

THE RESISTANCE COMMITTEES: *DEVİRİMCI YOL* AND THE QUESTION OF
REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION IN TURKEY IN THE LATE 1970s

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to examine the experiences of the resistance committees organized by a revolutionary Movement, *Devrimci Yol* (Revolutionary Way), in Turkey in the late 1970s. More specifically it focuses on Devrimci Yol's formulations concerning the issue of revolutionary organization, how it and the resistance committee experiences –within their contexts- embodied the tension between being organized in accordance with initiating change within the social relations of everyday life and being organized in accordance with a strategy of state takeover. The study argues that Devrimci Yol's attempt towards the reconciliation of these two understandings gave the Movement its peculiarity within the left in Turkey. With all their constraints the resistance committees and accompanying experiences of people's and workplace committees pointed out a logic of revolutionary organization different from the predominant one in which any kind of revolutionary transformation was postponed until the forthcoming revolution. When examining Devrimci Yol and the resistance committees, the study refers to different approaches to the question of revolutionary organization in Marxist theory and practice.

Keywords: Revolutionary Way, resistance committees, revolutionary organization, Left in Turkey in the late 1970s

ÖZ

DİRENİŞ KOMİTELERİ: DEVRİMCİ YOL VE 1970'LER SONU TÜRKİYE'SİNDE DEVRİMCİ ÖRGÜTLENME SORUNU

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Bu tez Türkiye'de 1970'lerin sonunda Devrimci Yol hareketi tarafından örgütlenmiş olan direniş komiteleri deneyimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Daha özeldir Devrimci Yol'un devrimci örgütlenme konusuna ilişkin formülasyonları ve Devrimci Yol ve direniş komiteleri deneyimlerinin –kendi bağlamlarında- gündelik yaşamın toplumsal ilişkileri içinde deęişim gerçekleştirmek ile devlet iktidarını ele geçirme stratejisi uyarınca örgütlenmek arasındaki gerilimi bünyelerinde nasıl barındırdıkları üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, Devrimci Yol'un bu iki anlayışı uzlaştırma çabasının onu Türkiye solu içinde özgün bir yere yerleştirdiğini iddia etmektedir. Bütün sınırlılıkları ile birlikte direniş komiteleri ve beraberindeki halk ve işyeri komiteleri deneyimleri her türlü devrimci dönüşümün gelecekte gerçekleştirecek olan devrime kadar ertelendiği hakim anlayıştan farklı bir örgütlenme mantığına işaret etmiştir. Çalışma Devrimci Yol ve direniş komitelerini incelerken devrimci örgütlenme sorununa dair Marxist kuram ve pratikteki farklı yaklaşımlara atıfta bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Devrimci Yol, direniş komiteleri, devrimci örgütlenme, 1970'ler sonunda Türkiye solu

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ÖZ	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION, STATE AND LEADERSHIP IN MARXIST THEORY	7
2.1. Introduction	7
2.2. Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Party and Soviets	10
2.2.1. The Soviets	11
2.2.2. Lenin on the Party and Soviets	13
2.3. Gramsci on Factory Councils and Modern Prince	18
2.4. Different Forms of Revolutionary Organization and the Issue of Leadership in the Third World in the Second Half of the 20 th Century	21
2.5. Recent Debates Old Questions	24
2.6. Concluding Remarks.....	28
3. DEVRİMCİ YOL AND ITS ROOTS WITHIN LEFT IN TURKEY	31
3.1. Introduction	31
3.2. The Roots of Devrimci Yol within Left in Turkey	35
3.2.1. National Democratic Revolution (MDD) Thesis on Questions of Revolutionary Organization and Power	39
3.2.2. FKF/Dev-Genç: The Youth Movement, Leadership and Mass-Cadre Relations	42
3.2.3. THKP-C on Armed Struggle and Revolutionary Organization.....	44

3.2.3.1. Anti-Imperialism and Politicised Armed War Strategy ..	48
3.2.3.2. The Issues of Organization, Leadership	
Mass-Cadre Relations	49
3.3. The Organization Inflation: Main Pillars of the Left	
in Turkey in the Late 1970s	51
3.4. Devrimci Yol and the Question of Organization	53
3.4.1. General Characteristics and	
the Fundamental Premises of the Movement	55
3.4.1.1. The General Organizational Scheme	
of the Movement	55
3.4.1.2. Fundamental Premises of the Movement	57
3.4.1.3. Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Organization	61
3.4.1.4. “To Create the Narrowest Cadre within	
the Widest Mass”: Devrimci Yol’s Understanding of	
Mass-Cadre Relations and Leadership.....	65
3.4.1.5. A Movement on the Road of Becoming a Party	68
3.5. Concluding Remarks	70
4. THE RESISTANCE COMMITTEES.....	74
4.1. The Twofold Character of the Resistance Committees	
and Different Roles Attached by Devrimci Yol to Them	76
4.2. Resistance Against Fascism: The Resistance Committes	
and the Main Characteristics of the Organization	
in the Districts and Neighborhoods	79
4.2.1. Anti-Fascism and the Resistance Committees	81
4.2.2. General Composition and Activities of the Resistance	
Committees in the Districts and Neighborhoods	83
4.2.2.1. The Assaults, Religion and Solidarity	86
4.2.2.2. The Roles of Devrimci Yol Militants the Formation	
and Operation of the Resistance Committees	90
4.3. The People’s and the Workplace Committees.....	93
4.3.1. Workplace Committees:	

The Case of <i>Yeraltı Maden-İş</i> Union.....	94
4.3.2. <i>Fatsa</i> and the People’s Committees	99
4.4. Three Different Approaches towards the Resistance Committees within the Left in Turkey in the Late 1970s	101
4.4.1. Kurtuluş	102
4.4.2. Devrimci Sol	104
4.4.3. Birikim	107
4.5. Concluding Remarks	110
5. CONCLUSION	115
REFERENCES	123
APPENDIX A: INFORMATION ON THE INTERVIEWED MILITANTS	134

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 1970s were the years of intensification of the political mobilization of subordinated classes in Turkey, where many demonstrations, strikes and occupations were realized. The era also witnessed a popular support towards the left as a whole and the existence of many splits among the revolutionary movements and parties. Although these were the years of important social transformations and dense struggles in many different fields of the social life, the 1970s have been examined and discussed quite limitedly. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to these discussions with an examination of the Revolutionary Way (hereafter, Devrimci Yol), a movement, the organizational life of which had lasted almost two and a half year (from mid-1977 until the end of the 1980) and that constituted the largest revolutionary movement of the era (cf. Belge, 1987: 148, STMA, 1988: 2256-61). More specifically this is an exploratory study that concerns with Devrimci Yol's understanding of revolutionary organization and its practical implications.

The political climax in which Devrimci Yol operated as well as that of the leftist tradition it inherited as a whole leant upon a common conception of revolutionary organization as an instrument which was consisting of professional cadres and which was dedicated to the state takeover. Devrimci Yol incorporated this understanding a perspective of being organized with a rationale of initiating change from the existing situation, from the everyday life. Following this second perspective it organized the resistance committees and framed them as the seeds of an alternative society. The resistance committees were formed by the Movement in order to overcome the fascist attacks in the late 1970s with an emphasis on the need to channel the anti-

fascist movement to a revolutionary line by incorporating the mass initiative into it. It was proposed and attempted to be applied by Devrimci Yol to transform resistance committees into organizational units such as people's committees and factory/workplace committees where the social relations of the future could be concretized from now and here. This vision was also combined with a strategy of taking the state power and an emphasis on the need to create the party that would realize the takeover.

The main question this thesis asks is how Devrimci Yol did frame its formulations concerning the issue of revolutionary organization and how it and the resistance committee experiences embodied the tension between being organized in accordance with initiating change within the social relations of everyday life and being organized in accordance with a strategy of state takeover. The tension at issue, which is by no means peculiar to Devrimci Yol, has two dimensions: On the one hand to be organized via self-initiative and to attempt initiating change from the now and here has been bound with being absorbed and/or defeated by capital. On the other hand, to be organized in a centralized fashion with an aim of altering this risk has been susceptible to bureaucratization and the risk of transforming into a sort of organization that is tried to be transcended.

The main problem of the thesis, then, is to examine the practical implications of the tension that these two different dimensions implied for the case of Devrimci Yol and resistance committees. I will argue that its attempt towards the reconciliation of these two understandings gave the Movement its peculiarity within left in Turkey, that is to say, neither of the political organizations of the era had an effort towards such kind of reconciliation and neither of them confronted with a tension of this kind practically. Therefore, the attempt of identifying the components of the practical implications of this tension is important for a general assessment of the left in Turkey and specifically the place of Devrimci Yol within it. Furthermore the questions that was practically proposed by the Devrimci Yol and the committee experiences are by no means pertaining to the past, rather the reconciliation of and the compatibility

with these two understandings has been –and continues to be- crucial with regard to the question of revolutionary organization.

Before going into detail it is important to clarify one thing about naming. The resistance committees were the organizational units that were formed by Devrimci Yol, by leaning upon the existing defensive tendencies among the dwellers, as local defense organizations against the attacks realized by the ultra-nationalist, *ülküçü* militants. They were called by Devrimci Yol with this name and they specifically referred to ‘anti-fascist’ organizations in the districts and neighborhoods. However, besides, it was possible to confront with certain namings such as people’s committees and workplace committees. These were the names that specifically referred to certain organizations, the solidaristic and participatory characteristics of which were more on the forefront and which can be regarded as committee forms that were more akin to the category of ‘self-organization’. These committees had both similarities and differences among themselves as well as with resistance committees.

In order to puzzle out the main questions of the thesis, I have examined the journal of *Devrimci Yol* (1977-1980) with an aim of conceiving the Movement’s political disposition and its inferences and proposals concerning the issues of revolution, state, mass/cadre relations and the revolutionary organization. For an examination of the resistance committee experiences in the neighborhoods and districts, due to the lack of sufficient written material and information on their inner structures and general narratives, I have made in-depth interviews with seven militants of the Movement who had directly taken part in the resistance committee experiences in different neighborhoods and districts¹. Throughout the thesis I will use pseudonyms when making citations from the interviews.

When designing my questions, keeping in mind the risk of being susceptible to selective memory and the problem of retrospection, I have focused on the militants’

¹ Short information on the interviewed militants is provided in Appendix A.

own experiences in the neighborhoods and/or districts where they organized or partook in different resistance committee experiences, rather than taking to the center their general assessments concerning the Movement, their imprisonment processes and their comments on the political inclinations of different members of the Movement after the 1980 period. The questions I have asked can be collected under four main headings: The militants' narrative of the first contact with politics and specifically with Devrimci Yol; characteristics of the neighborhoods and/or districts and the resistance committees they organized or partook (including the general characteristics of the inhabitants, profiles of resistance committee participants, activities realized within the framework of committees, participatory mechanisms, militancy etc.); assessments concerning the relation between anti-fascism and resistance committees; the relations of resistance committees with the central committee (hierarchy, chain of command, impact and orientation).

I will begin with a review of different approaches concerning the question of revolutionary organization within Marxist theory in relation to different conceptions of revolution, state and leadership. The main focus of the second chapter will be the question of compatibility of the vanguard party, centralization and a state-centered politics with self-emancipation and self-organizations of soviet/council type. My examination will start with different conceptions of the terms 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'the withering away of the state'. Marx's reading of the Paris Commune and Lenin's conception of the party and his changing assessments concerning the party-soviet relations throughout the revolutionary process in Russia will be the following focal points. Lenin's ever-changing emphasis on the importance of the vanguard party had a deep impact in revolutionary politics throughout the 20th century. The suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion shortly after the October Revolution by the Bolsheviks will be issued as a symbol of the suppression of the workers' self organizations by the party that claimed to be their vanguard.

This chapter also concerns with Gramsci's conception of the 'modern prince' and the role he casts the party and the factory councils. The position of the intellectuals and the 'communist education' in his formulations will also be handled. My following focus will be an overall assessment of the general framework of revolutionary politics in the third world in the post-war period. Then I will finish this chapter with an elaboration of a recent debate, initiated by John Holloway and contributed by many other theorists. The questions they have been tackling with, I will argue, are also important for an elaboration of the resistance committee experiences in Turkey in the late 1970s. None of the historical periods and theorists addressed here will be handled in a detailed and a comprehensive manner. Rather, they will be briefly posed and the questions they bring up that are also related with the examination of Devrimci Yol and the resistance committees will be gathered.

Both the social climax of Turkey in the 1970s and the characteristics of the revolutionary tradition are vital to be taken into consideration in order to examine Devrimci Yol and the resistance committees. Accordingly in the third chapter I will concern with the general characteristics of the Movement, with an examination of its political roots within the left in Turkey. The chapter starts with an overview of the general characteristics of the 1960s and especially 1970s in Turkey and continues with the fundamental tenets of the Socialist Revolution-National Democratic Revolution debate that stamped the 1960s. In this chapter, along with the National Democratic Revolution line, I will especially deal with the movements of Devrimci Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu, (The Federation of Revolutionary Youth Associations, hereafter Dev-Genç) and Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi, (People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey, hereafter THKP-C) as the predecessors of Devrimci Yol by specifically focusing upon their conceptions of revolution, revolutionary organization and leadership. After mentioning the general lines of distinctions within revolutionary movements and parties of the late 1970s, my focal point will be the fundamental characteristics of Devrimci Yol as well as its main points of convergences and divergences with the political tradition it inherited. I will deal with the Movement's organizational characteristics, its way of framing anti-

fascism, revolution and revolutionary organization and the way it conceived the issue of leadership and the ‘mass/cadre’ relations. Accordingly in this chapter I will attempt to specify the peculiarities that distinguished Devrimci Yol from its roots as well as from the left in Turkey as a whole with regard to the above mentioned issues.

The fourth chapter will deal with the general characteristics of resistance committees, more specifically with the relation between the formulations of the Movement concerning them and their practice. Dwelling mainly upon the interviews I have made and the journal of the Movement I will concern with different characteristics of the committees, the contradictions and tensions they implied and the questions they proposed in their time of existence. I will also deal with the the people and the workplace committees, specifically with the Fatsa and the Yeraltı Maden İş experiences, and their similarities and differences among each other as well as with the resistance committees. It will be my contention that the committee experiences as a whole reflected an embodiment of the tension between self-organization, self-emancipation and the centralization, concentration. I will also argue that the committee experiences, with all their deficiencies and limits, were important –and the unique - cases in Turkey that carry the seeds of anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical and self-emancipatory forms of organization and a perspective of transformation in the everyday life by the self activity of the masses and in that regard they carried an affinity with the cases such as early Russian soviets and the Italian factory councils.

CHAPTER 2

DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION, STATE AND LEADERSHIP IN MARXIST THEORY

2. 1. Introduction

The history of socialism is the history of socialisms. Moreover it is a history of fraternal plurality, but of rivalry and antagonism. The battle lines have changed (Marxist versus anarchist, collectivists versus syndicalists, reformers versus revolutionaries, communists versus social democrats, Trotskyists versus everybody else...), but battle lines there have always been. Many socialists have reserved their sharpest arrows for attacks on other socialists, while almost all socialists have found it necessary to fight on at least two fronts at the same time. The arena of battle has also changed significantly over time, to take in new places, contestants and traditions (Wright, 1986:1)

The issues of state, revolutionary organization and leadership have had been complex objects of analysis within Marxist theory and practice, apprehensions of which are also interrelated with each other. They also purport to different understandings of socialism, which, as stated in the epigraph, has been subject to intense debates and the reason behind rivalry and antagonism among different Marxist currents and theorists. Different conceptions of these concepts have been proposed by different Marxist and/or revolutionary currents which have flourished in different time periods throughout the world. It is inevitable in this thesis to handle these issues and their different conceptions in a rough and a selective manner, in a way that focuses on the further examination posed in the subsequent chapters. Therefore I will restrict myself

with elaborating on certain different understandings of these concepts with reference to several key figures within Marxist theory without trying to be all inclusive. In that regard my focal point will be the different conceptions of and the roles attached to the ‘vanguard party’ and ‘power organs of soviet/council type’. That is to say, the issues of state and leadership, rather than being handled as separate topics, will be dealt with in relation with the above mentioned focal point.

How a revolutionary process should be organized; what the peculiar organizational form should be for the [self-] emancipation of the dominated classes; whether the notion of vanguard party is compatible with the realization of socialism; whether it is possible and necessary to reconcile the self-organization and centralization; can power organs of soviet/council type appear, perpetuate and permeate without concentration and centralization will be the questions that I will pose when examining the formulations of different figures concerning the issues of revolutionary organization, state and leadership.

The debate over the compatibility between the means utilized in the process of revolution and the ends that would be achieved by that process, which can be called as means-ends question, is crucial with regard to these questions. It can be argued that there have been two different understandings of revolutionary transformation, broadly speaking: the one which has regarded that the withering away of the state and emancipation of the masses can be achieved by a transitory state, namely after the conquest of state power; and the other which stands for the realization of socialism by initiating transformation in the everyday life. Alongside the arguments implying the incompatibility of the two; there are also many attempts of combining and reconciling these two positions within Marxist theory, only some of which I can address here.

My examination will start with an elaboration of the notions of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and ‘the withering away of the state’. In that regard I will deal with different interpretations of Marx’s conception of the Paris Commune and its

connection with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Then I will continue with a short examination of the Russian soviets and their process of elimination from being working class power organs starting from the beginning of the 20th century in Russia and their suppression by the ‘party-state’. Lenin’s way of approaching the party and the soviets and different assessments concerning his understanding of revolutionary organization and power will be my following focus. Then I will try to examine Gramsci’s conception of the Italian factory councils, the mission he attaches to the party and the way he understands the relation between these two forms of organization. Then I will briefly take a snapshot of the ‘third world’ in the post-war period with a focus on the issue of organization. My last focus in this chapter will be a recent debate concerning the possibilities of ‘changing the world without taking power’; the debate, which has been initiated by John Holloway and contributed by many others, and which I find generative in asking questions and also offering partial answers concerning the issues of state, revolutionary organization and leadership².

All formulations that will be dealt with in the following parts are the products of different contexts, i.e. they are conditional to the specific circumstances and thus they are meaningful in the proper sense only when they are thought in their specific contexts. None of the historical periods and theorists addressed here will be handled in a detailed and a comprehensive manner. They will be briefly posed and the questions they bring up that are also related with the examination of the ‘resistance committees’ will be gathered.

Moreover the issues, processes and theorists handled in this chapter are chosen among the ones that impacted upon the formulations of different components of the revolutionary left in Turkey in the 1970s, as well as among the ones, albeit having no

² The answers of the questions ‘How should the state wither away?’ and ‘How should subordinate classes be organized?’ are strictly bound with different ways of answering the question ‘What is this state as such that is to be wither away?’. There we confront with different conceptions of the state such as the state as an ‘instrument’ (to be seized or to be transformed via parliamentary means); and the state as a relation (a form of capitalist relations), which reflect distinct understandings and definitions of the term and bring along different conceptions of revolution and revolutionary organization. For examples to the first see (Sweezy, 1942 and Miliband, 1969); for the second see (Poulantzas, 1980).

impact upon the debates in the period, I found useful for my examination of the resistance committees.

2. 2. Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Party and Soviets

Engels in his introduction to Marx's *Civil War in France*, which he wrote for the 20th anniversary of the Paris Commune, expresses that the Paris Commune represents an exemplification of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Engels, 1891). The term was specified by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* as such: 'Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*' (Marx, 1970). Although, it is not directly associated with the Paris Commune by Marx (Johnstone, 1973: 82) his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat has been affiliated with his inferences concerning the Commune not only by Engels but also by many other theorists. However there has been an ongoing dispute, which has also persisted currently, about whether the dictatorship of the proletariat should be understood as the dictatorship of the party or the commune/soviet.

In that regard Pierson indicates that 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has been subject to several interpretations: "For some it is an inconsequential aside, for others it describes an expansive and democratic form of government, as in the model of the commune, while a number of commentators –both sympathetic and hostile- identify in the formula of dictatorship of the proletariat, the essence of Marx's commitment to a centralized state and coercive, class-based rule" (1986:23). Similarly with regard to the Russian soviets and Lenin, who was also inspired from Marx's interpretation of Paris Commune and the soviet experience in Russia, many different elucidations have been offered, which are also incompatible with each other.

Before examining some of these different assessments, it would be pertinent to deal briefly with the appearance and the basic characteristics of the Russian soviets, which also constituted a model for and/or had a kinship with several other experiences such as the workers' and soldiers' councils in Germany in 1918, the peasants' and workers' collectivities during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), different forms of self- organizations flourished in several parts of the Latin America and so forth, which experienced within different places and time contexts. To be organized by self-initiative and to base the act of organizing on social doing can be regarded the fundamental constituents of this commonality.

2. 2. 1. The Soviets

Originally the word "soviet" meant "council", which was used for defining many Russian political and other institutions (Wade, 2005: 64). Nevertheless, it came to have a definite connotation for specific councils, that is, the soviets of the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and the Soviet Union as well (Wade, 2005: 64).

The appearance of the workers' committees in Russia that can be regarded as 'the seeds of the soviets', coincided with a strike wave, which was consisted of 'spontaneous strikes' that were not organized by a union or a revolutionary party (Anweiler, 1990: 65-69). These strikes that preceded the 1905 Revolution were operated by workers' committees, which were consisting of deputies elected by the workers in the factories and which functioned during the strike (Anweiler, 1990: 69). In the spring of 1905 the deputies of several factories began to constitute strike committees that encompassed the cities they were operating in, which can be regarded as the early forms of the 'soviets' (Anweiler, 1990: 72).

The Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies was constituted at the pick point of the general strike in October 1905, which transformed into a protest against the Tsarist regime (Anweiler, 1990: 76-79). The soviet type of organizations rapidly spread into other cities and the provinces, and in different places soviets of workers', soldiers'

and peasants' deputies were constituted (Anweiler, 1990: 82-83). During the 1905 Revolution, different from 1917, the number of soviets of peasants and soldiers were relatively low and a general alliance between these and workers' was not at issue (Anweiler, 1990: 85-87).

Furthermore, again different from the 1917 soviets, the existence and impact of different political groups and parties was restricted in the soviets of 1905. In Wade's words:

“The institution of soviets originated in 1905 out of a strike movement within a revolutionary situation and led a short life as a vehicle for defending worker interests. Memory of it had lived on, especially among activist industrial workers themselves, but it had not been integrated into the ideologies of the various revolutionary parties as an institution that might play a role in a future revolution or the creation of a new society afterward” (2005: 66).

By the year 1907 the workers movement started to stagnate and to be regressed by the efforts of the Tsarist authorities and revived in February, 1917 after a period of strikes and an insurgency (Anweiler, 1990: 142, 147-148). The February Revolution, like 1905, was not organized or managed by a single revolutionary party. The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies which consisted of deputies from factories and workplaces, different parties and groups and soldiers was established in the same month (Anweiler, 1990: 152) and thereafter a 'dual power', namely the coexistence of the Petrograd Soviet and the provisional government, came into existence and persisted two months (Anweiler, 1990: 181,185).

In 1917 there were different worker organizations such as 'the city soviets'³; 'factory committees'⁴; 'trade unions'⁵; 'the district soviets of workers' (and soldiers')

³ The most famous and influential ones were the Petrograd and the Moscow Soviets. They were the 'political agency whereby the socialist parties came together with the workers (and soldiers) and through which they could advance their programs for change and future revolution' (Wade, 2005: 92).

⁴ Factory committees were the workers' organizations consisting of elected workers' representatives and mainly dealt with the issues such as work conditions, wages and the internal working of the factories and the shops (Wade, 2005: 93-94).

deputies;⁶ ‘volunteer workers’ armed bands, the workers’ militias and (later) Red Guards’⁷ etc. (Anweiler, 1990: 92-96) as well as the organizations of soldiers and sailors (i Anweiler, 1990: bid. 101-111) and peasant organizations such as ‘village committees’ (Anweiler, 1990: 130).

Different from the 1905 Petersburg Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, the executive committee of the 1917 Petrograd soviet was assigned before its formation and in the election process of the deputies, different parties and groups –especially Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionary Party- were more determinant (Anweiler, 1990: 153, 158, 161; Wade, 2005: 99). While, the Bolsheviks started as the least influential of the three major socialist parties, they grew rapidly in size and importance until the October Revolution (Wade, 2005: 208). In the September 1917 they became the major political group in both Petrograd and the Moscow Soviets (Brinton, 1990: 39).

2. 2. 2. Lenin on Party and Soviets

Lenin’s written works as well as his political life have been subjected to different interpretations with regard to his understanding of the party, dictatorship of the proletariat and the withering away of the state. And many theorists, political movements and parties have focused on selectively different aspects of Lenin’s corpus as well as his political life. While some have called attention his emphasis on the importance of commune-like organizations of workers’ self-emancipation; some

⁵ Trade unions developed after the February Revolution and gradually took over most wage negotiations while the production and other daily matters of the workers were dealt with by the factory committees (Wade, 2005: 94-95)

⁶ The district soviets of workers’ (and soldiers’) deputies were the organizations based on administrative subdivisions in the larger cities, and they were more accessible and responsive than the city soviets (Wade, 2005: 95).

⁷ These organizations were either self-organized or connected to factory committees or other worker organizations. Putting pressure on the factory managements and using force in order to protect workers’ interests were among their primary functions (Wade, 2005: 96).

others have pointed out his formulations about the ‘vanguard party’ as an organization that channels proletariat the revolutionary conscious from outside.

Colletti, for instance, emphasizes that the first impression of Lenin’s *State and Revolution* makes is that it stresses upon violence for the violence’s sake and for the author it was this interpretation that was valid throughout the Stalinist era not only in Russia but also in all Communist Parties of the world (1972: 69). In his opinion instead:

State and Revolution coincides with Lenin’s first penetration and discovery of the significance of the soviet (which had first emerged much earlier, during the 1905 revolution, but which he had failed to understand), so on the level of political theory *State and Revolution* coincides with his discovery that the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ is not the dictatorship of the party but the Paris Commune, the very same Commune that, even as late as the early months of 1917, Lenin had still regarded as only a form, though an extreme one, of ‘bourgeois democratism’ (Colletti, 1972: 74).

