

# Workers' control experiences and discussions in Turkey

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## Abstract

The first examples of workers' control and workers' self-management in Turkey were seen in the 1960s and 1970s, and discussions on this issue intensified in the same years. Workers' control and workers' self-management in Turkey can be followed through two different models: First, workers' control and self-management experiences through factory occupation, and second, new generation cooperatives and communes that can be evaluated within the scope of social and solidarity economy. In this study, first the concept of workers' control and self-management will be explained, and then the experiences and discussions on workers' control and self-management in Turkey will be examined.

**Keywords:** Workers' control; social and solidarity economy; working class struggles in Turkey.

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### Resumen

Los primeros ejemplos de control de los trabajadores y autogestión de los trabajadores en Turquía se vieron en las décadas de 1960 y 1970, y las discusiones sobre este tema se intensificaron en los mismos años. El control de los trabajadores y la autogestión de los trabajadores en Turquía se pueden seguir a través de dos modelos diferentes: Primero, experiencias de control y autogestión de los trabajadores a través de la ocupación de fábricas, y segundo, cooperativas y comunas de nueva generación que pueden evaluarse dentro del ámbito de la economía social y solidaria. En este estudio, primero se explicará el concepto de control y autogestión de los trabajadores, y luego se examinarán las experiencias y discusiones sobre el control y autogestión de los trabajadores en Turquía.

**Palabras clave:** Control obrero; economía social y solidaria; Luchas de la clase obrera en Turquía.

### Resumo

Os primeiros exemplos de controle dos trabalhadores e autogestão dos trabalhadores na Turquia foram vistos nas décadas de 1960 e 1970, e as discussões sobre este tema se intensificaram nos mesmos anos. O controle dos trabalhadores e a autogestão dos trabalhadores na Turquia podem ser seguidos através de dois modelos diferentes: Primeiro, experiências de controle e autogestão dos trabalhadores através da ocupação de fábricas, e segundo, cooperativas e comunas de nova geração que podem ser avaliadas no âmbito da economia social e solidária. Neste estudo, primeiramente o conceito de controle e autogestão dos trabalhadores será explicado, e em seguida serão examinadas as experiências e discussões sobre o controle e autogestão dos trabalhadores na Turquia.

**Palavras-chave:** Controle dos trabalhadores; economia social e solidária; lutas da classe trabalhadora na Turquia.

### Introduction

The history of militant workers' actions in Turkey goes back to the last periods of the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman Empire, since the second half of the 19th century, there have been many strikes and non-strike militant worker actions. Especially during the few months following the 1908 Revolution, there was a massive wave of strikes in almost all sectors. Although the Turkey labor movement sometimes rose relatively, it remained weak both quantitatively and qualitatively until the 1960s. The real rise of the Turkey labor movement took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

While the number of strikes and non-strike worker actions increased in the 1960s and 1970s, the labor movement also became politicized and militant. The first workers' control and workers' self-management experiences in Turkey emerged during this period. Especially between 1968-



71, there was a huge wave of factory occupations in Turkey. Additionally, discussions on workers' control and self-management intensified in this period, due to influence of the both examples of workers' control in practice and the Yugoslav self-management model.

The 1980 military coup crushed the militant working class movement and banned left-wing political parties. In 1983, in the first free elections held under the control of the military regime, a political party with a neoliberal program came to power. The labor movement, which was suppressed and weakened in the eighties, started to rise again in the late 1980s and 1990s. The 1990s were politically chaotic years for Turkey, which witnessed different social movements and struggles such as the Kurdish movement, the political Islamic movement and the reorganized revolutionary left movement. In the same period, there was a significant increase in the actions of public employees and workers. The crisis of capital and the state deepened further with the great earthquake of 1999 and the economic crisis of 2001.

