
The Left in Turkey **A Fragmented History**

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Contemporary Turkey Program



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Overview

The Gezi protest movement gripped Turkey throughout the summer of 2013 and reignited observers' interest in Turkey's left-wing activist groups, which participated in the protests. A review of the history of this complex and fragmented political movement will serve to highlight the points of continuity and the points of rupture, both individual and collective, which can be observed, as well as shedding light on the emergence of the Left in Turkey and the difficulty it has experienced in organizing itself due to repression and its own internal divisions. It is a situation that has persisted over the many elections that punctuate Turkish political life.

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Introduction to the Years of Torment

Only a year ago, discussion and analysis of the Left and its history in contemporary Turkey would have seemed an exercise better suited to the historian than the sociologist, as the Left seemed, from the 1980s onward, to be confined to highly contained and localized political margins. Given this context, the Gezi demonstrations¹ came as a powerful shock to Turkey and the Left. It came as a surprise to the government, which had been confident in the progressive establishment of its increasingly authoritarian power, as the repression of the movement demonstrated². The protests, which spread to almost forty cities, also came as a shock to observers who had previously been quick to highlight the apathy of the Turkish youth, which had been largely depoliticized following the military junta's heavy-handed takeover between 1980 and 1983³.

Historical and international comparisons and interpretations of the Gezi demonstrations have started to emerge. In the afterword of a collective work on Turkey, Ali Kazancıgil and his co-authors refuted the hypothesis of a "Turkish Spring" analogous to the "Arab Springs", since the movement was not seeking to end of an established dictatorship. They also rejected comparisons with the *indignados*, who were more concerned with austerity measures and the ultra-liberalization of the globalized economy. Instead, they aligned Gezi more with May '68 in France⁴, considering the socioeconomic context of the protests: strong economic development for several years

¹ To recap briefly, the protest movement was initially sparked by the project, supported by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to bulldoze a park located near Taksim Square in order to (re)construct an Ottoman-era military barracks destroyed in the early years of the Republic to make way for a mosque and shopping center. Gezi Park is one of the last remaining green spaces in the center of the city and was occupied by protesters for almost a month despite successive, violent attempts by security forces to regain control of the park.

² Six people were killed over the course of the protests and more than 7,000 were injured.

³ For a welcome critique of this widely held view, see the work of Demet Lüküslü who puts forward the notion of "necessary conformism" (after François Dubet's "necessary fictions") faced with the state's authoritarianism towards young people with strong political ideas. I would also like to direct readers to articles by Etienne Copeaux on Turkish youth in the years 1980-1990 on his blog, www.susam-sokak.fr

⁴ Ali Kazancıgil, Faruk Bilici and Deniz Akagül (ed.), *La Turquie, d'une révolution à l'autre*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Coll. Pluriel, 2013, pp. 335-338.

coupled with maintained, if not increased, social restrictions that were out of step with the evolution of society.

The objective here is not to define what Gezi is or is not, even if the parallel with May '68 is an interesting one in many respects with regard to the history of the Left, but rather to attempt to resituate it within the context and history of protest movements in Turkey, and particularly those implicating the Left. Given the magnitude of the June 2013 protests, one cannot help but think of the protests in Istanbul on the July 16th and 17th, 1970, and in particular of the tragedy that took place on May 1st, 1977, in Taksim Square, events that are considered to constitute the height of the wave of leftist mobilization in Turkey⁵. Without wanting to systematically associate Gezi with the Left⁶, at the risk of downplaying the movement's diversity, which gave it its power and originality, evoking these decisive events linked to Taksim Square provides a way of better understanding the history of the Left in Turkey.

Defining the Left in Turkey is a tricky exercise since it has, since its inception, been fragmented and diversified, as much from an ideological standpoint as an organizational point of view. Jacob Landau situates it, in the particular context of the Cold War and the military coup d'état of 1980, to the left of the original Kemalist party, the CHP⁷. Although any attempt at definition will inevitably be too narrow given the ideological and militant exchanges between the various groups, we are proposing here to refine this definition in the interest of clarity and to differentiate three strands among organizations claiming or having claimed a 'left' political label. Firstly, we have the category which is probably the most contestable yet fundamental to understanding the position of the subsequent formations. This is the socialist-democratic left of the government which corresponds to the CHP of the 1970s, then to social-democratic parties at the very beginning of the 1980s. The brevity of their periods in power and their alliances with right-wing or Islamist parties have largely restricted their capacity for action and the establishment of a solid social-democratic current. The second category consists of the legal, socialist left wing (in its different forms) which corresponds to the TIP (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi* – Workers Party of Turkey), the first legal socialist party in Turkey, founded in 1962, and

⁵ Korhan Atay, *1 Mayıs 1977. İşçi Bayramı Neden ve Nasıl Kana Bulandı?*, İstanbul, Metis-Siyahbeyaz, 2013, p. 216.

⁶ The Gezi protest movement brought together a wide range of actors from established political parties to members of Kurdish, ecological and anti-globalist movements, football supporters, nationalist and radical left supporters, members of associations for the protection of women, the LGBT movement, and anti-capitalist Muslims, among others.

⁷ Jacob M. Landau, "Images of the Turkish Left", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 32, n°5, September – October 1983, p. 74. The *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP – Republican People's Party), founded by Mustafa Kemal in 1923, originally fervently supported a state socialist, secular, republican Kemalist ideology.

its successive incarnations up to the present day. Finally we must take into consideration the third category, which is made up of illegal and clandestine revolutionary extreme left, violent or otherwise, composed of a multitude of groups from the end of the 1960s, established mainly among the student youth, and which we will examine in more detail later. For the sake of precision, we will leave trade unionism out of our field of inquiry since it deserves its own dedicated study.

Through a chronological presentation of these aspects of the Left, with particular attention paid to the decade of the 1970s, the aim of this paper is to highlight the areas of continuity and rupture with the current protest movements in Turkey. We will attempt to shed some light on the implicit dynamics of career changes and repositioning of radical left activists within a political context that underwent profound transformations beginning with the coup d'état of 1980. Tracking the triumphs and misfortunes of this little-studied political current provides a useful perspective on the transformations of the protest movement contesting the current Turkish government.

Between Grace and Disgrace: From the Communist Party to the Workers' Party of Turkey

At the beginning of the 20th century, socialist ideas were starting to be taken up within certain limited circles composed mainly of journalists and students arriving back from Western Europe – Berlin and Paris in particular – and principally based in Istanbul, the capital of the declining Empire⁸. Newspapers and debate groups started to crop up at the same time as the first trade union demands were being heard in the larger cities of the Empire (Istanbul and İzmir). The creation of the USSR led to the formation of the TKP (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi* – Communist Party of Turkey) in 1920, which was affiliated with Comintern. Following the collapse of the Empire, the main communist leaders were briefly allied with Mustafa Kemal during the War of Independence, but were eventually executed in 1921 on Kemal's order. The communist world vision based on class struggle was in fact in total opposition to Kemalist ideology in its vision of a classless society, thought of as a unanimous “organic body”⁹ headed by leaders who would defend its integrity from the threat of internal and external “foreign bodies”. The Communist Party of Turkey, which was bound to Moscow and was seen to have “infiltrated” society, was seen as a danger to the youth of the Turkish Republic, which would go on to ban communism in its penal code (arts. 162 & 163) and persecute communist supporters who were reduced to clandestine existences and exile in the Eastern Bloc. One emblematic figure of this era is the poet Nazim Hikmet who was imprisoned in Turkey for a large part of his life, before being forced into exile in the USSR.

