

The Workers of Yeni Celtek

The Mass-Trial of Turkish Mineworkers
and the events leading up to it

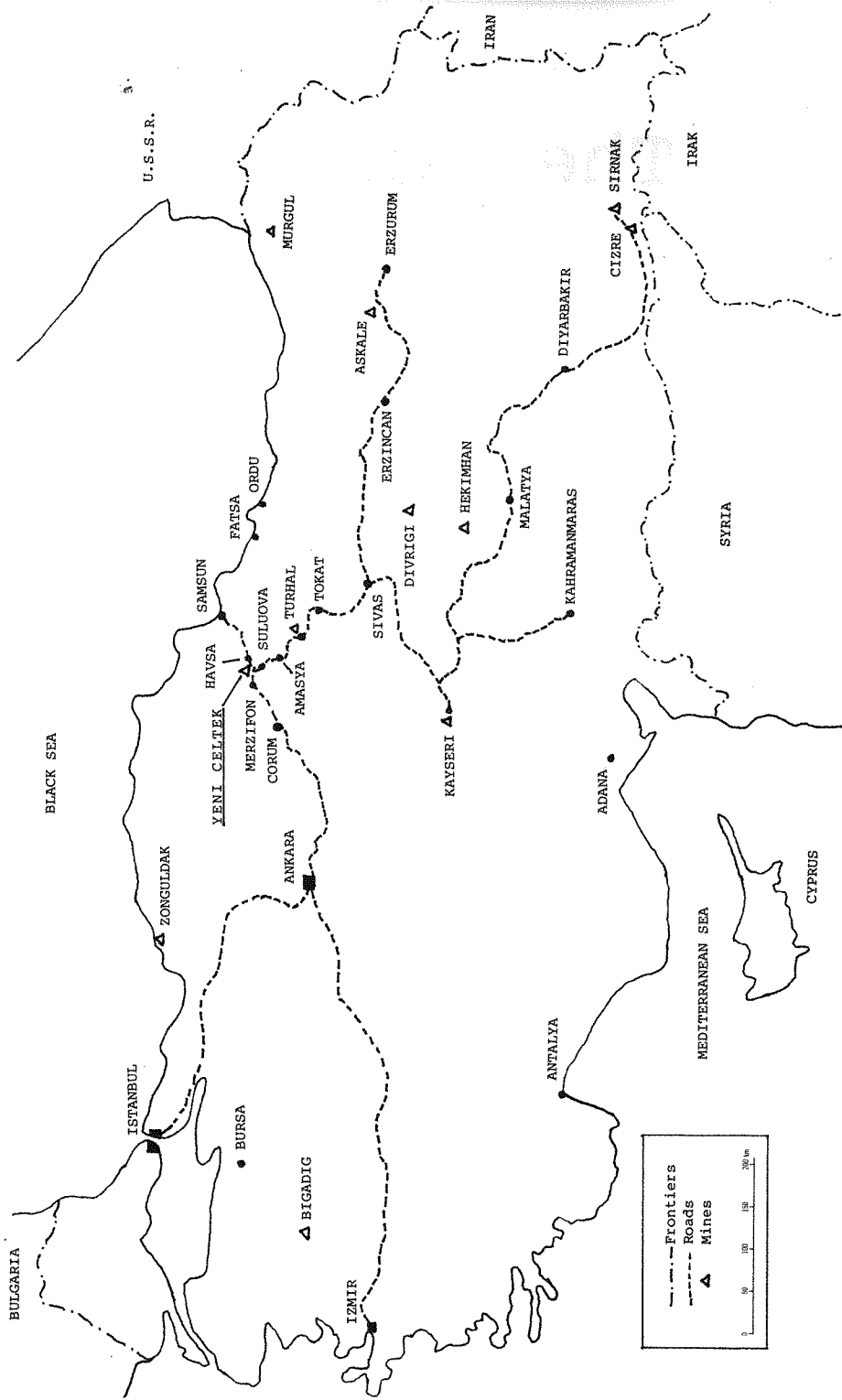


The Workers of Yeni Celtek

The Mass-Trial of Turkish Mineworkers
and the events leading up to it

This brochure is published by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft
Türkei-Flüchtlinge (Working Group Refugees from Turkey)
based in Basle.

The contents have been compiled from interviews with a
leader of the Turkish mineworkers' union Yeralti Maden-
Is, living in exile and a member of a progressive
Turkish organisation who was directly involved in the
events described in the brochure.



YENI CELTEK: THE IMPORTANCE AND GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF THE MINE

Yeni Celtek is a small town in Northern Turkey in the region of Amasya where a coal mine of the same name is situated. In 1975 the miners' union Yeralti Maden-Is was founded in this mine.