The 2002 elections and the coming to power of the AKP<sup>2</sup> led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were the beginning of a new era. In the 2000s, significant segments of capital and the state united around the neoliberal and conservative AKP. In this process, while privatizations and the neoliberal program were accelerated, the labor movement was tried to be taken under control by de facto banning many important strikes on the grounds of "threat to national security". Despite these conditions, throughout the 2000s, many important strikes were organized and the Gezi Resistance broke out. During and after the Gezi Resistance, the largest popular movement in Turkey's history, many squares were occupied by citizens, many *squats*<sup>3</sup> were experienced, some factories were occupied by workers, and an experience of workers' self-management emerged from these factory occupations. Today in Turkey, the first and only example of transformation into workers' self-management through factory occupation is the Kazova textile factory experience. Additionally, in Turkey, there are also new generation cooperatives and communes that adopt a model based on self-management. These cooperatives and communes, which can be evaluated within the framework of social and solidarity economy, operate according to democratic and egalitarian principles.

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<sup>2</sup> AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party).

<sup>3</sup> *Squat* refers to occupied buildings and residences.



## A. Concepts of workers' control and workers' self-management

The terms workers' participation, workers' control and workers' self-management refer to workers' initiative over the production process. Workers' participation and workers' control means that management is shared between the employer and the workers. The answer to the question of which side has the initiative depends on the struggle. In participation in management and similar models, strategic decisions of the business are generally made by top managers, and workers' influence on these decisions is relatively weak. Workers' control, on the other hand, emphasizes the power of workers, unlike participation in management. In participation in management or workers' control, the ownership of the business belongs to the employer (public or private) and workers are involved in management in certain ways and levels (Cangızbay, 2003; Azzellini, 2017, 2019). However, workers' self-management is different. In workers' self-management, both ownership and management of the enterprise belong to the workers. All decisions regarding business/production are made and implemented by workers (not by an external force such as the boss or the state). In this respect, it differs not only from participation in management and similar models, but also from the "socialist" regimes of the past and the system called self-management in Yugoslavia (Siriani, 1990; Arvon, 1991; Brinton, 1990; Ruggeri, 2018).

Workers' control and workers' self-management can be seen as an alternative to capitalist ownership and labor relations at the enterprise scale or at the macro scale. Capitalist property and labor relations are based on private ownership of the means of production, production of exchange value rather than use value, hierarchical relations and alienation. However, an economic unit based on self-management operates according to democratic and egalitarian principles and prioritizes labor and society, not capital and profit. Then, it can be said that workers' control is only the first step in the transformation of capitalist relations, and workers' self-management is the concrete experiments of relations beyond capitalist relations. In this sense, workers' self-management experiences are practically a critique of capitalism and a search for a new production/society relationship (Cangızbay, 2003; Ness&Azzellini, 2011; Ruggeri, 2018; Azzellini, 2017, 2019).

It is possible to find many examples of workers' control and workers' self-management throughout history and today. For example, the Paris



Commune of 1871 is modern capitalism's first experience of workers' self-management. The councils and committees that emerged in Russia, Britain, Germany, Italy and other countries in the first quarter of the 20th century are also very important experiences (Carr, 1989, 1998; Spriano, 1975; Bookchin, 2018; Ruggeri, 2018). During the civil war in Spain between 1936 and 1939, production based on self-management reached an enormous size, especially in Catalonia (Bookchin, 2014; Casanova, 2015). Yugoslavia and Algeria after World War II, France and Italy in 1968 and 1969, Portugal after the 1974 Carnation Revolution, and Iran in 1979 are among the examples where self-self-management experiences and/or discussions came to the fore (Bayat, 1987; Colin, 2017). For example, in Britain in the 1970s, hundreds of factories were occupied by workers and taken under workers' control, and on the other hand, the Institute for Workers' Control (IWC) was established. Again, for example, in the same years, the LIP watch factory experience turned into a symbol of workers' self-management not only in France but throughout the World (SMA, 1988; Ness&Azzellini, 2011; Danos&Gibelin, 2013; Reid, 2018).