Faced with Soviet pressure on the Turkish Straits following the Second World War, Turkey joined the Western Bloc. In 1952 it became the only member of NATO to share a border with the USSR and was America's chief ally in the region. In order to facilitate its integration into the western European community, the Turkish

⁸ For more information on the beginnings of socialism in Turkey, see George S. Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Publications, 1967, p. 215.

⁹ Hamit Bozarslan, “Structures de pouvoir, coercion et violence”, in Semih Vaner (ed.), *La Turquie*, Paris, Fayard-CERI, 2005, p. 231.

government made the transition to multiparty democracy in 1945¹⁰. The Democratic Party (DP) was then founded by former executives from the CHP and won the legislative elections in 1950, drawing votes from various parts of society that were discontent with the dogged reformist policy of the Kemalist government. Once in power, the DP embarked upon a liberal economic policy that opened up Turkey's economy to foreign investment, albeit in a relatively modest way. But it was their conservative (tolerance with regard to the brotherhoods banned under the CHP, the return of religious discourse in public and political life, etc.) and profoundly anti-communist policy that won them a majority of rural voters. The party was increasingly contested toward the end of the 1950s, accused of veering towards authoritarianism, notably by students, who were beginning to organize themselves into unions.

A coup d'état in 1960 overthrew the government of Adnan Menderes and the President of the Republic, Celal Bayar. Fearing that the Kemalist ideals and foundations of the government were in danger, the military junta put itself forward as the protector of the country's integrity¹¹. Although certain commentators have applied a 'left' label to this coup d'état, it might not be so straight forward. Certainly some of the coup leaders supported social progressivism as part of a Kemalist ideology tinted with socialism¹², but they represented only a part of the interim government, which also included military members from the extreme right¹³, conservatives, and those professing an ideological independence from the army, which had taken on the role of the country's security guard¹⁴. The junta gave legal experts the task of writing up a new constitution that would for the first time guarantee fundamental liberties and broaden the grounds on which political and social mobilization would be permissible, although communist ideology still remained prohibited.

This new institutional context partly explains the intense intellectual activity of the 1960s, a decade which saw attempts to revive Kemalism, influenced by an international climate that was highly marked by anti-imperialism and Third-Worldism. It was in this context that the review, *Yön* (Direction), founded in December 1961

¹⁰ From the time of the founding of the Republic in 1923, aside from two short intervals, the CHP was the only party.

¹¹ For an analysis of the military leaders' perception of their political role, see Hamit Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie. De l'Empire à nos jours*, Paris, Tallandier, 2013, p. 590, chapter 12 in particular.

¹² The government's position was, however, quickly contested by left-wing officials such as Talat Aydemir, known for his socialist leanings, who twice attempted to lead a coup d'état (February 1962 and May 1963). He was granted amnesty after the first, but executed after the second.

¹³ Such as Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, whom we will revisit later. These radical officers were quickly removed from the junta and forced into exile.

¹⁴ Under article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces internal service code which gave the army the duty to "preserve and protect the Republic" until it was modified in 2013. This article was used systematically to legitimize successive coups d'états.

and directed by a group of intellectuals aiming for a synthesis between socialism and Kemalism, saw keen support among educated young people and certain fringe groups of state and military bureaucracy¹⁵. The review defended national independence¹⁶ against Western imperialism – American in particular – and supported socialist (but not communist) modernization from the top down, led by an association of left-wing intellectuals and members of the military. Further, the spread within Turkey of revolutionary ideologies (Marxism-Leninism, Guevarism, Maoism) via the '68 movement (in France, the Czech Republic and the United States) and clandestine translations accelerated and bolstered the politicization of students and intellectuals who went on to appropriate and “adapt”¹⁷ these ideas to the situation in Turkey¹⁸.

The new constitution permitted the formation of a political party, the TIP, and a socialist trade union (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* – DISK, Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey, 1967), which was careful to never employ the terms “communist” or “Marxist” so as not to risk being banned. The TIP defended national independence, both on an economic and military front, against “imperialist” American influence. It also supported a social policy of redistribution which, through the progressive socialization of production assets and nationalizations, would lead to a national revolution by way of reformism. It was the first political party to officially raise the “Kurdish question”¹⁹ which led to it being prohibited after the coup d'état in 1971. It quickly gained a certain political and social audience: the TIP remains the only socialist party in Turkey to ever get into parliament, with 15 seats in

¹⁵ Igor Lipovski, *The Socialist Movement in Turkey. 1960-1980*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1992, p. 190, chapter 6 in particular.

¹⁶ Nationalism could be considered the common denominator among Turkish political figures. Although its intensity varies according to the particular faction, it is no less prevalent in the revolutionary socialist left in general from this point onwards, as seen in its support for military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 and again during the tensions with Greece in the 1980s.

¹⁷ Aysen Uysal, “Importation du mouvement 68 en Turquie. Circulations des idées et des pratiques”, *Storicamente*, n°5, 2009, http://www.storicamente.org/07_dossier/68-en-turquie.htm. These adaptations would go on to give rise to endless discussion within left-wing parties and groups on the nature of Turkish capitalism (peripheral outlier subjugated to global capitalism/future industrial power) and on the nature of its social structure (feudal/preindustrial).

¹⁸ Despite these external influences, most often filtered in by translators and adjusted to Turkey's situation by left-wing intellectuals (Mehmet Ali Aybar, Behice Boran), the Left in Turkey remained very poorly connected to international leftist debates and organizations of the time. Although certain militants from revolutionary groups in the 1960s have joined Palestinian camps in Syria and Lebanon, before and after the coup d'état of 1971, to undertake military training, their numbers were small and they did not take part in the large-scale terrorist action in the 1970s.

¹⁹ Many members and party officials in the TIP were Kurds, which explains why this question came to be on the party's agenda. It would go on to be a divisive topic and, faced with repeated breakdowns, would eventually lead these individuals to leave the party and turn the issue into a cause in its own right.

1965. It was a melting pot of left-wing ferment at the end of the 1960s. The DISK was soon in competition with the trade union confederation, *Türk-İş* (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions) which until then held hegemony in Turkey with close ties to the ruling power. In a few years, the DISK had close to 600,000 members (compared to one million *Türk-İş* members).

