

# INTERVIEW



*Dursun Karataş*

Av. DEV-GENÇ

## INTRODUCTION

A delegation was sent to Turkey from the 1st-5th March after being invited by **TAYAD** (Organisation of the families of prisoners and convicts in Turkey). Some of the things that they had on their schedule were to observe the hunger strikes taking place in Istanbul and other towns against the wearing of standard uniforms and for other demands, to see what TAYAD is doing, to watch the mass trial against **Devrimci Sol** (Revolutionary Left - a revolutionary movement formed in May-June 1978) and to study the results of the strikes in MIGROS.

On the 3rd March 1988 they watched the hearing in the **Dev-Sol** military trial in Metris, Istanbul. Comrade **Dursun Karatas** has been threatened with the death penalty on many occasions because he is regarded as the central figure of **Dev-Sol**. We print here a interview made by the delegation with him and his comrades who are the main accused in this trial. The interview covers, amongst other things, the eight year struggle of our comrades in prison and gives short a summary of the situation in the world and in Turkey.

**D.Karatas:** What did you (the members of the delegation) think of the Turkish courts?

**Delegation:** Very interesting. They were all asleep (the judges). Very cold (the court room).

**D.Karatas:** When are you going back?

**Del.:** Saturday... What do you want to tell us about the left in Turkey, and in the FRG, and about the revolutionary movement?

**D.Karatas:** What do you mean, the left in W.Germany in general or the revolutionaries in Turkey?

**Del.:** Both.

**D.Karatas:** First of all our appeal to all democratic and human rights organisations abroad, that they should see how it really is in Turkey, that the regime of 12th September is still here in Turkey. The democratisation under the Özal government was just a game, a trick maneuver. The 12th September continues in the constitution, in the college authorities, the trade unions, the laws, the organisations and the torture.

It is your duty to tell the democratic world and to put pressure on Özal government. In Turkey the revolutionary struggles beginning anew. In this respect we see a positive future. This is not recognised abroad but we believe that after a while the mass movements and the solidarity movements will increase, everyone will see that. We would like to see solidarity movements abroad increase parallel to this. We have just started a campaign today condemning the judicial system of 12th September. Our families and various democratic organisations are supporting this. We also expect a lot of interest and support from abroad. We believe that your solidarity action will influence the government. The best examples were seen in 1983. There were hunger strikes at that time. There were 2000 people in Istanbul on a 27 day hunger strike. They received support especially in W.Germany. There was a big campaign with hunger strikes both from the W.German left and the revolutionaries from Turkey, with petitions, telegrams of protest from intellectuals and authors to the government. We believe that this can be repeated. We don't know exactly how the situation is over there, what can be done and what not but we can say this—we will receive any solidarity gratefully.

**Del.:** you have told us about the hunger strike in Sagmalcilar/Istanbul, and about your own situation. You said you could also take part if the demands weren't met. Can you elucidate?

**D.Karatas:** Since the beginning of the 12th September numerous people have been thrown into prison, ten thousand, even a hundred thousand. One of the reasons for the 12th Sep. was to depoliticise the masses, and thus the prisoners. Reprials, ideological propaganda and torture were used. One of the instruments of torture was the standard uniform. To be more exact a return to the standard uniform was made in order to rob people of their personality, to stop peoples thoughts. We, revolutionaries, have rejected the standard uniform. The law forcing prisoners to wear standard uniform was first introduced in August '87. They tried to force prisoners to wear standard uniforms in January '84. There was resistance, one hell of a lot. The accused in our trial had four deaths to mourn. Gour of our friends died an hunger strike. We couldn't get rid of the standard uniform then, not with the strenght of resistance we had, but we achieved a few improvements. However we created a tradition of resistance to the standard uniform and at the same time a consciousness of why this was necessary. New actions resulted from this, finally the hunger strikes begun in July-August '84 assumed even larger proportions, covering the whole of Turkey. Didar Sensoy, the sister of a prisoners, died in front of the parliament building during this campaign. In spite of this the government didn't abolish the standard uniform. They had it in their heads to teach the prisoners a lesson, or to put it in modern terms to rehabilitate the prisoners. But after the standard uniforms were refused, after reappeared hunger strikes, after being pressurised from outside from the public and prisoners relatives, after all the resistance in the prisons the government couldn't maintain their determination, it declared, de facto, the abolision of the standard uniform. The standard uniform was abolished on zhe 30th day of the campaign in Sagmalcilar, but there are other problems. People are chained up on the way to the court, they live in solitary confinement in Sagmalcilar. The detention center called Sagmalcilar 2 still hasn't any communal cells. The windows are very small, food is passed, in bowls, through barred openings. Visits are not carried out in the usual way, tele-