Today, important examples of workers' control and workers' self-management are found in Latin America, especially Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela. In these countries, in the 1990s and 2000s, many enterprises at risk of bankruptcy were taken over by their workers and transformed into workers' self-management (Henriques&Thiollent, 2013; Azzellini, 2017; Novaes, 2024). The 2001 Argentine economic crisis was a turning point. During the 2001 crisis, many factories that went bankrupt in Argentina were taken over by their workers. Interestingly, even though the 2001 crisis ended, similar examples continued to be seen in some other factories in the following years. In Argentina, these factories/businesses are called "empresas recuperadas". The term "empresas recuperadas" refers to factories/enterprises that have been taken over by their workers and continue production because they have gone into bankruptcy and/or have been abandoned by the employer (Ruggeri, 2014, 2017, 2020; Ruggeri&Novaes&Faria, 2014; Ruggeri&Vieta, 2015). These factories/enterprises are converted into a workers' cooperative and operate according to democratic and egalitarian principles. Latin America stands out in terms of producers' self-management, with social movements such as "landless" (MST, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) and "bossless" (ERTs, Empresas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores/as) and



economic units considered within the scope of social and solidarity economy (Yeğin, 2006, 2015; Klein&Lewis, 2007; Şahin&Gökten, 2013; Novaes, 2024). Today, initiatives called "worker democracy", "worker economy", "social and solidarity economy" attract attention and develop in other countries. These experiences and discussions can be seen as a reflection of the search for alternatives to the neoliberal model and capitalist relations (Azzellini, 2016; Vieta, 2020; Şahin, 2021; Ruggeri, 2022; Yi, 2023).

## **B. Workers' control experiences and discussions in Turkey**

The first workers' control and self-management experiences in Turkey were seen in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> The 1960s and 1970s were a period when the labor movement rose, became politicized and militant. This period opened with the 1960 military coup and closed with the 1980 military coup.

The history of workers' actions in Turkey goes back to the last periods of the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman Empire, since the second half of the 19th century, there have been many strikes and non-strike militant worker actions. The first unions, workers' organizations and socialist movements began to be established in the last quarter of the 19th century.<sup>5</sup> While there

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, the first experience of self-management in Turkey was the 1923 typesetters' strike. The reason for the strike was the length of the working day and working conditions. The typesetters published their own newspapers during this strike, which started on September 6, 1923, and ended on September 20, 1923: "Haber" (News) and "Adil" (Fair). Moreover, in the newspapers they published during the typesetters' strike, they mentioned that they had another self-management experience in the previous years. It is estimated that the typesetters' previous experience with self-management occurred in 1900 or 1901. When their demands regarding wages and working conditions were not met, the typesetters went on strike, seized the printing house, and published their own newspaper: "Saadet" (Narin, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> The first important working class organizations/socialist parties were: Revolutionary Hunchakian Party (1887), Ottoman Labor Association (1894), The Federation of Socialist Workers (1909), Ottoman Socialist Party (1910), Communist Party of Turkey (1920). The first working class organizations and socialist parties were composed of Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Jews and other communities, in line with the multinational structure of the Ottoman Empire. For example, the first socialist party in the Ottoman Empire was founded by Armenians (Akin, 2024).



were occasional rises in the labor movement, its level of organization and struggle generally remained low in Turkey until the 1960s.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. Important periods of Turkey history and economic policies**

<b>Important periods in Turkey history</b>	<b>Economic policies</b>
<b>Ottoman Empire period (until the Proclamation of the Republic in 1923)</b>	Liberal
<b>Single Party period (or CHP<sup>7</sup> period, 1923-1950)</b>	Liberal (1920s) and statist (1930s)
<b>Multi-party period (or DP<sup>8</sup> period, 1950-1960)</b>	Liberal
<b>Between two coups (1960-1980)</b>	Import substitution
<b>Neoliberal period (after 1980)</b>	Neoliberal
<b>AKP<sup>9</sup> period (after 2002)</b>	Neoliberal

The main reasons for the weakness of the labor movement were weak industrialization, a large rural population, and state oppression. However, especially in the 1930s, the process of proletarianization accelerated with the industries established by the state. After World War II, the process of proletarianization continued increasingly as a result of industrialization and mechanization in agriculture, and mass migrations from rural areas to urban centers began (Yıldırım, 2010, 2015; Şen&Doğan, 2010). While capitalistization, urbanization and proletarianization continued, Turkey's first democratic elections were held in 1950 and the single-party regime ended.<sup>10</sup> Trade unions began to be established<sup>11</sup> and the acceptance of the right to

<sup>6</sup> The labor movement remained weak from the last century of the Ottoman Empire until the 1960s of the Republic of Turkey. However, short-term increases are observed in some years: during the few months following the 1908 Revolution; between 1919 and 1922, the period of nation-state foundation; and in 1946, when the ban on unions/organizations was lifted.