The mine lies on an important cross-roads, that of the road from Ankara to Samsun, a town on the Black Sea, and the one to South Anatolia. Yeni Celtek is 330 km. east of Ankara and 85 km. south of Samsun.

980 miners worked in the mine. The state-controlled coal board, Türkiye Kömür İşletmeleri (TKİ), holds the majority of the shares in the mine, the rest being in private hands.

The mine is the biggest enterprise in the region, the most important others being a sugar factory which employs 300 workers, some smaller mines, 3 mills and a few small metal manufacturing works. The majority of the population, however, work in agriculture and live in small villages. Most of them are small farmers. The main local crops are sugar-beet and cereals apart from which cattle and sheep rearing is the main farming activity.

THE SITUATION BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF YERALTI MADEN-IS

Until Yeralti Maden-Is was set up in 1975 there was no progressive trade union which represented the interests of mineworkers in Turkey. The workers at Yeni Celtek and the other Turkish mines were members of the union Cevher-Is which was affiliated to the Türk-Is federation.

The workers labelled Cevher-Is the "Gangster Union", because it in no way represented their genuine interests and collaborated with the employers and fascist forces

in Turkey. Cevher-Is always appointed as union officials those workers who were proposed by the fascist party of Alparslan Türkeş, the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP), but never those who opposed the MHP. The union was therefore fully controlled by Türkeş's party (the "Grey Wolves" are the para-military organisation of this party). The union officials operated a black market through which they sold coal for their own profit and also obtained jobs for the unemployed in return for bribes.

Cevher-Is in no way supported even the most basic of the workers' demands. Whenever miners insisted on their rights, Cevher-Is claimed that it was the communists who were stirring up all the trouble. Furthermore, the union spread propaganda that strikes, militancy, and wage claims only weakened the Turkish economy.

Wages were very low and working conditions extremely bad. Cevher-Is did precious little to improve this situation. Wages were so low that the workers barely managed to break even. Most of them were under 35 as the miners very quickly became ill in the prevailing working conditions and moreover were often made redundant before the official retirement age. Only when a miner had worked for 30 years did he have the right to a redundancy payment from his employer and a regular pension from the state. Those who were made redundant before they had worked for 30 years received neither and had to get by without social security.

The installations in the mine were very primitive, and little or no heed was paid to safety measures - even the safety regulations laid down by law were not followed. These stipulated, for example, that the miners should undergo a medical check-up twice a year. This however was not the case, since the trade union never insisted on the matter. The employers were also obliged by law to ensure that the presence of poisonous gases in the pit was regularly monitored. This also was never done, and, as a result, Turkey stood at the top of the international statistics for deaths by gas

poisoning in mines. Many of the workers died, and 70% suffered from silicosis (accumulation of coal dust in the lungs).

On several occasions before 1975 the miners organised spontaneous strikes in order to demand their rights. Cevher-Is however opposed them every time and collaborated with the management and police to break the strike. During one of these conflicts between workers and police, two miners were killed (Satilnis TEPE and Mehmet CAVDAR).

The behaviour of the union aroused hatred and indignation amongst the workers. The management exploited this situation by playing the miners off against the union. Because Cevher-Is did not stand up for their demands, the mineworkers' anger was often turned against the union, rather than against the management, and on several occasions stones were thrown through the windows of the union's offices.

By 1975 the dissatisfaction of the miners of Yeni Celtek had reached a climax.

THE FOUNDATION OF YERALTI MADEN-IS

Yeralti Maden-Is was founded by a mining engineer, Cetin UYGUR, and some of the miners from Yeni Celtek. For the first time, Turkish miners were represented by a progressive trade union. An important fact which contributed to its founding in this particular mine was that Cetin Uygur had many friends and colleagues in the region. Within a short period the majority of the workers had joined Yeralti Maden-Is.

The management of the mine did not however recognise the newly formed union, and did all it could to prevent its further development. From the very beginning Cevher-Is also opposed Yeralti Maden-Is, as did the right-wing and fascist forces of the region.

THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL STRIKE

Early in 1976 the time came for the regular two-yearly collective bargaining negotiations. The management refused to accept the new union as the miners' spokesman. The wage increases and improvements in social rights and safety precautions the management offered were totally insufficient.

As a result Yeralti Maden-Is drew up a list of demands the most basic of which were rejected by the employers. The latter hoped that, by rejecting these demands, they could force the newly formed union to take strike action. This they believed would fatally weaken the fledgling Yeralti Maden-Is.

Yeralti Maden-Is called the miners out on strike. It lasted 23 days. During the strike the workers travelled around the whole region, spoke with the farmers and other inhabitants and explained to them the reasons behind the strike and what they were aiming to achieve. As a result the miners won the support of a large part of the local population.

