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The 1968 Movement in Turkey: from Kemalist Values to Anti-Imperialism– An Examination of the Movement's Ideological Transformation and Radicalization.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the Turkish 1968 Movement and explores how its political identity, dominant discourse, and objectives transformed throughout its trajectory. It focuses particularly on the movement's ideological transformation from a predominantly Kemalist self-understanding toward an anti-imperialist and socialist framework, as well as the processes that contributed to its eventual radicalization. To do so, the thesis traces the movement from its origins in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when students largely understood themselves as defenders of the republic, the Kemalist legacy, and the unfinished modernization process, to the emergence of a new political consciousness shaped by anti-imperialism, Third Worldism, and socialist ideas. In examining this transformation, the study analyses the role of universities, professors, student organizations, political opportunities, and changing domestic and international circumstances in shaping the movement's development and political outlook. In its second half, the thesis provides an overview of the broader context in which the movement developed by examining the domestic and international political environment of the period, as well as Turkey's economic and social conditions, in order to provide a broader picture within which the movement found its place and significance. In conclusion, the thesis argues that the Turkish 68 Movement lies not only in the romanticized memory of youthful idealism, but also in the fact that it developed the theoretical and political means to formulate and provide an alternative political perspective, one that is largely absent from Turkish politics.

German Abstract

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Entwicklung der türkischen 68er-Bewegung und beleuchtet, wie sich ihre politische Identität, ihr vorherrschender Diskurs und ihre Ziele im Laufe ihrer Geschichte gewandelt haben. Ein besonderer Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem ideologischen Wandel der Bewegung von einem vorwiegend kemalistischen Selbstverständnis hin zu einem antiimperialistischen und sozialistischen Rahmen sowie auf den Prozessen, die zu ihrer letztendlichen Radikalisierung beitrugen. Zu diesem Zweck zeichnet die Arbeit die Entwicklung der Bewegung von ihren Anfängen in den späten 1950er und frühen 1960er Jahren nach, als sich die Studierenden weitgehend als Verteidiger der Republik, des kemalistischen Erbes und des unvollendeten Modernisierungsprozesses verstanden, bis hin zur Entstehung eines neuen politischen Bewusstseins, das von Antiimperialismus, Dritte-Welt-Bewegung und sozialistischen Ideen geprägt war. Bei der Untersuchung dieses Wandels analysiert die Studie die Rolle von Universitäten, Professoren, studentischen Organisationen, politischen Möglichkeiten sowie sich wandelnden innen- und außenpolitischen Umständen bei der Prägung der Entwicklung und der politischen Ausrichtung der Bewegung. In der zweiten Hälfte bietet die Arbeit einen Überblick über den breiteren Kontext, in dem sich die Bewegung entwickelte, indem sie das innen- und außenpolitische Umfeld der Zeit sowie die wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Bedingungen der Türkei untersucht, um ein umfassenderes Bild zu vermitteln, in dem die Bewegung ihren Platz und ihre Bedeutung fand. Zusammenfassend lässt sich sagen, dass die

Bedeutung der türkischen 68er-Bewegung nicht nur in der romantisierten Erinnerung an jugendlichen Idealismus liegt, sondern auch in der Tatsache, dass sie die theoretischen und politischen Mittel entwickelte, um eine alternative politische Perspektive zu formulieren und aufzuzeigen – eine Perspektive, die in der türkischen Politik weitgehend fehlt.

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Introduction.

“Delikanlım!.

İyi bak yıldızlara,

the

onları belki bir daha göremezsin.

again.

Belki bir daha

again

yıldızların ışığında

kollarını ufuklar gibi açıp geremezsin..

he stars...

My Lad!

Look Look closely at

stars

for You may never see them

Perhaps you will never

be able to spread your arms

like horizons , in the light of

Delikanlım!.

Lad!

My

Senin kafanın içi

yıldızlı karanlıklar

kadar

good

güzel, korkunç, kudretli ve iyidir.

Yıldızlar ve senin kafan

kâinatın en mükemmel şeyidir.

Universe.

The inside of you mind

is as

beaatiful, terriying, powerful, and

As the starry darkness.

The stars and your mind

Are the most perfect things in the

Delikanlım!.

Sen ki, ya bir köşe başında

My Lad!

you will either

kan sızarak kaşından

gebereceksin,

ya da bir darağacında can vereceksin.

İyi bak yıldızlara

onları göremezsın belki bir daha...

again“¹

blead to death at a street corner

with blood trickling from you brow,

Or give you life up on a gallows.

Look closely at the stars—

you may never see them

NAZİM HİKMET RAN

The Turkish 1968 movement is at the same time both mystified through a romantic culture of remembrance and neglected in regard to scholarly attention. While the symbolic power of the movement remains as present as ever, much of its political significance appears to have faded from public memory. Yet traces of that significance continue to emerge in contemporary Turkey. Only recently, for example, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan decided to close Istanbul Bilgi University by decree before reversing the decision after large-scale student demonstrations broke out. Whether consciously or unconsciously, such events evoke memories of an earlier generation of politically active students and the role they once played in Turkish politics.

The Turkish 1968 movement marks one of the most important turning points in the political history of Turkey. Situated between the opening of the multi-party system, the Cyprus crisis, and two military interventions—one in 1960 and the other in 1971—the movement developed in the middle of a period of profound political, social, and ideological transformation. It emerged in a country struggling with questions regarding modernization, democracy, national independence, social justice, and its place within the Cold War order.

In my opinion, the final lines of the poem above refer to the enormous potential that the student movement possessed, while the beginning of the third verse

¹ Nâzım Hikmet Ran, “Delikanlım,” *Milliyet*, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siirler/nazim-hikmet-ran-siirleri/delikanlim-siiri-nazim-hikmet-ran-6470232>.

foreshadows the fate that many of its participants would eventually face. Between these two images lies the tension that shaped the movement itself: the tension between hope and tragedy, between political participation and political repression, between revolutionary aspirations and violent confrontation.

This thesis examines exactly this tension. It does so by tracing the development of the Turkish student movement and examining how students, in correspondence with their environment and the developments surrounding them, formed a political identity that initially derived its sense of responsibility from a Kemalist self-understanding. It then explores how that self-understanding evolved and how parts of the movement gradually transformed their ideological orientation towards socialist and anti-imperialist frameworks, a process that for some ultimately culminated in forms of radical guerrilla militancy.

The first chapter looks at the most famous trial associated with the movement, namely the trial and execution of the three prominent student leaders Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan. By beginning with the trial, the chapter introduces the movement through its most symbolic ending and highlights the political tensions that surrounded the Turkish left at the beginning of the 1970s. The second chapter examines the different components of the university complex and the role they played in the development and unfolding of the movement. Specifically, it explores how students first developed a political consciousness and sense of political agency through the conflict between the increasingly repressive Democrat Party government and the professors who sought to defend university autonomy. It then examines how student participation in the military intervention of 1960 contributed to a self-understanding in which students increasingly perceived themselves as partners of the military and guardians of the Kemalist legacy. The second half of the chapter focuses on how the movement's dominant discourse gradually shifted from a Kemalist framework towards an anti-imperialist and socialist one through exposure to socialist literature and geopolitical developments such as the Vietnam War and, more importantly for the Turkish context, the Cyprus crisis. It further examines how this change in discourse transformed both the aims and methods of the movement, a development that became visible in campaigns such as the National Oil Campaign and the demonstrations against the Sixth Fleet. Finally, the chapter addresses how increasing pressure from right-wing groups, state repression, and internal disagreements regarding

revolutionary strategy contributed to the fragmentation and radicalization of the movement.

The third chapter provides an overview of Turkey's foreign and domestic political context in order to situate the movement within its wider environment and to examine how developments outside the universities influenced the movement's trajectory. The following chapter continues this contextual examination by focusing on society, the economy, and the state in order to provide a broader understanding of the environment in which the movement developed and unfolded.

The final analytical chapter approaches the Turkish 1968 movement through the lens of social movement theory. More specifically, it applies Doug McAdam's Political Process Model in order to gain a more theoretical understanding of the movement's emergence, development, and radicalization.

The primary sources used throughout this thesis consist mainly of memoirs, newspapers and journals from the period, and court documents related to the THKO trial. These sources are complemented by secondary literature dealing with the political, social, and ideological developments of Turkey during the long 1960s.

In the end, this thesis is both a historical narrative and a social movement analysis of the Turkish 1968 movement. Through an examination of the students' political identity and the dominant discourse of the movement, it seeks to understand how the movement evolved through its interaction with domestic developments, geopolitical events, and tensions between competing political legacies in modern T

The First THKO Trial- End in Sight

On May 6th, 1972, after a two-and-a-half-month trial period and nearly one year of political debate, protests, and judicial interventions, *Cumhuriyet* (*Turkish for "Republik"*), one of Türkiye's oldest newspapers, announced on the front of its title page, "*İdam edildiler*,"¹ which translates as "they have been executed".² Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, and Yusuf Aslan, who were known as the central figures of the Turkish '68 movement and leaders of the People's Liberation Army of Turkey, all gave

¹ Cumhuriyet, May 6, 1972, accessed April 26, 2026 Gaste Arsivi.

² Cumhuriyet, May 6, 1972, 1.

their lives on the same night, one after another on May 6, after their death sentences were executed in the courtyard of the Ankara central prison by the simple means of ordinary gallows and a short drop.³

This first chapter not only examines and reconstructs the course of the first THKO trial, which represented a pivotal moment in the trajectory of the Turkish '68 movement, but also investigates the political and legal circumstances under which the proceedings were conducted, the charges brought against the defendants, and the responses articulated by them.

On 12 of March 1971, following the memorandum issued by the chief of the General Staff, Memduh Tagmac, which compelled the civilian government under the Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel to resign and led to the imposition of Martial law, Deniz Gezmis and Yusuf Aslan left Ankara to join their comrades in the rural area of Malatya, where they sought to continue their revolutionary activities. The declaration of martial law marked the beginning of an intensified crackdown on the left. Following a series of incidents, Yusuf Aslan was captured while injured in the district of Sarkışla in the province of Sivas. On 16 March 1971, Deniz Gezmis, after engaging in a desperate Gunfight with the gendarmerie, surrendered. Hüseyin Inan, also regarded as one of the founders of the THKO, was captured shortly thereafter in the district of Pinarbasi in the province of Kayseri, reportedly after being denounced to the authorities by his uncle. A significant number of other members of the organization were killed or arrested following a military operation in the village of İnekli, after their location had been reported to the gendarmerie by local villagers.⁴

The Trial itself began on the 16 July 1971 after the military's prosecutors' office of the Ankara Martial Law Command prepared an indictment which accused the defendants of Article 146 of the Turkish penal Code {Türk Ceza Kanunu}, which basically stated that any person who attempts by force to alter, amend, or abolish the constitution or of

³ "THKO Davası Kronolojisi," PDF Document, 5, accessed April 22, 2026.

⁴ İbrahim Karatas, "Deniz Gezmis ve Arkadaşlarına yönelik İdam Cezaları ile ilgili Cumhurbaşkanlığı'na yapılan Başvurular," in Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimlerde Araştırma ve Değerlendirmeler, ed. Oğuz Diker, Yasin Akyıldız, Aytaç Toptaş (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2021), 288-289.

the Republic of Turkey, or tries to abolish the parliament and prevents it from functioning shall be punished by death.⁵

T.C.K. article 146 – “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Teşkilât-ı Esasiye Kanunu’nun tamamını veya bir kısmını, tadil, tebdil ve ilgaya ve bu kanun ile teşekkül etmiş olan Büyük Millet Meclisi’ni ıskata veya vazifesini yapmaktan men’e cebren teşebbüs etmek”.⁶

The trial was conducted before the No.1 military court of the Ankara Martial Law Command, operating under the conditions of martial law and chaired by Brigadier General Ali Elverdi.⁷ This institutional setting was not incidental. Following the 1971 Turkish military intervention, military courts assumed an increasingly central role in the prosecution of political cases, reflecting the broader expansion of military authority into the judicial sphere. While formally justified as a means of restoring public order, these tribunals functioned in practice as instruments of political repression. Already during the proceedings of the first THKO case, doubts emerged concerning both the legal competence and the judicial independence of the court, particularly with regard to its jurisdiction and over politically charged offences. As similar courts continued to operate in the following years, such concerns did not diminish but instead became a persistent feature of the legal and political landscape.

A. Prosecution and Defence

As the indictment already indicates, the strategy of the prosecution was not to pursue any individual felonies– which, in the case of the defendants, included charges like establishment and leadership of an armed criminal/terrorist organization, participation in an insurgent or terrorist group, aggravated robbery (committed with firearms, for political purposes), appropriation of funds through coercion, aggravated motor vehicle theft, kidnapping, hostage-taking, unlawful deprivation of liberty, attempted homicide, unlawful possession of firearms, explosives, and so on–, But to consolidate and frame these actions, in the light of the political orientation of the defendants as a systematically organized effort to change the constitutional order by violent means.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ankara Sıkıyönetim komutanlığı 1 No.lu Askeri Mahkemesi, *Gerekceli Hüküm* (Deniz Gezmiş ve Arkadaşları Hakkında)* (Ankara, 9 October 1971), 46.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

Considering the political atmosphere of that time, was that strategy not just applied to respond to the specific case of the THKO, but also to set an example and deter further political opposition, What also echoed through the court's prejudiced demeanour, which was reflected in the court's accelerated pace of the proceedings, and demanded severity regarding the judicial punishment.⁸

In contrast to the prosecution, the defence strategy was multifaceted. While the defence attorneys raised concerns regarding the court's jurisdiction, the broad application of Article 146 of the Turkish Penal Code, and irregularities in the judicial proceedings, the defendants themselves proved a willingness to pursue an alternative course. In a very extensive historical and economic analysis that covered a timeframe from the Ottoman Empire to the present day, which they began to articulate in their personal testimonies before developing it more explicitly in the collective defence statement, they did not deny the singular actions taken, but rather framed them as historical consequences and necessities that resulted from the political trajectory Turkey had taken.⁹ Based on their conceptualization of history through a Marxist framework, interpreting it as a continuous struggle between oppressors and the oppressed –extended to include both class struggle and imperial domination– they did not seek to excuse their actions, but instead legitimized them, as they categorically justified them as a means of liberation. Subsequently, Deniz Gezmis and his co-defendants, in their collective defence, further elaborated that Turkey, having emerged as an independent country after the war of independence under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had fallen back into a state of U.S military and economic dependency, and therefore could not fully unfold its potential for development. As to the submission to what they described as American imperialism, manifested itself, the defendants explained that the country was continually “sold” by internal “collaborators” –such as political elites, major industrialists, and large landowners– not merely contrary to the country's interests but increasingly for personal gain, which therefore according to their analyses meant that there has to be a reinterpretation of who the real opponents of turkey sovereignty and order are.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 65-74.

⁹ Halit Celenk, 1. THKO Davasi, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: 68'liler Yayinlari, 2008), 316-319.

¹⁰ Celenk 1. THKO Davasi, 394-401.

By taking that route, the defendants rejected the conventional way of defending themselves, which, considering the trial's all-encompassing atmosphere and circumstances, would include attempts to deny the allegations and expressions of contrition. Rather, they decided to appropriate the trials and to reform them into a political stage, which allowed them to regain control of the narrative and frame their actions as acts against imperial forces rather than attempts to overthrow the constitution or the resulting political organization.

*"The sole and indispensable condition for Turkey's development is the expulsion of America from our country. There can be no development as long as America remains here. Development is a social issue. As long as America is present in Turkey, society will not be able to develop; instead, there will be only the ultra-rich, middlemen, and lackeys. As long as America remains in our country, there will be no development; on the contrary, there will be hunger and destitution. Turkey's development and the people's liberation depend on the expulsion of American imperialism from the country. Without gaining our independence, development is impossible. Those who claim it is possible either speak out of ignorance or are lying for the sake of their interests. This is precisely why the task before us is the struggle to drive out American imperialism. And there is only one force capable of winning this struggle: the entire Turkish people—all those who are oppressed and excluded, excluding American partners, bosses, landlords, moneylenders, and merchants. Imperialism knows this very well, and because it has faced trouble many times before, it reacts to even the slightest stir in poor countries. JUST AS A RABID DOG FLEES FROM FIRE, SO DOES AMERICA FLEE FROM THOSE FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE. For this reason, it seeks to crush and eliminate independence struggles while they are still weak, at any cost, and to perpetuate its throne of enslavement. We have taken up arms and are fighting because we view the struggle against American imperialism as the first and foremost condition, and because we believe this struggle can only be won through arms. This is our sole purpose; for this reason, we began our struggle in the Nurhak Mountains. Not, as the honourable prosecutor claims, to abolish the constitution."*¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 458-459. "Original Turkish:" Türkiye'nin kalkınması için tek ve zorunlu şart Amerika'nın yurttan atılmasıdır. Hem Amerika, hem kalkınma olmaz. Kalkınma toplumsal bir sorundur. Türkiye'de Amerika var oldukça, toplum kalkınamayacak, fakat büyük zenginler, komisyoncular ve uşaklar olacaktır. Amerika yurdumuzda var oldukça, kalkınma değil, tam tersine açlık ve sefalet var olacaktır. Türkiye'nin kalkınması ve halkın kurtuluşu Amerikan emperyalizminin yurttan atılmasına bağlıdır. Bağımsızlığımızı kazanmadan, kalkınmak mümkün değildir. Mümkündür diyenler ya bilmeden söylüyorlardır veya çıkarları gereği yalan söylüyorlardır. İşte bunun içindir ki, önümüzdeki sorun Amerikan emperyalizmini kovmak için mücadeledir. Ve bu mücadeleyi başaracak tek kuvvet vardır o da; Amerikan ortağı, patron, ağa, tefeci ve bezirgânlar dışında kalan ve ezilen tüm TÜRKİYE HALKI'dır. Emperyalizm bunu çok iyi bildiği için ve başına birçok defalar bela geldiği için, yoksul ülkelerdeki en ufak bir kıpırdanmadan nem kapar. BİR KUDUZ KÖPEK ATEŞTEN NASIL KAÇARSA, AMERİKA'DA BAĞIMSIZLIK İÇİN MÜCADELE EDENLERDEN ÖYLE KAÇAR. Bunun için de ne pahasına olursa olsun bağımsızlık mücadelelerini daha zayıfken ezmek yok etmek ve esaret tahtını devam ettirmek ister. Bizler Amerikan emperyalizmine karşı mücadeleyi ilk şart gördüğümüz, bu işin de mutlaka silahla

So ultimately, even if their strategy, considering the verdict, did not produce any life-saving legal vindication, it enabled them to actively shape their story and the way they would be remembered, thereby transcending the confines of the courtroom. It contributed to a broader legacy of resistance, - for example, especially in the case of Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnönü and Yusuf Aslan and their ascendance to political martyrdom, - which later marked the spirit of the movements from 68, and of which the consequences will be discussed further down this work.

Appeal period, reactions, and the political process afterwards

After the first verdict on October 9, 1971, the THKO case was still far from over. Under the constitution, every death sentence had to be reviewed and approved by both the Senate and the parliament, and ultimately signed off by the president.¹²

In the appeal, the defence constructed a strategy that not only targeted the jurisdiction of the court itself but also questioned the framing of the defendants' actions and the excessive application of Article 146 that followed from it.¹³ Halit Celenk and his colleagues, who acted as defence attorneys for the THKO, argued that, contrary to the court's accusation, the actions committed by the members were of a fragmented, political, symbolic nature rather than constituting an organized attempt to overthrow the constitutional order. They emphasised, in particular, that the defendants lacked both the organizational structure and the material means necessary to realize or even attempt such an undertaking.¹⁴ Additionally, they argued that the verdict imposed a form of collective punishment and insisted that, especially in the context of the death penalty, each individual had to be assessed separately based on their specific actions and degree of involvement.¹⁵ Coupled with this, they also contested the jurisdiction of the court, maintaining that military courts were authorized only to try military personnel or offenses directly related to the armed forces. On this Basis, they

kazanılacağına inandığımız için silaha sarıldık ve mücadele ediyoruz. Tek amacımız budur, bunun için Nurhak Dağları'nda mücadeleye başladık. Yoksa, sayın savcının dediği gibi ANAYASA'yı ortadan kaldırmak için değil”.

¹² Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (1961), art. 64, in *Islamic Studies* 2, no 4 (1963): 482.

¹³ Celenk, Halit, et.al. Deniz Gezmiş Davası Layihası. Submitted to Askeri Yargıtay II. Dairesi, Dosya NO. 2/1971-357, 1971, 171-78.

¹⁴ Celenk et al., Temyiz Lâyihası, 206-208.

¹⁵ Ibid., 230-41.

demanded that the case be transferred to a civilian court, while also highlighting concerns regarding the exclusive court's lack of impartiality.¹⁶

The court partially accepted the claims put forward by the defence and commuted several of the death sentences to terms of imprisonment. Upon re-examining the evidence—or, in some cases, the lack thereof – it concluded that the threshold required for the death penalty had not been collectively met. However, in the case of Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin Inan, and Yusuf Aslan, the court upheld the death sentences, arguing that their leading roles in the organization and planning of the actions, plus the ideological leadership, constituted sufficient evidence of intent.¹⁷

Regarding the question of jurisdiction, the court maintained that the crimes committed were also directed against the military order, thereby justifying the authority of the military court to preside over the case.¹⁸

In light of the second ruling, it appeared that the court, by rejecting the notion of collective punishment, sought to preserve a certain perception of fairness. At the same time, however, through its application of a dual judicial logic, the court contributed to the separation of these three in the memory of the broader movement. By isolating and criminalizing their leadership position, it assigned them a distinct level of responsibility, which ultimately played a crucial role in shaping their perception as symbolic figures and, eventually, in their ascendance to political martyrdom. This separation, in turn, gave rise to further questions regarding the politicisation of the case, and more specifically, whether these three were ultimately sacrificed for a broader political purpose and resentment rather than being solely subjected to judicial punishment.

