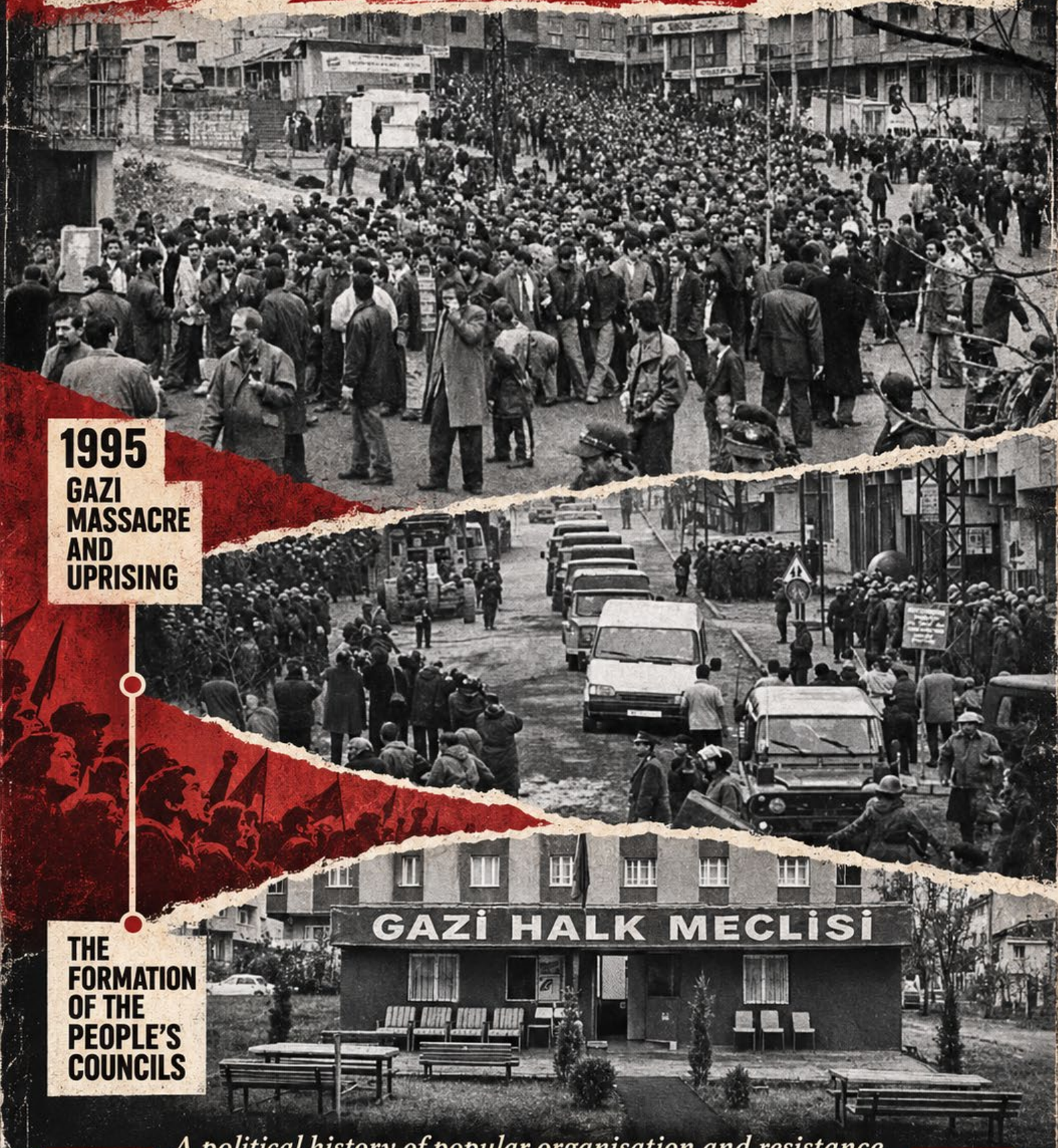
PEOPLE'S COUNCILS

From the Gazi Massacre to the Organised Power of the People



A political history of popular organisation and resistance

PEOPLE'S COUNCILS

From the Gazi Massacre to Popular Self-Organisation

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Source basis: historical accounts of the Gazi massacre and uprising (12–15 March 1995), the original Gazi People's Council's founding programme, regulations and interviews (1996), and the 1996 educational booklet "50 Questions About the People's Councils". The separate Turkish book Gazi: Gecekondulardan Geliyor Halk is used only as a reference for the massacre and uprising, never as a source for the 1996 council.

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Introduction — From the Gazi massacre to the People's Councils

On the evening of 12 March 1995, gunmen opened fire on cafés and a pastry shop in the Gazi neighbourhood of Istanbul, killing Halil Kaya, known as Halil Dede, and wounding other residents. The attack was followed by mass protests and an uprising from 12 to 15 March, as residents confronted police gunfire and repression. The events spread beyond Gazi, including to Ümraniye's 1 Mayıs neighbourhood. The Gazi massacre and the resistance that followed form the historical starting point of this book.

Gazi was a working-class gecekondu neighbourhood, shaped by migration from Anatolia and by persistent problems with housing, water, electricity, transport, education and healthcare. Alevis and Sunnis, Turks, Kurds and Laz people lived alongside one another. In the aftermath of the massacre, efforts to divide residents along religious or national lines did not prevent people from taking part in common protests. The experience of solidarity—sharing food and resources, caring for the wounded and acting together—left an enduring mark on the neighbourhood.

The first-anniversary commemoration in March 1996 showed that the events of the previous year remained central to local political life. Yet residents still faced the everyday problems and repression that had troubled the neighbourhood before the uprising. Over the following months, they began to discuss a permanent means of organising, making collective decisions and addressing the needs of the community. These discussions led to the establishment of the People's Council of Gazi and neighbouring Zübeyde Hanım on 5 October 1996, at a founding meeting attended by more than 1,500 people, as recorded in the original council materials.

This edition follows that chronology: first the Gazi massacre and uprising of 12–15 March 1995; then the first-anniversary commemorations and local organising efforts; next the establishment of the People's Council, its programme, regulations and the testimony of its members, including women organisers. The final part contains the complete educational text "50 Questions About the People's Councils" (Haziran Publishers, 1996), with the original question sequence preserved. The questions appear last so that readers can approach the general principles through the concrete experience of Gazi.

A note on sources: Gazi: Gecekondulardan Geliyor Halk is used only as a historical reference for the March 1995 massacre, uprising and immediate aftermath. It does not document the October 1996 foundation or organisation of the People's Council. The council's founding date, attendance, aims, regulations and interviews are drawn from the original People's Councils material. A small number of source footnotes and brief editorial notes identify relevant evidence and unresolved discrepancies without interrupting the narrative.

PART ONE — GAZI: FROM THE MASSACRE TO THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL

1. Gazi before and during the uprising, 12–15 March 1995

Gazi developed as a gecekondu neighbourhood on the outskirts of Istanbul from around 1970. Its residents included people who had migrated from Tokat, Dersim, Erzurum and other provinces: Turks, Kurds, Laz people, Alevis and Sunnis. Working-class residents faced poverty and police repression. The original council accounts describe long-standing problems with electricity, water, transport, schooling and healthcare, which later became central questions for the People's Council.

On Sunday evening, 12 March 1995, armed attackers fired on coffeehouses and a pastry shop in Gazi. Halil Kaya, known as Halil Dede, was killed. The Turkish historical account gives his age as 67, although an early English dispatch gives 70. Residents came onto the streets, gathering at the scene and marching towards the local police station. The book Gazi: Gecekondulardan Geliyor Halk describes the assault as a counter-guerrilla attack and records accusations of police collusion.

Between 12 and 15 March 1995, people resisted in Gazi and demonstrations spread to other parts of Istanbul, including Ümraniye's 1 Mayıs neighbourhood. The English reports and the Turkish historical account describe police gunfire, people martyred and wounded, barricades, arrests and solidarity across religious and national differences. Residents shared food and supplies and helped the wounded.

The early dispatches contain provisional and sometimes contradictory casualty figures. A later statement reproduced in the Turkish historical book refers to 17 deaths and more than 300 injuries in Gazi; other sources cover different districts or different dates. Rather than conflate them, this edition distinguishes the Gazi figures from those relating to Ümraniye and from subsequent deaths among people injured during the uprising.

Chronology of the Gazi massacre and uprising

12–13 March 1995. The earliest English dispatch reports gunfire at coffeehouses and a bakery or pastry shop, the death of Halil Kaya and injuries among residents. The Turkish historical narrative describes four coffeehouses and a pastry shop but subsequently names five coffeehouses. The English and Turkish accounts disagree about Halil Kaya's age. People gathered, marched to the police station and faced police intervention.

13–14 March 1995. Contemporary dispatches describe continuing demonstrations in Gazi and other Istanbul neighbourhoods, police fire, rising casualties and security measures, including restrictions on entering the neighbourhood. These reports were issued during unfolding events; their figures must not be treated as final totals.

14–15 March 1995. Solidarity actions and demonstrations spread, including to Ankara and Ümraniye's 1 Mayıs neighbourhood. The Turkish historical source describes Genco Demir as fatally shot on 15 March and Hakan Çabuk as wounded on 15 March and dying on 30 March. The latter belongs to the aftermath of the uprising, not to a change in the principal period of 12–15 March.

15 March 1995. The English reports describe a large funeral in Gazi and continuing resistance. A statement published at the time listed demands for the withdrawal of the army and police, the return of the bodies of those martyred, treatment for the wounded, the release of detainees, and an end to looting and vandalism. These are reproduced as historical demands.

