

# Turkey: A De Facto End to the Hegemony of the Coup of September 12, 1980

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Maybe we are not organized, but we are neither apolitical nor without ideology. We were only afraid, because we are the daughters and sons of a generation, killed and tortured to death just before and after the military coup of September 12, 1980 in Turkey. But, we have now learned that cowards die many times before their deaths. We went beyond the fear threshold and achieved the collective confidence that one smells in the air. For that reason alone, June 1, 2013—the date that the symbolic squares were taken back by the millions mobilized all around the country—will go down in history as the day that the hegemony of the Coup of September 12, perpetrated on society by military decrees, was torn to pieces. That is why the police violence and the censorship of the media during the Gezi Park actions have been so harsh: Now, thirty-three years after that coup, the collective will has finally been awakened.

The government's plan to build a shopping mall in the park, the resistance of the environmentalists to this project and their violent repression by the police force was only a sparkle. All segments of society under attack from the neoconservative policies of the government—disgusted by years of humiliation, repression, and neglect—revolted against the government. Young people, women, ecologists, football fan clubs, Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-sexual (LGBT) activists, anticapitalist Muslims and revolutionary Muslims, the socialist left, labor unions, street children, Kemalists, Alevis, Kurds and Armenians were on the streets, behind the barricades. This revolt was not a surprise for the people in Turkey, though it was mostly presented as a surprise in the local and foreign media. All the social groups mentioned above have been organizing and putting up a fight for years against the attacks targeting them. The surprise was the coming together of all these struggles in the squares of Turkey on the basis of being honorable, equal and free citizens united against the repressions. That was what caused the panic of the powers-that-be.

## **What were the components of the revolt? And why?**

It was not a coincidence that young people and women were on the front lines. Women and youth have been especially hard hit by unemployment. For years, youth has gathered an enormous amount of struggle experience against the YÖK (the Higher Education Council) that was founded just after the coup. The final straw for the university students was the new YÖK law that would enable the reestablishment of the universities as private companies to be managed in accordance with the rules of the free market.

Women revolted, as they shielded their bodies to water cannons and teargas, because the government had started to interfere in even their decision whether to give birth by caesarian delivery and how many children to have. Murders of women increased by 1400% under the Erdoğan government. Not long ago, women all over Turkey demonstrated against a draft law trying to impose restrictions on abortion. And the government had to step back after these demonstrations. Therefore, the women in Turkey knew by heart that organized struggle forces the power to retreat.

We saw the LGBT's rainbow flag waving over many barricades. Nothing is without reason. Since 2002, 70 trans individuals have been killed. Some 18 trans women were the victims of hate murders only last year. Homosexual young people have been abducted and murdered by their parents. As a

last shot, the resolution proposed by the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), and supported by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) regarding the investigation of the abuse of rights of homosexuals was rejected by the votes of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). During the vote on the resolution, one of the AKP MP's described homosexuals as "abnormal" and this has taken its place in the social memory of LGBTs and was one of the reasons that triggered the rage of LGBTs against the government.

Anticapitalist and revolutionary Muslims have been exposing the injustices conducted by the government that portrays itself as the real face of the Muslim people of Turkey. They had a particular importance during this resistance. From the Ottomans onwards, the power in charge always attacked these dissidents by labeling them as irreligious, drunkards, heretics or atheists and attempting to delegitimize their resistance in the eyes of the religious groups in society. The Erdoğan government has also tried to spread the same slurs. However, Miraj (the ascension of the prophet Muhammad to heaven) was celebrated at Gezi Park during the resistance under the guidance of these groups, no one drank alcohol that day, and pastry rings usually consumed on holy days were offered to the visitors. Friday prayer was performed twice in Gezi Park by the anticapitalist and revolutionary Muslims with the protection of a security cordon around them made up of socialists. Anticapitalist and revolutionary Muslims proved that the government's claims were false and refused to allow the government to delegitimize the revolt.