Having a similar focal point as Colletti, Greeman indicates that “*State and Revolution* represents Lenin’s break, not only with the ‘social patriot’ betrayers of the Second International, but also with his own political and philosophical past” (1971: 6). He goes on to argue that “Where all Marxists (and especially Lenin himself, in his 1903 *What Is To Be Done?*) had emphasized the vanguard leadership, for Organization, Organization, and more Organization, Lenin, studying the Commune, now burst forth with new appreciation for the spontaneous revolutionary creativity of the masses themselves” (Greeman, 1971: 6)

Luxemburg poses important critiques to Bolsheviks’ and Lenin’s understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the vanguard party. As part of her opposition to Lenin, she indicates that:

[S]ocialist democracy is not something that begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created, it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy

people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a -handful of socialist dictators (...) it begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat (...) But this dictatorship must be the work of the class, and not a leading minority in the name of the class –that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation by the masses, it must be under their direct influence; subjugated to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people (Luxemburg, 1972: 247-249).

Rather than opposing the party as a form of revolutionary organization Luxemburg criticizes the understanding of party as an organization of professional revolutionaries that channels consciousness to the proletariat from outside. Her emphasis is on the importance of spontaneity and the soviet-council type of ‘spontaneous’ revolutionary organizations. Stressing upon the importance of workers’ own initiatives in building socialism, Luxemburg attempts to formulate the relation between organization and spontaneity as ‘a dialectical democratic process’, as ‘a process of learning and experience’ (Behrens, 2002: 37-38).

Luxemburg and her some other contemporaries who insisted upon the workers’ own initiatives in building socialism have also inspired the anti-Leninist tradition which encompassed many different figures within Marxism, and which includes diverse points of departure. A contemporary reading of Lenin’s corpus, which regard itself as anti-Leninist and which nourishes from theorists such as Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek, is that of Bonefeld’s. For Bonefeld ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ depicted by Lenin and the Leninist tradition coincides with the dictatorship of the party and is incompatible with the ideal of the ‘withering away of the state’ (2002). Basing his arguments upon Marx, he indicates that ‘The society of the free and equal does, (...), not entail the liberation of Man through the state but the emancipation of Man from the state, its abolition by the freely associated producers organizing their own human world’ (Bonefeld, 2002: 129). For the author, as Marx puts it, the self-emancipation of the proletariat can only be achieved by its own effort and therefore vanguard party as an organization that would achieve this goal by the state takeover is controversial.

In fact Lenin's corpus and his political life enable such kind of distinct interpretations. While he stressed upon the importance of the professional revolutionaries organized under the proletarian party in the process of conscious formation of the proletariat which he stressed upon when contesting against the arguments of the 'parliamentary road' offered by the second international, he, in a different context, formulated arguments concerning the importance of the council, soviet, commune type of power organs. The following two passages, which were written by him in distinct historical contexts displays well the sources of these distinct interpretations. For, while the first, which is most probably the most frequently cited quotation from Lenin's dated 1902 *What is to Be Done*, stresses the important role of professional revolutionaries in 'social democratic' conscious building rather than the spontaneous 'trade-union consciousness':

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of *all* classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between *all* classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves, namely: "To go among the workers." To bring political knowledge to the *workers* the Social Democrats must *go among all classes of the population*; they must dispatch units of their army *in all directions* (Lenin, 1961).

The second from his dated 1917 *April Theses* implies the importance of workers' own initiatives and experiences in the road towards socialism:

The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as *this* government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an *explanation* especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses. As long as we are in the

minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience (Lenin, 1917).

In that regard Anderson (1995) draws attention to the controversial character of Lenin's corpus with regard to the issues of party and the soviets, with a detailed examination of his different works by taking into account the specific historical contexts they were written. According to him while Lenin reorganized his thought by strongly criticizing bureaucratism and stressing upon the central role of the soviets in the context of the socialism and the withering away of the state in his post-1914 writings –especially in *State and Revolution*–, he did not change his mind with regard to the party, which have undermined the liberatory content he attached to the soviet power (1995: 147). In a parallel fashion Sirrianni argues that Lenin, even when posing his arguments on the problems of bureaucracy, does not give place to workers' control in production (Sirrianni, 1985: 81) Indeed it has been argued by many theorists that it is Lenin's depiction of the vanguard party in *What is to be Done?* which has constituted an important source of inspiration for the Stalinist epoch (de Giovanni, 1978: 287; Magri, 1970: 127; Anweiler, 1990: 59; Brinton, 1990: 134).

As de Giovanni indicates “*What is to Be Done?* (...) and the theory of the party described there, remains a decisive historical pivot for both Leninist theory of the political and for the complex history of the communist movement” (1979: 287). Similarly, Magri indicates that ‘Lenin's theory and practice were later restricted or liquidated in the Stalinist epoch’ (1970: 127; cf. Colletti, 1972: 69). Thus it is Lenin's formulation of the party as the carrier of the political consciousness that is to be introduced to the working class from outside that has been accepted by many communist parties and regimes throughout the world. However, as Blackburn indicates it cannot be argued that Lenin carries the full responsibility for the historical course of what has been called after him as ‘Marxism-Leninism’ (1991: 189-190; cf. Anweiler, 1990: 59; cf. Brinton, 1990: 134). Thus his later arguments concerning the importance of the councils/soviets reflect a search for a dialectical

conception of the workers' organizations of self-management and the party. Indeed it has been Stalinism and the Comintern tradition which has represented the notion of 'the dictatorship of the party' and the suppression of all sort of workers' self-organizations. In that regard this tradition, with its worldwide different versions, has constituted a prototype for a kind of 'revolutionary' politics understood as an elite project.

Thus, shortly after the October Revolution, the councils/soviets that appeared in early 1900s started to be diminished and they were transformed into 'vehicles' by the party-state (Anweiler, 1990: 25; Brinton, 1990: 17). In that regard the suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion in March 1921 by Bolsheviks symbolized the defeat of the soviet/council movement in the Soviet Russia and the condemnation of the soviets by the party-state to complete insignificance⁸.

As Rooke indicates, substitution of the party for the self-activity of the proletariat has constituted the history of the 'state socialism' in the twentieth century, and Marxism throughout the period had been generally identified with the 'twin strands of state socialism', namely Stalinism and social democracy⁹ (2002: 93-94).

2. 3. Gramsci on Factory Councils and Modern Prince

Gramsci, like Marx on Commune, saw the Italian factory councils as the nucleus of a workers' democracy, a socialist state. In Buci-Glucksmann's words, for him 'the structure of councils was essentially an attempt to create the elements of a dual power, to construct, starting from the masses, the foundations for a seizure of power that would shatter the existing state' (1980: 165).

⁸ For a detailed examination of the Kronstadt Rebellion and its subsequent reflections see Brendel, 2002: 13-24 and Anweiler, 1990: 329-339.

⁹ An important Marxist current, eorocommunism, the main source of inspiration of which was Louis Althusser, appeared in 1970s as a critique of the international communist movement and an attempt to formulate a strategy peculiar to the Western context with an emphasis upon democratic political procedures and internal party democracy. Among its proponents The Italian Communist Party and the Spanish Communist Party can be counted as the most influential ones. For a detailed, classical elaboration see (Anderson, 1979)

Gramsci mainly in his *L'Ordine Nuovo* years discussed the factory council movement, which in Italy reached its peak point in late 1919 and early 1920 by the factory occupations throughout Northern Italy (Forgacs, 2000: 76-78). He states that:

The socialist state already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class. To link these institutions, coordinating and ordering them into a highly centralized hierarchy of competences and powers, while respecting the necessary autonomy and articulation of each, is to create a genuine workers' democracy here and now (...) (Gramsci, 2000: 79).

Gramsci in that regard poses the role of the party with respect to the councils as a coordinator body that orders them while respecting their autonomy. In his account, the disordered energies of the workers have to be rendered permanent and disciplined, they “must be transformed into an organized society that can educate itself, gain experience and acquire a responsible consciousness of the obligations that fall to classes achieving state power” and in that regard:

The party must carry on its role as the organ of communist education, as the furnace of faith, the depository of doctrine, the supreme power harmonizing the organized and disciplined forces of the working class and peasantry and leading them towards the ultimate goal (Gramsci, 2000: 80)

Thus Gramsci, as does Lenin, finds revolutionary party necessary for a successful revolutionary process. Put differently, both Lenin and Gramsci argues for a necessity of an understanding of revolution as a ‘moment’, a moment of achieving state power of the proletariat under the leadership of the party. However, his and Lenin’s understanding of the party and the role they cast for it implies differences. As Davidson indicates, for Gramsci “a party is essential, not so much for raising consciousness as *What is to be Done?* argues, but for the coordination of national initiatives which begin at council level, and for the assault on the bourgeois State machine” (1974: 139).

Gramsci, who stresses the importance of the role of hegemony both for the bourgeois state in its integral sense and a revolutionary politics to be conducted, draws attention to the centrality of the ‘war of position’ as the peculiar strategy for the Western context, which he finds necessary to be conducted until the ‘war of maneuver’, meaning the seizure of the power. The role of the party is decisive in that regard, which was formulated by Gramsci as ‘the collective intellectual’. In *Prison Notebooks* he depicts the role of the party as such:

The political party, for all groups, is precisely the mechanism which carries out in civil society the same function as the state carries out, more synthetically and over a large scale, in political society. In other words it is responsible for welding together the organic intellectuals of a given group –the dominant one- and the traditional intellectual (2000:310).

The role that Gramsci gives to the intellectuals and the party consisting of them reflects his emphasis on the ‘communist education’, which is also important in order to understand his way of approaching the relationship between the party and the councils. In that regard Gramsci’s approach purports to a reciprocal understanding of a communist education between the ‘intellectuals’ and the ‘masses’, ‘the party’ and ‘its social base’ (Merrington, 1968: 165). Hall et al. indicate that for Gramsci, the relationship of the party to the masses does not imply a one-way relationship, rather what he proposed was a dialectical relationship between ‘leadership and spontaneity’ (1977: 52). They go on to argue that “In itself, he sees spontaneity as doomed because riven by internal contradictions and incapable of producing a systematic account of the world, but when ‘educated and purged of extraneous contradictions’ that spontaneity is, for Gramsci, the motor of revolution (Hall et. al. 1977: 52).

As indicated above, Gramsci’s understanding of the party-council relations reflects certain differences from that of Lenin. Thus while sharing the notion of necessity and a vital importance of a vanguard party, Gramsci indicates its role as a coordinator and educator of the workers’ spontaneous organizations, and insists upon the importance of their autonomy. Put differently, he attempts to reconcile the withering

away of the state and the workers' self-emancipation via their self-organization, with the party as the revolutionary vanguard organization by assigning the party the role of 'coordination and education'. This educative role he attached to the party is a reciprocal one; i.e. is a process of mutual learning within practice.

2. 4. Different Forms of Revolutionary Organization and the Issue of Leadership in the 'Third World' in the Second Half of the 20th Century

The post-war period witnessed many revolutionary attempts and processes in the 'third world' including many different countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa having very distinct characteristics from the Soviet Union and Western Europe, as well as from each other. Inspiring to a greater extent from, among others, the Russian experience, several soviet theorists/politicians and the Comintern theses, various movements and parties attempted to initiate revolutionary strategies peculiar to the particular contexts of their countries, and in many places and historical periods the revolutionary strategies such as people's war and guerrilla warfare have been conducted with their different variants. These also have brought along distinct sorts of revolutionary organizations.

Imperialism, the level of maturity of capitalism and roles of different classes and strata in the revolution were among the most important issues that the left in the 'third world' tackled with in the post-war period. These issues have impacted upon the formulation and adaptation of different strategies, and they are still dominant in the programs and strategies of several communist parties and revolutionary movements operating in different parts of the world. Among others, two important experiences were the Chinese (1949) and Cuban (1959) Revolutions which became the sources of inspiration for many movements and parties all around the world. For, the strategy of 'people's war' and the formulation of the 'mass line' as a form of mass/cadre relations formulated and applied in China; and the 'guerrilla warfare' and the 'foco' as a form of revolutionary organization formulated and applied in Cuba

have been interpreted differently and tried to be implemented by numerous movements and parties all around the world.

Roughly speaking the ‘people’s war’ can be defined as a protracted war consisting of different stages which is based on the peasantry as the fundamental force of the revolution. Mao stressed on the role of the peasantry in the revolution to be realized in ‘a largely Asian feudal country experiencing imperialist oppression’, with a stress upon the need to a working class leadership, i.e., the leadership of the proletarian party (Knight, 2007: 144-145). The revolutionary strategy proposed by Mao and conducted in China have been adopted and implemented by different movements and parties in several regions and time periods¹⁰.

Another important concept formulated by Mao and concerned with the issue of leadership was the mass-line: Mao posed his famous depiction of the ‘mass line’ in his *Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership* as such:

“[A]ll correct leadership is necessarily from the masses, to the masses. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of the ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge” (Tse-tung, 1977: 16-17).

The ‘mass line’, which Mao proposed in the above cited manner as the desirable form of mass/party relations, has also impacted upon the understandings of several movements and parties.

¹⁰ Following Mao, for instance, Vietnamese communist Giap described peoples’ war as ‘essentially a peasant’s war under the leadership of the working class’ (cited in Gates, 1990: 327) for which the guerrilla warfare was important ‘especially at the outset’ however it in the time course should ‘develop into mobile warfare’ (cited in Gates, 1990: 328-329).

The Cuban revolution served as a trigger for the appearance and perpetuation of multifarious guerrilla movements throughout Latin America and in many different parts of the world as well. Guerrilla warfare, although being dedicated to the state takeover, implied many different characteristics from the socialist/communist/social democratic party organization. The theory and practice of the 'foco' as a distinct kind of revolutionary organizing debated and interpreted in different ways and brought along distinct revolutionary attempts in different parts of the world. The 'foco' as an organizational unit, which started to be theorized after the Cuban Revolution, can be defined in brief as 'a small guerrilla band located in the mountains' and the 'foquismo' refers to the 'primacy given to the rural armed struggle' conducted in the countryside (Childs, 1995: 594). Although the Cuban revolution and the form of guerrilla warfare conducted in the countryside have become the source of many revolutionary movements and parties, in several Latin American countries the urban guerrilla warfare have been conducted instead of the rural guerrilla warfare based on focos (Chaliand, 1977: 23). For with Guevara's death in 1967 and the defeat of the focos in most part of the Latin America, the tendency towards moving the locus of the revolution into the cities was brought into the foreground in several parts of the region (Gates, 1986: 543; Chaliand, 1977: 45).

In Guevara's formulation the Cuban Revolution revealed the following three lessons (cited in Childs, 1995: 604): (1) Popular forces can win against the army; (2) It is not necessary to wait until all the conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them; (3) In underdeveloped America the countryside is the basic area of armed fighting. Thus the basic principles of the rural guerrilla formulated by Guevara with an emphasis on the possibility and the need to defeat the army via popular forces; the subjective element that -in the absence of necessary conditions- can create these conditions; and the superiority and eligibility of the countryside over the city for the armed struggle.

Regris Debray furthered the formulation of the rural guerrilla and defined the foco in his *Revolution in the Revolution?* as the ‘party in embryo’ and he proposed that ‘the vanguard party can exist in the form of the guerrilla foco itself’ (cited in Childs, 1995: 619). He further concluded that the armed struggle in all other Latin American countries should be led from the countryside as in the Cuban case (Raths, 1984: 3), that is to say, should be conducted via focos organized and operated in the countryside, rather than the party.

With all their variants, the people’s war and the guerrilla warfare have been revolutionary strategies that aim to overthrow the state power and its army within conditions where it is regarded as impossible via non-military means to defeat a ‘counterrevolution’ or the army of a state and thus to conquer it¹¹.

2. 5. Recent Debates Old Questions

The issues such as state, power, party, leadership, revolutionary strategy have become an object of intense debate at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century with the appearance of different sorts of movements, different ways of organizing for the goal of self-emancipation that to a certain extent have displayed different characteristics from the revolutionary movements and parties of the past. Many scholars and politicians have debated over the position of the anti-capitalist, global justice, anti-globalization etc. movements considering their positions vis-à-vis state, their organizational characteristics and the way they understand the issue of leadership. The 1999 demonstration against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, the increasing impact of the Zapatista movement have all had important roles in the intensification of the debates concerning these issues. Among new ones, ‘old questions’ of Marxist theory and practice have been posed and answers compatible

¹¹ Hodges indicates in that regard for the Latin American revolutionary movements that “Despite whether a group claimed a Marxist-Leninist, Maoist, Castro-ist, Che-ist, or even Peronist revolutionary heritage, armed struggle and desire for state control was taken as granted in many Latin American insurgent groups” (cited in Grant, 2005: 45). In a parallel fashion Knight argues for the Asian case that in the region Marxism has had its impacts as a theory of revolution rather than a socialist construction (2007: 151).

with the time context have been formulated in an effort to generate strategic questions and suggestions for a revolution of our times.

John Holloway's *Change the World without Taking Power* can be regarded as one of the most striking attempts in that regard, in which he criticizes the identification of the revolution with the control of the state power that has dominated the Marxist theory as well as the revolutionary experience from Soviet Union and China to various national liberation and guerilla movements (Holloway, 2002: 12). The focal point of his argument, when criticizing all these experiences, is the understanding of the state as an instrument that would serve to the interests of the working class when the conquest is realized (Holloway, 2002: 13). In his words, 'Such a view reproduces, unconsciously perhaps, the isolation or autonomization, of the state from its social environment, the critique of which is the starting point of revolutionary politics (Holloway, 2002: 13). In that regard Holloway argues that the instrumentalization of the state serves as an impoverishment of the struggle and simply filters out other struggles, many ways of fighting for the dream of a different society 'through the prism of the conquest of power' (Holloway, 2002: 16).

Rejecting any kind of state-centered revolutionary politics, Holloway also criticizes the 'glorification' of the revolutionary leadership, the vanguardship as such (2002: 122). In his account the distinction between those who have true consciousness and those who have false consciousness is exactly what Lenin's theory of vanguard party implies¹² (Holloway, 2002: 128). Emphasizing upon the centrality of the 'self-emancipation' Holloway argues for an organization the principle point of reference of which is not the state, but the everyday life capitalist relations. In that regard he refuses the party as a favorable form of revolutionary organization, and offers taking 'negativity' -the scream- as the starting point of the revolution, while indicating its insufficiency. In his account this insufficiency can and should be eliminated via

¹² This is also the core of the approach concerning the Leninist party proposed in *What is To Be Done: Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and The Question of Revolution Today* (Bonefeld and Tischler, 2002)

social or communal forms of organization such as soviets and workers' councils (Holloway, 2002: 208-210).

Holloway's arguments lay aside many problems and engender questions concerning the issue of state and revolutionary organization, some of which have also been stated by him and by many other contributors of this debate¹³. By taking the anti-globalization, anti-war, anti-capitalist movement and more specifically the Latin American revolutionary tradition as his points of departure, Raby attempts to interrogate those experiences with respect to the issues of revolutionary strategy, program and leadership. Without a coherent political project that would unite all these particular attempts and a mechanism of representation or leadership that would realize this unification how socialist transformation could be realized is the fundamental question that Raby takes in hand as his focal point when dealing with different experiences he explicates in his book *Democracy and Revolution* (2006). In that regard he stresses that: "Insistence on direct, unmediated popular protagonism is admirable, but it becomes a futile distraction if it is elevated to the status of absolute dogma, evading questions of representation, leadership, organization and structure which is crucial to the success of any alternative movement" (Raby, 2006: 3). Raby, also criticizes Holloway's proposal of politics of anti-power/negation with an account that he does not try to examine an answer to the vital question of the revolutionary program and organization.

Raby assesses the issue of organization within the context of 'representation', and hence proposes his reservations from the axis of the classical view of organization as a matter of representation and leadership. De Angelis' contribution (2005) to the debate is also valuable, who also calls for an emphasis on the issue of organization from a radically different approach. His is an understanding of organization, as that

¹³ His diagnoses concerning the problems of his own argument are as follows (Holloway and Callinicos, 2005): The first question is the 'state repression', the problem of finding possible ways of 'dissuading the state from exercising violence' other than armed struggle and taking control of the state. The second is the question of constituting alternative productive activities within capitalism. And the last one is the issue of ensuring the seamless operation and organization of direct democracy on large scales.

of Holloway, that takes ‘social doing’ rather than representation as its focal point. In de Angelis’ (2005) account it is the question of ‘how’, which he thinks is lacking in Holloway’s formulation. De Angelis, rejecting the negation as a starting point, emphasizes upon the constitutive role of organizing, that is to say, organizing as an affirmative act, ‘as a form of doing’ (de Angelis, 2005: 245). In his argument the question of organizing is important for articulating many yeses into different forms of social doings and by this way for producing new social relations. (de Angelis, 2005: 242). In his account, the process of organizing should consider the issue of ‘state power, of repression, of the exercise of coercive power-to crush the mass movement’ in changing forms depending on the context and starting from the beginning, from the now and here (de Angelis, 2005: 246-247). The problem of the state and other powers to- to use Holloway’s terminology- is what according to him, traditional Marxists recognize as a strategic problem and although the answers proposed by them may not be agreeable, they are nevertheless answers that are given in order to tackle with this problem (de Angelis, 2005: 246).

Another contributor of this debate, Alex Callinicos, indicates as his main difference with Holloway that he believes the requirement of confronting and overthrowing the existing state and replacing it with a different sort of state power for a process of self-determination (Holloway and Callinicos, 2005). Rejecting the notion of simply seizing the existing state via revolutionary party that claims changing things on behalf of the oppressed and exploited, he nevertheless calls for a need of concentration and centralization which is combined with self-organization in order to break the power of capital (Holloway and Callinicos, 2005). For Callinicos this combination, is not without its problems and easy to achieve, yet necessary in order not to be defeated and isolated by capital¹⁴. Furthermore he, as opposed to Holloway, argues for the validity of the notion of ‘transitional state’ according to which the seizure of the state power as a moment is necessary in order working class can create ‘a new form of society’ Holloway and Callinicos, 2005).

¹⁴ Callinicos indicates in this regard that, the combination in his mind purports to Gramsci’s understanding of ‘the dialectical interaction between the moment of centralisation represented by the parties and the self-organised impulse from the movement’ (Holloway and Callinicos, 2005).

The central point of the debate, which has been initiated by Holloway's *Change the World without Taking Power* and contributed many others, has been the issue of organization, i.e. possible ways of organizing that are based on self initiative and social doing and that could also appear, perpetuate and mature without being absorbed by the capital or by the self-proclaimed representatives of a revolutionary vanguard.

2. 6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter certain important debates and disputes concerning the issue of revolutionary organization, its different forms and roles have been my main point of focus. All theorists that I have dealt with have proposed questions and answers concerning the tension between centralization and autonomy, between reconciling the means and ends of an emancipatory politics in their particular time contexts, in the lights of which I will try to examine Devrimci Yol and the Resistance Committee experiences.

I have started my examination about the issue of revolutionary organization with an elaboration of the notions of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'the withering away of the state'. Marx's assessments concerning the Paris Commune and its connection with the dictatorship of the proletariat has had different interpretations, one of which pertains to Lenin, who has been regarded before all else as the theoretician of the 'vanguard party'. After a brief elaboration of the appearance and the general characteristics of the Russian soviets, I have tried to outline Lenin's changing points of emphasis concerning the issue of vanguardship and spontaneity in different time contexts. I have argued that his later emphasis on the soviet power, albeit by no means leaving aside the issue of centralization and the 'vanguard party', has brought along different interpretations about his corpus and political life. The Stalinist era, with all its world-wide peer regimes, parties and movements have reflected a caricature of the Leninist vanguard party. The suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion

in March 1921 by Bolsheviks in that regard has constituted an historical example of how a vanguard party can transform into the repressor of the workers and their organizations. Some have argued for the inevitability of this sort of defeats, with an account that vanguardship and centralization is irreconcilable with the self-emancipation, which could only be achieved by the workers' power organs such as councils/soviets. As I will indicate in the following chapter the compatibility of vanguardship, centralization, and self emancipation, self organization was left aside for almost every revolutionary movement and party in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s.

With regard to this question of compatibility, Gramsci's answer constitutes an example of an argument that implies the necessity and possibility of such kind of coexistence. Thus while arguing for the importance and the need for the autonomy of the power organs of council type, he insists upon the prominence of the party which he assigns the role of coordinating and educating the 'spontaneity'. Rather than drawing sharp distinctions between the leaders and led, the party and the masses; Gramsci argues for the possibility of a process of reciprocal education among them.

Before elaborating on the recent debates concerning the issues of revolutionary organization and leadership, I have briefly outlined different understandings of revolutionary organization in the 'third world' in the post-second world war period. I have argued that with all their variants, the people's war and the guerrilla warfare have been revolutionary strategies dedicated to the state takeover. The issues of self-organization, self-emancipation and their compatibility with the vanguardship and centralization did not constitute important points of debate.

The possibility of the reconciliation of autonomy and centralization-coordination have also been proposed and discussed in recent times, as it has been debated and tried to be puzzled out in many different ways, spaces and time contexts, only a few of which I have outlined here. I find generative in asking questions and also offering

partial answers of the debate concerning the possibility of ‘changing the world without taking power’ in that regard.

The focal point of the debate can be regarded as proposing the possible ways of organizing and initiating revolutionary changes within the existing situation without laying aside the issue of ‘self-emancipation’. At its heart lies the question of being organized, organization based on social doing, based on the aim of transcending many different forms of domination and exploitation that are confronted with in the daily life. In that regard it points out the tension between autonomy and centralization; between the struggles pertaining to the everyday life relations and the state takeover.

The early Russian soviets, the workers’ and soldiers’ councils (Rate Bewegung) in Germany during 1918, the popular militias and the collectivities organized by peasants and workers during the Spanish Civil War, different forms of self-organizations flourished in several parts of the Latin America have all shared a common rationale of basing the question of organization into social doing and they all carried these tensions in changing forms depending on the contexts they were experienced in.

I will try to examine Resistance Committee experiences and Devrimci Yol in the light of these questions concerning power, revolutionary organization and leadership. I will argue that these questions, important for a revolutionary attempt of any kind, were implicitly proposed in their process of existence. Before elaborating on the case of resistance committees in the following chapter I will concern with the movement Devrimci Yol and the leftist tradition it inherited with a focus on the issue of revolutionary organization.

