

From the Movement of '68 to the Rupture of '71: The Transformation of Student Protests in Turkey

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“From the Movement of '68 to the Rupture of '71: The Transformation of Student Protests in Turkey,” a thesis prepared by Cenk Yılmaz Bayır in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts from the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, has been approved on 13 January 2025 by:

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Declaration of Originality

The intellectual content of this thesis, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.



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Abstract

From the Movement of '68 to the Rupture of '71: The Transformation of Student Protests in Turkey

Cenk Yılmaz Bayır, Master's Candidate at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, 2025

Professor Nadir Özbek, Thesis Advisor

This thesis analyses the student movement in Turkey between 1968 and 1971 and the transformation of the protest repertoire. In 1968, the student protests that began in Europe and the United States were also reflected in Turkey. The thesis aims to reveal the difference of the Turkey's '68 movement from the Western '68 movement, the emergence of unique student organizations and the multidimensional transformation of the student movement's repertoire of actions until the '71 rupture. Focusing on the leading universities of the country, Middle East Technical University, Istanbul Technical University, and Istanbul University, the thesis examines the Federation of Idea Clubs, Dev-Genç, Socialist Idea Club, and Revolutionary Student Union, which were the main student organizations. It explains how the student leaders of these organizations transformed the movement in ideological and practical terms.

40.000 words

Özet

'68 Hareketinden '71 Kopuşuna: Türkiye'de Öğrenci Eylemlerinin Dönüşümü

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Profesör Nadir Özbek, Tez Danışmanı

Bu tez Türkiye'de 1968 ve 1971 yılları arasında gerçekleşen öğrenci hareketini ve eylem repertuarının dönüşümünü inceliyor. 1968 yılında Avrupa ve Amerika'da başlayan öğrenci protestoları Türkiye'ye de yansımıştır. Tez Türkiye '68 hareketinin Batı '68 hareketinden farkını, özgün öğrenci örgütlenmelerinin ortaya çıkışını ve '71 kopuşuna kadarki süreç içerisinde öğrenci hareketinin eylem repertuarının çok boyutlu dönüşümünü ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Ülkenin önde gelen üniversiteleri Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi ve İstanbul Üniversitesi'ne merceğini koyan tez, başlıca öğrencilerin kurduğu öz örgütlenmeler olan Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu, Dev-Genç, Sosyalist Fikir Kulübü, Devrimci Öğrenci Birliği'ni inceliyor. Bu örgütlerin başını çeken öğrenci liderlerinin ideolojik ve pratik anlamda hareketi nasıl dönüştürdüğünü açıklıyor.

40.000 kelime





To my family



Table of Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms	<i>xii</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xv</i>
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 PALESTINE: THE FUSE THAT IGNITES THE STRUGGLE	11
2.1 The Convergence of Rising Class Movements and the Student Movement	12
2.2 The Intersection of Turkey's '68 Movement with Palestine	21
2.3 Conclusion	38
3 A SEARCH FOR A NEW IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	41
3.1 From Palestine to Diyarbakır: The Revolutionary Quest of the 68 Generation and the Intellectual Traces of THKO	42
3.2 The Ideological Foundations of THKO: İnan's Vision	58
3.3 Conclusion	76
4 THEORY IN ACTION: THE DYNAMICS OF URBAN AND RURAL MOVEMENTS	79
4.1 The Urban Actions of the Movement	81
4.2 The Rural Movement of THKO	93
4.3 Conclusion	115
5 CONCLUSION	117
BIBLIOGRAPHY	125

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AİTİA	Academy of Economic and Commercial Sciences (<i>Adana İktisadi ve Ticari İlimler Akademisi</i>)
AP	Justice Party (<i>Adalet Partisi</i>)
AÜ	Ankara University (<i>Ankara Üniversitesi</i>)
CHP	Republican People's Party (<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>)
CKMP	Republican Peasants' Nation Party (<i>Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi</i>)
Dev-Genç	Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey (Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu, TDGF)
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DİSK	Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (<i>Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu</i>)
DÖB	Revolutionary Student Union (<i>Devrimci Öğrenci Birliği</i>)
Fatah	Palestinian National Liberation Movement
FKF	Federation of Idea Clubs (<i>Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu</i>)
İTÜ	Istanbul Technical University (<i>İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi</i>)
İTÜTB	Istanbul Technical University Student Union (<i>İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi Talebe Birliği</i>)
İÜ	Istanbul University (<i>İstanbul Üniversitesi</i>)
İÜTB	Istanbul University Student Union (<i>İstanbul Üniversitesi Talebe Birliği</i>)
KMD	Association for Fighting Communism (<i>Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği</i>)
MBD	Struggle Union Association (<i>Mücadele Birliği Derneği</i>)
MDD	National Democratic Revolution (<i>Milli Demokratik Devrim</i>)
METU	Middle East Technical University (<i>Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi</i>)
METU ÖB	Middle East Technical University Student Union (<i>Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Öğrenci Birliği</i>)

MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>)
MİT	National Intelligence Organization of Turkey (<i>Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı</i>)
MTTB	Turkish National Students Union (<i>Milli Türk Talebe Birliği</i>)
OYAK	Military Solidarity Institution (<i>Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu</i>)
PDA	Proletarian Revolutionary Aydınlık (<i>Proleter Devrimci Aydınlık</i>)
SBF	Faculty of Political Science (<i>Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi</i>)
SD	Socialist Revolution (<i>Sosyalist Devrim</i>)
SFK	Socialist Idea Club (<i>Sosyalist Fikir Kulübü</i>)
THKO	People's Liberation Army of Turkey (<i>Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu</i>)
THKP-C	People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey (<i>Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi</i>)
TİP	Workers' Party of Turkey (<i>Türkiye İşçi Partisi</i>)
U.S.	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Soviet Union



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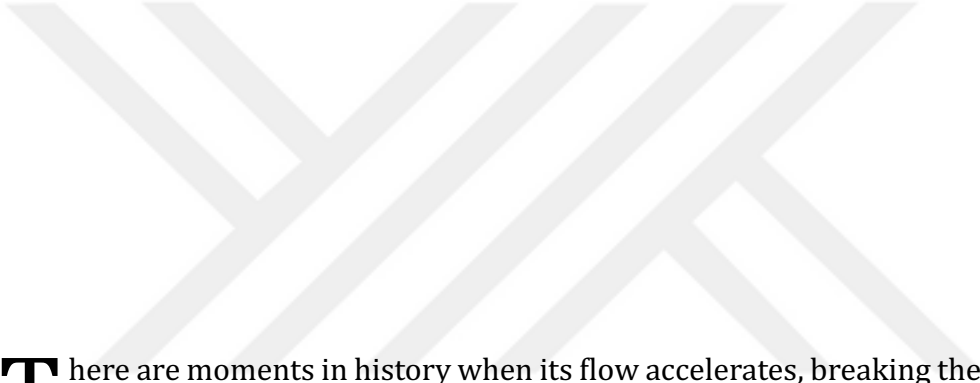
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To everyone who has made this journey meaningful and possible, thank you.



Introduction



There are moments in history when its flow accelerates, breaking the usual rhythm of societal dynamics and propelling them toward unfamiliar developments. These moments encompass cognitive leaps, societal awakenings, political mobilizations, and both individual and collective actions. Such moments serve as milestones in the history of societies, leaving traces that persist through time. However, these traces are not immutable; as societies undergo cultural, political, and economic transformations, the remnants of such moments also evolve, diverging from their original form. While these historical episodes may instill fear in those in power, who are unable to control them, they simultaneously offer hope to the oppressed.

The year 1968 represents one such acceleration in the flow of history, particularly in the global context. Student movements that began in the universities of advanced capitalist-imperialist states in Europe and America quickly transcended the “Western” axis, sparking uprisings

among students across the globe. In 1968, themes centered on liberation resonated deeply among students, catalyzing a widespread movement. Following World War II, the increasing enrollment of working-class children in universities fostered the emergence of a student-intellectual class rooted in lower social strata. This generation, aware of its class realities, initiated a transformation, aligning their demands with those of their class. The 1968 movement intersected with broader working-class and other social movements, merging student and class demands and triggering a large-scale societal mobilization.

Themes such as liberation, peace, anti-imperialism, social and political rights, socialism, and class justice were articulated through the slogans on students' banners. The movement progressed through university occupations, protests, forums, experiments in self-management, and communal practices, eventually expanding its repertoire to include various forms of political violence. This movement was perceived by ruling elites as a rebellion threatening the established order and was met with state repression.

The 1968 movements evolved differently in various countries, shaped by the socio-economic structures and developmental stages of capitalism in each context. Socio-economic factors also revealed the peculiarities of the '68 movement on a country-by-country basis. For example, the influence of national liberation struggles, anti-colonial movements, the Cuban and Chinese revolutions, and the ongoing Vietnam War shaped the youth movement in dependent capitalist countries differently from youth movements in advanced capitalist countries. For students in these countries, who often viewed their homelands as colonies of U.S. imperialism, the 1968 movement became a lever to craft a liberation blueprint for their nations.

Turkey stands as a prime example of such countries. The 1968 movement in Turkey, while aligned with the broader global trends, also bore unique characteristics, creating a distinct experience. In this context, Turkey's 1968 opened the door to a period where the pace of historical change surpassed that of the U.S. and European movements. The student movement, which gained momentum in the early 1960s,

drew upon the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the 1961 Constitution, university autonomy, and the influence of labor movements to shape its trajectory. These formative experiences were transmitted to the 1968 generation through organized frameworks. Youth organizations such as the Federation of Idea Clubs (FKF, *Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu*) played a pivotal role in shaping the consciousness and direction of the student struggle by 1968. In a sense, the groundwork for Turkey's 1968 had been laid during the 1960s, bearing fruit in various forms by the 1970s. The fruits of the movement are multidimensional, but the one I have discussed is the reddest of them all.

Those referred to as “the reddest” were young individuals whose intellectual foundation was rooted in socialism. Some of these individuals gathered around the Socialist Idea Club (SFK, *Sosyalist Fikir Kulübü*) at Middle East Technical University (METU), while others formed autonomous organizations at various universities. Initially, they joined the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi*), the most influential socialist party of the time. However, as the party began to reject this large youth cohort and metaphorically closed its doors to them, they were forced to forge their own path.

This student generation sided with the National Democratic Revolution (MDD, *Milli Demokratik Devrim*) line in the ideological debates of the era, particularly the division between Socialist Revolution (SD, *Sosyalist Devrim*) and MDD. They eventually criticized the inadequacy of parliamentary struggle, outlining an urgent mission for themselves: to take swift action toward realizing the MDD revolution in Turkey. These students were “revolutionaries”, and the most dynamic among them—those who rowed even faster in Turkey's already accelerated historical current—were the group referred to throughout this thesis as the “Ankara group” or the “*Dağcılar*” (the Mountaineers) This group is none other than the People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO, *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu*), the first organization to carry out armed revolutionary actions in the country.

This thesis examines the entire trajectory of the THKO between 1969 and 1971. This thesis aims to elucidate the distinct nature of Turkey's '68

movement by examining the 1971 rupture, with a specific focus on THKO as its central case. The THKO officially announced its existence on March 4, 1971, through an action accompanied by a public declaration. However, its formation dates back earlier. During 1968 and 1969, students involved in FKF and the Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey (*Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu*, TDGF, commonly known as Dev-Genç) had already been connected through nationwide protests and actions. This revolutionary community, nurtured by shared networks and a capacity for collective action, found its ideological direction amidst contemporary socialist debates, paving the way for new organizations. The leaders of the 1968 youth movement, in particular, played a pivotal role in initiating these organizational efforts. The Ankara and Istanbul groups that would later establish the THKO were led by key figures of the student movement.

Before formally adopting the name THKO, a group of “revolutionary students”, particularly those gathered around Hüseyin İnan at METU, embraced the idea of revolution through armed struggle. In 1969, they traveled to Palestine to receive training at Fatah (Palestinian National Liberation Movement) camps. Following this period, the group developed the ability to operate as an organized entity. During their incarceration in Diyarbakır Prison, they refined their theoretical approach and adopted a strategy of armed struggle grounded in rural movements.

This study centers around five main research questions as follows: What factors led the student movement in Turkey, which emerged between 1968 and 1971, to shift from using weapons as a means of defense to adopting the ideology of armed revolution? What were the conditions that facilitated the emergence of THKO, an organization primarily founded by students and based on political violence? How was the THKO movement organized and developed? What constitutes the theoretical framework of THKO? How did the THKO's rural movement evolve, and what were the reasons for its failure?

There are few studies on THKO in the literature. Most of these studies discuss THKO in a limited way. One of the few studies that deals broadly

with THKO belongs to Aydın Çubukçu, one of the important witnesses of the period and a member of the movement's successors. Based on his oral history studies with important witnesses of the period, Çubukçu evaluates the movement with a narrative in which the '68 movement is at the forefront rather than THKO.¹ This was followed by the *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi* (the Encyclopedia of Socialism and Social Struggles). The encyclopedia article, which examines THKO briefly but underlines its turning points, also differs from the others by starting with the criticism that Deniz Gezmiş was in the forefront of the movement.² İlhan Akdere and Zeynep Karadeniz's study on the Turkey's left is one of the limited number of works that analyze the movement.³ One of the earliest articles analyzing the movement is by Robert W. Olson, who examines the relationship between the movement and the March 12 memorandum.⁴ In the literature, there are definitions such as the movement without ideology, the petty-bourgeois movement, the revolutionary-democratic movement, and the movement expecting a military coup. Teslim Töre, who played an important role in the THKO rural movement, and Mustafa Şener claim that the movement was ideology devoid and consider it as a purely practical movement.⁵ Mustafa Yalçın, a member of the movement and one of its continuators, Akdere and Karadeniz, and Çubukçu classify the organization as a petty bourgeois movement, but argue that its successors were able to get away

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- 1 Aydın Çubukçu, *Bizim '68*, 14th ed. (Istanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2014).
 - 2 "Deniz Gezmiş Efsanesinin Gerisindeki Gerçek: THKO," in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 7 (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988).
 - 3 İlhan Akdere and Zeynep Karadeniz, *Türkiye Solunun Eleştirel Tarihi -1*, (Istanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 1994).
 - 4 Robert W. Olson, "Al-Fatah in Turkey: Its Influence on the March 12 Coup," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 2 (1973): 197–205. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4282471>.
 - 5 Mustafa Şener, *Türkiye Solunda Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset: Yön, MDD ve TİP*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Yordam Kitap: 2015). Teslim Töre, "Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu'nun (THKO) Doğuşu-Gelişimi ve Sonu", in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 7 (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988), 2170-1.

with self-criticism.⁶ Mustafa Şener, Tuncay Çelen, Teslim Töre, Haluk Yurtsever, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, and Yüksel Akkaya emphasize the revolutionary-democratic character of the movement, leading to the implication of a petty bourgeois movement.⁷ Ergun Aydınöglü evaluates THKO and similar movements as a retreat and a decomposition of the revolutionary genre.⁸ Kerem Ünüvar, on the other hand, argues that the movement was expecting a military coup and planned its actions according to the hope of a leftist coup by the army.⁹ Tanıl Bora examines the movement through voluntarism.¹⁰ Turhan Feyizoğlu, known for his biographical studies on the movement's leaders, largely refrains from making comments and determinations about the THKO in his works and lists the events by their historical flow.¹¹ Engin Erkiner presents a comparative study of THKO with similar movements of its time.¹² In addition to these, Vehbi Ersan, Alcan Sayılğan, Özgür Mutlu Ulus, Nadire

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- 6 Akdere and Karadeniz, *Türkiye Solunun Eleştirel Tarihi -1*. Mustafa Yalçınar, "THKO", in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 7 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988), 2178-9. Aydın Çubukçu, "TDKP-'Halkın Kurtuluşu': Gerilladan Partiye," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 / Sol*, 5th ed. (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2021), 724-36.
- 7 Şener, *Türkiye*. Tuncay Çelen, *Denizler'den Terzi Fikri'ye Türkiye*, (İmge Kitapevi Yayınları, 2011). Töre, "Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu'nun (THKO) Doğuşu-Gelişimi ve Sonu". Haluk Yurtsever, *Yükseliş ve Düşüş*, (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2008). Ertuğrul Kürkçü, "Türkiye Sosyalist Hareketine Silahlı Mücadelenin Girişi," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 / Sol*, 5th ed. (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2021), 494-509. Yüksel Akkaya, "Türkiye Solu ve İşçi Sınıfı" in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 / Sol*, 5th ed. (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2021), 790-810.
- 8 Ergun Aydınöglü, *Türk Solu (1960-1971)*, (Belge Yayınları, 1992). Ergun Aydınöglü, *Türkiye Solu (1960-1980) "Bir Amneziğin Anıları"*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Versus Kitap, 2011).
- 9 Kerem Ünüvar, "Türkiye Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu (1970-1971)," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 / Sol*, 5th ed. (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2021), 830-33.
- 10 Tanıl Bora, *Cereyanlar*, 8th ed. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021).
- 11 Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Deniz Bir İsyanının İzleri*, 1st ed. (Belge Yayınları, 1991). Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Hüseyin İnan / Erikler Çiçek Açtığı Zaman Dede*, (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2014). Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Sinan: Nurhak Dağları'ndan Sonsuzluğa* (Ozan Yayıncılık, 2000). Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Denizler ve Filistin*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2011).
- 12 Engin Erkiner, *68'den Ne Kaldı?*, (Ankara: TDAS, 2018). Engin Erkiner, "Küba'dan Türkiye'ye Öncü Savaş," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 8 / Sol*, 5th ed. (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2021), 536-542.

Mater, Emin Alper devote limited space to the movement in their works.¹³ In many of these works, the THKO narrative based on the *foco* theory and modeled on the Cuban Revolution is common.

Apart from these, various novels and documentary studies include the movement within the scope of romanticism. There are two important distinctions here. The first is related to the ideological dimension of the movement, and the second is intended to sanitize them in order to depoliticize them from a radical form and to draw a plausible revolutionary narrative.

This thesis aims to address the gap in the literature by examining the organizational process of the People's Liberation Army of Turkey in a detailed and comprehensive manner, as it has been minimally studied. It challenges the claim that THKO was merely a practical movement devoid of ideology. Accordingly, the thesis approaches the organization holistically, analyzing both its ideological and practical dimensions. It examines the organization's published declarations, journal articles, brochures, and actions as interconnected components.

The thesis also seeks to disrupt a historical narrative in which THKO, the organization associated with Deniz Gezmiş—widely regarded as a leader of the 1968 youth movement—has been overshadowed by his prominence. Instead of presenting a THKO eclipsed by Gezmiş's legacy, the study comprehensively addresses the organization's development, focusing on Hüseyin İnan, perceived as the natural leader of THKO, and the members of the Ankara group. In doing so, it does not dismiss Gezmiş's agency or overlook his influence in the organization's history.

Furthermore, the thesis adopts a critical stance against the romanticized narrative that seeks to detach THKO from its historical

13 Vehbi Ersan, *1970'lerde Türkiye Solu*, 3th ed. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014). Aclan Sayılğan, *Türkiye'de Sol Hareketler*, 5th ed. (Doğu Kütüphanesi, 2009). Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *Türkiye'de Sol ve Ordu (1960-1971)*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016). Nadire Mater, *Sokak Güzeldir 68'de Ne Oldu?*, (Metis Yayınları, 2009). Emin Alper, *Jakobenlerden Devrimcilere: Türkiye'de Öğrenci Hareketlerinin Dinamikleri 1960-1971*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2018).

context. Its structure and narrative aim to counter such idealized portrayals, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of THKO.

My methodology is based on written sources. It encompasses critical materials for understanding the organization, including memoirs, articles written by organization members in journals, declarations published by the organization, newspapers and journals of the period, court case files, oral history studies, and archival documents. The thesis relies less on court defenses written by organization members under pressure, where they could not freely express their views due to lawyer interventions. Instead, it prioritizes memoirs, declarations, articles, and oral history studies produced by the actors of the movement. Additionally, the thesis draws upon the literature on social movements in Turkey and the political history of Turkey between 1960 and 1980.

The thesis consists of three body chapters dealing with the foundation, ideology, development, and end of the THKO movement. These titles are: Palestine: The Fuse that Ignites the Struggle, A Search for a New Ideological Perspective, Theory in Action: The Dynamics of Urban and Rural Movements.

The subsequent chapter, after introduction, examines the rapid expansion of student political movements from university campuses to the broader societal sphere, highlighting their interactions with emerging class movements. It explores the state's response, along with attempts by Islamist factions and nationalist paramilitary groups to suppress the student movement. Building on this context, the analysis investigates the shift among socialist students from viewing arms as defensive tools to adopting the concept of armed revolution.

Further, the chapter delves into the relationship between the student movement and Palestine, emphasizing the journey of the Ankara group under the leadership of Hüseyin İnan. It scrutinizes their motivations, connections, and experiences in Palestine, as well as the internal and intergroup conflicts encountered by the Ankara and Antep groups at Fatah camps. Finally, it underscores the pivotal role of the experiences gained in Palestine in shaping the eventual formation and ideology of the THKO.

The third chapter delves into the ideological underpinnings of THKO by analyzing pivotal written works produced by the movement's key figures. It offers a detailed examination of THKO's theoretical framework and its divergence from earlier revolutionary traditions. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first focuses on foundational texts by the movement's leaders, and the second on Hüseyin İnan's post-movement pamphlet, *The Path of Turkey's Revolution*, alongside the THKO's second declaration.

The initial section evaluates three key documents: Yusuf Aslan's "Why Did I Go to Palestine?", the imprisoned groups' manifesto "To the Peoples of Turkey", and Deniz Gezmiş's "What the Days Ahead Will Bring." These texts not only trace THKO's ideological evolution but also highlight the transformation of the broader 1968 student movement into a more militant form of activism in ideological level.

The second part contextualizes Hüseyin İnan's pamphlet within THKO's ideological continuity, linking it to the earlier texts while exploring its distinct elements. It assesses how İnan synthesized ideas from prominent figures like Mihri Belli and Doğan Avcıoğlu, while also marking a critical departure through his emphasis on rural guerrilla warfare. This section underscores THKO's ideological rupture from the army-centric revolutionary expectations held by its predecessors. By analyzing the second declaration of THKO, the chapter contrasts the movement's positions with the Yön/Devolution movement and Mihri Belli, emphasizing THKO's unique vision.

The core of the fourth chapter revolves around the actions carried out by the organization in urban and rural settings, as well as the declarations it published. Understanding the ideological and political trajectory of THKO, as well as the movement in its entirety, requires examining these limited theoretical and political texts alongside the organization's practical activities. This chapter seeks to comprehend and convey the organization as a whole by analyzing both its written materials and its practical operations.

The first half of the chapter focuses on the organization's urban actions, specifically those conducted in Ankara. The movement lacked a

formal program and charter, operated with semi-autonomous groups, and had no official central authority. However, due to the Ankara group's leadership roles and the alignment of its actions with the organization's ideology, it effectively served as a de facto center. For this reason, the urban actions examined are limited to those in Ankara. This section highlights the anti-imperialist nature of the organization's actions and their role in resource acquisition. The first declaration issued by THKO following its most striking action is analyzed from political, class-based, and cultural perspectives.

The second half of the chapter addresses the organization's rural movement. THKO viewed the primary contradiction as existing between imperialism and the masses of people and based its dual party-army structure on this premise. By claiming that the peasantry would form the primary human resource of the people's army, the THKO framed its efforts as a rural-based movement. Within this context, the second section examines factors critical to the construction of the movement, such as networks, resources, and recruitment. It also explores how urban actions supported the rural movement, the relationships established with local communities, and the communities' perceptions of the revolutionaries. In doing so, it seeks to challenge the romanticization of revolutionary figures. The chapter discusses the local relationships and networks that enabled the movement to endure under challenging circumstances, highlighting their scope and significance. It also analyzes the organization's shortcomings from geographical and structural perspectives. Covering the period up to the Kürecik action, this section aims to shed light on all factors leading to the movement's dissolution.

Palestine: The Fuse that Ignites the Struggle

*Bütün dünyaya karşı
Yüzyıllarca kandırılmış
Ezilmiş
Okkanın altına gitmiş küçük adamların
Uyanış marşı.*

– Haldun Taner, *Gözlerimi Kaparım Vazifemi
Yaparım*

This chapter examines how the '68 movement in Turkey paved the paths that intersected with the Palestinian resistance organizations. The first section explores how the students' political mobilization, which quickly extended beyond university campuses, intersected with the rising class movements, supported by concrete examples. It highlights the inclusive organizations within the student and youth movement. Following this, the analysis focuses on the groups opposing the burgeoning socialist-led student movement. Predominantly conservative and nationalist, these groups, along with the government, are scrutinized for their stance against the student movement. The conditions that contributed to students adopting "the weapon as a means of defense" and eventually turning toward "armed struggle" are also discussed.

The second part of the chapter addresses the youth generation's inclination toward the idea of "armed struggle" and its intersection with Palestine. It examines the early examples of individuals who joined Palestinian resistance organizations and their motivations. From this starting point, the analysis delves into the Palestinian experience of the Ankara group, led by Hüseyin İnan, and composed of key figures from the student movement. The section evaluates the factors influencing individual and intergroup divisions, followed by an exploration of the Ankara group's experience in Palestine. Finally, it presents the overall relationship established between Palestine and the student movement of Turkey and the outcomes of this relationship for İnan and his comrades.

§ 2.1 The Convergence of Rising Class Movements and the Student Movement

The trajectory of the student movement in Turkey was never confined solely to economic and social issues related to student life. While the 1968 student movement initially gained momentum with student demands, it quickly transcended these boundaries, advancing far beyond isolated student protests. The movement's arena was not limited to university campuses; it spanned from the villages of Anatolia to the squares of Istanbul, from campuses to factories and fields. The actions and mobilization at the university level did not develop as isolated or fragmented initiatives; rather, students from different universities engaged in constant interaction, sharing experiences and building a solidarity network that encouraged participation in collective actions.