phone calls are listened in on, even when they are to a solicitor. I think you already have the demands of the Sagmaicilar prisoners. They are on hunger strike to get rid of all of this. We have heard that they have been negotiating for the last three days. We believe that they will carry on if no positive results come out of this. If the hungerstrikes carry on we will have to begin action supporting them and we are of the opinion that other prisoners will make definite efforts in support. However, we don't think that the resistance will last long, we certainly hope that it will end. That is, the resistance will take on other dimentions whether it ends today or not. Because we will certainly win our remaining rights. The feeling of solidarity between prisoners is very strong in Turkey. When resistance is being carried out in one prison it is impossible that another prison will not get involved. Solidarity is carried out everywhere because our problems are the same everywhere.

**Del.:** In an earlier conversation you gave us a run down on the left of Turkey, the reformists and the TKP:

**D. Karatas:** Yes, it is very useful to give a short summary of the left of Turkey. The tradition of the left has been symbolised since the 20s by the TKP. Up to the 60s they were limited to activities within the framework of a group of intellectuals. Out of a period of 50 years a good 30-40 years went by with one believing in Kemalism, what we call dictatorship of the petty-bourgeoisie, the representative of petty-bourgeois ideology. That mean there was no independent representation for the proletariat and the working population, no determined fight for power. And the defeats have weakend them, the TKP, daily. About 1951 they dissappeared from the political arena. In the 60s the Workers Party of Turkey (TIP), was formed. One could say that this was the first time that the conditions were right for the left of Turkey to become a mass movement. But the TIP didn't have a line which made it a workers party, a mass movement. After 1960 there was a comparatively large democratic arena which meant that the young generation could get to know, through translations, the classics of Marxism-Leninism. But because they couldn't understand them completely a revolutionary strategie for Turkey wasn't able to develop. That is, they couldn't grasp completely the principles of Marxism-Leninism and they ran to join the TIP, nearly

everyone did this. In that respect the TIP gained a mass basis. But understanding Marxism-Leninism one recognised the parliamentary-reformist line of the TIP. There were various splits, the supporters of the national revolution doctrine, the socialist revolutionaries and lines which didn't fit in with either. The result of this thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis was the armed movement which came about in 1971. The message that this armed movement put across was that the bourgeois-fascist government could only be overthrown through armed struggle and that the parliamentary way was impractical.

This was built on by the organisation known as the "*Popular Party and Front for the Liberation of Turkey*" (THKP-C) and the "*Popular Army for the Liberation of Turkey*" (THKO). That is the tradition of armed struggle appeared in 1971 with the THKP-C and THKO. At the same time a regrouping of the left began. One group saw the way to revolution through armed struggle and were convinced that the revolution could only be realised through armed struggle. The other believed that armed struggle wasn't necessary for revolution. The latter appeared around the TIP, Socialist Workers Party of Turkey (TSIP) and the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP). In spite of what they said about not turning down armed struggle we still haven't seen any campaign or action aimed at armed struggle. So, basically, we see the left of Turkey in two categories, one which sees the overthrow of the existing rule in armed struggle and one which tries a peaceful path. The politics of the THKP-C is, today, split into several groups. The THKO doesn't represent its old line any more. People have appeared who have other views, other strategies. But seen as a whole they can all be put into one of the two categories, for or against armed struggle. The "United Left" which as far as I know is made up of 7-8 groups led by the TKP, represents, fully, the Gorbatschow line and campaign mainly against atomic weapons, seeing this as an act of peace and seek an agreement from all governments in order to avoid the danger of a nuclear war. In our opinion this is a line which prevents the revolution and is a set back the peoples struggle. It must be turned down. We say it is not Marxist-Leninist. The result is that the politics of the "United Left" have never been consistent. They conform to what is said in the USSR. That is, yes-

terday they represented Chrustchow's line and today Gorbatschow's. Gorbatschow criticises Chrustchow. Yesterday they defended STALIN, today they defend Gorbatschow. Gorbatschow now condemns STALIN.

