikmet. The committee succeeded. The poet was freed in 1950. But his odyssey continued. Hikmet tells us about the nature of his odyssey:

I went to the Forum
I convinced people anew
-Do not kill your brothers
-Do not be killed by your brothers
Down with the war

I believe Zarakolu and all his comrades-in-letters and all the human rights campaigners just recently imprisoned in Turkey have all gone to that same Forum for that same reason. Their odyssey now continues in prison. Let us rage against this injustice and demand freedom for the Turkish people's valiant humanist intellectual, Ragip Zarakolu, and for all his comrades-in-letters and all the campaigners for human rights who are the victims of the notorious Article 301. The latter's place ought to be surely not in the Turkish Penal Code but in the dustbin of history, I humbly believe.