2. The first-anniversary commemoration, March 1996

A retrospective account of the first anniversary describes a major commemorative gathering at the cemevi and a march to the cemetery. It reports police checkpoints, identity checks and arrests in the

preceding days, yet says residents arrived from many working-class districts across Istanbul. Participants included workers, students, pensioners, teachers and people of different national and religious backgrounds.

The original report interprets the commemoration as a demonstration of continued resistance and unity between residents and revolutionaries. A commentary attributed to Kurtuluş, dated 9 March 1996, stresses the organisational lessons of the uprising: sharing materials, feeding those at the barricades, helping the wounded and acting collectively across religious and national divisions.

The first anniversary, in March 1996, drew residents and supporters back to Gazi, despite checkpoints and police restrictions. The commemoration became another expression of solidarity. But the practical issues facing residents remained, reinforcing the argument that people needed an enduring form of collective organisation.

From the uprising to lasting organisation

The account in Kurtuluş dated 9 March 1996 describes how people from different backgrounds joined the uprising, opened their homes, shared resources and cared for those who were wounded. These experiences contributed to discussions about how solidarity could be sustained and directed towards the neighbourhood's continuing problems.

A People's Council was proposed as a means through which residents themselves could identify their needs, discuss solutions, make decisions and organise practical work, beyond the extraordinary days of the uprising. The organisational history that follows is based on the council's own 1996 documents and interviews, not on the Turkish massacre book.

3. Establishment of the People's Council, October 1996

After the uprising and the first-anniversary commemorations, residents of Gazi and neighbouring Zübeyde Hanım continued to experience police operations, detentions and unmet social needs. They discussed uniting existing initiatives in a People's Council that would bring together people of different backgrounds to identify needs, decide priorities and act collectively.

Preparatory meetings took place over approximately three months. Draft principles and regulations were discussed publicly, with participation from local shopkeepers, workers, pensioners, young people, housewives and other residents. The founders emphasised that people should take part as residents, rather than as formal representatives of their political parties.

The People's Council was publicly launched on 5 October 1996 at a meeting in the Sultan festivities hall attended by more than 1,500 people, according to the supplied council documents. The celebration included a collective circumcision ceremony with volunteer healthcare workers and prayers offered by a Sunni imam and an Alevi dede. The organisers presented it as an expression of unity across religious traditions.

Ali Ekber Emre opened the ceremony on behalf of the council. He recalled the failure of the authorities to provide basic services and explained that the people had learnt that individual efforts were insufficient. He argued that solidarity was the answer to attempts to divide residents. At the founding stage, the council was reported to have 130 members drawn from different sections of the population.

Practical activities had already begun. Volunteer medical specialists conducted free examinations and distributed medicines; a shopkeepers' committee sought improvements to the unreliable electricity supply and gathered signatures for a petition. The founding meeting also received support from associations, trade unions, political organisations, publications, artists and musicians. Among those performing were the children's choir of the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre, folk dancers, Grup Özgürlük Türküsü and Grup Yorum.

The council's founding message was that the people of Gazi could no longer be divided on political, religious or ethnic grounds and would instead express their shared will through collective organisation.

4. The council's aims and programme

The following programme is adapted from the Gazi council's founding statement. Its original eleven aims and three concluding principles are retained, but sentences have been streamlined and overlapping introductory passages removed.

The people of Gazi concluded that the creation of a People's Council was necessary to restore solidarity and address the neighbourhood's problems. Participation would be voluntary, with residents themselves taking part in leadership and decision-making.

1. Restore solidarity among residents without distinctions based on national or religious identity, and develop the collective capacity to resist attempts to divide the neighbourhood.

2. Oppose arbitrary arrests, militarised policing and other violations of rights, and organise collective demands for the rule of law.

3. Address long-standing inequalities in infrastructure, education, social security, healthcare, employment, housing and food provision.

4. Work collectively to overcome social and cultural problems, including drug dependency, gambling and alcoholism, by building on the positive values and capacities of the community.

5. Address the particular problems faced by women, including working women, mothers and housewives, and establish a women's organisation in accordance with local conditions.

6. Develop cooperatives and other forms of production and consumption based on solidarity rather than private profit, with the aim of reducing unemployment and strengthening mutual support.

7. Seek solutions to shortages of parks, market spaces, healthcare facilities and other essential neighbourhood services.

8. Encourage participation in sport and healthy recreation, with particular attention to children and women, rather than treating sport only as a spectacle.

9. Improve education through cooperation among families and associations: better schools, more teachers, better teaching conditions and opposition to excessive educational costs.

10. Organise free medical examinations, within the council's resources, and develop this provision on a lasting basis.

11. Arrange collective celebrations, including weddings and circumcision ceremonies, to reduce individual costs and strengthen solidarity.

Founding principles

• Identify problems affecting the neighbourhood and develop workable solutions through the active participation of residents.

• Build a culture of unity, cooperation and mutual responsibility, challenging practices that undermine solidarity.

• Where possible, resolve everyday disputes peacefully within the community rather than unnecessarily resorting to the courts.

5. Regulations of the Gazi People's Council

1. Objective

The People's Council is an open, democratic popular institution that discusses matters affecting residents, takes decisions and organises their implementation. No distinction is made on the grounds of nationality, religion, belief or political views.

2. Responsibilities

The Council addresses the economic, social, cultural, political and specific local problems of the neighbourhood.

3. Bodies of the Council

The Council consists of the General People's Committee, the Council Committee, the spokesperson, the secretariat and specialised committees.

3(a). General People's Committee

The General People's Committee is the highest decision-making and supervisory body. Participation is voluntary.

3(b). Council Committee

The Council Committee is elected by the General People's Committee. It has a limited membership and takes decisions on matters that do not require a meeting of the full General People's Committee.

3(c). Spokesperson

The spokesperson communicates the Council's statements, decisions and bulletins to the public.

3(d). Secretariat

The secretariat acts under the instructions of the two governing committees, arranges meetings, keeps minutes and monitors the implementation of decisions.

3(e). Specialised committees

Specialised committees are composed of people with relevant knowledge and experience. They work directly on questions and problems discussed by the Council.

4. Membership and eligibility

All neighbourhood residents aged 18 or over who have not committed crimes against the people may vote and stand for election. They are members of the General People's Committee. The General People's Committee elects the Council Committee, which in turn appoints its own bodies.

5(a). General People's Committee meetings

The General People's Committee meets annually to elect the Council Committee and every six months to review its work. It may also be convened for extraordinary meetings at the request of the Council Committee or the residents.

5(b). Council Committee elections and meetings

Members of the Council Committee are elected by open or secret ballot, according to the decision of the General People's Committee. The Council Committee has at least 25 members, with the number adjustable by the General People's Committee. It normally meets in the first week of each month. Additional meetings may be called by at least one-fifth of its members or by the secretariat, with at least five days' notice.

5(c). Spokesperson

The spokesperson is elected by the General People's Committee or the Council Committee. The term of office is determined by the Council Committee.

5(d). Secretariat

The secretariat is appointed by the General People's Committee or the Council Committee and consists of at least three people. Its membership may be changed when necessary.

6. Voting and decisions

Members of all Council bodies are elected by majority vote, and ordinary decisions are taken by a majority. For especially important matters, such as dissolution of the Council or decisions that affect the population as a whole, the regulations state that a simple majority is not considered sufficient at the outset; they do not specify a universal alternative threshold.

7. Suspension or exclusion

A member may be suspended for conduct or lack of discipline that obstructs the Council's work. The body concerned must then consider the person's membership; exclusion requires a three-quarters majority.

7. Resignation

Members who resign are expected to explain their reasons. The original regulations allow a resignation to be refused in a narrowly described situation where a member has been given a task because of particular skills or social position, the task does not endanger the member's life, and no timely replacement can be found. In other cases, a resignation is to be accepted.

8. Acceptance of regulations

Those who undertake Council activities, whether as volunteers or elected representatives, accept the Council's regulations. The regulations were approved by the General People's Committee at the founding meeting on 5 October 1996.

6. Interview with members of the Gazi People's Council

When the People's Council was established, large numbers of neighbourhood residents participated because the council addressed their needs. The representatives and the secretariat were elected at its founding meeting.

You announced the founding of the People's Council at a circumcision ceremony. The public heard about the establishment of a People's Council through the press and TV. We would like to hear from you, the representatives of the People's Council, about the way it has developed so far. What needs and thoughts initiated the formation of this People's Council?

Süleyman Şengül: I have lived in Gazi for thirty years. First, let me explain what kind of neighbourhood it is. Gazi is like a mosaic, bringing together people from across the country. In my experience, different religious beliefs have always been respected here. We had no religious conflicts until the massacre of 12 March 1995. I believe the attack was intended to destroy the friendship and solidarity among us and to divide residents. Instead, it had the opposite effect. The people of Gazi saw through the manoeuvre.

As far as the government is concerned, Gazi might as well be a remote valley outside Turkey. It has received no help with its problems. Officials come regularly to collect taxes, promising that the money will return to us in public services, but we have seen no such services. Residents realised that we would have to solve our own problems. Individual efforts and separate committees were not enough. Let me give you an example from the small shopkeepers. Before the People's Council was founded, a few friends and I went to the electricity board.

The electricity problems had become so severe that we faced the choice of moving away or closing our businesses. The director told us that electricity was occasionally cut off even in a wealthy district such as Ataköy. His words struck us: the people of Gazi were being treated as second- or third-class citizens. He later regretted saying it, but the words were his. We concluded that these problems could not be solved by individuals or isolated committees. We had to act together.