X In this sense the Friends lack consistency. We say that the way forward, specific for Turkey, is by the "Strategie of Politicised Military Struggle". This is a line based on armed struggle but which doesn't turn down the usual democratic, economic, ideological and political forms of struggle. In short similar to the Cuban, El Salvadorian and Nicaraguan line. That's the sort of line we represent. In our opinion the left of Turkey are no strong force, regardless of what the TKP say on their own radio station about leading everything in Turkey. If you live in Turkey you know that it isn't true. No doubt they have some strength, but is limited to workers in the unions and bureaucrats. Their strength is of no importance. You ask if the other left groups have any influence. No. They haven't either. The left of Turkey has received some serious setbacks since the 12th September and it hasn't picked itself up again. In this way there has been a development, not large but noticeable, but it can't be used by the "United Left". The "United Left" and the TKP or as they are now known, the "United Communist Party of Turkey" TBKP have in any case, come to a line in conciliation with the government, a line which hinders the revolutionary struggle. We turn this line down. Of course other lines have appeared in the meantime, lines which the TBKP and the THKP-C turn down. We could also put them into various categories. They haven't yet chosen a line of conciliation with the government but we have differences with them in regard to tactic and strategy. In spite of this we are for an alliance of all left groups in Turkey against imperialism and fascism, except for the supporters of "Aydinlik" who in the past have betrayed revolutionaries to the bourgeoisie. We are convinced that in spite of all the differences on the left unity in the struggle against imperialism and fascism can be reached. We are making a special effort, but it is here that the left of Turkey doesn't have enough experience and is having difficulties. It won't be easy. Whilst on this point I'd like to say this; Erol Aydin was killed in Hamburg, I think you know that. This was done to try to set back our movement. It was said that Dev-Sol had killed E. Aydin

but the culprit (what's his name) later confessed to have killed him by mistake. I'd like to explain the following to the whole world. In the whole history of our movement never has a weapon been turned on left patriots or revolutionaries. Dev-Sol has never soiled its name with the blood of patriots or revolutionaries. In this sense we have always condemned the fight within the left. Supporters of other groups have killed or injured our friends, setting us back in our politics. In spite of this we have never retaliated because we know this leads to a dead end. In the case of E. Aydin we have repeatedly stated that he wasn't killed by any of our friends, but we weren't believed. I don't know maybe you didn't believe us in W. Germany either but in the end Yilmaz Ulusoy (yes, I remember now, his name is Yilmaz Ulusoy) admitted to killing his own friend by mistake. We turn down such fights within the left. There is no problem within the left which can't be resolved by dialog and discussion. We direct this appeal to the whole left, especially revolutionaries of Turkey in other countries. There have been many killings within the left in the past, many revolutionary patriots have been killed, a lot of blood has been spilled. This must be condemned. We must get together sensibly and find the reasons for this mistake. If they are not found there will be more serious incidents in the future, worse armed fights and massacres. The only way is to carry out a relentless campaign against the mistakes of the past, look for those responsible and to find the material reasons for them.

Del.: Why are there differences in the court cages today and those you experienced before and what, in your opinion, are the reasons for these differences.

D. Karatas: Turkey is an economically and politically unstable country. That is, all underdeveloped countries like ours are unstable. A new junta comes approximately every 10 years. In the history of Turkey there was a coup in 1971 and in 1960 a by the petty-bourgeoisie a few bourgeois-kemalist forces. On 12th September there was the coup by Messers Evren and Co.. All this is a result of the economic, political and social instability. Exploitation is rife, exploitation by imperialism. The ruling forces are fighting among themselves, the struggle of the people, the revolutionary struggle, is increasing because of the increasing exploitation. Monopoly

capital has not developed, as it did in Europe, by means of its inner dynamic, it is extremely weak and for this reason it is helpless in resolving both its internal contradictions and containing the struggle of the masses, thus from time to time all democratic principles are put aside fascism is turned to. We are even of the opinion that X fascism is permanent in Turkey, now open, now hidden. When it is hidden then we say something called the democracy game is being played. That is, whilst oppression and violence prevail, they try to prove that democracy exists by pointing to the apparent existence of a few rights. But this is a country where, in fact, no democracy, no freedom exists.