After the judicial process had confirmed the death sentences, the fate of Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin Inan, and Yusuf Aslan was still not completely finalized. According to the constitutional procedure of the time, every death sentence had to pass through a final political stage before it could be carried out. It first had to be approved by both the parliament and the National Senate, and only afterwards could it be sent to the president of Turkey, whose signature was necessary for the executions to be carried out. In this sense, even after the courts had reached their decision, the case remained

¹⁶ Ibid., 7-43.

¹⁷ Karatas, "*Deniz Gezmiş ve Arkadaşlarına Yönelik İdam Cezaları*," 290.

¹⁸ Celenk et al., *Temyiz Lâyihası*, 4-20.

suspended between the legal and political spheres.¹⁹ Before the sentences were voted on in parliament, Ismet İnönü, who at that time was chairman of the Republican People's Party, tried to intervene by introducing a proposal that would abolish the death penalty for political crimes. Even though the proposal was formally presented as a general legal reform, it was clearly brought forward with the pending sentences of the three THKO leaders in mind. However, İnönü's attempt was rejected by all parties except his own, especially by those associated with the political right, such as the Justice Party. This was significant as the Justice Party stood in Continuity with the banned democrat Party, whose leading figures had themselves been executed after the military intervention of 1960. Therefore, the parliamentary debate was not only concerned with the legal fate of the three revolutionary activists but also carried with the memory of earlier executions and the question of political revenge.²⁰

After İnönü's proposal failed, the death sentences were quickly brought before the parliament and the Senate, where they were discussed, voted on, and approved, yet before President Cevdet Sunay could sign them into force, the Republican People's Party made one last attempt to stop the executions by appealing to the constitutional Court. The Party argued that Procedural breaches had taken place during the parliamentary approval of the Sentences. During this period, Prime Minister Nihat Erim urged the president to withhold his signature until this legal procedure had been clarified. The Constitutional Court eventually ruled that procedural violations had indeed occurred, but it did not change the legality of the death sentences themselves. As a result, the approval process was simply repeated in both the parliament and the Senate. Thus, the case did not return the question of justice itself, but only to the correction of its procedure. In this way, the repetition of the process did not change the political direction of the decision but rather restored the formal legality of an outcome that had already been politically determined.²¹

Following the repeated approval of the death sentences in the parliament and the Senate, the case did not remain limited to the institutional spheres. While the legal and political procedure moved towards their final conclusion, attempts to stop the execution also emerged outside the formal boundaries of the spheres mentioned above.

¹⁹ Karatas, *"Deniz Gezmiş ve arkadaşlarına Yönelik İdam Cezaları,"* 290.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 291.

On the one hand, parts of society tried to intervene through petition, public appeals, and declarations of solidarity, especially among intellectuals, artists, members of the middle class, and the political left.²² On the other hand, there were also attempts of a more radical nature, through which revolutionary groups tried to force the state to prevent the executions. The two most important examples were the Kızıldere incident of March 30, 1972, and the hijacking of a Turkish Airlines plane on May 3, 1972.

On March 26 1972, Mahir Cayan and several associates of the THKP-C and THKO kidnapped two British and one Canadian technician from the Ünye NATO radar station in Ordu. They aimed to demand the cancellation of the execution of Deniz Gezmiş Hüseyin İnan, and Yusuf Aslan. After their demands were not met, they withdrew to the village of Kızıldere, where they were later surrounded by the military. Following brief negotiations, a gun fight broke out, during which all three hostages and almost all militants were killed, except for one.²² The Final desperate attempt to save the three took place on May 3, 1972, only a few days before the executions were to take place. Three who were associated with the THKO hijacked the Turkish Airlines plane “Boğaziçi” in order to demand the release of their comrades, who were already awaiting execution. The plane was redirected to Sofia, Bulgaria, but after the hijackers realized that their demands would not be fully fulfilled, they surrendered.²³

These actions, although intended as acts of solidarity and attempts to save the lives of the three, had the opposite effect in practice. Contrary to their intention, they only contributed to hardening the government’s position and provided further grounds for the state to stigmatize the leftist movement as a criminal, violent force. They allowed politicians on the right to demand stronger repression against the left, and if anything, accelerated the process leading towards the execution of Deniz Gezmiş and his friends.²³

Furthermore, these actions also had a negative impact on public support. Many who had previously supported the petitions or appeals for clemency began to withdraw, as the radical interventions made it easier to associate the broader campaign

²² Ibid.

²² Milliyet, April 1, accessed May 9, 2026 Gaste Arsivi.

²³ Berat Güncikan, “*Deniz İçin O Ucagi Kaciran Bendim*,” Haber7, May 18 2008, <https://m.haber7.com/guncel/haber/320051-deniz-icin-o-ucagi-kaciran-bendim>.

²³ Cumhuriyet, March 31, accessed May 9, 2026 Gaste Arsivi.

with violence.²⁴ While these attempts were meant to draw public attention to the case, they ultimately attracted the wrong kind: instead of strengthening the demand for mercy, they reinforced the state's narrative of disorder, threat, and necessary punishment. In this sense, these acts not only failed to prevent the executions but also contributed to a wider cycle of violence that would continue to unfold throughout the following decade.

Reactions

Reactions to the capture, trial, and death sentences of the THKO leaders varied widely across the public and the political spectrum. What stood out, however, was that at least as many, if not more, appeals against the executions came from the international actors and diaspora communities than from within Turkey itself. Various organizations of the Turkish diaspora, workers' unions, students' communities, faculty members, and intellectuals from countries such as France, Germany, and the United States demanded that the young students who had founded and led the THKO be pardoned.²⁵

In an open letter addressed to President Cevdet Sunay, members of the Turkish diaspora in Paris, for example, wrote: "*As Turkish citizens, we want to see our university students in key positions in an enlightened Turkey, not on the gallows.*"²⁶ Rather than punishing them with death, they demanded that the president examine the political and social circumstances that had created the urge in these young students to pursue such actions in the first place. Most of these reactions did not solely focus on the death sentences themselves but also criticized the broader manner in which the military had begun to repress political opposition, especially the left. What echoed through many of these appeals was also the perception that a civilized society could not resort to the death penalty as a form of punishment, as well as the concern that the use of such measures would damage Turkey's standing within the broader international community.²⁷

The reactions in favour of the executions, however, were even more revealing. While opinions on the death sentences were clearly shaped by political bias, meaning

²⁴ Karatas, "*Deniz Gezmiş ve arkadaşlarına Yönelik İdam Cezaları*," 291.

²⁵ Ibid., 292-98.

²⁶ Ibid., 292.

²⁷ Ibid., 292-298.

whether the actions of the THKO were interpreted as being against the national interest or, on the contrary, as being carried out in the name of national interest or independence, they also pointed to a dynamic that went deeper than surface level political ideology. In many cases, the demand for execution was not only fuelled by a sense of commitment towards law and order, but also by morality, revenge, and historical resentment.

İsrafil Karatas, in his documentation of the reactions to the death sentences, shows that several personal letters addressed to President Cevdet Sunay grounded their demand for execution in the earlier death sentences of Democrat Party figures after the military intervention of 1960, particularly of former prime minister Adnan Menderes, Fatin Rüstü Zorlu, and Hasan Polatkan. In this way, the debate around Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnönü, and Yusuf Aslan became intertwined with the unresolved memory of the executions of 1960.²⁸

What these reactions therefore reveal is a dynamic that had accompanied the trial all along: the resentment produced by the execution of the Democrat Party leaders after the first military intervention of 1960 had not disappeared but had transformed into a political force of its own. The death sentences of the THKO leaders were thus not only debated as a legal or security question but also became part of a wider historical struggle over revenge, legitimacy and the symbolic balancing of political violence of the past.

The Trial: Conclusion

The effects of the trial and its outcome were manifold. While the military leadership, after the intervention of 1971, clearly instrumentalized the trial to set an example and deter further forms of violent insurgency in the country, the execution of the three students produced, to a considerable extent, the opposite effect. Rather than eliminating the appeal of radical politics, the trial further amplified the feeling within

²⁸ Ibid., 299.302.

the radical left that meaningful political change through legal and institutional channels had become impossible, especially after the government forcibly abolished and the Constitutional Court dissolved the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP). Additionally, the one-sided persecution and crackdown on the left generated immense resentment towards the state and the military. This further intensified the existing sense of hostility and alienation that parts of the left already felt towards state institutions and contributed to the atmosphere of political antagonism that would shape much of the decade to come. While the executions granted the three students an unforgettable martyr status within the history of Turkish politics, they also became an example of a broader logic of revenge and redemption politics. As some of the reactions in favour of the executions already indicated, the memory of the execution of the leading figures of the Democrat Party after the military intervention of 1960 played an important role in shaping attitudes towards the fate of students

Even Süleyman Demirel, who had served as Prime Minister before the military intervention of 1971 and who would dominate Turkish politics after 1965, reportedly shouted during the parliamentary ratification process of the death sentences that they killed three of ours, now we get three of them. Whether understood as a political statement, an emotional reaction, or an expression of the tensions that had accumulated throughout the previous decade, the remark illustrates how deeply the memory of earlier political conflicts continued to shape political decision-making. Therefore, the trial was not only important because of its immediate legal and political consequences but also because it became a portrait of the tensions, divisions, and unresolved conflicts that had gradually unfolded throughout the 1960s and ultimately culminated in the events surrounding the military intervention of 1971.

The 1968 Movement

The Turkish 68' Movement did not emerge randomly, nor can it be just acknowledged as a mere reflection of contemporary global protest movements of its time. Rather, it developed within a specific national context shaped by the relative liberalization granted by the new constitution of 1961, the rapid expansion of higher education, increasing socioeconomic disparities, and anti-imperialist inclinations, which corresponded with a larger legacy of students as protectors of the republic and a revolutionary force. While transnational influences, particularly from Paris and Berlin, provided ideological stimuli, the Turkish 68 movement was more decisively shaped by domestic political structures, institutional settings, and historical narratives.²⁹

A. The Student Movement: The University Complex

To completely understand the extent of the role the universities played in the Turkish 68 movement. I think it is necessary to dissect the university complex into its individual components—being, professors, students, and the different roles the complex played as a physical base of assemblages, but also as an environment in which political consciousness, organizational networks, and ideological orientations were formed, discussed, and consolidated.— to assemble them after their separate examination according to the way they interplayed with each other, to arrive at a more complete picture or understanding.

Universities

As will become clearer throughout the chapter, the universities played very different roles and served many purposes as the Turkish 68 movement developed and unfolded. Starting from the most obvious, the universities as a physical communal space played an essential role in the students' process and ability to mobilize themselves, but also to come together and to share and develop politically. For example, through the means of the student unions, the discussion clubs, and societies. Another important asset the universities provided for the movement was the professors. While at the beginning of the movement, they will provide important guidance and examples for the students'

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political and ideological development, they will later become references from which the students will differentiate themselves and evolve. But what really determined the university's value, in my opinion, is that throughout the students' and movements' development, and expansion of theoretical repertoire, the universities and the education system as conceptual structures will become a medium through which the students, by the use of their theoretical repertoire, will interpret their surroundings and their structural insufficiencies. For example, towards the peak of the movement's development, a part of the students, through their newly acquired socialist and anti-imperialist frameworks, will conclude from the structural perceived inadequacies of the education and university system to the perceived structural inadequacies of their societies and even the international system itself.

Professors

Besides their role as intellectual shepherds of the students during the actual '68 protests, the professors of the leading Turkish universities already constituted an important political force in their own right. As Emin Alper argues, even prior to 1968 university professors were actively embedded in the political sphere, adopting what he describes as a Jacobin-like identity. This identity was less concerned with partisan alignments and more oriented towards broader questions of the country's well-being, which elevated them over the decisive nature of daily political debate. It was grounded in the belief that the university, as an autonomous institution and a central site of scientific knowledge production, carried a responsibility within a democratic system to function as part of a wider structure of checks and balances.³⁰ In this sense, universities were not merely educational institutions, but a possible field of tensions that could critically engage with and, when necessary, challenge other state institutions, including the legislative and judicial branches. At the same time, professors saw themselves as having a continuous obligation to contribute to the progress and development of the country.

³⁰ Emin Alper, *"Student movement in Turkey from a Global Perspective, 1960-1971."* (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2009), 178-82.

Alper further emphasizes that the attempts by the Democrat Party government to restrict this autonomy, particularly by limiting professors' political involvement, generated increasing tensions between the academic sphere and the political authority. These conflicts played a significant role in the broader political crisis that ultimately contributed to the Democrat Party's downfall through military intervention in 1960. Importantly, he notes that this intervention itself was not independent of academic influence, because professors – especially the circle around the newspaper *Forum* – were among the actors shaping its ideological and political direction. The restructuring of the political landscape and constitution that followed created the conditions under which the Turkish student movement of 1968 could emerge and flourish.³¹

However, the relationship between the democrat party and the broader academic and intellectual sphere, much of which was more closely affiliated with the Republican People's Party, was far from stable or mutually long-term satisfactory. In its early years, the democrat party government under Adnan Menderes positioned itself as a protector of university autonomy. It introduced legislation aimed at safeguarding the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his reforms, thereby projecting no immediate or detectable threat to the republican and reformist foundations of the academic sphere.

In this early phase, relations between the government and the universities remained relatively cooperative. In 1952, the universities even rejected accusations made by İsmet İnönü, then chairman of the Republican People's Party, who had claimed that the government was attempting to undermine university autonomy. On the contrary, some universities even acknowledged that the governments had made efforts to meet the universities' demands, indicating a rather positive relationship between the two sides. This situation began to shift in 1953, when the first signs of the government's tendencies and tensions emerged. The democrat Party introduced legislation aimed at restricting the possibility of political involvement for university professors. While academics were still permitted to be members of a political party, they were prohibited from holding an active position or publicly expressing political views through publications or within the university space. Notably, this proposal initially encountered little resistance beyond the opposition, which, unsurprisingly,

³¹ Ibid., 173-75.

given its position, emphasized the importance of free speech and unrestricted political expression.³²

As Emin Alper suggests, the relatively limited reaction to this law can be understood in the light of how both the government and parts of the academic sphere perceived it at the time. Rather than viewing it solely as a restriction, it was also interpreted as a mechanism to safeguard the institutional autonomy and impartiality. This perception was closely tied to the above-mentioned Jacobin self-understanding of the academic elite, which emphasized a moral responsibility towards the nation's development and interest that stood above partisan interests. From this perspective, active engagement in party politics could be seen as compromising the integrity of the university and reducing intellectual activity to the pursuit of personal or particularistic political goals.³³

However, this relatively stable relationship began to deteriorate significantly after the Democrat Party's re-election in 1954. In the subsequent period, the government increasingly introduced measures that directly challenged the principles of free speech and academic autonomy that it had previously appeared to support. In the second half of 1954, new legislation granted the government the authority to retire civil servants, including university staff, without regard to the remaining years required for retirement eligibility. This measure effectively provided the state with the tool to purge sectors perceived to be dominated by supporters of the opposition, particularly those aligned with the Republican People's Party.³⁴

After 1954, the nature of the relationship between the universities and the government changed fundamentally. While the government increasingly resorted to a tone that emphasized the supremacy of parliamentary authority over the universities and other independent institutions, it simultaneously began to frame any non-government-affiliated institutions as a part of a broader oppositional conspiracy apparatus. In the years that followed, the conflict between the universities and the government gradually shifted from a dispute over institutional autonomy and spheres of influence into a more fundamental confrontation centered on the questions of

³² Ibid., 175-76.

³³ Ibid., 176-77.

³⁴ Cem Eroğul, *Demokrat Parti: Tarihi ve ideolojisi*. (Ankara: Sevinç Matbaası, 1970), 117.

institutions , constitutional legitimacy, democracy, and the government's drifting away from these principles.³⁵

As Nikos Christofis has argued, the increasingly repressive stance of the Democrat Party toward independent institutions such as the army and the universities can be understood as a manifestation of its fear of the historically rooted connections between these institutions and the opposition. These connections had developed over time, particularly during the one-party era under the Republican People's Party, when the line of separation between party and state structures remained blurred. In this sense, the government's attempt to curtail the institutional autonomy can be interpreted as an effort to remove these actors from the political sphere altogether by undermining their independence.³⁶

The Conflict reached a new level of escalation between 1965 and 1957. A key turning point emerged when the dean of the Faculty of Political Science in Ankara, Prof. Dr. Turan Feyizoglu, was dismissed from his position by the Minister of Education of the Democrat Party government. The dismissal followed Feyzioglu's opening speech for the new academic year, in which he urged the students not to alter their political convictions merely to conform to the political current in power. The incident significantly heightened tensions between the government and the academic sphere and contributed to a growing political consciousness among students regarding the broader developments unfolding in the country. Students reacted strongly to the dismissal by boycotting classes and sending petitions and telegrams to President Celal Bayar, demanding the reinstatement of their professor. At the same time, the incident triggered an extensive wave of resignations among younger scholars and associate professors, many of whom had initially sympathized with the direction of the democrat Party but became increasingly disillusioned as the government continuously adopted more repressive policies. This growing dissatisfaction pushed a significant part of the newly emerging intellectuals into an oppositional position and contributed to the emergence of new political and intellectual forums, including the establishment of the Freedom Party and the rise of the liberal journal *Forum*.³⁷

³⁵ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 177.

³⁶ Nikos Christofis, "Turkey will be a Second France, Unless Our demands are Satisfied": *The Turkish Student Movement in the Long 1960s*, Turkish Historical Review 12 (2021): 166.

³⁷ Ibid., 166-7.

The government's reaction to these developments became increasingly confrontational. As the conflict intensified, a growing number of Democrat Party politicians openly declared that the autonomy of the universities existed only insofar as the government permitted it and could therefore be abolished whenever deemed necessary.³⁸

By 1958, another major controversy emerged. Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Nail Kubali, a law professor at Istanbul University, publicly condemned the government's newly introduced parliamentary regulations as anti-democratic. Kubali defended his criticism as an expression of expertise within his academic field rather than as an act of intervention in daily partisan politics. Nevertheless, the government interpreted his statement as politically motivated and favourable towards the opposition. When rumours regarding Kubali's possible forced retirement began circulating across the university, students accompanied his arrival at the campus the following day with applause and cheers.³⁹ Kubali responded with a short speech, declaring: "*I accept this demonstration and consider it a respect and love for science and for my faculty, not as an act of daily politics*".⁴⁰ In the aftermath of this demonstration, the Minister of Education demanded that the Senate of Istanbul University investigate Kubali. The university rejected this request, arguing that his statement could not be classified as partisan political activity. Ignoring the university's position, the ministry nevertheless proceeded with Kubali's dismissal. Once again, students reacted with large-scale protests, overwhelming both the presidency and the ministry with telegrams condemning the decision. Unlike earlier incidents, however, criticism now extended far beyond the student body, as professors from universities across the country publicly denounced the government's action as unlawful. As a result, the conflict between the universities and the government continued to intensify further into the following year.⁴¹

In 1959, the academic staff of the University of Istanbul elected Prof. Dr. Siddik Sami Onar as the new director of the university. Onar was widely known for his critical

³⁸ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 180.

³⁹ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁰ Muammer Taylak, Saltanat, II. Mesruiyet Ve I. Cumhuriyet'te Örgenci Hareketleri (Ankara: Basnur Matbaası, 1969), 253.

⁴¹ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 181.

stance towards the government and his strong defence of university autonomy, in contrast to his predecessor, who repeatedly positioned himself closer to the government.⁴²

Throughout 1959 and into 1960, the disputes surrounding the university's autonomy, the professors' involvement in politics, and the broader relationship between the academic institutions and the state continued to deepen. These tensions ultimately reached their peak in April 1960, when student protests and campus occupations first erupted at Istanbul University before spreading to Ankara University as well. The demonstrations and subsequent clashes became one of the central developments contributing to the military interventions of May 27, 1960.⁴³

What this prologue to the later erupting 1968 movement demonstrates is that the university professors and other members of the academic sphere, as protagonists in this episode, were not just important to students as mediators of the political ideas and knowledge. More fundamentally, they embodied, defended, and transmitted many of the values associated with the republican reforms, such as freedom of the press, political participation, constitutionalism, and the separation of powers. These principles gradually merged into a particular Self-understanding that was firmly anchored in the Kemalist tradition and in the belief that the modernization process initiated by the republic was still incomplete and had to be protected and further advanced.

This self-understanding became highly significant for the later student movement of the 1960s, as it played an important role in the political atmosphere that emerged after the military intervention of May 27, 1960, and in the formation of the 1961 constitution that followed it.⁴⁴ The constitution embedded many of the principles that the university professors had defended throughout the previous decade, particularly broader guarantees regarding freedom of expression, political participation, and institutional autonomy, thereby creating a considerably more liberal political environment in which student activism could prosper.⁴⁵ At the same time, the conception of themselves as guardians of Kemalist values and of the unfinished

⁴² Ibid., 181-182

⁴³ Christofis, *"Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied,"* 168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁵ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 245-54.

modernization process became a fundamental component of the political identity of the student movement during the first half of the 1960s⁴⁶. Yet, as the movement expanded and radicalized in the second half of the decade, this very identity became a point of internal tension and friction. Sections of the movements began to distance themselves from the earlier Kemalist framework, since their political horizons and leftist vocabulary expanded, as the movement progressed, a development that would become more pronounced throughout the later process of radicalization.