<sup>7</sup> CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party). CHP is the founding party of the Republic of Turkey and was founded by Turkey's founding leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

<sup>8</sup> DP: Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party). DP is the first political party to come to power through free elections after the declaration of the republic in Turkey.

<sup>9</sup> AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party).

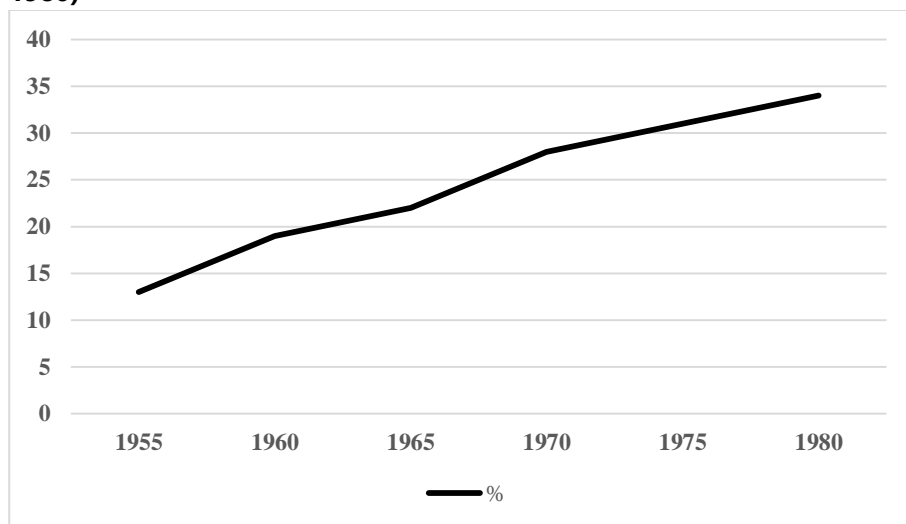
<sup>10</sup> In fact, the first free election was held in 1946, but it was "rigged".

<sup>11</sup> The first trade union confederation was established in 1952: The Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, Türk-İş).



strike began to be discussed.<sup>12</sup> In the 1950s, the number of labor disputes increased and the struggle for the right to strike rose. All these developments paved the way for the strengthening of the labor movement (Koçak, 2008; Çelik, 2010; Koçak, 2015, 2016; Çavdar, 2016; Makal&Çelik&Koçak, 2016).

**Graph 1. The share of wage and salary workers in employment (1955-1980)**



Source: Çelik, 2019.

### ***Between Two Military Coups: 1960-1980***

After the 1960 military coup, the labor movement became stronger than ever before.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the labor movement became militant and politicized. In 1961, The Turkish Workers' Party (TİP, Türkiye İşçi Partisi)

<sup>12</sup> The 1909 Strike Law made it mandatory for labor disputes to be resolved by compromise before a strike and prohibited unionization. In other words, even if the strike was legal on paper, it was made impossible in practice. The 1936 Labor Law banned strikes and the 1938 Associations Law banned unionization. The ban on unionization was lifted in 1946. Strikes remained banned until the 1961 Constitution, which was prepared after the 1960 military coup.