When we discussed the idea with others, we found that friends, café customers, shopkeepers and other residents supported it and regarded it as necessary. Around thirty people attended our first meeting, and we decided to continue. The number of problems we had to tackle grew, but so did participation. Gazi faces not only economic and infrastructural problems but political ones too. Taxi drivers often refuse to take us to addresses in Gazi because the neighbourhood has a bad reputation.

People are searched at the entrances to Gazi as though they were crossing a border. This causes anger and resentment. The Council was established to address such problems. In short, a People's Council means that the people take the solution of their problems into their own hands.

Nazan Askeran: Gazi has experienced very rapid population growth compared with similar Istanbul neighbourhoods, and it faces many problems. Our children are refused places in schools outside the district and can have difficulty entering secondary education. As Süleyman said, taxis refuse to come here. The authorities do not solve our problems; they try to distract us from them. We have discussed the electricity supply. We have a clinic and an X-ray machine, but neither functions, so people must resort to private clinics they can scarcely afford.

These matters can be viewed politically, but political differences should not stop us finding practical solutions. During the anniversary commemorations of the Gazi uprising, a roadblock was set up. Perhaps you saw it. I live outside the neighbourhood but work here, and I am searched whenever I enter or leave. Residents are searched constantly too. Some older women are not accustomed to carrying identity papers. We saw a woman of about sixty or sixty-five ordered off a bus and arrested because she did not have her papers. That is the kind of police repression we face.

As you can see at the entrance of our neighbourhood, the police station with its tanks, policemen and police cars is always ready to move. There is no other neighbourhood with such a police presence. But the problems in Gazi are not being solved. When these problems accumulated, people went to look for solutions. They went to the city administration and asked for help in the areas of street construction, sewers and education. Sometime ago the newspaper Zaman reported that the mayor of Gaziosmanpaşa had invested most of the money in the area of Gazi. Well, there must be another neighbourhood which is called Gazi because we have seen nothing of these investments. So we started to think how we could solve these problems, what we could do for Gazi, how we could create solidarity.

We discussed these problems and kept returning to the idea of solidarity. What could we do when the electricity went off, food spoiled in our refrigerators and employment opportunities were elsewhere? Few families could easily afford to replace a fridge or television. We decided that we had to unite, support one another and work out practical solutions together. That is what we called the People's Council. We could have chosen another name, but this one expressed what we wanted.

Some newspapers described the People's Council as an alternative to parliament. That is not how we see it. We united so that we could state our problems and work towards solutions. People speak of democracy, and we said that we would learn democracy from one another. Democracy is not a matter of asking for favours: it means identifying problems, discussing them and finding solutions. That is why we founded the Council.

Whom did you approach with the proposal to establish a People's Council? Did you speak to associations and political parties, or directly to people in the streets?

Halil Telek: We approached everyone, regardless of political views or party membership. What mattered was whether they lived in Gazi. We asked people what they thought of the project, and around ninety per

cent responded positively. Some were uneasy about how the Council might develop or feared that it could become a political organisation. Nevertheless, people participated. The work grew with the membership. Our early meetings attracted sixty or seventy people, and numbers soon increased. We believed the Council could succeed because the majority supported the idea and we excluded no political tendency.

We chose people who responded constructively to the problems. Our friends knew that we intended to exclude no one, and they offered their support. They took part in the founding process because they believed that the neighbourhood's problems could only be solved together.

Nazan Askeran: We did not want people to participate as representatives of political organisations. Residents may belong to the CHP, Refah, DYP, ÖDP or ANAP, and may hold their own political views, but the People's Council must remain independent. We want everyone in Gazi to participate. This does not mean that people must abandon their political ideas or stop their political work. They take part because they live or work in Gazi, care about its problems and experience those problems themselves. Nobody has the right to speak here on behalf of a party.

We are here as people and as residents of Gazi.

Halil Telek: When we went to the small merchants, our friends and the people in the streets, we decided that those who wanted to participate in the People's Council, or who wanted to support it, should not be representatives of some kind of party. But when they participate as inhabitants of Gazi, they are welcome. The friends, who are members of a party, gave us their personal view. They supported us personally. Nobody mentioned his membership in a party or a political organisation. And this created a good atmosphere for the people. Those who initially had a bad feeling were relieved because of this. Nobody propagated his or her own political ideas to influence others. Everybody saw it as his or her task to work with this. Because of this, our people agreed with this work.

You have mentioned the reluctance, prejudice and fear surrounding the establishment of the People's Council. Could you tell us more about these obstacles? How did you address people's doubts, and how did they respond?

Halil Telek: Before we approached the people, we wrote a report about our goals and our views. We explained the problems in Gazi. And with this report, we went to the people: Their shouldn't be made differences between Alevis and Muslims, there weren't differences in the past. But insults were made on 12 March 1995. We approached the people directly to solve this. We listened to their problems and the things that bothered them. We tried to convince them. We already knew these people and they reacted in a positive way. We listened carefully to their problems. All the people who hoped for a solution for the problems in Gazi welcomed the organising. They promised to support us in all matters.

We listened to the different political views and we told them we would be open to them if they were brought in a positive way and if they would contribute to a solution.

Nazan Askeran: We witnessed some negative things during this time as well. People were afraid to approach each other. They witnessed some immoral events in the neighbourhood. There are people who are afraid. When you talk to the people, you'll hear that a lot of their children are in prison. This has a double effect: they are angry, but they are afraid as well. And the families whose children are not in jail say this can happen every moment. People say there could be another barricade action any time, or the police could move in again, and that scares them. There have been initiatives for cooperation in the past, associations were opened, but this did not develop because some people took political missions on them. And there is unrest.

The People's Council is seen in a positive way, but there are still second thoughts. Some people say we should wait for a while. But we will solve this. We have made a lot of progress already. I told all the people who came to my pharmacy about this project. Some said they were going to wait and watch how it developed. Others were even more open, and they said: "We've already had this in the past, and it didn't

work. Hopefully you'll succeed." There were some who were prepared to participate, there were others who were afraid and indecisive. We approached the people who were on their way to work and we approached them when they went home again. They were the people who live in this neighbourhood and who have serious problems.

We've had some positive experiences, for instance, there was a family which was afraid at first, they were not interested, but now they participate in the People's Council. I like that. But there were serious prejudices as well, they asked us what party we belonged to. My friend said: "I'm from party A", I said I was form party B and another one said" "I'm from party C". We did not speak as party representatives, we spoke as inhabitants from Gazi, but the people did not believe this at first.

What did you do when you saw it was difficult to approach the people, what did you do to remove the prejudices?

Süleyman Şengül: We did not have meetings and discussions about this item alone. We also carried out a programme of free health care, for instance. And we saw that people had more trust after this medical test.

Nazan Askeran: We went through a phase of discussions. We had meetings, again and again, to call for participation in the People's Council. At first, there were a lot of people, but then the participation in the discussions declined and people started to keep away from the meetings. As you've said, people want so see concrete results. We weren't at ease, before the People's Council was founded, people wanted to know who we were. But then we reached a point when the discussions were becoming endless. We had to make some positive steps, otherwise the people would lose their trust. We couldn't wait for the People's Council to emerge from itself. We talked about establishing a commission. The commissions were just temporary, we founded an administrative commission. Through this, we founded more specific commissions. These commissions work autonomously.

There are serious health problems in the neighbourhood. Many people cannot afford a doctor or medicines. We contacted companies and collected supplies; residents brought medicines they had at home. We also spoke to doctors, who carried out free medical examinations on three successive Sundays. They examined 200–300 people each time and distributed medicines. We never claimed that we could examine everyone: around 90,000 people lived in Gazi and Zübeyde Hanım. Even the government could not examine so many at once. The point was to begin practical work, make the Council visible and build trust. We succeeded. Many women and children learnt about us through these examinations. Previously, most of the people we had reached were men, but women made up the majority of those attending the health sessions.

That was particularly important. Some people claimed that the examinations had been arranged by the municipality, but we explained who had organised them and distributed our leaflets. We saw the positive effect in subsequent meetings. People who had attended earlier meetings and then stayed away because of the prolonged discussions began to return.

What other steps did you take?

Halil Telek: After the free medical examinations, we turned to the repeated electricity cuts. Sometimes power failed three or four times in a day. Shopkeepers active in the Council called a meeting attended by around 200 small traders. They elected a committee to approach the electricity board. The employees took their demands seriously because they were speaking on behalf of local residents, not a political party. Afterwards, power cuts became less frequent, and the traders took on further work within the Council.

You held several meetings before the Council was founded. What considerations guided you, and where did those meetings take place?

Nazan Askeran: We wanted people to know that the Council was not tied to any particular party. For that reason, we could not meet in CHP or DSP offices. As residents of Gazi and Zübeyde Hanım, we also wanted meetings to take place in our own neighbourhood. Before the Council was established, we had no permanent premises, so we looked for spaces where people felt welcome and could get to know us. There were many associations formed by people from the same villages, and several meeting participants belonged to them.

We thought we might meet in those associations, and their members agreed. The arrangement worked well. Before the medical examinations, it had been difficult to find meeting places; now that problem has eased. We meet wherever we can within the neighbourhood. Another principle is not to attack supporters of particular political parties, because we want them to participate too. Now that the Council has been founded, we are looking for a permanent place of our own.

Halil Telek: I want to say something about this. We did not think about going to a cemevi (an Alevi association). Because we do not draw distinctions between political views or religious creeds. This should be a common project. So we did not allow that others would make such differences.