Notably, student leaders from prominent universities like Istanbul University (İÜ, *İstanbul Üniversitesi*), Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ, *İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi*), and METU traveled to various universities across the country to maintain these connections and inspire solidarity. For example, following the "Kanlı Pazar" (Bloody Sunday) of 1969, a forum held at METU in early April resulted in a decision to boycott classes in protest against the murders and the government's silence, as well as its repressive legal proposals. One significant resolution from the forum

was for groups of students to travel to various regions of Anatolia to organize protests and meetings. Members of the METU SFK devised plans to visit different regions. Hüseyin İnan and Tayfur Cinemre were members of SFK, and they decided to head to the Mediterranean region, aiming to engage with villages, raise awareness of the pressures on universities, support peasant resistance, and encourage boycotts in local universities. At the Adana Academy of Economic and Commercial Sciences (AİTİA, *Adana İktisadi ve Ticari İlimler Akademisi*), for instance, a debate about a boycott decision was ongoing but lacked majority support. During his visit to the Mediterranean, Hüseyin İnan attended a university forum at AİTİA, encouraging hesitant students to take action. Consequently, the boycott materialized.¹

One of the most significant factors connecting students across different universities was their unification under a common organization: initially, the FKF, which later evolved into Dev-Genç. FKF/Dev-Genç can be broadly described as an umbrella organization that housed various factions and groups. In its early years, these factions were not sharply divided. Simplistically, they could be categorized into two main groups: one advocating for MDD and the other aligned with SD ideology of the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi*). The relatively blurred distinctions between these groups made their coexistence under a single umbrella feasible, as unifying factors outweighed the dividing ones.

Structurally, FKF was a federation composed of Idea Clubs from universities. This allowed both local, autonomous decision-making at the university level and centralized coordination under FKF/Dev-Genç, facilitating communication, organization, and solidarity across universities. When FKF transitioned into Dev-Genç, the dominance of the MDD faction within the organization ensured the continuity of its unified operational function.

1 Tayfur Cinemre, *Anılar Belleğimizizin Bekçileridir*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2020), 45-50.

As noted earlier, the movement's scope extended beyond university campuses. Student demands were not confined to university-level issues but sought to encompass laborers and peasants as well. Consequently, FKF/Dev-Genç's organizational efforts included activities in rural areas and villages. Between May and October, when universities were on break, Dev-Genç members carried out organizational activities, propaganda, and demonstrations in villages. The Central Executive Committee of Dev-Genç formed and assigned groups to various regions for this purpose. These rural campaigns often culminated in peasant rallies organized in the targeted areas. The organization conducted activities in numerous provinces, including Kars, Çorum, Amasya, Tokat, Malatya, Denizli, Uşak, Gaziantep, and Mersin, analyzing the regions through various parameters and reporting their findings.²

Students also actively participated in labor movements and strikes, supporting worker protests and demonstrations. FKF and Dev-Genç members were involved in many labor strikes, such as the historic 15-16 June 1970 Great Workers' Resistance, widely regarded as Turkey's largest worker uprising. Military prosecutors even accused Dev-Genç of organizing parts of the resistance and participating actively, a claim not unfounded given the significant involvement of university students in the mass demonstrations that shook Istanbul and Kocaeli.³

Not only the FKF/Dev-Genç but also another organization, the Revolutionary Student Union (DÖB, *Devrimci Öğrenci Birliği*), supported these actions. DÖB was established by students who regarded the Istanbul Secretariat of FKF as passive. Among its founders were notable figures such as Deniz Gezmiş and Cihan Alptekin. During this period, many student leaders, including Gezmiş and Alptekin, stood alongside workers during significant strikes and factory occupations at Singer, Demirdöküm, Sungurlar, and Horoz Çivi factories. FKF-affiliated students protested the dismissal of three workers from the Singer Factory by delivering a black wreath, distributing leaflets to 650 workers during the

2 Ali Yıldırım, FKF Dev-Genç Tarihi: 1965-1971 Belgelerle Bir Dönemin Serüveni (İstanbul: Doruk Yayıncılık, 2008), 436-437.

3 Ibid, 415.

Horoz Çivi strike, and supporting workers clashing with police. When thousands of Sümerbank workers staged a nationwide strike, FKF and university student unions provided substantial backing. Students were not perceived as an “external” element by workers; on the contrary, workers sometimes sought the assistance of students to ensure the success of their actions. A notable example of this collaboration occurred during the Derby Rubber Factory strike. Believing the strike had lost its impact, the striking workers decided to occupy the factory, calling for the support of socialist students experienced in faculty and university occupations to carry out the action. The students supported the workers’ occupation efforts, resulting in a successful outcome. During the Sungurlar factory resistance, students and workers once again stood together against strike-breaking workers. They even demonstrated a united front with the workers against the military forces sent to break up the strike. The students did not merely stand in solidarity with the workers; they actively took part in the struggle by distributing leaflets about the strike in working-class neighborhoods, reinforcing the legitimacy of the strike across various social groups, and contributing to the expansion of the solidarity network.⁴

This close relationship between revolutionary youth, many of whom were university students, and the labor movement enabled students to inject their political agenda into worker-led movements. During strikes and protests, students complemented the economic demands of workers with their own political slogans, expanding the scope of actions beyond purely economic issues into the political realm.

2.1.1 *Escalating Violence Against the Student Movement*

Social movements were on the rise, and socialism had become mainstream in universities, with students identifying themselves as

4 Aydın Çubukçu, “TDKP-‘Halkın Kurtuluşu’: Gerilladan Partiye,” in *Sol*, 726. Turhan Feyizoğlu, FKF: Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu, (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 2002), 345-352. “Türkiye’de 1968,” in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988), 2084. Zafer Aydın, *İşçilerin Haziranı 15-16 Haziran 1970*, (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2020), 61, 108-110.

“revolutionaries.” The movement was gaining strength and extending its reach beyond university students to include non-university youth. In this sense, the “student movement” should not be understood as a movement solely comprising students but rather as a comprehensive “youth movement”. Throughout this thesis, the term is used with this inclusivity in mind.

The rise of the student movement inevitably led to the emergence of its opposition. However, this was not an unavoidable necessity but rather a response by groups benefiting from the status quo to rally more supporters and unite around shared interests against the rising movement. These groups included the conservative Justice Party (AP, *Adalet Partisi*) government led by Süleyman Demirel, as well as conservatives, Islamists, and nationalists. While various organizations represented these factions and often competed among themselves, they tended to cooperate when facing the “common enemy” of the student movement.

The student movement identified itself as “revolutionary” and labeled its opponents as “fascist” and “reactionary.” Conversely, nationalist and conservative circles referred to student activists as “Moscow agents,” “godless,” and “traitors to the nation.” This politically polarized environment fueled conflicts, but the instigators of violence were often those aligned with the status quo.

The student movement primarily clashed with government forces but was also targeted by conservative and nationalist groups. Despite this, the movement managed to maintain a balance of power by resisting effectively. However, this equilibrium began to deteriorate as nationalist groups increasingly armed themselves. A leading figure in this escalation was Alparslan Türkeş, who led the Republican Peasants’ Nation Party (CKMP, *Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi*) and its successor, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*). Although the CKMP/MHP maintained good relations with the ruling AP at the time, state reports associated the CKMP with Nazism, stating that it aimed to

“spread National Socialist doctrine under the guise of Turkish nationalism.”⁵

In response to the growing socialist movement, the CKMP decided to establish armed paramilitary groups to suppress student movement. Consequently, in July 1968, the first “commando camp” was established in the Gümüldür region of İzmir, connected to the far-right youth organization Ülkü Ocakları (Idealist Hearths), affiliated with the CKMP. Between 1968 and 1970, more than 150 such camps were set up in 35 provinces, training over 15,000 young individuals in weaponry, combat, and ideological indoctrination.⁶ State reports likened these commando camps and the units formed by the CKMP to the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) of Nazi Germany.⁷

Ülkü Ocakları, labeled as “reactionary and fascist” by revolutionary students, played a key role in this dynamic. Members of Ülkü Ocakları referred to themselves as “*ülküçü*” (idealist). Türkeş believed that the existing balance had shifted in favor of the left due to student protests and actions. From the inception of the commando camps, idealist youth were tasked by Türkeş with serving as a “balancing force.”⁸ In his words, they would “speak the language that communists understand.”⁹

The first significant action by the idealist commandos occurred in late 1968. Although they had engaged in prior incidents, they were not yet widely recognized as “commandos.” In their inaugural operation, idealist commandos clashed with leftist students at Ankara High Teacher Training School. Following this incident, the magazine *Milli Hareket* (National Movement), linked to the CKMP, praised the commandos for

5 *Ülkücü Komando Kampları: AP Hükümetinin 1970’te Hazırlattığı MHP Raporu*, 4th ed. (İstanbul: Kaynak Yay., 1997), 37.

6 Celil BOZKURT, “1968 OLAYLARI’NIN TÜRK SİYASETİNE ETKİSİ: MİLLİYETÇİ HAREKETİN ‘KOMANDO’ KAMPLARI”. *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 117, p. 231 (December 2017): 67-84. 71-73.

7 *Ülkücü Komando Kampları*, 20.

8 Bozkurt, *1968 Olayları’nın*, 72.

9 *Ibid*, 51.

“quelling the disturbances caused by leftists and teaching them a necessary lesson.”¹⁰

From this point onward, the commando movement directed its efforts against areas dominated by the student movement. Over the subsequent four years, idealist commandos sought to disrupt student-led boycotts and university occupations, attacked student-organized protests and demonstrations, and raided faculties, dormitories, and classrooms in an attempt to intimidate students through violence. These attacks resulted in thousands of injuries on both sides. The violence escalated further, leading to fatalities, including the killings of two students, Battal Mehetoğlu on December 14, 1969, and Süleyman Özmen on March 17, 1970, both shot by commandos.¹¹

The group most prominently involved in clashes with “revolutionary students” was the “*ülkücü* commandos”, but they were not the only ones. Organizations such as the Turkish National Students Union (MTTB, *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği*), the Association for Fighting Communism (KMD, *Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği*), and the Struggle Union Association (MBD, *Mücadele Birliği Derneği*) also played a role. These groups predominantly consisted of conservative/Islamist members. Although these associations were not organized into paramilitary units like the *ülkücü* commandos at the time, they frequently participated in confrontations with socialist students. These clashes often ended in injuries or deaths. For instance, Mehmet Büyüksevinç was killed by an Islamist group on December 10, 1969. Similarly, during the funeral of İmran Öktem, the president Court of Cassation, who faced backlash from Islamists for his atheist views, a group of Islamists, including KMD members, launched an attack.¹²

A pivotal incident in Islamist attacks occurred on February 16, 1969, during a protest in Taksim against the American Sixth Fleet. This

10 Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Fırtınalı Yıllarda Ülkücü Hareket*, (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Ozan Yayıncılık, 2005), 49.

11 *Ülkücü Komando Kampları*, 23.

12 Emin Alper, *Jakobenlerden Devrimcilere: Türkiye’de Öğrenci Hareketlerinin Dinamikleri 1960-1971* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2018), 372.

demonstration, organized by workers, students, socialists, and democrats, marked a turning point. Between 1967 and 1969, numerous protests had been held in cities like Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, and Trabzon, primarily led by organizations such as FKF, DÖB, university student unions, and the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK, *Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*). However, the lead-up to the 1969 protest saw heightened targeting by right-wing media. Mehmet Şevket Eygi, in a column for Bugün newspaper, called on Muslims to “fight against the Red Infidels.” The media also sensationalized the event by claiming that a red flag had been raised on Beyazıt Tower, pointing to a flag with Vedat Demircioğlu’s image, further stoking tensions. Right-wing newspapers published numerous articles accusing “communists” and leftists of planning to “spill blood” and alleging that Mihri Belli was inciting student uprisings. On the day of the protest, approximately 10,000 Islamists, armed with knives, machetes, and clubs, marched from Dolmabahçe to Taksim without any police intervention. They awaited the arrival of a group of about 20,000–30,000 leftists, including workers and students who were marching from Beyazıt. Allegedly, the Islamist group threw a bomb at the protesters. Despite their numerical superiority, the leftists lost their advantage when police forces intervened, dividing their group. This allowed the Islamist group to launch an attack, resulting in the retreat of the leftist protesters. The violence left 200 people injured, and two workers, Duran Erdoğan and Ali Turgut Aygaç, were stabbed to death by the Islamists.¹³

One of the significant turning points in this context occurred months before “Bloody Sunday,” during the protests against the U.S. Sixth Fleet in July 1968. Students engaged in “harassment actions” against American soldiers, which included beating them, throwing red paint on them, and verbally taunting them. The student movement had developed a practice of “anti-imperialist action” rooted in non-lethal but politically charged violence against U.S. soldiers. The İstanbul Technical University Student Union (İTÜTB) and its dormitories became the headquarters of these

13 Alper, *Jakobenlerden*, 351. Cinemre, *Anılar*, 44. Aydın, *İşçilerin*, 39-41.

protests. Although clashes frequently occurred between students and the police around the İTÜ, police could not enter the campus due to university autonomy. However, one morning, taking advantage of the rector's absence from the campus, the police broke this tradition. The "fortress" of the students had fallen. Police raided faculties and dormitories, arresting 30 students and reportedly injuring 47 others so severely that they required hospitalization. One of these students, Vedat Demircioğlu, fell into a coma due to police violence. Students alleged that the police threw Demircioğlu out of a window. News of this incident spread rapidly, prompting renewed student mobilization. University students from various institutions in Istanbul gathered in front of İTÜ and marched towards Taksim to protest the events. This marked a turning point for the FKF. FKF leaders and İTÜTB president Harun Karadeniz feared a more significant police crackdown and tried to prevent the crowd from heading towards Dolmabahçe. FKF and İTÜTB members even set up barricades to block the crowd. However, a DÖB-affiliated group, led by Deniz Gezmiş, used agitation to steer the crowd towards Dolmabahçe. Once there, revolutionary students threw U.S. soldiers they encountered into the sea. This incident was pivotal in diminishing the influence of TİP on FKF. TİP began to be perceived as too passive, paving the way for MDD ideology to dominate FKF and set the stage for its transformation into Dev-Genç. Shortly after these protests, news of Vedat Demircioğlu's death broke on July 17, 1968. He had succumbed to injuries sustained from police violence. His death reignited student protests. As clashes between police and students escalated into what resembled street battles, the government intervened by deploying military units to restore order.¹⁴

One of the "imperialist" targets of the student movement was Robert Komer, a former U.S. Secretary of State and subsequently appointed U.S. Ambassador to Turkey. Students referred to Komer as the "Butcher of Vietnam." From the moment Komer set foot in Turkey, he faced protests,

14 "Türkiye'de 1968," in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, 2084-2085. Yıldırım, *FKF*, 207-214.

starting with his reception at the airport. Weeks later, during a visit to METU to meet with the university's rector, Kemal Kurdaş, Komer parked his official vehicle, complete with diplomatic insignia, in front of the rector's office. The sight of his car immediately drew the students' attention. Within moments, a crowd gathered around the vehicle and began protesting. Among them were key student movement leaders such as Taylan Özgür, Sinan Cemgil, Yusuf Aslan, Ulaş Bardakçı, and İbrahim Seven. The group first overturned Komer's car and then set it on fire. The burning of Komer's car became a moment of jubilation for the students and quickly turned into a symbol of resistance. Over the years, it was frequently depicted in posters and imagery targeting "imperialism." By setting fire to Komer's car, the students symbolically crowned the series of protests against the U.S. Sixth Fleet, contributing to Komer's reassignment and achieving a symbolic victory in their fight against "American imperialism."¹⁵

However, this victory did not sit well with the government. The incident turned into a diplomatic crisis. In response, prosecutors issued a warrant for the gendarmerie to enter METU for the first time in search of the perpetrators. Subsequently, the university was closed by the rector for a month. Yet, the government's retaliation extended beyond legal measures. Most of the prominent figures involved in burning Komer's car would later be killed in different ways. The first victim was Taylan Özgür. He had returned to İÜ for the Istanbul University Student Union (İÜTB) elections, during which tensions flared near the campus. Taylan Özgür was shot and killed during the turmoil on September 23, 1969. Although his friends claimed that Özgür was shot by a police officer, the murder officially remained unsolved.

§ 2.2 The Intersection of Turkey's '68 Movement with Palestine

The heightened political polarization of the era had resulted in a multidimensional conflict, with distinct alignments and sharp divisions.

15 "Türkiye'de 1968," in *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, 2103-2104.

In particular, the convergence of conservative and nationalist groups' agendas with government policies created a common ground of mutual interests, solidifying their positions against the predominantly socialist student and youth movements. This alignment also brought about practices of violence targeting the student movement, primarily composed of self-identified socialist youth. The shift by right-wing groups towards "paramilitary" organization meant that the monopoly on violence was no longer solely held by the state, creating a disproportionately skewed landscape. The only significant form of protection for socialist students was the organizational control they maintained over their domains, with universities acting as "fortresses" of security. However, the protection these "fortresses" provided had clear limits, as exemplified by the deaths of Taylan Özgür and Vedat Demircioğlu. These were not isolated cases, as other incidents also reflected the deteriorating balance of violence against the student movement, pushing it towards adopting "weapons as a tool of defense."

However, this defensive stance did not constitute a sufficient political strategy for the student movement in terms of its ideological foundation and political consciousness. The intellectual and ideological guidance provided by the prominent thinkers and ideologues of the left shaped the movement's mindset. The "ideal of revolution" acted as the driving force behind the movement, with "revolution" occupying a central place in its collective mind, though its path and methods remained undefined. Not everyone within the movement shared the same vision, and there was a notable absence of a cohesive written discourse on alternative revolutionary paths in the movement. Despite this, seeds of alternative approaches persisted in the collective consciousness of the era's youth movement. These seeds largely centered on "armed struggle" as an alternative path. While the specifics of this approach remained ambiguous during 1968-1969, by 1970-1971, these ideas began to crystallize, leading to a clearer articulation of thoughts surrounding "armed struggle."

Hüseyin İnan was not immune to this trend. He harbored ideas about "armed struggle," which he discussed with a close circle and sought to act

upon. Although the concept of a “revolution through people’s war” existed as a nascent idea in İnan’s mind, definitive analyses or strategies were not formulated at that time. Nevertheless, the desire to shape these ideas through practical experience motivated İnan and his peers to seek opportunities to engage in armed struggle directly. Initially, inspired by the Cuban Revolution and the Vietnam War, their thoughts turned to obtaining training in these regions. However, geographical distance proved to be a significant obstacle, leading them to consider closer alternatives.

The nearest possibility for engagement lay with the Barzanis, who were involved in a “national struggle.” Taylan Özgür, before his death, had established contact with the Barzanis. However, the tribal structure and ideological orientation of the Barzanis were dismissed by the Ankara group as “feudal and reactionary,” eliminating this option. Thus, they were left with a viable alternative: Palestine, which gained popularity after March 1968.

Contrary to the common narrative in the literature, which often identifies figures such as Abdülkadir Yaşargün and his associates or Deniz Gezmiş and various student leaders in Turkey as the first figures to travel to Palestine, this claim does not align with historical accuracy. The first individual to venture to Palestine was Semih Dinç and his associates. Dinç, a student expelled from Kuleli Military High School for possessing Soviet newspapers (*Pravda* and *Izvestia*) and books on Nâzım Hikmet, had joined TİP in İzmir following his expulsion. However, the youth movement of the era, characterized by its activist stance, contrasted sharply with the theoretical and parliamentary focus of TİP, leading Dinç and his circle to perceive the party as “passivist.” Dissatisfied with TİP’s parliamentary approach, Dinç and his group were among those who turned toward “armed struggle.” Believing the Ba’ath Party to be socialist and a potential ally, Dinç and his group first crossed into Syria. Following discussions with leaders of the Syrian Communist Party, they decided to join the Palestinian resistance organization Fatah. By late March 1968, after meeting with Abdülislam, a Syrian Fatah representative fluent in Turkish, the group officially affiliated themselves with the organization.

Unlike later volunteers who tended to view their participation in Palestine as a temporary means to gain training in armed struggle before returning to Turkey, Dinç adopted a longer-term perspective. He became the longest-serving Turkish figure in Palestine, remaining there from 1968 to 1975. Over this period, he rose within the ranks of Fatah to become a close bodyguard of Abu Jihad (Khalil Ibrahim al-Wazir), the organization's second-in-command. Dinç also took on the responsibility of receiving Turkish groups who arrived to join the movement at various times. While Dinç harbored aspirations of encouraging trusted individuals from Turkey to join Fatah and later leveraging this experience to launch a revolutionary struggle in Turkey, these ideas never materialized in practice. Nonetheless, his prolonged and active engagement in Palestine laid the groundwork for subsequent connections between the revolutionary movement of Turkey and Palestinian resistance.¹⁶

Separate from the group led by Semih Dinç, Abdülkadir Yaşargün and Mustafa Çelik embarked on their own journey to Palestine. Yaşargün, who was first introduced to the TİP during his high school years in Gaziantep, became increasingly critical of what he perceived as the party's "parliamentarist" approach. This disillusionment led him to embrace the idea of "armed struggle." In October 1968, Yaşargün and Çelik traveled to Syria with the initial goal of approaching the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) consulate to enroll in Lumumba University. Believing that the university offered training in socialism and armed struggle, they were met with disappointment when their efforts failed. Left with limited options, the pair established contact with Fatah and joined it.¹⁷

However, tensions soon surfaced between Yaşargün and Semih Dinç. Yaşargün accused Dinç of being a spy and spread these allegations to others in Turkey. Dinç, in turn, characterized Yaşargün as an unruly and disruptive figure at the Fatah camp, citing his impulsive behavior and lack

16 Oktay Duman, *Devrimcilerin Filistin Günlüğü (1968-1975)*, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları), 34-53.

17 *Ibid*, 104-107.

of discipline. Despite these conflicts, Dinç claims that Fatah's leadership overlooked Yaşargün's shortcomings due to his ability to recruit participants from Turkey into their ranks. The circumstances surrounding Mustafa Çelik's fate remain contested. According to Yaşargün, Çelik was killed during an operation against Israeli forces. Dinç, however, claimed that Çelik died in 1969 during a training exercise at the Fatah camp.¹⁸

The first university students from Turkey's student movement to travel to Palestine were Deniz Gezmiş, Ömer Erim Süerkan, Cihan Alptekin, Yusuf Küpeli, and Selahattin Okur. Their journey was initiated by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which sought to establish connections with Turkey's youth movement. In response, leaders from the Ankara and Istanbul student movements convened and decided to engage with the DFLP, favoring its Marxist orientation rather than Fatah. In June 1969, the group traveled to Amman, Jordan, where they met with DFLP leader Nayef Hawatmeh. During their month-long stay, they received various forms of training before returning to Turkey. While the experience reinforced the belief in the necessity of armed struggle against imperialism for some of the participants, it also led to divergent views among them. Cihan Alptekin and Deniz Gezmiş opted to pursue one path, while the others chose different directions. Selahattin Okur later attributed his decision to part ways with Gezmiş's group to what he described as Gezmiş's "childish behavior," signaling underlying tensions within the group.¹⁹

In August 1969, Abdülkadir Yaşargün and Deniz Gezmiş returned to Turkey, unaware of each other. Yaşargün, having returned to Antep with the intention of recruiting more people, began discussing the idea of organizing an armed struggle in Turkey with his associates. Among those he approached with this idea was Celal Özcan. Özcan and Hüseyin İnan had become acquainted through the TİP, and İnan had been purchasing weapons from Antep with Özcan's assistance. This existing connection

18 Ibid, 64-67.

19 Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Denizler ve Filistin*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2011), 17-19. Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 255.

facilitated a meeting between İnan and Özcan when the former visited Antep. Given that İnan was already leaning toward armed struggle and seeking organizations that could provide weapons training, his conversations with Özcan and Yaşargün became pivotal in paving the way for the group's eventual connection to Palestine.²⁰

After their discussions, İnan invited Yaşargün and Özcan to meet the friends in Ankara, and the pair traveled there. During his time in Ankara, Yaşargün, along with Deniz Gezmiş—who had also recently returned from Palestine—shared their experiences at Fatah camps during the Middle East Technical University Student Union (METU ÖB) General Assembly and the FKF Extraordinary General Assembly. Yaşargün declared his intent to return to the Fatah camps and offered to take anyone interested in joining him. Following the General Assembly, Yaşargün and Özcan met with Hüseyin İnan and his associates at METU SFK. During this meeting, İnan expressed his desire to establish a connection with Palestine, marking a crucial step toward forging ties with Fatah.²¹

2.2.1 *The Fatah Experience of the Ankara and Antep Groups*

The death of Taylan Özgür marked a significant turning point for the Ankara group. The killing of their friend —likely by police gunfire—galvanized the group into action. Spurred by news from Abdülkadir Yaşargün, the Ankara group departed for Gaziantep by bus on October 10, 1969. The members traveling from Ankara, primarily from the METU circle, included Hüseyin İnan, Yusuf Aslan, Ahmet Tuncer Sümer, Mustafa Yalçiner, Alpaslan Özdoğan, İbrahim Seven, and Halil Çelimli. This group is referred to here as the Ankara group. Conversely, the participants traveling from Antep—Abdülkadir Yaşargün, Celal Özcan, Fevzi Yaşar, Cemal Bağcı, Recep Alpay, Halil Dayaç, Hasan Hulise Köse, and Ercan Kanar—are labeled the Antep group. The two groups converged in

20 Enis Rıza and Ebru Şeremetli, *Erikler Çiçek Açınca Nurhak'ı Hatırlamak: A. Tuncer Sümer Kitabı* (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2014), 30.

21 Feyizoğlu, *Denizler*, 30. Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 30.

Gaziantep before proceeding to Syria. During the journey, Hasan Hulise Köse and Halil Dayaç opted to part ways before crossing into Syria.²²

Abdülkadir was the only one who knew whom to contact and what path to follow, making him the de facto leader of the journey. To reach Palestine, the group first needed to cross the Turkey-Syria border. While Abdülkadir initially sought assistance from a smuggler he knew, the smuggler deemed it too risky to transport a group of thirteen people across the border. Given that the Turkey-Syria border was heavily mined, crossing at random points was impossible. When they approached another smuggler, he also refused to help move a group of thirteen but offered an alternative suggestion: "Take the train. Jump off as it crosses the border." Following the smuggler's advice, the group boarded a train and successfully crossed into Syria by jumping off as the train passed the border.²³

Upon arrival, Abdülkadir initiated discussions with Fatah officials. The group was subsequently directed to Bilhemi, an Fatah training camp near Damascus, where they arrived the following day. Although they expressed a desire to meet with Abu Jihad, they were informed that he was currently in Jordan. To travel to Jordan, they needed a permit signed by Fatah, which functioned as a de facto passport in both Syria and Jordan. Consequently, the group stayed in Damascus for a short period to secure the necessary documentation. Once the permits were obtained, they promptly traveled to Amman, Jordan, where they met Abu Jihad, a founding member of Fatah, a central committee member, and second only to Yasser Arafat in the organization's hierarchy.²⁴

During the meeting with Abu Jihad, the Arabic translation was handled by İbrahim Seven and Abdülkadir Yaşargün, while Hüseyin İnan served as the group's spokesperson. They brought along newspaper clippings to illustrate their anti-imperialist struggle in Turkey. Tuncer Sümer later recounted the discussion:

22 Feyizoğlu, *Denizler*, 31.

23 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 32-33.