Students

Now, coming to the primary Dynamo of the movement, the students themselves, it is important to note that although students possessed a certain legacy within the political development of the country, reaching as far back as the Tanzimat reform era, they were never a single homogenous or static entity driven by one ideological direction or one fixed objective⁴⁷. Rather, the student movement has to be understood as an adaptive collective that continuously transformed itself according to the changing political circumstances, available means, and the experiences it accumulated throughout the process. As the movement unfolded and progressed, it repeatedly reformulated both its identity and its objectives, reinventing itself in response to the political and social realities surrounding it.

Before continuing with the examination of this collective and the role it played within the trajectory of the Turkish 68 movement, as well as the broader meaning and consequences, it is necessary to return once more to the concept of the students 'self-understanding, which had been introduced in the previous paragraph regarding the university professors. In the conclusion above, it was argued that professors symbolically passed down to students a self-understanding rooted in the idea of understanding themselves as guardians of the Kemalist legacy and of the unfinished modernization process of the republic. The use of the word symbolically is important here, as there are different explanations regarding how this self-understanding developed among the students themselves.

⁴⁶ Harun Karadeniz, *Olayli Yillar Ve Genclik* (Istanbul: Belge Yayinlari, 1975), 36.

⁴⁷ Christofis, "*Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied*," 163.

One explanation is of a socio-economic nature. The students of the period overwhelmingly originated from upper-middle-class backgrounds, often from families connected to the republican bureaucracy, the military, or other sectors historically associated with the Republican People's Party and the Kemalist tradition more broadly. Through this social environment, many students were already exposed to a political culture shaped by republican ideals, secularism, modernization, and the belief in the responsibility of the educated elites toward the state and society.⁴⁸

A second explanation is provided by Erik Jan Zürcher, who argues that the students' sense of political self-efficacy and collective agency was substantially shaped by the participation of professors and students in bringing down the Democrat Party government. Their involvement in the events leading to the military intervention of May 1960 served as what many perceived to be concrete proof of the political effectiveness of organized intellectual and student action.⁴⁹ This understanding strongly resonated with the wider Kemalist conception of transforming society from above through the guidance of an educated and enlightened elite. In this sense, the intervention of 1960 not only altered the institutional and constitutional structure of the country but also reinforced the belief among students that they themselves constituted legitimate political actors capable of intervening in the historical trajectory of the newly founded republic.⁵⁰

Another perspective, highlighted by Ali Rıza Karacelik, places greater emphasis on the normative dimensions of this self-understanding. Particularly during the early 1960's, Turkish society still consisted overwhelmingly of a rural and largely economically disadvantaged population, much of which remained illiterate or possessed only limited access to education. Against this background, attending university was perceived as an extraordinary privilege. Large parts of society consequently projected significant expectations onto university students, regarding them as future representatives of progress, modernization, and national development. At the same time, students themselves increasingly internalized these expectations and gradually transformed them into what they perceived as their own social responsibility. Their self-understanding, therefore, emerged not only from ideological indoctrination

⁴⁸ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 145-47.

⁴⁹ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 254-55.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

or institutional traditions but also from the reciprocal relationship between social expectations and the students' growing political consciousness.⁵¹

A Further interpretation that combines ideological, normative, and circumstantial elements is presented again by Nikos Christofis. Christofis argues that the attempt to construct the youth as guardians of the republic and to embed this role deeply within the political culture of the new Turkish state was itself part of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's broader nation-building project.⁵² According to this interpretation, youth was not merely imagined as a demographic category, but rather as one of the principal vessels that would reproduce and protect itself. By embedding the values of the republic into the identity of the new Turkish youth, Atatürk not only initiated a process of ideological continuity but also effectively positioned the youth as protectors and guardians of both the Kemalist reforms and the republic itself. This responsibility was not only implied symbolically but articulated explicitly in Atatürk's longest speech (Nutuk).⁵³

*"Hey! Turkish youth! Your very first duty is to protect and defend eternally Turkish independence and the Turkish Republic. The sole foundations of your being and future is this. This foundation is your most valuable treasure. Even in the future, you will have enemies, internal, external, who will want to deprive you of this treasure. If one day you find yourself forced into the position of defending independence and the republic, to take up duty at once, you should not think about the contingencies and constraints of the situation in which you find yourself... The power you need is present in the noble blood in your veins!"*⁵⁴

Especially the final line, *"The power you need is present noble blood in your veins"*,⁵⁵ illustrates particularly clearly the constructed connection between a Turkish national identity and the perceived responsibility, but also ability, to defend the republic and its revolutionary foundations. Atatürk reiterated this idea even more explicitly in his later Bursa speech, where he not only repeated the responsibility assigned to the youth but

⁵¹ Ali Rıza Karacelik, "Türkiye'de 68 Kusagi Öğrenci hareketleri," New Era international journal of Interdisciplinary Social Researches 14 (2022): 36.

⁵² Christofis, "Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied," 163-65

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Vesikalar*, Vol. 3 (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1963), 897-98.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

also described how he imagines the youth will react when they perceive the values to be under threat: *“The youth will not say, ‘this country has its police, its gendarmes, its justice administrations’; it will defend its achievements with its hands, with stones, sticks, arms, or whatever it has at its disposal.”*⁵⁶

While this self-understanding initially functioned as a safeguard mechanism that would reveal its political significance during the events surrounding the military intervention of 1960, it also provided students, many of whom had not yet developed a coherent political agenda of their own and instead largely followed the guidance of the professors, with an interpretive framework through which they could understand the political developments surrounding them. Particularly in the context of what the students increasingly perceived as the anti-democratic measures of the Democrat party, culminating in the establishment of the research commission (Tahkikat komisyonu), this framework enabled students to reinterpret broader demands for democracy, freedom, and participation within the specific context of the universities themselves. The investigative Committee, which was equipped by the government with extraordinary power to investigate and suppress opposition, came to symbolize for many students the government’s departure from constitutional and democratic principles. Consequently, demands for democracy and participation within the national political sphere increasingly translated into demands for democratic participation within the university system itself.⁵⁷

This interconnectedness between the political sphere and the universities, whose central connecting point was precisely this self-understanding, ultimately culminated in the first major student protests and university occupations on 28 and 29 April 1960. These protests established many of the traditions, methods, and political practices that would later accompany and characterize the student movements of the following decade and simultaneously became one of the immediate precursors to the military intervention of 27 May 1960.

Following the establishment of the investigative committee, protests immediately erupted on 28 April on the campus of Istanbul University, accompanied

⁵⁶ Christofis, *“Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied,”* 165.

⁵⁷ Alper, Emin. *“Student Movement in Turkey,”* 193-197.

by the discourse that emphasized the necessity of defending the constitution. The government responded harshly, and police forces reacted with considerable brutality, even opening fire on protesting students. Rector Siddik Sami Onar was beaten by the police, while the student Turan Emeksiz was shot dead. The following day, protests spread to Ankara University, where the Faculty of Political Science once again stood at the centre of the demonstrations. Here, too, the authorities responded through repression and police brutality. In the aftermath, the democrat Party government ordered the closure of the universities. Yet the movement had already outgrown the limited spaces of its campus, which meant that although students were removed from the university grounds, demonstrations continued throughout the streets of the two major cities.⁵⁸

On 22 May 1960, students of the Turkish military academy organized and carried out a protest that, according to Alper, represented the final omen of the preceding military intervention of 27 May 1960—one that the Democrat Party failed to recognize.⁵⁹

Given these circumstances, the student movement of 1960 still differed substantially from the later '68 movement that was yet to emerge. Nevertheless, the importance of this first wave of protests lies precisely in the fact that it provided the later movement with traditions, methods, political positioning, and an identity from which subsequent generations of activists could evolve and differentiate themselves. While the first wave remained deeply shaped by its Kemalist self-understanding and by the perceived threat posed to the identity by the policies of the democrat Party government, it simultaneously established a political culture centred around democracy, participation, constitutionalism, and freedom, principles that subsequently found expression in the following constitution of 1961. In this sense, the events of 1960 not only transformed the political trajectory of the republic itself but also opened the space through which the later student movement could continuously reformulate and reinvent itself according to changing historical circumstances and political needs.

After the military intervention of may 27 1960

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

After the military intervention, parts of the military increasingly declared the students as heroes of the revolution.⁶⁰ The students, in turn, took the confidence that their involvement in the downfall of the Democrat party had provided and transformed it into a new stage of political self-understanding. What had before been rooted primarily in the idea of acting as guardians of the Kemalist reforms and the republican ideas gradually developed into a self-conception as active partners of both the military and the political order that was to emerge after the elections of 1961.⁶¹ In this sense, the students embedded the military intervention into their broader understanding of Turkey's Modernization process and increasingly interpreted it as their responsibility not only to defend the intervention itself, but also to protect its political and constitutional outcomes.⁶² At the same time, this identity was also instrumentalized by parts of the military apparatus and later by the republican peoples Party led government that followed. The students' role as defenders of the republic and the revolutionary process became a useful political tool through which criticism regarding the intervention and its consequences could be suppressed. The following years were strongly shaped by this relationship. The students organized annual meetings to commemorate the anniversary of the intervention, visited rural parts of the country to explain and justify the necessity of the military intervention to broader parts of the population, and openly criticized or boycotted media outlets that attempted to delegitimize the revolution of May 27 and its outcomes.⁶³

Simultaneously, the broader political sphere was undergoing a significant change. The constitution of 1961, which emerged as a direct consequence of the military intervention and whose drafting process was strongly influenced by professors and intellectual circles, many of whom had been closely associated with the *Journal Forum* and had become increasingly critical of the Democrat Party and its trajectory toward the end of the 1950s, introduced a significantly more liberal constitutional framework, especially considering the Turkish context. It expanded political rights,

⁶⁰ Ömer Turan, "The '68 Movements around the World and in Turkey: one Movement or many?" *Turkish Historical Review* 12 (2021): 138.

⁶¹ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 206-7.

⁶² Turan, "The '68 Movements around the World and in Turkey," 138.

⁶³ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 213-14.

widened freedom of expression, and created a greater institutional space for ideological diversity, new media outlets, and political organization.⁶⁴

This constitutional opening contributed directly to the emergence of a broader political and intellectual landscape in which the later Turkish 68 movement would develop. New student organizations, political newspapers, and parties began to emerge. Particularly influential was the weekly newspaper *Yön*, which would later play a substantial role in shaping the ideological orientation and intellectual trajectory of the student movement. Politically, the new constitutional order also facilitated the establishment of parties that would become central to the movement's later evolution, most notably the Justice Party, which emerged as the successor to the banned Democrat Party, and the Turkish Workers' Party (TIP), which introduced a more organized socialist and labour-oriented political discourse into the public sphere and carried a certain intellectual continuity with earlier Turkish leftist traditions like the Turkish communist Party.⁶⁵

Yet between 1962 and 1963, this relatively stable relationship between the students, the military legacy of May 27, and the Republican People's Party began to deteriorate. While students still largely grounded their political identity in the Kemalist self-understanding described above, the Republican People's Party increasingly pursued a process of political normalization. As Emin Alper states, İnönü's 'broader political objective was essentially to return the military to the barracks, the students to the universities, leaving the sphere of politics to the politicians. However, this normalization proved difficult for a generation of students who had recently become conscious of their own political agency through their perceived impact on the military intervention of 27 May 1960.⁶⁶ This growing tension became especially visible when rumours emerged that the government was planning to pardon the remaining ministers of the former Democrat party government, particularly former President Celal Bayar. Bayar had initially been sentenced to death after the intervention, but because of his age and health concerns, his sentence had later been commuted to life imprisonment.

⁶⁴ Feryat Bulut, "68 Kusagi Genclik Olaylarinin Uluslararası Boyutu ve Türkiye'de 68 Kusagina Göre Atatürk ve Atatürkcülük anlayisi," *Çagdas Türkiye Tarihi Arastirmalari Dergisi* 11, no. 23 (2011): 140.

⁶⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 254.

⁶⁶ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 240.

By the end of 1962, these rumours became reality. In an attempt to restore political stability and move towards a democratic environment less centred on revolutionary legitimacy and justice, the Republican People's Party and its coalition government issued an amnesty that included the former ministers and Bayar himself. On March 22 1963, Celal Bayar was released from prison and welcomed by a large crowd of supporters in Ankara.⁶⁷

The students reacted sharply. In the days that followed, demonstrations involving more than ten thousand students erupted and escalated rapidly. Protesters attacked justice Party affiliated newspaper such as *Yeni Istanbul*, *Son Havadis*, and *Zafer*. Buildings were targeted under a rain of stones, while Turkish and Atatürk flags were raised prominently as symbolic markers of legitimacy and republican ownership. During the protests, students even accused İnönü of betraying the May 27 revolution.⁶⁸

These developments in 1963 had particularly important consequences for the student movement. First, the debates surrounding the amnesty of Celal Bayar created an opportunity for more conservative students to articulate themselves more openly as nationalists and to raise political objections against the largely Kemalist and increasingly left-leaning student majority, whom they accused of hiding communist ambitions behind the symbolic cover of Turkish nationalism and republican imagery.⁶⁹ Although this division would emerge only gradually throughout the remainder of the 1960s and fully intensify in the 1970s, this period represented an early stage in the later right-left polarization of both the student movement and Turkish politics more broadly. Second, the reconciliatory approach of the People's Republican Party created a rupture in the relationship between students and their political allies. Over time, this rupture widened considerably. Combined with increasing exposure to leftist ideas through *Yön* and the growing political engagement of the TIP, students began to rearticulate their political identity. Their self-understanding evolved from a primarily Kemalist conception based on functionality—seeing themselves as guardians of a republican values-based process—toward a more complex identity that remained practically Kemalist in institutional orientation, yet increasingly leftist in ideological content. This transformation also served as a way of distancing themselves from

⁶⁷ Ibid., 225-28.

⁶⁸ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 40-42.

⁶⁹ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 226-228.

former Kemalist partners, especially the military bureaucracy and political elites, whom many students increasingly perceived as having betrayed the revolutionary spirit they once claimed to defend.⁷⁰

In 1964, particularly toward the beginning of the academic year, the students once again turned their attention back towards the universities. This time, however, the demands were no longer centred around isolated concessions of symbolic interventions, but increasingly focused on broader structural reforms within the university structure and system itself. The immediate catalyst for this renewed wave of mobilization was the largely uncommunicated announcement of a substantial increase in tuition fees, especially affecting major institutions such as Istanbul University and the Technical University of Istanbul. What initially appeared as an economic issue quickly developed into a broader political confrontation.⁷¹

The MTTB, one of the most influential student organizations of the period, reacted immediately and rejected the increase in tuition fees. Their argument was not framed purely in economic terms, but rather in constitutional, social, and normative language. The Students argued that such an increase effectively led to the exclusion of poorer segments of society from education and would therefore deprive them of their constitutional right to education.⁷² In this way, tuition fees became more than an administrative matter; they were interpreted as part of a wider struggle over access, equality, and democratic participation within the university system.

On 21 September, leaders of the national student union as well as representatives of university-specific unions, including figures such as Yüksek Cengel, Zeki Telci, and Hüseyin Avni Sagesen, organized a press conference in the garden of Istanbul University. There, they argued that raising the tuition fees in a country where a significant proportion of the population still remained uneducated was fundamentally incompatible with democratic principles and with the broader promises embedded in the constitution of 1961. They further framed such a measure as an attempt to sabotage not only the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students, but also the developmental potential of the Turkish youth as a whole. At the same time, they strongly criticized both the universities and the Ministry of Education for

⁷⁰ Ibid., 207

⁷¹ Ibid., 266-68

⁷² Ibid.

implementing such decisions without consulting any student body or representative institutions. This criticism once again demonstrated that students were gradually no longer demanding merely material concessions, but political participation within the institutional decision-making itself.⁷³

Two days later, on 23 September, the national student Union continued to articulate its dissatisfaction by sending a Telegram to Ismet İnönü, who was the prime Minister at the time. In the telegram, the students declared:

*“The university’s decision to increase the tuition fees has inflicted an irreparable wound on the hearts of the youth and sparked an outcry. The blow intended to be dealt in this manner to the younger generation of our nation, which faces major social problems, is in fact aimed at undermining the foundations of a people-centred and democratic regime. There are countless benefits to be gained from taking swift and decisive action to prevent this situation from leading to dire consequences.”*⁷⁴

At the beginning of October, the universities partially responded to student pressure and announced that tuition fees would be reduced, while shortly thereafter, the increase itself was postponed after the government agreed to cover parts of the universities’ budget deficits through subsidies. Yet, despite this partial victory, the demonstrations did not end. What is particularly significant here is that the centre of the criticism began to shift. While the students initially mobilized around the tuition increase and educational accessibility, they increasingly redirected their dissatisfaction toward the professors and the university establishment itself.⁷⁵

Toward the end of October, Istanbul University in particular decided to cancel its annual opening ceremony, mostly to prevent the leader of the Istanbul University student union, Zeki Telci, from publicly addressing the audience. One reason for this measure was Telci’s earlier criticism of professors and threat to confront them with what he described as a “Kemalist fist.” The cancellation further intensified tensions.⁷⁶ Students interpreted the decision to cancel the opening ceremony not just as a measure

⁷³ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 86-87.

⁷⁴ Ibid., “Original Turkish” Üniversitenin, harçların arttırılması hakkındaki kararı gençliğin kalbinde telafisi kabil olmayan bir yara açmış ve bir infial uyandırmıştır. Büyük sosyal problemleri olan ulusumuzun genç kuşağına bu suretle indirilmek istenen darbe, aslında halkçı ve demokratik rejim temeline kundak sokmayı hedef tutmaktadır. Durumun vahim sonuçlar doğurmasına engel olacak ani ve kesin kararlar alınmasında sayısız faydalar vardır.”

⁷⁵ Alper, Emin. “*Student Movement in Turkey*,” 267.

⁷⁶ *Cumhuriyet* (Istanbul), October 29, 1964. accessed May 19, 2026 Gaste Arsivi.

of administrative control but as another example of the university's paternalistic attitude and unwillingness of the institution to engage with the students' voices.

After the cancellation of the annual opening ceremony, the student unions decided to organize an alternative one themselves. In a press conference held before the ceremony, representatives of the National Student Union, organizations such as the MTTB TMTF, IÜTB, and ITÜTB voiced criticism of the professors on an unprecedented scale. Their accusation went far beyond tuition issues. They argued that the professors had sacrificed their academic integrity for economic interest, particularly by maintaining strong private sector engagements alongside their university positions. Further, they did accuse some of the professors of favouritism, claiming that relatives had allegedly been admitted without undergoing any proper entrance examination procedures. More severe accusations regarding moral and institutional misconduct further escalated the atmosphere of distrust. Whether all claims were substantial or not, what mattered politically was that students increasingly no longer perceived professors as unquestionable intellectual prophets, but as institutions and actors that could be challenged as well. Following these accusations, the university agreed to form a committee to investigate both reform demands and the charges raised by the students. Nevertheless, distrust remained high. Students repeated their demands during further demonstrations and came more and more to believe that reform would not emerge from within the university's complex. Consequently, they sought to push change directly through the political sphere. They approached the parliament and demanded that decisive action be taken within seven days, threatening that if no reforms were introduced, they would occupy and effectively shut down the universities.⁷⁷

After this Ultimatum, President Ismet İnönü and Cemal Gürsel agreed to meet with the representatives of the student unions. Although the meeting itself was largely unproductive, and İnönü expressed clear dissatisfaction both with the tone and the attitude of the students, he nevertheless chose to make concessions and promised that reform efforts would be examined. This relatively lenient approach was likely shaped by the approaching elections of 1965, during which İnönü could afford to lose the political sympathy of the students, who were already gradually drifting towards the

⁷⁷ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 268-72.

Turkish Workers Party and wider Leftist politics. Given these promises, students temporarily cancelled their remaining demonstrations.

At the same time, however, it is also important to note that the widening rupture was also being felt from the professors. In Meetings between university professors and İnönü, many professors rejected the majority of the students' claims and argued that the increasingly provocative, confrontational, and self-righteous attitude of the students had made meaningful cooperation nearly impossible. While most reform promises ultimately never materialized, and the issue itself lost urgency by 1965, the political significance of this episode was far greater than immediate policy outcomes.⁷⁸

What this stage in the development of the student movement demonstrated was manifold. On a practical level, the reform struggle and the way it unfolded became a manifestation of the students' growing awareness of the height of their political power. By passing the university institutions and directly engaging with parliament and national political actors, students reached a new level of consciousness regarding their practical political influence. This experience infused the movement with a degree of confidence that would remain with it throughout much of its later development. Concurrently, this episode also added another layer to the students' political identity. While the student movement of the early 1960s had initially mobilized itself more broadly under a one-dimensional self-understanding as a guardian of the Kemalist reform tradition—an identity partly inherited from their professors—the developments of 1964 introduced a new normative and idealist dimension. Students increasingly began to evaluate and judge their professors not simply as intellectual authorities, but according to whether they embodied or betrayed the values they themselves had once helped transmit. The perceived conformism, opportunism, and practical compromises of sections of the academic elite created growing disillusionment. In this sense, the reform struggle of 1964 not only strengthened the students' political agency but also, through the development of a normative dimension to their identity, accelerated the ideological and emotional separation between the student movement and the professoriate that had once served as one of its principal intellectual foundations.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

From 1964-67

The period from 1964 to 1967 can, in many ways, be understood as the final prelude to the movement that the Turkish 68 movement, in its narrower, more known sense, was about to become. During this time frame, the movement underwent its final movement, encompassing ideological and political metamorphosis before it fully unfolded in 1967-68. Several developments fundamentally shaped this transformation. Among them was the Republican People's Party's electoral defeat to the Justice Party, which, for the non-conservative segments of the student movement, meant the loss of an important political patron saint and institutional safety net.⁷⁹ At the same time, the continuously growing influence of the Journal *Yön*, the Turkish Workers' Party, and the later Federation of Ideas Clubs (FKF) profoundly reshaped both the intellectual orientation and political trajectory of the movement.⁸⁰ Yet perhaps the most decisive transformation was the shift in the dominant discourse of the student movement. Itself. Harun Karadeniz, one of the leading figures of the movement, described this as a transition from a struggle centred primarily around freedom and political participation toward one increasingly concerned with national and economic independence.⁸¹ This shift gradually moved the student movement closer to the ideological framework of Third World socialism, closely associated with *Yön*, and toward a broader anti-imperialist and class-based understanding of both domestic and global politics. Two developments in particular, both reflected and accelerated this transformation: the Cyprus crisis and U.S. President Lyndon Johnson's letter to Turkey, as well as the later national oil campaign of 1965. These events became crucial moments through which the movement more and more interpreted national questions through anti-imperialist and socio-economic lenses.⁸²

The Cyprus issue had already been a recurring source of tension within Turkish-Greek relations since 1955. However, a temporary equilibrium had been achieved in 1960 following Cyprus's declaration of independence and the establishment of the new constitution. Yet this arrangement was inherently unstable.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 290-3.