Nazan Askeran: We could have a meeting in a cemevi, but that does not mean we always have to meet there. Our neighbourhood is a mixed one. It's a fine mosaic. It would be wrong to make religious differences. This would exclude people.

Your meetings and discussions in offices, homes and village associations became widely known, and the authorities learnt about your work. How have the authorities responded?

Halil Telek: The authorities heard about our work quite early and watched from a distance. Police officers even attended one of the meetings and asked, 'Aren't we part of the people too?' We replied that we would invite them if there was a reason to do so. They also came to look at the circumcision celebrations. So far, they have not attacked our meetings.

Nazan Askeran: There have been no attacks, but the authorities have made a demand. They want a list of members from the People's Council. We then went to the local mayor and we told them they could have the list because everyone participated voluntarily and because it almost includes the entire neighbourhood. As Halil has said, our meetings have not been attacked. But other things happened, for instance they arrested some people during a barricade action in the period of the death fast. Our mayor was among them and the asked him some questions. They wanted to know whether he was one of the founders of the People's Council. The police and we, we know each other. You could say they are in a waiting time.

Who can join the People's Council, and what are the conditions for membership?

Süleyman Şengül: Members must be at least eighteen years old, live or work here, and must not have committed crimes against the people.

You announced the Council's founding through a collective circumcision festival. Could you tell us about it?

Halil Telek: As the Council began to take shape and residents were invited to join, we decided to celebrate its founding with a collective circumcision festival. It was intended as an expression of solidarity in which the entire neighbourhood could participate. Around eighty children were circumcised.

How was the festival organised?

Nazan Askeran: The first question was how we would finance the celebration. Some families could not afford clothes for the children, and we also had to provide food for a large gathering. Residents volunteered for different tasks and brought clothing and other materials. The Council arranged fifty-five suits. Some people supplied fabric and buttons; others did the sewing. It was collective work, and that

was its beauty. We received donations and tried to ensure that no family was excluded by cost. We divided responsibilities, but nobody was compelled to take part. People volunteered for what they could do.

That was the beautiful part of it.

Süleyman Şengül: Furthermore, we were supported by the health care workers, the doctors and so on. Nobody asked for payment. All the friends that came brought things with them that could be used. In this way we managed the financial difficulties.

Nazan Askeran: Doctors, surgeons and other healthcare workers came voluntarily. Specialists and general practitioners attended, and our nurses worked throughout the day. The volunteers who came from outside Gazi left satisfied that they had done useful work. We also thank the artists who participated. We were beginners and lacked experience, yet everyone was pleased with what we achieved together.

Halil Telek: There is something else worth mentioning. Political parties, municipalities and even the president organise circumcision festivities in Turkey. We have not seen them provide preliminary medical examinations for the children. We did. We wanted to establish whether there were medical reasons not to perform a circumcision, and we approached the matter scientifically.

Nazan Askeran: We had little experience before this festival, but we learnt a great deal. Next time we should organise it during the school holidays, not term time. We should also encourage more families to help prepare the clothes—not simply to save money, but to strengthen the bonds between them. It would be better to hold the circumcisions in the morning so that the children could join the festivities afterwards. We also need a larger venue. Many residents want more space for such gatherings, and summer would make that easier.

Your regulations do not provide for a president or a conventional governing board. Why was that choice made, and how are decisions taken and implemented?

Ali Ekber Emre: We must work for the unity of the people in Gazi. We try to develop collective solutions for the problems of the people here. We will solve the problems of education, health care and so forth, we will create a culture of solidarity. They want to instigate a fight between Alevis and Muslims. It does not really work, but they are trying. We will not accept this. As Alevis, Muslims, Kurds, Circassians, Laz, Arabs and Turks, we will make sure that all can exercise their customs and morals. And we will live together, despite the differences. Everybody will be accepted as they are, nonetheless, we will realise unity. In the future, we plan to organise cooperatives.

Will the People's Council also respond to problems outside the neighbourhood? How will it respond to oppression in other neighbourhoods and in Turkey more generally?

Ali Ekber Emre: As we have said, we will not be indifferent to injustice elsewhere in Turkey or in the world. If injustice occurs, we will raise our voices publicly and stand with the oppressed. Such solidarity is already part of the character of this neighbourhood. People here are concerned not only with their own difficulties but with those of the wider country and beyond. We hope People's Councils will spread across Turkey so that people become increasingly conscious of their capacity to solve problems through their own collective action.

When people in Turkey take responsibility for solving their problems, they will find solutions. If nothing is done, no solution is possible.

7. Women of Gazi speak about their committees

Bedriye Cavus (housewife): On September 22, 1996, there was a meeting of the women's committees. Our women were heavily oppressed. That's why they are very interested in these committees. Our meetings are going quite well. We tell all the other women in the area about it. For instance, our

circumcision festivity was very nice and effective. The women in Gazi appreciate our People's Council. We did not make differences in the work of the committees. We went into the mosques, as well as into the Alevi centres. At the meetings, the women talk about their problems and they look for solutions. Our women of health problems. This was an item at our last meeting. Some women did not want to have the meetings in the evening, but we have to solve these problems. There are women who work.

We have to think about them. I think our numbers will grow. I will work for it, so our numbers will grow.

Adalet Budak (computer expert): We have set up committees for the areas where we have our biggest problems. For instance, there is a health committee, a sports committee, a women's committee, and so on. They are responsible for different areas, but they work together. Women have special problems. These are education problems, but also problems in the health area. We as the women's committee want a health examination for the women. Our women should learn something about family planning. There are many contagious illnesses for women. They have education problems, many cannot read. Some women cannot make a living with the pay for their manual labour. We want to make an exhibition about that. The women will organise that themselves. The men which do not bring their women to the meeting are warned.

Our women can solve their problems themselves. They can find the strength for that in our committee.

Zeynep Erturk (secretary): Although we are living in the twentieth century, women in our neighbourhood cannot read or write. This problem must be tackled at first. We as committee members want to offer writing and reading courses for women in our neighbourhood. We must take care of women in our neighbourhood who cannot read or write. When our committee started its activities, we were just a few. But when it became clear we could achieve something, our numbers started to grow. The electricity has always been a problem in our neighbourhood. We feel better since the electricity problems have been solved partly. Problems like no water, no electricity, no pavement, especially concern the women.

Saadet Erdogan (housewife): We have a lot of problems in our neighbourhood. Health care, electricity, water, and so forth. We want the People's Council and the committees to be interested in this. These problems make the women's lives very hard. In our neighbourhood we have had electricity problems for a long time. Now we have a women's committee. Our work is going very well. Our women are getting to know each other. I'm really exited about that. I speak about these things to people I know and I call upon them to join. In the beginning there were only a few women who came to the meetings of the women's committee. At the last meeting there were already 20 women. The meeting was held in the house of a friend. We had dinner together.

But we also tried to find solutions for our problems. We talked about health problems. All the women joined the discussion. Next week our doctor will come. And there will be more women at the future meetings. After the meeting many decided to speak to the women they knew. They had been reluctant at first, but after this meeting they were glad they had participated. Many women have difficulties because of their men, because the meetings were in the evening. We told them they should not feel guilty. The men should adjust a little.

Hanim Kartal (housewife): I appreciate the People's Committees. My son is in prison. We are witnessing a severe repression. There are many prisoners. We have to take care of their basic needs, because they are in prison for us. I can only express and solve this problem in our People's Committees. In the past I tried to get help from the people on my own, but now we are hundreds and these problems can only be solved collectively. When we unite, we can defend ourselves. I haven't been to committee meeting until now, but I will make up for that. It's very nice to have a women's committee which defends the women.

Kismet Kilic (dental technician): We expect our People's Council to solve the problems of our neighbourhood, because the problems in Gazi are the problems of women in our neighbourhood. Our women are very interested in these activities and their participation should increase even more. When we look at our People's Council, there are 21 women among the 130 members, the rest are men. In the beginning there were even fewer. We were only with 5 or 6 women. But we see that the number of women is increasing because they value the work and the women have recognised that they can defend their dignity. We women will not find the solving of our problems through support, we will find it through our dignity. We have a lot of health care and economic problems.

A lot of women cannot really sell their manual work, they only get a low pay for it. They want to support their families through their manual work, but they only get 3 million Lira, not even 50 dollar. The women work very hard, they do this manual work besides all the work in the house, but they are poorly paid.

Gulseren Ates (housewife): I am a member of the women's committee. We discuss the education, health care, electricity and water supply problems. During the last meeting we discussed the health care problems. We will all be examined next week. I tell the people about the People's Committees. A lot of people are afraid, they want to keep a distance. But when they see our work, they appreciate it. There are people who thanked us, although they do not participate. But sooner or later, they will come too. When they shut down the electricity, we do not have electricity for 24 hours. We do not have a problem like this anymore, the People's Council solved it and he people know this. Everywhere I go, I tell the people about our People's Committees and the People's Council.

Two weeks ago I brought two women with me to the People's Committee. We must speak about our work, and in a while more women will participate. It's very nice that no distinctions are made between Alevis and Muslims, and it is even nicer when all come up with their proposals.

Serpil Yeter (confection worker): I went to the last meeting, it was the meeting of the women's committee. I went there with my mother. I liked it very much. I see it as something positive when People's Committees are set up in our neighbourhoods. I'm proud of that. The circumcisions festivity was very nice. I spoke to people before the festivity and I invited them. The people see it as something positive. We have a lot of problems in our neighbourhood, like with the telephones. A lot of people do not have a telephone in their house. Since a while there have been no connections. And then there are the electricity, the water and the health care problems. Education is the biggest problem. I have many hopes in our People's Council.