24 Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 125-129.

“Hüseyin explained at length that we were organizing to wage an armed struggle against American imperialism in Turkey. He emphasized that we needed practical training and requested their assistance with guerrilla training, even stating that we were willing to join the fight against Israel if necessary. Abu Jihad listened attentively and responded, ‘I will provide you with these resources.’ However, as I recall, Abu Jihad also made an important point:

“Turkey is very different. The terrain, social structure, and organizational methods are distinct. We are not a Latin American-style guerrilla organization, so we cannot offer training in that style. However, we can provide you with general physical conditioning, weapons training, and instruction on how to conduct raids and other tactical operations.’ We agreed to the proposal.”²⁵

After the meeting, the group was hosted in Amman and taken the next day to the Zarqa Camp by Fatah. At the time, about a hundred Palestinian youth were undergoing training there. Zarqa Camp, the oldest Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, was established in 1949 for refugees who had fled following the 1948 war. Naturally, it had evolved into an organizational and military training hub for Fatah.

Zarqa Camp was the primary site where the group, which would later establish THKO, received its weapons and combat training. The training sessions were largely practical rather than focused on theoretical or tactical warfare. The aim was to instill discipline in both body and routine. Mornings began with early runs, followed by physical exercises and drills, and sessions on assembling and disassembling weapons. The training emphasized familiarity with weapons and physical conditioning but fell short of the group’s expectations.²⁶

While the group was aware that this would form the basis of their training, they had hoped for more advanced instruction in areas such as

25 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 35-36.

26 *Ibid*, 37.

ambush tactics, what to expect during armed confrontations, navigating mountainous terrain, evasion techniques, and methods of concealment. The lack of comprehensive tactical training was a significant shortfall for a group envisioning a rural-based armed struggle in Turkey's distinct terrain. This gap would reveal its adverse consequences nearly a year later.

The Ankara group observed the multi-faceted and ideologically diverse structure of Fatah. The organization operated as a broad coalition, encompassing various ideological tendencies and factions, including Islamist groups, Arab nationalist groups, and socialist groups. While the Muslim Brotherhood faction held significant influence within Fatah, the organization had also undergone notable ideological transformations over time. High-ranking leaders with Marxist orientations, such as Abu Jihad, the second-in-command, exemplified this shift. As a national liberation movement, Fatah emphasized that such ideological diversity was natural and advised their Turkish counterparts not to view it as a point of contention. This diversity was framed as a strength rather than a hindrance, aligning with the broader goals of anti-imperialist struggle. Yalçiner, reflecting on the Ankara group's experiences in Palestine, highlighted their maturity and ability to approach different cultural and religious values respectfully. This attitude demonstrated their adaptability and openness to the diverse environment they encountered within Fatah.²⁷

However, cultural and ideological differences created a degree of separation between the group from Turkey and the Palestinians. The group from Turkey spent much of their time apart from Palestinians, perceiving their training commander as ideologically insufficient and expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of strategic training they had hoped to receive. This gap in expectations led to challenges in their integration and fulfillment of training goals. Eventually, the group conveyed to the Fatah leadership that they deemed the basic training sufficient and requested a dedicated instructor solely for firearms

27 Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 129.

training. Additionally, the group proposed conducting their ideological training independently, tailored to their specific preferences and goals. In response, Fatah allocated a separate area for the Turkish group and provided the requested firearms instructor. From that point onward, the group organized their training schedules and guard duties according to their own needs, creating a more autonomous and self-directed environment.²⁸

2.2.2 *Swerve and Separation*

Although the group gained a measure of autonomy and was relocated to a separate area by Fatah, internal conflicts soon emerged. These issues manifested in two main ways: first, friction between the Antep and Ankara contingents, and second, problems on an individual level.

The group itself was composed of two subgroups—one from Antep and one from Ankara—each possessing its own cultural and ideological characteristics. Those from Antep came largely from rural or provincial backgrounds. While they had ties to TİP before, they were also influenced by the student movement, having distanced themselves from TİP’s political line. In contrast, the Ankara contingent consisted entirely of university students. These differences in origins shaped behaviors and attitudes. According to the Ankara group, those from Antep derided student activism by referring to it as “kantın devrimciliği” (cafeteria/canteen revolutionaries), implying a dismissive view of campus-based organizing. They also claimed that the shabby demeanor of Cemil Bağcı and the grumbling of Celal Özcan contributed to tensions. From the Antep group’s perspective, the Ankara contingent, composed of students, behaved arrogantly and looked down on them. Such incompatibilities and problematic conduct on both sides heightened the conflict between the two factions.²⁹

The issues within the group were not confined to the divide between the Antep and Ankara contingents; conflicts also arose within each

28 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 37-38.

29 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 39. Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 166.

subgroup. The lack of ideological unity and the absence of a well-defined organization with clear goals and boundaries exacerbated internal tensions. While those who traveled to Palestine shared certain expectations, what they encountered did not align uniformly with what each member had hoped to find.

Conflicts within the Ankara group emerged as early as their first days in the camp. İbrahim Seven, in particular, was criticized for his lack of discipline³⁰ and unrestrained comments. Over time, his dissatisfaction with the conditions led to further disruptions. During endurance training, for example, Seven refused to enter cold water and displayed defiant behavior. From Seven's perspective, Fatah offered nothing beyond conventional infantry training, which he considered irrelevant to the broader goals of organizing the masses. He believed the group should receive training tailored toward mobilizing and organizing the public, a perspective that put him at odds with Hüseyin İnan. Moreover, Seven questioned the ideological and revolutionary purpose of Fatah, characterizing its struggle as a nationalist conflict between Arabs and Jews rather than a revolutionary movement. These disagreements escalated to the point where Seven expressed his desire to leave the group entirely.³¹

Another notable example was Halil Çelimli, whose case diverges from others as it is rooted in an ideological debate. After reading William Pomeroy's *Guerrilla Warfare and Marxism*, Çelimli argued that guerrilla struggles, with the exception of Cuba, had not achieved success. He also criticized the inadequacy of the training they received at the camp, signaling his growing skepticism toward the idea of armed struggle. During the ensuing discussions, Çelimli pointed out that American forces had defeated guerrillas in the Philippines and that neither the USSR nor China had provided them with support. His implication was clear: if a guerrilla war were to unfold in Turkey, it was likely doomed to failure. This perspective created significant tension within the group, escalating

30 Demir Küçükaydın says that when İbrahim Seven went to the DFLP, he was similarly indisCIPLINED. See also: Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 281.

31 Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 130.

into a battle of words with Hüseyin İnan. Reportedly, İnan accused Çelimli of using theoretical arguments as a pretext to mask his cowardice. The heated debate strained the camp's already tenuous cohesion. Ultimately, Çelimli distanced himself from the group and began to act independently.³²

Individual issues were not confined to the Ankara group; similar challenges also emerged within the Antep group. Fevzi Yaşar expressed a desire to leave the camp, reportedly due to his offense to a joke made by the Palestinians. Recep Alpay was another member who wanted to depart. Ultimately, all individuals expressing such sentiments left the camp after some time.

At this critical juncture, Hüseyin İnan took on the responsibility of trying to unify the group and reintegrate them into the struggle. In an effort to dissuade İbrahim Seven from leaving, İnan told him: "We didn't come here to critique or intervene in these people's camp. Nor did we come to judge the Palestinians. We came to receive training for ourselves. Let's take whatever they offer, learn it, and then move on."³³ Despite İnan's efforts and conciliatory stance, his words were insufficient to prevent the departures.

Two weeks after the departures, the remaining group completed their training. They were relocated from Amman to a house atop a hill in the town of Salt, situated along the route to the Jordan Valley. Salt, a sparsely populated area, housed an Fatah weapons depot. The group resided there alongside a commander and two operatives. The subpar nutrition and hygiene conditions they had endured during training were replaced by more favorable circumstances. They traded their training uniforms for *fedayeen* attire—signifying guerrilla fighters—and began carrying weapons. A week later, they were transferred to the town of Suhne, near the Dead Sea, where they were housed in a citrus orchard villa equipped with a pool. This location, referred to as a *qaidah* (base), was a strategic site where the group began participating in operations and gaining

32 Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Hüseyin İnan / Erikler Çiçek Açtığı ZamanDede* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2014), 157.

33 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 39-40.

combat experience. Here, they engaged in clashes, particularly practicing harassment-style attacks, providing them with their first taste of direct combat tactics.³⁴

Their commander, known as Arab Faysal, would arrive at night, selecting certain members of the group and ordering them to prepare for night raids. Everyone in the group was eager to go to the frontlines and participate in these operations. Faysal often highlighted the determination of the group from Turkey as an example for the Palestinian fedayeen. Teams of up to fourteen were formed for these raids. They traveled by car to areas near the Jordan Valley (Sharia Valley), proceeding on foot from there. The raids and skirmishes predominantly occurred in the Sharia Valley region, extending to the Dead Sea. The town of Karameh, devastated by Israeli attacks, served as a crucial base for Fatah during these operations. Among the Ankara group, Alpaslan Özdoğan participated in eight raids, Mustafa Yalçiner in seven, and Tuncer Sümer in five. Fatah militants considered Özdoğan one of the best fighters and drivers in the group, which led to his frequent assignment to nighttime patrols. These engagements provided the core team that would later establish THKO with their first experience of live combat, marking a significant moment in their development as armed fighters.³⁵

The initial team, having undergone training and participated in combat, had reached a certain level of maturity. However, as mentioned earlier, various reasons led to several members departing, reducing the group's numbers. After approximately two months at the camp, Hüseyin İnan recognized the possibility of bringing a new group to continue the training. He proposed returning to Turkey to recruit and lead the new team, a suggestion that was unanimously accepted. It was decided that Hüseyin İnan from the Ankara group and Ercan Kanar from the Antep group would return to Turkey. With İnan's departure, the remaining members of the Ankara team—Alpaslan Özdoğan, Mustafa Yalçiner, Yusuf Aslan, and Tuncer Sümer—stayed behind in the camp. On November 9,

34 Ibid, 35.

35 Atilla Keskin, *Acılara Yenilmeyen Gülümseyişler*, 7th ed. (Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2008), 32. Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 42-43.

1969, Hüseyin İnan and Ercan Kanar, guided by Semih Dinç, crossed the border and made their way back to Turkey.³⁶

Hüseyin İnan's departure introduced significant challenges, particularly exacerbating the friction between the Antep and Ankara teams. Celal Özcan from the Antep group sought to leverage İnan's absence to assert himself as the leader of the group. However, the group lacked a formalized concept of leadership or a structured organizational framework. The Ankara group members were friends, and no predefined hierarchical structure had been agreed upon. Although Hüseyin held no official title, his role as an organizer and planner, coupled with his personality and demeanor, had established him as a natural leader within the group.

When Özcan attempted to assume leadership, the Ankara team strongly opposed him. In a heated discussion, they emphasized the absence of an official leadership role and argued against Özcan's suitability for such a position. They asserted that if any hierarchy existed, it was defined solely by the authority of Fatah. Özcan, in turn, responded by dismissively criticizing the Ankara team, accusing them of "canteen revolutionaries" and undermining their revolutionary credibility based on their student backgrounds. Özcan argued that genuine revolutionary struggle could only be carried out by rural peasants, a perspective influenced by the Antep group's predominantly rural origins. This ideological and cultural rift further deepened during debates over how to approach armed struggle in Turkey. The Antep group advocated for supporting an already established armed movement rather than initiating one themselves. In contrast, the Ankara group was committed to spearheading a armed struggle. These divergent perspectives strained the relationship between the two groups, leading to an irreparable divide.³⁷

Following these disputes, the Ankara team chose to separate from the shared base and relocate to a different one. Upon his return, Hüseyin İnan

36 Aydın Çubukçu, *Bizim '68*. 14th ed. (Istanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2014), 121. Feyizoğlu, *Hüseyin*, 157.

37 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 48.

made efforts to reconcile the two factions. However, the ideological and personal differences proved insurmountable, ultimately resulting in both groups deciding to proceed independently.³⁸

2.2.3 *Departure from Fatah: Promises and Unfulfilled Hopes*

When Hüseyin İnan returned to Turkey to assemble the second group, he already had certain names in mind. While some individuals were considered prior to his departure for Filistin, the two-month period in his absence opened opportunities to involve additional figures. İnan had strategically planned for this expansion. For instance, he intentionally did not include Atilla Keskin in the first group, ensuring Keskin could maintain connections and organize potential recruits for the second team. Prior to İnan's departure, Keskin had been nominated as the chairman of the SFK, a move designed to maintain their influence at METU. In consequence, a second group was formed under the Ankara group. The second group, consisting of Ahmet Müfit Özdeş, Ercan Enç, Hamid Yakup, Teoman Ermete, Bahtiyar Emanet, Ali Tenk, Hüseyin Elmacı, Halis Özkan and Yavuz Kaçar, Ahmet Erdoğan, Atilla Keskin and Kadir Manga, arrived in Amman on New Year's Day 1970.³⁹

When the second group settled in the Suhne camp and began their training, the routine largely mirrored that of the first group. They woke at dawn for morning runs, followed by breakfast, and then weapon training. However, their weapon training was limited to disassembling and reassembling firearms and theoretical lessons on their operation. Firing practice or using explosives was not feasible. Unlike the first group, the second group did not have access to a designated training camp, nor was a separate one established for them. Instead, their training occurred in a conflict-prone area, presenting significant constraints. Practicing with live ammunition would have revealed their position to Israeli forces,

38 Ibid.

39 Keskin, *Acılara*, 150-151.

inviting potential bombings. This constant risk severely restricted the scope of their training.⁴⁰

The second group's primary disadvantage was its lack of exposure to combat, operations, or tactical experience, a stark contrast to the first group. For the Ankara group, acquiring such practical combat experience was a top priority, making this a significant shortfall. On the other hand, the second group benefited from better conditions. The fedayeen stationed at the kaide (bases) during this period were well-fed, with fresh vegetables available daily. Additionally, they received abundant supplies of meat, canned goods, rice, and tea, often exceeding their needs. Moreover, the group was allocated a modest monthly stipend, which they chose to save rather than spend, intending to use these funds for their future struggle in Turkey. However, the disadvantages outweighed these advantages. Without the opportunity to gain critical combat training, there was no reason for the second group to continue to stay.⁴¹

Hüseyin İnan was dissatisfied with the conditions faced by the second group. Fatah had been reluctant to provide them with adequate weapons training and instead intended to deploy them directly into combat. İnan expressed his concerns to Abu Jihad, emphasizing that Fatah had initially promised a dedicated camp and specialized training but had instead Fatah desired to send the group to the frontlines. He also noted that the group's original expectations remained unfulfilled. The prevailing opinion within the group was that inexperienced members should not be sent to the battlefield, as doing so would likely result in unnecessary casualties. This perspective formed the basis of İnan's insistence. However, Abu Jihad held a different view, arguing that the best training could only occur on the frontlines, through real combat experience. While Abu Jihad eventually assured İnan that the group's requests would be met, these promises were never fulfilled.⁴²

The first group had the opportunity to undergo comprehensive weapons training in a dedicated training camp, but the second group,

40 Çubukçu, *Bizim*, 121-122.

41 Keskin, *Acılara*, 164-167.

42 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 51.

stationed near an active conflict zone, was deprived of such an experience. Their training was limited to physical exercises and weapons handling, with no live-fire or combat drills. Fatah's failure to fulfill its promises prompted the group to turn to the DFLP. The DFLP was not unfamiliar to student from Turkey, as a previous delegation, including prominent figures like Deniz Gezmiş and Yusuf Küpeli, had already established contact with the organization. Consequently, representatives from the second group traveled to Amman to meet with the DFLP leadership. However, what they encountered was starkly different from the Fatah camps they were accustomed to. The DFLP office was adorned with portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and many members wore Mao badges. Moreover, there was a significant presence of women in the DFLP ranks, a notable contrast to the predominantly male Fatah camps. Considering the Ankara group's ideological orientation and cultural values, the DFLP appeared to align more closely with their aspirations and worldview.⁴³

However, it was too late for meaningful collaboration. When the group met with a DFLP official, they were met with skepticism about why they had initially chosen a nationalist organization like Fatah. Despite Atilla Keskin's explanation that their relationship with Fatah was purely for weapons training and not based on ideological alignment, the response remained unchanged. The DFLP official explained currently had no active training camps. He suggested that they might establish a camp in a few months, but there were no guarantees. With their last hope dashed, the Ankara group recognized that Fatah would not fulfill its promises. A month after the second group's arrival, they decided to return to Turkey.⁴⁴

Fatah was reluctant to see the Ankara group leave. In an attempt to persuade them to stay, the organization offered two significant incentives: the possibility of being sent to Vietnam for further training or

43 Feyizoğlu, *Denizler*, 17.

44 Keskin, *Acılara*, 169-171.

being appointed as ranking officers within Fatah. However, these offers were not enough to change their minds.⁴⁵

Before departing, the group received a small cache of weapons, bombs, and explosives from Fatah. As they prepared to leave, they were bid farewell by Abu Khalid, a prominent figure within the organization. Abu Khalid suggested that small-scale sabotage operations targeting American facilities and foreign-owned petrol stations in Turkey could have a meaningful impact. As a token of remembrance, he gifted each member a single cartridge. With this farewell, the group set off on their journey back to Turkey.⁴⁶

§ 2.3 Conclusion

The student and youth movement that began in 1968 rapidly transcended its initial scope, moving beyond merely addressing student demands to actively participating in the struggles of the working and peasant classes and cultivating a practice of solidarity. Influenced by this engagement and the prevailing ideological debates of the period, the movement coalesced around the ideal of “revolution,” identifying “imperialism” as its primary adversary. While the student movement demonstrated a broad repertoire of actions and achieved significant objectives aligned with its goals, its progress was not without obstacles.

The alliance of right-wing governments, nationalist factions, and conservative groups emerged based on shared interests, and this alliance primarily targeted the ascending student movement. Nationalist and conservative groups subjected the student movement to armed and unarmed attacks, which were further compounded by violence from government-aligned police forces, heightening the sense of vulnerability among the students. In response to these threats, the practice of “using weapons for defensive purposes” began to take root and spread within the movement.

45 Duman, *Devrimcilerin*, 169.

46 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 51-52.

However, the student movement, now armed, soon found the defensive use of weapons insufficient for advancing the "revolutionary goals" it aspired to achieve. Against the backdrop of contemporary debates and the conditions they faced, many within the movement viewed "pacifist" methods as inadequate, leading to the emergence of the idea of "armed struggle." In line with this shift, numerous young activists turned their focus toward Palestine, the nearest locus of resistance. As evidenced by figures such as Semih Dinç, Abdülkadir Yaşargün, Hüseyin İnan, and Deniz Gezmiş, the rejection of "parliamentarism" and "pacifism" and the embrace of "armed struggle" were not isolated or unique tendencies but rather indicative of a broader and collective inclination within the movement.

Palestine holds a symbolic rather than a strictly geographical significance. For students who believed that revolution sought a form and a body, Palestine became the first destination on their journey. In reality, the groups did not geographically reach Palestine itself; instead, they attended camps organized by resistance movements like Fatah or the DFLP in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. While only a fraction of these individuals gained combat experience against Israel, and even fewer fought directly on Palestinian soil, their presence in these camps was still highly significant. For both sides, the involvement of students from Turkey symbolized the necessity of an international struggle against imperialism, underscoring the shared stakes in a broader "revolutionary movement".

The divisions experienced in the Fatah camps stemmed from the absence of a cohesive ideological unity, the lack of a shared Turkey-based organization, and cultural differences. These challenges had negative consequences, such as a reduction in group numbers and the failure to coalesce around a common struggle. However, the early occurrence of such issues and their resolution through separation proved beneficial by reducing the likelihood of similar challenges in future organizational efforts.

The Ankara group, which joined Fatah both to receive training and to "fight against Zionism and imperialism," managed to gain partial

experience despite not receiving the comprehensive training they had envisioned. The first group, having engaged in live combat and spent more time with Fatah, acquired significantly more practical experience in armed struggle compared to the second group.

Overall, the Palestinian experience served as a catalyst in shaping the form of struggle centered around “armed struggle.” It provided clarity to the Ankara group’s ideological outlook and laid the groundwork for the struggle they would later frame around the concept of “people’s war.” For the Ankara group, the Palestinian phase should be interpreted as a springboard that emboldened them and provided the impetus to pursue the struggle they envisioned.



3

A Search for a New Ideological Perspective

This chapter aims to reveal the ideological line of THKO by analyzing the texts of the movement's subjects. In the first part of the chapter, it analyzes two texts written by the Ankara group returning from Palestine and the text written by the Deniz Gezmiş group. It analyzes the article "Why Did I Go to Palestine?" by Yusuf Aslan, a member of the Ankara group, the article "To the Peoples of Turkey" by members of the group in prison, and the article "What the Days Ahead Will Bring" by the Deniz Gezmiş group. It examines the common themes emphasized by these texts and their implications for the future. THKO is a movement that

has left a very limited number of written texts. For this reason, these texts are pioneering texts that can be traced in the formation of the THKO world of thought. In these texts, the transformation of the 1968 student movement and its approach to forms of political violence are observed. Thus, it also reveals the uniqueness of the world of thought of Turkey's '68.

The second half of the chapter deals with Hüseyin İnan's pamphlet *The Path of Turkey's Revolution* and the second declaration of the THKO. Although İnan's pamphlet was written after the movement, it shows continuity with the three texts mentioned in the first part. In this context, it plays a summarizing role in understanding THKO's theoretical approach and puts the movement on its feet. The chapter analyzes the sources from which İnan's approach was inspired and how he differed from those sources in order to identify the unique points of the movement. It questions how the movement legitimized its position based on political violence and the method of revolution adopted by the movement. In the following section, he touches upon the views of the Yön/Devolution movement and Mihri Belli, who assigned a revolutionary role to the army. After this, the second declaration of the THKO is analyzed and it is argued how it differs from the two movements that influenced the ideological aspects of the movement. In this way, it identifies different findings for the debates in the literature.

§ 3.1 From Palestine to Diyarbakır: The Revolutionary Quest of the 68 Generation and the Intellectual Traces of THKO

The Ankara group, led by Hüseyin İnan, reentered Turkey from Palestine via Syria. During this period, several members left the group without prior notice. In an effort to continue on to Ankara, the group decided to employ various modes of transportation, ultimately splitting into smaller units. One segment was apprehended by the police in Diyarbakır, prompting heightened security measures when authorities discovered weapons and ammunition supplied by Fatah. Over several days in detention, this segment was subjected to torture during

interrogations. Meanwhile, local and national media outlets circulated unfounded claims that the group's goal was to bomb the Diyarbakır Faculty of Medicine. In response, and to clarify their actual intentions, the group issued two written statements.⁴⁷

The first statement was authored by Yusuf Aslan, who was arrested along with Savaş Al, unaware that the other faction of the group had already been taken into custody. Aslan was also tortured for days; however, since the interrogating officers failed to establish a link between him and his detained friends, he was eventually released.⁴⁸ The second statement originated from the Ankara contingent held in Diyarbakır Prison. Taken together, these statements hold significant analytical value for understanding how the political outlook of a faction emerging from the '68 student movement underwent transformation, how they sought to unite the struggles of Palestine and Turkey under a shared framework, and how they constructed their ideological foundations.

3.1.1 *A Call to People's War Against Imperialism*

In response to the media's attempt to discredit the group captured in Diyarbakır, Yusuf Aslan wrote an article titled "*El-Fetih'e Niye Gittim?*" ("Why Did I Go to Fatah?") in *Ant Haftalık Dergi*. The article aimed to explain the struggle of the Fatah against imperialism, the torture experienced by Ankara group who returned to Turkey after receiving training in the Fatah and to refute the allegations against them.

Today in the Middle East the Arab Peoples are waging an anti-imperialist war against Israel, the outpost of American Imperialism. This war is part of the revolutionary struggle waged by the peoples oppressed by imperialism in Asia, Africa, Latin America and all over the world.

The war against imperialism is a common war of all the peoples of the world. Every bullet fired against imperialism in Vietnam,

47 *Milliyet*, 1970, 3-8 February. *Cumhuriyet*, 1970, 3-8 February.

48 "Diyarbakır'da 4 sabotajcı daha tutuldu", *Milliyet*, 6 February 1970, 1.

the Middle East and Latin America is also fired for the liberation of the people of Turkey.

In today's conditions, especially in the Middle East, where imperialism has turned into a hot war zone, it is one of the main conditions for all peoples, Turkey, Iran, Arab, Cypriot, and Kurdish peoples, to establish an anti-imperialist front, to form the Middle East Revolutionary Circle, to strike a crushing blow against imperialism.⁴⁹

Aslan underscores that the conflict in Palestine extends beyond opposition to Israel and encompasses a struggle against American imperialism. Building on this premise, he connects the broader anti-imperialist campaign to Turkey, suggesting that efforts to combat imperialism ultimately advance the emancipation of the Turkish people as well. Consequently, he argues that the peoples of the Middle East must establish a united revolutionary front against imperialism. At the same time, he implies that the revolutionary movement in Turkey must transcend its purely national character and embrace an international dimension. Reflecting on his own experience, he remarks: "That is why I went to Fatah to go through the practice of the revolutionary struggle that has been going on in the Middle East for years and to contribute as a soldier to the liberation struggle of the oppressed Arab peoples."⁵⁰ By doing so, he highlights his concrete participation in a process that validates his theoretical assertions and underscores its legitimacy for revolutionaries.

In the article, Aslan further emphasizes that Fatah's leadership includes Marxist-Leninists, has effectively forged a worker-peasant alliance, and has secured support from segments of the petty bourgeoisie. He presents this configuration as a blueprint that THKO aspires to implement in Turkey in the future. He also notes that even reactionary Arab regimes felt compelled to endorse the Palestinian cause at the time. Given that the piece was written before Black September, the

49 Yusuf Aslan, "El-Fetih'e Niye Gittim" *Ant Haftalık Dergi* 165 (February 24, 1970): 6.

50 Ibid.

tension between Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization had not yet materialized. In the subsequent sections, Aslan extols the virtues of a people's war, thus reinforcing his overarching revolutionary argument.