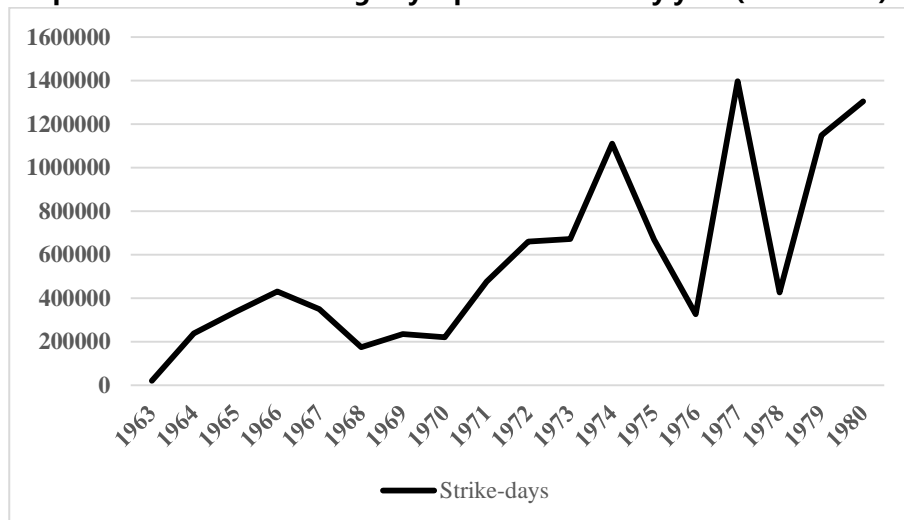
<sup>13</sup> In the 1961 Constitution adopted after the 1960 military coup, fundamental rights and freedoms were comprehensively included and the right to union and strike was recognized. The 1982 Constitution, adopted after the 1980 military coup, restricted fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to union and strike (Çelik, 2019; Turgay, 2023).





was founded by a group of trade unionists. In 1967, a new and militant union confederation, the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK, Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu), was established (Çelik, 2018, 2020).<sup>14</sup> During the same period, the number of unionized workers increased (from 300,000 in 1960 to 1 million in 1980) and the number of both strikes and non-strike actions. For example, while in the 1960s the number of strikers averaged 10,000 per year and working days spent on strike averaged 240,000 per year, in the 1970s the former exceeded 25,000 and the latter reached 911,000. Towards the eighties (before the 1980 military coup), the same figures were 33,000 and 1 million, respectively (Güzel, 1996; Koç, 2010; Çelik, 2019; Turgay, 2023).

**Graph 2: Number of working days spent on strike by year (1963-1980)**



**Source:** Çelik, 2019.

In the sixties and seventies, the working class often turned to non-strike actions. For example, the workers' uprising of 15 and 16 June 1970 was the largest worker protest in the history of Turkey and was carried out against a law passed to neutralize the new and militant trade union confederation DİSK. In the same years, factory occupation action entered the

<sup>14</sup> The Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions' (Türk-İş) approach was "non-partisan policy".



action repertoire of the working class (Aydın, 2012, 2015).<sup>15</sup> Especially between 1968 and 1971, there was a large wave of factory occupations. For three years, workers occupied many factories, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes consecutively.<sup>16</sup>

The reason for the factory occupation wave, which included many factories between 1968 and 1971, was the employer's violation of the principle of freedom of union. Workers wanted to organize under the umbrella of the new and militant union DİSK, but the employer was trying to prevent it. Workers were responding by occupying factories. Even though the cause of some conflicts in the factory seemed to be related to wages and working conditions, the real reason was the violation of the principle of freedom of union by the employer. It can be said that the 1968-1971 factory occupation wave was a movement in defense of DİSK by workers. While the state, employers and the Türk-İş confederation management which adopted the "non-party policy" approach, did not want to let DİSK through the factory gates, the workers resisted and defended their union. In other words, DİSK was officially established in 1967, but actually in factories between 1968 and 1971 (Aygül, 2015).

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, the first factory occupation action in Turkey took place in a fabric factory in Izmir in September 1934. According to the news in the newspapers of the period, the police intervened against more than a hundred workers occupying the factory, on the grounds of violation of the Strike Law, and the workers were removed from the factory. The reason for the factory occupation action is the employer's announcement that they will switch to a performance-based wage system. Workers went on strike and occupied the factory on the grounds that their wages would decrease as a result of the change in the wage system (Gürler, 2023). Another factory occupation that occurred before the 1960s took place in a cement factory in 1948. The reason for the factory occupation is that the employer changed the shift system and the workers did not accept it (Toydemir, 1951).