It organises the people, because the situation in Gazi is very hard.

Fatma Itmec (worker): The inhabitants of Gazi have a lot of problems. I'm a member of the People's Council. We organised this council ourselves, and we will go on. We will open the road for this council. The people should work together, without making differences. We witnessed 12 March. Since then, the government looks at us as terrorists. This is very hard for us. It's very good that we live together and demand our rights. We have to become even more successful. The women expressed their demands in the women's committee. We are housewives and we work, that's very hard. We discuss our problems in the committee. It gave women in our neighbourhood a good feeling. We met in a house, with cookies and tea, but we didn't chat, we seriously discussed our problems.

Our goal is set very high, we want to build a great solidarity between the people, that's what we really need. I speak with the people I see in the neighbourhood. It's true, the people in Gazi are repressed more severely than the people in other neighbourhoods. We can solve all our problems in our People's Council. At the last meeting we discussed the women's health. Our women do not know about their own health. It will take a while until women in our neighbourhood will know, but we will succeed. We have to work hard, we may grow tired, but I'm ready. I will try to get all people to the meetings.

PART TWO — FIFTY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PEOPLE'S COUNCILS

Preface

People's Councils have entered the political discussion. Yet much of that discussion has focused on abstract theoretical questions instead of what is necessary and urgent in practice.

Establishing People's Councils is an immediate task, but their development will also have far-reaching consequences. We can shape their future only by taking part in the practical work.

The People's Council is no longer simply a proposal for the future: it has begun to take shape. The institution is young and participation remains limited, but experience will accumulate and the idea will spread.

This booklet, '50 Questions About the People's Councils', explains what a People's Council is, what it aims to achieve and how it can be established, without becoming lost in abstract debate. People living and working in each neighbourhood must themselves give the councils their form and content. As the well-known revolutionary principle puts it: 'Set the masses in motion and let them take the initiative.'

People's Councils are important to the future of our people and their struggle. Experience will enrich both theory and practice. The councils will strengthen unity against exploitation and oppression, enable the people to learn from one another and help lay the foundations of a better future.

Let us build and strengthen the People's Councils.

'The masses are the real stronghold.'

A. Social conditions and the need to organise (Questions 1–11)

1. What kind of country do we live in?

This is a beautiful country, with fertile land and resources sufficient to provide for everyone. There is land for farmers to cultivate and space for people to live and work in the cities. It could offer a decent life to all. Yet it has become a country in which the majority struggle to survive.

The policies of those in power have created two contrasting realities in Turkey. On one side are the oppressors, exploiters and criminals who enjoy enormous wealth; on the other are the people who struggle to make a decent living.

Official propaganda cannot conceal what everyone can see. Exploitation and repression continue without mercy. The people have been deprived of the right to determine their own lives, while those in power act as they please.

The country is ruled by the monopoly bourgeoisie, the Mafia, the torturers, the counter-guerrilla and the village guards. The Susurluk affair revealed only a glimpse of the links between criminal networks and state power. What came to light was a sign of the decay of the political system.

Turkey is a large country, home to millions of workers, civil servants, peasants and unemployed people. Many work exhausting hours simply to survive. They live from day to day, asking how they will feed their families, reach the end of the month, buy schoolbooks and uniforms, or pay the electricity bill.

They are denied the security needed to plan their lives and imagine a better future. The future is made to look like a locked, dark cell.

Others, however, live without having to worry about where their next meal will come from.

The wealthy can fly to Europe or America for medical care even for a minor complaint, while seriously ill people are turned away from hospitals because they cannot pay.

Some households have no access to safe drinking water, while others have enough to fill their swimming pools.

Some live with the daily fear that their gecekondu homes will be demolished, while others reside in luxurious villas.

Millions work themselves to exhaustion, often holding two or three jobs, while a privileged few scatter banknotes at their wedding celebrations.

Many who struggle for their rights face imprisonment, torture and death, while Mafia bosses such as Civan, Edes and Bezmen are described as moving freely through society.

These examples illustrate the two faces of the country. No short booklet could describe all its contradictions: millions experience exploitation and humiliation, while a small wealthy minority lives in luxury and collaborates with imperialist interests.

In this order, some feast while others can only watch. To prevent popular resistance, those in power use oppression, lies and empty promises.

Fascism is the most bloody and openly repressive form of capitalist dictatorship. For years, those in power have used fascist laws and policies to preserve their rule.

Laws and rights are disregarded. Young people lose their lives. Neighbourhoods, villages, factories and universities are surrounded by police and soldiers; people are beaten, detained and tortured. These are methods of intimidation.

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are violated. Those who dissent from the government or its security apparatus are branded traitors and subjected to repression.

Education is shaped by big capital and imperialist influence, serving their interests. Children from working families struggle to gain an education because of the costs and inequalities involved.

The economy, depending on the imperialist countries, is falling apart. The state deficits are out of control, the interests on foreign debts can no longer be paid. Every new baby is born with a debt of thousands of dollars. The industry, agriculture and cattle-breeding are going bankrupt.

No government, coalition or military junta has solved these problems. They have held power to preserve exploitation, not to end it.

The government and parties are estranged from country and people. Government seats are given to those who can best sell out the people and the country, to those who best order torture and killings. That's why parliament and political parties are only into dirty jobs, and governments are built and brought down by corruption.

Injustice can no longer be concealed. An event such as the Susurluk crash is enough to expose the underlying corruption.

Future governments will follow the same course unless the underlying order changes. Their policies make life increasingly unbearable for working people.

Yet this is not the only reality in our country. In spite of exploitation and repression, there have always been people prepared to struggle for justice and a better life.

Young and old alike have made sacrifices for the people. Working people have refused to be silenced, have continued to demand their rights and have taken to the streets.

We must change our country so that we can live in freedom and justice. This country belongs to us.

2. Whom do the parties of the system represent?

The parties of the system represent the system's interests, of course. This system serves the monopolists, the usurping big merchants and the large landowners who all collaborate with the

imperialists. The Sabanci's, the Koc's and TUSIAD have built this system, and they support it with all their strength because it works for them.

The parties of the system, whatever their name, their program and their slogan, are parties which defend the existing lawless and exploitative order. Whatever their promises, the survival of the system and the state security always have priority over the interests and the demands of the people. This attitude leads to the oppression of the people's struggle, it maintains injustice and it aims at continuing the honourless and immoral system.

ANAP, DYP, RP, DSP, CHP, MHP, BBP, DBH, YDH.... they all work for the interests of the exploiting classes, directly or indirectly. They know the problems of the people very well, because they caused them. But they are not feeling the pain they cause. No board of a system party has members from the people. The system parties only think about the workers, the peasants and the civil servants shortly before the elections, and after them they just continue.

Although the system parties all have the same goal, protecting and developing the existing order of injustice, there are also contradictions between them, stemming from the fight for a part of the booty. That's why they are calling each other names, while they act against the people arm in arm. These parties are opportunistic to the bone: what they spit out yesterday with disgust, is digested today with great appetite.

The parties with a democratic facade play a special role within the system. That's why also social democratic parties like the DSP and the CHP have nothing to do with the people and with democracy.

When the interests of those in power are at stake, these parties remain silent about torture, shootings, village destruction and massacres. They do not even protest when their own representatives are assaulted by police. Their silence during the repression in Sivas, Gazi and on May Day reveals their true character: the existing order does not tolerate genuine opposition.

The demand of the Refah Party for a "Just Order" unfolded to be a big lie when Erbakan took a seat in government. They've used the religious feelings of the people and the dismay of their voters for the system. It's mere hypocrisy that the Refah Party still speaks about a "Just Order", despite the dubious financial dealings of Erbakan, despite the confiscated gifts for Bosnia, despite the Mercumek-file and despite the revealed entanglement in the drug trade. And it was just as false when the Refah Party at one side attacked the forces abroad and imperialism, even stating that America was "the great devil", but on the other side Erbakan flew to the USA for open and secret talks. Later they even admitted that the USA had given their permission for the Refah Party to join the government.

To be able to occupy their government seats, the Refah Party distanced itself from its statement that the Customs Union was "Pact of Servitude". While the board of the Refah Party promises to "free the people from poverty", Erbakan spends trillions of Lira in 5-star hotels to celebrate his daughters wedding. They claim to oppose the policy of Israel and Zionism, but they are the ones who sign military and economic treaties with Israel. The Refah Party tries, behind its Muslim mask, to maintain the system. It nourishes itself, far from its religious ideals, from the money of the imperialist countries and the oil sheikhs. As soon as it became a government party, its mask fell.

From ANAP and DYP to MHP, parties of the system have governed in different combinations, yet none has solved the people's problems. They are united with big capital, torturers, the Mafia, usurers and large landowners. Counter-guerrilla chiefs hold key positions, while links between representatives of these parties and fascist murderers such as Çatlı have inflicted great harm on the people.

In case a system party is not in power, they call upon the people to protest. But such calls are always within the framework of the system. The system parties are not principally against opposition forces, because they know they cannot get in government without support of the people and the media, but they want an opposition which is aimed against the parties which are in the government, thereby supporting

the own party. They don't want an opposition which comes from outside the system. That's why they are prepared to collaborate with the governing parties in case the people's opposition has to be smashed.

3. Whom does parliament serve?

Can the Turkish parliament, the Grand National Assembly, solve the problems of the people? Long experience has given us the answer.

First, we must recognise this: parliament has become an institution without real independence. Its members are controlled by the National Security Council, which is itself influenced by imperialist powers. Parliament merely approves decisions dictated elsewhere.