The employers were obliged by the strike to recognise Yeralti Maden-Is and to negotiate. This resulted in the signing of the first agreement signed by the new union. This agreement was one of the best in Turkey that year. When they saw the successful result of the negotiations, the remaining 150-200 miners left Cevher-Is and joined the new union. Thus Cevher-Is lost all its influence in the mine.

The strike and agreement came to be looked upon by the workers in all the other Turkish mines as a model to be followed.

INCREASED REGIONAL ACTIVITY AND GROWING REPRESSION AGAINST YERALTI MADEN-IS

After this success Yeralti Maden-Is gained further influence in the region, and the links with the local population were strengthened. The miners explained what they had achieved through their strike and what their aims were.

They went to the agricultural workers and small farmers who cultivated the sugar-beet for the local factory and cereals for the mills. Inspired by the miners they formed agricultural cooperatives. They also visited the mills and sugar factory where, as a result, the workers founded their own union. The miners in most of the smaller pits decided to join Yeralti Maden-Is. They set up associations together with the local inhabitants and began to organise progressive cultural and educational activities in the local community centres.

In this way a very close relationship developed between the miners and the rest of the population.

This regional mobilisation caused the authorities, management, Cevher-Is and "Grey Wolves" great anxiety. The strategically important position of the mine only increased their fears. In addition reactionary circles in Turkey feared that Yeralti Maden-Is might extend its influence to other mines - all the more dangerous considering that mining is one of the most vital sectors of the Turkish economy.

Through the foundation of the new union, Cevher-Is lost not only its influence in Yeni Celtek, but also its membership dues, the management's bribes and its profits from the black market.

It was therefore not long before the management, Cevher-Is and the "Grey Wolves" stepped up their repression against the miners. They organised several armed attacks against them and towards the end of 1976 Yeralti Maden-Is lost its first member: Ramazan SEVINDIK, killed by members of Cevher-Is during a major assault on the mine.

When the local population heard of this attack, many of them immediately came and surrounded the mine. Their intervention contributed very decisively towards ensuring that the "gangster unionists" vanished as quickly as possible.

It was clear to the miners that it was not sufficient just to campaign for economic and democratic rights. They realised that it was also necessary to ward off, together with the local population, the attacks of the "grey wolves" and Cevher-Is, and to combat the fascists' influence in the region. They also received support from many young people who were also the victims of attacks by the "grey wolves". The miners also supported workers from other sectors in their struggles.

Thus the miners truly succeeded in "leaping over the walls surrounding the mine and merging with the local population".

As a result, the "Gangster Union" decided to resort to other methods: they attempted to personally attack officials and the most active members of Yeralti Maden-Is. Early in 1977 they hired an assassin. As Cetin Uygur, the president of the miners' union, was sitting in his flat, talking with two colleagues, the assassin opened fire through the window. Cetin Uygur was hit in the face by a bullet, and was seriously wounded, as were both his colleagues.

THE EXPANSION OF YERALTI MADEN-IS TO OTHER TURKISH MINES

The news of the successful strike in Yeni Celtek spread throughout the other Turkish mines. Representatives of Yeralti Maden-Is also travelled from Yeni Celtek to other mines and explained what they had achieved. As a result, many of these miners began to set up branches of the new union. Particularly in 1977 Yeralti Maden-Is underwent a considerable expansion.

The first mines in which a strong movement of militancy developed similar to that in Yeni Celtek were the coal mine at Askale and the iron-ore mine at Hekimhan.

The Askale region was one in which the reactionary and fascist forces were particularly well established. Yeralti Maden-Is nevertheless succeeded in gaining a foothold in the mine. After a three month strike the new union managed to push through its demands in its first negotiated agreement in Askale. Three months later the state-controlled management decided to close the mine. The workers occupied the pit and continued to produce coal for seven months. In the end the management was forced to officially reopen the mine.

In Hekimhan the miners had to strike for 16 months before Yeralti Maden-Is was recognised and their demands were accepted. Both in Askale and in Hekimhan the workers were able to mobilise the support of the local inhabitants and ward off together the attacks of the fascists.

Between 1977 and 1979 the workers from the following mines also joined Yeralti Maden-Is: Cizre-Sirnak (coal), Divrigi (iron ore), Murgul (copper), Turhal (antimony), Kayseri (chromium), Zonguldak (coal) and Bigadig (coal).

THE INTERVENTION BY US EMBASSY OFFICIALS

By 1978, after the first wave of strikes, the American Embassy in Turkey had become aware of the new mine-workers' union. The rapid expansion of Yeralti Maden-Is worried not only the Turkish coal board, TKI, but also the Americans who possessed a monopoly of the production of chromium, borax and antimony in Turkey.