However, divisions and frustrations quickly rose to the surface in the melting pot of the TIP in which Guevarism, Stalinism, Maoism and other local variations of socialism objecting to the legal route chosen by the party were thrown together in a context of unparalleled social excitement and ferment. All these local variations were more or less nationalist and anti-imperialist and called for armed combat against American imperialism in Turkey²⁰ and the political class which was seen as subservient to it²¹. A spate of violent altercations in several of the country's big cities followed the transition to armed violence of certain student-based radical groups and Turkish left-wing groups (under the supervision of figures such as Deniz Gezmiş, leader of the THKO, Mahir Cayan from the HKP-C and Ibrahim Kaypakkaya from the TKPML-TIKKO²²) and the simultaneous rise of an extreme right party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* – MHP, Nationalist Movement Party), which was directed by Alparslan Türkeş, a former colonel of the Turkish Armed Forces, and which had paramilitary groups at its disposal. Thousands of workers occupied Istanbul on the 16th and 17th June 1970 in what was the largest strike in Turkey's history.

The conservative faction of the military intervened in 1971 with a memorandum to counter a probable coup d'état by socialist-leaning officers and to impose what they saw as a necessary return to order. The Demirel government stood down and a government of technocrats led by Nihat Erim and supervised by the military leaders was put in place. Their seizure of power heralded a period of repression of far greater magnitude than was witnessed in 1960:

²⁰ The anti-imperialist dispute (directed mainly at American presence in Turkey from the end of the Second World War) would be the object of a violent protest in 1968 in Istanbul during the arrival of the United States Sixth Fleet and would lead armed groups to direct their actions (abductions and attacks) primarily toward American and NATO representatives in Turkey.

²¹ To call for armed combat in order to accelerate the revolution in a society deemed 'mature' is a position that has a certain ambiguity. The program adopted by the groups in question remains highly equivocal. Even though they were inspired by Third Worldist and communist revolutions, they conserved a strong attachment to the figure of Atatürk, claiming to be the inheritors of his revolutionary legacy, as well as a strong attachment to the founding principles of the Republic, as their intransigent nationalism demonstrated.

²² Respectively: *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu* (People's Liberation Army of Turkey), *Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi* (Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front) and *Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist-Leninist-Türkiye İşçi ve Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu* (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist – Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey).

leaders of the student left-wing were executed or imprisoned, left-wing parties, groups and associations were banned and the constitution was amended to reduce civil liberties and therefore political agitation, which the army saw as closely linked. In 1973 the military handed back some power to civil society and the 1970s would go on to be a decade of political radicalization and widespread politicization of Turkish society.

The 1970s in Turkey: “Golden Age of Combat”²³ or “Decade of Chaos”²⁴?

The 1970s was a difficult decade for Turkey. The country experienced serious economic crisis (American embargo following the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, aftermath of the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, high devaluation of the lira and unemployment) and institutional stalemate (a high turnover of precarious short-term governments: seven between 1974 and 1980 and the impossibility of electing a president for more than a year and half for lack of consensus) which led to “unnatural” political alliances. The CHP went into coalition with Necmettin Erbakan’s MSP (*Millî Selamet Partisi* – National Salvation Party, Islamist) in 1974 before the formation of the two so-called “National Front” governments in 1975-1977 then in 1978-1979, uniting the AP (*Adalet Partisi* – Justice Party, liberal right), the MHP (extreme right) and the MSP.

The left-of-government position that the CHP wished to occupy was at the time largely nuanced by its alliance with the MSP as well as by the brevity of its periods in power. The CHP certainly contributed to the decade’s ideological and political confusion through the voice of its new leader, the young Bülent Ecevit, appointed in 1972. He redirected the party toward the center left, seeking to salvage the heritage of the TIP, which had been banned after the 1971 coup d’état, while also appointing himself the leader of a movement undergoing total (re)structuring regarding youth and the union movement. As the political opposition was going through a period of crystallization, which tended toward radicalization, the CHP strove to differentiate itself from its opponents and garner votes from the Left through a rereading of Kemalism, emphasizing its revolutionary dimension²⁵. He thus gave the AP a conservative or

²³ This is in reference to the title of Lilian Mathieu’s work, *Les années 70, un âge d’or des luttes ?*, Paris, Textuel, 2009, p. 141.

²⁴ Hamit Bozarslan, “Le chaos après le déluge: notes sur la crise turque des années 70”, *Cultures & Conflits*, n°2425 (1997), pp. 79-89.

²⁵ He also gained popularity for changes made in his capacity as Labor Minister in which he extended union rights, in 1965, to public service employees.

even reactionary label and denounced the MHP as “fascist”²⁶. He advocated for stronger social policy, attempting to position himself as a partner of the unions, showing support for workers’ rights and the economic plan put into place under Kemal. The invasion of Cyprus in 1974, against advice from the United States, and the law passed granting political amnesty to prisoners of the 1971 coup d’état earned him huge popularity from left-wing groups. The party continued to support this strategy by joining the Socialist International in 1976²⁷. This would turn out to be well worth their while since the DISK, as well as certain student groups, went on to routinely encourage their members to vote for the CHP until 1980. The CHP’s gain was at the loss of the smaller socialist parties which became marginalized by the CHP’s expansion and encroachment on their positions.

The rest of the Left, which had been repressed as a result of the coup d’état, attempted to reorganize itself within this new structure. Previous works²⁸ have revealed the existence of “structures of endurance”²⁹ under the technocratic and authoritarian government of 1970-1971; leaders were imprisoned but militants remained in universities, waiting for better days. The law allowed for the progressive reconstruction of legal parties and clandestine groups whose divisions and activism were increasing. Indeed, quarrels about the legacy of the TIP and different armed groups undermined the Left which did not managed to discipline itself. Several socialist-leaning parties were formed, all claiming more or less to represent a continuation of the TIP as its rightful successors³⁰. At the same time, the numbers of student groups flourished. Their influences were highly diverse and they aspired to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors of the 1960s. It is important to note that, contrary to the extreme right, the left and its radical groups in particular, never really managed to organize themselves at a national level. They established themselves in the political landscape as outposts of broader

²⁶ A discourse all the more applicable since the party’s militants, and Ecevit himself, were victims of acts of violence by the MHP (assassinations, beatings, and attacks on municipal premises, etc.)

²⁷ It is still a member of the IS as well as of the Party of European Socialists. Since 1990, the CHP has from time to time found itself at odds with the leaders of the IS on certain decisions and because of its nationalism, which has been viewed as too zealous.

²⁸ Semih Vaner, “Violence politique et terrorismes en Turquie”, *Esprit*, n°10-11, October – November 1984, pp. 79-104.

²⁹ Verta Taylor, “La continuité des mouvements sociaux. La mise en veille du mouvement des femmes”, in Olivier Fillieule (ed.), *Le désengagement militant*, Paris, Belin, 2005, pp. 239-250.