CHAPTER 3

DEVİRİMCİ YOL AND ITS ROOTS WITHIN LEFT IN TURKEY

3. 1. Introduction

The 1960s and the 1970s were the decades, where important social transformations and dense struggles were experienced in many different fields of the social life such as factories, universities and neighborhoods in Turkey. The right to strike was enacted by the constitution that was put into operation after the 1960 coup d'état. And a union established in 1967, under the name of Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions, hereafter DİSK), with a claim of being alternative to the existing Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of the Trade Unions of Turkey, hereafter TİSK). DİSK played important roles in the mobilization of the working class and its interaction with the revolutionary politics. The constitution of the DİSK, along with many strikes and demonstrations realized in these years were also important indicators of the increase in size and politicization of the working class in Turkey. The youth also started to engage rapidly with the revolutionary ideas. Furthermore, first time in the history of the country, in the 1965 general elections, a party with a claim of being the representative of the working class, Türkiye İşçi Partisi (The Workers Party of Turkey, hereafter TİP), gained the 3,4 percent of the votes.

Although the military intervention realized on 12 March, 1971 brought along an interruption with regard to the activities of many trade unions, revolutionary movements and parties; after the 1974 amnesty, they became important actors of the political scene again. After the 1974 amnesty, with which the former arrested leftists

were released, many splits among the leftist movements/parties occurred, most of which were the successors of the pre-1974 movements/parties. The era witnessed not only a split among the leftist movements and parties, but also the right spectrum fragmented starting from the 1960s¹⁵. One of the most important actors of the right spectrum was the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party, hereafter MHP) which was established in 1965 as the political party of the ultra-nationalist movement. As indicated by Ağaogulları (2003: 213), the ultra-nationalist forces (widely known as *ülküçüs*), were regarded by the big bourgeoisie and its representative in power, the Adalet Partisi (*Justice Party*, hereafter AP), as suitable tools for repressing the increasing oppositional movements in the country and they also served as subsidiary forces against the revolutionary left in that regard. The period between 1974 and 1980 witnessed violent conflicts among the leftist movements, parties and the ultra-nationalist, *ülküçü* movement¹⁶. As I will indicate below, the revolutionary movements and parties of the period devoted most of their energies in both defining and countering this movement.

The 1960s and the 1970s were also the years in which a rapid industrialization was taking place in Turkey. The import substitution industrialization was adopted as the principle capital accumulation strategy, which by the end of the 1960s brought along an increase in dependence on imports (Boratav, 2004: 120). By the end of the 1970s, the 1973-1974 world recession and the increase in oil prices also started to have reflections in the country more intensely (Boratav, 2004: 129) and the balance of payments crisis broke out at the end of the decade. The scarcity, price increases and

¹⁵ Most prominent actors of the right spectrum were the center right Adalet Partisi (Justice Party, AP), the islamist Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party, MSP) and the ultra-nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party, MHP) in the 1970s. These parties, along with the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican Peoples' Party, CHP) that posed its political position as the 'left of the center' by the mid-1960s, also constituted the prominent actors of the parliamentary politics in the era, which, with changing compositions, constituted 'weak' coalition governments in the 1970s (Zürcher, 2004: 382).

¹⁶ Ülkü Ocakları were the youth organizations that were separate but under the control of the MHP (and the Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi, (Republican Peasants Nation Party, CKMP) that preceded it) (Can, 2001: 2003-204). They started to be established in certain universities in the late 1960s. The name *ülküçü* refers to the militants who attached to these organizations.

the black market can be regarded as fundamental concepts in identifying the economic situation in the late 1970s.

The industrialization, starting from the 1950s, rendered the city centers attractive for the rural population and the period between 1950 -1980 witnessed important migration waves from the rural to the urban areas. By the 1970s population considerably increased in the cities. The *gecekondu*s (built over night), which were especially built by the migrants coming from the rural areas, were rapidly becoming widespread in the cities in the 1970s (Aslan, 2004: 77). In those years *gecekondu* regions became important centers of struggle. Thus leftist movements and parties had considerable support from these settlements and the ultra-nationalists also became dominant in several *gecekondu* regions. As Aslan indicates, in the *gecekondu* regions in the 1970s the familial, kinship and *hemşerilik*¹⁷ mechanisms were considerably determinant in the poverty-stricken city dwellers' perpetuating their daily lives (2004: 69) and these mechanisms also brought along several solidaristic practices. This characteristic had also its reflections on the formation and development of dwellers' political inclinations (see Pekdemir, 1988: 2346). Thus as we will see in a more detailed fashion in the following chapter, when examining the resistance committees organized in *gecekondu* regions, there was a segmentation within and among different neighborhoods and districts with regard to the 'fascists' and 'revolutionary' camps, which also coincided to a great extent with the residential origins as well as religious believes of the dwellers.

The late 1970s witnessed also brutal attacks towards the Alevi population, the peak points of which were realized in Maraş (22-25 December 1978) and Çorum (May-July 1980). These incidents have also occupied important places among the collective memories of both the Alevi population and the revolutionary left as a whole¹⁸. Hostile attitudes among Sunnis and Alevis started to be instigated more

¹⁷ *Hemşeri* is used in Turkish for referring the people coming from the same city or town.

¹⁸ For a detailed examination of the Kahramanmaraş Incidents see (Gürel, 2004)

intensely in those years and Alevis as a minority population more intensely than before became focuses of assaults and segregation.

As I have indicated above, the 1970s witnessed an intensification of the social struggles, in which many demonstrations, strikes, factory and university occupations were performed. Among many others, the workers' demonstrations on June 15-16, 1970 can be counted as an event, which constituted a direct indicator of this intensification, and which directly influenced upon the left as a whole. The 1977 Mayday should also be regarded as a milestone in that regard, which took a crucial place in the collective memory of the working class and the revolutionary movements at least until the 1980 coup d'état.

The social struggles that stamped the era coincided with the January 24th decisions and the 12 September 1980 coup d'état which represented a period of transition from the import substitution industrialization strategy to the export-oriented economic strategy with an emphasis on integration with the global markets. By the September 1980 military coup, almost every oppositional element that were regarded as threats to this new capital accumulation strategy and the 'structural adjustment program' initiated in accordance with it, were suppressed through the arrests, tortures, murders, banning of the oppositional organizations of any kind, a new constitution and many other legal arrangements. Thus by the year 1980 a new era started in Turkey. The organizational existence of Devrimci Yol, and the resistance committees were also ceased by this year.

In this chapter I will examine the general characteristics of this Movement and its relations with the Left in Turkey. Yet, due to the scope of the thesis the focal point will be the organizational principles of the Movement and their practical implications. In that regard Movement's conceptualization of the revolutionary organization, power, mass-cadre relations and the leadership will be elaborated on. Furthermore the basic characteristics of the Movement with regard to these issues will be handled in terms of its points of convergences and divergences with the

political tradition it inherited. Thus, before elaborating on Devrimci Yol's conception of organization, state and leadership; both the practical organizational styles and the theoretical proposals of different currents that constituted its roots within the Left in Turkey concerning the revolutionary organization will be handled.

While examining Devrimci Yol's understanding of revolutionary organization and the practical implications of this understanding, specific questions will be tried to be answered. 'How should a revolutionary organization be constituted in Movement's account and what kind of functions should it have?'; 'How can we understand the issue of mass/cadre relations formulated by it?' and 'What were the meanings attributed by the Movement to the state, revolution and fascism?' will be the guiding questions in that regard. Following sections will try to examine the way Devrimci Yol gave answers to these questions in the late 1970s by paying particular attention to the elements that it inherited from the tradition it belonged as well as to those it specifically proposed in its time of existence.

3. 2. The Roots of Devrimci Yol within Left in Turkey

Whether the democratic revolution should be completed before the realization of the socialist revolution constituted one of the most fundamental debates in the 1960s within left in Turkey that divided it into two currents that were called as the proponents of the Sosyalist Devrim (Socialist Revolution, henceforth SD) versus the Milli Demokratik Devrim (National Democratic Revolution, hereafter MDD). While the underlying premise of the first was capitalism's maturity in the country, the second's claim was the existence of a semi-feudal formation where the remnants of feudalism was still one of the fundamental components of the existing mode of production, the elimination of which would ripen the conditions for the socialist revolution. This debate was also combined with other interrelated issues such as the leadership of the revolution and coalitions that should be constituted in this process. In this regard while SD thesis advocated the working class vanguardism, the MDD thesis argued for the need to a broader coalition, a 'national front', for the realization

of the democratic revolution that would precede the socialist one. In that regard MDD had also a specific emphasis upon the role of the military-civilian officials.

Another important point of divergence of these two theses was their identification of the main contradiction that determined the principle operation of the society in Turkey. While the SD thesis specified the main contradiction as between bourgeoisie and proletariat, MDD defined it as between dominant power alliance (consisting of comprador bourgeoisie and landlords) and the Turkish people as a whole. As directly interrelated with this, different from SD, the proponents of MDD attached a particular attention to the issues of dependency and the semi-colonial character of the country in which the remnants of feudalism was still existent as an important determinant element and the capitalist relations did not yet mature enough. In that regard while SD proponents emphasized the unification of anti-imperialist and socialist struggles, proponents of MDD advocated the gradual revolution thesis according to which the priority should be assigned to the struggle against imperialism and the remnants of feudalism.

Having differences in terms of their assessments of the production relations in Turkey, the alliances that should be constituted for the realization of revolution and the sort of revolution that should be realized, these two branches had similarities concerning the issue of power and the characteristics of the revolutionary organization to be constituted as well. Within this context, the first part of this section will specifically deal with the MDD tradition in comparison with SD.

In the late 1960s while SD gradually lost its influence in the leftist arena in Turkey, MDD became the most inspired revolutionary thesis within the biggest student organization of the era, the Dev-Genç, and then among certain groups that originated from it. They adopted the fundamental premises of the national democratic revolution thesis as the base of their different revolutionary strategies. The THKP-C, the predecessor of Devrimci Yol, was one of those groups, the theoretical inferences of which (formulated mostly by one of its leaders, Mahir Çayan) influenced

markedly upon not only Devrimci Yol but also the leftist arena as a whole in the late 1970s. THKP-C, as other leading leftist movements/parties of the era, had a specific emphasis on the issue of revolutionary strategy. Thus many concepts such as, ‘the politicized armed war strategy (PASS)’, ‘artificial balance’ ‘the ideological leadership of the proletariat’ were proposed by the Movement in order to specify and differentiate its revolutionary strategy, which will be elaborated in the second part of this section.

Devrimci Yol tackled with all these issues and by making a reevaluation of them generated a new formulation that shared similarities as well as differences with both the MDD tradition as well as THKP-C. In its argument Turkey was a country that could not complete the process of democratic revolution and the dependent development of capitalism rendered the role of bourgeoisie invalid in the process of democratic revolution (Devrimci Yol, 1977a). Thus the revolution at issue in Movement’s formulation should have a democratic, anti-imperialist character and should be realized by ‘all people’s democratic power’ under the leadership of the proletarian party (Devrimci Yol, 1977a). Different from the MDD thesis, at least in theory, Devrimci Yol, following THKP-C, attached a specific importance to the proletariat as the ‘ideological’ leader of the revolution and it determined the constitution of the proletarian party as ‘the main duty of the revolutionaries’ by rejecting to assign an important role to the military-civilian officials. However alongside being the subject of revolution working class did not constitute a vital component of Devrimci Yol’s theory and practice. Rather the contradiction that was prioritized by the movement was between the oligarchy and the people, and the imperialism and independency struggles in parallel with it. Thus, the most important constituents that rendered Devrimci Yol an ideological extension of MDD and THKP-C were its premises of the incompleteness of the democratic revolution process; thus a need to a gradual revolution and its strong emphasis on the struggle against imperialism¹⁹. As for Devrimci Yol, these characteristics also constituted a

¹⁹ As it will be mentioned below while the emphasis on anti-imperialism was central for the MDD and the THKP-C, for Devrimci Yol it had a secondary position when compared to the Movement’s central focus of anti-fascism.

common ground for certain other movements of the late 1970s coming from this tradition.

Within this context Devrimci Yol formulated its revolutionary vision as to unite all oppressed classes within the ‘people’s front’ under the leadership of the proletarian party (Devrimci Yol, 1977g) that would overthrow “the oligarchic dictatorship of the dominant power alliances” and establish “all people’s democratic power” through the people’s war (Devrimci Yol, 1977c). As a movement that dedicated itself to the constitution of the proletarian party in order to realize the revolution as such, it nourished from different Marxist currents which existed within Turkey as well as in international level. Furthermore the need to formulate and perform practical solutions considering the developments in the country brought along the Movement to generate an organizational model which had variances in kind and which was called by them as resistance committees.

Sharing certain characteristics with the MDD and THKP-C tradition, Devrimci Yol had certain peculiarities that distinguished it from this tradition as well as from the Turkish left as a whole, which stemmed mainly from its organizational characteristics as well as the practical implications that these characteristics implied. Before elaborating on these peculiarities, in following sections I will try to examine the line that constituted the roots of Devrimci Yol in the 1960s and the early 1970s with a specific focus on the issues of power, organization and leadership. In that regard first the debate in the left that stamped the 1960s and that appeared as the MDD (national democratic revolution)-SD (socialist revolution) division and the appearance and perpetuation of Dev-Genç will be elaborated on, and then the movement THKP-C, the Movement that Devrimci Yol adopted as predecessor, will be handled within a similar framework.

3. 2. 1. National Democratic Revolution (MDD) Thesis on Questions of Revolutionary Organization and Power

The primary debate that stamped the revolutionary Left in the 1960s was about the characteristics of the revolution to be realized. In that regard the maturity of capitalism in Turkey, the classes and strata among which alliances to be established constituted important subjects of discussion. The question of organization, on the other hand, was not elaborated on, it was taken for granted and regarded as being secondary when compared to the above mentioned debates. The quality of revolutionary organization in that period was mainly handled around two different models: the party as the workers' organization that adopts parliamentary methods on the one hand and the front that is thought to realize revolution by means of extra-parliamentary methods. Two main currents were the carriers of these approaches. While the first was adopted by the Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Worker's Party of Turkey, TİP), which was established by 12 trade unionists shortly after the 1960 military coup; the second was formulated by certain members of the Türkiye Komünist Partisi (Communist Party of Turkey, TKP)²⁰, who started to direct their opposition to TİP and its strategy of socialist revolution (SD) in the journal *Yön*, and who later called themselves as the proponents of national democratic revolution (MDD) thesis. Thus while there was an organizational body (in the form of party) that represented the socialist revolution thesis, MDD was not represented by an organization; rather, several organizations appeared that inspired from this line.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to emphasize that even though they implied two different strategies, the proponents of MDD and SD thesis shared a common ground concerning their comprehensions of state and the issue of power. Both envisaged socialism as an order to be established only after the state takeover that is realized via

²⁰ TKP was founded in September 1920 with a congress held in Baku. It constituted a baseline for the MDD tradition when formulating its fundamental thesis concerning the revolutionary strategy. TKP was dependent to Comintern, and thus Communist Party of Soviet Union, both financially and politically (Tunçay, 2007: 355). The party also adopted the Comintern thesis/strategies concerning the 'colonial and semi-colonial' countries (Gökay, 2007: 346). Almost all leading figures of the MDD current, that appeared in late 1960s in an opposition to TİP, were also members of the TKP.

professional cadres either by parliamentary manners or non-parliamentary ones, and conceived the state in that regard as an instrument to be seized.

Beginning from the late 1960s MDD started to be adopted by the members of the largest organization of the youth movement in the country and it was diversified by different movements that were flourished from within the youth movement. Thus in the early 1970s there were several movements in the leftist political arena which, albeit in different forms, share the gradual revolution thesis and the premise of anti-imperialism combined with it as the fundamental tenets of their revolutionary vision (cf. Aydınoğlu, 2007: 141-187). Therefore it can be argued that these movements, which gained popularity in the early 1970s, emanated from within the MDD by adopting its several core premises.

With its fundamental premises, MDD constituted and initiated a leftist tradition in Turkey which focused on ‘American imperialism’, and ‘the comprador bourgeoisie’ and ‘large landowners’ (*ağalar*) that were regarded as the extensions of the first. Thus the contradiction between proletariat and bourgeoisie and the capitalist relations of exploitation and domination did not constitute the fundamental points of emphasis for this line. Instead, all contradictions within society were regarded as being linked to the contradiction between imperialism and the nation as a whole. This way of understanding inevitably took state as the point of departure of its political strategy and understood it in an instrumentalist and a functionalist manner. Thus for this line of argumentation the state which was an instrument of the ‘American imperialism’, ‘the comprador bourgeoisie’ and ‘large landowners’ and that functioned on their behalf should be taken over by a democratic revolution. It proposed this understanding in political demands like ‘to emancipate the state from American Imperialism’, ‘to seize the state that is in the hands of the comprador bourgeoisie’ etc. that were coded as the vital prerequisites of the emancipation of the masses understood as the unified nation except from the extensions of imperialism and the residues of feudalism. Mihri Belli, one of the most prominent figures of this line, formulated this notion as such: ‘The revolutionary duty of the Turkish

society...is to prepare free Turkish nation's development conditions in an unimpeded manner and in a national unity by realizing the Turkish national independency and by abolishing feudalism entirely' (cited in STMA, 1988: 2078).

As it was indicated above, the youth movement in the period between 1968 and 1971 had gradually adopted the MDD thesis as the peculiar strategy of a revolution in Turkey and the movements that flourished within revolutionary youth became successors of this tradition. However both the increasing working class mobilization in the country as well as the developments concerning the course of the revolutionary struggles in certain parts of the world brought along those movements to pose reservations to some premises of the MDD. These reservations and the divergences that came into existence as a result were mainly about the revolutionary tactics proposed and the classes and strata that would be the 'fundamental force' of the revolution.

Increasing mobilization of the workers, the pick point of which can be regarded as the workers' demonstrations on July 15-16, 1970 that were overwhelmed by the army, served as a turning point in that regard, which played an important role in the removal of the notion that adopted the military as an ally in the revolution from the agenda of the revolutionary movements (STMA, 1988: 2156-2157). The 1971 Memorandum also played a reinforcing role in that regard, which brought along revolutionaries to face persecution. Thus, the diminishing importance of the military in the eyes of many revolutionary organizations and the increasing mobilization of the workers in the late 1960s brought along several movements to integrate working class as a more powerful actor into their revolutionary strategies. However, in spite of all divergences among them- stemming from above depicted factors- most of the revolutionary movements that became popular in Turkey from the late 1960s until 1980 adopted the gradual revolution thesis as the mainstay of their revolutionary strategy, which constituted the core of the MDD thesis²¹. Different revolutionary

²¹ For a notion which argues that the gradual revolution thesis constituted the Stalinist core of the MDD movement see (Aydinoğlu, 2007).

strategies they adopted, with an impact of their inspiration from the experiences in different parts of the world, such as China, Vietnam and Cuba were also purported to different models of organization by means of which the democratic revolution that would precede the socialist one could be realized. In the following section I will attempt to depict this process in a more detailed fashion.

3. 2. 2. FKF/Dev-Genç: The Youth Movement, Leadership and Mass-Cadre Relations

Idea Clubs were the youth organizations that were formed within several universities of the country, the first of which was founded by students in Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences in 1956. Almost a decade later Idea Clubs were combined in a new institutional body called Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu (The Federation of Idea Clubs, FKF) which was formed as the youth organization of TİP in December 1965. In a couple of years FKF started to be dominated by the MDD proponents and was transformed by them into Devrimci Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu (The Federation of Revolutionary Youth Associations, hereafter Dev-Genç) in Federation's 4th congress that was held on October 1969.

Fundamental reasons behind youth's inclination towards the MDD was the intensifying revolutionary processes experienced in different parts of the world (such as Vietnam, Cuba, Philistine and China) that was mainly characterized with their militant extra-parliamentary stands, as well as the increasing mobilization of the labourer classes within the country. In that regard TİP's parliamentary strategy was regarded as unsatisfactory for the large segments of the youth (STMA, 1988: 2096) and they inclined towards the MDD line as the representative of the 'extra-parliamentary' road. Thus it was not only the impact of MDD-SD debate or the dynamism of the youth that constituted the distinguishing element of the Movements of late 1960s and early 1970s, the experiences that practiced all around the world, especially in Latin America, Asia and Africa, had also a vital role. By the impact of the MDD thesis, the national-liberation struggles and different forms of guerrilla

warfare in different parts of the world that had anti-imperialist emphasis, anti-imperialism appeared as the fundamental tenet of Dev-Genç's political stance. Thus from 1968 to 1971, alongside the boycotts and university occupations concerning the academic matters, actions such as making protests against the coming of the United States Sixth Fleet to the Istanbul Port, setting on fire the official car of the American ambassador in Middle East Technical University etc. (STMA:2084, 2103) were realized with highly organized youth participation.

Along with the foundation of Dev-Genç and the approval of the domination of the MDD thesis in the organization, with the 4th Congress of the FKF certain divisions within the young proponents of MDD came into light and on January 1970 a new journal called *Proleter Devrimci Aydınlik* (Proletarian Revolutionary Enlightenment, hereafter PDA) started to be published by a group of revolutionaries that were detached from the journal *Aydinlik* which along with the *Türk Solu* constituted the main theoretical publications of the MDD (STMA, 1988: 2140-2141). These two branches (*Aydinlik* and PDA), while advocating the need to a national democratic revolution in Turkey, disagreed about its content. And a short time later, the cadres that constituted the THKP-C movement disengaged from the journal *Aydinlik*. The issues of the route of revolution (from the cities to the rural areas or vice versa), its form (military coup or people's war), its vanguard (proletariat, peasantry or military officials) dominated their debates as well as that of other movements that flourished from within Dev-Genç in the period between the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

In the 1960s Dev-Genç functioned, to a certain extent, as an organizer of the meetings and the land occupations of peasants and small producers all around the country (STMA, 1988: 2136). It also contributed to the increasing working class actions such as factory occupations, strikes and meetings. However the fundamental role it played was bound up with its character of serving as a training field for the cadres that organized and led several revolutionary movements in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Thus almost all powerful revolutionary movements of the era originated from and amalgamated with Dev-Genç. THKP-C, Türkiye Halkın

Kurtuluş Ordusu (People's Liberation Army of Turkey, THKO), Türkiye İhtilalci İşçi Köylü Partisi (Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Party of Turkey, TİİKP), Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu (Worker's and Peasant's Liberation Army of Turkey, TİKKO) and Türkiye Komünist Partisi- Marksist Leninist (Communist Party of Turkey-Marxist Leninist, TKP-ML) were the most influential ones among those movements (Lipovsky, 1992: 119) which in Kürkçü's words 'came from the professional revolutionary seeds of 1968' (2002: 27).

Accordingly although Dev-Genç did not promote a particular revolutionary organizational model, it impacted upon that of these movements and played an important role in the formation of their understandings of leadership and the mass/cadre relations. Thus, various revolutionary leaders who claimed to be the head of an army, front or party regarded themselves as the professionals who could theorize and realize the revolution as such and they attempted to form different sort of revolutionary organizations that were consisted of professional groups of revolutionaries equipped with different strategies. Nevertheless these movements, without exception, conceived revolution as an armed destruction without making any emphasis on its constitutive character. Following section will elaborate on one of these movements, THKP-C, which was regarded by Devrimci Yol as its predecessor, with a particular attention on its understanding of organization, mass/cadre relations and leadership.

3. 2. 3. THKP-C on Armed Struggle and Revolutionary Organization

THKP-C was one of the guerilla movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Turkey, almost all cadres of which were the active militants of the biggest organization of the youth movement in the country, Dev-Genç. Its theoretical inferences and organizational form were mainly developed by Mahir Çayan with an inspiration both from the MDD tradition as well as the revolutionary current that was represented by different parties and movements of the 'third world' in the late 1960s

and the early 1970s, the forerunner of which can be regarded as the Communist Party of Cuba (Kürkçü, 2002: 51; Erkiner, 2007: 538).

Influencing from the MDD tradition, Lenin, Stalin, the guerrilla movements in Latin America, several thesis of Mao and the Chinese Revolution and the liberation movements in certain parts of the ‘third world’; and by proposing certain reservations to them, THKP-C attempted to formulate a ‘revolutionary strategy that was appropriate for Turkey’. In essence the theoretical and practical formulations of the movement constituted an amalgamation of all these traditions (cf. Atılgan, 2007: 696)²².

THKP-C adopted the fundamental thesis of the MDD. Thus, in its formulation, Turkey was a semi-colonial, underdeveloped country where the capitalist and feudal relations coexisted (Çayan, 1992: 13). Accordingly, different from the advanced capitalist countries, Turkey should follow a two-phased/gradual revolution model and in the current time it was in the stage of national democratic revolution (MDD) which brought about proletariat to have a ‘secondary contradiction’ with ‘nationalist classes’ (Çayan, 1992: 20) in collaboration with which it would realize the national democratic revolution that would precede the socialist one.

Çayan constituted his formulations about national democratic revolution strategy by leaning upon Mao’s, Lin Piao’s, Giap’s and Stalin’s formulations; the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, and especially Lenin’s 1905 dated *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*²³ (Çayan, 1992: 148-162; 275-277, 313-

²² Implying the eclecticism of Çayan’s corpus, Aydınöglü indicates that his writings constituted in the eyes of young revolutionaries of the post 1974 period an inheritance that served answers to every question in their minds (2007: 310).

²³ Different components of MDD tradition based their interpretations about this strategy especially on Mao’s corpus and Lenin’s ‘Two Tactics’ (Şener, 2006: 309). Thus as Şener indicates this book, which was written by Lenin in the course of 1905 revolution and in which he formulated the essentials of the democratic revolution realized by proletariat and peasantry and was to be followed by the socialist one, was subject to three different readings, pertaining to Mihri Belli, Doğu Perinçek and Mahir Çayan, and these three different readings bought along three different MDD strategies (Şener, 2006: 210).

327). Following these figures Çayan indicated that the prospective national democratic revolution in Turkey would essentially be a peasant revolution. It would also be conducted as a ‘people’s war’, in which –different from the Russian democratic revolution- the ‘fundamental force’ would be the peasantry and the ‘leading force’ would be the proletariat²⁴ (Çayan, 1992: 149-150).

Furthermore in his formulation, the people’s war in Turkey would pass through a ‘vanguard war’ conducted by the vanguard party that was predicated on the principle of armed propaganda; and this course was valid for all colonial and semi-colonial countries (Çayan, 1992: 314). Çayan named this understanding of people’s war, the first stage of which was a vanguard/guerrilla war’, as ‘politicised armed war strategy’. In his account the Cuban case constituted an example where the armed propaganda was handled as the main form of struggle and conducted by the revolutionary vanguards of the people at the inception of the people’s war (Çayan, 1992: 142-147; 314). The basic premises of the Cuban Revolution, he argued, reflected the Bolshevik line that was valid for all proletarian revolutionaries in the countries that were under the hegemony of imperialism (Çayan, 1992: 314).