⁸⁰ Turan, "*The '68 Movements around the World and in Turkey*," 140.

⁸¹ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 165-71.

⁸² Christofis, "*Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied*," 174-7.

While the Greek majority on the island largely supported *Enosis*, meaning union with mainland Greece, the Turkish minority increasingly demanded *Taksim* partition or political and communal autonomy, in addition to institutional guarantees.⁸³

The Constitution of 1960 granted both communities veto rights, yet in practice, this constitutional arrangement in practice proved difficult to sustain and increasingly paralyzed the governance of the country. As a consequence, President Makarios proposed constitutional amendments aimed at transforming Cyprus into a more unitary political structure, while simultaneously promising that minority protections would remain intact. Ankara rejected the proposal in November 1963. In December the same year, armed confrontations involving Turkish Cypriot communities and the Cypriot police escalated into broader communal violence. Turkish villages increasingly became isolated and were subjected to pressure from Greek paramilitary forces. Throughout 1964, the United States attempted to facilitate dialogue between Greece and Turkey, during which Turkey constantly preserved the right to threaten to militarily intervene should Turkish interests and the safety of the Turkish minority continue to be undermined.⁸⁴

For the student movement, the Cyprus issue became more than a foreign policy question. It repeatedly functioned as a political vehicle of mobilization, largely because it appealed strongly to nationalist sentiment, while it also allowed anti-imperialist interpretations to enter the wider public discourse. On 4 April, Makarios openly declared that he no longer recognized Turkey's legal guarantor rights over Cyprus. In response, as an expression of Turkey's outrage, Ankara for the first time openly suggested that it might reconsider aspects of its NATO alignment if national interests continued to be ignored. This marked an unprecedented symbolic shift in Turkish foreign policy and Turkey's political climate.⁸⁵

Throughout the summer of 1964, student mobilizations and protests intensified alongside the deepening crisis. Turkey demanded the restoration of the previous status quo before considering military intervention. On June 4, Ismet İnönü informed President Johnson of Turkey's planned operation. Johnson responded immediately in his now famous letter of 5 June, after the military operation was effectively halted and

⁸³ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 250.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 250-4.

⁸⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 274-7.

Turkey ultimately agreed to an armistice later in August the same year. Even though the complete content of Johnson's letter became fully known to the broader public only later, its central implications were immediately clear. Johnson had effectively prevented Turkey from militarily intervening in Cyprus in defence of the Turkish minority. More importantly, the letter strongly implied that in the case of a Turkish military intervention, the US would, in the event of a Soviet attack, not automatically defend Turkey. Johnson also prohibited the use of American weaponry in such an intervention without prior American approval.⁸⁶

The political and ideological consequences of this letter were enormous. On a practical level, it led to some of the first openly articulated popular anti imperialist demonstration. In a series of protests that began in Ankara and directly spread to Istanbul, students marched towards the American embassy shouting slogans such as "Yankee Go Home" and "Fake friend Johnson." In these demonstrations, American foreign policy was increasingly condemned not just as diplomatically disappointing, but as structurally exploitive and imperialist. At the same time, the intellectual left was given a powerful interpretive opportunity. Johnson's intervention allowed leftist circles to frame American actions, which, to some extent, were now perceived as contrary to Turkish national interests, not as an isolated diplomatic disagreement, but as evidence of a broader international structure and pattern of imperial domination. This was crucial. Anti -imperialist thought could now increasingly be articulated not only through socialist rhetoric, but also under the protective language of patriotism and national sovereignty, which significantly contributed to the spreading of socialist ideas and the broader movement's shift to the left.⁸⁷

On a political level, the letter also gave the Turkish government a certain room to rethink its foreign policy. For more than a decade, distancing oneself from the United States had often been politically risky because of anti-communist sentiment and fears of being accused of Soviet sympathy. Johnson's letter, however, provided a fertile ground for more considerations towards a stronger independence in Turkish foreign policy. In this atmosphere, both *Yön* and the Turkish Workers' Party found new space to advocate for a more autonomous and national-driven anti-American political line.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 251-65.

On an industrial and strategic level, the Cyprus crisis also revealed something deeply significant to both the military and broader political sphere: Turkey's military capacity remained highly dependent on American support. This meant that in the case of an embargo or military restriction, Turkey would struggle to independently protect its own strategic interests. As a result, discussions increasingly emerged around the need for domestic military production, technological self-sufficiency, and industrial independence. In many ways, the student movement later transposed this lame logic onto broader sectors of the economy. What military dependence revealed in defence and strategic interests, students increasingly interpreted as a wider structural dependency across national industries, resources, and economic development.⁸⁸

Consequently, Johnson's letter, precisely because it was perceived as an act that disregarded Turkish national interest, created a political and emotional atmosphere that allowed anti-imperialist ideas to spread to a much broader audience. The United States, by appearing to undermine Turkish sovereignty in the public eye, weakened the earlier illusion that Turkish and American interests were naturally aligned. As a result, anti-Americanism slowly shifted in meaning. It progressively moved from being seen merely as a synonym for Communist sympathy to becoming, in many circles, compatible with nationalist and pro-Turkish sentiment. This transformation was highly important. It enabled leftist actors such as *Yön* and the Turkish Workers Party, and the developing student movement, to merge anti-imperialist ideas with national rhetoric. In this sense, the Cyprus Crisis and the Johnson letter did not just simply influence foreign debates; they helped complete one of the final ideological transformations of the student movement before the full eruption of the Turkish 68 itself.

National Oil Campaign 1965

The National Oil Campaign of 1965 became one of the most important issues of both the student movement and the broader public sphere and marked the first concrete manifestation of the movement's growing engagement with economic matters at that time. More importantly, it represented the practical appropriation of the anti-imperialist theoretical framework that increasingly entered the movement after the Cyprus crisis and the Johnson letter. While the earlier student mobilizations had largely

⁸⁸ Ibid.

revolved around constitutional rights, political participation, and institutional conflicts, the oil issue marked the movement's shift towards economic dependency, national production, and resource sovereignty. In this sense, the nationalization of oil became not merely an economic demand but a gateway through which the movement gradually connected national independence to national development.⁸⁹

The first segment of this campaign concerned itself with the question of oil resources and the broader issue of national control over production. A central role in this process was played by the Student Union of the Technical University of Istanbul (İ.T.Ü.T.B.), which became involved after the Turkish petroleum joint venture (Türkiye petrolleri Anonim Ortakligi, TPAO) consulted the union to conduct research and mobilize support in the public and intellectual sphere, particularly from the increasingly left-leaning spectrum of society. This was especially important because the TPAO had been denied additional licenses by the government to expand extraction and refining operations, which raised broader suspicions regarding the relationship between national economic interests and foreign private capital investments.⁹⁰

What the research conducted by the student union of the Technical University of Istanbul revealed was striking. By 1965, eleven foreign firms and only one national actor, TPAO, were licensed to operate within the Turkish oil sector. Since every firm was legally permitted to open up to eight oil wells, this created a potential production imbalance of 88 to 8 in favour of foreign companies. Yet what raised even stronger suspicion among the students was that the research simultaneously showed that the actual net production output of TPAO exceeded the combined productive output of the other eleven foreign firms. This led the students to believe that many foreign companies were not primarily interested in productive extraction within Turkey, but rather in securing licenses and occupying strategic oil wells in order to block Turkish expansion while continuing to supply the Turkish market with oil extracted more cheaply from more productive foreign sources.⁹¹ In this understanding, what emerged was not simply an economic imbalance but a form of market manipulation that restricted domestic production to preserve foreign dependency.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 277-8.

⁹⁰ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 51-2.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Additionally, the research also suggested that foreign firms sold oil in Turkey at prices significantly higher than in comparable markets. The students emphasized that prices in Turkey were, in some cases, 35 percent higher than those in neighbouring European markets such as Greece.⁹² This further reinforced the growing perception that the Turkish oil sector was operating less in accordance with national development and more in favour of foreign economic interests. According to the students, the entire structure depended on the Oil Laws of 1954, which had been passed in parliament under the Democrat Party government. The student organizations engaged in the Oil campaign increasingly argued that these laws had been drafted in a way that was highly concessionary toward foreign firms, and that they were just a reflection of the economic interests of foreign corporate actors. They based that assumption on the fact that these laws were drafted by foreign lawyers, and got approved by parliament without any amendments. Interestingly, the Republican People's Party had criticized these laws at the time on the grounds that they were too generous towards foreign interests and undermined Turkish economic sovereignty. Nevertheless, despite these objections, the party never came to revise these laws during its own legislative period. This was an example that showed that both political camps failed to confront structural dependency.⁹³

Given the results of the research, the student union of the Technical University of Istanbul decided to transfer the matter to the National Student Union, which immediately turned the issue into a nationwide campaign. The National Student Movement responded by launching a nationwide protest that urged the population to consume oil only from the national firm and simultaneously demanded that the government amend the oil laws, with the objective of nationalizing the Turkish oil sector entirely. The protest repertoire of the students also expanded considerably. The National Student Union issued public statements, printed brochures, pamphlets, and posters, and increasingly moved beyond conventional protest methods. Walls and sidewalks were painted with slogans such as "*Kahrolsun emperyalizm*", "*Kahrolsun Yabancı petrol şirketleri*", and "*Petrol millileştirilecektir*"—Meaning Down with imperialism, Down with foreign oil companies, and Oil will be nationalized.⁹⁴ These

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 281-2.

⁹⁴ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 53-55.

slogans were highly symbolic because they showed how anti-imperialist discourse and vocabulary had now fully entered practical protest methods. What had emerged after the Cyprus Crisis as a growing intellectual and foreign policy-based critique of dependency was now being translated into direct domestic mobilization around national economic sovereignty.

The effectiveness of this campaign was unexpected. Consequently, the issue regarding the nationalization of oil quickly became the most dominant political question in the country. Whether in the press, within intellectual circles, or in parliamentary discourse, oil became a national debate every day. This public pressure forced the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Mehmet Turgut, who was part of the Justice Party government, to publicly declare that the oil laws would not be amended and that nationalization would not be pursued.⁹⁵

The National Student Unions' response came immediately and sharply. In a public statement, it demanded Turgut's resignation and openly accused him of functioning as a defender and apologist of foreign oil firms within the ranks of the parliament. In the following days, students even radicalized their symbolic protest. They stitched the emblems of companies such as Shell and Mobil onto lawyers' robes and sent them to Turgut and Süleyman Demirel, implying that they were not acting in accordance with national interests, but rather as advocates for foreign economic gain.

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The oil issue unfolded like a broader domino effect. Throughout 1965, students increasingly expanded their anti-imperialist critique toward other sectors of the economy and began examining additional foreign firms that were now interpreted as visible symbols of imperialism and economic dependency. Among these, Coca-Cola became one of the most prominent examples and targets. Thus, the oil campaign did not remain an isolated economic protest, but rather evolved into a broader framework through which the students increasingly analysed national development, production, and dependency.⁹⁶

So, concludingly, as already indicated, the significance of the National Oil Campaign of 1965 for the student movement was immense. It represented the first

⁹⁵ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 282-5.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

moment in which it became fully visible that the dominant discourse and state of mind within large parts of the movement had fundamentally changed. The abstract objectives that largely emerged out of the 27 May 27 self-understanding, combined with the rather passive posture of reacting and rejecting Democrat party positions and defending constitutional principles, were now transformed into a far more political attitude and discourse. A discourse that was driven by anti-imperialist and socialist frameworks. In this sense, the Oil became one of the first practical expressions of the ideological change and repertoire that had developed after the Cyprus crisis and President Johnson's letter. It demonstrated that the movement no longer understood independence just as constitutional and political autonomy, but increasingly as economic sovereignty, productive self-sufficiency, and liberation from structures of foreign dependency, and as a necessary condition for national development. In that way, the National Oil campaign of 1965 symbolised one of the clearest bridges between the earlier Kemalist political consciousness of the movement and the growing socialist, anti- imperialist orientation that would define the full eruption of the Turkish 68 movement in the following years.

It is 1968

While the first student protests and student occupations of the year 1968, which are today widely understood as the beginning Turkish 68 movement in a narrower sense, unfolded in a highly spontaneous manner, it is important to mention that they did not emerge in a political or intellectual vacuum. Both Harun Karadeniz, who was the head of the Istanbul Technical University student union and one of the leading figures of the broader student movement, and Emin Alper, who provided one of the few detailed historical examinations of the student mobilizations that later became what is known as the Turkish 68 movement, repeatedly stressed that while the first protest and occupations developed unexpectedly and organically, the atmosphere which enabled them was already preconditioned. Especially the student uprising of May 1968 in countries such as Italy, France, and Germany, events which had been covered extensively by the Turkish Press, had contributed to an atmosphere in which a similar eruption not only became likely but was anticipated. In this sense, the public sphere,

be it intellectual circles or journalists, professors, or the political elite, and broader segments of ordinary society, were just waiting for the protest to occur.⁹⁷

On 10 June, the first protests and occupation erupted at Ankara University, particularly within the faculty of Language, History, and Geography. Only two days later, on 12 June, the movement had already spread to Istanbul, where the faculty of law at Istanbul University became the first to follow. From there, the protests and occupations expanded rapidly across all major universities in the country.⁹⁸ In Ankara, the first initiative emerged during the examination week, when a group consisting of approximately 30 to 40 students surrounded the head of the student union after expressing immense frustration with the examination system and demanding that he take action similar to what students in Europe had recently done. Within a timespan of minutes, a larger group of students gathered around them, and the students announced that they would follow the European example and occupy the university.⁹⁹

The co-ordinational effort and response were immediate. Studently, quickly formed occupational committees in order to facilitate, coordinate, and administer the occupation. What is particularly interesting in that process is that although the initial trigger had emerged from what could be perceived as a political issue or a practical matter (frustration with the examination procedures) the leftist-oriented segment of the broader student body took the initiative and instantly appropriated the protest by occupying most of the central positions within the occupation committees to control and shape the political direction of the protest and occupations.¹⁰⁰

In Istanbul, the occupation of the university was led and administered by Deniz Gezmiş,¹⁰¹ whom we already encountered earlier in this thesis in the chapter on the THKO trial, where He appeared as one of the Leaders of the THKO, who got sentenced to death. His presence here is historically significant because it illustrates how figures that later became important to the radicalized phase of the movement had already risen to prominence during the occupations of 1968. Yet despite the increasingly dominant role of leftist students in organizing the protests, the movement in its initial phase

⁹⁷ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 350-5.

⁹⁸ Christofis, "Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied," 177.

⁹⁹ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 357.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 358-9.

¹⁰¹ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 91-92.

consciously refrained from openly framing itself through explicit socialist rhetoric. Students instead often mobilized around slogans such as “No left or right”, but Boycott.” Attempting to avoid alienating broader sections of the student body by preserving unity across ideological lines.¹⁰²

The one university that to some extent stood out of that atmosphere of neutrality in the beginning of the protest was Istanbul University. Due to the socialist dominance within large parts of the student body, as well as the emerging leadership of Deniz Gezmiş, ideological polarization appeared somewhat earlier than in the other universities. Nevertheless, even there the movement initially refrained from using ideologically motivated language before a more explicitly ideological dimension became dominant.¹⁰³

Harun Karadeniz, with the unfulfilled educational reforms of 1964 still in mind, described the nature of the demands in 1968 not just as another outcry for another educational reform, but increasingly as a call for an extensive educational revolution. What had changed was not only the scale of dissatisfaction, but also the conceptual lens through which students interpreted the university system itself. A particularly interesting observation that Karadeniz adds is that students, especially those at technical universities, had increasingly come to the realization that the existing educational system was not suited to produce independent and capable professionals, but, in their view, prepared them to become servants of a capitalist system and of the dominant social classes.¹⁰⁴ This highlighted that by this point, at least parts of the student movement had begun to adopt socialist and Marxist analytical frameworks to interpret their own positioning in the structures they were living in.

Some demands remained faculty-specific. For example, the faculty of Language, History, and Geography of Ankara University demanded the abolition of certain Latin examinations in philology and the restructuring of particular examinations in the first academic year. Yet most of the demands concerned the educational system and the university structure as a whole. These included stronger participation and presentation within the university governance, questions regarding the purpose and orientation of the curriculum, abolition of student fees, and the

¹⁰² Ibid., 93

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 91.

responsibility of universities in creating and facilitating employment prospects after graduation.¹⁰⁵

For example, a press statement of the Istanbul Technical University occupation council declaring the students' demands reads partially as follows:

Note No 10

- 1. Our Council is determined to continue the occupation until the following issues are resolved.*
 - a) The commencement of negotiations regarding a principled agreement on students having a say and a vote in the administration of the university.*
 - b) The unequivocal acceptance of student participation in the drafting of new education and teaching regulations.*
 - c) The immediate initiation of Senate preparations to prevent the academic staff from moving to private schools.*
 - d) The abolition of the disciplinary regulations and the drafting of new ones with student participation.*
 - e) The establishment of a commission comprising students and academic staff to resolve internship issues, and the immediate commencement of its work.*
 - f) The removal of all material and moral pressures preventing students from organising themselves, and the provision of every possible material and moral resource within the university to enable our organisations to carry out their work.*¹⁰⁶

...

The perception of the university occupations and protests within both the public and political spheres was, at least in the beginning, mostly positive. Unlike later phases of the movement, the occupations of June 1968 were not immediately framed as destabilizing or a political threat. On the contrary, the students managed to gather support not just from large parts of society, but also from a substantial number of professors who themselves agreed that reforms within the universities had become necessary and unavoidable. This supportive attitude was shared by important actors as

¹⁰⁵ Alper, Emin. “Student Movement in Turkey,” 360.

¹⁰⁶ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 97.

well, who also understood that the demands were in accordance with the current zeitgeist. The Minister of Education, İlhami Ertem, together with President Cevdet Sunay, even agreed to meet with the students and to satisfy their demands.¹⁰⁷

In the following weeks, the majority of the demands were accepted by the universities, and the occupations gradually began to dissolve toward the end of June, granting the movement a moment of success.¹⁰⁸

An especially important development that Emin Alper highlighted during his examination of these occupations was the apparent shift of guard within the leadership of the student movement. He argues that socialist students, who had increasingly adopted and embodied the earlier transformation of the dominant discourse from a broadly Kemalist orientation to a left-Kemalist framework and more explicitly toward a socialist and leftist interpretation, used the spontaneous occupation committees to consolidate themselves as the principal ideological shepherds and driving forces of the movement. By occupying central positions within the committees, they increasingly replaced the earlier importance of the National Student Union, which, until that point, had functioned as one of the most important mobilizing structures and had generally maintained a more central left or Kemalist left orientation.¹⁰⁹

Additionally, Alper points out that socialist students consciously instrumentalized the university occupations, not just as a means to demand reforms, but also as political spaces through which they could further popularize their ideas and gradually accumulate a broader following among students who, in that particular moment, were still primarily mobilized around educational issues and practical concerns rather than fully developed ideological commitments. In this sense, the occupations became not only reform struggles, but also important recruitment and polarization hubs within the development of the movement.¹¹⁰

Because I have chosen to trace the broader Turkish 68 Movement primarily through the development and transformation of the political identity and ideas within the movement, I think there is another perspective that, in many ways, reinforces Alper's observation. Harun Karadeniz, in his own account of the university

¹⁰⁷ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 360-4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

occupations that occurred in June 1968, argued that this time the leading minds of the occupations committees increasingly reached a different conclusion than in earlier phases of the movement. They no longer interpreted the insufficiencies of the universities and educational system as isolated institutional failures but rather understood them as consequences of broader structural inequalities and dependencies that existed outside of the education apparatus, most importantly, capitalism, class domination, and imperialist dependency.¹¹¹

This was a highly significant transformation in the development of student political consciousness. In the earlier stages of the movement, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, students had often interpreted external political developments, such as state repression, Democratic Party policies, or constitutional questions, as forces that shaped and restricted the university sphere. Their reasoning largely moved from broader political events toward university-based consequences. By 1968, however, this logic had increasingly been reversed. Through the expansion of their theoretical repertoire and through their growing exposure to socialist and anti-imperialist frameworks, students were now increasingly able to move analytically from the insufficiencies of the universities and educational structures toward larger structural contradictions outside of them. The university had become a lens through which capitalism, dependency, and broader inequalities could be interpreted. In this sense, the development of their theoretical tools allowed them to transpose their own problems and their roots onto a much broader scale. Their dissatisfaction was no longer framed merely in institutional, educational, or even purely national terms, but increasingly as part of wider structural relationships that extended beyond the universities and even beyond the domestic political sphere itself. What had once been a struggle for reform and participation within universities was now gradually evolving into a critique of broader systems of domination, dependency, and class hierarchy.