³⁰ Some of the left-wing political parties of the 1970s : the *Türkiye Sosyalist İşçi Partisi* (Socialist Workers Party of Turkey), the *Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Birlik* (Communist Party of Turkey/Union), *Türkiye Emekçi Partisi* (Workers Party of Turkey), the TIP itself is re-formed in 1975, the *Sosyalist Devrim Partisi* (Socialist Revolution Party), the *Türkiye İşçi Köylü Partisi* (Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey), the TKP which continues in exile in East Berlin and minimally in Turkey through its illegal youth branch and its review *Ürüm* (Production).

organizations such as *Dev Yol* (Revolutionary Path), *Dev-Sol* (Revolutionary Left), *Kurtuluş* (Liberation), *Halkın Kurtuluşu* (People's Liberation) or as localized structures in big cities (Istanbul and Ankara) or in particular regions (Dersim and Hatay) with varying capacities for action ranging from the mobilization of high-school students and university students taking action at their places of study and in their neighborhoods, to the formation of armed groups of around a dozen individuals engaged in raids and targeted assassinations.³¹ This last point allows us to avoid a comparison that is too often made between militants of the radical left and right during this period, which tends to consider their capacity for action as equal. Since the end of the 1960s, the radical right, in particular the youth branches of the MHP, the Grey Wolves (*Bozkurt*) and the Forges of Ideal (*Ülkücü Ocakları*, also translated as "Hearths of Ideal") had been setting up training camps in several locations around the country to train militants in the "anti-communist fight." We also know that certain members of the Turkish Armed Forces were in regular contact with the leaders of these groups (Abdullah Çatlı and Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, among others) and supplied them with arms and provisions during some assaults (attacks, targeted assassinations, etc.)

Violent clashes with the extreme right, which had been relatively spared by the military regime in 1971, took hold again especially from 1975-1976, first on university campuses, before spreading to several areas around the country. These clashes sometimes followed ethnic (Turkish-Kurdish) or religious (Sunnite-Alevi) divisions. In the country's east in particular, these confrontations sometimes went so far as to turn into pogroms with several hundred victims (massacres of the Alevi population at Çorum and Kahramanmaraş)³². Due to the violent conflict that characterized this period it became known as the "Period of Terror" (*terör dönemi*) or the « Decade of Chaos ». This dramatic terminology does not best serve analysis of the topic and as such it is preferable to borrow Ernst Nolte's expression, "confined civil war"³³, coined to describe post-First World War Germany. Indeed, there were more than 5,000 deaths between 1975 and 1980 in clashes between militants from the Right, the Left, the Kurdish population³⁴ and state forces³⁵. Mobilizations

³¹ Examples are the *Acilciler* (Urgent Ones) and the MLSPB (*Marksiist-Leninist Silahlı Propaganda Birliği* – Marxist-Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit).

³² Hamit Bozarşlan, "Le phénomène milicien, une composante de la violence politique dans la Turquie des années 1970", *Turcica*, Vol. 31, 1999, pp. 185-244.

³³ Ernst Nolte, *La Guerre civile européenne 1917-1945. National-socialisme et bolchevisme*, Paris, Editions des Syrtes, 2000, p. 207.

³⁴ Through the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the radical-left movement and the Kurdish movement were very close. The PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* – Kurdistan Workers' Party) founded in 1978, initially claimed to follow a Marxist-Leninist ideology. The repression in the wake of the 1980 coup d'état having eliminated left-wing organizations coupled with the beginning of the guerrilla warfare

were not limited to students during this turbulent decade, even though universities remained the principal location of politicization and recruitment for radical organizations. In reality the entire population underwent a process of politicization, especially in the economic sector in which the number of unionized employees and protest actions rose rapidly. There was also an increase in the presence of radical groups³⁶ in the more marginalized outskirts of larger cities. Such mobilizations, each evolving in their respective field, sometimes merged to form a focal point of agitation. This was the case at the Tariş factory in Izmir in January 1980 where, following a strike, security forces came up against workers and students for several days at the factory site and in four surrounding areas. The 1976 and 1977 May 1st demonstrations in Istanbul also saw all the left-wing organizations (trade unions, parties, student groups)³⁷ marching together.

May 1st 1977

Labor Day, 1st May, 1977, hundreds of thousands of people (workers, employees, students) came together around Taksim Square in Istanbul, just like the year before which was the first time since the 1920s and, one after another, leaders from left-wing parties and unions delivered speeches. A platform had been erected in front of Gezi Park and militants occupied the square. The *Atatürk Kültür Merkezi* (Atatürk Cultural Center) was covered with posters of workers freeing themselves from their chains and there were hundreds of banners calling for workers to join unions, for revolution in Turkey and for people to fight against American imperialism. The protest took a tragic turn for reasons that remain unclear to this day. Some sources accuse Maoist militants, who were opposed to the celebrations, of starting a fight and firing shots which caused the crowd to panic. The turmoil ended with thirty-four deaths and hundreds of people injured. The most credible theory is that radical right-wing Turkish groups, supported physically and/or logistically by security forces, fired shots from rooftops surrounding the square. The

initiated by the PKK, and the divergent responses to the Kurdish question led to a distancing between the two movements through the 1980s and 1990s despite temporary electoral alliances. Recent years have seen several attempts to found a common movement, currently manifested by the political platform that is the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, see below).

³⁵ Benjamin Gourisse, *L'Etat en jeu. Captation des ressources et désobjectivation de l'Etat en Turquie. (1975-1980)*, 2010. Doctoral thesis, Pantheon-Sorbonne University.

³⁶ For those around Istanbul, see Şükrü Aslan, *1 Mayıs Mahallesi*, Ankara, İletişim Yayınları, 4. Baskı, 2013, p. 240.

³⁷ Continuing to the present day, the May 1st celebrations in Turkey have had a turbulent history. They have often been banned or have been the scene of violence. For a detailed history of this particular commemoration, see Paul Dumont, "Le premier mai en Turquie", in Jacques Thobie and Salgur Kançal (ed.), *Industrialisation, communication et rapports sociaux en Turquie et en Méditerranée orientale*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994, pp. 245-257.

perpetrators of the shots have never been identified. Since this date Taksim Square has become highly symbolic for the Left. It is in the heart of modern-day Istanbul and is where the monument in honor of Atatürk stands, a figure somewhat ambiguously revered by the Turkish left wing, and especially for young people, whom he cast as his successors³⁸. The May 1st celebrations in 1978 were banned by the military governor of Istanbul, with a state of emergency being declared in the larger cities due to the escalation of violence.

The 1970s constituted the height of the protest movement that started at the end of the 1960s and which was briefly interrupted by the coup d'état of 1971. But the crescendo of violence and repression to follow would go on to totally disrupt and transform this dynamic. The MHP made the most of its influence in government during its two periods in power to arrange for legal cases to be dropped and for the quick release of militants. In the context of the government's dwindling political legitimacy and its inability to re-establish order despite the declaration of a state of emergency in the larger cities, the army allowed the situation to deteriorate so it could intervene and style itself as the restorer of order and national independence which was being threatened by "communists", the internal enemies infiltrating influence from "foreign powers". This discourse was endowed with American approval as Washington was anxious to keep Turkey in the West's sphere of influence given the events which were shaking the Middle East, such as the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet forces in 1979 and the Iranian Revolution in the same year.