Parliamentary proceedings are public for everyone to see. Debate is dominated by corruption, embezzlement and breaches of the law. From the party leaderships to individual representatives, the institution is tainted. Every day, television and newspapers expose new scandals.

Parliament has become a place where many representatives go to enrich themselves. Before elections, they spend enormous sums on propaganda; afterwards, they seek to recover that money several times over through corruption, abuse of office and embezzlement. Their absence from their constituencies shows whose interests they really represent.

The fist fights, the insults and the barbecue parties in parliament can hardly be distinguished from scenes in a pub, and the transfers of delegates between the parties resemble the transfers between football teams.

We cannot expect this parliament to make wise decisions or pass laws that benefit the people. Members attend in force when voting on their holidays, salary increases or extensions of the state of emergency. When the interests of the people are at stake, many stay away. Their conduct reveals how little they care.

This parliament is even hostile towards the pseudo-democracy. Remember how the delegates from the DEP and the HADEP, elected by the people, were taken in custody and put in jail.

This parliament isn't a "National Council" at all, and the delegates are in no way "representatives of the nation". Because all of us know that it is not the people, it's the boards of the parties and the bosses of the monopoly bourgeoisie who decide who is becoming a delegate. They are no representatives of the nation, they are representatives of the holding firms, the powerful families, the Mafia gangs and the party leaders.

That's why they do not listen to the nation's problems, they listen only to the bosses. They do what they are told by these people. Parliament cannot find a solution for the problems of the people. On the contrary, they share the responsibility for its needs.

4. What is our position towards political parties and parliament?

We are forced to live with the plunder and corruption of the parties. The representatives of the system organise a race to fill their treasuries as quickly as possible before the end of their government period. Their scandalous acts, their backroom dealings and their lies stink to heaven, so we cannot trust them. The bourgeoisie is panicking because they have to compromise. Nevertheless, they put thieves and murderers at the top of their parties.

Fascists and murderers like Okkes Sendiller or Yasar Dedelek. Pseudo exporters like Cavit Caglar, contra-guerrilla chiefs like Mehmet Agar, Unal Erkan, Necdet Menzir or Dogan Gures, they all found a place under the same roof to continue their hostility towards the people as delegates and ministers.

There is a world of difference between the lives of the delegates and our lives. We curse them every day, in our houses, in the cafes, at work and in the bus when they try to soothe us with their lies and promises.

There is scarcely anyone who trusts this system, the existing parties or the politicians. We have distanced ourselves from parties with which we were once associated.

But despite the mistrust and our distance from the system, we do not really know what to do or where to turn.

We have to find the right way. When we do not become aware of our strength and act accordingly, we will fall for the "elections" again and we will tumble from one system part to the other.

Whatever party we vote for, and whether or not we openly express our anger at the system, we all feel indignation at conditions in our country. When we recognise that our problems do not arise simply from one party or another, or from individual politicians, our anger is directed towards the system and the state itself.

The uprisings in Gazi and Elbistan arose from this development. Despite massacres by the state, the people of Gazi refused to retreat and resisted in the streets for days. The people fought back and expressed their anger. In Elbistan, too, the people directed their anger at the state.

Despite the influence of forces hostile to progress, thousands confronted state institutions. Even in the presence of large numbers of soldiers and police officers, they were not afraid to challenge state power. Confrontations in Nurtepe, Okmeydanı, Kirazlı, Göktürk and on May Day 1996 showed both growing anger at the existing order and greater determination. Not everyone involved in these uprisings was already politically conscious or convinced of the need to oppose the state. The people learn through their own experience, discover the source of their suffering and begin to direct their protest against the system, its parties and their false promises.

5. What are our problems, and what causes them?

Can we count all our worries?

Injustice... hunger... poverty... homelessness... no education... threatened by illness and death because of lacking physicians and midwives... the ban on organisations... the removal of the freedom of expression and the freedom of self-determination... the forced influence of another culture, the alienation from ourselves and our traditions... the exploitation of the workers and the toilers... the oppression of the young people... the exploitation and humiliation of women... the loss of identity of the peoples in Turkey... the police truncheons and the cruelty of the soldiers... torture, dungeons, fascist attacks, extra-judicial executions and massacres... the wiping away of our villages, the forced evacuations and the destruction of the gecekondus...

The cause of these problems is not the torturing police commissioner, it is not the chief slave of the bosses, not the corrupt school director, not the greedy chief physician of the hospital. Therefore it's short-sighted that only the "sloppy" government is responsible for our problems. The causes must be looked for at their roots.

The corrupt directors, torturing policemen and greedy bureaucrats fulfil the task they were given by the state. Did it ever happen that a person from the people, a democrat or a revolutionary were asked for such a position? On the contrary, the state is very busy with throwing such people out of their positions.

At the roots of the problems we thus do not find individual persons, we find the state. The problems result from the exploitative and oppressive system, erected by the state against the people.

The ruling class has to force millions of workers into poverty and starvation to increase it wealth through capitalist exploitation. Without cruelty against the people, which raises its voice against injustice, poverty and disgrace, the powers that be in this system could not hold on to their position.

By brutal oppression, the rulers try to force us into submission. To break our strength, they strive to divide us into Alevis and Sunnis, into Turks and Kurds, to incite us against each other.

No matter which problem one looks at, the cause always is the same. All our small and greater worries are a result of the system which representatives try to protect this cruel order with their fascists acts.

6. Can our problems be solved within the existing system?

As long as the exploiting and cruel order exists, there are no feasible solutions, and our problems will continue.

The solutions, offered to us by the system parties, lead to nothing. Nothing will improve because of a change in personalities in government.

When we achieve a certain goal today with a lot of efforts, the same problem could emerge tomorrow again because of the political and economic developments. The fascist could take away the gained rights again. A comprehensive solution is only possible through a revolutionary People's Council.

This doesn't mean of course, that it is not worthwhile to fight for our rights because there is no people's government yet, or because they could take away our gained rights the next day again.

It is possible to force the existing system to grant certain right through a stubborn, patient and, if need be, open struggle. We can solve some problems without governing power, just by developing mutual aid and solidarity and by uniting the strength of the people.

If we do not start to fight for our rights and freedom today, if we do not make new experiences, we will stand still on a certain level and we will not come closer to the struggle for building up our own government.

7. Do we have the strength and ability to govern ourselves?

Yes.

When even the representatives of this order, shortly before ruins, belief that they are strong enough to govern a people, than we can do that as well, and much better.

Furthermore, the people's forces will not pursue their own, individual interests, they will pursue the interests of the entire people.

When we think of the people, we see a picture of diversity, of great wealth. All capabilities, all knowledge and experience are to be found in the people, there we find the people with a purpose, people who are determined and prepared to sacrifice. The people create new values and develops them. There are no difficulties for the people to govern itself. The only hindrance is the existing order.

Popular government is best placed to advance economic, technical and cultural development and to train capable people in every field. The decisive question is who holds power. Bourgeois politicians, who have governed for decades, insult the people by claiming that they alone know how to govern. Yet their record shows that they cannot. We can prove our capacity only by taking power into our own hands. Strength lies with the millions of working people, not with a handful of parasites who live on their labour.

These millions of people are the workers in the factories, the civil servants in the state institutions, the pupils in school and the merchants on the market.

They live in the neighbourhoods. And when we talk about neighbourhoods, we do not mean the wealthy neighbourhoods like Etiler in Istanbul, Cankaya in Ankara or Alsancak in Izmir. We mean working-class neighbourhoods, the neighbourhoods where the workers and working people live.

8. What problems do people face in working-class neighbourhoods?

Working-class neighbourhoods are home to people from many sections of society: workers, unemployed people, civil servants, shopkeepers, craftspeople, pupils, pensioners, widows, widowers and orphans. Millions of people, whatever their occupation, age or gender, face similar problems.

These problems are numerous. Some, such as price rises and police repression, are felt throughout the country. Others are particular to certain neighbourhoods: impassable roads, inadequate water and electricity supplies, or the demolition of homes. Shopkeepers, housewives and young people also face problems specific to their circumstances. Whether a problem affects everyone or a particular group, its underlying cause is the same: the system.

The problems have different levels of urgency, according to neighbourhood and region. In one place the water supply might be the most urgent problem, somewhere else the destruction of the gecekondus might need most attention. Anyway, there are a lot of problems.

The streets can hardly be used, in winter because of the mud, in summer because of the dust, so ambulances or fire-engines can only reach the neighbourhood with difficulty. A lot of people, especially children, are killed in traffic accidents because there are no safe crossings on the main roads.

Residents of the gecekondu areas suffer from the bad access to public transport. City buses usually don't come there, or the frequency is so low that people have to wait for hours. And when a bus comes, it's packed like a sardine can.

One of the biggest problems in poor gecekondu areas is the water supply. In some places only dirty and unhealthy water comes from the taps, in other places there is no water at all.

While the neighbourhoods of the rich and the shopping centres are very well lit, the working-class areas are doomed to darkness. Often the voltage is too low, and the many power cuts damage the electrical appliances bought with great difficulty, so there are additional costs for the families and the small merchants. Because of the faulty installation of electric wires, there are many accidents.

People have to live in dilapidated buildings that are harmful to health. The houses cannot be heated or ventilated properly, water pours in through the roofs, and the cold in winter causes frost damage, sometimes leading to dangerous situations like the collapse of the building. And then there is the worry when the city administration is going to tear down the buildings or if the house owner is going to throw out the tenants.

There are great health risks in every working area. In many areas there are open sewers and rubbish is not collected. Such conditions cause many diseases.