The First Secretary of the American Embassy and another official, Alexander George Peck, carried out an investigation in the Yeni Celtek area, as they knew that the miners of Yeni Celtek were the driving force behind Yeralti Maden-Is.

They asked the miners and farmers why they had joined or supported the new union and what its aims were. Often after they had left a town or village fascist attacks followed shortly afterwards. Just after they departed from Tasova the public prosecutor, who was well known for his democratic opinions, was murdered by "grey wolves".

Yeralti Maden-Is protested against the activities of the Americans and several members of parliament also intervened. The scandal was widely reported in the press and the two Embassy officials were finally declared personae non gratae by the Turkish government.

Alexander George Peck was transferred in 1978 to Afghanistan - there can be little doubt that he was an agent of the American secret service, the CIA.

THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF YERALTI MADEN-IS

Yeralti Maden-Is was organised according to the shop steward system. Every 20 workers elected a shop steward, and the stewards formed the "Konsey Temsilciler Meclisi". This council in turn elected 10 delegates who represented the workers at important internal discussions at the union's central office in Ankara.

In addition there existed a works committee consisting of three miners who were elected by the entire workforce, and three representatives of the management. It was this committee which negotiated working conditions, the recruitment of new workers, redundancy notices, safety measures, pensions etc. It was vital for the union to participate in the choice of new workers, as only in this way could they prevent the management from introducing fascists into the mine. The miners and the management had therefore equal voting rights on the committee the president of which changed for each session and did not have more voting rights than the other members.

When the works committee failed to reach an agreement, a second committee in Ankara took the matter up. This was made up of three union delegates and three representatives from the State Coal Board. If these negotiations also collapsed the workers had the right to strike.

The central office of Yeralti Maden-Is was in Ankara where about 20 permanent officials worked. They did not receive wages as such, but only their rent and food costs and other expenses. They lived collectively in a house in a workers' area and were constantly in close contact with the other inhabitants. They often travelled in the mining regions where they had very friendly and close relationships with the workers and always found accommodation for the night with miner families.

1978: THE SECOND STRIKE

1978 was the year in which a new collective agreement was to be signed with the management. For the first time, the workers of Yeni Celtek prepared a whole list of demands in advance. From the very beginning the employers refused however to negotiate with the new union.

They had not forgotten the agreement of 1976 or the workers' militancy and wanted to prevent a second success by the union. In addition, the managements of the other mines did all they could to put the employers at Yeni Celtek under pressure. They wanted to ensure that no agreement was signed which could provide the other miners with a second model agreement to emulate. They were particularly vexed by the works committees.

Confronted by the management's obstinacy, the miners went out on strike. The strike lasted two months. This time, already before stopping work, the miners had mobilised the solidarity of the local population. They had explained their situation to the farmers, the

small tradesmen, the workers in the other regional factories and made clear to them what a successful outcome to the strike would mean for the region.

The employers attempted to break the strike in every possible way. There were constant attacks, searches and threats, directed not just against the miners but also their families and relations. The police claimed that the miners had arms depôts and tried to arrest some of the workers. The management also wanted to arrange for the strike to be declared illegal by the state authorities, but were unsuccessful.

After the strike had lasted two months, the employers were obliged to accept the economic and other demands of the miners. These included considerable wage increases, improvements in the workers' social rights and the safety measures in the mine.

For example it ceased to be necessary to have worked 30 years in the mine to qualify for a redundancy payment and a regular pension. The redundancy payment was also increased by 50%. Another clause of the agreement stated that each miner should receive 3 tons of coal per year from the management free of charge. Up to this stage they had been obliged to buy their coal from dealers. In addition the mine had to supply the union with 10 tons of coal per day. This coal was distributed by Yeralti Maden-Is to democratic and union organisations, as well as to poor families. A further demand that was accepted was that underground workers should be entitled to early retirement with full pension. For the first time the workers also succeeded in pushing their demand through that in contrast to other regions of Turkey the 1st May be recognised in Yeni Celtek as "Workers' Day".

This agreement represented the most positive and far-reaching deal obtained by a union throughout Turkey that year.

YENI CELTEK: PLAGUE OF THE FASCISTS

The immediate effect of this second successful agreement and the rapid expansion of Yeralti Maden-Is was to provoke greatly increased activity by the reactionary and fascist forces of the region.

When the National Front government under Demirel returned to power in 1979, a meeting was organised in the Yeni Celtek region. Amongst the participants was Alparslan Türkeş, chairman of the fascist MHP party and at that time also Vice Prime Minister and Minister of State. Ali Sefci Erek from the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Governor of Amasya province and the MHP candidate for Amasya, Saraçoğlu, also took part.