<sup>16</sup> Actually, it can be said that the period between 1960 and 1980, when the labor movement was at its highest, started with the occupation of a cable factory (Kavel) by workers in 1963 and ended with the occupation of an agricultural production factory (Tariş) by workers in 1980. The first strike and occupation (Kavel) took place during the days when strikes were prohibited in Turkey, and the strike law was enacted after this resistance. The second resistance (Tariş) was a rebellion against the organization of fascism within the enterprise and evolved into the armed resistance of the workers and urban uprising. While the Kavel strike paved the way for workers' struggle in the sixties, the Tariş resistance was the last militant worker action before the 1980 military coup.



Factory occupations were a grassroots movement. In other words, neither a labor union nor a left-wing party leader had called for action. The occupations were organized by workers and supported by those living in the neighborhoods around the factory. Türk-İş, on the other hand, declared that it had "no tolerance" for these and similar actions and put an end to some of the actions.

The workers' aim was generally not to take over the factories. In other words, there was no intervention in property and labor relations. However, during this period, some factories were taken under control by workers because their demands were not met. For example, the experience of workers' self-management at the Alpagut Lignite Enterprise (ALE) in Çorum province was one of them. ALE was meeting the coal needs of Çorum and surrounding provinces. The workers were working in very bad conditions and the boss had not paid their wages for months. Workers held many actions and strikes and demanded the nationalization of the mine. When their demands were not accepted, they took over the management of the mine. The workers formed a Workers' General Assembly attended by all employees, and the General Assembly elected a Workers' Council to manage production and enterprise. The ALE workers' self-management experience lasted 34 days between June 13, 1969 and July 16, 1969 and ended with the intervention of the gendarmerie. Some unionists and workers were fired. Thereupon, the workers did not go down to the mines to protest the dismissals. With the end of the occupation, a collective agreement was signed between the union and the employer. Dismissed workers were rehired. After a while, the enterprise was nationalized upon the request of the workers (Narin, 2014).

Another worker self-management experience was the Günterm boiler factory in Istanbul. On April 29, 1970, Günterm workers occupied the factory and continued production because they could not receive their accumulated wages and the boss ran away. The self-management experience of Günterm workers ended with martial law declared after the workers' uprising on 15 and 16 June 1970 (Narin, 2014; Yaraşır, 2022).

The Yeni Çelttek coal mine experience in Amasya province is different from the first two experiences. The struggle of Yeni Çelttek workers continued from 1976 until the 1980 military coup, and this struggle included the organization of a new and militant union (Yeraltı Maden-İş), workers' self-management, and councils/committees established jointly by workers and local people. Yeraltı Maden-İş was organized in the form of



councils/committees and had power over the employer on many issues, from collective bargaining to the recruitment of new employees. After the councils/committees reached significant power in Yeni Çeltek, the employer launched a counter-attack. After a strike that started in 1980 as a result of a disagreement in the collective agreement, the employer closed the mine. Thereupon, workers started production without a boss on April 26. Production was carried out and managed by workers, and the coal was sold through a network of committees. However, local authorities intervened in this experience of the workers, and the workers ended the factory occupation on May 29 and turned their protests into a strike. The Yeni Çeltek strike lasted until the military coup of September 12, 1980 (Narin, 2014; Bütün, 2015; Gümüş, 2023).

During these years, there was also a major wave of land occupation. Between 1967 and 1971, a total of 146 land occupations were carried out by poor and landless peasants in different parts of Turkey. As a result of mechanization and capitalistization in agriculture, which has been going on since the 1950s, landowners began to usurp public lands used by villagers, and the peasants responded by occupying the land. In Turkey, where land reform has never been carried out, a newspaper at that time made the headline "Peasants are secretly carrying out land reform." However, unfortunately, this struggle of the peasants could not result in the creation of common lands and a collective production model for various reasons (Firat, 2017, 2021).