³⁸ In a speech given on 20 October 1927, Atatürk handed over to his country's young people the responsibility of "eternally protecting and safeguarding Turkish independence and the Republic of Turkey."

Post-1980: Crossing the Desert

Confronted with economic and political degradation, the military leaders, commanded by Kenan Evren since 1978³⁹, used the pretext of an Islamist protest at Konya on the 6th September 1980, during which anti-secular slogans were chanted, to stage another coup d'état during the night of the 11th to the 12th September 1980. This coup d'état had in fact been planned for several months, probably in collaboration with the United States Secret Service⁴⁰. Military staff announced the coup the same morning on the radio via a press release and televised broadcast by General Evren while troops and tanks took up their stations in the main streets and a state of siege was declared across the entire territory. The army's weight was felt quickly all over the country: on the 15th September, strikes and lockouts were banned and police custody was extended from 15 to 30 days; on the 20th, the retired Admiral Bülent Ulusu was pronounced Prime Minister; on the 25th, all mayors were stripped of their functions and replaced by retired army personnel or civil servants close to the army; and, on the 16th October, political parties were suspended. All political activists from radical groups, but principally left-wing groups, were prosecuted: "650,000 imprisonments for varying durations, often accompanied by ill treatment and torture, 1,683,000 judicial investigations, 517 death sentences (of which 49 were executed), 30,000 dismissals from the civil service, 14,000 individuals deprived of Turkish citizenship, the prohibition of 667 associations and foundations, hundreds of suspicious deaths".⁴¹

³⁹ The 1960 coup d'état saw many opposing ideas within the army about the purposes and the political orientation to attribute to military intervention, ranging from socialist Kemalism to the conservative extreme-right. The level of internal conflict is demonstrated by the fact that the memorandum of the 12 March 1971 was initiated by the conservative-majority military staff who feared a coup d'état by Socialist-leaning officers, which some revolutionary organizations were calling for. This conflict at the heart of an institution which required cohesion in order to fulfill its mission to defend the nation and its Kemalist principles was intolerable for the more senior officers who also saw their authority being challenged. The army therefore underwent a process of "purification" of its socialist elements through the 1960s and 1970s in particular, which benefitted its conservative, interventionist and authoritarian side, represented by the General Kenan Evren.

⁴⁰ For the preparation and execution of the coup d'état see: Mehmet Ali Birand, *The Generals' Coup in Turkey. An Inside Story of 12 September 1980*, New York, Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1987, p. 220.

⁴¹ Elise Massicard, "Répression et changement des formes de militantisme : carrières et remobilisation à gauche après 1980 en Turquie", *Revue européenne d'analyse des sociétés politiques*, n°28, 2010, URL :

Many left-wing activists were imprisoned for periods ranging from around twenty months to around ten years and those with the means fled to Germany, Sweden, France or the UK if they were able to do so in time. They often stayed for several years as political refugees, working odd jobs and continuing their activism mainly through denouncing the military regime all the while planning a utopian return to their country to fight the dictatorship. Sentences delivered by the military courts meant that for a long time returns were deferred until amnesty was granted in 1991, a period which lasted until the early 2000s and saw a gradual return of these people. Many others decided to stay definitively in Europe and others remained in hiding in Turkey before eventually being found out. Civil servants and leaders of legal parties were also arrested, banned from politics for life⁴² and detained.

The military regime was in place from September 1980 to the end of 1983. The junta deeply reformed Turkey's institutional architecture with the drafting in 1982 of a new constitution that was even more authoritarian than the previous one and that reinforced executive powers, in particular those of General Kenen Evren, the leader of the junta who was hastily elected President of the Republic. It also restricted private and public liberties and established military supervision over the government through the MGK (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* – National Security Council)⁴³. A similar ideological and technical supervision was seen in universities through the YÖK (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu* – Council of Higher Education). Successive laws governing political parties (1983) and associations (1983) drastically limited a return to electoral competition. Parties were not allowed to establish political relationships with or receive funds from associations, cooperatives or professional groups; they were prohibited from starting youth or women's branches; those under twenty-one, students, and teachers in higher education were banned from becoming members; the number of departments in which parties had to be present to be eligible to present themselves at legislative elections was increased from fifteen to thirty-four. This last point, in conjunction with the constitutional regulation requiring 10% of votes to be eligible for parliamentary representation had the effect, "on the one hand, to quash smaller political parties and, on the other hand, to

<http://www.fasopo.org/reasopo/n28/article.pdf>

⁴² This sentence was lifted by referendum in 1987 which also allowed parties to use their pre-coup d'état names and allowed political leaders from the 1970s to reassume their leadership positions.

⁴³ The MGK was created under the 1961 constitution and was kept by the 1982 constitution. It periodically brought together civil and military leaders of the majority to discuss the country's major political issues. Its rulings were binding for the government, which was obliged to apply its decisions. This body sanctioned the military's ward-ship over civil power until reforms in 2003 (from that point on, non-military members outnumbered military members) and again in 2004 (when it became a consultation body) which considerably reduced its influence on internal politics. However, it still plays an important role in terms of setting foreign policy and defense strategy.

reduce political participation despite the authorization accorded to parties to create organizations at neighborhood and village level, as had been the case before 1960⁴⁴. Left-wing parties were the first, though not the only victims of this move aimed at excluding them from national representation. Gilles Dorronsoro described this restriction and supervision of Turkish society by the military using the notion of a “security regime”⁴⁵.

Military leaders handed back power to civilian leaders at the end of 1983. The political field would go on to reconstruct itself little by little but in a form quite different from that of the previous decade. Political parties reformed progressively and were once again all permitted to participate in the 1984 elections, apart from left-wing socialist parties, which were still prohibited. The place that was previously held by the CHP in the political spectrum was under dispute between the son of the former President İsmet İnönü, Erdal İnönü, and Bülent Ecevit, both leaders of their parties: the SODEP (*Sosyal Demokrasi Partisi*) which in 1985 became the SHP (*Sosyal-Demokrat Halkçı Partisi* – Social Democratic Populist Party) was İnönü’s party and Ecevit was leader of the DSP (*Demokratik Sol Partisi* – Democratic Left Party)⁴⁶. In 1995 the SHP joined with the CHP which had re-formed in 1992 under Deniz Baykal’s leadership⁴⁷. These parties duly noted the weak electoral appeal of a leftist position in the post-military period and distanced themselves noticeably from the social-democratic leaning which the CHP had adhered to in the 1970s in favor of a shift toward the center, and came out in support of the country’s political and economic evolution (conflict in Kurdistan, economic liberalization). Both adopted a more hard-line nationalist approach, which was particularly evident in Deniz Baykal’s approach to the Kurdish question around the beginning of the 1990s and they both professed intransigent secular positions regarding the veil and the rise of political Islam. These decisions contributed to their subsequent and present marginalization, albeit to differing degrees, from the rest of the socialist and revolutionary left⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ Semih Vaner, “La démocratie et l’autoritarisme vont de pair”, in Semih Vaner (ed.), *La Turquie*, Paris, FayardCERI, 2005, pp. 169-170.