This transformation also strongly confirms the developments that had already become visible in the previous sections of this chapter. The anti-imperialist discourse that had emerged through the Cyprus Crisis, the Johnson Letter, and the National Oil Campaign had now entered the universities not simply as rhetoric, but as a practical analytical framework. The students increasingly interpreted their own immediate

¹¹¹ Mehmet, *68 Örgenci Olaylari ve Üniversitelerde Politik Siddet*, “Birey ve Toplum 8, no. 15 (2018): 95

realities through this lens. The university occupations, therefore, marked not only the beginning of the Turkish '68 movement in its narrower historical sense, but also the point at which ideological radicalization became increasingly internalized within the student body itself. This transformation was further proven by the events that immediately followed the university occupations, because what came next increasingly demonstrated that the student movement was no longer confined to educational reform or institutional participation, but was preparing to project its political agency into broader national, ideological, and eventually revolutionary struggles.

Welcoming the 6th fleet

The following Sixth Fleet incidents, together with their aftermath and political consequences, strongly demonstrated that the earlier transformation of the dominant discourse within the student movement toward a socialist and anti-imperialist framework had now substantially deepened. The growing popularity of these ideas meant that students, as already indicated during the Cyprus Crisis and the National Oil Campaign, increasingly outgrew the boundaries of their universities and became more directly concerned with broader political questions, foreign influence, and the wider political trajectory of their country. In this sense, the Sixth Fleet incidents represented another decisive moment in which anti-imperialist thought moved from discourse and symbolic economic critique toward direct confrontation in the public and political sphere.

Directly after the university protests of June 1968, the American Sixth Fleet once again returned to the ports of Istanbul.¹¹² Throughout the 1960s, the Sixth Fleet had increasingly become the flagship of American military presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East and gradually evolved, through the development and appropriation of anti-imperialist frameworks within the student movement, into one of the strongest symbols of American imperialism and foreign presence on Turkish ground.¹¹³

¹¹² Karaçelik, "*Türkiye'de 68 Kuşağı Öğrenci Hareketleri*," 37.

¹¹³ Alper, Emin. "*Student Movement in Turkey*," 311.

In the years before, students had already progressively begun protesting the recurring arrival of the Sixth Fleet in Turkey.

One of the most important early turning points occurred during the night of 17 to 18 July, when a group of students from the Istanbul Technical University Student Union—including Harun Karadeniz—after a meeting, decided to go out for soup late at night in order to further discuss and plan how they intended to protest the fleet's arrival. On their way from Taksim Square toward Beyoğlu, which was one of the central nightlife districts of the city, police forces suddenly began blocking entrances to the district and arbitrarily arresting students. At the same time, allegations circulated that some students had harassed or attacked American soldiers who were also present in the district that night.¹¹⁴

Students from the Istanbul Technical University quickly gathered and retreated toward Gümüşsuyu, where both the campus and dormitory were located, and decided to protest the arrests of their fellow students. There, they barricaded parts of the entrance to the district and began attacking a hotel under a rain of stones because it was hosting American soldiers who were reportedly in the company of Turkish women. According to Harun Karadeniz, the idea that students, as the youth of their own country, were unable to move freely through the streets at night while American soldiers could do so without restriction deeply enraged them.¹¹⁵

After a short time, police forces surrounded the Gümüşsuyu campus and dormitory, and a relatively limited confrontation broke out between students and the police. During the altercation, some students took a civil police commissioner hostage and confiscated his gun. Through negotiations, the students eventually agreed to release the hostage, and for a brief moment the situation appeared to calm down. However, after a phone call from the university president, who declared that the dormitory was not legally part of university property and therefore not protected under the broader institutional immunity associated with university grounds, police forces launched a raid on the dormitory at approximately 4:30 in the morning.¹¹⁶ The raid was extremely violent. Students were dragged from their beds, many of them half naked, and were beaten during arrest. According to Karadeniz and multiple eyewitness

¹¹⁴ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 107-10.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 368-372.

accounts from students, several were nearly beaten to death. Vedat Demircioğlu, a student of the Technical University, was, according to eyewitnesses, thrown from a second-floor window and then dragged across the ground by the police. He would die in the following days and became one of the first major student casualties after 1960, turning into a deeply symbolic figure within the radicalizing movement.¹¹⁷

After the violent night, students gathered the following day and decided to proceed with their already legally registered demonstration against the Sixth Fleet, which had originally been planned before the incidents of the night had unfolded. Throughout the day, however, the atmosphere was already heated, tense, and deeply shaped by anger over the police violence. The governor of Istanbul ultimately declared that the planned protest march from Taksim Square to the Dolmabahçe port was cancelled. Yet the emotional intensity of the students had by this point already surpassed institutional control. After gathering in Taksim Square, Harun Karadeniz, who remained one of the leading advocates for nonviolent forms of protest and feared another major confrontation with police, together with other student leaders, attempted to redirect the crowd back toward Gümüşsuyu and the dormitories. However, the larger mass of students, increasingly agitated and particularly influenced by more radical student figures such as Deniz Gezmiş, continued marching towards Dolmabahçe, where the American Sixth Fleet was anchored. Deniz Gezmiş and parts of the student movement had by this time already begun drifting toward a more militant understanding of political struggle and social transformation.¹¹⁸ When the students arrived at Dolmabahçe, confrontations escalated rapidly. They began physically assaulting American soldiers and threw several of them into the sea. According to Emin Alper, the Dolmabahçe Sixth Fleet incident became one of the most symbolically powerful moments of the Turkish '68 movement. The act of driving American soldiers into the sea carried a strong historical symbolism because it echoed nationalist myths of the Turkish War of Independence, in which foreign armies, particularly the Greek army, had been expelled into the sea. Anti-imperialism here was therefore articulated not only through socialist rhetoric, but also through deeply nationalist symbolic language.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 113-16.

¹¹⁹ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 369-70.

Karadeniz later reflected that the restrained and cautious attitude of himself and his friends during these developments significantly contributed to the gradual loss of control that the nonviolent and reform-oriented sections of the student movement had over the broader direction of events. He increasingly realized that more radical camps within the movement, those that advocated militant or revolutionary approaches to social change, were beginning to dominate. This growing ideological divergence, however, will be examined in more detail in the later subchapter on diverging ideological currents of the movement¹²⁰

On 24 July, after Vedat Demircioğlu died following approximately a week in a coma, students once again gathered on the campus of Istanbul University. After speeches delivered by several professors, they organized a march toward the governor's office while carrying a symbolic coffin in order to demand justice for their fellow student. Yet the procession never reached its destination. In Cağaloğlu, the protesting masses were intercepted by police forces, and clashes broke out almost immediately. Students attempted to resist for nearly an hour with stones and sticks, but the police response became so violent that even internal command structures reportedly struggled to maintain control over the forces.¹²¹

After fighting had continued for some time, the military intervened in order to separate both sides. Yet even after a temporary pause, enraged police forces once again assaulted the students, creating a scene of broader chaos in which police officers, students, and soldiers all became entangled in violent confrontation. According to Emin Alper, this clash represented one of the most important turning points in the relationship between the state and the student movement, because it marked the moment when the police's attitude toward the students fundamentally shifted. The police increasingly no longer approached students as reformist actors or manageable political protesters, but rather as a security threat. This shift contributed immensely to the radicalization of parts of the student movement.¹²²

The Republican People's Party, which at that time served as the principal opposition force, criticized the conduct of the police and argued that the police had increasingly lost their impartiality. The government itself, however, showed little

¹²⁰ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 113-16.

¹²¹ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 370-2.

¹²² Ibid.

visible discontent with the violence and largely remained silent. This silence further reinforced among many students the growing perception that institutional channels of justice and political mediation were narrowing.¹²³

After this turning point, although protests over university matters still occurred sporadically, the student movement increasingly fragmented amid ideological differences, strategic disagreements over militancy, rising state repression, and the simultaneous emergence of violent right-wing camps. The movement was no longer defined only by university reform or anti-imperialist demonstrations but was moving into a much more fractured and confrontational political atmosphere that gradually began to take shape the form of a civil war, and that would dominate Turkish everyday life till the military intervention in 1980.

Preliminary Conclusion

Before I continue with the next chapters on prominent ideologies, organizations, and the movement's development toward a more radical direction, I would like to offer a preliminary conclusion that the Turkish 68 Movement or generation is more of an umbrella term or description that could cover all kinds of political, ideological, and societal developments in Turkey from the end of the 1950s up to the beginning of the 1980s. Therefore, one could use many different angles and perspectives to tell and examine the happenings of that time. As indicated above, I decided to go through the important historical events of that time by also assessing their impact, or their role as expressions of the development of the political identity and the dominant political discourse of and within the student movement. This includes the appropriation of the Kemalist self-understanding, the development of a normative dimension to that understanding, the transformation to a socialist, anti-imperialist understanding, and the consequences resulting from that process (for example, the Cyprus crisis contributed to the popularization of anti-imperialism within the student movement, which then found expression in the National Oil campaign). I thought that this perspective would give me a good angle on the interplay between the movement and its position in the historical events, to then assess its development and wider contextual meaning in

¹²³ Ibid.

Turkey's history and political landscape. The complete elaboration will follow in the Conclusion.

Organisations, Ideologies and Diverging Views

In this chapter, I'm going to look at the most prominent and important organisations and ideologies or ideological currents that influenced and carried the movement throughout its development. Here, it is important to note that there was never a single important organisation or a single ideology, but rather more or less popular and dominant ones, especially considering that the movement never stood still and was constantly evolving, and therefore its organizational mobilization structures and ideas. Both components, meaning the organisations and the ideologies, continuously co-existed and interacted in a state of symbiotic relationship, and consequently contributed new impulses to the movement trajectory. For example, the FKF (ideas club federation) became, from the second half of the 1960's, one of the most important mobilization structures of the student movement and substantially enabled the popularization of socialist and anti-imperialist ideas and thus also the shift of the dominant ideological discourse towards the left in the movement.¹²⁴ But when the

¹²⁴ Turan, *"The '68 Movements around the World and in Turkey,"* 140.

dominant discourse in 1969 changed again, this time the organization changed and transformed into Dev-Genç (Revolutionary-Youth).¹²⁵

Organisations

The two most important organizations within the student movement, especially as mobilizing structures, were the TMTF (Türkiye Milli Talebe Federasyonu – National Federation of Students of Turkey) and the MTTB (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği – National Turkish Student Union). Both organizations operated on a nationwide level and functioned as umbrella structures that coordinated the university-specific student unions, such as those of Istanbul University, Ankara University, Istanbul Technical University, and many others.

The TMTF was founded in 1948 with the official objectives of combating developments directed against the Kemalist Revolution, defending the autonomy of the universities, and contributing to the country's progress and development. The MTTB, on the other hand, had originally been established after the First World War, was abolished in 1938, and reopened in 1946 as an organization that maintained close ties to the Republican People's Party. In their earlier years, both organizations were primarily concerned with national issues such as reactionary Islam, the protection of Atatürk's reforms, and questions surrounding Cyprus.¹²⁶ However, toward the end of the 1950s, both organizations became increasingly politicized and gradually transformed alongside the dominant discourse within the student movement itself, evolving from predominantly Kemalist organizations into more center-left and eventually socialist and anti-imperialist ones as the movement developed ideologically.¹²⁷

While the Kemalist and later socialist hegemony over these student bodies remained largely uncontested until 1965, the election of the Justice Party introduced significant changes regarding both the political orientation and the importance of these organizations within the student movement. Following its electoral victory, the Justice

¹²⁵ Emine Öztürk, "Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu / Dev-Genç (1969–1971)," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 77, no. 2 (2022): 354–355.

¹²⁶ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 184–9.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Party increasingly attempted to occupy important positions within the governing bodies of these organizations through more conservative-oriented students. This led to growing struggles over control of the unions, the establishment of parallel committees, and various incidents involving corruption, manipulated registrations, and contested elections. In many of these disputes, the government intervened on behalf of conservative students in order to gain influence over the organizations and weaken important mobilizing structures of the leftist student movement.¹²⁸

As a consequence, both national student unions became increasingly fragmented by internal power struggles and gradually lost their position as the primary mobilizing structures of the student movement. After 1965, this role was increasingly assumed by the FKF (Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu – Federation of Ideas Clubs), which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Another important organization for the student movement, particularly regarding its ideological development, was the Turkish Workers' Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi – TİP). After the Constitution of 1961 opened the possibility for a broader and more diverse political spectrum to participate within the new multiparty environment, the Turkish Workers' Party was founded by twelve trade unionists. During its first year, however, the party leadership realized that it required stronger intellectual and political leadership that could also shape the party's ideological direction. Consequently, in 1962, the party offered its leadership to Mehmet Ali Aybar, an international lawyer who had also participated in Bertrand Russell's International War Crimes Tribunal.¹²⁹

Aybar envisioned a Turkish Workers' Party that would distance itself from the traditional Turkish communist movement and its close association with the Soviet Union. Instead, he advocated a path that concentrated on achieving a socialist transformation through democratic and parliamentary means. In the elections of 1965, the party achieved a relative success by securing approximately three percent of the vote and gaining fifteen seats in parliament. This success further strengthened Aybar's belief that meaningful social and political transformation could be achieved through participation in the political system itself.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 290-5

¹²⁹ Emine Öztürk, "Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonunda Türkiye İşçi Partisi–Millî Demokratik Devrim Hareketi Mücadelesi (1965–1969)," *Marmara Üniversitesi Öneri Dergisi* 17, no. 57 (2022): 390.

The next organization that played an important role in the development of the student movement, especially after 1965, and which was closely connected to TİP, was the FKF (Federation of Ideas Clubs). Following 1961, Ideas Clubs began to emerge at most major universities across the country.¹²⁸ These clubs differed significantly from the student unions. Rather than functioning primarily as representative bodies, they operated more as discussion and debate societies in which students gathered to exchange views, discuss political developments, and formulate their own political ideas.

Throughout the development of the movement, these Ideas Clubs increasingly became important spaces through which newly introduced socialist ideas were distributed among the wider student population. After the electoral success of TİP in 1965, sections of the party analyzed their electoral support and concluded that, besides the traditional leftist intelligentsia, students had become one of the party's most important constituencies. Recognizing the broader shift within the student movement from the political center toward the left, parts of TİP supported the establishment of the Federation of Ideas Clubs in order to unite the individual clubs across the country under a single umbrella organization.¹²⁹

The objective behind this initiative was to mobilize students politically without requiring them to become directly affiliated with the Turkish Workers' Party itself. The FKF was officially founded on 16 December 1965 on the premises of Ankara University. Over the following years, the organization grew steadily in importance and increasingly replaced the national student unions as the primary mobilizing structure of the student movement, especially as those organizations became weakened through internal struggles and external interference supported by the Justice Party government and conservative anti-communist students.¹³⁰

In 1969, the FKF transformed itself into Dev-Genç (Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu – Federation of Revolutionary Youth). This transformation reflected broader ideological changes within the movement. As the dominant orientation of the federation became increasingly revolutionary, the organization deliberately abandoned its earlier image

¹²⁸ Christofis, "Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied," 172.

¹²⁹ Turhan Feyizoğlu, *FKF: Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu: Demokrasi Mücadelesinde Sosyalist Bir Öğrenci Hareketi* (Istanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 2002), 107-8.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

as a federation of student clubs and reconstituted itself as a revolutionary organization that was not limited exclusively to students but was also open to civilians and other segments of society.¹³¹

In the next subchapter, I will elaborate on which organizations served as vehicles for specific ideological currents and how these organizations evolved alongside the broader ideological development of the student movement itself.

Ideologies and diverging views.

As outlined in the chapter above, the beginnings of the student movement's political identity and political agency were largely rooted in a Kemalist self-understanding. Harun Karadeniz, for example, recalled in his memoirs that Kemalist values and principles remained the dominant ideological orientation of the student movement until approximately 1965.¹³² But what exactly does this mean?

It is important to note here that Kemalism, or Atatürkism, is not a coherent, polished, and fully developed ideology in the conventional sense.¹³³ Zürcher, for example, argues that *"Atatürkism can best be described as a set of attitudes and opinions that were never defined in detail. It evolved gradually."*¹³⁴ What I mean by a Kemalist self-understanding is that students derived their political identity from a number of ideas, values, and experiences that corresponded with Kemalist principles and that increasingly appeared to be under threat. For example, the increasingly repressive tendencies of the Democrat Party toward the end of the 1950s, particularly its restrictions on freedom of the press and what many students perceived as attacks on fundamental Kemalist principles such as secularism, combined with the universities' involvement in the overthrow of the government, produced an understanding among students that their newly discovered political effectiveness came with a responsibility. The students increasingly believed that they had a duty to protect these values and the ongoing modernization process of the country. Consequently, their

¹³¹ Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu / Dev-Genç (1969–1971),” 336-9.

¹³² Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 36.

¹³³ Hüseyin Kurt, “A Rebellious Generation: Anti-Imperialist Momentum in Turkey, 1959–1971” (paper presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention, Columbia University, New York, May 2–4, 2019), 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

political action was rooted in the perception that it was their responsibility to defend Kemalist principles such as reformism, secularism, and national independence.

After 1964, however, the dominant ideology within the student movement gradually shifted toward a socialist and anti-imperialist orientation.¹³⁵ Exposure to socialist literature, developments in the wider world such as the Vietnam War and the Cuban Revolution, Turkey's position within the Cold War, and the Kemalist emphasis on national independence all contributed to the growing popularity of anti-imperialism among students.¹³⁶ Regarding socialism, students were exposed to different interpretations that diverged less on theoretical grounds than on the question of how a socialist revolution in Turkey was to be realized. One of these positions was the Socialist Revolution line (Sosyalist Devrim). Promoted primarily by Mehmet Ali Aybar and the Turkish Workers' Party (TİP), this approach was based on the assumption that Turkey had already undergone a democratic revolution and possessed a sufficiently developed working class. Consequently, the road to socialism was believed to lie through the existing political institutions. Through sufficient political mobilization and electoral participation, the working class could eventually bring about a socialist transformation through democratic means and establish a political order led by the proletariat.¹³⁷

The second position that became influential within the student movement was the National Democratic Revolution line (Milli Demokratik Devrim – MDD). Advocated primarily by figures such as Mihri Belli and circles associated with the journal *Yön*, this interpretation argued that Turkey's working class was too weak and underdeveloped to carry out a socialist revolution on its own. According to this view, Turkey remained a semi-feudal and semi-dependent society that first needed to complete a national democratic revolution before socialism could be achieved. This process was envisioned as occurring in two stages. The first stage would be carried out by a revolutionary intellectual elite in cooperation with progressive elements of the military, who would seize power and initiate the transformation of society. Only in the second stage would broader sections of society become integrated into the revolutionary process. In this sense, the MDD line attempted to combine socialist ideas

¹³⁵ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 36-7.

¹³⁶ Christofis, "Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied," 174.

¹³⁷ Feyizoğlu, *FKF*, 18.

with older Kemalist notions of elite-led modernization, while simultaneously drawing inspiration from Third Worldist examples such as Nasserism and military-led development projects in the Global South.¹³⁸

Parts of the student movement that aligned themselves with the MDD line increasingly based their political actions on the expectation that their own activism and agitation would eventually encourage sections of the military to intervene on behalf of the revolutionary cause and initiate the first stage of the socialist transformation in cooperation with revolutionary intellectuals.¹³⁹

While both ideological currents coexisted within the movement for most of the 1960s, a variety of developments gradually strengthened the position of the MDD line. Increasing repression under the Justice Party government after 1965, changes to the electoral system in 1969 that significantly reduced the Turkish Workers' Party's ability to participate effectively in parliamentary politics, growing violence from right-wing militant groups, the limited participation of the working class in the movement, and the growing belief that large sections of the peasantry would remain aligned with conservative political parties all contributed to weakening confidence in a parliamentary road to socialism.¹⁴⁰

Consequently, the National Democratic Revolution line gradually prevailed within significant parts of the student movement and increasingly shaped its understanding of political strategy and revolutionary action.

Radicalization the Left vs the right and the State

Bloody Sunday

The violent confrontation with the police that occurred after the symbolic procession for Vedat Demircioğlu in 1968 already indicated to the student movement that the attitude of both the police and the government had changed. Increasingly, students found themselves confronted not only by right-wing militants in the streets but also by the police forces themselves. An event that further confirmed this new dynamic and

¹³⁸ Kurt, "A Rebellious Generation," 19-21.

¹³⁹ Feyizoğlu, *FKF*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 215.

later became symbolic of the movement's radical turn was the incident that is today remembered as Bloody Sunday (Kanlı Pazar).

At the beginning of 1969, students were once again awaiting the arrival of the American Sixth Fleet. This time, however, they planned a much larger demonstration that was intended to go beyond the student movement itself and include workers and other segments of civilian society. During the preparations for this demonstration, student leaders met with Governor Vefat Poyraz and urged him to instruct the police to remain neutral throughout the protest. Poyraz, in return, asked the students to remain within the boundaries of the law.¹⁴¹

Even before the demonstration took place, the growing popularity of the National Democratic Revolution (MDD) line, with its emphasis on a revolutionary alliance between socialist intellectuals and progressive elements of the military, had created considerable anxiety within conservative, nationalist, and Islamist circles. As a reaction to these fears, right-wing groups organized a counter-demonstration aimed at confronting the anti-imperialist protest against the Sixth Fleet. The student leadership, having learned of these plans, nevertheless believed that the size of their demonstration would render any attempts at disruption ineffective.¹⁴²

On 16 February 1969, approximately twenty to thirty thousand people gathered at Beyazıt Square and began marching toward Taksim Square in protest against the arrival of the Sixth Fleet. When the front rows of the demonstration entered Taksim Square, a group of right-wing militants and conservative Islamist activists was already waiting in and around Gezi Park.¹⁴³

As the demonstrators entered the square, these groups attacked them with stones, bombs, and Molotov cocktails. According to numerous eyewitness accounts, the police played an active role in isolating the students from the wider demonstration and subsequently allowed the right-wing militants to attack them. Chaos quickly broke out. Students found themselves under assault not only from the right-wing groups but also from the police forces themselves. By the end of the clashes, more than two hundred people had been injured and two demonstrators had lost their lives.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 400-5.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik*, 126-7.