The working people are excluded from health care because they cannot pay. In the working-class areas there are no or insufficient healthcare facilities in which there are sometimes no doctors available. There are thousands of cases in which people remained disabled for the rest of their lives, or even died, as a result of relatively minor diseases.

The educational provision is also totally inadequate. Sometimes there is no school in the neighbourhood at all, often there is a primary school but no secondary school or secondary school. The children have to travel for miles every day to go to school. In the available schools, they are raised very badly, they start to think egoistically and then they are of no use, they are no joy to their parents and family anymore. These schools are estranging them from the values of their people. The state demands school fees from the students, money for books, for uniforms, for sports classes and for the heating of the buildings.

In winter, the workers have problems to heat their houses because there is a shortage of fuel in quality as well as quantity. The people are dependent on the merchants and the usurping business men. This situation endangers the health, especially of the children.

Young people are drawn into the quagmire of drugs, prostitution and gambling. This causes serious problems for family life.

There are no sports facilities for the youth and the workers. The available facilities are profit-oriented and can only be watched rather than used by ordinary people.

The children have to work because their families' difficult economic circumstances, and it is often very hard for young people to find education or employment. And they only receive very low wages for their hard labour under bad conditions.

Millions of people are excluded from social and cultural life. Things like theatres, cinemas and libraries are very rare in the working-class areas, and if they are available, the poor in the area cannot afford to go there.

People are humiliated by the state institutions, especially by the city administration. Without bribes, nothing can be achieved there.

It's similar with the police and the gendarmes in the working-class areas. The police stations have become centres of cruelty, the police extracts protection money from the merchants and the craftsmen and they torture the people. When one needs to go to the police station for something, one is glad to come home again without being tortured.

Fascist gangs, set up with the support of the police and the state, exercise their terror in the working-class areas. These enemies of the people open their meeting places with names like "Ulku Ocagi", "Bizim Ocak Dergesi" or "Milli Genclik Vakfi". They threaten the small merchants who are forced to pay protection money, they have become a plague. At night, they roam the streets in gangs, they fire their weapons in all directions to intimidate the people, they set fire to the working places and the houses of the workers. These fascists act on orders of the state.

People grow poorer by the day because of the economic crisis. They have become accustomed to repeated increases in the prices of necessities such as fuel, sugar and bread.

There are also people without relatives in these areas, disabled people and people who need care. Some of them are even homeless. And there are a lot more problems, general ones, as well as specific ones. The ones we listed are just the most common, the ones that come to mind first.

9. Can the state solve our problems?

No, it cannot.

Because state institutions themselves cause many of our problems. The state tries to conceal this, while parties of the system use those same problems as election propaganda, as though they bore no responsibility for them.

In their propaganda, the parties pretend they achieved the rights and successes which were in fact gained by us. And then they just don't care anymore, they just leave everything as it is. Concepts are made, but never realised. Services are started, offered for a month, and closed again. It's not their real goal to solve the problems.

Local authorities bear responsibility for many of the problems described above. Yet candidates who promise 'services for the people' are often more concerned with their careers and personal enrichment than with meeting public needs. Even minor improvements are presented as acts of generosity rather than duties. Neighbourhoods that give governing parties few votes are punished through the denial of essential services.

This hostility towards the people continues at higher levels of the state. Those in power put their own interests first. In the institutions of the existing order, the will of exploiters and oppressors prevails over that of working people.

10. Can we find solutions ourselves?

Yes.

We can solve a lot of problems ourselves. Some problems can never be solved within this system, but others can be addressed even within the framework of the system.

There are many examples for the latter. If the roads are bad, we can all do something by taking a spade in our hands and repairing the road ourselves. But we could also try to get the city administration to act. But in all cases we depend on one thing if we want to use our possibilities: organised cooperation.

It's us who have to deal with all these problems. That's why we know best which demands have to be made and what measures have to be taken. It's not enough to know the problems, we must be able to solve them. This can only be done through unity and collective struggle. We will have to develop the determination to fight, the determination to win. If we help each other and fight together in solidarity, we will get ahead step by step.

11. Why must we unite and organise?

Without organising, the fight for our rights will not succeed.

Those who exploit our people and attack it, have united themselves and their acts are co-ordinated. Therefore we cannot confront them as individuals or as small groups.

If we resist the exploitation and the cruelty as individuals, it will hardly be possible to succeed. For example, a single factory worker cannot change the basic conditions by resisting on his own. All the workers in the factory would have to join. And if real changes are to be achieved, all the workers in a certain branch of the economy would have to unite. Or let us look at our neighbourhood: if a single person goes to the city administration to demand reparation of the roads, they do not even listen. The situation changes when the whole neighbourhood unites. And if all working-class areas are united, nobody will be able to ignore our demands.

There is a proverb: "One hand cannot clap, only two hands have a voice". We do not have just two hands, we have millions. Imagine the voice of these numerous hands! Who could possibly withstand these hands, clenched into one fist?

We have to organise ourselves and unite to show the strength of the people, to show what can be done.

B. Purpose, character and independence (Questions 12–19)

12. What is a People's Council?

The People's Council is a true form of self-organisation by the people. The hands of the people are joined in it.

It consists of organised people who are humiliated by exploitation and excluded from the basic necessities of life like education, health care and the right to organise.

The People's Councils are made up of the workers, the civil servants, the small merchants, the unemployed, the youth, and by all people who want to live in dignity. There are no differences made between the people, there is no hierarchy. Provocateurs, oppressors, exploiters, robbers and thieves are excluded from participating in the People's Council.

The Council discusses the people's problems and seeks solutions. It makes decisions that the people themselves put into practice.

The people's will is also a theme of the Council. The people do not want to be exploited and oppressed. They want a decent life, a future for their children and security for their old age. They do not want the resources of the country to be exploited for the benefit of others. They want all people, all

nationalities and religious creeds to live together as brothers and sisters. They do not want freedoms which only exist on paper. So the People's Council is an organisation for a humane and dignified life. It serves as a defence against the enemy forces against the people, against oppression, against the ban of organisations and against the cruelty of the state.

13. What are the tasks of a People's Council?

The People's Council has the following tasks and functions:

• Solving the problems in the neighbourhood by means of a struggle in solidarity.

• Uniting all organisations that fight in their own field against exploitation and oppression.

• Strengthen the people's resistance to state repression, protect the neighbourhood against intimidation and limit the damage caused by attacks.

• Securing the right of self-determination of all people, now and in the future.

• Gathering experiences in self-rule by the people.

• Creating a unity between Turks and Kurds, Alevis and Sunnis, workers and small merchants on the basis of mutual interests, thus surpassing all discrimination on a national, religious or professional basis. This will prepare the foundation for the solidarity between the people from different professional, religious, national and cultural groups.

• Making the people aware of their own strength, thus increasing confidence.

• Participation of the creative strength of the people in the liberation struggle.

• Creating a force against the ruling system which has to be taken seriously.

• Spreading the awareness that the fight for our demands has to be a fight for a life in freedom, equality and justice.

14. Why do we want People's Councils?

Today there are many mass organisations operating in different fields and regions, with different aims and programmes. Most arose from the people's struggles and developed through them. They possess a wealth of experience. The struggle has now reached a stage at which new and more effective forms of organisation are needed.

Existing organisations are often divided by occupation, sector, nationality, religion or region. The People's Councils we seek to establish are open to all, regardless of nationality, origin, gender, religious belief, occupation or age, because they should express the unity of the people.

Important features of a People's Council are representation, agreed regulations and the imperative mandate, under which delegates remain accountable to those who elected them. In many existing organisations, bureaucracy has excluded the rank and file, leaving important tasks to a small leadership. The councils must not repeat that pattern.

The associations, the unions and the other organisations will continue their work independently. But the people's forces in working-class neighbourhoods will unite in the People's Councils.

The People's Councils will become mass organisations that will achieve concrete successes through solidarity between the people, the unity in struggle, the unity of strength and the broadest possible democratisation.

By founding, expanding and coordinating the People's Councils in the whole country, we will transform the great potential of the people into a giant organised force.

15. Are the People's Councils secret?

No.

People's Councils are not secret institutions. They are legitimate, open and democratic organisations of the people. Their legitimacy derives from the justice of their aims.

The demands of the People's Councils are legitimate and justified. A humane life, justice, equality and freedom are demands whose legitimacy cannot reasonably be denied. Their work in support of these aims is therefore legitimate. There will be lawful activities as well as struggles for rights that the existing laws restrict.

In this way, we will push forward the democratic struggle in our country.

In countries like ours, organisations like the People's Council cannot force rights by remaining strictly within the law because the constitution and the laws leave no room for the people to exercise their rights. For example, freedoms and rights are listed in the constitution under "Individual Rights and Freedoms", but all of them are restricted, or even totally hollowed out, because of additions and exceptions. Such a constitution is of no use to the people.

Other laws like the Anti-Terrorism Law, the Press Law, the Law on Gathering and Manifestations, the Police Law and the Law on the Regions are exclusively designed to restrict, or even totally deny, the democratic rights of the people.

Should we not wage a democratic struggle in such a country? Should we not establish organisations for such a struggle?

Of course, such a democratic struggle and the establishment of mass organisations is necessary. Alongside the associations and unions there are organisations in many fields which, although they are not officially registered as an association, are nevertheless legal and legitimate. The People's Council is such and open, legal and legitimate organisation.

It may be forbidden to rally on Kizilay, the central square in Ankara, but the square has been occupied by workers many times. And it is not legal to gather signatures for a petition. But the people's struggle has broken through these restrictions, these laws only exist on paper now.