### ***After 1980: Neoliberal Period***

Although the military coup of September 12, 1980 crushed the labor movement, the labor movement was revived in the late eighties and nineties. The labor movement, which rose with the 1989 Spring Protests/Demonstrations, reached its peak with worker and civil servant strikes and demonstrations in the nineties. After the AKP came to power in the general election in 2002, neoliberal policies intensified and the postponement of strikes on the grounds of "threat to national security" became a routine. Although the number of strikes has decreased, there have been significant strikes, occupations and examples of workers' democracy in the 2000s.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> On labor during the AKP period, see. Şahin&Erol, 2021.  
Revista Fim do Mundo, nº 11, jan/jun 2024



During the neoliberal period, the struggle for workers' control/self-management in Turkey can be followed through three different models. The first of these is the councils and committees established by workers in actions such as strikes and factory occupations. There were many strikes and factory occupations in Turkey during the 1990s and 2000s, and the most important reasons for these were privatizations and demands regarding wages and working conditions.<sup>18</sup> In these strikes and occupations, councils/committees were established to organize the action, convey the demands and meet the needs of the workers. Historically and today, councils/committees are concrete experiences where workers' democracy comes to life.

The second model that can be evaluated within the framework of workers' control/self-management is cooperatives that operate according to democratic and egalitarian principles and aim to develop solidarity relations. Starting from the first cooperatives established in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, cooperatives in Turkey generally have a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure. However, in recent years, it has been observed that a new style of cooperatives has developed, which includes criticism of traditional cooperatives, operates according to democratic principles and aims to develop solidarity relations (Aykaç, 2018; Öngel&Yıldırım, 2019; Işıl&Değirmenci, 2020; Şahin, 2021; Şahankaya et al., 2023; Köne et. al, 2024). The increasing number of production/consumption cooperatives, ecological villages, communes, barter markets, urban gardens, solidarity networks and similar activities can be evaluated in this context.

The 2008 crisis increased interest in cooperatives in Turkey as well as in the world. Due to the emergence of the inadequacy of markets and traditional businesses in meeting economic and social needs, initiatives and activities within the scope of social and solidarity economy have begun to gain importance (Yi, 2023). Moreover, the Gezi Resistance, which broke out in the last days of May 2013, gave concreteness to the idea of self-management. During and after the Gezi Resistance, public spaces such as parks, squares and streets were occupied by the public, and practices based on self-management were organized in these areas (forums, collective

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<sup>18</sup> The SEKA strike/occupation in 1998 and 2004, the 2006 Novamed women's strike, the 2009 TEKEL resistance, the 2012 Topkapı Şişecam occupation, the 2014 Greif strike/occupation, the 2014 Yatağan resistance, the 2015 Bursa 'Metal Storm', and the 2018 Flormar resistance are the prominent struggles of this period.



kitchens, urban gardens, squats, alternative media, factory occupations) (Göztepe, 2013; Kaygısız, 2014; Gürler&Gürler, 2016). These experiences paved the way for building solidarity networks during the pandemic days.<sup>19</sup>

The third model that can be evaluated within the framework of workers' control/self-management is the workers' struggle for self-management based on direct action. Today, the first and only example of workers' self-management experience through factory occupation in Turkey is the Özgür Kazova Textile Cooperative. The wage struggle in the Kazova factory turned into a struggle for self-management. Kazova workers were inspired by the *empresas recuperadas* experiences in Latin America and encouraged by the Gezi Resistance and started production with the motto "production without bosses" (Acar, 2019; Dinler, 2018).

The events that led to the establishment of the Özgür Kazova Cooperative developed as follows: Kazova textile factory established in 1947. The factory has been in financial trouble since 2010 and started to make losses in 2013. The employer announced to 94 workers that the company is experiencing temporary financial problems and asked them to work unpaid for a while. Workers continued to work for another four months until January 31, 2013, when the employer imposes a week of compulsory unpaid leave. When the workers return to work, they found that the factory has been evacuated. The employer took the machines, 100 thousand sweaters and 40 tons of raw materials and left the workers unemployed with four months' unpaid wages. As of February 2013, 11 out of 94 workers (7 men, 4 women) started protest marches in Istanbul city center. At first, their demands consisted of payment of wages and severance pay. In April 2013, they set up a tent in front of the factory to prevent the employer from taking the last remaining machines. While the struggle of Kazova workers continues, the Gezi Resistance, the most massive action in Turkey's history, broke out in May 2013. Workers occupied the factory on June 28, 2013, under the influence of the Gezi Resistance. They restarted production using the remaining machines and unfinished products. They sold their products in the forums formed during the Gezi Resistance and through various solidarity relationships. During this process, many events were organized to show solidarity with Kazova workers. The income thus obtained was reinvested