¹⁴⁴ Alper, Emin. "Student Movement in Turkey," 400-5

In the aftermath of the incident, heated debates erupted in parliament. Opposition figures accused the Justice Party government of tolerating, supporting, or even encouraging the attacks carried out by the right-wing groups and of instrumentalizing the police against the student movement. Despite these accusations, no substantial political consequences followed.¹⁴⁶

For supporters of the National Democratic Revolution line within the movement, Bloody Sunday served as further proof that the legal and institutional road to social change was increasingly blocked. The event reinforced the belief that peaceful forms of political participation were becoming ineffective and that only a more militant approach would allow the movement to survive and achieve its objectives. Much like the incidents surrounding the Sixth Fleet in 1968, Bloody Sunday marked another decisive step in the separation between those students who still believed that social transformation could be achieved through non-violent means and those who increasingly came to see revolutionary violence as a political necessity.

The movement arms itself

After the MDD line became the dominant ideological orientation within the student movement, the students once again fragmented, this time over the question of how the revolution itself was to be realized. During this period, figures such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Régis Debray rose to almost superstar status within the movement. Students who increasingly embraced revolutionary militancy began to accuse both the Turkish Workers' Party and those who still adhered to the Socialist Revolution (SD) line of being passive, conformist, and incapable of producing meaningful change. However, even within the framework of the National Democratic Revolution thesis itself, disagreements emerged regarding the practical realization of the revolutionary process. Prominent figures such as Mahir Çayan and Deniz Gezmiş increasingly came to believe that leaving the active side of the revolution entirely to progressive elements within the military would not do justice to the vanguard role that students had, in their

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

own understanding, acquired through years of political activism and militancy in the streets.¹⁴⁷

By the end of 1969, Deniz Gezmiş and a number of his associates travelled to Palestinian guerrilla camps connected to Fatah and the PLO, where they received training in guerrilla warfare. While Deniz Gezmiş and his circle increasingly gravitated toward a revolutionary model inspired by the Cuban experience and the writings of Che Guevara, believing that the revolutionary struggle should begin in the countryside and gradually spread throughout the country, Mahir Çayan remained skeptical of such an approach. He argued that neither the peasantry nor the rural areas of Turkey were sufficiently prepared to sustain a successful guerrilla insurgency.¹⁴⁸

These strategic differences ultimately produced different organizational outcomes. Deniz Gezmiş and his associates founded the Turkish People's Liberation Army (THKO) and increasingly concentrated their efforts on transferring the revolutionary struggle into the countryside. Mahir Çayan, on the other hand, founded the Turkish People's Liberation Party-Front (THKP-C), which was based on the idea that urban guerrilla warfare would be a more suitable strategy under Turkish conditions. From this point onward, the movement increasingly abandoned its earlier character as a student movement and fragmented into a variety of militant insurgent organizations. What had begun as a student movement centered around questions of political participation, educational reform, and national independence gradually transformed into competing revolutionary organizations that sought to realize social change through armed struggle. These organizations would ultimately meet their fate in the aftermath of the military intervention of 12 March 1971.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Kurt, "A Rebellious Generation," 19-21.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Historical and Political Context

A. Turkey after the Second World War into the Cold

While Turkey remained formally neutral throughout most of the unfolding of the Second World War—except for its symbolic entrance toward the end of the war to secure a seat in the newly established United Nations—anti-Soviet sentiments within Turkey and growing American concerns regarding Soviet ambitions already began preparing the ground for what would become a long-lasting Turkish–American Cold War alliance.¹⁵⁰

After Turkish hopes for a Soviet defeat were disappointed, Soviet pressure toward Turkey increased significantly. On 8 August 1946, the Soviet Union sent a diplomatic note to Turkey declaring that wartime developments had revealed the

¹⁵⁰ Cangül Örnek and Çağdaş Üngör, eds., *Turkey in the Cold War: Ideology and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5.

inadequacy of the Montreux Convention, which had largely entrusted responsibility for the security and regulation of the Turkish Straits to Turkey itself. The Soviet proposal demanded the establishment of a new agreement that would partially transfer security responsibilities over the Straits to the Soviet Union. Turkey rejected this proposal and argued that no concrete breaches or incidents had occurred during the war that would justify such a revision. The Soviet side countered this argument by claiming that substantial Soviet military resources had been forced to remain withdrawn from the main battlefield to secure the Black Sea region because Turkey had allegedly allowed German naval vessels to pass through the Straits during the war. While this diplomatic back and forth did not lead to a productive solution, it strongly contributed to the growing perception within Turkey that Soviet intentions constituted a direct security threat. Hearing what many contemporaries perceived as increasingly approaching Soviet footsteps, Turkey began to search for stronger security guarantees in the West.¹⁵¹

Consequently, on 1 August 1950, Turkey officially applied for admission into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Yet Turkish accession was far from uncontested. During the following council discussions, Norway, Denmark, France, and Great Britain expressed reservations regarding Turkish membership, officially arguing that Turkey was not geographically a North Atlantic power. In practice, however, many of these states were hesitant to extend collective security guarantees directly onto the Soviet border.¹⁵²

As a partial compensation, Turkey was invited on 4 October to participate in the process of developing NATO's defensive planning for the Mediterranean region. Shortly after, on 18 October, Turkey attempted to increase its strategic value in Western eyes and responded positively to the United Nations call regarding Korea by deploying approximately 5,000 troops and later an additional 2,000 soldiers to Pusan and actively participating in the Korean War¹⁵³

Over the following year, Britain, France, and the United States attempted to integrate Turkey into a broader regional security structure and invited both Turkey and Egypt

¹⁵¹ Geoffrey Lewis, *Modern Turkey* (London and Tonbridge, Kent: Ernest Benn Limited, 1974), 198.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 198-9.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

into the proposed Middle East Command. However, due largely to Egyptian resistance and broader regional tensions surrounding British involvement, the initiative ultimately failed. Nevertheless, attitudes toward Turkish membership gradually softened, and Turkey officially entered NATO on 18 February 1952.

After the Middle East Command collapsed, NATO announced in July 1952 the establishment of the Southeast European Command with its headquarters in İzmir, which, according to Geoffrey Lewis, also functioned as an attempt to compensate for and soften Turkish disappointment regarding NATO's initially hesitant admission process.¹⁵⁴

While Turkish military involvement in the Western alliance throughout the 1950s intensified continuously, relations between Turkey and its Western partners, particularly the United States, were not always as harmonious as they appeared.

The first visible cracks emerged during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. During negotiations with the Soviet Union, the administration of President John F. Kennedy agreed to withdraw the Jupiter missiles stationed in Turkey without informing or consulting Turkish authorities beforehand. For Turkey, this became one of the first moments in which the equality of the partnership with the United States began to be questioned¹⁵⁵. The perception increasingly emerged that Turkish security concerns could be subordinated to broader strategic interests of the alliance whenever necessary. These doubts were later amplified significantly by the Cyprus Crisis and Johnson's Letter discussed in the previous chapter. Geoffrey Lewis even identifies this broader period as one of the moments in which anti-American sentiments in Turkey began to develop more openly.¹⁵⁶

After these developments, particularly toward the middle of the 1960s, Turkey, while never seriously considering withdrawal from NATO, slowly began exploring possibilities of pursuing a somewhat more independent foreign policy line and incrementally improving relations with neutral countries and even partially opening channels toward the Soviet Union. These moves also functioned as signals directed at the United States that Turkish support should not be treated as unconditional.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, "Turkey and the United States," in *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003), 163.

¹⁵⁶ Lewis, *Modern Turkey*, 205

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

In April 1954, NATO's earlier vision of constructing a Middle Eastern security structure experienced something of a resurrection through the "Agreement for Friendly Cooperation" between Turkey and Pakistan. Particularly important was Article 6, which stated that: "Any State whose participation is considered by the contracting parties useful for achieving the purpose of the present agreement may accede to the present agreement under the same conditions, and with the same obligations, as the contracting parties."¹⁵⁸

According to Lewis, this article reflected broader American strategy and the attempt to connect states that had not yet firmly committed themselves to the neutralist line into a Western-oriented security architecture. The exclusion of Israel from the agreement simultaneously reflected an attempt to preserve the possibility of broader Arab participation. In 1955, following the accession of Britain, Iran, and Iraq, this initiative transformed into the Baghdad Pact and later, during the 1960s, into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).¹⁵⁹

Despite moments of hesitation and periods of strategic frustration, the election of the Justice Party eventually redirected Turkish foreign policy back toward a stricter pro-American and NATO-committed orientation. Nevertheless, the doubts that had emerged throughout these years regarding alliance asymmetry, dependency, and national autonomy did not disappear. Instead, they remained beneath the surface and would later become increasingly important not only for Turkish foreign policy debates, but also for the intellectual and political climate in which the student movement of the Long Sixties would eventually unfold.

Internal Implications of the Cold War

Turkish involvement in the Cold War and its partnership with the Western alliance was not just of a military and strategic nature but increasingly affected the country internally and gradually extended into economic structures, social developments, and even directly into the education system. After the electoral victory of the Democrat Party in 1950, Adnan Menderes attempted to reposition Turkey economically and politically by pursuing a model of development that aimed to transform Turkey into a

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 201-2

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

capitalist stronghold within the Western bloc. Symbolically, this ambition was often summarized through his promise to make Turkey a “Little America” through the promotion of private enterprise, agricultural modernization, and urbanization.¹⁶⁰

One of the earliest and most important instruments through which this transformation unfolded was the Marshall Plan. In 1948, the United States included Turkey in the Marshall Aid Program under the assumption that Turkey could substantially contribute to the reconstruction of postwar Europe through the provision of agricultural products and mineral resources. Consequently, American assistance in Turkey became heavily concentrated on agriculture and was specifically directed toward increasing production through mechanization and expansion of cultivated land.¹⁶¹

Initially, this strategy appeared remarkably successful. Turkey experienced substantial growth in agricultural production and, for example, transformed itself between 1948 and 1953 from a country dependent on wheat imports into one of the world's major wheat producers. During this same period, the total acreage cultivated for wheat expanded dramatically. These developments created the impression that mechanization and external investment had successfully solved structural inefficiencies within Turkish agriculture. However, this success proved to be considerably shorter-lived than initially expected. The rapid modernization of agriculture increasingly revealed structural limitations that mechanization alone could not overcome. A lack of technical knowledge regarding the operation and maintenance of machinery, infrastructural insufficiencies, coordination failures in planning, increasing fuel and maintenance costs, and ultimately the disappointing harvest of 1954 all exposed deeper structural weaknesses. These developments suggested that agricultural development required broader institutional transformation rather than purely technological intervention.¹⁶²

Although the practical and long-term developmental impact of Marshall Aid on agriculture remained limited and often uneven, politically the program proved highly beneficial for the Democrat Party. The expansion of agricultural production and modernization policies allowed the government to mobilize significant electoral

¹⁶⁰ Örnek and Üngör, eds., *Turkey in the Cold War*, 6.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁶² Ibid.

support among rural populations and the peasantry, who became one of the central social bases of Democrat Party rule throughout the decade.¹⁶³

Another sector that was strongly shaped through the Turkish American alliance, and one that would later directly affect the student movement itself, was education.

Beginning in the middle of the 1950s, Turkish and American officials increasingly agreed that the Turkish university system, which had historically oriented itself primarily toward German and French educational traditions, should gradually be remodelled according to the American educational system. Existing institutions such as Robert College, which already represented one of the strongest American educational influences in Turkey, and newly founded universities such as Middle East Technical University, which adopted English as its primary language of instruction, increasingly served as reference points for this transformation.¹⁶⁴

One particularly illustrative example of this process was the establishment of Atatürk University in Erzurum.

During his visit to the United States in 1954, Turkish President Celal Bayar, recognizing the importance that agricultural universities and land-grant institutions had played in American development, requested American support in establishing a similar institution in Eastern Turkey. This initiative became incorporated into the broader technical assistance programs connected to Marshall Aid and ultimately resulted in the creation of Atatürk University under a semi-cooperative structure with American participation, especially involving the University of Nebraska.¹⁶⁵

The educational philosophy behind this project differed considerably from traditional Turkish university culture. Whereas Turkish higher education had historically relied heavily on memorization, theoretical instruction, and a relatively hierarchical relationship between professors and students, American advisors attempted to introduce a curriculum that combined classical academic education with practical applications, field experiments, laboratories, and research-oriented learning. The intention behind this transformation was not merely educational reform but also the adaptation of higher education toward what was perceived as the practical developmental needs of the country. Yet this transition proved significantly more

¹⁶³ Ibid., 180.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 177-8

difficult than initially anticipated. Tensions emerged between Turkish academic staff and American advisors almost immediately. Turkish university personnel often struggled to adapt to unfamiliar pedagogical concepts and educational expectations, while American advisors increasingly questioned the qualifications of local staff and criticized what they perceived as insufficient applied research and practical expertise.¹⁶⁷ These tensions reflected not only educational disagreements but also broader differences regarding modernization, expertise, and the role of universities within society. Additional obstacles emerged on a practical level.

The first years of cooperation suffered from severe logistical difficulties. Construction processes fell behind schedule, laboratories and facilities remained incomplete, and housing opportunities for visiting faculty were often non-existent. During the first years, some classes reportedly had to be conducted in elementary school classrooms within the city itself due to the absence of university infrastructure. Nevertheless, after years of institutional and practical difficulties, the project gradually began to show results. During the first half of the 1960s, Atatürk University produced its first generation of professionals, many of whom later assumed positions within ministries such as Agriculture and Education and contributed to the broader bureaucratic and developmental structures of the Turkish state.¹⁶⁸

Yet the broader political atmosphere was changing.

Following the Cyprus Crisis in 1964, growing anti-American sentiment and the increasing politicization of universities gradually weakened enthusiasm for such projects. Universities themselves became increasingly politicized spaces in which broader questions regarding dependency, foreign influence, development, and national autonomy were debated. In this atmosphere, projects that had once symbolized modernization increasingly became associated by parts of the intellectual and student sphere with external influence and asymmetrical relationships. By 1967, the Atatürk University cooperation project had largely reached its end.¹⁶⁹ Yet despite its limitations and contradictions, the broader transformation it represented left an important imprint. The Cold War alliance had not only reconfigured Turkish foreign policy and economic development but had also entered the university system itself and reshaped how

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 180-1.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 182-90

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

education, expertise, modernization, and national development were increasingly understood as questions that would later become central concerns of the student movement examined in the chapters above.

While there could be an entire thesis written on Turkey's involvement in the Cold War or on Turkish-American relations during that period, this chapter aimed to provide and explain some broader context regarding Turkey's positioning and orientation within the Cold War constellation and what implications this orientation had internally.

Anti-imperialism was not merely an ideological concept with which the students sympathized because of international events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion or the Vietnam War. Rather, it increasingly became a broader desire and interpretative framework which, enabled through the appropriation and development of socialist theoretical tools, allowed students to reinterpret Turkey's position in the international order and the structures surrounding them. Through this perspective, students increasingly understood not only visible and physical American presence on Turkish soil, expressed through the recurring arrival of the American Sixth Fleet or military establishments such as the American air base in İncirlik¹⁷⁰, but also American involvement in areas such as the education system and the economy as relationships of dependency that, according to the students, hindered the country's development and potential and compromised what they understood as one of the central values of the republic and of Turkish political identity: independence.

While Turkey's positioning within the Cold War constellation had initially been largely determined by geopolitical and security concerns, this chapter showed that student anti-imperialism was additionally fuelled by the extension of American involvement into spheres of Turkish life that increasingly exceeded purely military and strategic questions and entered domains that directly affected everyday life, education, development, and the broader direction of the country.

B. Domestic Politics: What happened inside

¹⁷⁰ Larrabee and Lesser, "Turkey and the United States," 164.

Now that we have already watched the movie unfold, namely the Turkish 1968 movement, it is time to take a closer look at the scenery in which that movie took place. Therefore, this chapter examines the different political contexts in which the movement developed and unfolded. While the international context has already been elaborated upon above, this chapter now turns towards developments within Turkey itself during the same period. While this chapter focuses specifically on domestic politics, the following chapters will examine the broader context in more detail by looking individually at society, the economy, and the state.

In 1946, after growing pressure from within his own party and also in the hope of integrating Turkey further into the Western political system, İsmet İnönü decided to end the more than twenty-year-long one-party rule of the Republican People's Party and open the political sphere to opposition parties and competitive elections.¹⁷¹ One year earlier, a group consisting of Adnan Menderes, Celal Bayar, Fuat Köprülü, and Refik Koraltan had voiced objections to the party's proposed land reform, which aimed to redistribute large concentrations of land ownership to the peasantry. Beyond their criticism of the reform itself, they also demanded a liberalization of both the political and economic systems. After these demands were rejected and the group was subsequently excluded from the Republican People's Party, they founded the Democrat Party in 1946 after consultations with İsmet İnönü.¹⁷²

İsmet İnönü underestimated the level of dissatisfaction that had accumulated within large segments of the population towards his party. His intention was largely to create a controlled and limited opposition through which criticism of the Republican People's Party could be channeled without fundamentally threatening its position. However, as the popularity of the Democrat Party grew much faster than anticipated, İnönü called for early elections in 1946 in the hope of capitalizing on the Republican People's Party's organizational advantages before the newly founded Democrat Party could properly establish itself across the country.¹⁷³

Although the Republican People's Party ultimately won the elections, the Democrat Party managed to secure sixty-two out of 465 parliamentary seats despite being only a

¹⁷¹ Yunus Yoldaş, *Das politische System der Türkei* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 45.

¹⁷² Cengiz Günay, *Die Geschichte der Türkei: Von den Anfängen der Moderne bis heute* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2012), 187.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

few months old.¹⁷⁴ This result already indicated the broader political trend that would shape Turkish politics over the following years. According to Cengiz Günay, one of the main strengths of the Democrat Party during this period was its ability to mobilize not just one specific social group but rather a broad coalition of voters who had become dissatisfied with the Republican People's Party. After decades in power, the Republican People's Party had increasingly directed itself into a state of political rigidity through its inflexible etatist and authoritarian style of governance, which made it less capable of responding to the changing needs and expectations of society.

The Democrat Party, on the other hand, benefited greatly from its more liberal orientation. This allowed it to mobilize diverse groups that were longing for political and social change and helped the party frame itself as an anti-establishment alternative to the existing political order. It is important to note that while the Democrat Party succeeded in attracting support from many different segments of society, one of its greatest strengths was its ability to mobilize support from the social and political periphery. These were groups that often felt alienated by what they perceived as the elitist attitude of the Republican People's Party and by its strict interpretation of secularism, which still appeared foreign to large parts of the rural population.¹⁷⁵

When Turkey held its first genuinely competitive democratic elections in 1950, the results became a clear manifestation of a trend that had already begun to emerge four years earlier. The Democrat Party ended the Republican People's Party's long period of political dominance by winning more than fifty-three percent of the popular vote and securing an absolute parliamentary majority. As a result, Celal Bayar became the new President of Turkey, while Adnan Menderes assumed the office of Prime Minister.¹⁷⁶

The Democrat Party rule from 1950 to 1960

The Democrat Party's rise to power marked a significant shift in Turkish political history. While the first five years of its rule were characterized by rapid modernization and economic prosperity, the second half of the decade demonstrated that much of this

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, 306.

success was only temporary. Upon entering office, the Democrat Party immediately directed its attention towards the bureaucratic elite, which had traditionally been closely aligned with the Republican People's Party. Large numbers of senior civil servants, administrators, and military officers were retired or removed from influential positions. For the first time since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the traditional Kemalist bureaucratic elite found itself increasingly pushed to the margins by a new political and economic elite that was more closely connected to private business interests and emerging industrial circles.¹⁷⁷

Economically, the Democrat Party implemented a more liberal economic strategy. It promoted a capitalist market economy by encouraging private enterprise, facilitating foreign investment, and providing access to credit and state support for private initiatives. At the center of this modernization strategy stood the agricultural sector. Through substantial assistance provided under the Marshall Plan, the government accelerated the mechanization of agriculture, which initially led to remarkable increases in productivity and output. During these years, the Turkish economy achieved annual growth rates that exceeded seven percent and created the impression that the country had entered a period of sustained economic development.¹⁷⁸

The momentum generated by these successes translated directly into electoral support. In the elections of 1954, the Democrat Party expanded its parliamentary dominance and secured an even larger victory than it had achieved in 1950.¹⁷⁹ However, the pendulum swung quickly. Towards 1955, the economic growth that had largely been sustained through American aid, foreign loans, and external credits began to stagnate. As foreign credits became less available and agricultural production started to decline, structural weaknesses within the economy became increasingly visible. The reduction of external financial support and the slowing of agricultural output contributed to rising inflation and a broader decline in economic growth.¹⁸⁰ These developments particularly affected civil servants and state employees whose fixed salaries did not adjust to inflation. Consequently, many members of the bureaucracy experienced a

¹⁷⁷ Günay, *Die Geschichte der Türkei*, 193

¹⁷⁸ Zülküf Aydın, *The Political Economy of Turkey* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 31-4.