⁴⁵ Gilles Dorronsoro, “Mobilisations et régime sécuritaire”, in Gilles Dorronsoro (ed.), *La Turquie contestée*.

Mobilisations sociales et régime sécuritaire, CNRS Éditions, Paris, 2005, pp. 13-30.

⁴⁶ His death in 2006 led to the decline of the party which today holds only a very minor stake in the political field with the CHP representing the principal opposition party to the AKP.

⁴⁷ İnönü, who represented the social-democratic branch, had in fact been quickly marginalized within his party. Baykal had led the CHP until 2010 when he was replaced by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu who partially softened the party’s position and forged contested electoral alliances with Devlet Bahçeli’s MHP (see below).

⁴⁸ Even though they remain divided on the Kurdish question and, confronted with the overt nationalism of the CHP, the Left has sometimes supported political Islamist militants both in the name of freedom of expression and as a force that could put an end to bureaucratic and military oppression. This happened in 1997 during the so-called “postmodern” coup d’état which forced Erbakan’s government to stand down

In every regard, the 1980s was a nightmare⁴⁹ for the socialist and communist left in Turkey which had been overwhelmed and weakened by a combination of three factors operating on different levels. Firstly, the targeted brutal repression to which it had been subjected, secondly the breakup of the Eastern Bloc which left it isolated toward the end of course of the decade, and finally, the profound transformations that Turkey underwent over the decade: opening up on an international level, rapid liberalization of the economy, a shift of attention from social conflict to the Kurdish question, and the imposition by the military of a Turko-Islamic synthesis, which was a combination of fervent nationalism and a return to religious doctrine. The Left and its activists, whose ideological construction and organizational capacity were greatly reduced by the coup d'état, were effectively silenced. Although the antiterrorist act of 1991 granted general amnesty to left-wing activists who were still imprisoned, allowed those in exile to return and authorized the re-formation of left-wing political parties, they nevertheless struggled to become operational again since the networks, structures and resource supplies had been dismantled or weakened and activists and members were geographically scattered and traumatized by repression.

However, although many of them withdrew totally from political life after the military regime and the era of repression, others did not remain inactive. The professional and political sanctions with which some were faced (lifelong ban from working in the civil service) led them to find new avenues for political engagement or new areas in which to become involved, backed by their "militant capital"⁵⁰. Opportunities varied depending on background, from whom the opportunities and resources came, as well as the geographical location (big or small city) of those involved. Career changes were sometimes numerous and should also be considered, on the one hand, from the perspective of the new framework of renewed and diversified mobilization efforts since the mid-1980s in Turkey and the pressure coming from the regime directed towards individuals and organizations, on the other⁵¹. Here we will deal with militant career changes and, in the interest of clarity, leave to one side those of a more personal and professional nature. Career changes were either

and again during the power struggle between the AKP and senior members from the military's administration from 2002. Erdoğan's authoritarian shift, followed by the repression of the Gezi movement, caused some activists to turn away from the AKP which for them had become (again) a "fascist" and "reactionary" force.

⁴⁹ To use, in a very different context, François Cusset's expression from *La décennie. Le Grand Cauchemar des années 1980 ?*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006.

⁵⁰ Frédérique Matonti and Franck Poupeau, "Le capital militant. Essai de définition", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2004/5 – 155, pp. 4-11.

⁵¹ To grasp the diversity of mobilizations in Turkey since the 1980s, see any of the diverse contributions presented in Gilles Dorransoro (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2005.

simultaneously or successively related to associations (*hemşehri*⁵²; feminist groups⁵³; “victim” or veteran groups – such as the *78'liler*, *Devrimci Federasyonu* – Federation of Reformist 78'ers, which has worked on developing a record of the mobilizations and repression; associations for the protection of human rights) and political groups (involvement in small legal left-wing parties, joining the CHP). Some of those who were Kurdish in origin turned to the Kurdish movement, which gained momentum from the 1980s, through its partisan⁵⁴, military (with the PKK, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* – Kurdistan Workers' Party, which since 1984 has been in a declared state of guerrilla warfare against Turkey⁵⁵) and associative dimensions. Others, of Alevi origin, turned to Alevi “identity” activism⁵⁶. Among those who continued their activism following the military regime, there was a great diversity of pathways. On the one hand this was down to individual choices (of a professional, political or family-related nature) but also because of the restructuring of activism in Turkey from the mid-1980s, which also had an influence on the direction of their career paths. It should be noted that the vast majority of individuals who took up activism again did so within the framework of legal organizations.

⁵² The *hemşehri* are associations in cities which bring together migrants from the rural community and people from different departments and cities around Turkey, providing a means for them to maintain their networks and links with their places of origin.

⁵³ Some of the women met as part of our doctoral research went from revolutionary activism in the 1970s to feminist activism which (re)emerged in the 1980s as Şirin Tekeli demonstrates in “Les femmes : le genre mal-aimé de la République”, in Semih Vaner (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 251-281.

⁵⁴ Several Kurdish parties, successively banned by the Constitutional Court, have followed one after the next in the Turkish political field: the *Demokrasi Partisi* (Democracy Party, DEP) from 1993 to 1994, the *Halkın Demokrasi Partisi* (People's Democratic Party, HADEP) from 1994 to 2003, the *Demokratik Halk Partisi* (Democratic People's Party, DEHAP) from 2002 to 2005, the *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party, DTP) from 2005 to 2009 and the *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party, BDP) since 2008. The political and social positions held by these parties had the support of left-wing activists, and some of their executives were from the Left, but the prerequisite of Kurdish “ethnicity” prevented any long-term organizational union and only one-off, localized electoral alliances were formed. The BDP did make attempts at greater openness to alliance (see below). Certain positions defended by these parties completely overlap with those of the Left (reduction of inequality, recognition and safeguarding of rights and the extension of liberties) but their central “ethnic” grounding means they cannot be considered as straightforward left-wing organizations.

⁵⁵ The PKK initially claimed affiliation with the struggles for national freedom which were taking place in various locations around the world and also considered itself to be Marxist-Leninist. The guerrilla war led by the PKK against the Turkish state since 1984 counts almost 50,000 victims to the present day.

⁵⁶ For more on former radical-left activists' involvement in the Alevi movement, see Elise Massicard “Quand le militantisme s'adapte au terrain. Continuités et discontinuités dans les carrières militantes au sein du mouvement aléviste en Turquie et en Allemagne”, *Politix*, 2013/2, n°102, pp. 89-108.