The environmentalists' struggle didn't begin with Gezi Park. Environmentalists have been conducting a very organized and informed struggle against the planned construction of hydroelectric plants in almost every part of Turkey. The first martyr of this fight died two years ago, on May 31, 2011, which was also the date of the beginning of the Gezi Park resistance this year. Police violently attacked the people of Hopa (a town in Artvin) who gathered as a result of a call by revolutionary socialists to protest the sale of their streams before a meeting of Erdoğan there. Metin Lokumcu, a teacher and a revolutionary, died due to the intense use of teargas sprayed to disperse the crowd. There was a banner in his hand as he fell down: "Water is a human right and cannot be sold."

Kemalists, followers of Mustafa Kemal, also known as Atatürk, who established the secular republic in the 1920s, have been on the streets for the last few years because they thought they were losing the gains of the Republic one by one, secularism being the first on the list. There are many groups in Turkey ranging from the CHP, many Kemalist associations with infinite ideological and political variations leaning towards both left and right, to ex-Maoist, and quasi-fascistic Labour Party describing themselves as Kemalists.

Alevi are a religious group that was persecuted and sometimes massacred under both the Ottomans and the Republic. Among other pogroms there were the 1978 Malatya and Maraş massacres, the 1980 Çorum massacre and the 1993 Sivas massacre, all of which are still fresh in our social memories. By using nearly every ideological apparatus, most of the people are indoctrinated that Alevism is a perverse belief. The government has recently proposed to name the planned third bridge over the Bosphorus after Yavuz Sultan Selim, a former Ottoman ruler who killed nearly 40.000 Alevi in Anatolia. Fearing that the Alevi might support his military rival, Shah Ismail, Selim instructed religious scholars to issue fatwas against Alevism to justify the massacre; these fatwas accused Alevi of burning the Koran and mosques and using women as common property, slanders that are continued to this day. During this revolt, Alevi were also in the streets in great numbers. As always, they didn't withhold their support from the progressive forces of the country.

Although there have been many Kurds on the streets, the Kurdish movement didn't join the rebellion with its masses. The cities of Turkish Kurdistan remained silent during the last 20 days, some organizing only symbolic press releases together with the unions, NGOs etc. For this reason, the activists in the streets were unfortunately unable to force the construction of a social negotiation

platform for an actual democratic resolution of the Kurdish issue on the basis of the principle of peaceful coexistence.

The trade union movement has been under constant and intense attack since the AKP's ascent to power. Workers, especially the private sector, face widespread subcontracting and precarious employment. The spring 1989 strike wave and the TEKEL resistance were inspiring historical moments for the union movement. After a long-running fight extending over many years, in 2010 unions and the socialist left were able to take back Taksim Square, accepted as the May Day Square of Istanbul, which was closed to the workers and progressive forces after the massacre on the May Day in 1977. However, the government banned the May Day celebrations in Taksim Square in 2013, using the construction activities in the square as an excuse. This year there were clashes between police and the people trying to go to Taksim Square from various streets. After this year's May Day, the police attacked every group trying to gather in the square for a press release or protest, using their TOMAs (riot control vehicles) and teargas. The ban on meeting in Taksim Square was one of the most important sparks that fired the revolt.

The Confederation of Public Laborers' Unions (KESK) and the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) added their support to the resistance, declaring strikes twice, first on June 5 (only KESK) and then on June 6, and again on June 17. Night after night, there have been repeated marches in different working-class neighbourhoods on the outskirts of cities such as Istanbul and Ankara. It seemed that the working-class's response and support to the resistance was more spontaneous and direct than that of its organizations.

Revolutionary socialists have for years been involved in most of the struggle mentioned here, fighting for justice, freedom and equality, and trying to translate this large scale social opposition into an informed and organized grassroots movement.

All of the groups in Turkish society that have been harmed by the government's neoconservative policies came together behind the barricades in Taksim Square and Gezi Park and also in the other cities of Turkey. What made the barricades so strong this time was the coming together of revolutionary socialists who are experienced at defending the barricades and the thousands of people who took their places with their chants just behind them every night. What these groups together will be able to achieve is as yet unknown. But there is no doubt that the hegemony of the 1980 coup is gone.

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