¹⁷⁹ Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, 307.

¹⁸⁰ Aydın, *The Political Economy of Turkey*, 31-4.

significant decline in their purchasing power and social status, which increased dissatisfaction with the Democrat Party and its policies.¹⁸¹

In response to the growing criticism and worsening economic conditions, the Democrat Party gradually became more sensitive and less tolerant towards opposition and dissent. Given the close historical relationship between the Republican People's Party, the state bureaucracy, and the military, a relationship that had developed during more than two decades of one-party rule and was reinforced by İsmet İnönü's symbolic position as both a national hero and Atatürk's closest associate, the Democrat Party increasingly feared intervention from these circles.¹⁸² These concerns contributed to the government's gradual adoption of a more repressive approach towards its opponents.

One of the first major measures taken by the government was the confiscation of property that had been accumulated by the Republican People's Party during its long period in power. Beyond this, the Democrat Party introduced a series of restrictions that increasingly limited the ability of the opposition to articulate criticism. Opposition parties were denied access to radio broadcasts and other important channels of communication. Their opportunities to organize public rallies were curtailed, and their ability to communicate with the wider public became increasingly restricted. Parliamentary debates were eventually removed from public broadcasting, and the government even attempted to further limit the opposition's ability to speak effectively within parliament itself.¹⁸³

These developments reached their peak with the establishment of the Tahkikat Komisyonu (Investigation Committee), a parliamentary body that was granted extensive powers to investigate opposition activities and, if deemed necessary, suspend political rights and parliamentary immunities. For many observers, the committee represented the most visible manifestation of the Democrat Party's increasingly authoritarian direction.¹⁸⁴

Having learned from the Republican People's Party's earlier electoral strategies, the Democrat Party decided in 1957 to call early elections. Although the party managed to

¹⁸¹ Günay, *Die Geschichte der Türkei*, 198

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 199.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.,

remain in power, the elections also revealed a substantial decline in its popularity. As the rift between the government and the traditional bureaucratic, military, and intellectual elites continued to widen, the Democrat Party increasingly redirected its political attention towards more conservative and rural segments of society. This shift was accompanied by a growing use of religious rhetoric in public discourse.¹⁸⁵

Combined with the increasingly repressive measures directed against the opposition, the government's confrontational relationship with İsmet İnönü, and the growing economic difficulties experienced by large parts of society, these developments gradually produced a political atmosphere that contributed to the military intervention of 27 May 1960.

The military intervention in 1960

In the end, the military intervention of 1960 was the result of a combination of factors: the Democrat Party's increasingly repressive measures against the opposition and the democratic principles of the country, the gradual abandonment of core Kemalist principles, especially secularism, and the deteriorating economic situation, which affected not only the financial position of civil servants and military officers but also their social status and prestige within society.

During the night of 27 May 1960, Colonel Alparslan Türkeş delivered the announcement of the military intervention via radio. A group of young military officers had staged a coup d'état and overthrown the Democrat Party government in order to seize power. The intervention was organized largely outside the traditional chain of command and was mainly planned, coordinated, and executed by a group of colonels and junior officers. Only at the very last stage did they integrate General Cemal Gürsel into their ranks in order to provide the intervention with greater legitimacy and public credibility. After the coup had taken place, the military quickly arrested the current and former leading members of the Democrat Party government. Among those detained were President Celal Bayar, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan. Together with many other leading

¹⁸⁵ Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, 308.

figures of the Democrat Party, they were transferred to Yassıada, where they awaited trial.¹⁸⁶

To govern the country during the transition period, the junta established the National Unity Committee (Millî Birlik Komitesi – MBK). Its official purpose was to supervise the transition back to civilian rule and prepare the foundations for a new political order. However, divisions soon emerged within the committee itself. A more radical faction, led by Alparslan Türkeş and composed of officers who had participated in the intervention, opposed a rapid return to civilian politics and instead advocated prolonged military rule. In order to facilitate a smoother transition process, this faction was expelled from the committee and subsequently sent abroad. At the same time, the National Unity Committee commissioned a group of legal scholars, primarily from Ankara University and Istanbul University, to draft a new constitution. The resulting constitution reflected both the traditional principles of the Kemalist elite and newly emerging liberal ideas. On the one hand, it substantially expanded civil liberties and political rights in response to the repressive practices of the Democrat Party during its final years in power. On the other hand, it established a number of new institutions intended to function as safeguards against future authoritarian tendencies. Among these institutions were the Constitutional Court as the highest judicial authority, the Senate as a second chamber intended to act as a control mechanism on parliamentary power, and extensive guarantees for the autonomy of universities and student organizations. These institutions were increasingly understood as important elements within a broader system of checks and balances. Another important institution established under the new constitutional framework was the National Security Council (Millî Güvenlik Kurulu – MGK). The council consisted of senior military officers and government representatives and was tasked with advising the government on matters concerning national security. However, the concept of national security was intentionally defined in a broad manner. This enabled the military to participate not only in questions of defense and foreign policy but also in matters of domestic political significance. In this sense, the new constitutional framework institutionalized the military's interventionary role within Turkish politics.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Atatürk and After* (London: John Murray, 1997), 94-109.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

The constitution was approved through a referendum in 1961 and became the foundation of the new political order.

While the National Unity Committee was preparing Turkey's transition into a new liberal democratic era, the question of how to deal with the former Democrat Party leadership remained unresolved. The party members faced a broad range of charges. While some accusations appeared primarily aimed at discrediting the defendants politically and personally, others were considerably more serious. Adnan Menderes and leading members of his government were charged under Article 146 of the Turkish Penal Code for attempting to undermine, alter, or overthrow the constitutional order by force. As a consequence, several leading figures received death sentences. Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Hasan Polatkan were executed shortly after their sentences became final. The sentence of former President Celal Bayar was commuted to life imprisonment because of his advanced age and deteriorating health. Adnan Menderes himself was executed on 17 September 1961 after a series of delays and complications.¹⁸⁸

One week after the execution of Menderes, the National Unity Committee proceeded with the transition back to civilian rule and initiated the process for new elections.

İsmet İnönü entered these elections convinced that the Republican People's Party would secure a comfortable victory. The outcome, however, proved deeply disappointing for him. Although the electorate of the former Democrat Party had been fragmented among several newly established parties that all attempted to claim the legacy of center-right and conservative politics, the newly founded Justice Party successfully positioned itself as the primary successor to the Democrat Party. As a result, the Justice Party emerged as the second strongest party in the elections, finishing only one percentage point behind the Republican People's Party, with approximately 35 percent compared to the CHP's 36 percent. Since İnönü failed to secure an absolute majority, he was subsequently forced to form Turkey's first coalition government of the post-intervention era.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Günay, *Die Geschichte der Türkei*, 211

The beginning of the second Republic

The new coalition between the Justice Party and the Republican People's Party was not destined to last. This marriage, largely arranged under the supervision and expectations of the military, quickly headed towards divorce. Questions regarding the legitimacy of the new constitutional order, demands for amnesty for surviving members of the Democrat Party, and a long history of mutual animosity between the two parties made effective cooperation increasingly difficult.¹⁹⁰

The collapse of this first coalition government in Turkish history set the precedent for much of the first half of the decade that followed. İsmet İnönü, who remained the most important connection point between the military and the sphere of civilian politics, participated in three out of the four coalition governments that ruled Turkey until the Justice Party secured an absolute majority in 1965. These coalitions were often formed with smaller parties from both the political left and right and were characterized by their fragility and limited ability to formulate a coherent long-term political direction.¹⁹¹

As a consequence, many of the structural problems that had accumulated during the final years of Democrat Party rule remained unresolved. Economic difficulties persisted, political polarization continued, and successive coalition governments often lacked both the stability and the parliamentary support necessary to implement comprehensive reforms. The frequent changes of government created an atmosphere in which day-to-day political survival often took precedence over long-term planning. The elections of 1965 therefore represented an important turning point. Under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel, the Justice Party secured an absolute majority with approximately fifty-three percent of the vote. The result confirmed a trend that had already become visible in the elections of 1961, namely that a substantial portion of the former Democrat Party electorate had transferred its support to the Justice Party, which increasingly established itself as the legitimate successor of the Democrat Party tradition.

¹⁹⁰ Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, 310-16

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

The years that followed, especially until 1968, were comparatively calm when contrasted with the political turbulence of the previous decade. Domestically, the Justice Party government was largely occupied with addressing economic challenges and maintaining political stability. At the same time, the escalating Cyprus crisis increasingly dominated both foreign and domestic political discussions and became one of the central political issues of the period. After 1968, however, the situation gradually changed. The increasing radicalization of the student movement, both in terms of its political objectives and its willingness to embrace more militant forms of action, combined with growing confrontations between left-wing and right-wing militant groups, contributed to the gradual destabilization of the political environment. These developments increasingly challenged the authority and stability of the Justice Party government and formed part of the broader atmosphere that ultimately culminated in the military intervention of 1971.¹⁹²

Another development that stood out during this period and became particularly important for both the institutional left and the student movement was the electoral success of the Turkish Workers' Party (Türkiye İşçi Partisi – TİP). For the first time in Turkish political history, a socialist party succeeded in entering parliament, securing fifteen seats in the elections of 1965.¹⁹³ This achievement provided the Turkish left with an unprecedented level of political visibility and legitimacy and would have important consequences for the ideological development of the student movement in the years that followed.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ *Turkey will Be a second France, Unless Our demands are satisfied*,” 172.

Social Context

A. The Society

The state of Turkish society during the period in which the Turkish 1968 movement developed and unfolded was largely characterized by the societal rift already indicated above. The Republican People's Party's elitist approach to shaping and directing the country's destiny from the top down, often without significant regard for the wider population, contributed to the emergence of a divided society consisting, on the one hand, of a predominantly rural and conservative population and, on the other, of an urban Kemalist elite. This division existed not only on ideological lines and in terms of living realities but also manifested itself in the cultural sphere.

The massive mechanization of agriculture and the economic growth experienced during the first half of the 1950s under the Democrat Party government accelerated processes of urbanization and gradually transferred this divide from the countryside into the cities themselves. The percentage of the urban population increased from 16.4 percent of the total population in 1927 to 25.1 percent in 1960 and further to 33.3 percent in 1970. These figures illustrate the significant demographic transformation that Turkey underwent during this period. One of the most visible manifestations of this societal divide and the broader process of urban migration was the emergence of the gecekondü settlements, commonly referred to as shanty towns.

Labour migrants from rural areas, who traditionally had only travelled to the cities seasonally for work, increasingly began to settle there permanently together with their families. Many of these new arrivals established themselves on vacant plots of land that often belonged to the state. On these areas, migrants constructed houses, frequently within a very short period of time and often without official permission. Over time, these settlements expanded rapidly, developed into small communities, and were eventually incorporated into the wider urban infrastructure.¹⁹⁴

The gecekondu settlements were generally populated by communities that already shared certain affiliations before migration. These affiliations could be based on common village origins, kinship ties, regional backgrounds, or religious identities such as Alevi communities. As a result, migration into the city often did not dissolve existing social bonds but instead reproduced them within a new urban environment. These affiliated communities functioned as an important safety net for migrants facing the social and economic challenges of adapting to life in unfamiliar urban surroundings. At the same time, however, they often made integration into the already existing urban communities more difficult. This became particularly relevant for the Republican People's Party's elite-driven modernization project, which had already struggled to integrate and mobilize many of these social groups while they still lived in the countryside.¹⁹⁵

The Justice Party, on the other hand, largely tolerated and in many cases indirectly encouraged the expansion of these gecekondu settlements. This was not only because they provided a large and inexpensive labour force that could support the country's industrialization process, but also because their inhabitants were increasingly perceived as a reliable electoral constituency that could strengthen the party's political position in the growing urban centers.¹⁹⁶

B. The economy

After Turkey's economy under the one-party regime had been largely controlled by the state through an etatist model, one of the biggest promises of the Democrat Party was to liberalize the Turkish economy. The measures that the Democrat Party introduced

¹⁹⁴ Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 293-7.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

after its electoral victory in 1950 included the devaluation of the Turkish lira, the reduction of quotas, attempts to privatize state-owned enterprises, the encouragement of private investment through cheap loans, and the permission of foreign enterprises, for example in the oil sector, in order to attract foreign capital. Additionally, the government invested heavily in the mechanization of the agricultural sector, especially through the opportunities provided by Marshall Plan aid.¹⁹⁷

Unfortunately, these measures were not enough to attract sufficient levels of foreign direct investment, and foreign capital entered the country primarily in the form of foreign credits. Measures such as the privatization of state-owned enterprises proved difficult, since there was a lack of a domestic private sector with sufficient financial power to acquire them. As a result, foreign borrowing remained the primary means of stimulating the economy and encouraging short-term growth. By 1954, export earnings had become insufficient to service the growing foreign debt, and the economy began to deteriorate rapidly. Zülküf Aydın explains Turkey's lack of economic stability during this period through the inconsistencies of the Democrat Party's economic policies. While Western recommendations focused on prioritizing agriculture and limiting state intervention, the government did not hesitate to abandon these principles whenever it deemed it necessary. Therefore, the liberal economic model remained inconsistent in its implementation, with foreign borrowing being the only constant element of the party's economic strategy. The Democrat Party simply lacked both the financial resources and the administrative capacity to fundamentally restructure the economy for long-term success.

Turkey's predominantly agricultural economy, combined with the absence of substantial industrialization, produced only a limited number of export commodities, such as cotton and hazelnuts, which made economic diversification difficult. Additionally, the continued influence of the statist tradition and its connection to the Kemalist legacy, which still maintained a strong presence within society and the political sphere, including parliament, made the implementation of more radical economic reforms increasingly difficult. Furthermore, many state-owned enterprises were simultaneously too expensive for the domestic private sector to acquire and not profitable enough to attract foreign investors. Turkey's weak export performance

¹⁹⁷ Aydın, *The Political Economy of Turkey*, 31-4

continued to fail in balancing the country's growing foreign debt obligations. Consequently, Menderes, alongside measures such as raising taxes and restricting bank credits, was forced to adopt the IMF-guided stabilization package and austerity program of 1958. Even the devaluation of the Turkish lira in 1958 and 1959 failed to significantly increase export revenues or solve the underlying structural problems of the economy.¹⁹⁸

In the end, the domestic economy's inability to balance the foreign debt, which increasingly functioned as a substitute for a properly functioning market economy, contributed to rising inflation and economic instability and therefore also played a significant role in the decline of the Democrat Party government and the military intervention of 1960. After the coup, the state introduced two successive Five-Year Development Plans during the 1960s. These plans managed to stabilize the economy to a certain extent but were not sufficient to fully repair the structural damage and imbalances that had accumulated during the Democrat Party's attempt to liberalize the economy.

While both of the chapters above are insufficient to fully depict the complete picture of Turkish society and the economy during this period, they nevertheless highlight two very important dynamics that were highly relevant for the development of the Turkish 1968 movement: first, the economy's extensive dependence on foreign capital and foreign credits, and second, the profound social divide between the elite and large segments of the rural population that continued to shape Turkish society throughout the 1960s.

Turkey's 1968 movement: A Theoretical Analysis

McAdam's Political Process Model

Given that this master's thesis is an interdisciplinary one, I decided to additionally examine the Turkish 1968 movement through the lens of Social Movement Theory,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

specifically through McAdam's Political Process Model, to gain a more holistic understanding of the movement itself.

In summary, McAdam's model, contrary to alternative approaches such as Resource Mobilization Theory, does not examine internal and external factors separately, but rather focuses on how these different categories dynamically interact to explain the emergence and development of a social movement. The three main categories that McAdam identifies are political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and a shared cognition or consciousness among the population of the movement. Throughout the unfolding of a movement, these three categories continuously interact with and are influenced by a fourth factor, namely the social control response to insurgency, which refers to actions of groups outside the movement. According to McAdam, it is ultimately the interaction between these four factors that determines the trajectory, development, and eventual outcome of a social movement.¹⁹⁹

Before continuing with a more detailed explanation of the individual components of this model and how they help explain the emergence and development of the Turkish '68 movement, it is necessary to outline several fundamental assumptions upon which McAdam builds his model.

First, McAdam understands social movements primarily as political phenomena rather than psychological ones. Second, he conceptualizes social movements as continuous processes that develop from emergence to dissolution rather than as a series of separated and progressive stages. Third, the Political Process Model is based on a more Marxist understanding of power. According to McAdam, Marx acknowledged that the disparity of power between elites and excluded groups can be substantial, but that this imbalance does not make change impossible. Every social and political structure functions through relations of power that are exercised within that structure. Consequently, groups that are excluded from power nevertheless possess the potential to disrupt the functioning of the system precisely because of their position within it.²⁰⁰ For example, when workers in a factory decide to strike, they are able to interrupt production and therefore alter the power dynamics within the structure itself. Through

¹⁹⁹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 59.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 36–40.

their collective action, they are capable of influencing not only the functioning of the factory but also the relationship between those who possess authority and those who are subject to it. In this sense, power is never entirely monopolized by elites, because the functioning of every structure remains dependent on the participation and compliance of those situated within it.²⁰¹

Another important assumption underlying McAdam's model is that the impotence of minorities or excluded groups often does not stem from their actual inability to produce change. Rather, it frequently results from their perception of powerlessness. Consequently, the consciousness of one's own political agency and the realization of one's collective potential occupy a central role within the Political Process Model.²⁰²

First Factor: Political Opportunities:

For McAdam, political opportunities are created by any force or process that undermines or interferes with the assumptions and calculations upon which a political structure bases itself and thereby challenges the status quo. Important to note here is that the Political Process Model, contrary to more classical approaches, does not assume that broader social processes directly cause social movements. Rather, these wider social developments only indirectly enable political opportunities, specifically by altering the existing power relations between the insurgent group and the establishment. According to McAdam, industrialization, for example, did not directly produce social insurgencies, but instead strengthened the position of insurgent groups and therefore increased their ability to challenge existing structures. To be more precise, political opportunities and their causes enable social movements in two ways. First, they can disturb the political order to such an extent that change or restructuring becomes increasingly difficult to avoid, which encourages political activism. Second, they can weaken the existing structure to a degree that significantly increases the political leverage of the insurgent group. In both cases, the weakening of the status quo encourages political activity. What this strengthened leverage position means is not only that the interests of the insurgent group have a greater chance of prevailing against the interests of external groups, but also that repression becomes more costly. A stronger insurgent group represents a more significant opponent whose suppression

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

requires more resources, effort, and political capital, while simultaneously carrying the possibility of stronger repercussions for those attempting to repress it.²⁰³

Indigenous Organizational Strength:

Indigenous Organizational Strength basically refers to the idea that an aggrieved population can only capitalize on a volatile political atmosphere and the opportunities it creates if it possesses already existing organizational and communication structures. These structures provide the movement with the ability to mobilize, coordinate, and sustain collective action. As the movement progresses, it is capable of transforming these structures according to its needs.

This ability to transform existing structures is crucial for the survival of the movement because the organizational structures available at the beginning were usually not created for the purpose that the movement is now trying to achieve. Consequently, the movement must adapt and reshape them according to changing circumstances and objectives. The condition of these available structures also determines the speed with which a movement can expand, its ability to mobilize supporters, and ultimately its capacity to survive. For example, a student movement already possesses indigenous structures in the form of student unions, student societies, campus networks, and communication channels through which information can circulate, and collective action can be organized.²⁰⁵

Cognitive Liberation

While political opportunities and organizational resources provide the possibilities and means for collective action, they are on their own still insufficient to produce a social movement or insurgency. Cognitive Liberation basically refers to the idea that the insurgent group must be capable of recognizing and interpreting the opportunities in front of them as actual opportunities. McAdam describes this process as the connection point between opportunity and action. Opportunities only become politically meaningful when individuals interpret their situation in a way that encourages collective action. What is important here is that it is not enough for only a few individuals to interpret a situation as an opportunity. Rather, a substantial portion of the insurgent group must come to this conclusion.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Ibid., 43.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 44-8

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 48-6

All of these factors reinforce each other. Political opportunities and strong organizational structures increase the likelihood that individuals will perceive changing circumstances as opportunities. At the same time, the perception of opportunity itself helps mobilize people and further reinforces the changes taking place within the structure. As individuals begin to see that their actions produce results, they receive feedback suggesting that the existing order is becoming more vulnerable and that success is becoming increasingly possible.²⁰⁷

For McAdam, Cognitive Liberation requires both a change in consciousness and a change in behavior. This transformation in consciousness consists of at least three specific aspects.

First, people within the system begin to recognize that the system has lost its legitimacy. Individuals who previously accepted the way the system functioned now increasingly perceive its operation as unjust or wrong.

Second, people who previously believed that changing the system was impossible begin to see change as a realistic possibility.

Third, a new sense of agency emerges. Individuals who previously perceived themselves as powerless begin to believe in their own ability to contribute to the process of change.

McAdam further notes that these transformations in consciousness are more likely to occur collectively rather than individually. Isolated individuals often tend to interpret the causes of their situation as personal failures rather than as products of broader structural conditions. Interaction with others therefore becomes important because it provides alternative perspectives through which grievances can be understood as collective rather than individual problems.

In the end, for a movement to emerge, a substantial segment of the group must come to define its situation as unjust and must collectively decide that action should be taken in order to change it. According to McAdam, this is only possible through the process of Cognitive Liberation.

The Social Control Response to Insurgency

The Social Control Response to Insurgency refers to the idea, already mentioned above, that because a movement is partially dependent on changing political

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

circumstances, the movement itself also introduces new dynamics and inputs into the political system. These new dynamics inevitably provoke reactions from actors outside the movement who respond according to their own interests. These responses subsequently affect the insurgency itself, forcing the movement to react and adapt. For McAdam, two factors are particularly important in determining these responses.