The one who goes to Palestine sees the power of the people's war and how the imperialists are right to fear the people's war. One sees how the people are organized and conscious in armed struggle and how they successfully fight against imperialism. One believes once again that the determined struggles of the peoples of the world against the barbarities and superior armed power of imperialism will continue and will surely result in lasting victories.⁵¹

Aslan's emphasis on "people's war" and his defense of its legitimacy are significant for illustrating how the student movement of the period diverged from both its narrowly defined student-based demands and its limited repertoire of actions. In proposing this alternative form of struggle—one he identifies explicitly as a people's war—Aslan not only underscores a different strategic path but also aligns himself with a discourse that was widely debated among national and international socialist intellectuals of the time. Moreover, his experience in Palestine appears to have reinforced his adoption of this rhetoric in practical terms, reflecting the deeper influence the era had on his worldview.

At the same time, the movement's chief ideologue, İnan, had not yet produced a theoretical text of his own. The earliest such work was an eight-page document written in Diyarbakır Prison, which, although no longer extant, is known to have formed the basis for İnan's later pamphlet, *Türkiye Devriminin Yolu* (The Path of Turkey's Revolution). In essence, Aslan's presentation of people's war as an effective strategy against imperialism demonstrates that, despite the absence of a commonly adopted theoretical text at that stage, the group possessed a coherent ideological core. His endorsement of a people's war against

51 Ibid.

imperialism further served as a call to the socialist student public of the era. By taking into account the student movement's strong anti-imperialist stance, Aslan invited activists to move away from passive forms of protest and toward a mode of struggle predicated on political violence.

In the remainder of the article, Aslan contends that the "collaborationist government"—aligned with imperialist forces—dispatched a delegation to Cairo in order to cultivate a favorable impression among the Turkish populace. Concurrently, however, he argues that the same government subjected Turkish revolutionaries who had gone to support Arab peoples to torture. By citing his own experience of torture, Aslan aims to expose what he regards as the government's contradictory stance on the Palestinian cause.

One and a half months after I returned to my hometown, I was arrested at Kargamış Station on first of February because I had traveled abroad without permission. I was interrogated under torture for four days, first at the gendarmerie station and then at the Gaziantep Police Department. The mildest tortures were falaka for hours, shining a light in the eyes and pulling out hair...⁵²

In the remainder of the article, Aslan asserts that the tortures orchestrated by the ruling classes will not succeed in discouraging revolutionaries. He then points to the case of his comrades who were arrested in Diyarbakır, dismissing the charges brought against them as baseless. In his view, the government's primary objective in making these allegations was to undermine their credibility in the public eye.

The purpose is clear: To portray the revolutionaries as adventurers and anarchists, to make the people of the East suspicious of the just struggle of the Arab peoples and to sow discord in the brotherhood of the Kurdish and Turkish peoples with the rumor of sabotage against the Faculty of Medicine, which was established with difficulty in Eastern Anatolia.

52 Ibid.

It should be clearly known by the ruling cliques who are the organizers of this game: Our war is against imperialism and its collaborators, the disgrace of our age; it is part of the resistance of the oppressed peoples of the world and will continue until imperialism is kicked out of the Middle East and disappears from the world.⁵³

The phrase “the medical faculty, established with great difficulty in the East” essentially reflects Yusuf Aslan’s conviction that the Eastern region remained underdeveloped. However, he did not mention who had responsibility. A broader look at the text and consideration of Aslan’s ideological position suggests that he holds imperialism and the ruling classes responsible. One can also detect traces of the “developmentalist” approach—an outlook that framed much of the socialist debate in Turkey during this period, especially through the MDD theses. The reference to “great difficulty” thus indicates the influence of developmentalist discourse on THKO’s ideological background.

The socialist movement of the period developed various perspectives on the national question. THKO would also develop its own solution proposal based on these perspectives that moved away from the axis of denial of the national question. With these developments, the Kurds of Turkey were able to find representation within the student and socialist movement of the period. Since the national question intersected with the grassroots search of the revolutionary movement of the period, Aslan was aware of this and emphasized brotherhood rhetoric. Since Aslan's and the Ankara group's understanding was based on the dichotomy of the peoples' struggle against imperialism, this discourse put forward an international struggle project based on the peoples of the Middle East. In this sense, THKO also adopts a future-oriented international projection instead of an understanding of socialism stuck in the national sphere.

Aslan’s chief aim in this text is to counteract the media’s distorted narrative and clarify the group’s objectives to the revolutionary public. Yet the text ventures beyond this immediate goal, adopting a form

53 Ibid.

reminiscent of a micro-manifesto. When interpreted in tandem with other writings produced by the movement, Aslan's text offers clear evidence of a shared ideological unity within THKO.

3.1.2 *From Diyarbakır "To the Peoples of Turkey"*

This time, the group imprisoned in Diyarbakır wrote a declaration, only a week after Yusuf Aslan's article. The statement, which had similar emphases to Aslan's article, was published in the journals *Ant*⁵⁴ and *Türk Solu*. "*Türkiye halklarına...*" ("To the Peoples of Turkey..."), the declaration's introduction denies the allegation of sabotage against the Faculty of Medicine, claiming that this was a baseless plot by the government and the police.

Our innocence is as legitimate as our oppression, as sacred as the sweat of our brow. Our only crime is that we are the children of an underdeveloped country and that we know what imperialism is. The fact that we are aware of the realities of Turkey, that we know the games that imperialism is plotting all over the world and that we fight against imperialism is being made to look like a crime in Turkey, which is an underdeveloped country.

We went to Palestine to support the just struggle of the peoples of the Middle East against imperialism, the scourge of the peoples of the world. Our aim was to support the liberation of the Arab peoples on the one hand and to fulfill some of our duties as revolutionaries from Turkey on the other.⁵⁵

The declaration draws attention to the fact that Turkey is a backward country and says that imperialism is the perpetrator of the backwardness of the country. Drawing attention to the common fate of the Arab peoples and the peoples of Turkey in the subtext due to imperialism, the declaration argues that revolutionaries who wanted the independence of

54 Hüseyin İnan et al., "Tutuklu 11 Gencin Türkiye Halklarına Bildirisi", *Ant Haftalık Dergi* 166 (March 3, 1970): 4-5.

55 Hüseyin İnan et al., "Türkiye Halklarına" *Türk Solu* 120 (March 3, 1970): 10.

the country and fought against imperialism were punished for this reason. In the understanding of the group that wrote the article, an opposition is constructed between revolutionaries and imperialism, while the role assigned to the government here is “collaborationism.”

The article goes on to claim that since imperialism cannot tolerate the solidarity of the peoples of the Middle East, it is plotting a plan against revolutionaries through its collaborators. It states that the government tries to portray revolutionaries as “hired agents” and “saboteurs” with its propaganda apparatus.

We were subjected to more than 150 hours of torture. Pre-prepared testimonies were made us sign and turned into criminal files. The aim was to involve the entire revolutionary movement in Turkey in this plot and to create an atmosphere of fascist terror through mass arrests. Days of torture and inhumane practices were reflected to the judicial authorities as 'we are deepening the investigation'.

All this: Six days of torture, thousands of beatings with batons, sticks, swearing and countless statements, all to protect the interests of the collaborators and their partners.

We want to make this point clear to the peoples of Turkey: The allegations that we are going to bomb or sabotage here or there are LIES, DELIBERATE, and a PLOT.⁵⁶

It is essential to interpret this period in the context of significant political polarization. In this polarized climate, student movements had shifted considerably to the left and defined themselves as revolutionary, while those labeled “fascist” were predominantly Islamist and nationalist groups. Against this backdrop, nationalist and Islamist movements—acting in collaboration with the government—launched attacks on leftist students at universities. As a result, socialist students occupied one side of the polarization, with the government and Islamist-nationalist groups on the other.

56 Ibid.

Against this setting, the group under discussion attributes the media portrayal of their activities, as well as their subsequent arrests, to a broader narrative. In their view, the ultimate goal is “to create an atmosphere of fascist terror against all revolutionaries in Turkey.” Yet, this interpretation appears somewhat overstated. While the Ankara group remained in custody, the judiciary and the government were still attempting to discern the group’s real objectives. Having not previously confronted an armed group grounded in political violence, the government lacked a clear precedent. Although the prosecutor’s office alleged that the group intended to “blow up the medical faculty,” it failed to present concrete evidence to support this charge.

Moreover, despite the government’s general inclination to suppress student movements, it soon recognized that this particular group did not resemble a typical student organization. Although their membership in Dev-Genç and connection with Fatah was known, the group’s main objective was unresolved, leaving the authorities without any established reference point for legal action. However, the declaration implied that all the subjects it saw against them were united in a common cause. When the group was released a few months later, it would become clear that not all subjects within the government were acting with the same political baggage. Because although the judge knew the ultimate aim of the Ankara group, he would not take a position against them.

Saying that the allegations are lies and conspiracy, the declaration claimed that the main aim is to loosen the link between the revolutionary struggle of the Arab peoples fighting against Israel, imperialism’s outpost in the Middle East, and the revolutionary struggle of the peoples of Turkey.

No matter how serious the imputed crime is, no matter how much the persecution increases, we will never turn back from our revolutionary fight. Our fight is part of the revolutionary struggle of the peoples of the world. This plan of imperialism and its collaborators will also fail. We will walk our revolutionary path with determination, faith, and stubbornness until the end. (...) LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE OF OUR PEOPLE

AND ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD DIRECTED TOWARD
VICTORY!⁵⁷

The group's declaration in Diyarbakır and Yusuf Aslan's article were generally similar and complementary. Although both articles were written to refute the allegations, they also called the revolutionary community to a new line of struggle. Although this was not explicitly stated, the originality of the Ankara group's experience in Palestine was striking for revolutionary communities. This would already attract the attention of revolutionary spheres and encourage them to visit the İnan group to learn about this experience firsthand.

An analysis of the two writings in question reveals the core concepts shaping THKO's ideological formation: "anti-imperialism," "people's war," "revolutionary struggle," and "internationalism." By linking Turkey to the revolutionary movements in the Middle East, the group shifts their intended national revolution onto an international plane centered around opposition to imperialism. They seek to reinforce this approach through their firsthand experience of the people's war in Palestine, and they propagate the idea among socialist circles in Turkey that this mode of struggle represents the essence of revolutionary action. In İnan's later formulations, these concepts will be articulated even more explicitly.

Another effect of the declaration was to disrupt the alleged media propaganda. The people of Diyarbakır generally adopted a protective attitude towards their friends who visited the İnan group in prison. When locals realized that the visitors were being followed by National Intelligence Organization of Turkey (MİT, *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) agents, they preferred to warn and protect them. Other prisoners in the prison treated the Ankara group with respect. Overall, this is in contrast to the emphasis on the opposition between the people and the revolutionaries that serves the discourse of romantic revolutionaries.⁵⁸

The group's earlier activities in Palestine—fighting against Israeli forces and supporting anti-imperialist struggles—also drew widespread

57 Ibid.

58 Sümer, *Adsız*, 61-63.

attention. Their ability to carry revolutionary action across national borders was rare, inspiring many from different segments of society. As a result, Diyarbakır Prison became a site of constant visits from members of the Dev-Genç, TİP, and other left-leaning communities.⁵⁹

A diverse group of supporters—students, teachers, civil servants, and workers—came to discuss political ideas and exchange views with the Ankara group during prison. Some sought advice about joining the Palestinian struggle, but Hüseyin İnan emphasized the importance of focusing on local organizing efforts in Turkey. Especially, İnan took this as an opportunity to make propaganda for glorifying the people's war. These discussions highlighted the urgency of political violence strategies, leading to deeper theoretical debates within the prison walls.⁶⁰

While THKO is sometimes characterized as a movement driven solely by practice, the Ankara group used their time in prison to refine their ideological foundations further. Their internal discussions produced an eight-page pamphlet that later shaped *The Path of Turkey's Revolution*—a text authored by Hüseyin İnan before his execution and regarded as central to the group's strategic vision.⁶¹

Ultimately, the group knew what kind of a line of struggle it would pursue in Turkey after returning from Fatah. The origins of the split between İbrahim Seven and Hüseyin İnan, which resulted in Seven's departure from the group, as well as the split with the Antep group, were always shaped by the debates on the form of the revolution in Turkey. With the emergence of the eight-page theoretical text, the way of carrying out the revolution had taken on a written form. However, this again led to a split. Ercan Enç and Müfit Özdeş disagreed with the group and chose to leave. Özdeş and Enç would later join the Proletarian Revolutionary Aydınlık (PDA, *Proleter Devrimci Aydınlık*). Anyone who wanted could leave the group freely since the group did not yet have a defined program and statute, so there were no sanctions. Hüseyin İnan gave this text to

59 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 69.

60 Keskin, *Acılara*, 209. Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 67-70.

61 Sümer, *Adsız*, 63-64.

Yusuf Aslan and Gülay Ünüvar and asked them to read it only to trustworthy people who were likely to join the movement. Now, the organization could move forward with a straightforward program.⁶²

3.1.3 *The Ideological Convergence of Deniz Gezmiş and the Ankara Group*

The student movement in Istanbul was at a high level. There were frequent clashes between students and the police, Islamist and nationalist groups. At a time of high tension, first Mehmet Büyüksevinç was killed on December 8, 1969, and then Battal Mehmetoğlu was killed on December 14 as a result of an armed attack by a nationalist group. On December 15, the students organized a protest to commemorate their murdered friends. The protest turned into an urban war between students and the police with the intervention of the riot police. Military troops also intervened in the events, and Istanbul Governor Vefa Poyraz withdrew the police to prevent the events from escalating. Following these events, the National Youth Organization of Turkey (TMGT, *Türkiye Milli Gençlik Teşkilatı*) building was raided, Deniz Gezmiş and Cihan Alptekin were detained, then arrested and placed in Istanbul Sağmalcılar Prison.⁶³

This period represented a crossroads for them. There were ongoing discussions among students about the armed movement, and this situation was reflected in DÖB. On June 1, 1970, a manifesto published in *İleri*, the official magazine of the Dev-Genç, was an essential example of this. The title of the manifesto was "*Önümüzdeki Günlerin Getirecekleri...*" ("What the Days Ahead Will Bring...") and the signatures under it were Deniz Gezmiş, Cihan Alptekin, Ömer Güven, İbrahim Öztaş and Rıfki Ertuğrul. The declaration began as follows:

The youth protests, which have been intensifying since 1968, have entered a new period this year, undergoing a major qualitative change. Professional revolutionary cadres have been trained,

62 Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, 2169. Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 73.

63 Agit Cihan, *Devrimin Önsözü Deniz Gezmiş*, 1st ed. (Yeni Dönem Yayıncılık, 2010), 95-96.

organic ties have been established with the peoples of the world fighting against imperialism, and most importantly, the first steps towards militant organization have been taken. These are positive developments of the new period. On the contrary, the triad of American imperialism - collaborator capital - feudal landlordism have turned towards silencing the revolutionaries with weapons, prisons have been filled with revolutionaries in numbers never seen in any period and some pacifist intellectual tendencies calling themselves revolutionaries have embarked on defeatist activities in our ranks. The ruling classes, alarmed by the impact of the revolutionary struggle in Palestine in our country, have prepared despicable plots against our revolutionary brothers who fought against imperialism in Palestine with a number of provocations. The coming period is the period when the counter-revolution will increase its armed attack and the ruling classes will resort to fascist methods. The political line of each period cannot succeed unless it is combined with a consistent military path. What should we do in this period?⁶⁴

The group's declaration contends that youth activism has entered a new phase. It asserts students are no longer a transient assembly that mobilizes only for its own immediate interests; rather, certain individuals have emerged who possess the commitment and gravity necessary to dedicate their entire lives to revolutionary objectives. According to the declaration, these individuals are not merely articulating anti-imperialist rhetoric but are also putting it into practice. Recognizing this development as a genuine threat, the declaration claims that imperialist forces and their collaborators have responded with armed assaults against revolutionaries, resorted to imprisonment, and even introduced "so-called" revolutionaries advocating pacifism into the ranks as a means of disrupting the struggle. The group further warns that what awaits committed revolutionaries now is an escalation of attacks and potentially death.

64 Deniz Gezmiş et al., "Önümüzdeki Günlerin Getirecekleri...", *İleri* 3 (June 1, 1970): 31.

From the document's perspective, passive forms of protest no longer hold any promise for revolutionaries and may even undermine them. In response, the declaration posits that the sole viable strategy is the "military path," or armed struggle. Manifesto claims that, confronted with a ruling class organized at the state level—supported by a counter-guerrilla apparatus—revolutionaries must employ weapons not simply as a defensive measure but as a principal revolutionary instrument. This, the group argues, represents a critical turning point. Student-oriented organizations such as DÖB and Dev-Genç had not been founded for the explicit purpose of armed struggle; consequently, new organizations would need to be formed to fulfill this objective.

It went on to list five points on what should be done:

- 1- We must give importance and speed to militant organization.
- 2- We must neutralize the armed aggression of the counter-revolutionaries and be prepared for every form of struggle.
- 3- We must further tighten our ties with the peoples of the world who fight imperialism, this bond will be established in the strongest and most solid way through the struggle against imperialism in our country.
- 4- We must expose and neutralize the defeatist pacifist and petty-bourgeois intellectual tendencies in our ranks.
- 5- To be the organizer of the spontaneous movements of the masses of workers and peasants and to bring them to the proletarian revolutionary political level.

Marxists are revolutionaries in every period. The best Marxist is the one who combines his revolutionary anger with his practice at every stage of the struggle. The task of every revolutionary is to make a revolution.⁶⁵

In this manifesto, the Deniz Gezmiş group appears to be implicitly calling out to Hüseyin İnan's group. The emphasis on Palestine serves as

65 Ibid.

evidence that they had not forgotten them, and the rhetoric of imperialist aggression against revolutionaries aligns with the themes echoed by Yusuf Aslan and the Ankara contingent in their own writings. Nevertheless, the call here is not a formal, explicit appeal but rather a figurative one, since the two groups had not yet achieved a fully synchronized ideological stance. Both had drawn on the dominant MDD ideology of the time and had been inspired by various contemporary revolutionary movements. They were acquainted through shared participation in different student protests. However, the eight-page theoretical text authored by İnan had not yet reached the Gezmiş group, so despite the similarities in perspective, their convergence was still incomplete. Because the manifesto was composed in prison and subject to censorship, the language remained guarded; yet it still betrays parallels between the two groups' evolving ideas.

In essence, the manifesto presented a stark choice between life and death to the politicized student movement: aligning with a militant strategy and rejecting pacifism was portrayed as essential for survival, whereas clinging to pacifism would, it was argued, enable the ruling classes to destroy revolutionaries through fascist methods. This militant vision broke with the traditional repertoire of student activism, urging a more radical course of action—a “military line” closely aligned with the “people’s war” framework espoused by İnan’s faction. Much like İnan’s thought, the manifesto underscores the importance of organizing among workers and peasants, infusing them with political consciousness, and advocating a global anti-imperialist struggle in solidarity with other nations. It proposes that the most effective way to combat imperialism is through a resolute internal campaign. Although the two groups remained formally distinct, their conceptual toolkit—centered on themes such as anti-imperialism, revolution, and armed struggle—clearly overlapped. Recognizing these parallels after the manifesto’s publication, Hüseyin İnan’s group would make deliberate efforts to establish closer ties.

Deniz Gezmiş and Cihan Alptekin were sent from Sağmalcılar Prison in Istanbul to Bursa on June 10, 1970, and handed over to Bursa Prison Prosecutor Ali Haydar Cengiz. Bursa Prison was better for Gezmiş and

Alptekin because Ali Haydar Cengiz was associated with the TIP. He made it easier for them to meet with the outside world. At that time, Gezmiş and Alptekin had differences of opinion with their friends in the DÖB. Deniz Gezmiş and Cihan Alptekin sent a letter to Mustafa Lütfi Kıyıcı and Mustafa İlker Gürkan from the DÖB and ended it with the phrase “Long live the victory of the people’s war” and made their position clear. However, neither Kıyıcı nor Gürkan thought like Gezmiş and Alptekin. They felt that armed struggle could not succeed and that student protests were limited. The result of this inevitably pointed to a split. The ideological divergence led Alptekin and Gezmiş to part ways with the DÖB. However, this separation would not be limited to the two of them; they would also try to attract people they trusted to the path of armed struggle.⁶⁶

Yusuf Aslan and Günay Ünüvar felt they were being left alone and decided to visit them monthly in Bursa. In this way, relations between the İnan group and Gezmiş-Alptekin progressed. Apart from ideological affinity, personal relationships were among the most critical factors in Deniz Gezmiş and his friends getting closer to the İnan group. As relations between the groups improved, Hüseyin İnan sent a message from Diyarbakır Prison to Bursa Prison and invited them to fight in his group. Before this invitation, letters were exchanged between the two groups. Yusuf Aslan gave the letters to Fatih Uludere, who forwarded them to the Deniz Gezmişs. Aslan received a positive response to his invitation letter that day. Gezmiş and Alptekin would join the struggle alongside the İnans, confirmed by a letter Deniz Gezmiş wrote to İnan afterward. All those mentioned in the declaration published in the magazine *İleri*, except Ömer Güven, would take part in establishing THKO. Deniz Gezmiş, the most popular name in the student movement at the time, joined İnan's group, which not only increased interest and sympathy for the group, but also helped it gain new members.⁶⁷

66 Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Deniz Bir İsyancının İzleri*, 1st ed. (Belge Yayınları, 1991), 208-209.

67 Sümer, *Adsız*, 64.

§ 3.2 The Ideological Foundations of THKO: İnan's Vision

Doğan Avcıoğlu's *The Order of Turkey (Türkiye'nin Düzeni)* and Mihri Belli's *National Democratic Revolution (Milli Demokratik Devrim)* played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual climate of their time. The student movement, which transcended the narrow focus on student-specific demands, drew upon these two works to ground both its broader ideological framework and its repertoire of actions. Consequently, these writings also had a significant impact on the development of Hüseyin İnan's worldview. Although his pamphlet, *The Path of Turkey's Revolution (Türkiye Devriminin Yolu)*, clearly bears the imprint of these earlier texts, it diverges from them on a number of key points, reflecting İnan's evolving theoretical perspective.

In İnan's analysis of the country and class analysis, it can be said that he remained faithful to these two sources for the most part. According to İnan, the reactionary classes in alliance with imperialism in Turkey are the collaborationist bourgeoisie, the commercial bourgeoisie, the landlords and the intermediary classes. The moneylenders and notables (*eşraf*) are on the side of imperialism and on the enemy side because they make profits in the distribution of industrial products and in the agricultural sector and keep small producers, poor peasants and the agricultural proletariat under control. The civil-military (high) bureaucrats, on the other hand, side with the reactionary classes because of their economic interests. Some well-off artisans and craftsmen are portrayed as reactionary because they have the opportunity to move up a class. With his analysis of the civil-military bureaucracy and artisans and craftsmen, he differs from Belli with slight nuances. In Belli's alliance system, the door is somewhat open to these classes and strata.⁶⁸

According to İnan, the progressive classes positioned against the reactionaries are the working class, semi-proletariat, agricultural

68 Hüseyin İnan, *Türkiye Devriminin Yolu*, (İstanbul: Ulusal Kültür, 1991), 14-15.

proletariat and poor peasants. He argues that even if the middle and rich peasants cannot be included in the alliance due to their reactionary tendencies, they should be neutralized. İnan states that it is important for revolutionaries to organize the lumpenproletariat and include them in the alliance. The urban petty bourgeoisie consists of civil servants, technocrats, teachers, peddlers, self-employed people, artisans and craftsmen. He includes these classes, excluding artisans and craftsmen (except for those tending towards proletarianization), in the "National Front" (*Milli Cephe*). He continues the influence of Avcıoğlu and Belli by saying that the artisans acted shifty in the Turkish War of Independence and should not be trusted. However, unlike them, he refrains from including them in the alliance.⁶⁹

Stating that there was hardly any national bourgeoisie and national industry under its control in Turkey, İnan says that independent capitalist enterprises could not develop because imperialism controlled all investment areas. Here he acts on Belli's arguments. However, he does not include class analysis because the national bourgeoisie is very small and, unlike Belli, he does not open an alliance space for it.⁷⁰

Belli argues that in the West, the bourgeoisie once served as a revolutionary class, carrying out the democratic revolution by mobilizing all available forces in the struggle against feudalism. However, he maintains that in countries where the democratic revolution remains unfinished, there is no longer a bourgeois class capable of fulfilling such a revolutionary role. Consequently, Belli deems the concept of a National Democratic Revolution more appropriate for an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle. According to this view, nations that have not yet achieved a democratic revolution remain under the yoke of imperialism, which aligns itself with reactionary classes—in other words, the collaborationist bourgeoisie and feudal landowners. In this framework, opposing feudalism becomes tantamount to opposing imperialism,

69 Ibid, 18-24.

70 Ibid, 9-10.

thereby making the National Democratic Revolution an unavoidable necessity.⁷¹

Hüseyin İnan sees the MDD as an alliance of oppressed classes and strata in political struggle. According to him, the revolutionary step required to solve the fundamental contradiction in Turkey can be achieved with the ideological infrastructure offered by the MDD. Since the country is under the yoke of imperialism, he sees the fundamental contradiction as the contradiction between imperialism and the masses of the people. According to İnan, imperialism is in alliance with all reactionary classes and strata in different relations of production. Therefore, the struggle must be waged against this reactionary structure in its political, economic, and ideological aspects. The fundamental criterion here is the question of class alliance. The alliance system of the SD is different from that of the MDD. He claims that while the basic opposition in the labor-capital contradiction is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the factor of imperialism makes this impossible in Turkey and forces a broad alliance.⁷²

In the process of implementing this policy, he argues that a dual organization is necessary to lead the masses of the people to revolution. These are the working-class organization and the people's army. These two forms of organization are indispensable tools in İnan's MDD. For this reason, he says that the task of revolutionaries is to "work according to the organization of the masses of the people based on these two means."⁷³

The only criterion that determines the existence and strength of the people's war is the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the organization in the political struggle, which is the armed force of the people. The development of the people's army can only be achieved at a level where the politics of violence is taken as a basis. A struggle not based on the politics of violence cannot

71 Mihri Belli, *Milli Demokratik Devrim*, (Aydınlık Yayınları, 1970), 20-21.

72 İnan, *Türkiye*, 32.

