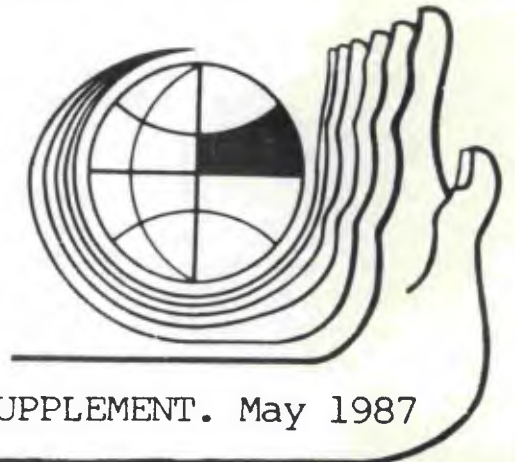


TURKEY NEWSLETTER



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Defence of Democratic Rights in Turkey

STUDENT SUPPLEMENT. May 1987



STUDENT PROTESTS SWEEP TURKEY



NEW WAVE OF STUDENT PROTESTS

Thousands of students in Turkey's largest universities began a new campaign of mass protests in April 1987.

The latest protests were provoked by proposals to further restrict the already minimal rights of students. Most important of these was the Bill on student associations being pushed through the Turkish Grand National Assembly (parliament) by the regime. The effect of this bill would have been to crush the Student Centres which have been multiplying in faculties and on campuses throughout Turkey. In their place, the regime wished to impose one strictly controlled student association per campus.

STUDENT CENTRES

Student Centres have emerged as the main form of organisation adopted by students as a means of establishing independent, democratic student bodies defending their interests.

Following the military coup in 1980 all student unions and associations were closed-down. The Student Centres emerged in 1985-86 as an attempt by students to once more establish their own bodies. Despite being subjected to such severe repression by the political police and university authorities that they have had to function almost clandestinely, the centres (there are usually several on each campus) are beginning to link-up nationally.

The Student Centres really emerged as a force during the December 1986-January 1987 hunger strikes and demonstrations by students against the reactionary education system.

OPPRESSION BY YOK

Apart from the Bill on student associations, the latest protests were also caused by the continuing repressive practices of YOK (Higher Education Council) which exercises total control over higher educational establishments. A new example of YOK's policy of imposing military-style discipline on students and suppressing freedom of thought was shown at Hacettepe University on March 24. Here, the university authorities have drawn-up a new list of offences for which a student can be expelled. Apart from normal expellable offences such as theft or drug-taking, the authorities have introduced others such as: "Swearing", "belittling another student", "reading or possessing banned publications", "spending an evening outside campus or hostels without permission", "staging protests against the campus management", "carrying out ideological activities".

PROTESTS

The April student protests began with scattered actions over a wide variety of grievances. An example was at Istanbul University on April 8 when students presented the Rector with a petition saying they "cannot study on empty stomachs" and asking for larger portions of food in the university's refectories. 500 students gathered in front of the Rector's office. Eventually security police arrived to disperse the crowd and the Student Centre's press officer was detained. She was later released.

The protests accelerated on the weekend of April 11-12. Students at Istanbul, Ankara, Adana and Bursa universities staged canteen boycotts and sit-down demonstrations. The biggest and most violent confrontation took place in front of the Architectural Faculty of the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. During a sit-down protest paramilitary gendarmes waded into the students lashing out with the butts of their guns as they arrested student Ismail Aksoy and several others on the accusation of "singing a revolutionary march".

The reaction of the regime to protests at the Middle East Technical University was particularly harsh. They have not forgotten that it was there that the last big student 'action' took place before the 1980 coup when, at the university's opening ceremony, students drowned out the playing of the Turkish National Anthem by singing the 'Internationale'.

At all affected universities students handed out leaflets and at Istanbul students posted-up placards reading: "Student organisations will not be shut down", "no to YOK", "long live our struggle for an open and democratic university".

On April 15 2,000 students in Istanbul, took the authorities by surprise and marched from the Aksaray district to Beyazit Square (in front of the main university building). Police calls to disperse were ignored and students continued to march forward. In the square students sang songs against YOK and also ones by banned poet Nazim Hikmet. When the police chief in person again called on students to disperse, one shouted back "let the police disperse first, then we will". He was promptly arrested. In the words of a Turkish press report (Milliyet 16/4/87) : "Despite the police giving full warning the resistance continued so the police hit out at girl and boy students with batons and dragged them by the hair to the police vans". A general melee continued as units of riot and political police lashed-out indiscriminately.

Students shouted slogans such as: "An end to being a slave of YOK" and "we will defeat torture".

Police took 100 students to the notorious Gayrenteppe Political Branch Interrogation Centre. At the time of compiling this report 66 are still detained there.

The march to Beyazit Square was the first "unauthorised" march through the centre of Istanbul since the 1980 coup.

Various protest marches and other actions in the provinces were broken-up by police and the participants detained.

However, following the protests the regime announced that the student associations bill had been withdrawn "for further consideration".