When there is a Junta the powers that be are a bit bolder, all democratic rights are abolished. But as the experiments in various other countries of the world have shown, this open fascism can not be institutionalised for long periods because of the demands of the various classes and castes, because of the intensifying of the class war and because of its own internal contradictions. It was



*Sinan Kukul speaks to the members of the delegation*

tried with the 12th March and the 12th September but the proposed program of the 12th March couldn't be carried through completely at that time because of the developing armed struggle. Only with the 12th September could it be realised. The carrying out of the 12th September program could only be done, in a certain sense, because of the sins of the left. The left didn't fight enough. It was surprised, completely exhausted and a part retreated to Europe. And because no battle which was able to destroy fascism and its game was fought the 12th September is more resistant and programmatic. The left is also in part to blame for the fact that the courts and institutions of the 12th September exist today. Also the disinterest in the Junta shown by the public in the democratic world and the socialist countries is to blame. We are convinced that if there was enough solidarity from the democratic revolutionary forces, U.S. imperialism wouldn't be able to install such governments in countries like ours, or at least with great difficulty. But there is not enough X solidarity in the world today.

We see on T.V., Israeli soldiers breaking arms and legs of Palestinian people, but the reaction is very weak. It means that, because the fight and solidarity of the democratic forces of the world is very weak, the powers that be, together with U.S. imperialism, can install a Junta anywhere they want. Of course another important factor is the internal dynamic of that country and the revolutionary forces there. But we can only criticise the revolutionary forces within the framework of their historical development. The left of Turkey is a new, young movement. The revolutionary and armed struggle has a history of only 20 years. During this time it has received two serious blows. In spite of this it is struggling to carry on. On the 12th March we received losses, on the 12th September again, but we are trying to get back on our feet, in this sense we have some difficulties.

We couldn't organise enough strength against fascism. In this sense we must take the blame for the institutionalising of the 12th September and its continuation. But the reasons for this are objective. The subjective reasons are, in our opinion, of limited importance in comparison.

The change in the legal system must be thought of as being parallel to this. The junta can't practice its open fascism openly, and they can't show their, what we call, fascist laws openly. That's why on 6th November 1983 they started to try to show that democracy exists. This had a partial effect on the courts. Actually the changes in the courts and prisons can be attributed to the struggles of the people they wanted to rehabilitate. It is doubtless that the struggles outside played a part but this influence is limited. Order can't install itself. And as long as it can't a policy of loosening and tightening the screw is used. That is, when strong pressure is used over a period of time it has to be released sometimes to avoid a reaction. The 12th September with its constitution and laws has lost face, its decline has started and that affects the judicial system. They can no longer banish us from the court room, maybe they won't be able to keep us from the hearings, because we don't wear a standard uniform, they don't beat us anymore. But the paragraphs 141, 142 and the martial law of 12th September carries on. Therefore not much has actually changed. In the past we were presented naked and beaten, that doesn't go on anymore. But we fought hard for that. People died, we are still fighting. In short, what I want to say is; the ruling powers haven't given us anything. This struggle of the revolutionary forces is carried out with support from patriots and intellectuals. It is doubtless that the revolutionary, democratic and human rights organisations have contributed to this success. For that we are thankful.

Del. Has our presence changed anything, as far as you can see?

D. Karatas: Of course, this visit from W. Germany has unsettled the courts: our views are seen as a denunciation of Turkey in Europe, especially when there is a visit from abroad, and this opens up the question of personal honour. We say to them: "Your state is a member of the Council of Europe and wants to become a member of the E.C. If you are a member of the Council of Europe and want to join the E.C. then you must fit in with the customs over there." In this respect we have no problems, Turkey is denounced over there. We only bring to light the actual situation in Turkey. We have done this when no European is present. But when a European is present

they, the courts, try to hinder us so that their crimes are not shown to the world. It is our duty to convey how it really is in Turkey to the democratic world. We say: "The people of the world must know the whole truth". Of course they get nervous. Both the representatives of the ruling powers and the courts don't want how it really is to come to the attention publically abroad, because they try to say that democracy exists. It is unimaginable that in a democratic country there could be no right to a defence. But there is no right to a defence in Turkey. Likewise, in a democratic country there can't be courts which are controlled by the military. But today, in Turkey, trials are carried out under military control and there are people who have been in custody for 8 years. That doesn't fit in with democracy. It is not wanted that these facts become known abroad. That's why they become nervous. Of course we must use this visit to make these facts known abroad. We have had this conversation in order to spread our message. Do you understand what I want to say?