73 Ibid, 39.

be called a people's war, and the organization shouldering the struggle cannot be called a people's army.⁷⁴

The People's Liberation Army of Turkey, therefore, sets out to wage struggle based on the politics of violence. İnan legitimizes the people's war by stating that due to the formal democracy in Turkey, political struggles and organizations other than reactionary forces do not have the possibility to work legally. According to İnan, while the peasants lack democratic rights, the working class has partial democratic rights due to imperialist exploitation. On this axis, the vast masses of peasants are unable to enter any organization at the economic level, while the working class is forced into a consensual economic struggle. He reinforces the legitimacy of the people's war by claiming that this structure of formal democracy cannot be changed through legal methods of struggle without establishing a revolutionary power.⁷⁵

According to İnan, Turkey cannot adopt the Soviet model of revolution because of imperialism, and in this sense, it has a unique character. It is also impossible to wage a political struggle with a classical working style in the Bolshevik organizational model in Turkey's specificity. For this reason, İnan argues that the working class and the masses of the oppressed people must struggle based on the politics of violence through a dual organization. The dual structure of the people's war: A party organization that will include the working class and its allies, including the poor peasantry, and the people's army, which is the armed force of the broad masses of the people. The struggle will develop on this basis.⁷⁶

The vast masses of oppressed peasants live in the countryside. The peasants are not a reserve force, as in the Soviet model of revolution, but the main force. Their general demands for liberation from the exploitation policy are land and freedom. It sees the peasants as the natural allies of the working class in the liquidation of imperialism and

74 Ibid, 40.

75 Ibid, 42.

76 Ibid, 43.

as the main human force of the people's army. The fact that the majority of the industrial proletariat is in the cities and production prevents the workers from being as much a part of the people's army as the peasants. He says that it is impossible for the working class in production to abandon production and join the struggle in a long-term people's war in the people's army.⁷⁷

He argues that guerrilla warfare is the strategic method of struggle that the party and the army, which will bear the weight of the people's war that will begin in rural areas, will apply in the first period. Guerrilla warfare is considered to be the most accurate means of organizing the masses of the people in the initial period of the people's war. There is a fine line here for İnan. İnan sees guerrilla warfare as a strategic necessity of a certain period of the people's war. He criticizes those who make guerrilla warfare an end in itself and opposes the view that the people's war is a purely military logic. In this respect, he criticizes the *foco* theory (or *foquismo*) formulated by Regis Debray for making guerrilla an end and equating the people's war with a purely military logic. It was against this ideological background that THKO set out to wage guerrilla war. Against those who equate THKO with *foco* in the literature, İnan's approach to the *foco* theory and his rejection of adventurism are shaped on this basis.⁷⁸

Debray mentions in his book that the party was founded after the revolution. He says that under certain conditions the vanguard party is an organic whole within the people's army. Throughout his book, he puts the army before the party.⁷⁹ In this respect, it is a fact that İnan was influenced by the *foco* theory. However, he does not postpone the task of establishing the party until after the revolution. He sees it as a need that will arise with the development of the people's army during the struggle. This is where the criticism of Debray'i for making guerrilla the goal or end arises. Although he differs from the *foco* theory with the form it describes as a dual structure, it has serious similarities in the general line,

77 Ibid, 45.

78 Ibid, 46-47.

79 Regis Debray, *Revolution in Revolution?*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 105-107.

even if they exist on a methodological basis. Although İnan rejects *foco*, he cannot completely break away from its method. Although this shows that those who define THKO as a *foco*-type organization in the literature are not wrong, equating it with *foco* one-to-one is not correct. Defining it as “a form influenced by *foco* theory” would be more accurate.

In terms of political struggle, İnan characterizes his working method in three points. It puts forward the military method and guerrilla warfare against the concrete enemy. The basis here is attacks against the areas where imperialism is embodied. First of all, US military installations, warehouses and bases are targeted. Secondly, it aims to emphasize the local contradictions of the masses and to give a political character to the economic struggle of the masses. Here, landowners and usurers are targeted and the struggle takes on a class character. Finally, it aims to carry out broad political and ideological propaganda work.⁸⁰

İnan contends that the primary aim of urban guerrilla forces is merely to support and reinforce rural guerrilla warfare. Thus he legitimizes THKO's operations in urban centers. At the theoretical level, this perspective also reveals the organization's conception of resource generation in the city. Moreover, İnan critiques the notion of an armed struggle predicated on urban guerrilla tactics, asserting that these environments are ill-suited for laying the foundational quantitative and qualitative groundwork necessary for a people's war. He attributes this limitation to the army's extensive operational reach in urban settings and to the fact that the working class remains engaged in production, which complicates the formation of a sustained guerrilla force.

This critique is primarily directed at the Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (THKP-C). THKP-C, an organization ideologically led by Mahir Çayan, became dominant within Dev-Genç following the THKO's shift toward rural areas. Although THKO and THKP-C were two highly similar organizations, they were also engaged in an implicit rivalry. Their competition stemmed from the fact that both emerged from the student movement and were centered around armed struggle. However, despite

80 Ibid, 51-52.

their similarities, no unification took place between them—except at Kızıldere. While certain personal distrusts played a role, the primary issue was their strategic divergences.

At its core, the important point of divergence between THKO and THKP-C was their claims on where guerrilla warfare should begin. As mentioned, İnan did not rely solely on urban guerrilla warfare, though he pragmatically incorporated it in THKO's early urban activities. In contrast, Çayan's strategy centered on urban guerrilla warfare yet aimed in the long term to develop rural guerrilla warfare and mobilize the peasantry, whom he regarded as the fundamental revolutionary force.⁸¹

İnan criticized Çayan's urban-based approach, arguing that the spatial limitations of cities would create a deadlock for the people's war, eventually leading to a departure from the people's war model altogether. He contended that, due to the class composition of urban areas, the movement's military structure would gradually transform from a people's army into a workers' army. For İnan, this meant neglecting the peasant masses from the outset in the fight against imperialism. Therefore, he did not condition his own rural guerrilla strategy on the fate of urban operations. Moreover, İnan considered the urban guerrilla model specific to Latin America and deemed it unsuitable for Turkey.⁸²

In his implicit criticism of THKP-C, İnan suggested, "An organization that did not base its strategy on rural areas and political violence, and the class alliances within a national front—regardless of whether workers constituted the majority—ultimately harbored a petty-bourgeois ideology."⁸³ Through this critique, he indirectly implied that THKP-C's urban guerrilla orientation reflected a petty-bourgeois perspective rather than a broad-based revolutionary strategy.

Another central point of divergence between Çayan's group and İnan's group was the issue of the party. Çayan's group believed a party-building process was necessary and aimed to complete the

81 Barış Yıldırım, "Mahir Çayan ve 'Kesintisiz Devrim,'" in *Mühürler: Türkiye Sosyalist Hareketinden Eserler*, ed. Gökhan Atılğan (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2019), 415.

82 İnan, *Türkiye*, 53-55.

83 İbid, 50.

organizational phase before launching actions. However, according to İnan, this approach turned the party into an end rather than a means and amounted to a mere imitation of Bolshevism. He argued, "Applying the working style and policies of the Bolshevik Party as a political framework in our country means sinking into the swamp of opportunism from the very beginning of the struggle."⁸⁴ The primary target of this criticism was not actually THKP-C but rather other factions that did not prioritize political violence. However, due to Çayan's group's insistence on party-building, they were also indirectly included in the scope of the criticism—albeit in a secondary manner rather than as the main target.

For İnan, the conditions of the Turkey's revolution were different, and emulating the Soviet revolution would lead nowhere. Yet, he believed that THKP-C had merged this party concept with urban guerrilla warfare, thereby developing a flawed war strategy. He contended that a struggle strategy and party model based on the Bolshevik working style were more suited to advanced capitalist countries than to Turkey's socio-economic reality.

İnan did not see a strict party-army distinction as necessary in the early stages of the struggle. He viewed the insistence on a party structure as a bureaucratic and artificial stance. In his perspective, during the initial phase of the people's war, the people's army could maintain its ideological coherence, as he assumed that the militants who joined early on were already committed to the ideology of the working class. In fact, one of the key factors shaping İnan's perception of the party was "ideological unity." For İnan, an organization consisting of only a few committed and theoretically strong revolutionaries already constituted a *de facto* party. However, at a more advanced stage of the struggle—when broader popular support expanded the ranks of the army—he deemed the establishment of a formal party necessary, primarily to prevent the infiltration of petty bourgeois ideologies. With the formation of party cadres, armed struggle would be supplemented with various political

84 Ibid, 54.

activities, including efforts to support the economic struggles of different social segments and mobilize them into political action.⁸⁵

These fundamental divergences constituted a significant obstacle to unifying the struggle under a single organization. Although these differences may appear profound, in reality, Çayan and İnan shared substantial similarities in their overall perspectives on Turkey's revolution, particularly in terms of historical interpretation, class analysis, and revolutionary strategy. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for these similarities was their engagement with and influence from the same theorists. Instead of leveraging their common ground to establish organizational unity, they chose to amplify their theoretical differences and use them as a means of organizational separation. Despite these divisions, both organizations ultimately symbolize the rupture of '71.

İnan characterizes Turkey not as a fully developed capitalist country, but rather as a semi-dependent state under imperialist exploitation. Broadly speaking, he perceives Turkey as a society in which an underdeveloped form of capitalism coexists alongside feudal and semi-feudal relations. His depiction of Turkey as a place where multiple modes of production intersect likewise draws on the theoretical groundwork laid by Belli.⁸⁶

Although İnan draws heavily from Belli's analysis of Turkey's production relations and class structure, he represents a significant departure when it comes to the strategy of struggle. While Belli's approach lacks a dynamic and immediate framework capable of satisfying the revolutionary zeal of student youth, İnan's vision aligns more closely with their aspirations for action. This divergence becomes particularly apparent when considering the assessments made in the writings of the Deniz Gezmiş group, which emphasize the necessity of urgent and radical struggle. In this context, İnan's approach markedly contrasts with Belli's more gradualist and theoretical stance, signaling a shift toward a more action-oriented revolutionary strategy.

85 İnan, *Türkiye*, 51-53. Barış Yıldırım, "Hüseyin İnan ve 'Türkiye Devriminin Yolu'" in *Mühürler*, 450.

86 İnan, *Türkiye*, 3.

In his National Democratic Revolution pamphlet, Belli critiques the TIP as a project of “authorized socialism,” suggesting that the party’s structure initially lacked the radicalism needed to drive a transformative struggle. However, he claims that the grassroots efforts of the working class at the level of local organizations had begun to reshape the party. He criticizes the “opportunism” of figures like Aren and Boran, arguing that under their leadership, TIP was unable to maintain its position at the center of the socialist movement. Consequently, Belli posits that the national democratic struggle had to occur outside of TIP.⁸⁷

This assessment is partly accurate, as a rift had indeed developed between TIP and the youth movements, leading to the party closing its doors to student groups. However, Belli’s proposed strategy ultimately revolves around reforming TIP along the lines of MDD theses, reshaping its ideological orientation to better align with the principles of a national democratic revolution. He argues that this transformation would create the conditions necessary for the political organization of the proletariat and impoverished peasantry, ensuring their active participation in the revolutionary struggle.⁸⁸

This approach proved insufficient for the highly mobilized student movements and the ideologically evolving student leaders of the time. Increasingly rejecting parliamentarism and pacifism, these groups were founding the proposed strategy of a passive struggle path unconvincing. By 1969, the student youth who traveled to Palestine to receive training in armed struggle demonstrated no inclination to revert to passive revolutionary methods. Their actions and ideological evolutions reflected a clear preference for radical and immediate measures over gradualist or reformist approaches.

For the increasingly active student movement and the ideologically transforming student leaders of the time, such strategies were inadequate. These groups, who had progressively rejected parliamentarism and pacifism, showed no desire to return to passive

87 Belli, *Milli*, 46-47 .

88 *Ibid*, 48-49.

revolutionary methods. This was especially evident in 1969, when student activists traveled to Palestine to receive training in armed struggle, signaling a decisive turn away from gradualist approaches.

In this context, İnan played a pivotal role in redefining the youth's dynamism and urgent tasks, as can also be discerned in the writings of Yusuf Aslan and the Deniz Gezmiş group. These writings reflect nascent calls for more radical forms of struggle, which İnan conceptualized as a mode of active resistance centered on an organization built around political violence. By rejecting legalist forms and framing this path as legitimate, he provided ideological justification for such a strategy.

For İnan and his associates, the method of political struggle was unequivocal: political violence policy based on the guerrilla warfare. Other debates were rendered irrelevant, as their chosen path was firmly set. İnan's vision not only captured the urgency and militancy of the student movement but also sought to channel this energy into a coherent framework of revolutionary action.

3.2.1 *The Role of Military in Revolution*

The rise of the social movement also affected the strata in the various apparatuses of the state. Civil servants, bureaucrats, teachers and most importantly the army. There was a split within the army. In 1962 and 1963, Talat Aydemir and the military school students around him tried to stage a coup twice, but failed. But the danger of a coup within the army did not stop. Because there was a *Yön/Devrim* (Direction/Revolution) movement that would try to make use of the mobility within the army.

The group led by Doğan Avcıoğlu, centered around the *Yön* and later *Devrim* magazines, promised an alternative development strategy for Turkey beginning in the early 1960s. By the mid-1960s, the *Yön* group had refined its historical perspective and theoretical approach, and by the late 1960s, buoyed by the rise of social movements, they escalated their efforts with the publication of *Devrim*. In essence, the *Yön/Devrim* movement aimed to achieve revolution through a leftist military coup, relying on a coalition they referred to as the "vigorous forces" (*zinde kuvvetler*), which consisted primarily of military and civilian

intellectuals. This coalition envisioned uniting anti-imperialist segments of society—youth, workers, peasants, the petite bourgeoisie, and non-collaborationist bourgeoisie—to launch a Second War of Independence (İkinci Milli Kurtuluş Savaşı). This movement sought to achieve development through a non-capitalist path, ultimately desired to pave the way for a uniquely Turkish form of socialism. The rhetoric of the anti-imperialist Second War of Independence also found its place within the THKO's discourse. However, unlike THKO, Avcıoğlu did not identify as a Marxist-Leninist. Instead, he laid the foundations for a Kemalism infused with Marxist undertones, emphasizing Atatürk's legacy and anti-imperialism. This approach, often referred to as "Left Kemalism," also garnered support from Mihri Belli and his circle. Over time, the frameworks of National Democratic Revolution and the Second War of Independence began to exhibit significant similarities in both discourse and theoretical foundations.⁸⁹

Ergun Aydınöğlü argues that Belli's stance toward Avcıoğlu was primarily tactical, asserting that Belli did not adopt Avcıoğlu's alternative developmentalist approach. According to Aydınöğlü, Belli's theses were not national in character compared to Avcıoğlu's framework. Instead, he contends that Belli adapted the democratic revolution theses—rooted in the policy of "alliances with bourgeois forces," which became dominant in Marxist literature after the 1920s—to the Turkey's context. In this regard, Belli viewed Avcıoğlu as a strategic ally in the pursuit of a democratic revolution.⁹⁰

As a fruit of this alliance, Belli did not refrain from expecting a revolution from the army. On the basis of the MDD theory, he, too, asserts the "progressiveness" of the military-civilian intelligentsia. He says that the ground for an alliance between the military-civilian intelligentsia and the collaborationist bourgeoisie and feudal forces does not exist in Turkey. With the examples of the War of Independence and Atatürk's

89 Gökhan Atılğan, "Anti-Emperyalizm ve Bağımsızlıkçılık (1920-1971)" in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce 8 / Sol*, 5th ed. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), 683.

90 Aydınöğlü, *Türkiye Solu*, 174-176.

legacy, he formulates that the intellectual richness of the military will not give room for “reactionism”.⁹¹

Doğan Avcıoğlu and the *Yön/Devrim* movement did not leave their views only at the intellectual level but also made efforts to turn them into reality. The approach of the *Yön/Devrim* movement, based on the army and made it a partner in the vanguard, found sympathy within the army, especially among the higher ranks. In this way, they were organized within the military. It should be underlined that there are conflicting claims and sources regarding this organization. According to the allegation, the group led by Lieutenant General Cemal Madanoğlu was expected to carry out a leftist military coup on March 9th. The junta plan was carried out by a secret organization, which led the military wing by Madanoğlu and the civilian wing by Avcıoğlu. According to the claim, the Revolutionary Party would come to power after the coup, including representatives from the working class, left parties and organizations, intellectuals, youth organizations, progressive officers, and technocrats. The army, on the other hand, was to remain outside politics. However, in time, the Madanoğlu junta became ineffective, and the idea that the coup was planned at higher levels became stronger. According to this plan, a Revolutionary Council of fifty people would be formed after the coup, and no civilian, including Avcıoğlu, would participate.

Nevertheless, since the program of *Yön/Devrim* formed the intellectual skeleton of the coup, his ideas would have been in power even without Avcıoğlu. Muhsin Batur, the Commander of the Air Force, and Faruk Gürler, the Commander of the Land Forces, who were expected to lead the coup hierarchically, had various disagreements about the coup. It is even claimed that Batur could not be convinced of the coup plan or that he changed his mind after being convinced and denounced by the officers. The plans of the Madanoğlu group, on the other hand, were being listened to by MİT agent Mahir Kaynak for a long time. In short, the

91 Aydınöğlu, *Türkiye Solu*, 60-64.

expectation of a leftist coup had turned into a situation that was sensed not only by intelligence sources but also by many others.⁹²

There was a division not only among the higher ranks but also among the officers due to the influence of the social movement. These officers were close to the MDD line in terms of tendency. There were about a hundred officers who were primarily affiliated with the THKP-C. These officers separated themselves class-wise from the higher ranks. In a possible coup, the THKP-C planned to drag the coup further to the left through these officers. In the end, looking at the overall picture, there was a division in a key apparatus of the state, such as the army. The subjects within the state were in different quests. All these expectations came to an end with the March 12 memorandum. On March 12, not the army's left wing but the right-wing carried out a coup. However, many revolutionary-democratic groups thought that a left-wing coup had taken place and declared their support for the memorandum issued by the army. Among them were Dev-Genç and DİSK. When Dev-Genç, led by the THKP-C, realized it was not a leftist coup, it would issue a correction. DİSK, like the other unions, would not change its initial position.⁹³

3.2.2 *A Declaration Against the Illusion of Military Revolutionism*

One group distinguished itself from the others. It argued that the army could not be “progressive”, rejected the expectation of a revolution from the army and put itself in the place of the army that would realize the revolution. This group was the THKO. THKO's analysis of the March 12 Memorandum is clearly an indication of how it differed ideologically from other groups. Immediately after listening to the March 12 memorandum, Hüseyin İnan sat down at his typewriter and wrote THKO's Declaration No. 2. This declaration is critical in that it was written immediately after the memorandum and distributed to the agencies on the same day.⁹⁴ It is

92 Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *Türkiye'de Sol ve Ordu (1960-1971)*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), 123-125.

93 Ibid.

94 Sümer, *Adsız*, 83.

critical because it is the biggest proof that the THKO did not have any expectations from the army compared to other movements -the *Yön/Devrim* movement that expected revolution from the army through a coup, the MDD-Mihri Belli line that allocated a share to the army in the democratic revolution, the THKP-C that aimed to turn a possible coup in its favor even though it did not rely on a coup by organizing within the army-.

The declaration begins with an analysis of the reasons that paved the way for the memorandum. The memorandum claims that the government, which is characterized as treacherous and representative of imperialism, was unable to solve the economic crisis and as a result, a political crisis emerged. It states that with the emergence of economic and political depression, the reactions of the masses based on economic demands increased. Claiming that the economic struggle of the masses of the people made political breakthroughs, the declaration states that the struggle of each class to protect its class interest became more evident. It is also claimed that the revolutionary struggle gained new dimensions and sowed the seeds of the war of national liberation. Stating that the state mechanism ensures the continuation of exploitation, the declaration draws attention to the fact that instruments such as the government and parliament have become dysfunctional. It claims that this has shaken the alliance between the capitalist forces, which are described as reactionary, and that control has been lost.⁹⁵

The determinations made about the army in the declaration are remarkable. Asserting that the army is the state's greatest instrument of oppression, the declaration emphasizes that it is reactionary and states that the army has lost its prestige. Here, İnan draws attention to the “progressive” forces within the army and attributes a subjectivity to them, despite declaring the army as a whole “reactionary”: “4. Progressive forces within the reactionary army have started to unite and become candidates for power.”⁹⁶ These “progressive forces” can be

95 THKO'nun 2 No.lu Bildirisi [1971], *iştirakî*, no. 10 (2016): 123

96 Ibid.

understood in a wide range: From “revolutionary officers” in the army to commanders in high ranks who are close to Doğan Avcıoğlu's views. İnan does not deny the existence of “progressive forces” within the army, but he distances himself from it by analyzing it as a “reactionary” institution. Although he says that these progressive forces are engaged in a struggle for power, he does not expect a revolution through a leftist coup. This is clearly seen in the rest of the declaration.

Stating that the perpetrators who triggered the army memorandum were the US and the reactionaries, the declaration argues that other parts of the state will be reinforced in place of the government and parliament, which have become dysfunctional, and that the guarantee for this is the handing over of control to the army. It claims that this move by the army will pave the way for the forces it describes as reactionary to regroup and form more solid alliances. He justifies this claim by showing the support for the memorandum from the sections he refers to as reactionary.

The paper goes on to make several important analyses for the future. These include:

3. As the army plays the role of rallying the reactionaries, its prestige will rise and prepare the ground for a military dictatorship in the future.
4. The struggle of the progressive forces within the reactionary army that are candidates for power will be prevented in the short term and in the long term this progressive force will be liquidated.
5. The struggle of the masses of the people will lose its former momentum with the arrival of the new government. Society will wait for a while for the government to solve its problems, and the class struggle will be sterilized by promising to solve the economic crisis as if the political crisis had been solved.
6. The revolutionary struggle will be suppressed and an environment of guided struggle will be prepared.⁹⁷

97 Ibid, 124.

Although İnan's expression of "military dictatorship" for the future was made in the context of the March 12 Memorandum, it brings to mind the 1980 military coup of Turkey. In the process that followed the memorandum, government forces were able to suppress the rising social opposition and armed movements. As İnan predicted, the officers linked to the leftist coup, which he described as "progressive" within the army, were purged. However, this did not require a long period of time as İnan thought, but was realized in a short period of time. After the memorandum, social opposition was suppressed and economic-based social movements weakened. In line with the fifth and sixth articles, the increasing pressure of the government was able to suppress various revolutionary, democratic and trade union struggles that had been progressing rapidly since 1968. For a while, what he describes as a climate of struggle actually calmed down. From the second half of the 70s onwards, with increasing political polarization, the social movement increased and chaos prevailed. Socialist organizations much stronger and more diverse than the socialist movements that emerged in the first half of the 70s emerged, which increased the rapprochement of those close to the right. Considering many factors such as the Nationalist Front governments, various anti-communist associations, nationalist armed groups, strikebreakers, and various sects, it is seen that society was polarized into two poles. The rising political polarization and the almost daily display of various forms of political violence reinforced the chaotic atmosphere. Against this background, if İnan's concept set is used, it can be inferred that the "state" forces, unable to suppress the rising socialist or "revolutionary" movement, deemed the 1980 coup, that is, a "military dictatorship" necessary. In a sense, it would not be wrong to say that İnan unraveled the traditionalized character of the government and bequeathed a warning to the future.

Considering that Hüseyin İnan wrote this text a few hours after the memorandum and that he was executed on May 6, 1972, so he was unable to witness the subsequent developments, the relative accuracy of his predictions is surprising.

In the continuation of the declaration, the attitude of the THKO is explained by stating that the memorandum is a “typical American military coup plan”. It is stated that the THKO interprets the development that started with the memorandum of the army as reactionary, not progressive. Against this “reactionary” development, it is stated that the THKO “will resist as an armed force to continue the revolutionary struggle”. It is stated that the “military dictatorship” is coming and that the way out is to become an armed force.⁹⁸

This declaration is of a nature that negates the claim in the literature that the THKO started its movements in the hope of a leftist military coup. The fact that the declaration was written immediately after the memorandum and the determinations made about the army in it support this. İnan predicts that even the moves of the sections within the army that he characterizes as “progressive” will be insufficient. Moreover, he made inferences quite far from Avcıoğlu and Belli's position on the army and characterized it as “reactionary”. In *The Path of Turkey's Revolution*, which was completed about a year after the declaration, he analyzed the post-memorandum process as “fascism”. In the same work, he states that there are still “progressive” forces within the army, but that they can participate in the revolutionary struggle “only as individuals in the short term”. He says that non-commissioned officers from oppressed and exploited class origins are closer to the revolutionary front. He attributes this to the fact that high-ranking officers are made partners in the “system of exploitation” through the Military Solidarity Institution (OYAK, *Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu*). For the privates, he states that they can join the “people's war” en masse under conditions when the struggle develops and enters the “advanced” period.⁹⁹

THKO did not try to organize within the army during its movement. The ideological background of this can be traced back to İnan's interpretations of the army. İnan invited only one high-ranking person in the military to join the THKO movement. That person was Saffet Alp. Air

98 Ibid.

99 İnan, *Türkiye*, 3, 9. Yıldırım, “Hüseyin İnan ve ‘Türkiye Devriminin Yolu,’” in *Mühürler*, 443.

lieutenant Saffet Alp was one of the “progressive” officers in the army. He was also a high school friend of Hüseyin İnan. Alp rejected this offer, stating that he was acting in alignment with the THKP-C, and apologized to İnan, saying that perhaps in time they could come together in the struggle.¹⁰⁰ This example, which corresponds exactly to the definition of individual participation in the struggle, is also an example of the fact that THKO's ideological line did not change during the organization process and after the end of the movement.

§ 3.3 Conclusion

What the first three articles have in common is that the leaders of the student movement see imperialism and the state as elements that want to suppress the movement. It is claimed that they created various traps and perception games to suppress the movement and that the ultimate aim was to create an “atmosphere of fascist terror”. These inferences indicate that the student movement feels threatened. They shape this threat through future possibilities based on the events they have experienced and present a narrative. The narrative is that the student movement will be destroyed unless it transcends its own form and takes on an armed form. This indicates that the movement is getting closer to political violence.