While arguing for the compatibility of the national democratic revolution thesis for the Turkish case, THKP-C opposed the way that other proponents of the MDD conceived it. One of the most fundamental inferences of the Movement, which was utilized by Çayan, was the *uninterrupted revolution*, according to which in a country where the bourgeoisie lost its historical mission, the bourgeois revolution should be realized by the working class in collaboration with its alliances and then the working class should incline towards the socialist revolution in an uninterrupted manner (Çayan, 1992: 89). In that regard the main difference with and the fundamental point of criticism that THKP-C directed towards the PDA²⁵ was about its disregard

²⁴ Çayan indicated in that regard that Mihri Belli embraced a static understanding of Lenin’s *Two Tactics* and attempted to adapt it statically to the Turkish context (Çayan, 1992: 280-281).

²⁵ PDA adopted the argument of the immaturity of the working class in Turkey, and a need to national front that would realize the national democratic revolution. In its formulation a protracted people’s war was the revolutionary strategy that should be implemented in Turkey. Chinese Communist Party

concerning the vanguard role of the proletariat as the ‘ideological leader’ of the democratic revolution and the specific role it attached to the military-civilian bureaucracy within the ‘national front’ that would realize the national democratic revolution (Çayan, 1992: 138-139; 173-174). Mihri Belli, on the other hand, was criticized by Çayan for adopting the proletariat as the ‘fundamental force’ of the democratic revolution, and for determining the direction of revolutionary struggle from the urban to the rural areas (Çayan, 1992: 198-199). Furthermore its emphasis on the ‘ideological’ leadership of the proletariat and the need to conduct revolutionary struggle via a vanguard party constituted the primary points of differentiation that THKP-C made use of when distinguishing itself from the the Turkish Popular Liberation Army (THKO)²⁶.

Drawing these demarcation lines with the conceptions of other proponents of the national democratic revolution thesis, Çayan asserted that in colonial and semi-colonial countries the route of the national democratic revolution should be from rural areas to cities and the main power of the revolution had to be peasants because of the weak character of the proletariat in terms of both quality and quantity and since the control of imperialism was stronger in cities (Çayan, 1992: 150). Furthermore Çayan indicated with reference to Mao that in national democratic revolution the leadership of the proletariat should be ideological in character. ‘Ideological leadership’ referred to the situation in which the working class was the leader of the peasant revolution that would be realized by the self-organization of the working class the majority of which was consisted of poor peasants (Çayan, 1992: 151-152). Thus, in his regard to handle the proletariat as the ‘fundamental force’ (temel güç) of the revolution and to wait for its maturation, in a country like Turkey

was one of the primary sources of inspiration for Proletarian Revolutionary Enlightenment (PDA). For it regarded the CCP as the ‘true’ representative of Marxism-Leninism, the revolutionary strategy and tactics should also be followed by the revolutionaries in Turkey (Doğan and Ünüvar, 2007: 731). PDA also emphasized upon its pro-Chinese position when drawing its lines vis-à-vis other movements of the era. Furthermore it emphasized on the importance of the military-civilian bureaucracy in the democratic revolution to be realized.

²⁶ While, THKO advocated the Cuban thesis that the revolutionary army would not emanate from the party, rather the party would emanate from the revolutionary army (Akin, 2007: 98), THKP-C insisted on the need to a proletarian party and the determinant character of the ‘political struggle’ over the ‘armed strategy’.

where it did not mature both quantitatively and qualitatively, meant laying aside the realization of the revolution as such (Çayan, 1992: 159). For the ‘actual leadership’ (instead of ideological one) of the proletariat the level of its consciousness and organization should be high, that is to say the subjective conditions should be matured, and a national front consisting of all anti-imperialist classes and strata should be constituted, which according to Çayan was not the situation in Turkey (Çayan, 1992: 105).

It can be argued that two fundamental dimensions that characterize the THKP-C were anti-imperialism and the armed struggle. Yet Çayan regarded the ‘imperialist occupation’ in the country as the fundamental point of justification of the national democratic revolution in Turkey as well as the armed struggle that was determined by the Movement as the most peculiar way of realizing it. In the following part, I will briefly examine these two dimensions.

3. 2. 3. 1. Anti-imperialism and the Politicised Armed War Strategy

In Çayan’s account the fundamental contradiction in Turkey was between the people and the American imperialism (Çayan, 1992: 84-85) and thus it was impossible to construct socialism ‘without first driving imperialism out’ (Çayan, 1992: 30). This stemmed from the notion that the objective conditions of the revolution in a country was precisely determined by the quality of imperialism in that country (whether it is direct or hidden in character); put differently, the quality and the course of the capitalist relations was not a direct determinant in the process of revolution as such, rather it was the imperialist occupation, which could be either direct or hidden in character, that directly determined it. In that regard Çayan indicated that: “It is not the level of economic development in a country that determines the hegemony of the working class in the revolution, since the objective conditions of its hegemony existed in all countries in the imperialist stage” (Çayan, 1992: 172).

In Çayan's formulation within the 'third crisis period of imperialism' the form of the imperialist occupation altered and the direct occupation was replaced by the hidden one (Çayan, 1992: 303). Within this period, in countries where the methods of new colonialism were implemented, the monopoly bourgeoisie did not develop with its own dynamics; rather it appeared as being integrated with the imperialism (Çayan, 1992: 308). In parallel with the expansion of the market in the underdeveloped countries as a result of new-colonialism, the social production and wealth relatively increased, which brought about an *artificial balance* between the oligarchy and the masses (Çayan, 1992: 310).

From his diagnosis concerning the hidden imperialist occupation in Turkey and the artificial balance that brought along the pacification of the masses, Çayan inferred the need to an armed propaganda that would enable the break of the artificial balance. Çayan called this strategy as *Politicized Armed War Strategy* (PASS) and described it as such: "The Politicized Armed War Strategy is the conduct of the guerilla warfare as a means of the political mass struggle, namely as a means of the campaign of explaining the political facts" (Çayan, 1992: 292).

Thus for Çayan the existence of imperialist occupation within those countries rendered invalid the notion of waiting for the maturation of the relations of production; put differently, the evolutionary and revolutionary stages coalesced. According to this formulation Marx's thesis of the peaceful transformation that was proposed for the specific conditions that existed before the monopoly stage of capitalism was invalid (Çayan, 1992: 36). Instead what was valid for the 'imperialist stage of capitalism' was the overthrow of the state and construction of the proletarian dictatorship via armed struggle (Çayan, 1992: 40).

3. 2. 3. 2. The Issues of Organization, Leadership and Mass-Cadre Relations

In Çayan's formulation the proletarian socialists were endowed with two focuses: to struggle against imperialism and feudalism in collaboration with all 'nationalist strata

and classes' on the one hand, and on the other hand by giving proletariat political consciousness to ensure it to be organized (Çayan, 1992: 13-14, 112-114). Proletariat would lead the other 'anti-imperialist classes' in the process of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal national revolution according to this formulation. Furthermore in his account, the first step of struggling against imperialism and constituting the national front was to construct the proletarian party, which would have the mission of making the 'second national liberation war' against imperialism (Çayan, 1992: 112).

Çayan based his understanding of revolutionary party mainly by leaning upon Lenin's *What is to Done?* and *State and Revolution* and attempted to determine the form of Marxist-Leninist party that was peculiar to Turkey, which he defined as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country. Referring to *What is to be Done?* he specified the party to be constituted as an organization of professional revolutionaries organized according to the principle of democratic centralism that should bring consciousness to the proletariat from outside (Çayan, 1992: 61-62; 270-275). For Çayan, this organization should have a semi-military nature, that is to say, the centralist aspect of the principle of democratic centralism rather than the democratic one should be dominant; and this was valid for all countries that did not have a bourgeois democracy (Çayan, 1992: 272). His reading of *State and Revolution* was also compatible with that of *What is to done?*. In his argument, this work of Lenin generated a theory of revolution that deepened Marx's state theory, and his formulations of class struggle and proletarian dictatorship (Çayan, 1992: 51). Thus, according to it, the revolution should be realized by a vanguard party consisting of a small number of professional revolutionaries, under the leadership of which the bourgeois state apparatus would be smashed, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be established and transition to socialism would be realized (Çayan, 1992: 51). Defining revolutionary process in this manner, Çayan also emphasized the need for constituting relations with the masses within action in order the party to be transformed into the mass party of the proletariat (Çayan, 1992: 272).

In that regard Çayan stated one of the main goals of the revolutionaries as to educate the masses, to bring consciousness to them. He further argued that the most peculiar way of this was not to construct mass organizations, rather becoming conscious and organized of the masses could only be realized within the process of the revolutionary war, by the efforts of the revolutionaries to attract them to the revolutionary action via their armed operations (Çayan, 1992: 209). As it will be indicated below, despite having a similar emphasis on the ‘mass education’ and the roles of professional revolutionaries in this process, Devrimci Yol had a different approach with regard to the role of ‘mass organizations’ and ‘armed struggle’.

3. 3. The Organization Inflation: Main Pillars of the Left in Turkey in the Late 1970s

With regard to the assessments concerning the Left in the late 1970s, rather than taking hand the different leftist movements/parties of the period in detail, there is a tendency to make generalizations that supposed to be characterizing the left in general (see Belge, 2007: 40; Aydınoğlu, 2007: 278-279). When examining a period in which approximately 40 organizations existed, this kind of an examination, to a certain extent, is inevitable. Accordingly, without making a detailed examination, I will restrict myself with posing the general lines of distinctions within revolutionary organizations that operated in the era.

The revolutionary organizations that appeared after the 1974 amnesty constituted their revolutionary strategies within a framework that included the debates and the fundamental distinctions in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the course of the working class mobilization in Turkey, the increasing assaults of the ultra-nationalists and state repression, and the general revolutionary divisions in the world level. Besides, the effort of distinguishing themselves within this general framework from others and drawing distinctive lines in that regard constituted another field of struggle, which by its own, had an important role in different organizations’ self-definitions.

Among others, one of the most marked points of differentiation between those organizations was their positioning of themselves with regard to two international revolutionary currents²⁷. Thus the revolutionary organizations constituted their strategies of revolution by differentiating themselves with regard to two international revolutionary lines that divided Leftist scene in Turkey into three main currents in late 1970s²⁸: the line that was represented by the Communist Party of Soviet Union and the one that was represented by the Chinese Communist Party. A tripartite general division can be specified in that regard when describing the revolutionary organizations of the era: Sovietists, Maoists and those that defined themselves with their opposition to the polarization at issue²⁹ (Belge, 1987: 148). This third line composed of organizations that, albeit being inspired from various revolutionary experiences in a world level -especially Latin America-, rejected a direct identification of the 'Turkish road' with a specific international source. Most of the organizations that located themselves with regard to this 'international' distinction, also posed themselves as the followers of different organizations formerly existed in Turkey (Aydinođlu, 2007: 367-389)³⁰.

The international inspirations of different organizations together with their different sources of 'inheritance' within Turkey played also a determinant role in their formulations concerning the issue of revolutionary organization. Although they

²⁷ Almost all Movements/parties of the era, without attempting to analyse the course of capitalist relations within country and by choosing themselves international experiences to inspire, attempted to propose different strategies they found adequate for realizing the revolution in Turkey. For similar assessments, having different points of departure, that consider the dominance of this logic as a powerful tendency in the Turkish leftist tradition see Bařkaya (2007: 75) and Ercan (2004: 630-651).

²⁸ For an examination of the revolutionary organizations of the late 1970s that utilizes this classification see (Belge, 1987: 148).

²⁹ The leading organizations as the representatives of these three lines were TKP (Soviet line); Halkın Kurtuluřu (Maoist line); Devrimci Yol (the 'third line') (cf. Belge, 2007: 38-39; Aydinođlu, 2007: 279).

³⁰ For instance, while Halkın Kutuluřu adopted the inheritance of THKO and combined it with a maoist perspective; Devrimci Yol regarded THKP-C as its predecessor. TKP, on the other hand, was an organization that, albeit intermittently, existed within the Turkish Left since 1920. For detailed examinations of the Maoist line in Turkey and TKP see respectively (Dođan and Ünüvar, 2007 and Çetinkaya and Dođan, 2007).

formulated differently the tactics to be conducted and the roles of distinct classes and strata in the revolution, the revolutionary movements and parties operated in this era shared a common ground with regard to their conceptions of the state, revolution and the revolutionary organization. In that regard, they framed the revolutionary struggle as the struggle for the state takeover, that would be conducted by the professional revolutionaries; and they envisaged that the emancipation of the laborer classes could only be ensured after seizing the instrument of the state³¹. As it will be argued in the following part, Devrimci Yol also shared this common ground, although it incorporated certain elements of a different revolutionary perspective and a different vision of revolutionary organization into its formulation. Following section will deal with the characteristics of this commonality and the differentiation.

3. 4. Devrimci Yol and the Question of Organization

The Left, despite its fragmented character, had an important mass support in the late 1970s and Devrimci Yol constituted the largest organization of the era that gained the biggest share from this popular support (cf. Belge, 1987: 148, STMA, 1988: 2256-61). The Movement, adopting the inheritance of THKP-C, was first established under the name of Devrimci Gençlik³² in 1975 by the release of its journal with the

³¹ In the following chapter, when examining the resistance committees, I will deal with the understandings of revolutionary organization of Kurtuluş and Devrimci Sol, as two important organizations of the era that came from THKP-C tradition and that positioned themselves as being opposed to the Chinese-Soviet polarization.

³² Two different ‘Devrimci Gençlik’³² existed within the left in Turkey, which flourished in different historical periods and which represented different characteristics both organizationally as well as politically. First appeared in the 1960s and stamped the socialist/revolutionary scene in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The second, on the other hand, appeared in the mid-1970s and became an important actor until the 1980 coup d’état. Put differently, while Dev-Genç disappeared through procreating several armed struggle organizations of pre-1971, Devrimci Gençlik transformed into the movement of Devrimci Yol (Aydinoğlu, 2007: 312). The journal *Devrimci Gençlik*, which started to be published in December 1975, determined the constitution of the unity of the revolutionary movement by the establishment of the proletarian party as the fundamental task of ‘revolutionaries’, which constituted the main step that had to be managed in order to solve every other problem of the revolutionary process (Devrimci Gençlik, 1976b). For the Movement, the peculiar way of realizing this unity was to arrive at an agreement on a Marxist-Leninist theoretical basis (Devrimci Gençlik, 1976b), the fundamental components of which were regarded by the Movement as anti-imperialism and anti-fascism. It can be argued that Devrimci Yol’s way of approaching fascism and the strategy it generated to counter it was started to be formulated in the journal *Devrimci Gençlik*. For, it was indicated by the movement that there was a spontaneous tendency among the masses through reacting

same name and then it was transformed into Devrimci Yol in 1977. It inspired dramatically from the MDD tradition, especially from THKP-C/ Mahir Çayan as a movement that pretended to be a ‘critical inheritor’ of them. The conceptual tools used by Devrimci Yol in order to apprehend the Turkish social, political and economic formation and the proper way towards revolution were mostly gathered from the corpus of Mahir Çayan and the Marxist literature referred was restricted mainly with figures such as Lenin, Stalin, Dimitrov, Mao and Che. Furthermore, the Movement, as many other movements of the era, claimed to be the true interpreter and adherent of the theoretical inferences of those figures. Thus as one of the Movement’s leaders indicates Devrimci Yol was not only influenced from Marxist-Leninist ideology, but also had a special effort for not deviating from it (Pekdemir, 2007: 747).

Moreover, concepts that Movement mainly derived from Çayan’s corpus such as ‘artificial balance’, ‘colonial type of fascism’, ‘the revolutionary and evolutionary stages’, ‘people’s war’ and their adaptation to the current situation constituted the main theoretical discussions presented within the journal *Devrimci Yol*. It can be argued that a selective utilization of those concepts rendered Movement’s theoretical position amorphous and even ambiguous. As it was pointed out by different authors one of the most important characteristics of Dev-Genç and THKP-C was their theoretical eclecticism (Aydınöğlü, 2007: 267-268; Laçiner, 1998: 19-20) and Devrimci Yol as an inheritor of them also inherited this characteristic.

Nevertheless, as it will be explicated below, it is possible to determine two important characteristics of Devrimci Yol that differentiated it from the THKP-C, which were also impacted upon its understanding of revolutionary organization. First was Devrimci Yol’s emphasis on the need to establish a mass basis to the revolutionary

the fascist assaults and the goal of revolutionary youth in that sense should be to work for the organizational unity of this resistance and struggle potential of the masses (Devrimci Gençlik, 1976c). It was further indicated by the Movement that new forms of anti-fascist action should be generated that would help revolutionaries in their effort through getting the masses to comprehend the revolutionary ideas and to be organized (Devrimci Gençlik, 1976c)

struggle by constituting ‘organic links’ with them, rather than assigning a primary role to the armed struggle as the most peculiar way of attracting the masses as THKP-C did. The second, on the other hand, was the centrality of anti-fascism – rather than anti-imperialism- for Devrimci Yol’s formulation of revolutionary strategy.

3. 4. 1. General Characteristics and the Fundamental Premises of the Movement

3. 4. 1. 1. The General Organizational Scheme of the Movement

Before going into detail about the fundamental premises of the Devrimci Yol it will be worthwhile to set forth its general organizational scheme, which can also be helpful in understanding its approach towards the issue of revolutionary organization. By leaning upon the interviews I have made and the Indictment of the military presucusion (THKP-C Dev-Yol Trial³³), Devrimci Yol’s general organizational scheme can be roughly drawn as follows:

Devrimci Yol was a political movement, which had an hierarchical organizational core. It had a central committee consisting of 7 individuals at the top. In the country level, the organization was divided into regional committees, each having a distinct responsible. The central committee was the organ which had the authority in determining the political line and the strategic decisions. Devrimci Yol had also a general committee, an organ that encompassed the members of the central committee, the region responsables and some other key militants, which took advisory decisions concerning the general political and strategic line of the Movement. The region responsables were directly attached to the central committee and were charged with ensuring the execution of policies determined by the central committee. Alongside the region responsables there were also militants who were responsible for different units (like cities and districts) and that hierarchically

³³ T.C. Ankara-Çankırı-Kastamonu İleri Sıkıyönetim Komutanlığı Askeri Savcılığı, THKP-C-Devrimci Yol, İddianame, Ankara, 1982: 97-110.

attached to the region responsables³⁴. In parallel with the Devrimci Yol's adoption of the principle of secrecy, the communication networks among these units were provided by the militants who were responsible for different units³⁵. The Movement also encompassed a broad and a widespread layer of militants and sympathizers at the very bottom.

Besides, armed organizations were also formed by Devrimci Yol in two general forms. First was the *armed resistance forces* (Silahlı Direniş Birlikleri, SDB), which operated under the framework of resistance committees and were charged with the armed defense of the district or the neighborhood from the assaults of the ultra-nationalists; and the second was the *revolutionary war forces* (Devrimci Savaş Birlikleri, DSB), which started to be formed by the year 1979³⁶ and composed of professional revolutionaries directly attached to the central committee and which organized in the form of guerrilla (Pekdemir, 2007: 774).³⁷

The Movements' support base, namely its rank and file militants and the sympathizers that constituted the bottom layer of its organizational scheme, mainly composed of urban people, among which the *gecokondu* settlers constituted a considerable portion, and to a certain extent people from the countryside. As a movement that was first formed under the name of Devrimci Gençlik (the most widespread youth movement in the era), it had also considerable number of rank and file militants and sympathizers from the youth. However, although Devrimci Yol appeared as a youth movement, in a little while it transformed into a general political movement (Pekdemir, 2007: 772) that was encompassing many different segments of the society.

³⁴ The resistance committees in the neighbourhoods and districts, as it will be examined in the following chapter, were attached to the district or neighborhood responsables.

³⁵ Hüseyin, interviewed in Ankara, 09 August 2008 and Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

³⁶ Hüseyin, interviewed in Ankara, 09 August 2008.

³⁷ Alongside these units the Movement had also an organization abroad.

The profiles of the writers of 'reader letters' published in the Movement's journal constitutes a source of information about the social base of supporters/sympathizers of the Movement. Most of them were students, peasants, civil servants, industrial workers and workers in the service sector. Reader's Letters, which take part in almost all volumes of the journal, end with sender's own attributions to themselves. Some of them are as follows: 'Revolutionaries of Kozören Village', 'Güldere Villagers', 'The labourer Drivers Working in the Kadıköy-Pendik Line', 'Revolutionary Bakery Workers From İzmir', 'A Revolutionary Teacher from Yüksekova', 'A group of Devrimci Yol Proponent from Çarşamba', 'Devrimci Yol Proponents from Abdurrahmanpaşa Lyceum', 'The Dentistry Students of Ankara University', 'A group of workers from Uşak Sugar Factory' etc.

As Belge argues, with regard to Devrimci Yol one can talk about the existence of a fluid organizational network throughout Anatolia that operated without having strict ties among each other (1987: 164). The majority of the militants had no contact with the upper level responsables and the central committee, namely the organizational core of the Movement. Furthermore, as it will be elaborated in the following chapter, especially in the district and the neighborhood level one cannot talk about a strict orientation from the central committee level³⁸.

3. 4. 1. 2. Fundamental Premises of the Movement

As it was indicated above, revolutionary organizations in the late 1970s constituted their proposals of revolution in terms of their positions with regard to the polarization between Soviet and Chinese communist parties. In that regard Devrimci Yol determined its position in an opposition with the Communist Party of Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party and the organizations that claimed to be proponents of these lines. As it was indicated above THKP-C had also an effort of proposing and executing a revolutionary strategy that is peculiar to Turkey.

³⁸ As it will be mentioned below this characteristic was not desirable for the Movement, rather it was regarded as a characteristic that stemmed from its rapid expansion and that should be eliminated.

Following this effort Devrimci Yol as well attempted to formulate a strategy that refrained from directly attaching itself to an international revolutionary line.

The Movement argued that while Soviet approach of transition to socialism corresponded to 'economism', the approach of Chinese Communist Party should be conceived as 'voluntarist' (Devrimci Yol, 1977e). According to the Movement the first should be neglected as a reference point of Turkish revolution thus socialism was assessed by it as an automatic result of the economic development and was attached to the nationalization of the private property of the means of production and the development of the productive forces. This, for Devrimci Yol, should be regarded as an underestimation of the determinant position of the proletariat's ideological and political action and the necessity of a permanent cultural and ideological revolution. Furthermore, the Movement criticized Soviet Ideologues with an argument that they related everything to the 'economic competition between US and USSR' (Devrimci Yol, 1977d).

The Maoist position, on the other hand, was regarded by Devrimci Yol as a product of idealist tendencies, which overestimated the determinant role of the politics and did not take into consideration the role of the economic factors (Devrimci Yol, 1977e). The fault of the 'social imperialism' thesis of the Chinese Communist Party, according to Devrimci Yol, was its premise that when governors adopted the revisionist ideology they were transformed into a new type of state bourgeoisie and society became state monopoly capitalism, by the impact of which socialist state became a capitalist one. Devrimci Yol interpreted this notion as voluntarist and idealist, with an argument that it presupposed that the ideas of the governors will determine the quality of the society (Devrimci Yol, 1977c).

Rejecting to be a part within the Chinese-Soviet dualism, Devrimci Yol argued that the main contradiction at the global level was between imperialism and the liberation struggles that were conducted as 'intensive armed struggles' by the peoples of 'underdeveloped countries' and who weakened imperialism were 'the peoples of'

Asia, Africa and Latin America (Devrimci Yol, 1977c). In its argument “The power that would carry the world’s revolutionary movement to more developed positions was people’s liberation struggles under the leadership of the proletariat” (Devrimci Yol, 1977c)³⁹.

Identifying the primary contradiction in the global level in this manner, Devrimci Yol regarded that the dominant form of exploitation in Turkey was the capitalist exploitation and other forms of exploitation were connected to it and serve it (Devrimci Yol, 1977e). For the Movement since feudalism in Turkey lost its ground as a result of a from-above effort, the anti-feudal struggle could not be the single determinant of the revolution hereafter (Devrimci Yol, 1977e). Accordingly the difference between Turkey and countries like China and Vietnam was that the first was not a semi-feudal country anymore but a ‘new colony’ (Devrimci Yol, 1977e). As a new colony Turkey was under the ‘hidden occupation’ of imperialism and imperialism became an inherent phenomenon that was integrated with the rule of oligarchy (Devrimci Yol, 1977a). In Devrimci Yol’s formulation dominant class alliance, namely oligarchy, which was consisted of domestic monopoly bourgeoisie as the extension of imperialism and large landowners, was identified directly with imperialism. Moreover in accordance with this identification the prospective revolution was characterized as both anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist (Devrimci Yol, 1977a).

These diagnoses and strategic inferences, which were mostly framed within the framework of Çayan’s corpus, were combined with an emphasis on anti-fascism by the Movement. The rise of the fascist movement was regarded by Devrimci Yol as an indicator of the ‘hidden imperialist occupation’ in the country, and was called as ‘colonial type of fascism’. Furthermore, for Devrimci Yol, due to the ascendance of

³⁹ Thus as its predecessor, THKP-C, Devrimci Yol regarded the revolutionary attempts that were experienced in ‘the colonial and semi-colonial countries’ as being more valuable and more akin to Turkish context. In parallel with this in the journal *Devrimci Yol* it was given place in almost all issues to news and commentaries concerning the revolutionary movements/parties as well as to the course of struggles in those countries, some of which were Nicaragua, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Peru, Honduras, Mozambique, Angola, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Iran and Albania.

fascism in Turkey, anti-fascist struggle became the most important aspect of the revolutionary struggle that should be conducted via constituting an anti-fascist front for the realization of the revolution that was characterized as anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist.

Moreover, by following Mahir Çayan, Devrimci Yol adopted the *people's war* as the most suitable revolutionary strategy to Turkey as well as other old/semi-colonial and new-colonial countries (Devrimci Yol, 1978a: 22). Çayan's formulation that due to distinct character of new-colonies (like Turkey) from old/semi-colonial countries stemming from the existence of the artificial balance in the first it was necessary to conduct a 'vanguard war' at the stage of inception, before transmitting the struggle into the 'people's war' was also reiterated by the Movement (Devrimci Yol, 1978a: 44). Thus the fundamental aim of the armed actions was formulated by it as a means of attracting the masses to a revolutionary direction (Devrimci Yol, 1978a: 45).