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<sup>19</sup> Some websites for experiences and discussions of the cooperative movement, social and solidarity economy and self-management in Turkey: <https://sosyalekonomi.org/>, <https://birartibir.org/>, <https://iscidenetimi.net/>.  
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into production and workers continued production. In October 2013, after a ten-month struggle, the court ruled that the remaining machines from the employer should be given to the workers as compensation. Meanwhile, there was a split -actually ideologically based- among the Kazova workers, and the group associated with the Revolutionary Workers' Movement calls itself *Diren Kazova* (Resist Kazova), while the other group calls itself *Özgür Kazova* (Free Kazova). *Özgür Kazova Cooperative* officially started its activities in November 2014 with the slogan "production without a boss" and adopted the slogan 'occupy, resist, produce', just like similar experiences in other countries of the world.

The biggest supporters of Kazova workers in the process of becoming a cooperative were the groups that participated in the Gezi Resistance. The income generated by selling the produced products in forums created by social solidarity networks has significantly supported the self-management initiatives of Kazova workers. However, as the support and interest of social support networks decreased, sales began to decline. When the workers could not cover the production costs, they paid off the debts by selling the machines and ended production (Kaya et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

Workers' control and self-management experiences in Turkey were first observed in the 1960s and 1970s. In the period between the two military coups, the labor movement rose both quantitatively and qualitatively. During these years when the working class was organized, radicalized and politicized, a wave of major factory occupations and several experiences of workers' self-management emerged. Although these experiences lasted a few months, they left a mark on memories and inspired today's experiences and discussions. Influenced by both practical self-management experiences and the model called self-management in Yugoslavia, discussions on self-management intensified in the sixties and seventies, both within and outside academia. However, as the labor movement weakened in general with the 1980 military coup, workers' self-management experiences faded.

During the neoliberal era in the 1990s and 2000s, there were many strikes and factory occupations, particularly against privatizations and related to demands regarding wages and working conditions. While in some cases (as in the 2014 Istanbul Greif and 2015 Bursa 'metal storm' strikes and



occupations) workers took control of the factory through councils and committees, some actions (as in the 2009 TEKEL resistance) spread throughout Turkey. The councils and committees organized during these strikes and factory occupations were important examples of workers' democracy. During the 2013 Gezi Resistance, the largest public movement in Turkey's history, self-management practices were organized across the country, such as forums, assemblies, collective kitchens, squats, urban gardens, barter markets, and factory occupations. Around the same time, Kazova textile factory workers created the first workers' self-management experience of the neoliberal era in Turkey. Following examples in Latin America and Argentina, Kazova workers occupied the factory and transformed a capitalist enterprise into a workers' cooperative. With all these experiences, the idea and practices of self-management began to flourish again.

Especially after the 2008 crisis, interest in social and solidarity economy and cooperatives increased in Turkey, as in the world. Starting from the first cooperatives established in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, cooperatives in Turkey generally have a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure. However, in recent years, a new generation of cooperatives and communes organized according to democratic and egalitarian principles have been established. These cooperatives are an alternative not only to capitalist businesses and relationships, but also to traditional cooperatives. The increasing number of new generation cooperatives has also triggered discussions on alternatives to the neoliberal economic model and capitalist relations, and vice versa. For now, they are few in number and have a very small share in the economy. Additionally, it is clear that there is a need for regulations and institutions that will ensure the development of the social and solidarity economy in Turkey. Despite all, the search for an economy that prioritizes people, society and the planet rather than capital and profit continues to develop.

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