Some examples of activists' career paths⁵⁷:

Hüseyin: Born in 1955, originally from a village in the south-east of Turkey. He began his university studies in Ankara in 1976 and joined the *Halkın Kurtuluşu* (People's Liberation, which in 1978 became the TDKP *Türkiye Devrimci Komünist Partisi* – Revolutionary Communist Party of Turkey), which sent him to a factory to carry out politicization work. He was put in prison a few months after the coup d'état and was released in 1984. Having never finished his degree, he worked several different jobs and is now retired. He joined the *Emek Partisi* (founded by former members of the TDKP) and presided over one of its branches in a neighborhood of Ankara around the end of the 1990s. He is a member of the *78'liler Devrimci Federasyon*.

Asiye: An activist member of *Dev Yol* during her high school years in Istanbul, she narrowly escaped prison after the coup d'état. After her university studies, during which she was careful to keep a low profile, she became a teacher. She started to get involved in activism again in the mid-1980s with the re-emerging feminist movement and participated in the formation of a small group in Ankara. She met her husband, a former activist imprisoned by the military regime, at the beginning of the 1990s. She is now retired but continues her activism through a neighborhood association and regularly takes part in activities organized by the ÖDP (see below).

Şadi: Originally from Istanbul and the son of a law professor, Şadi began an economics degree at Marmara University in Istanbul in 1973 and became active in a Trotskyite group. He was arrested in 1982 after two years underground and was released in 1987. After several years of unemployment during which time he wrote a doctoral thesis, he became a lecturer in political sciences at his alma mater in 2009 and since 2010 has been the leader of the *İşçi Kardeşliği Partisi* (Workers' Fraternity Party), a small, legal revolutionary party.

During the 1990s, the war in the south-east saw a division in Turkey's Left between those who supported recognition of Kurdish rights and the more nationalistic fringes which fell more in line either with the CHP, which was strongly attached to the integrity of the "one and indivisible" Turkish state, or with a group which emerged at the time and would go on to become the İP (*İşçi Partisi* – Workers' Party) which was organized around a former Maoist leader from the 1960s who had become ultranationalist, Doğu Perinçek⁵⁸. In 1996, in the

⁵⁷ These provide a small sample of some of the career paths studied as part of work on our doctoral thesis which looked at the biographical consequences of revolutionary activism during the 1970s and the military repression that followed the coup d'état of 12 September, 1980.

⁵⁸ Doğu Perinçek is currently in prison over the Ergenekon affair, which resulted in the conviction of dozens of individuals (including some of the most important military

context of a relatively vacant political left-wing⁵⁹ and the CHP's return to a more centrist and nationalistic position, the ÖDP (*Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi* – Freedom and Solidarity Party) was born. Its aim was to bring together the various left-wing forces and was, in part, led by former activists from *Dev Yol*. Its initial energy meant it was able to rally several thousand activists but internal divisions brought about a crisis and many left the party around the year 2000. The party managed to get by but it had minimal following and the followers it did have were concentrated in the larger cities. Other small revolutionary parties were created or recreated during this period, repeating old battle cries and establishing themselves primarily in big cities (Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara), such as the *Emek Partisi* (Labour Party) or the TKP⁶⁰. This fragmented left remains to this day very weak and divided. As a measure of this, one could look at the number of activists or the number of votes obtained in elections (less than 1% of the legislative vote and therefore without any parliamentary representation). The continual presence of localized and episodic extreme-left terrorism should also be mentioned: organizations such as the DHKP-C (The Revolutionary People's Liberation Party–Front, successor of *Dev Sol*) or the TIKKO have, despite considerable generational shift among activists, prevailed in certain limited areas of the country (in Istanbul in the Gaziosmanpaşa and Okmeydanı⁶¹ districts and in certain Kurdish regions such as Tunceli). These organizations planned and carried out many fatal attacks and hunger strikes during the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly as part of a campaign against prison reform and ill treatment of prisoners accused of terrorist acts⁶².

Social-democratic parties claiming a left-wing position eventually moved away from their 1970s program with regard to their social and economic standpoint and to date have not managed to constitute a credible opposition to the AKP. The revolutionary left has survived, not without difficulty, but has maintained a link with its history, which arises periodically, such as in 2012 at the beginning of

staff, political activists and journalists in Turkey) who were accused of inciting a coup d'état against the AKP during the 2000s.

⁵⁹ Trade unions re-commenced their activities at the end of the 1980s and made their mark as part of a vast social movement in 1989, known as the “workers’ spring”. For further reading on the topic, refer to the ongoing doctoral work by Işıl Erdiç supervised by Gilles Dorransoro at the University of Paris-I, on trade unionism in Turkey from 1980.

⁶⁰ The present-day TKP has little in common with the pre-1980 TKP other than the name. It is made up largely of young activists and, apart from a few exceptions, there are no former TKP activist members.

⁶¹ On this topic, see two recent articles by Jean François Pérouse on the website, l'Observatoire de la Vie

politique turque : <http://ovipot.hypotheses.org/10115>

⁶² For more details on this issue, refer to Elise Massicard, “La réforme carcérale en Turquie”, *Critique internationale* n°16 - July 2002, pp. 169-181.

the trial of the 1980 coup leaders⁶³ or during the Gezi demonstrations. However, the repression experienced under the military regime has never been, and it does not seem that it will be, the subject of a gesture of national remembrance in Turkey, by way of a Truth and Justice Commission as has been the case in Chile and Argentina through, following the fall of military dictatorships.

⁶³ The two generals who are still alive, Evren (97) and Şahinkaya (89), were sentenced on June 18th, 2014, after two years on remand, to life imprisonment by the Ankara Criminal Court for “crimes against the state”. See *Cumhuriyet*, 19/06/2014.

Is Gezi on the Route to Revival?

The generation of the 1960s-1970s sees itself as having failed in its mission to emancipate Turkey, but can now consider itself a cornerstone in the struggle for liberation. From the beginning of the 2010s, we have seen a regrouping of the Left, driven by the younger generation and supported by these “veterans”, especially at Gezi. This raises the question, which has yet to be thoroughly examined, of the relationships between “militant generations” within the Turkish Left and its various forms. However, it should be noted that, despite the comparisons that have been made, the Gezi movement is very different from the May 1st mobilizations in the 1970s. This difference comes firstly from the temporal interval between the two events and the aforementioned profound economic and social upheavals that the country has been through since the 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, Gezi encapsulates a particular timeframe which is neither as ephemeral nor as durable, as the social agitation in the second half of the 1970s would be. In reality, after a month of demonstrations, which is now described by its participants as a wonderful interlude, the movement quickly subsided without managing to turn into something long-lasting or to broaden its objectives. The movement did, however, succeed in uniting groups of diverse political leanings, and not only among the socialist left. Finally, as opposed to previous disputes for which Taksim Square was the symbolic reference point, the June 2013 movement’s issue was the Gezi Park whose destruction was being planned in order to make way for a property development project, supported by the Prime Minister himself. It wasn’t until after this initial stage that the protest widened to include the government and the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The banners and flags unfurled in Istanbul, and subsequently in many other Turkish cities, attest to the participation of several radical left-wing political parties and groups in the protests. The end of the protests, following *ad hoc* meetings primarily conducted between ecological and anti-capitalist groups, led many to anticipate the creation of new political parties to capitalize on the energy of the movement⁶⁴. On the contrary, the CHP did not manage to channel Gezi’s energy to its benefit and the protestors themselves did not hide