Del. It's very cold here.

D. Karatas: For two years solid they brought us here during Winter in vest and underpants, and even beat us. They kept us waiting 6 hours in the cold. If, in Summer the sun came in in one corner, they prevented us from getting to it so that we froze. I would like to add that I am not saying this just to complain but so that it is known and thus showing the presence of fascism.

Del. Is this the first time that you've been able to come here in clothes that you've chosen yourself?

D. Karatas: No, we've been able to go to trial in our own clothes since 11th February 1986. Before that we never wore the standard uniforms and always came in our underpants. For two years the hearings were carried out in our absence. During this time the hearing went on with two or three people who didn't take part in our demonstration. But they went on for two years in our absence.

Sinan Kukul: Metris was the only place where our stand wasn't taken up, we were split. A part of the group, the majority in fact, wore the clothing. That was 1985. We went on hunger strike and four of our friends died. After that there was considerable discussion on whether or not to wear the standard uniform, this went on

for a long time. As well as our case (Dev-Sol) there was another, the TIKB case in which the accused were refusing to wear the standard uniform. In the end they wore the standard uniform as did the prisoners in Metris. It was only because we didn't budge from our position that the government stepped back. And later they took the standard uniforms off.

**Del.** What sort of people are the accused in the Dev-Sol proceedings. You have been authorised to give statements and therefore we would like your opinion on the Kurdish question and Kurd.

**D.Karatas:** Actually I'm not the only one who gives statements. There are other friends who can. You chose me, I came because you asked me. Every other friend could make the same statement. I am myself of Kurdish origin, therefore a Kurd. In Turkey there is the Kurdish question. In our view Turkey is a country with two nations, the Kurdish and the Turkish peoples. The Kurds have been robbed of all their national rights. We say that the Kurds must determine the future of their own nation. Nowadays it is forbidden to use the word Kurd. In Turkey to say that there are Kurds means separatism, thus committing a crime. But the reality is that there are 6-7 million Kurds living in Turkey and these people have been robbed of all national rights, they can't use their own language or enjoy their own culture, they have no rights at all. To be more exact they are denied everything that makes them a nation. In this sense the question is of the struggle of the Kurdish people. So as not to lead to any misunderstanding, we are not Kurdish nationalists. We are Marxist-Leninists and advocate a class struggle which doesn't exclude a national struggle instead of a separate struggle for self determination for the Turkish and Kurdish peoples. You see the basic goal for the Turkish and Kurdish peoples is the overthrow of the existing oligarchy and fascism. We say there must be a single organisation for both peoples, not according to nation but according to class. But that doesn't mean we don't support the Kurdish movement. We criticise the PKK and occasionally their campaigns but overall we support it as a Kurdish patriotic movement. Even though it includes nationalistic elements it represents a force against imperialism and against the oligarchy. They fight these and we support

them. In Turkey there is the Kurdish question and this is well known in the cities of Europe. Even in Turkey today different opinions on this question are being printed in the bourgeois press. In a way the bourgeoisie can't avoid the mentioning of the word Kurd and the existence of the Kurdish people. There have even been hundreds of court cases due to the mentioning of the Kurdish people and the demand for their right to self determination, but we believe that after a while the cases will be stopped de facto.

**Del.** There's a lot to discuss there. We also support the Kurdish independence movement but at the same time criticise the PKK.

**D.Karatas:** I'd like to point out a fact here. There are many organisations in Europe which demand independence for Kurdistan. But most of them don't exist in Kurdistan. The PKK does. The PKK is fighting, albeit with mistakes and inadequacies, and we respect and support that. They have had hundreds of casualties. The other groups only exist in exile. That's why the PKK is the main group.