However different from Çayan who, as stated above, opposed the construction of mass organizations and emphasized on the primary role of armed propaganda as the most peculiar way of attracting the masses, Devrimci Yol stressed heavily upon the need for 'constituting organic relations with the masses' and the importance of the mass organizations in that regard. This emphasis was also constituted one of the main reasons behind the split of a group of revolutionaries from Devrimci Yol in 1978. This group formed a political organization under the name of Devrimci Sol (Revolutionary Left) with an accusation of Devrimci Yol in discarding the principle of 'politicised armed war strategy' and with a claim of being the true follower of the THKP-C⁴⁰.

Adopting Çayan's premise of *politicized armed war strategy* in principle, Devrimci Yol reflected a different inclination in practice concerning the armed struggle, which was directly interrelated with its conception of fascism and the ways it attempted to

⁴⁰ Devrimci Sol has adopted the armed propaganda as the focal point of its revolutionary strategy and conducted several armed actions in accordance with it both before and after the 1980 coup d'état.

counter the assaults of the ultra-nationalists. In that regard it emphasized upon the initiatives of the ‘aggrieved masses’ as the actors of their ‘self-defense’ and the need to organize them in the direction of constituting an anti-fascist front. Since this point is a vital one in order to examine the Movement’s understanding of revolutionary organization, the following section will deal with Devrimci Yol’s conception of fascism and its reflections on the Movement’s organizational principles.

3. 4. 1. 3. Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Organization

The development of fascism in Turkey and its practical reflections can be regarded as Devrimci Yol’s main concern that it was dealt within its time of existence. Indeed to apprehend the forms that fascism took in the country and to tackle with fascist attacks was one of the main concerns of all movements of the era⁴¹. For the period between 1975 and 1980 can be regarded as the ‘fascism era’ of the socialist movement in Turkey as a whole (Belge, 1983: 1962) due to the fact that in this period the strengthening ultra-nationalist movement attracted almost all attention and energy of the left. However since its discourse and practices were dominated with its understanding of fascism in Turkey, this issue deserves particular attention when one deals with the theoretical inferences and the practice of Devrimci Yol. Accordingly, its way of approaching fascism and the way it combines the struggle against fascism and the problem of revolution will be elaborated in this section.

For the Movement fascism -in its classical sense- appeared after the ‘first imperialist war of partition’ as a form of ‘bourgeois class domination’, which stemmed from the impact of the socio-economic and political crises that occurred under the threat of proletarian revolutions (Devrimci Yol, 1978b). Furthermore, it was associated with ‘imperialism’s monopolistic character’ and was regarded as the regime of the ‘monopoly capitalism’, which appeared as an open dictatorship, namely as a distinct form of state that was different from other forms of bourgeois domination (Devrimci

⁴¹ For a detailed examination of different approaches concerning fascism in the Turkish left see Bora (2007). In this article the author claims, with regard to the importance of fascism for the left in 1970s, that the anti-fascist discourse constituted a basis for the left to articulate itself and to be popularized (Bora, 2007: 847).

Yol, 1978b). Thus for Devrimci Yol fascism came into being as a result of imperialism's economic characteristics. Yet while bourgeois democracy was the 'normal superstructure of capitalism', imperialism's monopolistic economic character brought about 'political reactionism' as its superstructure (Devrimci Yol, 1978b).

Defining Fascism in such a manner, Devrimci Yol opposed identifying the formation and perpetuation of fascism in Turkey with its 'classical forms' that appeared in 'capitalist European countries' (Devrimci Yol, 1978b) and attempted to differentiate its Turkish version from the one that pertained to those countries. The peculiarity of Turkey in that regard stemmed from its character of being a new-colony in Movement's formulation. Thus, for it, fascism and struggle against it in colonial/semi-colonial and new colonial countries should be examined with respect to their peculiar conditions.

Accordingly, Devrimci Yol argued that in countries where bourgeois democratic revolutions had not been accomplished, fascist dictatorships appeared inevitably in distinct forms from that of 'classical' fascism. The distinctiveness at issue stemmed from the fact that in those countries fascism had developed through state apparatus without having a wide mass basis (Devrimci Yol, 1978c). Another characteristic of this difference, in Movement's account, was that there still existed in those countries, albeit limitedly, democratic rights as different from the situation in countries that experienced classical fascism (Devrimci Yol, 1978c). However the lack of 'strong democratic struggle tradition' and 'strong working class movement' brought about oligarchy to apply terrorist methods and to orient towards fascism. This type of fascism, which encompassed situations where the form of the regime was neither bourgeois democracy nor classical fascism but where the monopoly bourgeoisie based its sovereignty on oppression and terror, was called by the Movement as *colonial type of fascism* (Devrimci Yol, 1978c).

According to Devrimci Yol, the orientation of fascism in Turkey and other countries like it was towards the establishment of a situation where whole of the state apparatus would become fascist and all rights and freedoms would be abolished. Leaning upon this diagnosis the Movement formulated the struggle against fascism as a struggle that should mainly be oriented towards the state and not only against MHP (Nationalist Action Party), as ‘fascism’s civil branch’, with an argument that state was where fascism emanated from (Devrimci Yol, 1978c). Thus, for the movement, this struggle could not be detached from the problem of revolution and should not be considered only as a problem of averting fascism’s ascendance, i.e. as long as it could not be combined with a revolutionary perspective this struggle could not be successful.

Thus what was at stake for the Movement was a state-centered understanding of fascism that was combined with a state-centered understanding of revolution. However this formulation did not directly orient the Movement to a notion that totally identified the anti-fascist struggle with the state-takeover. Rather, in parallel with its argument that fascism attempted to constitute itself a mass basis⁴², Devrimci Yol called attention to the reflections of fascism in the everyday lives of the people in factories, neighborhoods and universities etc. In that regard it emphasized upon the recruitment of the workers to the factories and workplaces, of the officials to the universities and municipalities, who were proponents of MHP and/or militants of the *ülküçü* movement (Devrimci Yol, 1977i; Devrimci Yol 1978e).

As it will be examined in the following chapter, this understanding concerning the development of fascism in Turkey had also its reflections on the Movement’s understanding of revolutionary organization and its formulation concerning the relations between the party and the resistance committees. In that respect, in parallel with its identification of fascism with the state, the Movement conceived the resistance committees as organizations that would facilitate the constitution of the

⁴² For the Movement, fascism, with the support of current state apparatuses and via fascist terror (and demagogy) organized by the state, endeavored to constitute itself a mass basis (Devrimci Yol, 1978c).

prospective party that would realize the state takeover. However, it also regarded them as the power alternatives by the struggle of which fascism could be revealed and eliminated and in which ‘nucleuses’ of desired social relations could be experienced from the existing situation on.

Identifying the specific appearance and perpetuation of fascism in Turkey and other countries like it in the above mentioned manner, Devrimci Yol attempted to formulate the duties of the revolutionaries that would be the counter forces within this context. According to it, revolutionaries should be in an *active defense* in the struggle against fascism and in order to counteract, they should reveal the ‘fascist demagogy’ and struggle ‘to unify all people in every district, working place and region’ (Devrimci Yol, 1977f). The movement framed the active defense as ‘a revolutionary defense line that is not passive and stable’ (Devrimci Yol, 1977c), that is to say, that includes both defending the unit and realizing preventive tactical assaults as well. However, as it was indicated above this second aspect was not central to the Movement’s formulation and practice. Thus although adopting the tactical assaults (within the framework of the principle of *politicized armed war strategy*) as an aspect of the anti-fascist struggle, the Movement emphasized more heavily upon the initiatives of the ‘aggrieved masses’ as the actors of their ‘self-defense’ and the need to organize them in the direction of constituting an anti-fascist front.

In that regard, by the Movement anti-fascism was conceived as a fundamental aspect of the matter of revolutionary organization, and a constitutive role was attached to the resistance committees in that regard (cf. Bora, 2007: 862). Put differently, although the Movement conceived fascism as a phenomenon that was directly interrelated with the ‘state apparatus’, it did not handle anti-fascist struggle and the resistance committees only as the means of state takeover, rather at the same time it attached to them the mission of being prototypes of an alternative social order.

Since the scrutiny concerning the general principles and the practice of these organizational units as well as the dilemmas and tensions they implied will be the focal point of the following chapter, in the subsequent sections of this chapter I will dwell on Devrimci Yol's way of approaching the mass/cadre relations and the party.

3. 4. 1. 4. “To Create the Narrowest Cadre within the Widest Mass”: Devrimci Yol's Understanding of Mass/Cadre Relations and Leadership

One of Devrimci Yol's most important criticisms towards the past and present leftist currents in Turkey was their awkwardness in their relationships with the masses. Movement's emphasis upon Turkish left's inability to keep its contact with the masses was also utilized by the Movement as an indicator of its distinctiveness. For it accused different segments of the Turkish Left with being 'intellectual priggish' and it regarded them as '*ulema*'⁴³ that try to demonstrate their 'deep scholarships' (Devrimci Yol, 1977g). According to Devrimci Yol, who focused on abstract debates over concepts and who did not consider the political practice serve pacifist and submissionary notions about the anti-fascist struggle (Devrimci Yol, 1977g). It is worth noting that movement's strong anti-elitism dominated its discourse and practice as a whole and its emphasis on concreteness, practical conditions and action was evident in that regard. This characteristic had also its implications with respect to Movement's assessment of 'the people' as well as the manners it preferred to reach the masses. Furthermore the mission that was attached to the Resistance committees by the Movement is also crucial in this regard. Forasmuch as according to Devrimci Yol the revolutionary act should be based on 'the masses', and therefore to constitute 'organic links'⁴⁴ between them and resistance committees had a great importance (Devrimci Yol, 1978c).

⁴³ *Ulema* is the name given to the body of scholars trained in Islam and Islamic law.

⁴⁴ Devrimci Gençlik had also a similar emphasis on the need to constitute 'organic links' with the masses, which was defined by the Movement as to take part together with the masses within the mass action in order to orient them towards the revolutionary goals (Devrimci Gençlik, 1975b).

In parallel with this, as a means of interacting with the masses the proponents of Devrimci Yol frequently realized home visits and *kahve* (coffee house) meetings. They attempted to incorporate the people to the anti-fascist struggle under the framework of resistance committees, who had inclinations towards different political groups and parties. Furthermore they attached a specific diligence to the values, traditions of the people they tried to organize. However this attention did not have a primary position in Movement's discourse. Instead it was subordinated to its effort of constituting intimate relations with the masses in order to attract them to the anti-fascist struggle. A piece of writing called 'The Points that should be Noticed in Mass Education' in the first issue of the journal Devrimci Yol, which named its collocutors as 'educators', constitutes a remarkable example in this regard. In this piece of writing the militants of the movement – the educators- were prescribed to respect the religions, customs and traditions of the people that would be educated (Devrimci Yol, 1977b). Furthermore they were warned to be pure both in terms of the language they use as well as their apparel.

The issue of 'revolutionary cadres' had a considerable centrality in Devrimci Yol's concern. It was even defined as the most important component of a revolutionary organization. Thus to have qualified cadres was regarded by it as a vital issue with an argument that they were the main subjects of the application process of all policies into the practice (Devrimci Yol, 1978g). This central role attached by Devrimci Yol to the cadres, which were also valid for the rank and file militants and sympathizers that would be their successors, brought about strict codes that were implicitly and explicitly proposed by it.

For instance, in the journal *Devrimci Yol* the required characteristics of all individuals who are and will be parts of the leadership cadres were defined with attributions such as being illegal, trustworthy, self-sacrificing and having self-confidence (Devrimci Yol, 1978g). These attributions were attempted to be strengthened and guaranteed by an understanding of 'revolutionary responsibility', which was defined by the Movement as being responsible to the revolutionary

movement as a whole. In this regard the responsibility to the superior was framed as a form of responsibility borne to the movement (Devrimci Yol, 1978g).

Furthermore, as a response to the accusations directed towards the Movement on the basis that it adopted a spontaneous and loose sort of organization, Devrimci Yol emphasized that this character was what the Movement was trying to overcome (Devrimci Yol, 1978d). It was further implied in the Journal *Devrimci Yol* that this kind of ‘negative’ tendencies could only be defeated by strengthening centralization and by constituting the ‘cadre’ that would serve the process of forming the party (Devrimci Yol, 1978d). The Movement’s understanding of the revolutionary leadership and the position of the revolutionary organization and the party in that regard is reflected in the following paragraph:

The vanguard party of our working class is the iron-disciplined unity of decisive, professional cadres that conceived Marxism-Leninism as an action guide and that with an accurate revolutionary program would organize and manage the revolutionary struggle of the laboring classes (in every field) and convey it to the triumph. It is only in the second stage, this narrow organization of revolutionaries could raise to the higher rank of being vanguard in its real sense, by coalescing with the most pro elements of the working class and the poor peasantry. If an organization could not success in transiting from the first to the second stage, it is obvious that it would also loose its initial position (Devrimci Yol, 1978d)

Thus for Devrimci Yol the matter of organization and the party was a matter of organizing Revolution’s Marxist-Leninist leadership (Devrimci Yol, 1977f). In that regard constituting ‘the cadre’, which was consisting of ‘professional revolutionaries’ that have the necessary administrative skills for organizing the people’s power and for directing the united-revolutionary war, should be the primary goal (Devrimci Yol, 1977f).

Indeed, Movement’s emphasis on the need to constitute organic links with the masses and the importance it attached to the ‘mass education’ was directly linked with its way of approaching the mass/cadre relations and these two elements implied

to a certain extent a contradiction. The tension between being organized in an illegal manner, in order to conduct anti-fascist armed actions, and to construct organic links between people and the struggle; and that between the Movement's effort of strengthening centralization and the cadres on the one hand and to construct close relations with the wide popular sectors on the other hand were all components of this contradiction.

This contradiction was bound, to a certain extent, with the social environment Devrimci Yol operated in, in which the constitution of a mass political movement was quite difficult due to the active state repression and the assaults of the ultra-nationalist movement. However the period at issue served at the same time a powerful possibility of conducting political activity among the dominated classes due to the intensification of their discontent and mobilization. This dual character of the context in Turkey in the late 1970s brought along Devrimci Yol to generate strategies that were peculiar to it, and that therefore implying contradictions and dualities.

3. 4. 1. 5. A Movement on the Road of Becoming a Party

Since its inception, by Devrimci Yol, the constitution of the proletarian party was emphasized as revolutionaries' main duty. The Movement in its 'declaration' that was published one month before the first issue of the journal *Devrimci Yol* specified its fundamental task as being a platform where the ways of struggling for the creation of the party would be proposed (Devrimci Yol, 1977a). The inchoateness of the revolutionary struggle within the existing situation and the need to be organized under the proletarian party was a continuously repeated issue in the journal *Devrimci Yol*. It also constituted the fundamental vantage point in Movement's assessment of THKP-C. For by Devrimci Yol, the defeat of THKP-C was associated with its inability to hinder schism and to protect unity and its fall down in transforming into a proletarian party (Devrimci Yol, 1977a).

Furthermore as it was indicated previously, Devrimci Yol determined one of its main efforts as to establish a mass basis to the party and thus revolution by realizing revolutionary transformations starting from the existing situation, and to establish ‘organic links’ between revolutionaries and the masses without splitting. The constitution of the proletarian party was conceived by the Movement as the only way of precluding the problem of fragmentation. Indeed the party as such was regarded as a magic wand, the foundation of which would constitute a crossroads for the perpetuation of the revolutionary process and the realization of the revolution.

According to the Movement what rendered the Leninist party theory universal and ever-binding was its premise that the state mechanism should be overthrown from below, socialism should be constituted from above under the proletarian dictatorship and the state and classes should wither away (Devrimci Yol, 1978d).

The party framed by the Movement in this manner, namely as an institution that should immediately be constituted in a centralized manner in order to realize and perpetuate the revolutionary struggle, was also regarded by it as a process, which should not be conceived in instrumental terms as a model of organization (Devrimci Yol, 1978d). This ‘processual’ conception of the party was declared by the Movement in the following words:

“The party, which is the uppermost synthesis of the communist components that are the seeds of the future society, is a process of creation of the classless society and the transformation of all segments of society into this kind” (Devrimci Yol, 1978d)

By taking into consideration Devrimci Yol’s overall emphasis on the importance of the professional cadres and a centralized organization consisting of them, it can be argued that, this second understanding did not have a dominant place in the Movement’s discourse. Nevertheless, although the Movement continuously emphasized the importance of establishing the party, and although it had an hierarchical organization with different units connected to each other in the country level, its binary understanding of the party and its loose ties at the level of the

neighborhoods and districts rendered it both a political movement and a revolutionary organization.

By taking into consideration its effort to have a mass basis, its binary understanding of the party and the revolution, one can argue that, Devrimci Yol was a movement that had a hierarchical organizational core and that attempted to be a mass party having professional cadres and a structured organization. In that regard as Erdoğan mentions, it had a popular-democratic tendency and a vision of ‘war of position’ that was incorporated with a vision of ‘war of manoeuvre’ to use Gramscian terminology (Erdoğan, 1998). The coexistence of these two perspectives and Devrimci Yol’s oscillation between being/becoming a structured organization and a ‘social/political movement that different from the classical party form carried the characteristics of being spontaneous, local and autonomous’ (Erdoğan, 1998: 33) brought along it to confront with practical tensions, the main components of which will be elaborated in the following chapter.

3. 5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have tried to examine the general characteristics and the roots of Devrimci Yol within the Turkish Left with a particular attention on the issue of revolutionary organization. Starting my examination from the 1960s, I have argued that the National Democratic Revolution (MDD) – Socialist Revolution (SD) debate and different proponents of them had a common ground concerning their conceptions of the issues of revolution and power. In that regard both envisaged revolution as a ‘moment’ to be realized in order to pass through the ‘stage’ of socialism. And within this context, they conceived socialism as an order to be established only after the state takeover that is realized either via parliamentary means or non-parliamentary ones. This conception of the state as an instrument to be seized also reflected upon their understandings of the revolutionary organization. In that regard they share a conception of revolutionary organization as an instrument which was consisting of professional cadres and which was dedicated to the state takeover.

This common ground concerning the issues of state, power and the revolutionary organization, was also shared by Dev-Genç and the THKP-C, which adopted the national democratic revolution thesis as the peculiar revolutionary strategy for Turkey; as well as the movements that operated throughout the 1970s and that were the successors of the revolutionary movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Devrimci Yol as a successor of the THKP-C movement also shared this revolutionary vision, as its emphasis on the immediate need to constitute a revolutionary party consisting of 'iron-disciplined' cadres in order to realize the state takeover shows. However it had certain peculiarities that distinguished it from this tradition as well as from the left in Turkey as a whole, which stemmed mainly from the binary character of its understandings of revolution, party and fascism. Its organizational characteristics as well as the practical implications that these characteristics implied also impacted upon this distinctiveness.

One characteristic that differentiated it from THKP-C was Devrimci Yol's emphasis on the need to establish a mass basis to the revolutionary struggle by constituting 'organic links' with them, rather than assigning a primary role to the armed struggle as the most peculiar way of attracting the masses as THKP-C did. This was also interrelated with Movement's way of conceiving the appearance and perpetuation of fascism in Turkey, which constituted one of the most important agenda for the left in Turkey as a whole throughout the 1970s. The shift of emphasis from anti-imperialism to anti-fascism constituted the second important point of differentiation with THKP-C and Devrimci Yol.

The Movement's binary understanding of fascism stemmed from its emphasis on the mass basis of fascism in Turkey, i.e. its widespread impacts in the everyday lives of the people, which accompanied its diagnosis that fascism emanated from the state apparatus and therefore the struggle against it should direct itself towards its takeover. In parallel with its first diagnosis the Movement emphasized upon the need to reveal fascism in the eyes of the people in order to remove its mass support and to

organize resistance committees in order to eliminate it. The mission of being prototypes of alternative social relations was also attached by the movement to the resistance committees. And in parallel with its diagnosis that fascism emanated from the state, it argued for a state-centered revolutionary strategy by which fascism could only be defeated.

Devrimci Yol had also a dual understanding of party, which was framed by it both as a narrow organization of professional cadres and as the instrument of state takeover on the one hand; and that was envisaged by it as a process of organizing for the creation of the classless society on the other hand. Although the definition of the party as the centralized and the disciplined organization of the professional cadres was more central to the Movement, and although in practice it attempted to establish an organization that was compatible with this understanding, its formulation of the party at the same time as a process, its emphasis on the need to establish organizations in which social relations of the future order could be concretized from the existing situation on strengthened its character of being a political movement (cf. Erdoğan, 1998: 33; Pekdemir, 2007: 773) and brought along it to have a revolutionary vision that to a certain extent carried different characteristics from that of the political organizations that preceded it as well as its contemporaries.

However, it is worthwhile to mention that, the Movement referred figures such as Lenin, Stalin, different components of the Comintern tradition when framing its arguments concerning the issues of the revolutionary party, mass-cadre relations and leadership; while at the same time insisting upon the need to constitute organic links with the masses and a vision of constituting a mass party. Thus while maintaining a vision of 'iron disciplined' cadres as the primary actors of the revolution; it also refrained from adopting an understanding of 'revolutionary' politics framed as a matter of profession. This, in my argument, constituted one of the central tensions of Devrimci Yol's political project, which also had its reflections on the formulation and the practice of resistance committees. In parallel with this tension, the Movement, during its period of operation, tackled with the problem of reconciling its

increasing mass support with its formulation of the centralized party as the organization of professional revolutionary cadres.

Along with the formulation and the practice of 'resistance committees', in the following chapter I will dwell on the practical implications of the Movement's organizational logic, and the relations of this practice with the framework proposed in its journal. Yet my focal point will be the resistance committees. In that regard I will concern with their different forms, contradictions and tensions they implied and the questions they proposed in their time of existence.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESISTANCE COMMITTEES

As it was indicated in the previous chapter, the late 1970s witnessed an intensification of mobilization of the subordinated classes and the clashes between different revolutionary movements and the *ülküci* movement. Resistance committees first and foremost had the aim of counterattacking and eliminating these assaults starting from the neighborhood/district level. However their main difference from other unorganized counterattacks was their emphasis on the need to channel the anti-fascist movement to a revolutionary line by incorporating the mass initiative into it. Thus one step forward of the resistance committees, it was proposed by Devrimci Yol to transform them into organizational units such as people's committees, factory/workplace committees and student councils where the social relations of the future order could be concretized here and from now on. Furthermore these attempts were not regarded as valuable *per se*, but rather they were conceived as the means of strengthening the creation of the party that would realize the seizure of the state power. In that regard Devrimci Yol tried to generate a form of revolutionary organization which attached importance on initiating change from within the existing situation by holding at the same time a strategy of taking state power.

As experimental attempts of constituting a balance between the understandings of revolutionary organization dedicated to the seizure of the state power and at the same time initiating change from within the existing situation, resistance committees during their time of existence implied fluctuations and contradictions. That is to say, the tension between the notion of conquest of the power as a process and as a moment was immanent in the formulation of resistance committees (cf. Erdoğan, 1998). Furthermore in that regard these organizational units raised questions

concerning the issue of mass/cadre relations and dualities such as movement- party, reform-revolution. Thus an analysis of resistance committees must necessarily concern with the issues of revolutionary leadership, organization and power, which, as outlined in the first chapter, has been a matter of intense debate discussed within the Marxist theory and practice.

Leaning upon the discussion made in the previous chapter, it can be argued that by the Movement the revolutionary organization was understood mainly as an instrument, an instrument of ‘seizing the power and making revolution’. The Marxist Leninist Party was posed by it as the most urgent and vital requisite in that regard, which was framed, as Lenin did in *What is to be Done?*, as an organization consisting of professional revolutionaries that would bring the political consciousness to the *masses*⁴⁵ from without. This understanding also coexisted with a conception of the state as an instrument to be seized for the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional period.

However the resistance committees, as unique experiences in Turkey organized by Devrimci Yol and existed in a particular time context, carried characteristics different from what this understanding did imply. Although they were, first and foremost, framed as anti-fascist organizations, that would facilitate the party formation and would serve as the mass basis of the party to be established and as a source where revolutionary cadres would be recruited; they were also regarded as the organs where socialist relations would be experienced from now and here by the self initiatives of the ‘masses’ themselves. The first set of characteristics when compared to the second was more on the forefront according to the Movement’s political line, as it was reflected in its journal. However in practice the second was more determinant in the formation and operation of these experiences. Thus they were based on different solidaristic practices and were endowed with a rationale of being

⁴⁵ As it was indicated in the previous chapter, Devrimci Yol used concepts like masses, popular sectors and the people, rather than having a specific emphasis on the working class.

the prototypes of the future society. This duality embedded in the committee experiences gave them their uniqueness within the history of the Left in Turkey.

In this chapter the fundamental tenets of the conception of resistance committees will be elaborated on with reference to the tension indicated in the previous chapter. In that regard different faces of the resistance committees will be concerned with. After focusing on the relation of resistance committees with anti-fascism and the general characteristics of the experiences in the neighborhoods and districts; I will briefly examine two different committee experiences (The Yeratı Maden-İş Union and The Fatsa cases) where the constitutive aspect of the committees were more apparent than the cases realized in the neighborhoods and districts. I will also deal with the approaches of two different Movements (Devrimci Sol and Kurtuluş) and a Journal (Birikim) of the era concerning the revolutionary organization and the resistance committees.

4. 1. The Twofold Character of the Resistance Committees and Different Roles Attached by Devrimci Yol to Them

According to Devrimci Yol, Marxist theory is charged with figuring out problems stemming from social practice and Resistance committees are ‘suggestions brought forward by the life itself’ (Devrimci Yol, 1978g). These organizations were proposed by the Movement as having two faces that are interrelated with each other, which were formulated by it with reference to ‘spontaneous’ tendencies among the masses⁴⁶.

On the one hand getting organized against fascist attacks was regarded as a spontaneous tendency of the masses, and resistance committees was framed as the organizational units under the frameworks of which those tendencies and

⁴⁶ As I will argue, although the resistance committees were organized by the Devrimci Yol militants by leaning upon the existing solidaristic practices of their subjects, one cannot talk about the existence of a ‘spontaneity’ of the soviet/council type. Thus different from the cases of the early Soviets and the Italian factory councils for instance, the Devrimci Yol militants had determinant roles in the formation and perpetuation of the committees.

spontaneous counterattacks would be consolidated and organized in a united manner as it would serve the realization of the revolution. In movement's words:

Attacks of fascist forces brought about a tendency of a kind of anti-fascist solidarity among 'wide popular sectors' (...) and resistance committees appeared as a necessity in order to channel this tendency towards a revolutionary line and to organize all anti-fascist popular forces in a way towards revolution (Devrimci Yol, 1978d).