⁶⁴ For more on the anti-capitalist movement in Turkey, see Gülçin Lelandais’s work, *Altermondialistes en Turquie. Entre cosmopolitisme politique et ancrage militant*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2011.

their disavowal of the party which had been deemed out of touch with the aspirations of a growing minority of its traditional voters. The CHP's recent electoral choices have further accentuated the distance between the party, its voters and leftist parties. It has repeatedly formed alliances with the MHP in municipal elections, such as those in Ankara where Mansur Yavas, a former executive of the MHP, was running, and again for the presidential elections of 2014 in which Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu ran as the joint candidate. Ihsanoğlu is the former president of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the alliance gave rise to much criticism of the party.

Nevertheless, Gezi opened a way for a major reshaping of relations between the Left and the Kurdish movement. When the Gezi protests broke out, the pro-Kurdish party, the BDP (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi* – Peace and Democracy Party) was at a delicate point in peace negotiations with the government and chose to exercise caution and to refrain from participating in any major way. Since its creation in 2008, however, it had been trying to elaborate a discourse aimed at Turkish society more broadly (and not only at Kurds) by emphasizing the idea of social justice and peaceful coexistence. This followed the party becoming conscious of its relative isolation in the political arena and of the legal risks it was running due to its “ethnic” position – a discourse that struggled to win over non-Kurdish voters. Some of its more visible officials such as Ertuğrul Kürkçü (MP for the BDP, former extreme left activist and member of the Mahir Cayan group at the end of the 1960s), Sebahat Tuncel (MP for the BDP in Istanbul and feminist activist) and Sırrı Süreyya Önder (MP for the BDP and active participant in the demonstrations) reproached its timid response to the Gezi movement. They formed a platform, then a party, the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* – Peoples' Democratic Party)⁶⁵, which sought to unite the Left and the Kurds in one organization while also promoting ecological, feminist and LGBT issues, among others⁶⁶. Developing concurrently, the BDP and the HDP shared out the territory in the 2014 municipal elections (the BDP took the east and the HDP the west). This new organization attracted many left-wing activists who recognized the effort to regenerate and who were equally disappointed by the developments of other parties, particularly the ÖDP since the beginning of the 2000s⁶⁷. The BDP and the HDP were represented by a joint candidate at the presidential elections in August 2014: Selahattin Demirtaş (a lawyer by training and vice-President of the

⁶⁵ The HDP grew out of the Peoples' Democratic Congress (*Halkların Demokratik Kongresi*, HDK), which itself came from the Gezi movement in June 2013.

⁶⁶ These issues came up at various points in public and political debate from the 1980s onward. There is no sign of them in the Left's discourse during the 1970s. They were progressively included on the agendas of left-wing organizations, not without tension or discussion.

⁶⁷ The party went into crisis at the beginning of the 2000s, with the failure of its ecumenical position regarding all left-wing movements. Many former activists who had joined the party when it was formed have now left or distanced themselves.

BDP since 2010) who is popular with both the Kurdish voters and the Left. In any case, the electoral weight of the Left remains very weak. At legislative elections, the scores of different parties that are able to put forward sufficient candidates rarely climbs above 1% of votes. The necessary minimum of 10% means they are systematically excluded from the National Assembly. To get around this problem, former radical left activists, most often Kurdish, have joined Kurdish parties and have thereby been able to occupy MP positions (as is the case for Ertuğrul Kürkçü).

The local elections held in March 2014 saw a few left-wing party victories in some small municipalities (two for the TKP and one for the ÖDP) in historically sympathetic areas (Tunceli and the eastern Mediterranean coast). We have thus observed few significant changes from either a quantitative point of view or in terms of the geographic distribution of votes for left-wing and extreme-left parties. But there was another episode which could have changed the order of things this year: the Soma mine disaster in May 2014 in which 301 miners were killed due to negligence on the part of the mine operator. Soma deeply shook the country and became the symbol of the negative side of ultra-liberalism which first took hold in the 1980s and was embraced with open arms by the AKP, bringing about deep social inequalities along with deterioration in working conditions in various economic sectors (mines and construction, among others) and a concomitant weakening of trade unions. Following the mining disaster, left-wing parties (ÖDP, HDP, and others) and four trade union groups launched a protest campaign which was systematically repressed. Although Tayyip Erdoğan expressed his condolences and evoked the “nature of the profession”⁶⁸ in an effort to defend himself, opposition parties led by the CHP pointed to the close links between the government and the owners of mines which had been privatized in a hurry. Questions surrounding the development of capitalism and its consequences in Turkey, the state of working rights and conditions, as well as the issue of corruption among the ruling elite (with Erdoğan at the head⁶⁹), became a part of the presidential campaign in the summer of 2014. Such issues could rally voters outside of the militant core of the Left.

⁶⁸ Laure Marchand, “Les Turcs entre chagrin et colère après le drame minier de Soma”, *Le Figaro*, 15/05/2014

⁶⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is suspected of corruption since the revelation on 17 December, 2013, of taped phone calls, probably as part of a settling of scores between the AKP and the highly influential brotherhood of Fethullah Gülen. For further details see the series of articles published since December 2013 by Jean Marcou on the OVIPO site: <http://ovipot.hypotheses.org/>

Uncertain Times

Turkey's Left has a tumultuous history, marked by violence and repression, and has only been able to organize and stabilize itself during the short periods of reprieve. The evolution of Turkey's political system over the last few years allows new opportunities to be seen. Developments are now becoming more concrete with the movement away from the military, which has always had a keen aversion to the Left, and particularly with the rapprochement between the Kurdish movement and certain activists from the Gezi movement within the HDP. However, there are certain factors that stymie such developments, such as the Left's constitutive weakness, the Turkish state's ingrained distrust of protests movements and, more recently, the ramping up of Tayyip Erdoğan's (who came out as the clear winner of the last municipal elections) more despotic tendencies. It is surely too soon to give a complete appraisal of Gezi, the evolution of the social movements to which it gave rise and their effects on Turkey's left wing. Although the Gezi movement might be overshadowed by the political crisis that is sweeping the country, the movement nevertheless drew attention to certain issues and helped to bring together those who oppose the current government, which is perceived by fringes of the Turkish population as intrusive and authoritarian in its attempts to dictate legitimate social conduct. Gezi provided a new space in which more marginalized political voices could express themselves. It remains to be seen what form new movements will take and what place the Left will occupy.