Gezmiş's emphasis on the “military line” and İnan's emphasis on the “people's war” in Palestine coincide with each other. Both groups present ideas that the struggle must advance within a similar framework. For both groups, Palestine is seen as a sign that the national struggle against imperialism has taken on an international form. Aslan's concept of the “Middle East Revolutionary Circle” argues that the “struggle of the peoples against imperialism” must go beyond national borders. This will also be dealt with in İnan's *The Path of Turkey's Revolution*, but the nationality of the revolution will be more prominent.

100 Murat Bjeduđ, *Devrimci Subay Saffet Alp Kitabı*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Ayırıtı Yayınları, 2021), 122-123.

Another important aspect of Gezmiş's article is his observation that the student movement has undergone a major change. It is determined that the student movement has undergone a qualitative transformation and in fact it needs to undergo a change in form. This change is that the movement should not be limited to the student axis but should move towards a national revolutionary goal. Arguing that the movement has created "professional revolutionary" cadres, it assigns a role to these people to lead the class movement.

These three texts are in continuity with the pamphlet *The Path of Turkey's Revolution* to be written after the defeat of the THKO movement. The pamphlet is a distilled version of these three texts and the second declaration of THKO, although there are no significant changes in the findings between the pamphlet and the articles. The main arguments in the texts are presented in the pamphlet with a broader justification. These texts set out the ideology of the THKO. In total, serious inspirations from Doğan Avcıoğlu and Mihri Belli stand out. Although this is especially evident in the analysis of relations of production and class, there are slight differences. The big difference is the form of struggle. The form of struggle is based on political violence and methods considered pacifist are rejected. This represents a serious break with its predecessors. Inan defines the form of struggle as a people's war and considers its method as a "rural guerrilla struggle". He criticizes the *foco* theory and tries to position himself differently from it. The Second declaration of THKO also expresses views against the army and the memorandum. The army is defined as reactionary and no revolutionary expectation is sought from it.

Altogether, these texts are proof that those who argue that the THKO was ideology-free are wrong. Although Inan's views contain serious inspirations, they have important originalities of their own. They symbolize a rupture from the restricted form of the student movement that led to political violence. Moreover, it would not be correct to see the THKO as an organization that embraced the *foco* theory because it criticized it. However, since it is not very differentiated from the *foco*, we can describe it as "*foco*-influenced" and avoid a one-to-one match with

the *foco*. To summarize, THKO can be defined as a unique movement of its period that embraced political violence, distanced itself from the army, and relied on a rural basis.



4

Theory in Action: The Dynamics of Urban and Rural Movements

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.

– Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

This chapter analyses an important rupture in the original transformation of Turkey's '68 movement. It reveals that the momentum gained by the 1968 student movement turned into a concrete rupture by 1971 and that one of the earliest examples of this transformation was seen in the urban and rural actions of THKO.

The first section of the chapter examines THKO's urban actions. While the organization envisioned a rural-oriented movement, its initial operations were carried out in urban settings. This section analyzes these urban actions through their objectives and targets. Given that the THKO leadership was concentrated in the Ankara group, which also laid the foundation for the rural movement and distilled the organization's

ideological approach through its operations, the urban activities of the Ankara group serve as the primary focus.

This part investigates operations such as the shooting of a police booth outside the U.S. Embassy, the İş Bankası heist, the interrogation of Jimmy Finley, and the abduction of four U.S. soldiers. Following this, the organization's first declaration is analyzed, with an emphasis on its consistency with the ideological framework discussed in the previous chapter. The section concludes with an examination of the raid on METU dormitories and the eventual release of the American hostages.

The second half of the chapter is dedicated to the organization of the THKO's rural movement. The initial part explores the construction of this movement, grounding the analysis in the resources mobilized. The subsequent section addresses the recruitment issue, which paves the way for THKO's defeat. The discussion focuses on how recruitment unfolded, the extent to which new members joined the movement, and whether the predominantly student-based structure succeeded in evolving into a broader organization.

The chapter proceeds to analyze the relationship between the THKO and the local population. Through various examples, it explores the connections, interactions, and chance encounters between the THKO and local communities, framed through the dual lenses of "trust" and "denunciation." The factors driving these tendencies are linked to historical dynamics, and this analysis also challenges the "romantic revolutionaries" narrative by highlighting the THKO's realist and grounded approach.

The concluding part of the chapter examines the THKO rural movement's consolidation process, the solutions it devised to address challenges, the factors that led to the Kürecik operation, the experiences leading up to the operation, and the disbandment of the rural cadre following their defeat. Additionally, the narrative includes the role of the gendarmerie, a key actor in the operations against the THKO, offering a multi-faceted perspective on the movement's trajectory.

§ 4.1 The Urban Actions of the Movement

The year 1971 represents a pivotal rupture for both the student movement and its leaders. This rupture initially emerged on an ideological level and subsequently manifested in practical actions. The ideological transformation that unfolded over the two years following 1968 began to bear tangible results in early 1971. By this time, student leaders no longer identified as students, nor were their actions confined to university campuses. These individuals, who referred to themselves as “professional revolutionaries,” had one ultimate goal: to bring about a revolution in Turkey. To achieve this, they adopted a method fundamentally centered on armed struggle.

In the history of the socialist movement of Turkey, the first of three pioneering groups to adopt and act upon this strategy was the People’s Liberation Army of Turkey. Until the group executed its most significant operations in urban areas, it remained clandestine, with members known as the “*Dağcılar*” (The Mountaineers) among METU students. This nickname arose from the widespread understanding within the “revolutionary student community” that İnan and his associates were committed to a struggle based on “rural guerrilla warfare”.

In many respects, 1971 was a year of firsts in both the history of the Republic of Turkey and the left of Turkey. Benefiting from its pioneering stance in adopting a strategy rooted in violence as a political tool, THKO demonstrated the early forms of this transformed mode of action.

A three-pronged approach characterizes the actions undertaken by THKO. Primarily, the group's initiatives target regions where imperialism and capital have become crystalized, with the intent to either intimidate or retaliate. Secondly, these actions are executed for the purpose of acquiring resources, including weapons and money. Thirdly, the group's actions are strategically employed to enhance THKO's credibility and reputation.

Through these strategic actions, THKO not only established a new approach within the revolutionary movement in Turkey but also set a

precedent for the use of armed struggle as a method of political resistance.

The initial action undertaken by THKO was the targeting of the police box situated in front of the US Embassy on the night of 29 December 1970. As an illustration of the initial approach, the action was undertaken in reprisal for the death of a student. Given that the student had been killed by law enforcement, the police station was targeted. However, by deliberately targeting the station in front of the US embassy, it conveyed a symbolic message of intimidation against imperialism. Deniz Gezmiş's testimony in his court defense alludes to a comparable action during the Turkish War of Independence: "We fired bullets at the police for the same purpose for which the Karakol Teşkilatı M. Grubu fired bullets at the British and Ottoman police in Istanbul in the 1920s."¹

The second action was politically unprecedented in Turkey: Bank robbery. On January 11, 1971, the Emek Branch of the İş Bankası was opened. This newly opened branch had just cut its ribbons and would soon write its name in history. THKO members needed money to finance the rural movement. It was not the amount that could be obtained by running a place like before. A large sum of money was needed in a short period so that the rural movement could be started quickly. For this reason, the Emek Branch, which had just opened and had a security weakness because it had just opened, was robbed by THKO members. The most prominent cadres of the organization such as Sinan Cemgil, Hüseyin İnan, Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan and Alpaslan Özdoğan took the one hundred and twenty-four thousand liras from the safe and drove away. The vehicle was stolen, and the police could have traced it. Therefore, they rolled the car into a ravine near METU.²

The abandonment of the car had once again drawn attention to METU. The rector of METU authorized the search to protect the university's reputation after the court decision was issued. He did not think that students would commit the bank robbery. Education at the university

1 İbrahim Kayan, *THKO Davası*, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: Akyüz yayınları, 1991), 324-325.

2 Çubukçu, *Bizim '68*, 131. "İş Bankasının dün açılan Emek şubesi soyuldu," *Cumhuriyet*, January 12, 1971, 1, 7.

was suspended for four days and the campus was searched. The Ankara Police Chief targeted students by claiming that four members of Dev-Genç committed the robbery. Dev-Genç, on the other hand, considered this as part of the attacks against universities. Declaring that the police had done this to discredit universities in the eyes of the public, it saw this as “a disgusting part of the games played” by the police and rejected the allegations.³ This was the first time such an action had been carried out. For this reason, socialist student communities were also divided. One faction considered the action to be a positive development, as the nature of the student movement had undergone an evolution. Conversely, another faction regarded the actions as a provocation, perceiving it as a negative influence on the movement.

It was not revealed who had committed the robbery until January 15th. Members of THKO were able to hide in a safe house in the city, thanks to their urban connections. Sevim Onursal and Kor Koçalak provided assistance following the robbery, ensuring their temporary safety. However, the location of the house was soon compromised. With the identities of Gezmiş, Aslan, and Cemgil exposed, they became targets of a police search.⁴

The robbery of the İş Bankası was not coincidental. The bank's relations with foreign capital were behind its targeting. In his defense in court, Deniz Gezmiş said, “The İş Bankası is the biggest institution in Turkey that does business with foreign capital. Wherever there is an institution that exploits the people of Turkey and works to the detriment of the people, there is definitely the İş Bankası underneath it.”⁵ This action exemplifies the organization's strategy of generating resources

3 “Banka soyguncuları üniversitede aranıyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, January 13, 1971, 1-7.

4 Emine Özcan, “Devrimci Ressam Sevim Onursal’ın Anlatılmamış Hikayesi 1. Bölüm: Fotoğraftan Kırılan Kadın”, *5Harfliler*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.5harfliler.com/devrimci-ressam-sevim-onursalin-anlatilmamis-hikayesi-1-bolum-fotograftan-kirpilan-kadin/>. “MİT Karadeniz sahilini arattırıyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, January 21, 1971, 1, 7.

5 Kayan, *THKO*, 325.

and targeting imperialism and capitalism. Furthermore, it reflects the ideological background of the organization.

The third operation they planned, like the previous one, aimed to generate resources through a robbery. However, this attempt carried distinct objectives. Based on intelligence they had gathered, the THKO members learned that weapons were stored in a depot belonging to the U.S. Army in Balgat. Their goal was to seize these weapons, achieving both a material gain and a moral victory. For the student movement of the period, imperialism and the United States were synonymous, making the acquisition of these weapons a symbolic act of defiance against “imperialism.”

However, events did not unfold as planned. On February 15, 1971, the THKO members discovered that the depot contained no weapons. Instead, they encountered U.S. Sergeant Jimmy Finley, whom they decided to abduct and take to the METU dormitory, which had effectively become a THKO base. There, Finley was interrogated about U.S. activities in Turkey and Vietnam. After the questioning, he was released unharmed. The reason for his release was his race; being Black, the THKO members viewed him as a potential ally due to their solidarity with the Black Panther movement.⁶

While the operation was initially aimed at acquiring weapons, the intelligence gained during Finley’s interrogation proved equally significant. This information would enable them to execute the most renowned operation of their history, one that would solidify their place in the revolutionary movement.

4.1.1 *A Turning Point: Abduction of the U.S. Soldiers*

The abduction of four American soldiers marked a turning point for THKO, standing apart from their previous operations. Earlier actions, such as the robbery of İş Bankası Emek Branch, were conducted to address financial needs, while the shooting at the police booth in front of

6 Kayan, *THKO*, 58-59, 326-327. Halit Çelenk, *1. T.H.K.O. Davası*, (Turkey: 68’liler Birliği Vakfı, 2008), 67.

the U.S. Embassy aimed to intimidate “U.S. imperialism and its collaborators.” Similarly, the kidnapping of Sergeant Jimmy Finley was an attempt to seize weapons from the Balgat base. However, during these earlier operations, the THKO had not yet revealed its name to the public.

The abduction of the four US soldiers signified that the organization believed it was time to make its presence known to the masses. While this operation shared some commonalities with previous actions—such as financial and symbolic objectives—it primarily aimed to create widespread propaganda opportunities. The ultimate goals were to inspire the public to join the “struggle against imperialism,” to boost organizational prestige, and to solidify the THKO’s place within the revolutionary student movement.

The intelligence for the action received from Jimmey Finley, an American sergeant who was abducted from the Balgat base on February 15, 1971 and interrogated. They then conducted advanced intelligence work for the abduction of four American soldiers. The route and times of the car were determined. They had been passing through the same place at the same time every day. The soldiers were going to Ahlatlıbel US Radar Base. On the night of March 3rd to March 4th, they mobilized for action. Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, Hüseyin İnan, and Sinan Cemgil walked for about an hour and a half along the snowy ridges of METU to the position where the ambush was to be set. They set up a barricade with wire fences and concrete pillars to stop the car. When the Americans' car arrived, they jumped in front of the vehicle, cut them off. They announced that they had been taken as political prisoner. They released the Turkish driver who was driving the soldiers' car at the time. Mete Ertekin came with a second car and gave it to Yusuf Aslan. Hüseyin İnan and Mete Ertekin took the soldiers' car, and the others kidnapped the soldiers in another car. The released driver found the traffic police on the road and reported the incident. The police then intercepted the

vehicle driven by Mete Ertekin. Hüseyin İnan managed to escape, while Ertekin was caught.⁷

THKO militants took the captured American soldiers to the flat they rented. Gezmiş, Aslan and Cemgil stayed with the American soldiers and kept watch over them. THKO's first declaration announcing its name had to be sent to the agencies. Hüseyin İnan delivered three copies of the declaration to Seyfi Alkan and he took it to the organization's safe house in Maltepe early in the morning. Gülay Ünüvar sent a copy to Hürriyet News Agency, Türkan Sabuncu to Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT, *Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu*) and Seyfi Alkan to Anadolu Agency. The declaration demanded that the declaration must be read three times on the 7.30, 13.00 and 19.00 newscasts and that a ransom of 400,000 dollars be paid for the release of the Americans. They also demanded that “no revolutionaries should be arrested for this incident while the prisoners were in detention”.⁸ After the declarations were delivered to the agencies, Hüseyin İnan met with the who had delivered the declaration to the agencies at METU to find out their safety.⁹

The declaration caused a significant shock, as it was unprecedented in the history of the Republic of Turkey. It marked the first mention of the People's Liberation Army of Turkey, an organization whose identity was entirely unknown at the time. Upon receiving the declaration, the agencies were alarmed and immediately forwarded it to government authorities. Rather than publishing the full text, they selectively released only a few general statements.

4.1.2 *The First Declaration of THKO*

The declaration holds significant importance as it represents THKO's first official statement to the public, marking the formal announcement

7 Erdal Öz, *Gülünün Solduğu Akşam*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Can, 1986), 33-35. Turhan Feyizoğlu, *Sinan: Nurhak Dağları'ndan Sonsuzluğa* (Ozan Yayıncılık, 2000), 281-285.

8 THKO'nun Amerikalı 4 eri kaçırmamasının ardından yayınladığı ve önceki eylemlerini de ilan ettiği bildiri, 1971, box 13, folder 1115, Nebil Varuy Arşiv Fonu, TÜSTAV. 1. <https://www.tustav.org/arsiv/TIP/nebilvaruy-arsivi/1115.pdf>.

9 Sümer, *Adsız*, 73-75.

of the organization's existence. It also reflects the ideological perspective solidified after the unification of the groups that formed THKO. Being the organization's inaugural manifesto, the declaration attempts to address numerous topics simultaneously, including class analysis, methods of struggle, political perspective, objectives, and contemporary political developments. These themes are presented in a propaganda-heavy and agitational tone.

The statement outlines the demands for the release of the four abducted American soldiers—Jimmie Sexton, James Gholson, Larry Heavner, and Richard Carazsi. It also highlights the group's previous operations, exposing the "enemy's" vulnerabilities while glorifying the success of THKO's actions. The declaration thus serves as both a political proclamation and a tool for mobilizing public support for the organization's "revolutionary struggle".¹⁰

Throughout the declaration, THKO addresses various social classes and groups, tailoring its message to the specific conditions—both economic and political—that these segments face. Within the framework of the "National Front", the statement appeals to a diverse range of groups, including workers, peasants, teachers, lower-level civil servants, officers, students, technical personnel, craftsmen, artisans, orphans, widows, and retirees. Notably, the national bourgeoisie is excluded from this outreach.

Although Inan's earlier pamphlet reflects a certain mistrust toward craftsmen, this declaration explicitly includes them in its appeal. What distinguishes the statement is its ability to unite these diverse groups under a common umbrella, emphasizing patriotism as the defining characteristic. Regardless of class differences, any segment that identifies as patriotic is provided a place within the revolutionary movement. This inclusive yet selective approach serves to align disparate societal elements with THKO's broader struggle against imperialism and "reactionary forces".¹¹

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

The declaration addresses workers by referencing their losses in union and economic struggles, invoking the 15-16 June Great Worker Resistance and the recent BOSSA strike as key examples. The 15-16 June events stand out as a unique moment in the labor history of Turkey, during which the working class nearly took control of major industrial cities over two days and clashed with security forces. The BOSSA strike, on the other hand, highlights how capital colluded with the government to deploy state forces against workers. Both events serve to expose the “class character” of the state along the axis of capital-imperialism-collaboration.¹²

In the declaration, THKO asserts that the only path to the liberation of the people and the independence of the country is through armed struggle. Their stated objective is to eliminate all “foreign enemies,” primarily the United States, and “traitors” (referring to collaborators) in order to establish a fully independent Turkey. The justification for this force-based struggle is articulated in the following terms: “Do not submit to the enemy; we will reclaim our rights by force because they have taken everything from us by force.”¹³

Building on this premise, the declaration appeals to “revolutionary factions” within the student movement, urging them to abandon peaceful methods of struggle under current conditions and to join the People’s Liberation Army which is committed to a policy of violence aimed at leading the masses toward liberation. The struggle is explicitly framed as a “national liberation war against imperialism.” This call to action underscores the necessity of transitioning from passive resistance to an active, militant engagement in the broader revolutionary cause. The declaration, with a few minor differences, is generally consistent with the ideological perspective of THKO outlined in the previous section.

12 “Türk-İş'e bağlı TEKSİF'ten ayrılıp DİSK'e katılmak isteyen 9 bin işçi direnişe geçti,” *DİSK*, no. 4 (November 13, 1970). “Türkiye işçi sınıfı genel grev için hazır olmalıdır,” *Ant*, no. 8 (December 1970): 3-18. 4-6.

13 THKO'nun, Nebil Varuy Arşiv Fonu, 1.

4.1.3 *METU Dormitories Raid*

With the declaration reaching news agencies, the government swiftly took action. This marked the beginning of a challenging few days for the authorities, as they had never encountered a situation of this nature before. The incident not only represented a domestic crisis but also carried international implications. Each student action was escalating beyond the previous one, driven by the momentum of the broader social movement, which continually expanded the repertoire of protest methods. The government was determined to put an end to this trend, capture Deniz Gezmiş—who had become legendary for evading arrest—and dismantle the newly emerging organization, THKO, before it could gain further traction. As part of this effort, they decided that raiding METU, which they perceived as the enemy's stronghold, was essential. METU was widely regarded as the epicenter of the student movement, and its connection to THKO was strongly suspected. These suspicions were not unfounded, as the THKO's Ankara group had used the university as a base for planning operations, conducting weapons training, and preparing for rural activities.

On March 5, 1971, an operation was carried out at METU under a court order. The stated reason was intelligence suggesting that those responsible for the abduction of American soldiers were hiding on campus. At around 4:00 a.m., the Ankara Provincial Gendarmerie Regiment, the Nevşehir Gendarmerie Commando Battalion, and the Ankara Riot Police surrounded METU. The operation was led by Colonel Mehmet Öztoprak, who requested a meeting with the university's rector, Erdal İnönü. İnönü proposed that representatives from the METU ÖB also participate in the meeting.

The METU ÖB president, Erhan Erdoğan; vice president, Akin Dirik; and METU SFK representative, Tayfun Mater, met with Colonel Öztoprak. The students were willing to allow the gendarmerie to conduct a search but opposed the involvement of the police, citing recent raids on the dormitories of Ankara University's Faculty of Political Sciences (AÜ SBF) and Hacettepe University, which had resulted in numerous student injuries. Although Colonel Öztoprak responded positively to this

suggestion, Interior Minister Haldun Menteseoğlu, whom the colonel contacted by phone, ordered that none of the students' demands be met.

This brought reconciliation efforts to a dead end. The police were going to enter METU. During the negotiations, students prepared to resist just in case. After the fruitless negotiations, the students discussed the topic among themselves.

“At the end of the discussions, the METU Dormitories Student Committee decided to resist the police. If the military came, the doors would be opened but the police would be resisted. We were all so confident that the military would not use violence. A few hours later we would realize how wrong we were.”¹⁴

At around 6:30 a.m., the sound of gunfire erupted. Machine guns unleashed suppressive fire with live ammunition. In response, a small number of students linked to THKO returned fire briefly, but their resistance had little effect against the disproportionate strength of the gendarmerie. During the exchange, Erdal Şener, a student, was shot. Upon receiving the news, Colonel Öztoprak urgently requested a helicopter to evacuate the wounded student, but the request was denied by the Interior Minister. Distressed by this refusal, Öztoprak suffered a heart attack, and command of the operation was transferred to another officer. By 1:00 p.m., the gendarmerie resumed fire and successfully quelled the students' resistance. The operation resulted in the deaths of one student, one soldier, and one cook, all killed by gendarmerie bullets. Additionally, fifty students were detained. Despite the extensive search, neither Deniz Gezmiş nor the abducted American soldiers were found.¹⁵

This event marked a turning point in the student movement. The army, once viewed as a distinct and sympathetic force compared to other state institutions, lost the trust and confidence it had enjoyed among the

14 Cinemre, *Anılar*, 90.

15 Cinemre, *Anılar*, 91-92. Yalçın Bükrev, *ODTÜ Tarih Direniyor*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: NotaBene Yayınları, 2016), 141. “Kitleli Mücadeleler ve Dev-Genç,” *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, 2264.

students. This shift signaled a new phase in the dynamics between the revolutionary movement and state forces.

4.1.4 *The Release of the US Soldiers*

The names of Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan and Sinan Cemgil were mentioned in the newspapers as the perpetrators of the incident, while Hüseyin İnan's name was listed for the first time. Alparslan Özdoğan had not yet been identified. METU had been raided and they were wanted everywhere. While they were being searched, Hüseyin İnan and Gülay Ünüvar were listening to the police radio to find out which addresses would be raided and deciphering the police's coded conversations. Unsubstantiated denunciations were made to the police. Police teams thought that revolutionaries were making these reports to mislead the police. So much so that once a group protested in favor of Deniz Gezmiş against the police officers who came with false tips.¹⁶

The repression was not only on the streets but also in politics. US President Richard Nixon advised against negotiations regarding the kidnapped soldiers and left the decision to Turkey, stating that he trusted the Turkish government.¹⁷ İsmet İnönü, head of Republican People's Party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) declared, "Don't get your hands bloody," and considered it "contrary to Turkish morale to make it a foreign issue."¹⁸

Three days after the incident, the four abducted American soldiers were still in the hands of the THKOs. In the operation organized in METU, the government detained revolutionary students and failed to fulfill one of the three conditions put forward by the THKO members. Hüseyin İnan was reading a newspaper when a news article caught his eye. It was a statement by Muhammer Aksoy, the president of the Turkish Law Association. "Revolutionaries, socialists, humanists do not kill innocent

16 Sümer, *Adsız*, 76-77.

17 "Nixon: Türk hükümetine güvenimiz tam. Endişe etmiyoruz," *Akşam*, March 6, 1971, 7.

18 "İnönü: Ülkenin temel varlığına saldırılıyor," *Akşam*, March 8, 1971, 7.

people, even to achieve the greatest goals”¹⁹ Aksoy had said and called for the release of the Americans. İnan then concluded that Aksoy²⁰ was the person to contact to negotiate with the government and met with him on March 8. Aksoy said it was difficult to read the declaration in the news and left the door open for a ransom. İnan’s concern was not the ransom but the delivery of the declaration to the public. He did not want the incident to be seen as an act of kidnapping people for ransom.²¹

İnan didn’t think Aksoy was trustworthy enough. But he believed he had found a channel for negotiations. The team holding the Americans captive knew that İnan would negotiate with Aksoy. After his first meeting with Aksoy, İnan received the news that the Americans had been released. The clocks were showing 11:00 p.m. He couldn’t believe it when he heard the news on the radio and got upset. His friends had released the Americans without waiting for Hüseyin İnan’s negotiation or discussing it with him.²²

Ultimately, this incident did not lead to any leadership disputes or debates over authority within the THKO. Hüseyin İnan was widely regarded as the natural leader of the organization. The decision to release him had the support of Deniz Gezmiş and Sinan Cemgil, both of whom were also viewed as leaders by THKO militants. This dynamic reflected an implicit understanding of collective leadership, with İnan at the forefront, a structure that, while not formally codified, was generally accepted by the group. From the time of this action until their eventual deaths, there is no evidence of significant disagreements or leadership conflicts among these three figures. Their cohesion and unity appear to have been a stabilizing force within the organization, preventing internal crises and maintaining the collective focus on their revolutionary goals.

19 “Prof. Aksoy Amerikalıları kaçıran gençlere çağrıda bulundu,” *Cumhuriyet*, March 7, 1971, 1.

20 Days later, Aksoy would reveal that the THKO members had asked him to mediate. See also: “Gezmiş ve arkadaşları ABD Elçisi nezdinde benden arabulucu olmamı istemişti,” *Cumhuriyet*, March 12, 1971, 1.

21 Sümer, *Adsız*, 78-79.

22 Sümer, *Adsız*, 80-81.

Although the action did not achieve its intended outcome, its results were not entirely unfavorable. The THKO managed to garner public attention and, to some extent, communicate its goals, even if this was constrained by the media space permitted by the government. The involvement of figures like Deniz Gezmiş, who had already gained legendary status and public sympathy, and Sinan Cemgil, a prominent figure in socialist circles, further heightened the visibility of the organization.

Additionally, the release of captured soldiers, despite the agreed conditions not being fulfilled, showcased the organization's perceived compassion and humanitarian stance, helping to build a favorable image among the masses. These developments created a conducive environment for the THKO to gain a positive foothold in public opinion.