They decided to take whatever steps were necessary to prevent Yeralti Maden-Is from extending its influence in the region. The militant struggle of the miners had to be broken. The attacks were therefore stepped up.

1980: THE COLLAPSE OF THE THIRD COLLECTIVE NEGOTIATIONS

Early in 1980 new collective negotiations were due. The miners had prepared their demands which were however not accepted by the management. In March 1980 an Arbitration Commission appointed by the courts was therefore called in.

As the negotiations had advanced to the point where it was clear that the commission was about to decide in favour of the miners, the employers' representatives walked out of the commission's chambers and broke off the talks.

According to Turkish law, workers had the right to strike when employers abandoned negotiations after the arbitration commission had been called in.

In April 1980 Yeralti Maden-Is therefore called the miners out on strike.

THE CLOSURE OF THE MINE AND ITS OCCUPATION BY THE MINERS

The management reacted to the strike call by suddenly declaring that the coal reserves at Yeni Celtek were exhausted and that the mine was moreover running at a loss. For these reasons they ordered its closure.

The decision to close the mine was illegal. Turkish law stated that a factory could not be closed down during a strike. Neither of the official reasons for the closure corresponded with the facts. The mine's administration and the state authorities knew only too well that the mine was not running at a loss. It was moreover a well known fact that coal was delivered to the local sugar factory for half the normal price. This was because one of the biggest private shareholders of the Yeni Celtek mine also owned a large proportion of the shares in the sugar factory.

The closure of the mine would spell catastrophe for the local population, the mine being the biggest regional employer - not only because the livelihood of the 980 miners depended on it, but also because many local factories, such as the sugar mill, relied on coal supplies from Yeni Celtek.

The miners also knew that if they did not perform the necessary maintenance work in the pit, it would soon be impossible to resume work. Water and explosive gases would collect in the galleries and the props would collapse for want of renewal.

The miners therefore occupied the mine early in May 1980. They carried out the necessary maintenance and continued to produce coal, controlling the production themselves.

The employers then asked the governor of Amasya to enforce the closure of the mine. He travelled to Yeni Celtek and spoke with the miners who explained to him that the strike was legal.

After these discussions he officially announced that he could do nothing as the strike was entirely lawful. He therefore called on the Employment Minister to set up a commission to decide on the matter. On 1 July the commission carried out an investigation in the Yeni Celtek region, interviewing the arbitration court, the union and the management. It also came to the conclusion that the strike was legal. Both the Minister for Home Affairs and the Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, knew this, yet they tried repeatedly to prove the contrary.

The state authorities were not prepared to accept the findings of this commission and therefore formed a second one, simply letting the report of the first commission disappear without trace. The second commission however confirmed on 8 July the decision of the first.

Also at this time Demirel announced to the press that a military "Point Operation" was being planned for the region Fatsa and Suluova. He also explained that this operation would be extended to include the Yeni Celtek region, since, according to him, the miners were responsible for "all the anarchy" in that part of Turkey. The present head of the junta, General Evren, played a leading role in the organisation of this military action. When he travelled to Fatsa to prepare it he also passed through Yeni Celtek where he had the chance to see the miners on strike. He also saw that there were numerous farmers from the region who had taken up position in front of the entrance to the mine. Once back in Ankara he announced that his "operation" would deal with the Yeni Celtek problem once and for all.

The operation was carried out in Fatsa and Suluova according to plan. Fatsa is a town on the Black Sea with about 30'000 inhabitants which was organised at that time according to the principle of self-government. Through 11 district committees all administrative problems were dealt with in accordance with the real needs of the population.

On 9th July 1980 the army marched into Fatsa and arrested 400 citizens of the town. Their houses had first been indicated to the soldiers by masked fascists. *

Through the intervention of eight democratically minded members of the second above-mentioned commission, however, it was possible to prevent the operation from being extended to Yeni Celtek.

During the strike and the occupation there were constant attacks launched by military, police and fascists, against the mine, the neighbouring villages and the families of the workers. These attacks were however successfully repelled. A permanent guard was organised around the mine, manned by miners in rotation, as well as by farmers, youths, teachers, civil servants and the workers from the local factories.

It was also essential to ensure that the areas in which the progressive members of the population lived were well protected. A large proportion of the local inhabitants were on the alert day and night to keep a close check on all movements and watch out for suspicious persons who might be planning an attack or provocation.

CONTINUED PRODUCTION AND SALE OF THE COAL BY THE MINERS

From the beginning of May to early in June the miners continued to produce coal. All the workers and engineers participated in the production, with only the management, the administrative and security staff (together about 45 persons) not taking part.