In spite of the existence of an anti-fascist emphasis and the association of the resistance against fascist assaults with a revolutionary perspective since the inception of the journal *Devrimci Yol*, the appearance of the resistance committees in the journal corresponded to a relatively later time. Indeed this characteristic strengthened Movement's emphasis on the spontaneous character of these organizations (cf. Erdoğan, 1998: 28).

Furthermore, Devrimci Yol abstained from attaching the resistance committees a deliberate, premeditated quality. This abstention is reflected well in the following words:

The resistance committees are not forms or schemes of struggle that are formed and shaped in the minds of revolutionaries and offered in such a way. Rather they are the defense organizations that are practically invented in actual life by the masses by way of trial and error and that are tried to be shaped and matured by them (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 547).

In that sense, resistance committees were regarded by Devrimci Yol within the framework of 'the people's self defense' and it was detached from an assault-based military strategy. In accordance with this first aspect resistance committees were constituted as defensive armed units in many districts, especially in the *gecekondu* regions of cities where assaults from fascist forces and the armed conflict between them and leftist groups were dense.

Alongside this first aspect, the need to establish people's own rule was contemplated as being an outcome of another sort of spontaneity, that was, the already existing discontent of the masses stemming from exploitation, expensiveness, poverty etc. And resistance committees were also framed by the Movement as the organizations where different ways of eliminating the sources of these discontents would be experienced. Thus, one of the Movement's leading figures defines resistance committees as 'spaces where new life styles, new understandings of democracy and administration are constituted from now' (Müftüoğlu, 1988: 2252). In that regard Devrimci Yol attempted to organize an election boycott campaign in the 1979 by-elections and launched a call for getting organized under the resistance committees.

Resistance committees were thus conceived as twofold projects that would first organize the 'wide masses' against fascist attacks and then that would be transformed into 'people's committees' which will be the advanced, matured forms of 'the rule of people' (Devrimci Yol, 1978i) by way of which the social relations of the future order would be constructed from now on. In fact the practice of resistance committees substantially reflected a concurrence of these two dimensions, rather than embodying a relation of succession as stated by the journal *Devrimci Yol*. Thus in many cases where resistance committees concretized, both anti-fascism as a rationale behind the act of organizing and attempts of establishing social relations of the future from the existing situation on coexisted.

This twofold character of resistance committees was also reflected in the actions and campaigns implemented by the Movement as well as other practical experiences it initiated. While the first was more dominant in places where fascist attacks were more intense, the second was more focused on in spaces where the density of the clashes was lower. The resistance against fascist attacks in Çorum on July 1979 constituted an example of the first, where forty committees were established in certain districts (STMA, 1988: 2356). These committees were centralized as three main committees which were in charge of guarding, arming and monetary affairs (STMA, 1988: 2356). A prototype of the second on the other hand was actualized in

a small northern Anatolia town, Fatsa, Devrimci Yol proponent Mayor of which initiated a model of direct participatory city administration. As it will be elaborated in the following sections, along with Fatsa, the case of Yeraltı Maden-İş can also be regarded as an experience where this second aspect was on the forefront.

Furthermore two main missions were attached to the resistance committees by the Movement, which, as it was indicated in the previous chapter, can be regarded as a reflection of the Movement's apprehension of the party both as a centralized organization composing of professional revolutionaries and dedicated to the state takeover; and at the same time as a process that should not be instrumentalized and reified (Devrimci Yol, 1978j). In parallel with its motto of 'creating the narrowest cadre within the widest mass', the resistance committees were regarded by Devrimci Yol both as a means of facilitating the constitution of the party, through supplying a mass basis for it as well as a resource where cadres could be educated and recruited; and on the other hand as revolutionary processes where socialist relations could be experienced without waiting for the state takeover.

In the following two sections I will dwell on different forms of committees which were organized and named differently and which point out different embodiments of the two dimensions mentioned above. I will start with the resistance committee experiences in the neighborhoods and districts and continue with the cases of Yeraltı-Maden İş and Fatsa. I will attempted to specify the similarities and differences among them as well as with the early Soviets and the Factory Councils that I have dwelled on the first chapter.

4. 2. Resistance against Fascism: The Resistance Committees and the Main Characteristics of the Organization in the Districts and the Neighborhoods

As it was indicated in the previous chapter the constitution of the party was stated by Devrimci Yol as a vital prerequisite to be achieved in order to become well organized and to realize the seizure of the power. Indeed being unorganized and

dispersed was regarded by the Movement as an undesired situation. The members of the Movement expressed in their court defense that the left could not have come out against the 1980 coup d'état due to the fact that it was unorganized, dispersed and relied on spontaneity (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 407-409). They also indicated their discontent concerning the idealization of resistance committees and their substitution with the party (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 555).

For the Movement the matter of constituting a united anti-fascist front was directly interrelated with and could not be thought apart from the creation of the party. However since there did not exist such kind of a party and since there was an immediate need to resist against assaults, the struggle should immediately be organized from below according to the Movement. It was stated in the *Devrimci Yol* journal that:

“Under current conditions, where a revolutionary leadership of all popular forces do not exist, the struggle for constituting the unity of resistance of anti-fascist popular forces will focus primarily on the efforts of the masses to establish defense units against the fascist assaults; and this imposes itself within the existing process” (Devrimci Yol, 1977h).

This urgent need constituted the basic rationale behind the formation of the resistance committees, and as it was argued previously the effort to establish an anti-fascist alliance played a constitutive role for the Movement since its inception. In parallel with this, the main function of the resistance committees was regarded as to overcome the fascist attacks by the initiatives of the aggrieved masses themselves. Thus, within the context of these organizational units, the emphasis of the Movement was on the notion that the counterattacks should be realized not only by the armed revolutionaries themselves but also the masses should be ‘educated’ and organized in order to defend themselves.

In the Movement’s formulation defense of the masses by themselves would also allow them to construct their own organizational units and would serve their unity

and organization under the proletarian party. To realize this was bound with revolutionaries' ability to channel the already apparent defensive attempts through revolutionary organization, in other words their ability to educate and orient people within this context.

4. 2. 1. Anti-Fascism and the Resistance Committees

Devrimci Yol attempted to formulate resistance committees as the organizational forms that would facilitate the overcoming of the fascist attacks. These organizations were regarded by the Movement as the subunits of frontal organization, the struggle for the development and perpetuation of which was subordinated to the struggle for the constitution of the party. On the other hand these organizational forms were conceived by the Movement as both the regional units for resistance against fascist attacks by the dwellers themselves and also for experiencing and applying, from the existing situation, the prototypes of the people's future rule. For the phrase of 'nucleuses (nüveler) of the revolutionary people power' was frequently used in the journal *Devrimci Yol* in order to refer resistance committees. In its court defense the Movement also used phrases such as 'nourishing democracy within people's resistance against fascism' (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 540) and 'advocating that the steps of the future's society, which will be free and exempt from exploitation, could be taken from within the current order of exploitation' (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 563) in order to identify the resistance committees.

Furthermore one of the main efforts of the Movement concerning the formulation of resistance committees was to show that they were legitimate initiatives of the masses, stemming from their need to self-defense. This understanding is reflected in the following paragraph cited from Movement's court defense:

“[Y]outh, students were right in thinking and taking precautions and carrying arms both as one by one and as en masse in order to secure themselves, their universities and academic staff. Their being organized as resistance committees, for that reason was right, legitimate and compulsory (...) Was the situation that was valid for

the youth different for the people living in neighborhoods, for the student who is going back home, for the worker, self-employed, civil servant or tradesman? No! It was not different...” (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 543-544).

In parallel with this, within the context of the resistance committees, armed struggle was not regarded by the Movement as a revolutionary strategy *per se*, rather it was considered as a necessity for self-defense. That is to say, the military methods were regarded by it as inevitable and the legitimacy concerning the arming was based on the existence of assaults.

As it was indicated before, this characteristic also constituted one of the most fundamental points of distinction of Devrimci Yol from the movements of late 1960s such as THKO and THKP-C which, albeit in different fashions, based their revolutionary strategies on an active armed struggle regardless of the existence of assaults. Indeed while the adoption of the armed struggle as the main pillar of the revolutionary strategy was at issue with regard to these movements of the late 1960s; what was at stake for the formulation of resistance committees was an indispensable but an undesired position with regard to arming⁴⁷. This indispensability was stated by the Movement as such:

“If the attacks, to which the people of neighborhood were exposed, were unarmed; if, for example, the fascists contented themselves with only harassing or shouting slogans by coming up to the neighborhood, lining up in front of the coffee house, then people could react by harassing and shouting slogans back. As it is known, fascists were not just harassing or shouting slogans.(...) Of course, defending could not be done by just palavers or slogans, where the attacks took such armed and lethal forms. Defense, also had to be armed.” (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 545).

Armed struggle, defined within the context of resistance committees in such a manner, had also another dimension and a function for the Movement, which

⁴⁷ In a more generalized fashion Kürkçü indicates that all Movements that could become popular and powerful after 1974 were the ones that chose being in defense or that was forced to remain in defense. This, according to the author, marks the existence of a differentiation rather than a continuation between post-1974 movements and the pre-1971 ones (Kürkçü, 2007: 509).

coincided with the state-centered side of its revolutionary perspective. That is to say, the twofold character of Devrimci Yol's understanding of the state and the revolution also brought along a twofold understanding of the armed struggle. As it was indicated in the previous chapter, Devrimci Yol also had military organizations (the DSBs) directly attached to the region responsables, and that started to be formed immediately before the 1980 coup d'état as a guerrilla organization in parallel with the Movement's conception of 'active defense'.⁴⁸ These armed units were contemplated as the prototypes of an army dedicated to the state takeover.

4. 2. 2. General Composition and Activities of the Resistance Committees in the Districts and Neighborhoods

Leaning upon the Movement's diagnosis that there was a spontaneous tendency among the masses against the fascist assaults, the resistance committees were formed by the initiatives of Devrimci Yol militants, who were sent to the districts and neighborhoods in order to organize these tendencies. A militant, who took part in the resistance committees in the İlker Neighborhood and the Piyangotepe District, explains this process and the fundamental reason behind it as such:

Who will come here next? Let's say, a group from Zafertepe will come. Then the group here will go there. The aim is to create the narrowest people within the widest mass as far as possible, namely, the people who are more akin to you, to the practice; who are more inclined to converse; to inquire and enhance; and who while doing this can naturally be in practice⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Two interviewed militants have indicated that, the DSBs were not well-established organizations. They were at the stage of formation. Hüseyin, interviewed in Ankara, 09 August 2008 and Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

⁴⁹ "Bundan sonra buraya kim gelecek atıyorum Zafertepe'den bir ekip gelecek, buradaki ekip oraya gidecek, gidiş amacı budur zaten mümkün merteye en genel insanların içerisinde en dar insanları yaratabilmek birazcık daha sana, pratiğe yakın sohbete yakın, birazcık araştırmaya geliştirmeye tartışmaya yönelik insanlar ve bunları yaparken de pratiğin içerisinde doğal olarak varolabilen arkadaşlar", Aydın, interviewed in Ankara, 12 April 2008.

Alongside the militants who were sent to the units by the Movement's central committee or by the region responsables and that partook in their process of formation and operation, resistance committees also encompassed individuals from the neighborhood or district who became militants within the committee processes experienced in their units. An interviewed militant, İsmail from Tepecik Neighborhood (Mamak, Ankara), who can be regarded within this category, expresses that his interaction with the Movement started with his getting acquainted with the Devrimci Yol militants who came to his neighborhood. Then he states that under the framework of the Resistance Committee they, together with the comers, accelerated the resistance and more systematically organized the people around their problem solving⁵⁰.

Furthermore, in several cases, the dwellers having no affinity with Devrimci Yol also participated in the resistance committees. In accordance with the aim of constituting an anti-fascist popular front, the resistance committees were tried to be formulated as inclusive organizations, which encompassed 'the people' with the exception of the 'fascists'. The composition of the resistance committees was stated in the Movement's court defense as such:

“Once resistance is chosen, the thing to be done is clear. It will be organized in order to resist. Everybody against fascism regardless of his/her political view, every proponent of democracy who wants to resist against fascism should try to be combined. Here resistance committees are. That is to say, resistance committees were not the organizations of a single political view. They were voluntary and profoundly democratic unities of all political views that felt the need for defense against fascist assaults” (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 544).

This inclusiveness was also mentioned by a militant, who partook in different neighborhoods and districts in Ankara, in the following manner:

⁵⁰ İsmail, interviewed in Ankara, 18 August 2008.

“Alongside us, it [the Resistance Committee in the İlker Neighborhood] consisted of the leading people in the neighborhood in general. These people, sure, carried anti-fascist characteristics. They may be proponents of the RPP [The Republican People’s Party] or of any other party, but everybody who wanted to take place in the resistance against fascists and undertake duty actively, could take place in those committees⁵¹”

The character of inclusiveness attached to the resistance committees had also a spatial dimension. That is to say, not only people that had different political inclinations attempted to unite under resistance committees, but also neighborhoods, workplaces, universities etc. were regarded as places where committees should be organized. Thus the only criterion in that regard was formulated as not being ‘fascist’. In parallel with this it was stated by the Movement that the revolutionaries should ‘struggle in order to unite the entire people in every district, workplace and region’ against fascism (Devrimci Yol, 1977e; see also Devrimci 1979a).

The inclusiveness attached to the resistance committees and the anti-fascist struggle as a whole was framed by the Movement according to its principle of ‘creating the narrowest cadre within the widest mass’. The resistance committees, then, on the one hand, conceived as organizations where the mass support could emanate from, and on the other hand the cadres could be recruited and the existing ones could draw the necessary level for being professional revolutionaries.

In accordance with its approach of the armed struggle within the context of resistance committees, the Movement also organized armed units as parallel organizations to the resistance committees under the name of *armed resistance forces* (Silahlı Direniş Birlikleri, SDB), which were mostly consisting of Devrimci Yol militants –partly from the local people (especially from the youth), partly from the militants sent to the district or the neighborhood- and the main duty of which were the defense of the unit (namely the neighborhood/district) from the fascist assaults (Devrimci Yol, 1978h).

⁵¹ “Bizim de katkılarımızla genellikle mahallenin önde gelen insanlarından oluşuyordu. Yani anti-faşist özellikler taşıyorlardı tabii. CHP’li olabilir başka partiden olabilir ama işte faşistlere karşı direniş içerisinde yer almak isteyen ve aktif olarak görev alan herkes o komitelerde yer alabiliyordu”, Cüneyt, interviewed in Ankara, 16 July 2008.

These units, alongside their main duties of armed defense, were also charged with taking place in political and social activities within the unit (Devrimci Yol, 1978h). A militant that partook in both different resistance committees and the armed organizations, indicates that the resistance committees and the SDBs were, in most districts and neighborhoods, interpenetrated with each other⁵². That is to say, the militants that took part in the SDBs also participated in and the parts of the resistance committees. Another militant also defines them as the ‘local militia’⁵³

In addition to the existence and/or threat of the assaults directed by the fascist forces, an examination of the Resistance committees that were organized in several neighborhoods and districts should take into consideration at least two other elements. First is the characteristics of the *gecekondu* regions and the dwellers that were living in these settlements in 1970s; and the second is the roles and initiatives of Devrimci Yol militants, who were to a certain extent determinant in their formations.

4. 2. 2. 1. The Assaults, Religion and Solidarity

The religious affiliations and fellowship (in the sense of being from the same city or village) played important roles in the formations of the resistance committees. Indeed the neighborhoods and districts where resistance committees could be organized had mostly specific characteristics in terms of these respects. Although to base the organizational relations upon these religious and/or communal ties should be discarded in the Movement’s regard (Devrimci Yol, 1978h), they had determinant roles in the constitution and operation of resistance committees in many places. In that regard, for instance Alevism can be regarded as an important aspect of the formation of these organizational units. As it was indicated in the previous chapter the late 1970s witnessed an intensification of segregation and assaults directed towards the Alevi population, the peak points of which can be regarded as the Maraş

⁵² Hüseyin, interviewed in Ankara, 09 August 2008.

⁵³ Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

and Çorum incidents. Alongside their religious ties, the solidaristic practices of Alevi stemming from their being exposed to different forms of exclusion played important roles in their articulation with the resistance committees.

A Devrimci Yol militant who took part in several districts in order to organize and partake in resistance committees indicates this aspect as such:

For one thing, the fact that the majority of the population was Alevi in these districts had sure a great role in leftists' effectiveness, since Alevi by their very nature are always open to left, leftism and progressive thoughts. Nevertheless it can be told that similar results in the districts where Sunni originated people were living could also be achieved. However this was harder. By all means, the world views, religious beliefs and the economic subsistence levels etc. of the people living in those neighborhoods impacted, in changing proportions, upon their participation. (...) An Alevi is more inclined to resist and struggle, since he/she comes of a culture that is more akin to this. He/she is more desirous to these sorts of notions than the other.⁵⁴

Another militant, a local person, who partook in the resistance committee in his own neighborhood (Tepecik, a *gecekondu* Neighbourhood of the Mamak district in Ankara), states the impacts of the religious and *hemşerilik* relations in the formation of dwellers' political affiliations in the following manner:

These were the people, who breathe the same air, who came from similar places, experienced similar problems and who was working in similar work places. They were not different in terms of their economic situations. Perhaps, to a certain extent, the religious affiliations were a factor that determined lots of things (...). For instance the people coming from Yozgat: they were not different from me. But they could define themselves as proponents of NAP [The National Action Party]. And therefore they could conceive the people,

⁵⁴ Bir kere bu mahallelerde solcuların ağırlıklı olarak etkin olmalarında tabî ki mahalle nüfusunun dinsel ağırlığının Alevi olmasının çok büyük payı vardır, çünkü Aleviler yapı itibariyle solculuğa, sola, ilerici fikirlere her zaman açık olmuşlardır. Ha bunun yanı sıra Sunni mahalleler, Sunni kökenli insanların bulunduğu mahalleler dede benzer başarıların sağlandığı söylenebilir, ama bu daha zor olmuştur. Mutlaka o insanların o mahallede oturan insanların kendi dünya görüşleri, benimsedikleri kendi dinsel inanışlar, ekonomik geçim düzeyleri v.b. gibi şeylerin halkın katılımında şu ya da bu oranda etkisi olmuştur (...) Alevisi böyle bir şeyde direnmeye, mücadele etmeye daha yatkın. Çünkü o zaten böyle bir kültürden geliyor, böyle fikirlere daha çok teşne öbürü daha az teşne", Salih, interviewed in Ankara, 28 April 2008.

who both economically and culturally had similar characteristics, as foes (...) Approaches such as ‘They are Alevi therefore they are leftists; they are Sunni therefore they are rightist’ could be influential⁵⁵.

Furthermore, the assaults and the distinctions such as fascist-communist and Sunni-Alevi, and the separation of the *geceköndü* settlement with respect to these distinctions, impacted upon dwellers’ solidaristic practices concerning their self-defense as well as their problems such as housing, transportation, poverty etc. In one militant’s words, ‘If an assault threat existed, more close relations could be at stake, the people can help each other more intensely, they could be more friendly’⁵⁶.

In several neighborhoods the resistance committees were organized by the articulation of Devrimci Yol militants with these solidaristic practices. Thus alongside the armed defense, in certain places, resistance committees had also the function of dealing with the issues that concerned the everyday life in the unit from familial matters to the housing problems. Among their activities, to serve the immediate problems and needs of the dwellers constituted a considerable part.

One of the prominent practices within this context was building squatter houses. In particular places by way of building squatter houses new neighborhoods were constituted. A militant who partook in a similar process in Dikmen (a district in Ankara) tells the house constructions as such:

“We confiscated some acres of land in Dikmen. As the revolutionaries from Dikmen we distributed it on behalf of people. Then people built

⁵⁵ “Sonuçta bunlar aynı havayı soluyan insanlar, aynı yerlerden gelen insanlar, aynı sorunları yaşayan insanlar, ya da aynı iş yerinde çalışan insanlar. Ekonomik olarak farklı insanlar değil. Bekli bir miktar o dönem çoğu şeyi belirleyen, bir miktar mezhepsel yan söz konusu. (...) O zaman Yozgat’tan gelmişler, Yozgatlılar ama benden farkları yok; fakat kinli vatandaşlar; dolayısıyla olaya bu şekilde yaklaştıkları noktada kendilerini MHP’li olarak görebiliyorlar, sağcı olarak görebiliyorlar; ve dolayısıyla yine kendi gibi olan insanları- kültürel olarak olsun ekonomik olarak olsun- düşman olarak görebiliyorlar (...) Onlar Alevi dolayısıyla solcu, onlar Suni solayısıyla sağcı gibi yaklaşımlar oluyordu”, İsmail, interviewed in Ankara, 18 August 2008.

⁵⁶ “Tabii yani bir tehdit varken, daha sıkı ilişkiler, insanlar birbirleriyle daha fazla yardımlaşıyor, daha dostça”, Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

their own houses, did their stucco-work and the painting and they built their roads. You know, we confiscated and gave to our people. We tried to give to those people who were in need: based on the references given by the people, we gave to, for instance those persecuted in Keçiören, whose houses were burnt, whose children were captured. We did the same in Şentepe, the same in particular regions of Keçiören etc.”⁵⁷.

Followings are some other examples given within this context by the people I have interviewed: to protest the increase in bread prices and to bake collectively by occupying several bakeries⁵⁸; to supply coal and wood for heating⁵⁹; to run greengrocer both in order to sell cheaper fruits and vegetables and to provide financial gain to other activities⁶⁰; to carry and distribute water⁶¹.

Alongside these, resistance committees also dealt with the complaints of the dwellers concerning their everyday relations and applied sanctions in order to solve their problems. One militant has described resistance committees as “both the prosecutor and the judge of the neighbourhood, namely, the resolution resort in case of disagreement” and has made an analogy between them and a board of alderman⁶². Another militant, Cüneyt, has expressed that they applied sanctions such as isolation and leaving alone to the drunkards and the gamblers⁶³.

⁵⁷ “Dikmende belirli bir dönüm araziyi kamulaştırdık; yani biz dedik bunu halkın adına dağıtıyoruz Dikmenli devrimciler. Dağıttık işte, halk kendi yaptı evini, sıvasını kendi yaptı, boyasını kendi yaptı, yolunu kendisi yaptı. yani biz kamulaştırdık halkımıza verdik. ihtiyaçları olanlara vermeye çalıştık: halkın kendi içerisindeki referanslarına dayanarak hani atıyorum Keçiörende eziyet görmüş evi yanmış evi yakılmış işte çocuğu zaptedilmiş bunlara verdik yani. Şentepede de aynısını yaptık işte Keçiörenin belirli bölgelerinde de aynı şeyleri yaptık”, Aydın, interviewed in Ankara, 12 April 2008.

⁵⁸ Aydın, from İlker and Şentepe resistance committees, interviewed in Ankara, 12 April 2008.

⁵⁹ Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

⁶⁰ Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

⁶¹ Mehmet, interviewed in Ankara, 18 April 2008.

⁶² Ali, interviewed in Ankara, 25 April 2008.

⁶³ Cüneyt, interviewed in Ankara, 16 July 2008.

As all these examples indicate the resistance committees were based on the solidaristic practices stemming from the religious and *hemşerilik* ties as well as the problems such as housing, transportation, poverty etc. and these organizations also had impacted upon the strengthening of the solidaristic practices. In the following part I will examine the impacts of the militants to the process experiencing in the committees.

4. 2. 2. 2. The Roles of Devrimci Yol Militants in the Formation and Operation of the Resistance Committees

It can be argued that with regard to the actors of decision-making and the implementation processes, different applications in different neighborhoods and districts were at issue. That is to say, while in certain cases the roles and initiatives of the militants were considerably determinant in the decision making as well as the implementation processes, in certain others participatory practices were more pronounced. For instance, a militant have told the *gecekondu* constructions in the district where he partook in the resistance committee as follows:

The issue of distribution of land to the people, indeed, in our place İlker, took off, well, while we were trying to struggle against fascism, some people were selling the public land to the newcomer fellowmen. Whose thing were they selling to whom? We ushered them out. We said, let's distribute these to you and by forming some kind of organization within, forming committees, some people assuming responsibility; we distributed these to people, free, in appropriate with some criteria. And we had our own neighborhoods there⁶⁴.

As an example of a parallel approach, which can be regarded as an indicator of the determinant roles of the militants in the activities realized under the framework of the resistance committees, another militant have expressed the sales of certain consumer goods in the following manner:

⁶⁴ Cüneyt, interviewed in Ankara, 16 July 2008.

“We founded our cooperative to avoid stores overcharging our people: People’s own cooperative. We collected money in its foundation, let’s say, we took flour, we took sugar, we took butter etc. from it, we gave for 2 liras if its price was 3 liras in the store. You know, people were shopping there⁶⁵”.

The above cases indicate the existence of a relationship of server and served within the resistance committees. Put it another way, in these cases, the militants coded themselves as the service givers, who remedy the problems of the dwellers on their behalf.

On the other hand, another interviewed militant have mentioned the existence of well-attended meetings in his own neighborhood, in which the matters concerning the neighborhood were discussed and the decisions were taken collectively⁶⁶.

As these cases indicate, in some resistance committees organized in neighborhoods and districts, the militants mostly located themselves as self-proclaimed representatives of the settlers and attempted to solve their problems stemming from the assaults and/or the neighborhood/district life, while in others different participatory mechanisms were in operation. This characteristic was also an indicator of the lack of strict orientation and intervention from the central committee level to the districts and neighborhoods.

This aspect was emphasized by different interviewees. Hüseyin, for instance, indicates that:

“Our central committee did not have a style of initiating in an explicit manner. After the determination of theoretical and ideological framework, a flexibility was retained concerning the creation of forms

⁶⁵ “Bakkallar halkımızı kazıklamasın diye biz kendimiz kooperatif kurduk: Halkın kendi kooperatifi. Kendi bünyesinde paralar topladık işte un aldık, şeker aldık, yağ aldık vesaire aldık ordan bakkalda 3 liraysa biz 2 liraya verdik. Hani halk kendi ordan alışverişini kendi yapıyordu” Aydın, interviewed in Ankara, 12 April 2008 .