In an open letter to the government, student leaders said: "The recent incidents which have exploded in the universities have been building up for a long time. The undemocratic ways being used to close our centres has been the last straw"... "The Student Centres where students can go to seek their rights are being threatened with closure"... The letter went on to accuse the regime of not abiding by even it's own legal norms and of having "an aristocrats understanding of democracy".

Despite this partial climbdown by the regime, student protests, hunger strikes and marches are continuing. Many students feel that the present concessions by the regime are temporary and small.

The major theme of the continuing protests are demands for the release of students detained by the political police and no victimisation of student activists. It is still difficult to determine the actual number of students still in detention as a result of the current protest actions but it seems in Ankara some 80-90 students are to be brought before the State Security Courts, 5-10 in Sivas, 13 in Izmir and an unknown number in Istanbul. The legal opposition Social Democratic Populist Party is also raising the issue of a number of students who seem to have 'disappeared' in police hands in Ankara.

Students issued another statement in Istanbul during further protests on April 21, in which they accuse the regime of: "Aiming to get rid of student centres...depoliticise students,...Create universities where freedom, democracy and knowledge are absent. And create a passive mass of students -no different from a haystack". The regime

... "wants students who believe everything they are told, are obedient and don't fight for their rights. They want to create a one-type, one-model human being". The students, on the other hand, are aiming for universities where freedom of thought and creativity flourish"... "This is dependent on being able to form student unions freely". Students should be able to participate in the management of the universities. However, students can not gain their rights "through being passive or begging." "We will continue to the end to defend our legal rights, our freedom and democracy"... "What is really illegal is for students to have to feel the police batons and the gendarmes' rifle butts"...

The students are receiving support from wide sections of Turkish society. Trade unions, parents, associations of relatives of political prisoners, leading writers and musicians and some academics have all been represented at student sit-down protests and hunger strikes.

CONTINUING CRISIS

It is clear that despite both the repressive measures and minor concessions by the present regime in Turkey, the student protest movement will continue to grow in the coming period.

The struggle students in Turkey have begun is not only a fight for what should be normal student rights in any democratic society. They are also fighting for fundamental principles of academic freedom and education instead of crude ideological indoctrination. The students of Turkey are also playing their part in the struggle to build a genuinely democratic society in Turkey in place of the current anti-democratic and authoritarian regime.

STUDENTS UNDER MILITARY DISCIPLINE

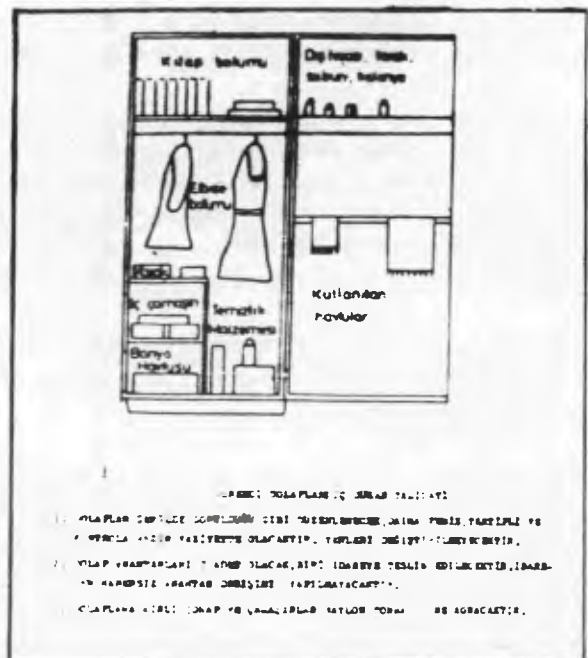
At the latest count, the lives of students in Turkey are being regulated by over 20 decrees. These affect every aspect of their daily lives, including how they lay out their wardrobes, dormitory floors, etc, etc...

"The Credits and Dormitories Law", (Act 351), the regulations governing students' daily lives run to 169 pages!. They even tell students when to sleep, when to get up, what to drink, and what they can talk about.

Example: "Students shall everyday including holidays and festivals, take turns between 2300 hours and 7.00 hours to guard the reading rooms, dormitories and floors. This they must do dressed in proper clothes. Not in pyjamas or shorts".

On the wall in every dormitory is a quote from a speech made by 'president' K.Evren to students: "Because the dormitories are not sufficient and there are not enough mattresses. Because of the bad food, high expenses, because of the form or unjustness of the exams and marking. With all these issues they (agitators) will come to you with seemingly innocent demands and draw you into protests. This way they will try to distort your minds".

Because of the regime's fear of a repetition of the role youth played in the struggle for political change in the early 1970s. All protests by students about these harsh conditions are met with accusations of attempting "to create anarchy".



The University authorities in Turkey are even dictating how students must lay out their closets or wardrobes.

The diagram opposite is issued to every student. It tells her or him exactly what can be put in the wardrobe and where.

The accompanying notes warn students that closets/wardrobes are liable to inspection at any time by the authorities. To have items other than those listed in his or her wardrobe will make a student liable to "disciplinary measures".