* At the moment a mass trial is being held in Turkey, in which the mayor of Fatsa, many members of these district committees and of other progressive associations are being prosecuted. The Turkish junta is demanding 258 death penalties in this trial.



"We produce coal and organise the work ourselves"

Photo:

"Fascism means poverty, constant inflation, unemployment, repression and torture."

Mahmut Yildirim

The miners did not go into the management's offices as they had little notion of complicated administrative work. In two notebooks they however kept a detailed record of the daily coal production and the wages they were entitled to.

To begin with the coal was sold in the immediate neighbourhood. In particular the farmers from the nearby villages bought coal in order to cover their winter needs. The coal was sold for 2000 Turkish Lira, instead of for 3000 TL as before. Payments were always made in cash, as it was necessary to cover the workers' wages. The miners also wanted to prove that the mine did not run at a loss. The coal was offered to the local factories for the same price (2000 TL) paid in cash. The sugar factory, which had earlier received supplies for 1500 TL/tonne, was however not prepared to accept the new price.

The coal was also sold in the nearby cities - first of all in Amasya, and then later further afield in towns such as Ordu, Samsun, Corum and Toket. The miners made contact with democratic associations (Töb-Der, teachers' association; Tüm-Der, civil servants' association etc.) and other trade unions which then organised the distribution of coal to their members. Needy families received coal free of charge.

The coal could obviously not be transported by the state railways. The farmers from the immediate neighbourhood fetched it themselves with their tractors and trailers. For transport further afield the mine's own lorries were used, as well as those of the local transport cooperative and of the village cooperatives in return for cash payment. While the bigger local merchants were naturally opposed to the strike, many smaller tradesmen sympathised with the miners' struggle and participated in the distribution of the coal.

Throughout the strike the regional population showed very strong solidarity towards the miners. Farmers brought sheep, milk and vegetables while small shop-

keepers and tradesmen delivered food. Democratic associations and the workforces of other factories supported the miners financially.

The struggle of the Yeni Celtek miners became a symbol for all democratic and progressive circles in Turkey. In many cities and regions money was collected and sent to Yeni Celtek. Information meetings were organised in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and other large cities. In Germany, England and France solidarity meetings and concerts were held and money for the miners collected.

During the occupation the workers also discovered several scandals. One of the worst was that, after four mines had been officially "closed", members of the management had continued to exploit them, recruiting new miners and pocketing the profits themselves.

Early in June the state coal board began to arrange for the police to stop the lorries transporting coal and to confiscate them. As a result, Yeralti Maden-Is decided to halt the production, but nevertheless to continue the strike and occupation.

After the union had paid the workers' wages and the overheads profits were 50% higher than before. The one month "production-strike" therefore proved that it was possible to run the mine at a profit.

12 SEPTEMBER 1980: THE MILITARY PUTSCH

On 12th September 1980, the army seized power in Turkey.

Already on the 11th, the day before the putsch, tanks were heading for the Yeni Celtek crossroads, travelling down the three roads from Havsa, Suluova and Merzifon. By the evening, they had taken up position around the mine.

On the morning of 12th September the mass-arrests in Yeni Celtek began. Soldiers and policemen encircled the villages, burst into the houses and carried out searches everywhere.



The mass-arrest of members of the local population

They systematically arrested all the miners they could find, and their families, relations and other people from the region at random: women, children, old people; farmers, teachers, small tradesmen, students.

Some of the miners tried to flee to the mountains and hide, but the troops pursued them there also. During these "operations", three miners, Adam ESER, Bayran LAFCI and Turan KOSE were killed. In Turkish police jargon "they were arrested in a state of death."

The "operation" lasted 50 days until the army had caught all the miners. They were brought to a slaughter-house in Suluova. Nobody knew where they were. They were held there between 60 and 180 days depending on how long each worker resisted interrogation. * Neither the examining magistrate, nor the state prosecutor, nor the prisoner's own lawyer had the right to get in touch with the prisoners during this period.

Day after day they were tortured in the slaughter-house. The military wanted them to say where the other miners were hiding and force them into signing confessions which would condemn themselves and their colleagues.

The other people of the region were also constantly arrested, brought to the military barracks or police station, questioned, released, arrested and interrogated once again. They also were tortured repeatedly, irrespective of their age or sex. They were likewise expected to betray where the last hidden workers were and give evidence against them.

On 16th September, the legal adviser of Yeralti Maden-Is, Emin Yüksel, travelled from Ankara to Suluova in order to represent the arrested miners, but he was also arrested.