⁶⁶ İsmail, interviewed in Ankara, 18 August 2008.

of struggle and organization appropriate to the particular fields of operation and the features of the region⁶⁷”

However the general emphasis of the Movement on the need to constitute ‘organic links’ among the masses and the resistance committees was adopted by the revolutionaries operating in the resistance committees. Thus in parallel with this formulation, the militants I have interviewed have indicated that they endeavored to take the ‘consent’ of the dwellers and to ensure their reliance upon the ‘revolutionaries’. A militant for instance, have indicated that the militants working in the neighborhoods and/districts had an approach of taking all decisions together with the dwellers.⁶⁸ Almost all interviewees have also expressed that they link the ‘success’ of the Movement in the districts and neighborhoods to the close relations they could establish with the dwellers. Cüneyt has expressed this aspect in the following manner:

We were able to be in harmony with the society. Maybe it was the thing that made us and society concord. Well, instead of taking directives from a place, the policy of moving together with the people in localities we subsist, it can be said. And being able to provide policies that provide unison with them, can be added, you know. We were not following particular patterns, rather we were uniting with the society, uniting with the problems of society, uniting with the wishes of the society. Hence, we could be their voice, their ear and we could easily unite and move together⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ “Bizim merkez komite öyle belirgin inisiyatif koyan şey, tarzı yoktu yani. Bizde teorik ideolojik çerçeve çıktıktan sonra özel çalışma alanları ve o bölgenin özelliklerine uygun mücadele ve örgütlenme biçimlerinin yaratılmasına dönük esneklik bizde söz konusuydü”, Hüseyin, interviewed in Ankara, 09 August 2008.

⁶⁸ Hüseyin, interviewed in Ankara, 09 August 2008.

⁶⁹ “Biz toplumla uyum sağlayabiliyorduk, Belki de bizi toplumla bu kadar bağdaştıran olay oydu. Yani her hangi bir yerden direktif alma yerine, var olduğumuz yerlerdeki insanlarla birlikte hareket edebilme politikası da diyebiliriz. Ve onlarla uyum sağlayan politikalar sağlıyor olabilmemiz de söylenebilir yani. Çünkü bir takım kalıpların peşinden koşmuyorduk, daha çok toplumla birleşebiliyorduk, toplumun sorunlarıyla birleşebiliyorduk, toplumun istekleriyle birleşebiliyorduk. Onun içinde onların sesi, kulağı olabiliyorduk. Onun içinde kolay birleşiyorduk, kolay birlikte davranabiliyorduk”, Cüneyt, interviewed in Ankara, 16 July 2008.

As all these indicate, the militants of the Movement had considerable roles in the formation and perpetuation of the resistance committees. This stemmed from their effort to articulate with the discontents and solidaristic practices of the dwellers as well as to strengthen them and channel them through organization. Thus the ‘spontaneity’ attached by Devrimci Yol to the resistance committees was partly at issue. Accordingly in some cases resistance committees remained as the organizations of the militants and hardly incorporate the dwellers actively in the struggle against fascism and in the organization of the district or neighborhood life. However, in some others the resistance committees could transcend the militants’ initiatives and transformed into self-organizations of the dwellers themselves.

The two committee experiences that I will examine in the following section were the cases where participatory practices were more pronounced both in the decision making and implementation processes.

4. 3. The People’s and the Workplace Committees

As it was indicated previously the committees were not monolithic organizations, rather they carried different characteristics in terms of the subjects who formed them and the fields they were organized in. Thus the committees organized in the neighborhoods and districts, the general characteristics of which was displayed in the previous section, were one form of these types of organizations that were organized before all else in order to defense against and to impede the fascist assaults. There were also different committee experiences that carried features different from that of resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts, and which called differently with names such as people’s committees, workplace committees and students’ representative council⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ The Students’ Representatives Council (Öğrenci Temsilcileri Konseyi, ÖTK) was a form of organization, which was formed in the Middle East Technical University after a boycott realized in 1975 (Asena, 1988: 2243). ÖTK participated in the university administration by its representatives and it partook in the decision making processes concerning almost all issues from the academic to the administrative and financial matters of the university. For a detailed information see “ODTÜ ÖTK’nin

As it was indicated above, resistance committees were not considered by the Movement only as defensive units against fascist assaults. They were, at the same time, conceived as spaces where democratic and solidaristic relations could be established as the prototypes of the future order. In its court defense after the 1980 coup d'état, Devrimci Yol stated this characteristic as such:

“Revolutionaries proposed these committees not only as ephemeral organizations restricted with the elimination of the assaults, but at the same time they offered handling and understanding them as the permanent nests of solidarity and democracy which people from every opinion could utilize in order to solve their own problems” (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 539).

In certain places where different committees existed, this constitutive role and the struggle against fascism coexisted. Put differently, the resistance committees, which were organized in fields like *gecekondu* neighborhoods and districts, and the workplace and people's committees, carried to a greater extent these two characteristics– with changing weights– accompanying each other. However, while resistance against fascist assaults were more determinant in the districts and neighborhoods, the constitutive aspect were more apparent and in the forefront for the two cases that will be handled in the following sections. For participatory decision making and implementation processes concerning the everyday life were tried to be established under the frameworks of different committees in accordance with the characteristics of the places that were organized in.

4. 3. 1. Workplace Committees: The Case of *Yeraltı Maden-İş* Union

The trade union movement became stronger in Turkey in the late 1970s than it was ever before and different leftist movements/parties in the era became politically powerful in changing proportions in trade unions in different sectors and workplaces,

Örgütsel Yapılanışı” in *ODTÜ ÖTK Bülteni*, Sayı 1, 1Mart 1978”, (www.devrimcigenclik.org), (accessed November 21, 2006)

including Devrimci Yol. However the existence of Devrimci Yol within the trade union movement remained restricted and appeared in fact as an outcome of its gradually getting a mass support (Aydınoglu, 2007: 391-392; Akkaya, 2007:804-805). While since its inception its bonds with the unions were considerably loose, at the end of the 1970s it started to be influential in some union branches and attempted to organize committees within the framework of its conception of resistance committees in several workplaces. Within this context organizational units called *workplace committees* were formed in different workplaces such as Yeni-Çeltek, Aşkale, Hekimhan Mines (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979a) by the initiative of the Yeraltı Maden-İş Union (Underground Miners' Union).

Yeraltı-Maden İş was a union founded by Devrimci Yol/Devrimci Gençlik affiliated mining engineers and workers. It was found in 1975 as being affiliated to the DİSK (Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu- Revolutionary Trade Unions' Confederation). Different from the hierarchical bureaucratic operation of other trade unions in the era, Yeraltı Maden-İş attempted to initiate a model of workplace democracy where decision making processes concerning the work processes and the union policies started first from the level of workplace committees. Workplace committees were the organizations consisted of worker representatives. The worker representatives were being elected by the members of the worker councils that were consisting of almost 20 workers in each field of work (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979b: 24). To decide and execute the recruitment of the workers, their trainings, arrangements concerning the working times were among the duties of those committees (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979b: 24).

The workplace committees were initiated by Yeraltı Maden-İş as parts of the 'preparation' process to an order in which 'the popular sectors would become authorized in decision making and implementation processes' (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979b: 22). As a part of this approach, the committees took the administration in certain workplaces by occupying mines, and they continued production 'without capitalists' (STMA, 1988: 2282).

The union first initiated this organizational model in Yeni Çeltek mining venture⁷¹. From the year 1975, workers in Yeni Çeltek started to participate gradually in the decision-making processes by the workplace committees that they organized under the leadership of a Devrimci Yol proponent (Devrimci Gençlik before 1977) mining engineer, Çetin Uygur. The workers, via committees during the period between 1975 and 1980, decided on and executed the new workers' recruitment and training processes, took precautions concerning the occupational safety and arranged the working hours (Yeraltı Maden-İş, Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007). In the course of time, they started to organize the sales of the coals that they produced, to the dwellers with low prices⁷². Committees were operating via well-attended meetings and discussions. In one committee spokesman's words, they "discussed collectively within committees on issues such as economic and democratic rights; workers' health and security and the general problems of the country"⁷³. When the employer decided to close the venture on April 1980 with an argument that it made loss, the union member workers objected the decision and operated the mine for 34 days (Yeraltı Maden-İş, Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007).

Additionally within the process between 1975 and 1980 organizations under the names of village committees and resistance committees were formed in the district by the initiatives of the Yeraltı-Maden İş workers together with other dwellers (Yeraltı Maden-İş, Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007). These committees, like the resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts that were dealt with above, were based on solidaristic practices concerning the problems such as accessing to fresh water, building schools in villages, cleaning the muddy roads etc. as well as concerning defensive practices such as guarding against the assaults of the *ülküçüs* and hindering their existence in the factory, village and town dwellers

⁷¹ Yeni Çeltek is a small town near Amasya, where the principle economic activity was mining and agriculture.

⁷² Interview with Yaşar Yılmaz (A spokesman of Yeni Çeltek Workers' council), Yeraltı Maden İş Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007.

⁷³ Interview with Hikmet Hamarat, Yeraltı Maden İş Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007.

(Yeraltı Maden-İş, Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007). A spokesman of a workplace committee mentions that they – in their village- organized a campaign called ‘Built your school by yourself’, carried the village fresh water and cleaned the roads from the mud⁷⁴.

Workplace committees and the committees in villages were also regarded as inclusive organizations by the workers and peasants themselves. This inclusiveness was framed by excluding the ‘fascists’ and encompassed all other people regardless of party affiliation or sympathy (Yeraltı Maden-İş, Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007).

Bad working conditions, lack of occupational safety and low wages were among triggering effects in the formation of workplace committees alongside the impacts of the unionist organizers’ initiatives about their constitution. Within the process of formation and perpetuation of the workplace committees the Yeraltı Maden-İş Union attempted to systematize different cases by transmitting experiences among them, i.e. to provide them a common basis. Within this context, the revolutionary and self-emancipatory perspective that these committees carried were frequently emphasized in the Union’s publications. In that regard, Yeraltı Maden-İş distinguished the project of workplace committees from the approach proposed by the Türk-İş (Trade Union Confederation of Turkey) which was framed within the framework of ‘the participation of the workers in the administration’. The fundamental difference of workplace committees from this approach was stated as the second’s lack of a revolutionary perspective (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979b: 19). Additionally for the Union, while the second envisaged a confirmation mechanism for the workers, thus carried the aim of ensuring their conformity with the capital, the workplace committees have the perspective of being an executive authority that would prepare workers to their prospective genuine self-management (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979b: 21-22).

⁷⁴ Interview with Aşur Eker; Yeraltı Maden İş Yeni Çeltek Documentary Film, 2007.

The revolutionary perspective attached by the Union to the committees also coincided with a stress upon anti-fascism. This coincidence was expressed in the Union's publication as such: “[O]ur movement besides strengthening itself as a tool in the economic-democratic struggle of workers, also mainly enlarged itself as a part of the struggle against fascism (...) [O]ur first and the most urgent mission now, is to organize the mine workers under one roof, under the roof of one revolutionary union. Working for the unity of mine workers will proceed on the axis of the struggle against fascism” (Yeraltı Maden-İş, 1979a: 1). This emphasis was also concretized in the resistance committee organizations against the assaults directed by the *ülküci* militants in places where the union was organized. Thus in several places workers, together with other dwellers, organized resistance committees alongside the workplace committees.

Among others, the workplace committees were the forms of resistance committees which were more akin to the worker council type of organizations. The fundamental reasons behind this similarity stemmed from that they were the workers' self-organizations based on a practice concerning the transformation of the relations of production. These organizations, like the Italian factory councils for instance, constituted a concrete example of an understanding of transformation in the existing decision making and implementation processes concerning the relations of labor and capital and they also marked a new form of struggle initiated from the everyday life level. The main difference of them from examples such as Italian factory councils was that they were organized not by the workers' themselves but by the unionists with workers' contribution. Moreover, when compared to the Italian case, according to their scopes and impacts, the workplace committees remained restricted in number and scope. Although the workplace committees remained restricted in the country level - they could only be formed in almost 10 workplaces- they were the first cases of their kind.

In the following section I will deal with another case which shared a similar vision within the context of a town.

4. 3. 2. *Fatsa* and the People's Committees

Fatsa was a northern Anatolian town the principle economic activity of which was the hazelnut agriculture. A Devrimci Yol proponent mayor, Fikri Sönmez⁷⁵, who based his electoral propaganda mainly on commitments such as management based on the participation of the masses; transparency; and struggle against hunger, black market and corruption (Şükrü Aslan, 2004: 74), was elected in the October 1979 Municipal Elections in the town. In accordance with his commitments he initiated a participatory local government by constituting organizational units called people's/district committees. Under his administration, Fatsa was divided into eleven units and elections were realized in order specify the representatives of the People's Committees⁷⁶. Eleven committees were constituted one month after the local elections in which – alongside Devrimci Yol proponents- inhabitants affiliated with different parties such as National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP), Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP) and Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) also took place (Devrimci Yol Savunması, 1989: 381).

The representatives of the people's committees were transmitting the local problems to the municipality and were monitoring the operation by periodical meetings in which the dwellers were directly participating (Hamamcı, 1980 cited in Uyan, 2004: 106; Güneş Gazetesi, 21.12.1979 cited in Uyan, 2004: 103-104). In addition to these participatory decision making and monitoring processes people's committees implemented certain campaigns that were related to the problems of the dwellers emanating from the town life and/or their livelihoods.

Among others, a campaign called '*End to Exploitation in Hazelnut*' can be given as an example, which was oriented towards the merchants and the moneylenders

⁷⁵ Fikri Sönmez is widely known as "Terzi Fikri" (Tailor Fikri) was an artisan living in the district, who also had taken part in the THKP-C.

⁷⁶ Aksakal reports that inhabitants of each unit elected representatives between three and seven in proportion to their populations (1989: 135).

operating in the town. As indicated in a documentary film called *Fatsa Reality* (Fatsa Gerçeği, 2007) the members of the committee took the bills that were signed among the Hazelnut producers and the merchants and moneylenders and tore them off within the context of this campaign. Another campaign conducted in Fatsa by the committee members was '*End to Black Market Campaign*'. Within its context, some basic consumption goods were expropriated, which were stockpiled by the merchants in specific times and then were being sold with supplementary prices. The committee sold them with their ordinary price to the residents and then gave the return back to those merchants (Fatsa Gerçeği, 2007). Furthermore another campaign called '*End to Mud*' was conducted in the region with a similar rationale, that is, in order to generate solutions to the actual problems of the dwellers and to implement these by their involvement. Within the scope of this campaign the mud problem in the town that was originated from the destructed canalization system was settled by the collaborative actions of the municipality and the dwellers (Aksakal, 1989: 45-48).

As all these examples indicate the Fatsa case reflected an advanced form of the resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts, where dwellers could be more effectively the actors of the decision-making and implementation processes concerning the matters about the place they were living in. They also directly participated in the town administration through the channels of people's committees and well-attended meetings. Accordingly, during the municipality experience the town was transformed into an autonomous space in which the social life could mostly be organized by its dwellers via the people's committees. Furthermore the committees became the dwellers' self organizations by which they organize their solidaristic practices and their different discontents and channel them into action, that is to say, into social doing. Thus, like the organizations such as soviets/councils, they carried, to use de Angelis' (2005) words, an affirmative aspect, an emphasis on the constitutive role of the act of organizing.

The municipality experience lasted almost nine months and was dissolved by an operation conducted by the police forces on 11 July 1980, which was called as Target

Operation (Nokta Operasyonu). This short lived experience had also its limits and deficiencies. It remained restricted with a single town and could not expand through other towns or cities. It was also associated with a single political movement, Devrimci Yol, during its time of existence. And it did not carry an explicit emphasis concerning the transformation of the capitalist relations of production. With all these deficiencies Fatsa experience constituted a case where solidaristic practices were channeled through self-organization by the initiatives of Devrimci Yol militants⁷⁷.

4. 4. Three Different Approaches towards the Resistance Committees within the Left in Turkey in the Late 1970s

The late 1970s were not only the most fragmente era for the left in Turkey, in which many splits existed, but also it was a period where the ideological and political premises of rival leftist movements/parties were handled and criticised frequently and rigidly by each other. Thus the political formulations of Devrimci Yol and particularly its understanding of the revolutionary organization was also discussed and criticized by the movements/parties of the era.

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, when dealing with the main pillars of the revolutionary organizations flourished after 1974, since approximately 40 organizations existed in the period between the mid-1970s until the 1980 coup d'état, it is inevitable to make generalizations concerning the political lines and the features characterizing the left. In this section rather than making generalizations concerning the approaches of different organizations towards the resistance committees, I will dwell on the assessments of two revolutionary organizations (Kurtuluş (Liberation) and Devrimci Sol (Revolutionary Left)), which came from the same tradition with Devrimci Yol, in order to identify the differences of the rationale behind the resistance committees from the approaches of these two organizations concerning the issue of revolutionary organization. The main reason of this choice is my attempt to

⁷⁷ Fatsa experience has been one of the most striking cases for the students of the history of the Left in Turkey. Recently written two theses are indicators of this interest (Morgül, 2007; Türkmen, 2006). For detailed information about the Fatsa case see (Aksakal, 1989).

specify how different is the rationale behind the committees even from the approaches of the organizations that were more akin to Devrimci Yol with regard to their origins. I will also examine the approach of a journal, *Birikim*, towards the resistance committees, which argued for the strengthening of the committee organizations and which different from the political organizations of the era had an affirmative approach towards them. In this section the main arguments that Kurtuluş, Devrimci Sol and *Birikim* posed when evaluating resistance committees will be handled, in addition to their fundamental proposals with regard to the issue of revolutionary organization.

Kurtuluş, Devrimci Sol and *Birikim* had different approaches about the issue of revolutionary organization; they also assessed Devrimci Yol's formulations concerning the resistance committees from different perspectives. Among others the only approach towards resistance committees that took them seriously and that call for their maturation and strengthening was that of the journal *Birikim*, which was not a political organization itself. On the other hand, the two movements coming from the same tradition with Devrimci Yol opposed the resistance committees with different stand points and the committee organizations as a whole did not attract their attention to take part in or struggling for hegemony.

4. 4. 1. Kurtuluş

Kurtuluş was a THKP-C originated movement that flourished after the 1974 amnesty and that started to publish the journal *Liberation Socialist Journal* (Kurtuluş Sosyalist Dergi, hereafter KSD) in July 1976⁷⁸. One of the central aspects of its understanding of revolutionary organization can be regarded as its emphasis on the need to be organized within the working class. It also criticized Devrimci Yol's formulation of resistance committees within this context. Kurtuluş diagnosed the

⁷⁸ Like Devrimci Yol, Kurtuluş rejected to adopt neither of the Soviet, Chinese or Albanian models. Although they came from a common tradition, approaches of Devrimci Yol and Kurtuluş implied differences with regard to the issues such as the position of the working class within revolutionary politics, the proper form of revolutionary organization, the evaluation of Kemalism, fascism and the Kurdish issue. For a brief information about the Movement see Öngider (2007: 952-960)

fundamental revolutionary task of the era as to ensure the unity among revolutionaries⁷⁹ and to unite the socialist movement with the working class in order to create the proletarian party (KSD, 1977: 48). In that regard it criticized THKP-C in overestimating the role of armed propaganda and in disregarding the importance of establishing close relations with the working class. Kurtuluş also found Devrimci Yol's formulations unfavorable with an argument that it disregarded the centrality of the proletariat within the revolutionary politics (KSD, 1978: 47).

As for Devrimci Yol, the creation of the party was a *sine qua non* for Kurtuluş, which was conceived by it as the focal point of the act of organizing. Put differently, the process of organizing conceived by the Movement within the context of the constitution of the party and an aspect directed towards the transformation of the everyday life was not included in its political strategy. The prospective party was envisaged by the Movement as a hierarchical organization consisting of professional revolutionaries, having a central committee and different sub-committees organized within regions, provinces, districts, factories etc. (KSD, 1978: 53-54). The main function of these committees, and the prospective party as well, was framed within the context of making agitation and educating (KSD, 1978: 58). Thus by the Movement the political activity was regarded as a propaganda process directed towards the constitution of the proletarian party and a form of political activity directed towards creating alternatives and generating transformative relations against different forms of exploitation and domination was left aside.

With regard to the working principles in the process of the constitution of the party, the Movement proposed a model called 'campaign committees'⁸⁰. In that regard it was indicated by Kurtuluş that "[Party] should draw upon campaigns as a means to establish certain new organizations, units" (KSD, 1980: 24). In KSD's formulation

⁷⁹ It also criticized THKP-C in disregarding the importance of constituting close relations with the masses and in reducing the class struggle to the armed struggle (KSD, 1976: 46).

⁸⁰ It should be indicated that in Kurtuluş's political formulations and practice, the campaign committees did not have a central position. They were also handled in only a few issues of the Movement's journal.

political campaigns and campaign committees were the means of agitation and propaganda, and the success of the campaigns should be appraised by paying attention to their role in the process of party formation (KSD, 1980: 32-33).

One of the most important points of differentiation between ‘campaign committees’ and ‘resistance committees’ was the specific emphasis that the first one put on the working class as the fundamental subject towards which campaigns should specifically be directed. In that regard the committees in the factories were regarded by Kurtuluş as the building blocks of the party organization (KSD, 1978: 62) and were conceived within the context of attracting the workers to the party via bulletins, publications, placards etc. (KSD, 1978: 62). For different from Devrimci Yol, Kurtuluş adopted that ‘political campaigns’ should fundamentally be oriented towards the ‘modern industrial proletariat’ (KSD, 1980: 26), while Devrimci Yol’s emphasis was on the ‘masses’/all popular sectors with regard to the resistance committees.

Another important difference between these two formulations was that, different from resistance committees, the campaign committees were conceived by Kurtuluş in respect to their contributions to the process of organizing within working class. In that regard no constitutive role was assigned to them by the Movement. Moreover, campaign committees that were framed as the prototypes of the party organization were not formulated as including participatory mechanisms concerning the decision making and implementation processes that seek transformations pertaining to the everyday life without waiting for the constitution of the party and the revolution to be realized by it. Thus the duality immanent in the resistance committees was not valid for the campaign committees and the Kurtuluş’s political agenda.

4. 4. 2. Devrimci Sol

Devrimci Sol was one of the revolutionary movements of the late 1970s in Turkey, which was constituted by a group of revolutionaries that split from Devrimci Yol in

1978. The issue of revolutionary organization had a vital importance with regard to the dissociation of Devrimci Sol from Devrimci Yol. Therefore in its publications the Movement took this issue on its agenda frequently and criticized Devrimci Yol's understanding of revolutionary organization and more specifically the formulation and practice of resistance committees.

The Movement adopted Çayanist principle of *PASS* (politicized armed war strategy) as the corner stone of its revolutionary strategy by maintaining the existence of the need in conducting tactical assaults in order to break the *artificial balance* constituted among the masses and the oligarchy. Furthermore Devrimci Sol emphasized that the Çayanist principle of *active defense* should be understood as being composed of defending against fascist assaults and conducting tactical assaults as well.

One of the main points of opposition of the Devrimci Sol to Devrimci Yol was about its approach concerning Çayan's *PASS*. The movement accused Devrimci Yol in disregarding the importance of this principle and substituting it with a horizontal kind of organization which was pertained to the advanced capitalist countries. For the Movement the main duty of the 'professional revolutionaries' was to show the masses that the main goal was the seizure of the power (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 93) and the peculiar way of doing this was to follow an armed propaganda. This point was also offered by the Movement as one of the most fundamental reason behind their departure from Devrimci Yol. In that regard Devrimci Sol accused Devrimci Yol in holding the route of 'right spontaneity' which was defined as 'to organize the masses first with peaceful political struggle forms and to start armed struggle thereafter the conditions become matured' (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 89).

Furthermore in Devrimci Sol's regard, the concept of 'active defense' was understood by Devrimci Yol by considering its one single dimension, namely 'to defense the unit that one belongs only when one confronts with assault' (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 105). For the Movement this dimension should not be detached from

tactical assaults, namely from 'the revolutionary terror actions', otherwise departure from the power-oriented struggle became irresistible (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 105-107). Thus for Devrimci Sol, in order to organize masses in a permanent way and to struggle against fascism, the 'revolutionary violence' should be central to the revolutionary struggle and therefore an organizational model such as resistance committees could not be successful since it did not carry this characteristic (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 99-100).

Accordingly for Devrimci Sol, what was at stake with regard to the organizational principles of Devrimci Yol and the resistance committees was the existence of daily struggles and actions that were in the wake of the actual process, instead of a deliberate, voluntary struggle in the context of a centralized organization and a program (Devrimci Sol, 1979: 7). Thus according to the Movement since the masses were in a political passivity owing to the artificial balance constituted among them and oligarchy, resistance committees, having no offensive perspective, could only lead to a retreat from the struggle for the seizure of the power (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 102-104).

Another fundamental point of differentiation concerning the understandings of revolutionary organization of Devrimci Yol and Devrimci Sol was about the issue of revolutionary leadership and the cadres. A specific emphasis on the role and importance of the 'revolutionary cadres' can be followed in Devrimci Sol's discourse, as it was the case for Devrimci Yol. However the martial qualities attached to the cadres were more powerful with regard to the first. In the Movement's regard Devrimci Yol put an excessive emphasis on 'mass relations' and attempted to recruit cadres considering only this dimension (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 97). In that regard it can be argued that although both had a specific emphasis on the professional cadres, the two movements enjoyed two different understandings in terms of their roles. Thus while by Devrimci Yol the importance of constituting organic links among the cadres and the popular sectors was emphasized, Devrimci

Sol focused on the armed propaganda as the most important role and duty of the cadres in attracting the popular sectors to the revolutionary politics.

The main reference point of Devrimci Sol in that regard was creating the nucleuses of the warrior revolutionary organization from now on. This stemmed from a differentiation concerning the mission attached to the masses by these movements. To be precise, while the point of departure of Devrimci Yol was to organize the already or potentially existing revolutionary tendencies of the masses under the revolutionary party, Devrimci Sol formalized the need to conduct an armed propaganda with reference to the lack and impossibility of existence of those tendencies among the masses. For according to the Movement there was not a rooted democratic movement and a tradition of protecting the democratic positions in Turkey (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 90). And for that reason the people was deprived of the ability to learn from its own experiences (Devrimci Sol, 1978: 91).