However, the action also exposed a significant drawback: the organization's inability to project a sense of deterrence or instill fear among the authorities they sought to challenge. This shortcoming highlighted a critical limitation in their capacity to assert power against the state and its institutions, detracting from the broader impact they aimed to achieve.

With this operation, the THKO Ankara group concluded its urban activities. Although the final operation did not yield the desired results, it succeeded in gaining public recognition, marking a partial success. Amid the intense repression brought on by the March 12 Memorandum and the relentless pursuit of THKO leaders, remaining in urban areas no longer held any strategic value. It was time to embark on the journey to the mountains to initiate the primary objective: the rural movement.

§ 4.2 The Rural Movement of THKO

THKO planned to carry out urban and rural operations sequentially, and this strategy was implemented accordingly. However, before initiating their urban actions, they began laying the groundwork for a rural movement. The initial efforts in this regard started in the second half of 1970, focusing on identifying a suitable location to establish the

rural movement. Regions such as Malatya-Akçadağ, Tunceli, Kars, Elbistan, and Adıyaman were selected as potential sites due to their geographical features and local connections. Based on reconnaissance conducted in these areas, Tunceli and Malatya emerged as ideal options, with the final decision favoring Malatya-Akçadağ. This region was considered advantageous due to its geographic structure, proximity to Syria, connections to surrounding mountains, and its logistical potential. Additionally, the demographic composition of the area, predominantly consisting of ethnic and religious groups (Kurdish and Alevi) with a history of conflict with central authority, was seen as a factor that could facilitate local support for the movement. Another factor influencing the choice of Malatya was the Poppy Rally, organized by Dev-Genç and supported by socialist peasants. Although the rally was ultimately deemed a failure from the perspective of Dev-Genç, THKO members managed to expand their network of contacts during the event. Through these connections, they recruited Teslim Töre, who would later play a significant role in their organization.²³

The movement conducted its logistical operations in the Malatya-Akçadağ region between December 1970 and March 1971. By January, part of the rural cadre had begun sheltering in the Malatya-Akçadağ area, while in nearby provinces. The majority of the rural cadre moved to caves in March 1971, and from that point until May, they actively operated as a rural guerilla movement based in the caves.

From October 1970 onward, trust-building efforts in the region were particularly facilitated by the local networks mostly established through Teslim Töre. By December, with the support of local actors, the movement initiated its organizational activities. During this period, the movement focused on stockpiling resources, establishing communication and intelligence networks, and conducting continuous reconnaissance operations in the area. These efforts laid the groundwork for a more structured and sustainable rural presence.

23 Çubukçu, *Bizim '68*, 124-131. Teslim Töre, THKO Hareketi ve Bazı Anılar, 1st ed. (Çağ Yayınları, 1979), 39-43. İleri, "Dev-Genç'in Köy Eylemleri ve Köylü Birlikleri," *İleri*, 5 (November 20, 1970): 19.

Logistical and sheltering operations for the THKO were carried out by its members and their local connections in the region. Through Teslim Töre, the THKO members were introduced to Mustafa Göçmen, known as “*Dayı*,” who provided crucial support throughout their activities. Throughout entire movement *Dayı* identified caves suitable for shelter, supplied food, and assisted with logistical tasks. The members relied on his guidance to locate caves with conditions suitable for extended stays. Food supplies were sourced from canned goods, local villagers with whom they had established connections, and nomadic groups setting up seasonal encampments in the area. Through *Dayı*, the THKO members also met Ali Uçar, nicknamed “*Boruk Ali Emmi*,” who became another key supporter. Thanks to Uçar, they purchased mule to facilitate logistical operations and expanded their sheltering options. Essential items for the rural movement, such as clothing, sleeping bags, and camouflage gear, were handcrafted by THKO members Gülay Ünüvar, Ayten Canatan, Türkan Sabuncu, and Nuran Ağırnaslı. All necessary supplies for the rural operations were first transported from METU to *Dayı*'s house in Malatya and then, after days of meticulous effort, moved to the caves. This systematic process ensured the sustainability of the rural movement.²⁴

The issue of weapons stands out as a critical aspect of the rural movement. During the course of the movement, weapons were procured through two primary means. The first was through arms supplied by the Palestinian resistance group Fatah. The second source was a weapons dealer. He was financed by part of 124,000 Turkish lira acquired during the İş Bankası robbery. Throughout the movement, Teslim Töre served as the primary figure responsible for procuring arms and ammunition. All transactions with the arms dealer were conducted through Töre, who initially was regarded as an exemplary figure for the movement due to his extensive network, ability to manage critical tasks, and influence in the region.

This sentiment is reflected in the journal kept by Mustafa Yalçınar during their time in the mountains, where he described Töre as “a

24 Sümer, *Adsız*, 117. Keskin, *Acılara*, 136.

miracle, he has handled our most critical tasks so far.”²⁵ Töre was originally a socialist peasant who had worked to organize for the TİP in Malatya. Like the student revolutionaries, he gradually distanced himself from TİP, believing that parliamentary and pacifist methods would not lead to meaningful progress, and began to embrace the idea of armed struggle. Töre’s introduction to THKO came through his encounter with the group at the Poppy Rally, after which he joined the movement.

Rather than being part of the rural cadre, Töre’s unique position led him to take on the role of supplying arms and ammunition for the movement. However, towards the end of the rural movement it was revealed that a significant portion of the weapons and ammunition he purchased from the smuggler were defective.²⁶ This caused the organization to lose critical resources, resulting in a major operational vulnerability. In response, Sinan Cemgil, one of the leaders, demanded that Töre be brought to the caves for trial by the organization’s internal court. However, the movement’s limited lifespan did not allow this plan to materialize. This situation brought about a loss of trust in Töre for the successors.²⁷

4.2.1 *The Recruitment During the Rural Movement*

After determining its method as a rural movement, THKO envisioned building its base primarily among peasants. By the time the organization had completed its urban operations, the significance of university campuses and urban connections had begun to diminish. Additionally, the repressive environment following the military memorandum weakened their ties with urban networks and the broader societal opposition. The rural movement represented a complete rupture from the student movement, marking a significant transformation. THKO had

25 A. Tuncer Sümer, *DEVİRİM Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu’nun Kuruluşu ve Kısa Mücadele Öyküsü*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: Evrim Yayınevi, 2012) 202.

26 In his 1979 book, *THKO Hareketi ve Bazı Anılar* (The THKO Movement and Some Memories), written in response to accusations directed at him, Teslim Töre addressed numerous topics but notably omitted any mention of this particular issue.

27 Rıza and Şeremetli, “*Erikler*”, 152-153.

evolved into a movement centered on politically organized violence in rural areas, signifying a shift in its foundational base. The countryside became the stage where the organization sought to translate its ideology into practice.

The cadre of the rural movement was predominantly composed of students, with the leadership consisting of individuals from student or intellectual backgrounds. While the students involved in the rural movement were not entirely unfamiliar with rural life, only a few had grown up in villages or possessed a deep understanding of the local populations. This dynamic highlighted a gap between the movement's ideological aspirations and its practical engagement with the rural communities it sought to organize.

THKO was not particularly successful in recruiting members from the local population in the region. From the Malatya/Akçadağ and Adıyaman/Besni areas, seven individuals joined the group: Teslim Töre, Mustafa Çubuk, Hüseyin Cemal Özdoğan, Hasan Kırteke, Hacı Tonak, Hasan Dalkılıç, and Aziz Şahiner. Of these, all except Teslim Töre joined during the rural movement phase; Töre had already become part of the team before the movement began.

Mustafa Çubuk was the nephew of Mustafa Göçmen, known as "*Dayı*"; Hasan Kırteke was the relative of Süleyman Kırteke; and Hüseyin Cemal Özdoğan was the son of Mehmet Ali Özdoğan, nicknamed "*Halahort Emmi*." Hasan Dalkılıç, a peasant involved in a land occupation, was a friend of Tuncer Sümer from Adıyaman/Besni. Aziz Şahiner, on the other hand, was a unionized worker who joined through Teslim Töre's connections. *Dayı*, *Halahort*, and Kırteke were all socialist peasants with roots in TİP. While they themselves did not join the rural cadre and instead supported the movement logistically, Töre's efforts convinced their younger relatives to join THKO. Hacı Tonak, already known to the group before the rural movement, joined through his own insistence.

Of the six individuals who joined during the rural movement, none stayed with the group until its end. For example, Hüseyin Cemal Özdoğan, tasked with going to a settlement to buy bread for the group, took the opportunity to desert. He was uncomfortable with the harsh mountain

conditions, and although his act was considered a punishable offense, the THKO members never had the opportunity to try him.²⁸ Mustafa Çubuk, citing illness, requested to leave the rural cadre. It was later revealed that his true reason for leaving was his unwillingness to fully commit to the THKO movement.²⁹

Aziz Şahiner, shortly after joining, began criticizing the rural movement, expressing doubts about its potential for success. His candid approach was appreciated by Sinan Cemgil, who allowed him to leave on the condition that he promise not to share any details about the group's activities. Schisms like these highlight the difficulties THKO faced in maintaining cohesion and commitment among its members, particularly those with limited ideological alignment or discomfort with the movement's rural strategy.³⁰

In conclusion, THKO was largely unsuccessful in both recruiting individuals from the region and retaining those it had organized within the movement. The group failed to execute armed propaganda as they had originally planned. Most of the peasants who joined the movement were neither ideologically committed to THKO's perspective nor practically equipped to adapt to the conditions of rural warfare. Relationships with the peasants were primarily transactional, focusing on the procurement of supplies rather than spreading revolutionary propaganda. This approach inevitably laid the groundwork for the organization's practical defeat.

4.2.2 *THKO's Relations with the Local People*

THKO aspires to draw its base primarily from the rural proletariat and impoverished peasants—a crucial factor in achieving the revolution it envisions. Good relations with the peasantry are therefore

28 After the THKO members were captured and imprisoned, they did not want the captured Hüseyin Cemal Özdoğan to be in the same place with them. They punished his behavior by excluding him months later. See also: Erdal Öz, *Mendilimde Kuş Sesleri*, 4th ed. (Can Yayınları, 2003), 28.

29 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 144.

30 Ibid.

indispensable. Indeed, throughout the course of the movement, it became evident that most of the essential resources needed to survive in the mountains—food, intelligence, shelter, and medicine—could be secured through these relationships. Nonetheless, because most THKO members were students, local residents tended to view them as outsiders or “foreign elements.” They managed to overcome this outsider status, through the local connections they established.

During the movement, interactions with peasants—many of them former members of the TİP—who had been mostly introduced by Teslim Töre generally developed in a positive manner. Individuals such as Süleyman Kirteke³¹, Mustafa Göçmen (known as *Dayı*), Gülsüm Göçmen, Ali Uçar (*Boruk Ali Emmî*), Cennet Uçar (*Ana*), Mehmet Ali Özdoğan (*Halahort Emmî*), along with others whose names remain unknown, played critical roles in sustaining the rural movement. A foundation of mutual trust underpinned these relationships. Another shared characteristic among them was that each had become acquainted with the movement through specific “reference persons.”

Throughout the movement, interactions consistently navigated a delicate boundary between trust and denunciation. In situations where reference persons were involved, relationships generally culminated in mutual trust. Conversely, whenever no references existed, that boundary resurfaced. Such reference-free encounters usually occurred by chance and, alongside the facilitated introductions, offer insight into how peasants perceived the “revolutionaries.”

Examining instances of denunciation within the movement reveals several underlying motives, typically linked to ideological proximity to the government’s rhetoric, vested interests, and fear of central authority or the gendarmerie. By contrast, decisions not to denounce appear driven by mutual trust, a preference for minimizing risk, and longstanding historical tensions between local communities and the central authority.

In most chance encounters, THKO members opt to lie rather than view these interactions as potential propaganda opportunities, primarily

31 Süleyman Kirteke had met the Hüseyin İnan group before.

to avoid complications. Since such unplanned meetings do not always lend themselves to targeted propaganda, they are generally seen as posing a higher level of risk.

While THKO members were sheltering in Meşeli Cave, they noticed someone approaching and quickly hid. Tuncer Sümer and Atilla Keskin were the ones to intercept the individual, who turned out to be a shepherd. The shepherd, noticing an unusual number of footprints, had followed the tracks, eventually discovering the armed militants. Sümer and Keskin introduced themselves as smugglers and requested that the shepherd keep their presence a secret. However, once the rest of the militants determined there was no immediate danger, they emerged from hiding and began joking with the shepherd, aiming to put him at ease. Reassured by the interaction, the shepherd continued on his way. Despite this peaceful encounter, the group deemed it prudent to relocate as a precautionary measure. They moved to Ilıcak Cave, a site that had been suggested by Dayı, to ensure their safety and maintain their operational security.³²

Approximately five or six days after the encounter with the shepherd, the THKO members came across three hunters near Ilıcak Cave. Tuncer Sümer, who had a local appearance and demeanor, was again the one to greet them. Presenting themselves as arms smugglers residing temporarily in the cave, Sümer managed to diffuse any immediate tension. While the hunters did not view him as an outright threat, they remained somewhat suspicious. They even offered to guide the group to a better cave nearby, but Sümer declined, maintaining his cover. Despite their suspicions, the hunters left without incident. Years later, more details about these encounters came to light. According to Tuncer Sümer, the shepherd realized the true identity of THKO members he had met but chose not to report them, instead confiding only in people he trusted. Similarly, the hunters did not disclose their encounter with THKO members to anyone.³³

32 Sümer, *DEVİRİM*, 109-110.

33 *Ibid*, 110-113.

A few additional cases parallel these positive examples. However, certain encounters that lacked a reliable intermediary yielded less favorable outcomes. During periods of intensified searches, when the gendarmerie was actively pursuing THKO members and the region was on high alert, some individuals chose to inform on the group. A prime example of this is İnekli Village, which had a strong MHP presence. Since the MHP regarded the student movement—and the revolutionary actions emerging from it—as enemies, it was unsurprising that residents in this village opted to provide information. A local shepherd, initially allowed to leave on the assumption that he would not denounce the THKO members, relayed the news to the village headman. İnekli Village was the only settlement in the vicinity equipped with a telephone, owing to its positive relations with the government. Acting on the shepherd's report, the headman promptly informed the gendarmerie about the group's whereabouts. This example will be discussed again in the Kürecik section.

Another incident highlighting the challenges faced by THKO militants occurred in the village of Kullartatlar, where their efforts to procure provisions raised suspicion. The militants, posing as herdsmen from the nearby plateau, visited a local grocery store. However, the grocer, familiar with the area's population and herd owners, did not recognize them. Given the small size of the community and the ongoing gendarmerie search operations in the region, the grocer became suspicious that these individuals might be among those being sought. Five days later, the revolutionaries returned to the store to make a larger purchase, further reinforcing the grocer's suspicions. He shared his concerns with the village headman, who subsequently reported the situation to the Elbistan District Gendarmerie Command on May 23, 1971.³⁴

Both examples align with the factors that influence the behavior of informing. In both cases, proximity to the government's rhetoric, a lack of historical conflict with state authority, and possible interests are key motivators driving the decision to denounce.

34 Erkekoğlu, *Nurhak*, 62.

There were situations where villagers felt compelled to inform on the THKO members, even against their will. For example, following the Kürecik operation, a group of THKO members encountered a nomadic encampment while fleeing the gendarmerie. The encampment, occupied by villagers who seasonally moved there for livestock production, consisted of tents. The arrival of a large group of armed strangers in broad daylight drew significant attention. THKO members requested permission to enter, and although reluctant, the villagers allowed them to stay. The revolutionaries provided medical assistance and treatment in exchange for the villagers' hospitality, sharing the food offered to them. During their stay, a Kurdish woman was heard crying out in Kurdish, which only Yusuf Aslan, who knew Kurdish, could understand. The villagers eventually revealed the source of their discomfort: three woodcutters from another village were present in the encampment and had seen the revolutionaries. This put the villagers in a difficult position, as they feared repercussions from the authorities. The villagers explained that, reluctantly, they would have to inform the gendarmerie about the presence of the revolutionaries. However, they warned the THKO members to leave immediately, giving them some time to avoid capture.³⁵

The issue of trust was multifaceted, extending beyond fear of state repression to include specific moral reservations rooted in local cultural norms. A telling example of this complexity is an incident involving Boruk Ali Emmi's wife, Cennet (*Ana*, Mother), and THKO members. In February 1971, the rural cadre was moving between trusted houses in nearby villages to maintain both their activities and secrecy. Due to the need for frequent relocations, Kadir Manga, Mustafa Yalçın, and Tuncer Sümer traveled in a truck prepared by Töre to Boruk Ali Emmi's house in Çıglık Village, near Doğanşehir. Boruk Ali Emmi, a former TİP member of Kurdish Alevi origin, was sympathetic to the revolutionaries and warmly welcomed them. The plan was for them to stay as guests for a few days. However, his wife, Cennet, who did not speak Turkish and communicated

35 Öz, *Gülünün*, 158-159.

with the young revolutionaries through gestures, had a particular concern. Her hesitation was not out of fear of hiding them; she accepted them willingly and with kindness. Rather, her worry stemmed from the presence of her two young daughters in the house. While she worked in the fields, she was uncomfortable leaving her daughters alone in the house with three young men. Her concern revolved around protecting their "honor," a deeply ingrained and culturally specific fear in the region. Teslim Töre reassured her with a response that addressed her concerns directly: "Ana, these are revolutionaries. They won't harm anyone; in fact, they will only be of help. You could strip your daughters bare and lay them with these men, and they would turn their backs and sleep. You have nothing to fear." This reassurance established a sense of trust, and as a result, when militants needed refuge again, they were able to find shelter through Cennet Ana's references.³⁶ This incident highlights how cultural sensitivities and interpersonal trust could shape the dynamics of revolutionary activity in rural communities.

In the latter half of the 1970s, certain revolutionary groups began developing practices aimed at countering informants among villagers. One notable approach was punishing informants or village headmen as a form of "revolutionary violence" intended to serve as a public warning. The idea was to instill fear of retaliation from both sides, discouraging villagers from acting as informants. However, no such examples can be found in THKO's history. I believe this stems from two main reasons.

First, with the exception of the *Kuvâ-yi Milliye* and certain Ottoman-era insurgent movements, there were no precedents within Anatolia that could serve as an inheritance for THKO to avoid similar mistakes. Even if these historical examples were taken into account, they were not fully applicable or suitable models. Second, THKO lacked both the organizational disposition and the individual character among its members to implement practices such as killing informants. This might be interpreted as stemming from a form of "populist romanticism or

36 Sümer, *DEVİRİM*, 104-105. Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 103-104.

revolutionary romanticism", but I would caution against such a simplistic reading.

While THKO members undoubtedly placed faith in the people, this belief was not rooted in an abstract or disconnected romanticism. Instead, it was grounded in objective realities: the peasantry was viewed as the central element in their envisioned revolution, and their interactions with the locals were largely positive. This alignment of ideological conviction with practical experience reinforced their belief in the potential of the people as allies, rather than as adversaries to be controlled through fear.

A common narrative about the '68 movement portrays its leading figures as "romantic revolutionaries," harboring an unreciprocated faith in the people, who in turn viewed them as enemies—ultimately leading to their tragic demise. However, when the entirety of the THKO experience is taken into account, the movement's mutually positive relationships with the populace challenge this generalized characterization.

This suggests that THKO members were not "naive-romantic idealists," as is often claimed. Rather, they were individuals who considered and engaged with the objective conditions of their environment. Their ability to foster meaningful connections with local communities demonstrates a realist and grounded approach, contradicting the simplistic depiction of blind idealism.

4.2.3 *The Gathering of Rural Cadres*

After completing their urban operations, THKO's Ankara group was prepared to initiate the rural movement. The oppressive atmosphere following the military memorandum had restricted the organization's activities in urban areas and begun to suppress its sympathizers. This reduced the feasibility of operating in the cities. After the Ankara group had completed its actions, the plan was for the Istanbul group to join the

rural cadre. Fully aware of the likelihood of death in this struggle, the leaders set out on their journey to join the rural movement.³⁷

The destination was Malatya, Akçadağ, specifically the village of Gölpınar, where Teslim Töre's house was located. The plan involved two motorcycles: one carrying Tayfur Cinemre and Sinan Cemgil, the other Deniz Gezmiş and Yusuf Aslan. Their first stop was Sarıkaya, a district of Yozgat, where they intended to meet Lieutenant Alpaslan Batu, a friend of Tuncer Sümer. They planned to ask him for a jeep to transport Gezmiş, Aslan, and Cemgil to Akçadağ. Afterward, Cinemre would return to Ankara, as he was not part of the rural cadre, while the others would continue to join their comrades. The journey began at midnight on March 15, 1971. They carried automatic Akabe rifles and pistols provided by Fatah. Since they were all wanted, they could only travel at night. Upon reaching Yozgat, snow-covered roads made travel increasingly difficult, and by dawn, the motorcycles carrying Gezmiş and Aslan broke down. Cemgil and Cinemre proceeded to Lieutenant Batu's house to seek help. They decided to exchange the motorcycles, as Gezmiş and Aslan's photographs had been published in newspapers, heightening the risk of recognition. Cemgil and Cinemre set out early, while the other two stayed back to repair the motorbikes.³⁸

After repairing the motorcycles, Cemgil and Cinemre resumed their journey but only made it as far as Tecer Village in Sivas due to the snow-blocked roads. From there, they traveled by night train to Malatya, evading a plainclothes policeman who tried to stop them. Eventually, they reached Töre's house in Gölpınar, where the THKO rural cadre awaited their transition to the caves. However, there was shocking news: Deniz Gezmiş and Yusuf Aslan were not there. The group learned from the radio that Gezmiş and Aslan had been captured. They had been spotted by soldiers in Şarkışla while attempting to flee; Yusuf Aslan was shot and wounded, and Deniz Gezmiş was captured after a prolonged chase and shootout.³⁹

37 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 114. Cinemre, *Anılar*, 130.

38 Cinemre, *Anılar*, 102-108.

39 Ibid. 120-122.

Following this news, Sinan Cemgil insisted they immediately leave the house, as they had been seen by too many people along the journey and had become obvious suspects. The group moved to Güvercinlik Cave on March 16, 1971, marking the rural cadre's official transition to the mountains. The first team included Mustafa Yalçın, Osman Arkış, Semih Orcan, Kadir Manga, Ahmet Erdoğan, Atilla Keskin, Sadık Soysetenci, Mehmet Nakipoğlu, Sinan Cemgil, Tayfur Cinemre, Recep Sakın, Mehmet Asal, and Tuncer Sümer. For them, the mountains symbolized the beginning of freedom. As Yalçın wrote in his diary, "Now we are free. Because we are in the mountains."⁴⁰

The next step was the arrival of leader Hüseyin İnan. A few days later, İnan and Mehmet Nakipoğlu set out for the rural cadre. Before joining the group, they stopped at the house of one of İnan's relatives in Kayseri's Pınarbaşı district to rest and eat, believing it to be a safe place to hide. However, the gendarmerie, suspecting İnan's possible presence, were monitoring the villages of Yassıpınar and Pınarbaşı. For the first time, İnan could not evade capture. On the morning of March 23, following a tip-off, he and Nakipoğlu were arrested at the house. This news dealt a severe blow to the morale of the rural cadre.⁴¹

Despite the setback, new members continued to join the movement. Adem Topal joined at Güvercinlik, followed by Metin Güngörmüş, Elazığlı Cemal, and Palulu Yusuf Aslan from Elazığ. Mustafa Yalçın returned from Ankara with funds and new recruits, including Osman Bahadır, Fevzi Bal, and Ercan Öztürk. Metin Yıldırım Türk and Cengiz Baltacı arrived from Kars. Meanwhile, the group had to move from cave to cave, transitioning from Güvercinlik to Meşeli, Ilıcak, and finally settling at Cibo's Cave.

As the rural cadre moved into the region, government forces also received suspicious reports. Colonel Yılmaz Erkekoğlu, who would be assigned to the operation against THKO in the future, took action. Based on intelligence that an armed group was in Akçadağ, hiding in caves

40 Sümer, *DEVİRİM*, 199.

41 Feyizoğlu, *Hüseyin*, 247-249.

between Bölüklü and İkinciler villages, Erkekoğlu first searched Teslim Töre's house but found nothing suspicious. He then searched Güvercinlik and Sarıkaya caves but again found no trace of the group, as they had already moved on. Erkekoğlu, who did not look carefully at the map in his hand, was unable to notice the surrounding caves and was forced to turn back. This mistake by Erkekoğlu was the beginning of a long chase between THKO members and the gendarmerie.⁴²

The capture of İnan, Gezmiş, and Aslan not only caused a significant loss of morale but also left the group without leadership. Among the members, Sinan Cemgil was naturally regarded as a leader. Although Cemgil initially proposed Tuncer Sümer for the position, Sümer declined. Ultimately, Cemgil was unanimously chosen as the new leader due to his ideological and personal maturity.⁴³

The cadre, now nearly complete, included new members such as Hacı Tonak and Alpaslan Özdoğan. Özdoğan, had extensive experience from fighting in Palestine and boosted the group's morale with his presence. With the rural cadre established, the group divided into smaller teams, each led by a commander.

The main group was commanded by Sinan Cemgil and included Alpaslan Özdoğan, Ercan Öztürk, Cengiz Baltacı, Elazığlı Cemal, and Mehmet Asal. Walking ahead of Cemgil's group was Kadir Manga's team. Under Manga's command were Hacı Tonak, Sadık Soysetenci, and Osman Bahadır. The rear group was led by Mustafa Yalçın and included Palulu Yusuf Aslan, Metin Güngörmüş, Metin Yıldırım Türk, and Osman Arkış. The vanguard group, commanded by Tuncer Sümer, consisted of Ahmet Erdoğan, Fevzi Bal, Semih Orcan, and Recep Sakın.⁴⁴

Each commander was responsible for their team members, who were expected to follow their orders. Meetings were often held among commanders to make decisions. These groups and their leadership were not elected but emerged organically during the rural movement and were

42 Yılmaz Erkekoğlu, *Nurhak Ey Nurhak*, (Tekin Yayınevi, 1988), 43-44.

43 Çubukçu, *Bizim '68*, 169.

44 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 130.

formalized by Cemgil. The focus now shifted to planning operations when conditions permitted.