* This was illegal, even according to the junta's own laws. The legal limit for this "police custody", which before the putsch was 4 days, has been progressively increased, first to 15, then to 30 and finally to 90 days. This period is in reality used for interrogation, and is thus also that of the worst torture.

THE TORTURE

Both physical and psychological torture methods were used against those arrested.

One of the methods most frequently employed was torture by electric shocks. Electrodes were fixed to the sexual organs, mouth, tongue, and ears and to the breasts of the women. The effects of the shocks were often increased by wrapping the prisoners in wet blankets.

Cigarettes were stubbed out on different parts of their bodies. The prisoners were struck with sticks, especially on the hands, feet and soles of the feet. Hot boiled eggs were inserted under their arms which were pressed together against their bodies. The prisoners, their heads shaved, were strapped to chairs for days or even weeks on end, while a drop of water repeatedly fell on the same part of the head.

They were hung up like cattle on the hooks in the slaughter-house by the tendons or arms. In some cases their tendons tore.

Many of the prisoners are today partially paralysed as a result of these tortures. Several of them can no longer move their arms and legs or have suffered other very serious injuries.

Psychological methods were also highly developed and used against many.

Prisoners were often taken into the mountains of the region where from a distance of several metres they could see some of their colleagues lying motionless, blindfolded and bloodstained on the ground. They were told that their colleagues had been shot because they had refused to sign confessions incriminating other workers. In reality those on the ground were alive, and the whole thing was simulated in order to put pressure on the prisoners.

Pseudo-hangings were also enacted. A prisoner would be fetched from his cell and told that he had only one more hour to live. If he wished he could write a last letter to his family. A priest, the Imam, was then brought in and said a last prayer for the condemned man. A rope was fetched and the prisoner forced to stand on a chair. As the noose was laid around his neck, the guards asked him his last wish. Finally the chair was kicked from under him. Since the rope had however been specially prepared in advance, the prisoner fell to the ground with the rope around his neck. The guards told him that it had snapped. "Tomorrow we'll try to hang you once again", they said.

Another method was to lead a prisoner into a high building and then to guide him blindfolded to an open window. He was told that if he did not sign the confession demanded from him he would be pushed out of the window. If he refused, he was thrown out, only to fall one or two metres, the window being in fact on the ground floor. He was then told that next time he would be thrown out of a window on a higher storey.

The military was particularly severe towards Cetin Uygur, President of Yeralti Maden-Is. He faced prosecution not only in connection with the events at Yeni Celtek, but also because he was a member of the progressive trade union DISK, as well as the left-wing organisation Devrimci Yol. As a result, he was transferred every two months from one prison to another (Istanbul, Erzincan, Amasya etc) and tortured at each of them.

He was held in custody for about a year. His fingers and ribs were broken, one of his kidneys was seriously damaged. In his case the death sentence has been demanded by the Junta both in the Yeni Celtek and the DISK trials, while he faces 20 years imprisonment for his membership in Devrimci Yol.

The prisoners were transferred from the slaughter-house to military prisons once they had signed the confessions which the military prosecutor needed for the trial.

This phase was over after 180 days. They have remained in military prisons to this day. They are marginally better off than in the slaughter-house, but still get tortured and beaten whenever the army want additional confessions or when they protest against conditions in the prisons.

THE TRIAL

Of all those from the Yeni Celtek region who had been arrested and interrogated 689 are now on trial. The accused are made up of 510 mineworkers, 105 farmers, 43 small tradesmen, 18 teachers, 9 students, 3 engineers and 1 lawyer. 427 of them are aged under 36 and the eldest is 62.

Prison sentences ranging from 5 to 15 years are being demanded for the majority. 73 face the death penalty - among them the President of Yeralti Maden-Is, Cetin Uygur, and the Vice-President, Osman Fahriskanli, who was also a worker at Yeni Celtek.

The Junta has always maintained that the "anarchy" in Turkey is the work of terrorists. In this trial, however, a large number of workers are charged - a fact which proves that the Junta is clearly pursuing totally different objectives from just eliminating a few terrorists.

The trial is being held before a military tribunal in the army barracks:

15. Er egitim tugayl
22. piyade Alayi
Durusma Salonu
Amasya

in the military district of the Third Army whose headquarters are at Erzincan. The two military prosecutors responsible are Adil Kucukay and Gurkan Gursoy. The military prosecutor from Erzincan has prepared a 352-page indictment which has even been published as a book.

The death sentences have been demanded on the basis of paragraph 146/1 of the Turkish penal code. The wording of this paragraph was taken directly from the Italian penal code of Mussolini.

Here are a few quotations from the indictment:

"With the aim of altering, overthrowing or violently dismantling the Turkish Constitution, the carrying out of an ideological occupation of the brown coal mine at Yeni Celtek, the seizure of the place and means of production in the name of the organisation and operation of the mine - in this way presenting the cause of the closure."