4. 4. 3. Birikim

Birikim was a Marxist political journal that was started to be published in 1975⁸¹. It was characterized by its oppositional position with regard to the ‘real socialisms’ of the existing era. It avoided constituting or taking part in any political movement or party, and attempted to be a platform where wide range of issues concerning Marxist theory and practice with reference to Turkey as well as other countries/regions of the world were debated.

In the mid-1978 Birikim started to generate its own proposal with respect to the issue of revolutionary organization and the party. It called this proposal, as an ‘alternative/new type of organization’ and attempted to frame it with reference to certain experiences such as Paris Commune, soviets and peasant unions (Birikim, 1978; Laçiner, 1979: 31; Birikim, 1979b: 48). In that regard Birikim emphasized that

⁸¹ The journal was banned by the Istanbul Martial Law Command in April 1980 and started to be published again in May 1989. Although it still exists, due to the scope of the thesis Journal’s pre-1980 period will be handled.

new sort of understanding concerning the issue of revolutionary organization was needed, which should locate the masses as the agents of political activity and which required new organizational bodies that could enable this partake (Birikim, 1978: 18). The ‘alternative organizations’ in that respect should adopt the perspective of transcending the mass-cadre distinction which according to the Journal was absolutized by the socialist movements/parties of the era (Birikim, 1978: 32-33). Furthermore these organizations should generate alternatives to the capitalist society in which the ‘subordinated classes and strata’ could comprehend the conditions that compel them to their existing situations and in which they could become the agents of change (Birikim, 1978: 33-34). This new kind of organizations, in other words, should be the organizational units where socialist way of life could be practiced *ab initio*.

Having these premises concerning the revolutionary organization, Birikim criticized the dominant, established understandings of the revolutionary party and the state. According to the Journal the tripartite process of revolution anticipated by almost all revolutionary parties/movements of the era was incompatible with the basic principles of ‘socialism’. For the journal this tripartite trajectory, which starts with the stage of party constitution and continues with the seizure of the state power and then the constitution of socialism from above, was before all else contrary to socialism’s fundamental principle of ‘withering away of the state’ (Laçiner, 1979: 30). That is to say, in Journal’s account, the state could not be equipped with a constitutive authority in a socialist society and the struggle for socialism should adopt this principle from its inception (Laçiner, 1979: 30).

Birikim assessed the resistance committees in relation to its formulation of ‘alternative organizations’. As it was indicated above Devrimci Yol boycotted the 1979 by- election and mounted a campaign in order to persuade people to not vote. This campaign and the Movement’s suggestion of being organized under Resistance committees instead of voting in the elections were supported by the journal *Birikim*. In this regard Devrimci Yol, owing to its proposal of Resistance committees, was

distinguished from other movements such as Halkın Kurtuluşu and Kurtuluş by the journal with an argument that the first not only negated but also offered an alternative model of organization (Birikim, 1979a: 5). According to Birikim, since Resistance committees were conceived by Devrimci Yol as permanent institutions, they could be regarded as a proposal of “socialist alternative” (Birikim, 1979a: 6). The journal regarded Resistance committees as a ‘vital prelude’ for the appearance of socialism, as a genuine alternative and expressed that to effectuate it was duty of everybody (Birikim, 1979a: 7).

In Birikim’s account while for *Kurtuluş* the nodal point was to gather the all progressive forces together within the party, for Devrimci Yol the content and the central point of the understanding of organization was different almost completely (Birikim, 1979a: 6). The difference stemmed, according to Birikim, from their distinct approaches towards the position of the masses in the issue of revolutionary organization. While for the first the masses would see ‘the alternative’ by the constitution of the vanguard communist organization, for the second ‘the alternative’ should be experienced by the masses themselves and they should experience it with their own political activity and active participation (Birikim, 1979a: 6).

However for Birikim, with regard to Resistance committees, the emphasis on ‘being an alternative to the bourgeois- parliamentary- order’ was not emphasized sufficiently (Birikim, 1979a: 6) The main reason of this insufficiency according to the Journal was that Devrimci Yol did not direct its critiques towards the existing ‘political order’ satisfactorily (Birikim, 1979a: 6). Furthermore according to the journal, there was an ambiguity concerning both the content and the practical implementations of the Resistance committees and naming could not also make sense accurately about the content (Birikim, 1979a: 7).

Birikim’s above depicted proposal of ‘alternative/new kind of organizations’ and resistance committees have important differences, which stemmed from different ways of approaching the issues of revolutionary leadership, the party and the seizure

of the power. Forasmuch as while for Birikim the ‘alternative/new kind of organization’ should have the aim of interrogating and abolishing the hierarchical mass/cadre relations and the institution of revolutionary leadership from its inception, a strong revolutionary leadership was regarded as vital by Devrimci Yol with respect to the resistance committees. Furthermore while the constitution of the party and the seizure of the power were located at the very center of the project of resistance committees, by Birikim the constitution of the alternative/new kind of organizations was regarded as the primary goal and the seizure of the power was considered as a moment which was necessary but not the most urgent one.

4. 5. Concluding Remarks

The resistance committees represented a novelty in terms of revolutionary organization, in a leftist environment where the principle of ‘deferment’ was taken for granted, or put it another way, any kind of revolutionary transformation was postponed until the forthcoming revolution. They also had an affinity with cases such as Russian soviets and Italian councils because of the self-emancipatory aspect they carried, although they have many different characteristics as well as limits when compared to these experiences. It is my contention that the affinity at issue stemmed from a common organizational rationale that is based on social doing and self initiative concerning the revolutionary transformations in the here and now without waiting for a prospective state takeover.

Different from the soviet/council type organizations, resistance committees were formed and organized by a political movement by leaning upon and articulating with the ‘spontaneous’, solidaristic practices among the masses. Therefore, it is not possible to talk about, for the case of resistance committees, a spontaneity of the soviet/council type; rather Devrimci Yol, a movement in the process of party formation, attempted to trigger masses to constitute their ‘spontaneous organizations’. Put differently, Devrimci Yol attempted to form self-organizations in different fields like neighborhoods, workplaces, universities by organizing different ‘no’s –to use Holloway’s terminology- under the frameworks of resistance, district,

people's, workplace etc. committees, within a context where there was a widespread discontent but no self-organization.

To organize this discontent, that was gradually escalating in the late 1970s within country, was also the aim of different revolutionary movements/parties of the era. However none of them attempted to base their strategies of organization upon committee-like self-organizations. Even the Movements such as Kurtuluş and Devrimci Sol that came from the same tradition with Devrimci Yol did not take into account such kind of organizations or seek to incorporate them to their political strategies. The only approach towards resistance committees in the era that took them seriously and that call for their maturation and strengthening was that of the journal Birikim, which did not directly get involved in the practical political process. Thus within their time of existence resistance committees remained affiliated with Devrimci Yol. Different from the early soviets for instance, where different political groups attempted to orient and to be hegemonic, the resistance committees never attracted other 'revolutionary' parties/movements' attention for taking part in or struggling for hegemony. They also have not been handled by different leftist movements/parties as part of a common revolutionary heritage in the post 1980 period; rather they have been bracketed with Devrimci Yol and assessed as part of the criticisms directed to the Movement.

Resistance committees were organized by Devrimci Yol militants in different neighborhoods and districts by leaning upon the defensive and solidaristic relations among the dwellers that stemmed from their discontent concerning the fascist assaults as well as exploitation, expensiveness, poverty etc. The Movement organized resistance committees as the organizational units under the frameworks of which those tendencies and spontaneous counterattacks would be consolidated and organized in a united manner. Except from to a certain extent the Yeraltı Maden İş experience they were not organizations based on the transformation of production relations starting from the workplace level as soviets or factory councils. And only in some cases they could be dwellers' self-organizations in the proper sense of the term,

where dwellers were the actors of decision making and implementation processes of the matters concerning the place they live. Fatsa was an experience where these mechanisms could be to a greater extent in operation via 'people's committees', which can also be regarded as a semi-autonomous town.

Resistance committees were endowed with two different missions. The Movement regarded them both as means of facilitating the constitution of the party, through supplying a mass basis for it as well as a resource where cadres could be recruited and educated; and on the other hand they were also regarded as revolutionary processes where socialist relations could be experienced without waiting for the state takeover. Following the interviews I have made and the primary resources I have examined I have reached the conclusion that different committee experiences embodied this binary mission, which was attached to them by the Movement, differently.

Thus in some cases they remained as defense organizations of the professional revolutionaries and in some others they became the self-organizations of the workers and/or dwellers, by which they attempted to transform relations of exploitation and domination. However, although they were organized by Devrimci Yol, resistance committees did not directly become the organs or the 'vehicles' of the Movement. Furthermore they did not constitute an important cadre source for the prospective party and they were not be the locus of the people's anti-fascist struggle, as envisaged by the Movement. However, more importantly, these organizations, which grounded on different solidaristic practices of their subjects concerning the resistance against assaults, problems stemming from deprivation, poverty etc. could, to a certain extent, transform into self-organizations by the initiative of the Movement, into a collective challenge and to a certain extent a collective doing.

Within the process of formation and perpetuation of the resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts different factors played important roles. The assaults of the *ülküciüs* and the thread of being attacked by them; the distinctions such as fascist-

communist and Sunni-Alevi and the separation of the settlement with respect to these distinctions were among these factors that impacted upon dwellers' solidaristic practices concerning their self-defense as well as their problems such as housing, transportation, poverty etc. Resistance committees were both based on these solidaristic practices and they also had roles in their strengthening and their channeling through organization. The militants of the Movement, who were either sent from the center or were individuals from the neighborhood or district that became militants within the committee processes experienced in their units, had also important roles in the formation and perpetuation of the resistance committees. In some cases they attempted to solve dwellers' problems stemming from the assaults and/or the neighborhood/district life on their behalf, while in some others the participatory decision making and implementation processes were in the forefront. In parallel with these, in many neighborhoods/districts they remained as the organizations of the militants and in some others they could transcend the militants' initiatives and transformed into self-organizations of the dwellers themselves.

In parallel with its goal of initiating change within now and here, Devrimci Yol also organized different committees that had different characteristics from the resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts, such as the workplace and the people's committees. While resistance against fascist assaults was more determinant for the committee organizations in the districts and neighborhoods, the constitutive aspect and the participatory mechanisms concerning the decision making and the implementation processes were more apparent and in the forefront for the two cases I have examined. Although, as the committees in neighborhoods and districts, both Fatsa and the Yeraltı Maden İş were the cases which witnessed committee organizations that were not directly formed by the initiatives of the subjects that constituted them, they could more effectively transform into self-organizations that were based on social doing.

The Yeraltı Maden İş Union attempted to initiate a model of workplace democracy via the workplace committees in workplaces such as Yeni-Çeltek, Aşkale, Hekimhan

Mines. The workplace committees as the workers' self organizations were based on a practice that indicated an attempt concerning the transformation of the relations of production. This characteristic distinguished them from other committee experiences realized both in the neighborhoods/districts and in Fatsa; and also rendered them more akin to the experiences such as Italian factory councils. Different from the Italian case, workplace committees were not initiated by the workers themselves and they remained restricted in terms of their scopes and impacts. However they constituted an example of a workers' organization initiated by a political movement and that could transcend this political movement and became a self-organization based on social doing.

Another case that I dealt with in this chapter was the Fatsa experience, which was a municipality experience that lasted almost nine months. This case, I have argued, reflected an advanced form of resistance committees organized in the neighborhoods and districts. Formed at the inception by Devrimci Yol militants, the people's committees could become the dwellers' self organizations by which they organize their solidaristic practices and their different discontents and channel them into action, into social doing. Through people's committees and well-attended meetings Fatsa could become an autonomous space where the social life could mostly be organized by its dwellers. However the Fatsa experience could not expand through other towns or cities and they remained affiliated with a single political movement. Furthermore, like the resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts, it did not carry an explicit aspect and emphasis concerning the transformation of the capitalist relations of production.

With all their deficiencies and limits, the committee experiences, were important cases in Turkey that carry the seeds of anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical and self-emancipatory forms of organization, and of an understanding of organization based on social doing. In the conclusion chapter, I will dwell on my general findings throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The revolutionary organization has been a practical question that has been attempted to be answered in a variety of ways from the very inception of the socialist politics. It has been strictly bound with the question of how the revolutionary transformation should be realized. It can be argued that there have been two different understandings of revolutionary transformation, which also have pointed out different ways of organizing, broadly speaking: the one that has regarded that the withering away of the state and emancipation of the subordinated classes can be achieved by a transitory state, namely after the conquest of the state power; and the other that has stand for the realization of socialism by initiating transformation in the everyday life via the self initiatives of the subordinated classes. The first has pointed out coordination and concentration and the organizational forms that have organized in compatible with the goal of conquering the state power; the other has signaled the self organizations of the subordinated classes that have organized in compatible with the goal of initiating change from here and now.

In the historical course these two broad lines have been attempted to be combined in different ways and have brought along tensions. On the one hand to be organized via self-initiative and to attempt initiating change from the now and here has been bound with being absorbed and/or defeated by capital, while on the other hand to be organized in a centralized fashion with an aim of overcoming this risk has been susceptible to bureaucratization and the risk of transforming into a sort of organization that is tried to be transcended.

Throughout the study, I have searched for answers to the question of how Devrimci Yol and the committee experiences organized by it, within their own context, embodied this tension, the tension between the struggles aiming at transformation in everyday life relations and that seeking for the centralization and the state takeover.

Devrimci Yol was a revolutionary movement flourished in a period where important social transformations and dense struggles were experiencing in Turkey, including the violent conflicts among the leftist movements/ parties and the ultra-nationalist, *ülküciü* movement. It was first established under the name of Devrimci Gençlik in 1975 and in a little while it transformed into a political movement (Pekdemir, 2007: 772) that encompassed a hierarchical organizational core and rank and file militants and sympathizers from many different segments of the society. Different from the tradition it inherited as well as its contemporaries Devrimci Yol attempted to incorporate its political strategy the goal of initiating revolutionary transformation from the existing situation, from the level of everyday life. Following this perspective it organized the resistance committees and framed them as the seeds of an alternative society, while at the same time adopting a state-oriented strategy and insisting upon the need to constitute the party consisting of professional revolutionary cadres. It has been my contention that this attempt of reconciliation and the tensions it engendered gave Devrimci Yol its uniqueness within revolutionary left in Turkey and also rendered it a valuable case to examine and discuss.

In order to examine the embodiments of the above depicted tensions by Devrimci Yol and the resistance committee experiences, in the second chapter I have relied upon some prominent experiences in the revolutionary practice and several theorists within Marxist theory, with an aim of posing different approaches concerning the issue of revolutionary organization. My focal point has been different conceptions of and the roles attached to the ‘vanguard party’ and the ‘power organs of soviet/council type’, the distinguishing characteristics of which can be regarded as being organized by the initiatives of their subjects and as being endowed with a rationale of organization

based on ‘social doing’, that is to say, based on the transformation of the relations of exploitation and domination by organizing the social life from the everyday level.

Lenin and Gramsci, as theorists and political actors, attempted to formulate policy proposals in order to puzzle out this tension within their specific time contexts. Both in the Russian and the Italian cases, the focal point of the question of organization was different from the case of Turkey in the late 1970s. For both cases there were spontaneous organizations that were not directly organized or formed by a political party/movement. Albeit having differences, both Gramsci and Lenin argued for the need and possibility of the reconciliation between these organizations and the party, as the political organ in which the centralization/concentration was embodied.

The Comintern tradition with its worldwide different versions had laid aside the questions of ‘self-emancipation’ and the ‘self-organization’ and had dwelled upon a revolutionary politics framed as a matter of profession. I have argued that with all their variants, the people’s war and the guerrilla warfare have been revolutionary strategies, according to which the issues of self-organization, self-emancipation and their compatibility with the vanguard party and centralization did not constitute important points of debate. A similar disregard was also valid for many different revolutionary movements in Turkey in the 1960s and the 1970s. Thus the National Democratic Revolution (MDD) – Socialist Revolution (SD) debate that stamped the 1960s was composed of political actors that had a common ground concerning their conceptions of the issues of revolution and power as well as the revolutionary organization. Having differences in terms of their assessments of the production relations in Turkey, the alliances that should be constituted for the realization of revolution and the sort of revolution that should be realized, both envisaged revolution as a ‘moment’ to be realized in order to pass through the ‘stage’ of socialism. They conceived socialism as an order to be established only after the state takeover that would be realized either via parliamentary means or non-parliamentary ones. This conception of the state as an instrument also determined their understandings of revolutionary organization, which they envisaged as an instrument

consisting of professional cadres and dedicated to the state takeover. Dev-Genç and THKP-C, the organizations that constituted the roots of Devrimci Yol, also shared this common ground concerning the issues of state, power and the revolutionary organization.

Following these diagnoses in the third chapter I have also attempted to specify the peculiarities of Devrimci Yol that distinguished it from the tradition it inherited as well as from the Turkish left as a whole. I have argued that the peculiarity at issue stemmed from its organizational characteristics as well as the practical implications that these characteristics implied. Although the movement had a distinguished position with regard to these issues, it also had important similarities with this tradition. Thus as a movement coming from this tradition, Devrimci Yol shared this vision as one constituent of its revolutionary line. It emphasized upon the immediate need to constitute the party that should consist of professional cadres and should focus upon the state takeover. It has been my contention that, albeit sharing this common ground, Devrimci Yol had a peculiarity that to a certain extent distinguished it from its roots and its contemporaries as well, which stemmed from the dual character of its understanding of revolutionary organization and the practical implications of this understanding.

The duality at issue concerning the Movements' way of approaching the resistance committees was also interrelated with its understandings of fascism, the party and revolution. These issues on the one hand were framed by it with reference to the state, which was understood as an instrument to be seized, and they were also regarded as social processes that had implications in the everyday life. Thus, while Devrimci Yol regarded fascism as directly emanating from the state, it also conceived it as a form of social relation that directly had its roles in the everyday life. Hence, although adopting the tactical assaults (within the framework of the principle of *politicized armed war strategy*) as an aspect of the anti-fascist struggle, the Movement focused more heavily upon the initiatives of the 'aggrieved masses' as the actors of their 'self-defense' and the need to organize them in the direction of

constituting an anti-fascist front. Devrimci Yol's emphasis and effort towards constituting 'organic links' with the masses, I have argued, constituted an important shift of emphasis that distinguished it from THKP-C, which assigned a primary role to the armed struggle as the most peculiar way of attracting the masses to the revolutionary politics. This effort can also be explained by the Movement's popular-democratic inclination and its search for counter-hegemony (Erdoğan, 1998).

Furthermore it was frequently emphasized by the Movement that the party should immediately be constituted in a centralized manner and as consisting of 'iron-disciplined' revolutionary cadres, in order to realize and perpetuate the revolutionary struggle. This understanding also coexisted with a conception of the state as an instrument to be seized for the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional period. However, Devrimci Yol also understood the party as a process, a process of organizing for the creation of the classless society, which should not be instrumentalized and reified. This second vision brought along the Movement to stress the need to establish organizations in which social relations of the future order could be concretized from the existing situation on and also gave it the character of being a movement (cf. Erdoğan, 1998: 33; Pekdemir, 2007: 772).

Although the Movement continuously emphasized the importance of establishing the party, and although it had an hierarchical organization with different units connected to each other in the country level, its binary understanding of the party and its loose ties at the level of the neighborhoods and districts rendered it both a political movement and a revolutionary organization. By taking into consideration its effort to have a mass basis, its binary understanding of the party and the revolution, I have argued that, Devrimci Yol was a movement that had a hierarchical organizational core and that attempted to be a mass party having professional cadres and a structured organization.

As I have mentioned in the third chapter, Resistance committees were formed by Devrimci Yol in order to counter the fascist assaults and to channel anti-fascist

struggle to a revolutionary line by incorporating the mass initiative into it. Parallel with its dual assessments concerning the fascism, party and revolution; besides the elimination of the fascist assaults, Devrimci Yol attached two different missions to the resistance committees. First was to facilitate the constitution of the party by supplying it a mass basis and by serving as a resource where cadres of the party could be recruited and educated. The second on the other hand was to trigger masses to constitute power organs where socialist relations could be experienced without waiting for the state takeover.

In parallel with this second mission Devrimci Yol also organized different committees that carried features different from that of resistance committees in the neighborhoods and districts, and which called differently with names such as people's committees, workplace committees and students' representative council.

In the fourth chapter I have examined the general characteristics of different committees, including the resistance, people's and the workplace committees, the similarities and differences among them as well as with the cases of soviets and the factory councils. I have argued that when compared with the committee experiences in the neighborhoods and districts, for the cases of Fatsa and the Yeni Çeltek the constitutive aspect and the participatory mechanisms concerning the decision making and the implementation processes were more apparent and in the forefront. Thus while in some neighborhoods and districts, resistance committees remained as the organizations of the Devrimci Yol militants who defended the unit and served the dwellers' needs, in some others they could transform into dwellers' organizations by which they decide and organize the place they lived in. The Fatsa and the Yeni-Çeltek experiences on the other hand, as the organizations initiated by the Devrimci Yol militants, more effectively transcended the militants' initiatives and transform into self-organizations. This characteristic renders them more akin to the cases such as soviets and the factory councils. Although sharing a similarity in that respect with the mentioned cases, the committees had also differences with them, which stemmed from at least three factors.

First, different from these experiences, the committees organized by Devrimci Yol cannot be regarded as ‘spontaneous’, self-organizations in the proper sense of the term. For in fact the ‘spontaneity’ attached by Devrimci Yol to the committees was partly at issue. Yet, while they were based on solidaristic practices of their subjects concerning their self-defense as well as their problems such as housing, transportation, poverty etc., the roles of the Devrimci Yol militants in their formations and perpetuations were also determinant. That is to say, they were organized by a political movement as partly consisting of its militants/cadres and partly of the subjects of the units organized, namely the workers, dwellers, students, peasants etc. Only some of them could transcend the militants’ initiatives and transformed into self-organizations of the subjects that constituted them. Another difference stemmed from the reason that, except from the case of Yeraltı Maden İş, the committees did not carry an explicit emphasis concerning the transformation of the capitalist relations of production. And finally the committees did not become organizations where different political groups took part. Thus, for instance, different from the early Russian soviets, where different parties and groups –especially Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionary Party- took place; the committees organized by Devrimci Yol were not contributed by different political organizations or parties and remained affiliated with a single movement.

Despite their limits and deficiencies the the committee experiences have constituted one of the major and may be the most effective one of the experiences in Turkey that attempted to initiate transformation in different fields of everyday life. In that regard they carried the seeds of anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical and self-emancipatory forms of organization, and of an understanding of organization based on social doing. The assaults of the militants of the *ülküci* movement and the direct state repression overshadowed the committees’ maturation as self-organizations in many districts and neighborhoods where the assaults were denser than others. Furthermore by the 1980 coup d’état they and the experiences such as Yeraltı Maden-İş and Fatsa were annihilated.

The fact that the Movement had a heritage and a political environment that left aside the issues such as self-emancipation, self-organization etc.; the existence of intensive state repression and the increasing assaults of the fascist militants; resistance committees' inability to transform into a widespread mass movement can be counted as important impacts that brought along their vulnerability and that impeded their consolidation and getting strength. All these can be regarded as the components of the tension between Devrimci Yol's attempt of initiating change from the now and here and its emphasis on centralization and the state-oriented vision. Thus, while the Movement was determinant in their formation and perpetuation, the tensions revolving around the conception of the committees seem to make it difficult for them to unfold their self-emancipatory characteristics. The repression exercised by the state and fascist assaults made things no easier in terms of the transformation of everyday life experiences of the subjects of committees through their own initiative.

It is my argument that what renders the Devrimci Yol and the resistance committee experiences important cases in Turkey, is that they constituted the only cases that tackled with this tension in practice in the period from 1960 to the late 1970s. The meaning of this tension and its way of embodiment by the resistance committees and Devrimci Yol is far from being a matter of past. The recent debate about 'changing the world without taking power' is also an important indicator of the issue's actuality, the central point of which has been the issue of organization, i.e. possible ways of organizing that are based on self initiative and social doing and that could also appear, perpetuate and mature without being absorbed by capital or by the self-proclaimed representatives of a revolutionary vanguard.

I hope that this thesis will contribute the discussions about these tensions, questions and the efforts that practically attempt to puzzle out them.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION ON THE INTERVIEWED MILITANTS

Mehmet is a 49 years old ex-militant from Yenimahalle district in Ankara. He participated in different revolutionary organizations when he was in high school. By the end of the 1970s, he engaged with Devrimci Yol and participated in the process of organization of the resistance committees in different neighborhoods of Yenimahalle. The interview was made in Ankara on 18 April 2008.

Salih is a 51 years old ex-militant who, before Devrimci Yol, acquainted with Devrimci Gençlik in the mid-1970s. He took part in the processes of agitation and organization in different neighborhoods and universities of Ankara. The interview was made in Ankara on 28 April 2008.

Aydın is a 51 years old ex-militant from Dikmen neighborhood in Ankara. He participated in the foundation of *halk evi* (people's house) in Dikmen in 1973. Then he acquainted with Devrimci Yol and partook in the resistance committee in his neighborhood. The interview was made in Ankara on 12 April 2008.

Ali, now in his fifties, first engaged in revolutionary politics in high school years. He took part in the processes of organization of the resistance committees in different neighborhoods of Ankara including Tuzlucaayır, Seyran and İncesu neighborhoods. He also went İzmir for one year in order to partake in the organization of committees in several neighborhoods. The interview was made in Ankara on 25 April 2008.

Cüneyt is a 50 years old ex-militant, who was first acquainted with Devrimci Gençlik, and then became a militant of Devrimci Yol by the year 1977. He participated in the organization processes of resistance committees in İlker, Ayrancı, Yıldız, Aydınlikevler neighborhoods of Ankara. The interview was made in Ankara on 16 July 2008.

Hüseyin, now in his fifties, partook in the processes of organization of resistance committees in several neighborhoods of different districts in Ankara including Demetevler, Şentepe, Karşıyaka, Seyran, Akdere. By the year 1979, he became a militant of Devrimci Savaş Birlikleri (Revolutionary War Forces, DSB) and until his arrest in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état he remained as a DSB militant. The interview was made in Ankara on 09 August 2008.

İsmail, now in his fifties, is from Tepecik neighborhood of Mamak district in Ankara. He got acquainted with Devrimci Yol when the militants of the Movement came to his neighborhood in order to organize the resistance committee. Then he joined them and took part in the committee organization in the neighborhood. The interview was made in Ankara on 18 August 2008.