First, the strength of the insurgency itself. Weaker insurgencies often invite stronger responses because the costs of repression are comparatively low.

Second, the extent to which outside groups perceive the insurgency as a threat to their own interests, opportunities, or position within the existing structure.

These factors help determine whether outside actors decide to suppress, abolish, tolerate, or support the movement according to their own interests and perceptions.

In summary, the Social Control Response to Insurgency explains the interaction between the insurgent group and its immediate environment and highlights the repercussions that the movement itself produces within the wider political system.

For McAdam, the first three factors—Political Opportunities, Indigenous Organizational Strength, and Cognitive Liberation—interact to enable a movement to emerge and manifest. As the movement develops, it encounters the fourth factor, the Social Control Response to Insurgency, which, in turn, influences the other three factors and shapes the movement's further trajectory and development.²⁰⁸

Application of the model to the Turkish 1968 movement

To apply this model to the Turkish '68 movement, I will now identify the factors explained above within the movement itself and examine how their interaction influenced its development and unfolding.

The first factor would be Political Opportunities. If we examine the beginning of the student movement and look at which dynamics altered the political status quo of the time in to create the volatile atmosphere necessary for mobilization, the first and most obvious answer would be the military intervention of 1960 and the Constitution of 1961 that followed. However, it is important to note that the intervention itself would be an insufficient explanation for how these opportunities emerged. As already

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

discussed above, the Political Process Model is more concerned with the longer processes that indirectly create political opportunities rather than with singular events themselves. Therefore, the increasingly repressive direction of the Democrat Party government and the deterioration of the economy under its rule can also be understood as important processes that contributed to the emergence of these opportunities. What is particularly interesting in the Turkish case is that the students themselves actively participated in the process through which these opportunities emerged.

The second important factor would be Indigenous Organizational Strength. Here, the Turkish '68 movement was relatively fortunate because it was primarily a student movement. The insurgency therefore benefited immensely, especially during the first half of the Long Sixties, from already existing mobilizing structures such as student unions, university campuses, dormitories, and other organizational networks. These structures provided the movement with the ability to communicate, coordinate, and mobilize. At the same time, these structures themselves developed and transformed over the course of the movement as new needs, objectives, and circumstances emerged.

The third factor would be Cognitive Liberation. Here, there are two dynamics that can be categorized as such within the Turkish '68 movement. The first would be the Kemalist self-understanding of the students, which functioned as the primary collective framework through which the movement interpreted its political environment and opportunities and from which it derived guidance for action. This framework was later gradually substituted by the anti-imperialist framework, which from approximately 1965 onward became the movement's dominant lens through which it interpreted political developments and defined its objectives. It was this framework, for example, that guided actions such as the demonstrations against the Sixth Fleet and many of the anti-imperialist campaigns examined throughout this thesis.

The fourth factor, the Social Control Response to Insurgency, was encountered by the movement during its further development. In the Turkish case, this factor can be observed particularly in the emergence of radical right-wing groups and commandos, which increasingly perceived the student movement as a communist force that threatened their vision of a nationalist and anti-communist Turkey. Their response to the movement subsequently contributed to the growing radicalization of

parts of the student movement and intensified the conflictual atmosphere in which it operated.

The more important question, however, is how these factors interacted with one another throughout the development of the Turkish '68 movement.

The Political Opportunity represented by the military intervention of 1960 is particularly interesting because it altered the status quo by removing the Democrat Party government and creating the conditions under which the movement could develop. The Constitution of 1961 provided broader freedoms of assembly, expression, and association, which in turn directly influenced the movement's mobilizing structures through the diversification of student organizations and the wider availability of socialist literature and political ideas. These developments subsequently affected the Cognitive Liberation of the movement. At the same time, the participation of students in the events surrounding the military intervention strengthened their political consciousness and their awareness of their own political agency, reinforcing the belief that they could actively influence political developments and realize their objectives.

The second factor, the Indigenous Organizational Structures, also contributed directly to the movement's Cognitive Liberation because these structures simultaneously functioned as spaces in which ideas were discussed, developed, and distributed. Furthermore, these structures changed as the movement progressed. One example would be the gradual replacement of the National Student Union as the primary mobilizing structure by the Federation of Ideas Clubs, particularly after outside actors increasingly attempted to influence or appropriate the former. The Justice Party government's efforts to infiltrate and influence existing student organizations demonstrate how external pressures could render older organizational forms increasingly unsuitable for the movement's changing objectives. Consequently, the movement adapted its organizational structures according to the circumstances it encountered.

The final factor, the Social Control Response to Insurgency, is relatively clear in the Turkish case. As the Justice Party government increasingly perceived the anti-imperialist ambitions of the student movement as conflicting with its own political interests, it supported actors and groups that opposed the movement. This response affected the movement's organizational structures through attempts to influence

existing student organizations and thereby forced the movement to adapt and restructure itself. It also affected the movement's Cognitive Liberation by reinforcing the perception that meaningful change through official political channels was becoming increasingly unlikely. As a consequence, the movement's perception of its political opportunities changed. This in turn contributed to the adoption of more radical approaches and ultimately influenced the movement's increasingly radical trajectory. As this short examination demonstrates, it is particularly the model's emphasis on the interaction between different factors and on their reciprocal relationship with the surrounding political environment that makes it suitable for application to the Turkish '68 movement.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the ideological development of the Turkish 1968 Movement and to understand how a movement that initially emerged from student demands, constitutionalism, and a commitment to the ideals associated with the 1960 intervention transformed into a movement increasingly defined by anti-imperialist and socialist ideas. In doing so, it sought to explain not only how this transformation occurred, but also why parts of the movement eventually embraced revolutionary violence.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the development of the Turkish 1968 Movement should not be understood as a sudden ideological rupture. Rather, it was a gradual process shaped by changing political opportunities, ideological influences, international developments, and the evolving relationship between the movement and the Turkish state. The movement emerged in the political opening created by the military intervention of 1960 and the adoption of the 1961 Constitution. These developments provided students with unprecedented opportunities for political participation and organization. At this stage, the movement was not primarily socialist in character. Instead, it was largely concerned with defending constitutional freedoms, protecting what it perceived as the gains of the 1960 intervention, and advocating educational and democratic reforms. The reform demands of 1964 therefore represented not a revolutionary challenge to the system, but rather an attempt to improve and expand the opportunities created by the new political environment.

Over time, however, both domestic and international developments contributed to a transformation in the way students interpreted Turkish political reality. The Cyprus Crisis exposed what many students perceived as the limitations of Turkish sovereignty and highlighted the extent to which Turkey remained dependent upon the United States and the Western bloc. Simultaneously, the spread of anti-colonial struggles, Third Worldist thought, and anti-imperialist movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America provided students with new intellectual frameworks through which to understand their own society. Increasingly, anti-imperialism became the dominant lens through which political, economic, and social developments were interpreted.

Importantly, this anti-imperialist turn did not necessarily represent a rejection of Kemalism. Rather, many activists viewed it as the continuation and completion of the anti-imperialist struggle that they believed had been initiated during the War of Independence but left unfinished by the Republic. From this perspective, socialism and anti-imperialism were not seen as alternatives to national independence but as the means through which genuine independence could finally be achieved. The movement therefore did not simply abandon one ideological framework in favor of another. Instead, existing Kemalist notions of national sovereignty and independence were gradually reinterpreted through anti-imperialist and socialist perspectives.

One of the most significant achievements of the Turkish 1968 Movement was its ability to develop an alternative framework through which Turkish political reality could be understood. For decades, Turkish political life had largely been structured around the competing positions of republican elites, conservative forces, and nationalist currents. The student movement challenged this established political triangle by introducing new concepts such as imperialism, dependency, class relations, and social justice into public debate. In doing so, it expanded the boundaries of political discourse and created an alternative interpretation of Turkey's past, present, and future.

Yet while the movement succeeded in developing this alternative framework, it was far less successful in extending it beyond its immediate social base. Although its ideas resonated strongly among politically active students and segments of the urban intelligentsia, they struggled to gain widespread support among broader sections of society. This represented one of the movement's central limitations. While it successfully challenged the dominant political narratives of its time, it failed to transform its critique into a durable mass political project capable of mobilizing large parts of the population behind its vision.

The ideological debates within the Turkish left played a crucial role in shaping the movement's future trajectory. The division between the Socialist Revolution (SD) and National Democratic Revolution (MDD) theses reflected competing understandings of Turkish society and the path toward social transformation. While the SD line emphasized class struggle and a direct transition toward socialism, the MDD thesis argued that Turkey remained subject to imperialist domination and therefore required a national democratic stage of struggle before socialism could become possible.

The increasing repression directed against organizations and actors associated with the Socialist Revolution thesis contributed significantly to the growing influence of the MDD perspective. As legal political participation appeared increasingly ineffective and state repression intensified, the MDD line gained greater appeal among many activists. Its emphasis on anti-imperialist struggle, national liberation, and decisive political action offered answers that appeared increasingly relevant to the conditions of the late 1960s. In this sense, the rise of the MDD thesis represented one of the most

important developments in the movement's ideological transformation and helped pave the way for the radicalization that followed.

The movement's drift toward revolutionary violence must therefore be understood within this broader political and ideological context. It was not an inevitable outcome, nor can it be reduced solely to ideological radicalism. Rather, it emerged from the interaction of political opportunity, disappointment with legal avenues of political participation, increasing repression, and the growing influence of revolutionary interpretations of anti-imperialist struggle. Nevertheless, while many activists viewed armed struggle as a necessary response to the political circumstances of the period, it ultimately contributed to the movement's isolation. The adoption of violence alienated potential allies and sections of the broader population whose support would have been necessary for the realization of the movement's objectives. At the same time, it provided the state with further justification for increasingly repressive measures. Consequently, the movement became trapped in a cycle in which repression encouraged radicalization, while radicalization in turn facilitated further repression.

Despite these shortcomings, the significance of the Turkish 1968 Movement extends far beyond the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today, the movement often occupies a romanticized place within Turkish political memory. Figures such as Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnönü, and Yusuf Aslan have become symbols that continue to inspire political activism and public commemoration. While this remembrance culture remains an important aspect of the movement's legacy, it can at times obscure its broader historical significance.

The lasting importance of the Turkish 1968 Movement lies not only in the symbolic status of its leading figures but in its profound influence on the development of Turkish politics itself. Many of the political actors, ideological traditions, and political conflicts that continue to shape Turkey today either emerged during this period or defined themselves in relation to it. The political debates surrounding anti-imperialism, secularism, nationalism, state authority, democracy, and social justice that became central during the 1968 Movement remain deeply embedded within contemporary Turkish political life. In this sense, the movement was not merely a historical episode but a formative moment in the construction of modern Turkish political identities.

Ultimately, the Turkish 1968 Movement demonstrates how political identities are neither fixed nor predetermined. Instead, they are continuously shaped through the interaction of historical circumstances, ideological influences, political opportunities, and political struggle. The movement's transformation from a student movement rooted in constitutionalism, reformism, and Kemalist notions of national independence into one increasingly defined by anti-imperialist and socialist ideas illustrates both the possibilities and limitations of political mobilization during periods of rapid social and political change. Although the movement failed to achieve many of its immediate objectives, its intellectual contributions and its influence on the political development of Turkey continue to endure. More than half a century later, the questions first raised by the Turkish 1968 Movement remain central to understanding both the history and the contemporary political landscape of Turkey.

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Appendecies

Chronology

- The State

1914-1918 World War I

1919 The Turkish liberation war

1923 Founding of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk Overthrows Sultan Mehmed VI, and establishes parliament

1939-1945 second World war

1950 start of the more Party system, first elections- 27-year reign of the republican party ends, win for DP Party

1960 first military Coup- Imprisonment of the leading government officials

1960 National Unity Committee was formed and installed

1960 the DP Party was dissolved and suspended

1960 team of Professors drafted a new provisional constitution

1960 Radical wing of the National Committee gets sacked and replaced

1961 Assembly for drafting a new permanent constitution gets formed (upper and lower house)

1961 political activity ban gets lifted, parties can register again for free elections
1961 Referendum on the new constitution (only 61 percent in favor)
1961 first free elections negative trend is verified
1961 FKF Founded
1961 expansion of the university system and enrollment

- **The Context**

1945 Turkish straits crisis
1947 Truman Doctrine results in large military and economic aid for turkey
1952 Turkey abandons Atatürk's neutralist policy and joins NATO
1954 military facility agreement with the US allows the stationing of American rockets and forces in Turkey
1955 Vietnam War
1959 Cuban Revolution
1964 UN forestalls threatened military intervention for Turkish Cypriots
1966 China's Cultural Revolution
1967 war with Greece over Cyprus was narrowly averted
1968 Global 68 Movements France, West Germany, Mexico Czechoslovakia
1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus

- **The Movement**

1961 FKF Founded
1961 expansion of the university system and enrollment
1965 TIP Enters parliament
1968 first University occupation in Ankara faculty for language, history, and geography
June 11, Faculty of Law and Science
June 12, Istanbul Faculty of Law
1968 founding of the THKO People's Liberation Army of Turkey
1969 FKF Involves into Dev Genç

1969 6th fleet incident

1970 DISK led workers and students strike Nationwide

1971 abduction of an American sergeant by the THKO

1971 abduction of 3 American soldiers

1972 execution of Student leaders and leaders of THKO Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, Yusuf Aslan

Dramatis Personae

-THE STATE

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938)

- Founder and first president of the Turkish Republic
- Founder and first party leader of the Turkish Republican People's Party (CHP)
- Field Marshal during the Turkish war of independence
- Symbolic father of the Turkish Nation

İsmet İnönü (1884-1973)

- Succeeded Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the president of Turkey and leader of the People's Republican Party (CHP)
- First Prime Minister of Turkey
- One of Atatürk's closest military and personal friends, often perceived as his right-hand man

Celal Bayar (1883-1986)

- Turkish economist, Prime Minister of Turkey from 1937 to 1939

- One of the founders of the Democrat Party (DP), after the beginning of Turkey's Multiparty period
- Won the election of the 1950's with the Democrat Party (DP) and became President of Turkey from 1950 to 1960
- Got incarcerated after the military Coup in 1960 and sentenced to death
- His sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment, got later released in 1964 due to ill health

Adnan Menderes (1899-1961)

- One of the founders of the Democrat party (DP)
- Became Prime Minister of Turkey from 1950 to 1960 under Celal Bayar and Democrat Party rule
- Succeeded Celal Bayar as Party leader of the Democrat Party (DP)
- Was sentenced to death and executed after the Military Coup in 1961

Cemal Gürsel (1895-1966)

- Turkish military officer
- President and Prime Minister of Turkey after the Military coup in 1960
- Leading figure of the Military Coup

Süleyman Demirel (1924-2015)

- served several times as President and Prime Minister of Turkey
- came first into power as Prime Minister of Turkey in 1965 as the leader of the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi), which succeeded the Democrat Party (DP) after the party was banned
- His third government and premiership ended after the second military coup in 1971

Alpaslan Türkeç (1917-1997)

- Spokesperson and one of the main contemplators of the Military Coup in 1960
- Became undersecretary of the Prime Minister after the coup, but was sent into exile after he opposed the idea of giving power back to civilians
- Chairman of the Republican Villager Nation Party (CKMP), which was later renamed the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)
- Facto leader of the far-right movement Grey Wolves

The National Unity Committee (NUC/MBK 1960-1961)

- Military Junta, which superseded the Senate of the Republic after the Military coup in 1960
- Chairman Cemal Gürsel
- Dissolved in 1961 after the return to the civilian political order and the General elections

- THE CONTEXT

Trumann (1884-1992)

- 33rd President of the United States of America
- Implemented the Marshall Plan after the second World war
- Established both the Truman Doctrine and NATO to contain the expansion of Soviet communism

Fidel Castro (1926-2016)

- Cuban revolutionary and founder of the 26th of July movement
- Leader of the Cuban Revolution
- Prime Minister and President of Cuba after the revolution was successful
- First secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba
- Symbolic figure of anti-imperialism

Mao Zedong (1893-1976)

- Chinese politician and revolutionary
- Founding member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), de facto leader of the party from 1935 onwards, and official chairman from 1943 until his death
- Helped to build the Chinese Red Army and developed strategies of guerrilla warfare
- Proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a one-party state that is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Ernesto "Che" Guevara de la Serna (1928-1967)

- Argentinian Marxist revolutionary, Doctor, Author

- was Part of the 26th of July Movement, and one of the most important figures of the Cuban revolution, with Fidel Castro
- Minister of Industries of Cuba, President of the National Bank of Cuba, after the revolution succeeded
- Died in 1967 in Bolivia after the attempt to spread the revolution from Bolivia across all of South America
- Became one of the most prominent global symbols of resistance and anti-imperialism
- His Photograph the portrait “Guerrillero Heroico” from Alberto Korda is one of the most reproduced pictures in history

The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DLFP-1969)

- Palestinian Marxist-Leninist and Maoist Organization
- Part of the Palestine Liberation Organization
- The declared goal is to create a people’s democratic Palestine, where Arabs and Jewish people would live without discrimination, in a state without social classes and national oppression, which allows both groups to develop their national culture
- Provided guerrilla training for some leaders of the Turkish 68 movement, like Deniz Gezmiş

- The movement

Deniz Gezmiş (1947-1972)

- Turkish Marxist-Leninist revolutionary
- Political activist and student leader of the ‘68 movement in Turkey
- Member of the Workers party of Turkey (TIP)
- Founder of the People’s Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO)
- Got sentenced to death and executed after the THKO trial, where he and other members of the THKO were accused of trying to overthrow the constitutional order

Hüseyin İnan (1948-1972)

- Turkish Marxist-Leninist revolutionary
- Political activist and student leader of the ‘68 movement in Turkey
- Member of the Workers party of Turkey (TIP)
- Founder of the People’s Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO)

- Got sentenced to death and executed after the THKO trial alongside Deniz Gezmis and Yusuf Aslan, where he and other members of the THKO were accused of trying to overthrow the constitutional order

Yusuf Aslan (1947-1972)

- Turkish Marxist-Leninist revolutionary
- Political activist and student leader of the '68 movement in Turkey
- Member of the Workers party of Turkey (TIP)
- Founder of the People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO)
- Got sentenced to death and executed after the THKO trial alongside Deniz Gezmis and Hüseyin Inan, where he and other members of the THKO were accused of trying to overthrow the constitutional order

Ibrahim Kaypakaya (1949-1973)

- Turkish Maoist revolutionary
- Founder of the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML)
- Perceived the Turkish Workers Party (TIP) as reactionary and opportunistic
- Was a strong supporter of the Kurdish question and the question of Kurdish self-determination amongst the left
- One of the important figures in the movements turn to the armed struggle
- After the military Intervention in 1971 and the crackdown on communists and leftists in Turkey, Kaypakaya was captured and tortured to death in prison in 1973
- Became one of the prominent symbols of leftist resistance in Turkey alongside Deniz Gezmis, Hüseyin Inan, Yusuf Aslan, and Mahir Cayan

Mahir Cayan (1946-1972)

- Turkish communist and Marxist-Leninist revolutionary
- Leader of the People's Liberation Party Front of Turkey (THKP-C)
- Was involved in the kidnapping and murder of the Israeli Consul General of Istanbul, Efraim Elrom, in 1971
- Died in the Kizildere incident after a military ambush, where Cayan and his friends abducted three Nato technicians from the Ünye radar station, to demand a pardon for Deniz Gezmis and his friends after they were sentenced to death

Fikir Kulupleri Federasyonu (FKF-1965-1969)

- Socialist Student Association, which was founded in the Ankara Political Science Faculty
- essential for the distribution and mobilization of ideas and students at the beginning of the 68 movement
- Functioned for a long time as the unofficial youth branch of the Turkish Workers Party (TIP)

People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO-1968)

- An armed underground movement that was founded at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara by Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, and Yusuf Aslan,
- Played an important part in the Movement's turn to the armed Struggle
- Believed that a truly democratic Turkey could only be achieved through a revolution, which is carried out through the means of force by an alliance of the Proletariat, peasantry, and petty bourgeoisie

The Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey(Dev-Genc-1965-1971)

- was a Marxist-Leninist student organization, born out of the Federation of Debate Clubs (FKF)
- essential for the distribution and mobilization of ideas and students at the beginning of the 68 movement
- was banned after the Second Military intervention in 1971

Workers' Party of Turkey (TiP-1961)

- The first Turkish socialist Party to win representation in the national Parliament
- Was founded by a group of labor unionists
- Played an important role in the emergence and ideological influence of the Turkish 68 Movement
- Got banned twice after the military Interventions in 1971 and 1980

The People's Liberation Front of Turkey (THKP-C-1970)

- Founded by Mahir Cayan and friends
- Involved in the kidnapping and killing of the Israeli Consul-General in Istanbul
- was part of the section from the Turkish 68 movement that turned to the armed struggle

The Communist Party of Turkey/ Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML-1972)

- Founded by Ibrahim Kaypakkaya
- Aimed to carry out a revolution through the means of Maoist military strategy of people's war against the Turkish government
- resulted from the Movement's turn to the armed struggle
- The party machinery got destroyed after Kaypakkaya and friends were tortured to death in prison after the second military intervention in 1971

Yön (1961-1967)

- Founded and published by Dogan Avcioğlu
- Was a leftist Kemalist political magazine
- First socialist magazine in Turkey
- Was very Influential for the early ideological direction of the Turkish 68 Movement
- Influenced Deniz Gezmiş, Mahir Cayan, Ibrahim Kaypakkaya, etc.

Pledge of Honesty

On our honour as students of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, we submit this work in good faith and pledge that we have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Onur Alhan

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