"Foundation of an Association with the aim of establishing the tyranny of one social class over another, the running of or adherence to such an association."

"In the face of searches carried out by the Government, providing a hiding-place for culprits or assisting them. The failure to give information as to the whereabouts of wanted persons under warrant of arrest."

"Violence against persons, collective non-cooperation, revolt against the Government, collective resistance in that more than 5 persons gathered together."

In the introduction to the indictment can be read:

"The biggest action carried out at Yeni Celtek is the following: illegal occupation after the plant had been closed, occupation of the means of production, socialisation of production in the name of the organisation and illegal resistance."

Thus the military prosecutors now declare the strike of 1980 to have been illegal and even a breach of the constitution. They have evidently forgotten that, at the time it took place, it was pronounced to be perfectly legal by all official commissions and by the responsible arbitration court.

The first court hearing took place on 15th April 1982. The 689 accused are represented by 25-30 lawyers. Apart from them no other outside persons are allowed into court, except the closest relatives in a few cases.

At this first hearing, the accused and their lawyers immediately protested against the fact that all the statements and confessions had been extracted from them under torture. As proof they presented medical certificates. The marks and effects of torture were moreover obvious to everyone present. Some of the accused were barely able to walk and showed signs of severe paralysis.

The trial was adjourned in the evening of the same day, 15th April. The next hearing was fixed for 23rd June.

The marks of torture were so plain to everyone that the Junta was obliged to admit that torture had taken place and to announce that steps would be taken against those responsible. This admission was also reported in the press. However it is not known whether any of them have actually been condemned.

The accused were brought back to the military barracks for the period between the two hearings. Many of them were tortured and beaten again. The repression was directed mainly against those who protested against the prison conditions and had attacked in court the torture methods used by the junta.

Of course the military employed methods, particularly psychological ones, which left less visible traces. Members of the families of the accused were brought to the prison and menaced and beaten before their eyes. "If you don't behave differently in the next hearing we'll kill your child..." they were told. Their wives, sisters and daughters were raped by guards in front of them.

Dogs were also let loose into the cells. They had been specially trained to bark loudly and go for the prisoners aggressively without actually biting them.

On 23rd June the accused were once again able to prevent the court from discussing their alleged crimes. They repeated their protests against the methods employed to obtain their confessions. The trial was readjusted in the evening of 23 June and the prisoners were escorted back to the military prisons.

* * *

APPEAL

This is the course of events as far as it is known to us. The trial is continuing and the situation of the prisoners has not improved.

Unlike the DISK and Turkish Peace Council trials which have received some publicity, this mass-trial is virtually unknown outside Turkey. There has therefore been practically no solidarity with the accused so far.

This state of affairs must not continue. The Turkish military junta must not be permitted to carry on the trial under the mantle of secrecy.

We therefore appeal to all to help break the wall of silence surrounding the fate of the mineworkers of Yeni Celtek.

It is most important that a European group of observers is present at the trial itself. In our opinion, representatives from mineworkers' unions from other countries should certainly take part in such a delegation. Lawyers should also investigate the conditions under which the trial is being conducted. In addition, it is essential that doctors also take part in order to examine the state of health of the accused. Finally it goes without saying that a maximum presence of the press at the trial is indispensable.

The Turkish military junta must be made to realise that the European public is following the development of the trial very closely.

Letters and telegrams of protest can be sent to the military court concerned, the Turkish Embassy in your country and to General Evren.

The address of the military court: Sekiyonetim Komutannligi
 Erzincan
 Turkey

The address of General Evren: General Evren
 Ankara
 Turkey

Please send copies of your letters of protest to the address below. This will enable us to build up a picture of the protests throughout Europe.

We appeal to all who are prepared to participate in a solidarity campaign with the miners of Yeni Celtek to get in touch with us.

We would also be very grateful for any information on events in Turkey and the situation of Turkish refugees in Europe.

A further brochure has been published by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft concerning requests by the Turkish junta for the extradition of Turkish refugees, most of them from Germany. Only French and German editions have so far been published:

"Le Droit d'Asile en Danger: Demandes d'Extradition contre des réfugiés turcs"

"Gefahr für das Recht auf Asyl: Auslieferungsbegehren gegen türkische Flüchtlinge"

Copies can be ordered from the address below.

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Türkei-Flüchtlinge
c/o European Cooperative Longo Mai
Postfach
CH-4002 Basel
tel. 061/446619

Copyright: Nicholas Busch, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Türkei-Flüchtlinge, c/o Longo Mai, Postfach, CH-4002 Basel.