**S.Kukul:** The PKK makes mistakes. We criticise them and refuse their organisational form, that is organising on a national basis because it is our opinion that the freedom of the Turkish and Kurdish peoples can only be achieved by means of a unified struggle. That's the way to achieve self determination for the Kurdish people. Separated liberation is not possible.

**Del.** In the FRG the revisionist-reformist orientated left groups end their discussions with the question-are you for or against the PKK- thus strangling further discussion. What we want to say is that the PKK must be supported despite all the points we could criticise them they are leading the struggle for independence and because they are active in Kurdistan at the moment.

**D.Karatas:** We approximately agree with that. You can still discuss in what respect they have been successful or unsuccessful. This movement can change or even correct itself. This depends on the power relationships in the world, at least that's how they see it.

Our opinion is that at the moment it is not possible for the PKK to achieve an independent Kurdistan alone and with this platform. On this point I think we agree. It goes without saying that the revisionists in Turkey will stand against the PKK. Status-quo-thinking pre-



dominates in the history of the left of Turkey. The tradition of fight historical doesn't exist within the left, it is very weak Reformism predominates. That could first be changed in 1971.

That's why the what we call reformist and revisionist left turned against all armed action, except for that of the ruling forces. They tried to prevent it because it would upset their reformist existence upset their work. That's why the reformist left is against all radical action, and they even back it up with a theory. They have already attacked the armed struggle with such words as; "They are CIA agents, counter revolutionaries and agent provocateurs." It was like that in 1971, also 1975-80. Nothing has changed. but in history of Turkey the tradition of revolution is very weak, reformism very strong. that is the root of this problem lies in the fact that the tradition of revolt in history of Turkey and in the masses is very weak or doesn't even exist. It is here that reformism finds its material basis. Reformist ideology can be understood in this way. It therefore natural that the groups in exile will call the PKK "counter-revolutionary" because they have never lead a struggle in Kurdistan and will never be able to.

They say that every armed action in Kurdistan is a provocation which will lead to genocide.

Del.: Am I correct in saying that the difference between you and the other groups has nothing to do with the names PKK or Dev-Sol but basically with armed struggle which the others turn down.

D.Karatas: Yes, that's it. That was what I wanted to say. It is not the opposition to PKK or Dev-Sol but to armed struggle. Your definition is right.

S.Kukul: It's a thing which threatens them. There is a balance within the system and they have a part to play in it. When this role is endangered by an armed struggle their existence becomes endangered and the right reacts. That's the reason for their opposition.

D.Karatas: They worry about the status-quo, they don't want it upset.

S.Kukul: We'd like to ask a question if we may. How do you know Devrimci Sol?

Del.: Dev-Sol first came to light in the FRG with the occupation of the consulate in Cologne. Before that no one had heard of an organisation called Dev-Sol. That's when they first got publicity. Thereafter they were represented in the W.German press, the bourgeois press, as terrorists because they used weapons.

It made the W.German revolutionaries job very difficult working against this because the revolutionary movement in W.Germany is itself weak and small. Our problem, the W.Germans, is that organisations such as the Greens have worked and still are with organisations in Turkey such as Dev-Yol. Therefore something is known about Dev-Yol but people still don't know anything about Dev-Sol. The papers still make mistakes such as writing Dev-Yol instead of Dev-Sol. They show Dev-Sol as a terrorist movement.

D.Karatas: If terrorism means undertaking armed struggle against the ruling classes then we are terrorists. If terrorism means taking up armed resistance against the fascists who attack all parts of the working population, protecting the masses, freeing their lives from fascist occupation, expelling the fascists then we are terrorists. Furthermore if Ho Chi Minh is a terrorist, the supporters of the FSLN in Nicaragua are terrorists then we are too, right.

Del.: It is in the interest of the ruling classes in the Federal republic to keep us in the dark about what is happening in Turkey because they want Turkey to do what they and the other E.C. countries say. 4 million people from Turkey live and work in the FRG. they also want to know. But people know more about e.g. Nicaragua than do about Turkey.

D.Karatas: We are very grateful that you came. The judges are coming.



**Dursun Karatas speaks to the members of the delegation**