4.2.4 *The Rural Cadre in Action: Towards to Defeat*

Although the group had been in the caves for some time, they had not yet launched any major operations—other than a raid on the İkinciler Radyolink Facility to recover weapons they had lost. According to Erkekoğlu, these weapons were reclaimed through coercion and intimidation⁴⁵, whereas Sümer claimed they were returned voluntarily by the facility personnel.⁴⁶ In either account, this was not considered a political action.

The inactivity stemmed from unexpected setbacks at the onset of the rural movement, primarily the capture of key leaders, which forced the group to reorganize its plans. This lack of action sparked debates within the organization, ultimately leading to a shared consensus that they needed to act swiftly. During this period, THKO did not carry out the armed propaganda, the formation of village committees, or the organization of peasants as initially envisioned.⁴⁷

Under the present circumstances, they decided on an operation that would both draw substantial attention and have an anti-imperialist character—ideally one that would secure the release of their captured comrades. They turned their sights on the nearest American base, the Kürecik U.S. Radar Station, which was situated at a considerable distance from their location, meaning they would need a vehicle.

They had also recently acquired critical intelligence indicating that, each month, a bank vehicle traveled from the Gaziantep Central Bank to Adiyaman to deliver civil servant salaries. By ambushing this vehicle, they could seize both the funds and the van itself. As an official bank vehicle, it would not arouse suspicion, allowing them to approach the radar

45 Erkekoğlu, *Nurhak*, 51.

46 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 113.

47 Ibid, 141.

station without attracting attention. The group therefore devised a single plan encompassing both operations.⁴⁸

To capture the bank's vehicle, however, they first needed a car, so they contacted Hasan Bakır—an associate in İkinciler Village—and asked him to rent a car. The plan was to intercept the rented car near the caves, detain the driver, expropriate the vehicle, and, after completing the operation, overpay the rental fee to compensate for the inconvenience. Sümer and Fevzi Bal were assigned this task, and initially, the plan proceeded as intended. About an hour away from the cave, they seized the car. Sümer then left Bal to watch over the driver and went to deliver supplies to the cave and summon reinforcements. While Bal was standing guard, the driver called out to two passing foresters for help and began to flee. Attempting to stop them, Bal fired at the car, but his gun jammed. With the keys still in the ignition, the driver easily escaped and reported the incident to the gendarmerie within a few hours.⁴⁹

Due to carelessness, the initial phase of the operation was compromised. The mistakes made were serious enough to warrant an internal trial before the organization's own court. Within its short lifespan, THKO developed only a limited legal system, typically imposing minor punishments for minor offenses (for instance, depriving a negligent sentry of bread for several days).⁵⁰ This particular case, however, was more complex.

The organizational court convened, and, aside from the two individuals on trial, all other members participated as members of the tribunal, resulting in a structurally democratic proceeding. According to Sümer, Fevzi Bal initially accepted responsibility for his mistakes prior to the trial but did not fully uphold this admission during the proceedings. Sümer, for his part, admitted to his errors and, as Bal's commanding officer, also bore responsibility for his subordinate's errors. Consequently, Sümer received the heavier punishment, while Bal faced a

48 Ibid, 149.

49 Ibid, 156-160.

50 T.C. Ankara Sıkıyönetim Komutanlığı 1 No.lu Askerî Mahkemesi, *Gerekçeli Hüküm (Deniz Gezmiş ve Arkadaşları Hk.)*, (Ankara: October 9, 1971), 78.

lighter penalty. The only person to object to the trial on principle was Hacı Tonak, who argued that if someone is appointed commander, one must also accept the possibility of mistakes. In Tonak's view, Bal was primarily at fault for fostering a casual relationship with the driver, leading to the group's exposure. Since no one else objected, the punishment recommended by the leader was adopted: Bal was sentenced to several meals without food, and Sümer was stripped of both his weapon and his responsibilities as commander. Command of Sümer's unit passed to Ahmet Erdoğan, and the harsh penalty inflicted a deep morale blow on Sümer.⁵¹

This punishment lasted a total of two days. Concluding that the penalty was excessive and potentially harmful, Cemgil revoked it and compensated Sümer by assigning him to an even higher-ranking role—namely, command of the main group. Cemgil relinquished this post because a separate strike team had been formed to carry out the Kürecik operation. The composition of this strike team, which Cemgil himself led, included individuals well-acquainted with the region, experienced in combat, or possessing leadership qualities: Alpaslan Özdoğan, Mustafa Yalçiner, Metin Güngörmüş, Ahmet Erdoğan, and Hacı Tonak. Filling the resulting vacancies among the commanders were Semih Orcan, Ercan Öztürk, and Osman Arkış.⁵²

On May 29, the strike team separated from the main group. Their principal objective was to raid the Kürecik U.S. Radar Station. Disguised in civilian clothing and familiar with the region, Hacı Tonak was responsible for gathering reconnaissance. He was to visit the base first, noting the schedule of the large transport vehicle that ferried soldiers on and off the base. The plan involved hijacking that bus, entering the base aboard it, securing the facility, planting explosives, and taking personnel hostage. They intended to demand the release of their imprisoned comrades, possibly sending them to Syria or Algeria, after which they would free the captives at the base. If their demands were not met and

51 Sümer, *DEVİRİM*, 114-118.

52 *Ibid*, 121-123.

the government mounted an offensive, they were prepared to blow up the base along with themselves.⁵³

Meanwhile, plans to seize the bank vehicle traveling between Gaziantep and Adıyaman remained active, dependent on intelligence from Hasan Dalkılıç. It was, however, considered a secondary operation. The two teams planned to reconvene in the Binboğalar region after completing their missions.

Before splitting up, the teams had already traveled extensively for days, aware that the gendarmerie was searching for them and that a commando battalion was on their trail. At times, military planes flew overhead, performing reconnaissance. The gendarme had first suspected in late April that THKO's rural cadre was active in the area. The suspicious arrival of Alpaslan Özdoğan and Atilla Keskin at the train station in military attire with a motorcycle led to the station police alerting the gendarmerie. Then came reports of the Radyolink Facility raid, prompting a three-day search of Gölpınar Village, Bölüklü Village, İkinciler Village, Ilıcak Cave, Cibo Cave, Başyurt Plateau, Sinekönmez Plateau, Şek Plateau, and the foothills of Kartal Mountain. At Cibo Cave, leftover items unlike those normally abandoned by villagers confirmed the presence of an armed group, and from that point on, the gendarmerie intensified its search. After May 18, a commando battalion was dispatched to Malatya to fight the THKO members, significantly increasing state forces' numerical and operational advantage. The key question for them was how to best leverage this reinforced capacity. The gendarmerie commanders of Maraş and Adıyaman proposed starting operations in Kürecik and then moving south, but Yılmaz Erkekoğlu, who had been pursuing the rural cadre for some time, favored an operation beginning from Göksu Valley in the opposite direction, heading north. Ultimately, the operation commenced in the Kürecik region, in line with the other commanders' decision, but was soon shifted southward following

53 Semra Çelebi, "Mustafa Yalçiner: Sanırım Sinan'ın Parmağı Tetiğe Basılı Kaldı", *Bianet*, May 30, 2009, <https://bianet.org/yazi/mustafa-yalciner-sanirim-sinan-in-parmagi-tetige-basili-kaldi-114863>. Mustafa Yalçiner, interview by Eylem Delikanlı, Bellek Müzesi, July 12, 2023, <https://bellekmuzesi.org/sozlutarih/mustafa-yalciner-1-2/>.

overlapping denunciations from a shopkeeper in Kullartatlar Village and the driver THKO had attempted to abduct. However, by then, the rural cadre had already left the area, eluding capture for the time being.⁵⁴

Exhausted from days of travel, the action team began to run short on provisions and water. Worn out, they sought refuge in a hollow among oak trees near İnekli Village. Their map sheets no longer covered this territory, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact location. As daylight broke, they recognized the heightened risk of being discovered given their military attire and weapons. A debate ensued about how to proceed, since they were racing against time for two planned operations. Some suggested retreat, yet Sinan Cemgil insisted on pressing forward without delay.⁵⁵

While they rested, a shepherd from İnekli Village stumbled upon the group and froze in fear. As on previous occasions, the revolutionaries introduced themselves as hunters. The man backed away nervously. Although they could have taken him captive to avert danger, they chose not to. Given their past experiences in the area, they presumed they would not be reported. This proved a costly mistake.

İnekli Village was predominantly MHP, whose members viewed the student movement and its revolutionary offshoots as enemies. Rumors of a Dev-Genç-affiliated group roaming the mountains had circulated for some time. Thus, it was unsurprising that the shepherd alerted the village headman, who phoned the gendarmerie to file a report. The presence of a telephone in the village turned out to be a stroke of misfortune for THKO.⁵⁶

The gendarmerie commander promptly conscripted able-bodied residents of the village, forming an armed unit, and set out to confront THKO. Meanwhile, the group, not having moved far, opted to rest—overconfident in their assumption that they would not be reported and

54 Erkekoğlu, *Nurhak*, 55-61.

55 Öz, *Gülünün*, 96-99.

56 Ibid, 109.

failing to notice telephone poles in the area. Fatigue also weighed heavily on their judgment.⁵⁷

Hacı Tonak was about to leave for reconnaissance and had departed from the group with Sinan Cemgil, intending to climb a slope offering a view of the valley. Everything appeared quiet. While they surveyed the area, they heard rustling in the bushes; then, gunfire erupted without warning. A combined force of gendarmerie troops and armed villagers opened fire on THKO members. Others quickly joined Cemgil, and the firefight lasted approximately two hours. The gendarmerie managed to encircle the group, securing a decisive advantage. First, Kadir Manga was shot and killed, followed by Alpaslan Özdoğan. Though wounded in the leg, Cemgil made his way to Özdoğan's side. Mustafa Yalçınır was shot in the hip and arm, collapsing to the ground. Moments later, the continuous firing of Cemgil's Kalashnikov was heard until it abruptly ceased. He had been killed, his finger still on the trigger. Ahmet Erdoğan and Metin Güngörmüş remained outside the cordon; their guns had jammed, preventing them from joining the fight. Believing their comrades would also retreat, they withdrew from the area. Thus, on May 31, 1971, THKO's Kürecik strike team was defeated and scattered.⁵⁸

The second group learned around noon that same day via radio that three of their comrades from the strike team had been killed, one had been captured wounded, and another had been apprehended unarmed. Shortly thereafter, they received news that Cihan Alptekin and Tayfur Cinemre, who were en route to join the rural movement, had been arrested. Cihan Alptekin was THKO's Istanbul leader. With three comrades from the strike team dead and Hüseyin İnan, Deniz Gezmiş, and Yusuf Aslan imprisoned and facing execution, the remaining members were confronted with a grim reality: THKO movement was nearing its end.

The group, led by Tuncer Sümer, convened to assess the situation. To enhance their mobility, they buried all non-essential items and carefully

57 Erkekoğlu, *Nurhak*, 71.

58 Mustafa Yalçınır, interview by Eylem Delikanlı.

set out toward Binboğalar. However, a sense of panic, hopelessness, and mistrust dominated the group. Morale had been severely depleted by the devastating news. The four commanders convened to discuss their next steps, ultimately agreeing on the idea of dispersing. Subsequently, a broader meeting was held with the entire cadre, where the proposal to disband was presented. Initially, Metin Yıldırımürk was adamant about fighting to the death, but the general sentiment within the group favored disbandment. He ultimately conceded and approved the decision.

The fourteen remaining placed their hands over their weapons and swore to continue the struggle and ensure that their comrades' sacrifices would not be in vain. They then divided the remaining funds equally among themselves and distributed the weapons according to need. They planned to split into smaller groups, scatter in different directions, and find safety in secure areas. First group consisted of Semih Orcan, Ercan Öztürk, Osman Arkış, and Recep Sakın. They planned to travel to Elbistan and seek assistance from known contacts. Second group comprised Mehmet Asal, Palulu Yusuf Aslan, Elazığlı Cemal, Hasan Kırteke, and Metin Yıldırımürk. The second and third groups would travel together until reaching Kullartatlar Village, where they would split, with the second group heading toward Kürecik. Third group included Osman Bahadır, Sadık Soysetenci, Cengiz Baltacı, Tuncer Sümer, and Fevzi Bal. They planned to proceed from Kullartatlar toward Kapıdere and Doğanşehir before dispersing.⁵⁹

The groups separated and embarked on their respective paths. However, it was not long before most of them were apprehended. Palulu Yusuf Aslan, Elazığlı Cemal, and Tuncer Sümer managed to evade capture for an extended period. Sümer eventually succeeded in escaping to Syria with Mustafa Karadağ, where he reunited with Teslim Töre and other members. The THKO rural movement came to an end with the disbandment of the groups.⁶⁰

59 Rıza and Şeremetli, *Erikler*, 170.

60 Ibid, 171.

§ 4.3 Conclusion

The THKO emerged from the student movement, but the ideological transformation that began in the late 1960s culminated in 1971 with a complete practical rupture from the student movement. This shift is reflected both in their adoption of armed struggle as a method and their orientation toward peasants as their primary base. Although their ultimate goal was a rural movement, most of their successful operations occurred in urban settings. These operations, aimed at creating resources, gaining prestige, retaliating, and intimidating, predominantly targeted locations symbolizing imperialism, their primary adversary. This alignment between their ideology and practical actions serves as concrete evidence of their consistency.

The resources obtained through urban actions were channeled into the rural movement, which began in March. In the rural, THKO managed to secure shelter and meet their basic needs through a network of relationships with local peasants. However, their objectives of conducting armed propaganda in villages and establishing village committees were not achieved. Relationships with local communities were largely limited to meeting immediate needs, resulting in a modest number of peasant recruits. Some of these recruits later departed due to practical difficulties and theoretical disagreements, leaving the student-dominated composition of the movement unchanged. Thus, while THKO aspired to build a base among the peasantry, they were unsuccessful in this endeavor. The abandonment of the student movement's natural organizational base did not lead to quantitative growth, and the low recruitment levels contributed to the movement's eventual defeat.

THKO's relationship with the local population was generally positive, despite being influenced by several variables. Throughout the movement, very few peasants reported them to the authorities, while many chose to assist the THKO, influenced by historical factors such as ethnic, political, and religious dynamics. Contrary to the common perception of THKO as "romantic revolutionaries" who held unrealistic beliefs about the masses, the interactions between the local population and THKO reveal a pattern

of mutual trust and collaboration. This underscores that they were not “naive, romantic, and idealistic” individuals but realist actors who evaluated their circumstances realistically. This observation challenges the prevailing narrative about the movement.

Karl Marx’s words, “The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses,”⁶¹ aptly summarize the THKO’s rural movement experience. Fully aware that material power must be countered by material force, THKO chose to prioritize the “criticism of the weapon.” However, their inability to connect their theoretical framework with the masses left them bereft of the material support of a collective force. Ultimately, they were defeated, unable to contend with the more organized and resourceful state apparatus.

61 Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 7.

5

Conclusion

Dixi et salvavi animam meam.

– Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*

Between 1968 and 1971, history appears to have proceeded at an exceptionally rapid pace, revealing numerous unprecedented developments. Those who propelled this acceleration were the actors within the student movement itself. The convergence with the era's class struggles, along with ongoing ideological debates, fueled the transformation of the student movement. Students did not merely identify themselves as students but rather described themselves as "revolutionaries." They declared their objective to be "revolution," and they designated "imperialism, the collaborating bourgeoisie, and feudalism" as their principal adversaries. Prominent organizations within the movement paved the way for breaking away from the conventional form of the student movement, thereby enabling it to extend beyond a framework solely composed of students and evolve into a more comprehensive youth movement. Throughout this thesis, therefore, the term "student movement" also encompasses young people who were not formally students. The unique aspect of '68 in Turkey is

that it transcended the parameters of a purely student-based movement by adopting approaches centered on political violence in pursuit of “revolution,” ultimately culminating in a practical and ideological rupture in 1971. THKO serves as the initial example of this break.

This thesis maintains a measured distance from the tendency to classify THKO as a “petty-bourgeois” movement. In the context of the leftist literature emerging in the latter half of the 1970s, the concept of a “petty-bourgeois movement/organization” became a form of labeling mechanism, losing much of its explanatory capacity. Although it ostensibly denotes a particular class characteristic, its application has been so extensive that it no longer functions as a sufficiently grounded analytical category. Instead, by acknowledging THKO as a singular movement of its time, this study deliberately avoids narrowing its interpretation of the movement through such constraining definitions.

Conflicts involving conservative and nationalist groups, as well as the government, played a significant role in deepening the political polarization of the period. In opposition to the student movement led by FKF and Dev-Genç, conservative/Islamist organizations, nationalist groups under the leadership of MHP and the right-wing AP government formed a tacit alliance driven by common interests. The outcome of this alliance materialized as repression and violence directed at the student movement. Numerous students within the movement lost their lives amid confrontations with Islamist forces, *Ülkücü* commandos, and the police. This development not only popularized the “use of arms for self-defense” among students but also intensified their sense of being under “threat.” The disproportionate violence against the movement was perceived as an attempt by the government to create an “environment of fascist terror” directed at “revolutionaries”, by students.

The waning influence of TİP—the largest socialist party of the time—together with its exclusionary attitude toward youth, left a negative impression of parliamentarism on the student movement. Over time, student and youth groups began to label TİP as “pacifist,” increasingly doubting that a “revolution” could materialize under its leadership, and consequently seeking alternative means. As TİP’s influence diminished

within the student movement and within organizations such as FKF/Dev-Genç and theories like MDD currently gained prominence.

The violence targeting the student movement, contemporaneous ideological debates, and the rise of class struggles led student and youth groups to conclude that while “revolution was seeking a form,” it could not be realized through “pacifist” methods. Initially taking up arms as a defensive measure, the movement gradually gravitated toward the notion of “revolution through armed struggle.” This shift ultimately intersected with the Palestinian cause.

Palestinian resistance organizations were regarded at the time as “armed groups engaged in anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist national liberation struggles,” which aligned with the inclination of these student activists. However, “armed struggle” then existed merely as an idea, and no original Turkey-centered approaches had yet emerged. Among the groups that traveled to Palestine to explore a strategy grounded in armed resistance, the Ankara group led by Hüseyin İnan exemplified this tendency.

With the assistance of Abdülkadir Yaşargün from the Antep group, the Ankara contingent joined Fatah both to receive training and to “fight against imperialism.” During this period, various ideological, cultural, and behavioral factors led to internal disagreements. While these rifts were detrimental in terms of reducing the overall number of participants to THKO, they proved beneficial to the Ankara group—who would later establish THKO—by fostering a tight-knit core united through mutual trust and shared ideas. For the future founders of THKO, the Palestinian experience yielded limited tangible benefits; the Ankara group did not attain the comprehensive training they had envisioned but did acquire some practical experience. Overall, the Palestinian episode broadened their view of anti-imperialist struggle on the international stage and established connections with the understanding of revolution in Turkey. Its resemblance to the form of struggle the Ankara group sought to undertake also served as a motivating force in the establishment of THKO.

If there is a particular individual and group who played a central role in the organizational process of THKO and the shaping of its ideology, it would be Hüseyin İnan and the Ankara group. As can be gleaned from the article written by Deniz Gezmiş and his cohort in the journal *İleri*, they shared a common perspective with İnan and his group. Following this article and the subsequent connections established, Gezmiş and those around him joined the Ankara group. This affiliation entailed both an alignment with İnan's ideological standpoint and the acceptance of his leadership. Although İnan's arrest deprived him of a central practical role during the rural movement, his theoretical leadership remained intact. Throughout this thesis, this context has been taken into account: Rather than supporting a narrative in which Deniz Gezmiş overshadowed THKO, the focus is placed on İnan and his group.

The articles "Why Did I Go to Fatah?" by Yusuf Aslan, "What the Days Ahead Will Bring..." by Gezmiş's group, and "To the Peoples of Turkey..." produced by İnan's group in Diyarbakır Prison, represent the earliest expressions of the THKO's foundational ideological orientation. In line with various concepts and themes discussed in these writings, the THKO acted within a specific ideological framework. A comparative reading of these texts alongside Hüseyin İnan's brochure, *The Path of Turkey's Revolution*, reveals clear ideological continuity. This brochure is significant for crystallizing many of the themes initially articulated in the earlier writings.

Contrary to certain claims in literature, THKO was not merely a movement grounded in practice without any ideological foundation. Although it left behind relatively few theoretical texts compared to other movements of its era, a close reading of these writings in conjunction with the organization's practical activities reveals clear evidence of an ideological framework. Influenced by contemporary theoretical debates in both national and international contexts, THKO successfully crafted its own ideological path out of these currents. Prominent among the sources that shaped the organization's theoretical outlook were Doğan Avcıoğlu and Mihri Belli. It is thus unsurprising that key aspects of the movement—such as its historical perspective, its analysis of economic

classes, and its positioning of imperialism as the chief contradiction—were informed by MDD theory pioneered by these figures. Beyond that, THKO also drew inspiration from the widely discussed Cuban, Vietnamese, and Chinese revolutions of the period. While some in the literature have classified THKO as a *foco*-oriented organization, its rhetoric of “people’s war” was molded not only by *foco* theory but also by the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggles that defined the era. Formed by young people who did not regard parliamentarist methods as a viable path toward the desired revolution and who believed that pacifism would ultimately lead to defeat, THKO endeavored to adapt various ideological streams to Turkey’s specific conditions rather than adopting them wholesale. By synthesizing these different influences, THKO forged a unique course that diverged from existing models on several points.

İnan, THKO’s leading theorist, characterized Turkey as a semi-dependent country under imperialist exploitation. He argued that capitalist, feudal, and semi-feudal modes of production all coexisted in Turkey. According to İnan, because imperialist powers control nearly all investment fields, genuinely autonomous capitalist relations can barely survive, and there is virtually no independent industrial base exists under the direction of a national bourgeoisie. Thus, he did not assign a revolutionary role to the bourgeoisie, nor did he interpret MDD merely as a “bourgeois revolution.” Rather, he maintained that all reactionary classes and strata were in collusion with imperialism. This group of “collaborators” included the collaborator bourgeoisie, commercial bourgeoisie, feudal landlords, and both civilian and military technocrats. He further asserted that the fundamental contradiction in Turkey lay between “imperialism and the masses of people.” Consequently, he proposed that the struggle—aimed at confronting imperialism and every reactionary class and social strata—would require the formation of a “National Front,” led by the working class and with the peasantry as its principal ally. As for the means of this struggle, he envisioned a dual structure: one consisting of a working-class organization/party and a people’s army.

According to İnan, because the working class is continuously engaged in production, it cannot join the people's army during the initial stages of the struggle. However, he argues that peasants, who possess even fewer democratic rights than workers, can serve as the principal force of a people's army. For this reason, as implied by its name, THKO was initially founded as a "people's army." Over the course of the struggle, the emergence of a party from within the army was anticipated. These factors explain why THKO is often associated in the literature with *foco* theory. Undoubtedly, although the movement's practical trajectory exhibits elements consistent with *foco* theory, İnan offers a clear critique of both "Regis Derbay" and *foco*. He contends that Derbay equates people's war with "guerrilla warfare" and transforms "guerrilla tactics" into an end in themselves, a position he deems adventurist and thus rejects. Overall, while THKO was influenced by *foco* theory, it also departed from it in some respects.

Despite Avcioglu and Belli's influence on İnan, his embrace of a "politics of violence," his "distance from the army," his rejection of "pacifist methods," and his endorsement of a "dual party-army structure" constitute a substantial break from these figures in terms of "revolutionary strategy," thereby highlighting THKO's unique character.

THKO's urban operations were primarily aimed at imperialism. They targeted banks "collaborating with imperialism", symbolic sites, or soldiers and military bases that "directly served imperial interests". Even those actions undertaken for resource acquisition in urban areas exhibited an anti-imperialist character. Through these activities, the organization secured financial resources, engaged in propaganda, and enhanced its reputation. The abduction of four U.S. soldiers marked the pinnacle of THKO's urban campaign. During this episode, the movement issued its first declaration, calling upon various social classes and groups to join the struggle and exposing imperialism. Considered collectively, the organization's ideology and actions reflect a consistent internal logic.

In its second declaration, published immediately following the March 12 Memorandum, THKO promptly adopted a critical stance against the memorandum and the prospect of a coup. Unlike the *Yön/Devrim* faction,

it harbored no expectation of achieving “revolution through a coup” orchestrated by the military. On the contrary, THKO thoroughly analyzed the memorandum, drawing attention to the army’s reactionary tendencies and highlighting that the memorandum targeted the rising revolutionary and class movements. Reiterating its view that “armed struggle” was the only avenue to counter a potential coup, THKO thereby challenged accounts in the literature suggesting it acted in the hope of triggering a leftist coup.

Efforts to establish the rural movement proceeded in parallel with urban actions, and with urban militants joining it, the rural movement began in full in March. Resources acquired from the city were utilized in the rural campaign. Relations with local communities played a critical role in constructing the movement; support often came from groups with longstanding tensions with the state due to ethnic, religious, or political factors. Key reference figures proved instrumental in establishing ties with the local populace and securing their trust. Throughout the movement, both the public’s perception of the revolutionaries and THKO’s relations with local communities were generally positive, indicating a reciprocal dynamic. This challenges the view that THKO members approached the peasantry with an overly romantic or utopian mindset, only to encounter opposition from the locals.

During the rural campaign, various factors—such as the capture of the organization’s leadership, the defective weapons, and the movement’s dependence on local communities—posed vulnerabilities for the movement. However, the primary problem was the challenge of achieving the movement’s main objective: “recruiting peasants.” Propaganda and organizing efforts directed at the peasantry were relatively weak, and relations mostly revolved around meeting immediate needs. Although some villagers did join through local networks, about half of them left the movement early. Born out of the student movement, THKO could not successfully shift its base from students to peasants. Insufficient recruitment meant the movement did not grow large enough to challenge the state’s capacity. It was ultimately defeated in clashes with the gendarmerie while attempting to raid the

U.S. radar base. Following the dispersal of the remaining rural cadres, THKO's rural campaign effectively came to an end.

Both THKO and similar organizations of the period were defeated at the time. Yet, is this truly a defeat? Considering that the legacy left by the leaders of '71 laid the groundwork for a robust socialist movement in the 1970s and provided momentum to broader social mobilization in Turkey, it is not an absolute defeat. Moreover, the enduring respect accorded to these figures in the society of Turkey constitutes a victory in its own right.



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