When a child was run over by a car because there was no safe crossing, many people blocked the traffic, spontaneously protesting without any permission, and they demanded those who were responsible to be held accountable. According to the law, this was forbidden as well. But thousands of people showed no fear to break this law, and nobody was able to do anything against it.

Day by day, the television news shows how thousands of workers take to the streets, despite the laws. It may not be legal, but it is justified and legitimate. They are attacked by the police again and again, but this does not prevent them from taking to streets again.

And there are many more examples...

It's the knowledge about the legitimacy of such activities which moves the people to break the law. All activities in which we are right, which we deem just, which are honourable and dignified, are thus legitimate. And that's why the People's Councils are legitimate, because they possess these characteristics.

16. What is the relationship between People's Councils and other mass organisations?

Alongside People's Councils, other mass organisations exist and will continue to exist.

Especially the workers and civil servants are almost all organised in unions, organised according to neighbourhoods and religious creeds. And there are associations of the small merchants, sporting clubs and cultural associations. These mass organisations were established despite political differences, because people still had lot in common. Temporary associations are set up in working-class neighbourhoods to deal with actual items, for instance the election of a mayor and the administration. These are mass organisations.

But a lot of these mass organisations are not pursuing the goals they pretend to. Some organisations are even only set up for personal gain.

The People's Councils do not reject the existing organisations (except the latter ones). They are not redundant, because they all have their tasks in specific areas. That's why the People's Councils cooperate with them and all upon all their members if necessary.

17. What happens if People's Councils are not established?

This question can be answered in several ways.

Let's first look at it from the people's viewpoint. Many failed attempts have shown that organising the people through the associations and the professional associations cannot succeed. These institutions were not able to gain the people's trust and they were unable to start any initiative. That's why we need, considering the present situation in our land, the People's Councils to organise the people in a democratic manner.

If the People's Councils are not established, the possibilities for the existing organisations will even get worse, they will get estranged from the people and they will only carry the people in their name. Fear and mistrust will continue to prevent mass participation. The powers that be will be able to split the people in different nationalities and religious creeds. Fights and racism will paralyse the organising of the people, and those who still find each other will be separated by state repression. In the end the masses will only be occupied with the daily worries to survive and the oppression will go on.

Even when some people will react to the situation, the problems in the neighbourhoods and in the rest of the country will continue. And as the government crisis deepens, the situation for the people deteriorates, although the pain will hardly be tolerable. The price of bread will rise day by day, hundreds or even thousands of people will loose their job, day in, day out. The violence by the police and the military will multiply. Our customs and morals will degenerate, and the people will get further estranged from their traditions. Everybody will be preoccupied with saving themselves, and solidarity between people will be destroyed. The politicians of the system parties will deceive the people and lie to them as usual, so people will continue to expect the solution from others and they will not take matter into their own hands.

From the viewpoint of the revolutionaries, there will be the problem that the supporters of the organisations will be apart of the people. They will speak on behalf of the people, but the people will not participate in the activities in large numbers. They will participate in some actions, but withdraw again afterwards. Some associations and trade groups have already separated themselves from the people, and some of them cannot even lead their own members. It often happens that the people do not understand the fight for the leadership and then withdraw.

If the People's Councils are not established, the revolutionaries will not be able to use the people's anger. People who distanced themselves from the system will return to it. This will enable the politicians to continue their lies to the people.

Their will be difficulties with the establishment and expansion of the mass organisations, but when the people, the bearer of the revolution, gets away form the influence of the system and finds the solution with itself, then this will have an effect on the revolutionary struggle as well. The people will see the necessity of the revolution and carry it on their shoulders. It will join the struggle with its potential and its creativity. Without the People's Councils, the revolutionary process will remain more limited and more painful.

On the other hand the People's Councils will be a base for revolutionaries to take root in the people and to strengthen themselves with the values and the power of the people. Without the People's Councils, the estrangement will increase.

18. What distinguishes People's Councils from revolutionary organisations?

A revolutionary organisation possesses an ideological program, a certain idea about the revolution and a centralist inner structure. It does not limit its program and struggle to individual, concrete areas and issues, it has the goal the take over political power in stead.

A revolutionary organisation strives to direct all unions, People's Councils, associations, legal, illegal, political and military organisations to the revolutionary goal, transforming them into one movement.

The People's Councils are different from the revolutionary organisations that are based on revolutionary unity. In the People's Councils, people with different political views meet to form a democratic organisation. A People's Councils includes socialists, revolutionaries, patriots, democrats and even supporters of right-wing system parties. In it there is room for people with different political thoughts and attitudes and also for non-political people as well, there is room for all who want to take part in solving concrete problems for the benefit of the people, because this is conform the nature of mass organising.

The goals and the struggle of the councils is at first instance limited, their political statements will be characterised by economic and democratic demands. It is not their aim to take over political power. Together with the number of issues a People's Council works on, its influence will increase. The expansion of its political framework and its development to the lower organs in the revolutionary struggle is a question of time and leadership.

19. Are People's Councils linked to a political organisation?

No.

The People's Councils constitute a organisational form on their own and are thus not connected to a political organisation. Of course revolutionaries, democrats and patriots who live in its area should participate in the Council's work and present their proposals and political views. These people have been leading the revolutionary struggle in our country for decades, they have made a lot of experiences in the economic and democratic struggles of the workers, civil servants and the inhabitants of the gecekondus and they should bring in these experiences to the councils. But the decisions are taken by the members and delegates after discussing the different proposals and ideas.

The People's Councils are open to all segments of the population and all members have the right to speak. A different form would overestimate or destroy the true organising of the people. Decisions are taken, not according to where the proposals are coming from, decisive is whether they are judged right or wrong.

It will not be easy to keep this characteristic of the councils. We must remain steadfast against the demagogy of the oligarchy which will turn against the participation of the revolutionaries in the People's Councils. Against these attempts, we will have to defend the legitimacy or the revolutionaries everywhere.

C. Establishment, representation and decision-making (Questions 20–37)

20. How is a People's Council established?

Decisive in establishing the People's Councils are our steps, our input and our determination with which we address the people. There will be sabotage attempts from several sides with different ideas and intentions, and there will be setbacks. The forces in power could possibly propagate that they are going the solve the problems of the people in case they do not take part in the council. They could claim the People's Councils are connected to a revolutionary organisation. They could try to destroy the organising of the people ideologically and physically. Despite these attempts we have to be patient, we must go on to convince the people of the truth and we must teach them to take matters into their own hands.

When we have achieved that, the question remains how we have to shape the founding process. This can differ.

In the neighbourhoods where the founding of a council is on the agenda, there is already a history of struggle. People already know each other. The first step to establish a council could be a meeting of the people who took part in the struggle in the area before, people who want to get organised and who understood the necessity of the councils.

It's very important that these people plan how the council is going to be set up and what its goals are. They establish what institutions, political groups and persons should be addressed and who is going to address them. The founders first establish the different views about the council, and then they call for a big meeting. The number of participants will gradually increase with future meetings.

From a certain point, dependent on the situation in the neighbourhood, the character of the area and the qualities of the activist, work will start. There is no fixed recipe, creative concepts have to be developed how all people in the neighbourhood can be reached. When this task is solved satisfactory, it will be determined which persons are members of the council and how many member the council will have. It is determined which issues will have priority, if and which delegates have to be elected and according to what regulations the organisation will work. Finally, the council will be founded and this will be announced.

21. What is the role of revolutionaries in this process?

Just as important as determination and our awareness of the necessity to establish the People's Councils, is the development of trust in the masses. On this basis, we must lead our work to success with patience and resolve, without getting intimidated by egoistic power games.

When we've understood the necessity of the work in the councils, we can make this comprehensible to others too. We have to make serious efforts to convince the people. Surely, many have lost their confidence and have become weak, but this must not prevent us from trying again.

The members of the council must not see their work as support, they should participate actively. Often people only offer their support, but the people we reach should take responsibility themselves to found the council and leading it to a mass organisation. We must make clear that the people should solve their problems together.

In the first phase, resolved work is necessary. Smaller preparatory meetings to set the agenda are necessary so the meetings will not be left to mere coincidence. We should take our work seriously if we are to achieve our goals.

We may not just tutor the people in the council, we should learn from them too, what do they want, what do they think., with what experiences do they approach the problems. We can accelerate the process by taking these things up and act accordingly.

It's very important to recognise the problems and the specifics of our neighbourhood and the region. We must note the results of our research and then list the priority of the problems and the qualities of the people. However, we should be careful in classifying people, because we must be prepared to address and welcome all.

The work of the council may not be become bureaucratic. We should act swiftly and with energy and self-confidence. The work in the council will be laborious, but it will be worthwhile.

22. Who can become a member of a People's Council?

All those who are against all forms of exploitation and who are on the side of justice, equality and freedom, can participate in the work of the People's Council. It's open to all who love their land and their people, who do not serve the state cruelty, who did not commit crimes against the people, who are honest and who do not sell out. Everybody is welcome who wants to work for the benefit and the will of the

people and who wants to take the solution of his or her problems into the own hands. The People's Council opens its doors to all who live in honesty and honour.

The possibility to participate does not depend on language, religious creed, nationality and traditions. Such differences should not exist.

The members of the People's Council should have the wish to fight for their rights. They have to act according to the will and the decisions of the council. It is no hindrance if somebody has given his or her vote to a system party on the past.

The call to participate is addressed to the people from all classes and segments of the population who are oppressed and exploited and therefore dissatisfied with the system: workers, civil servants, pupils, students, doctors, lawyers, engineers, craftsmen, housewives, the unemployed, and others. People from every age and gender, religious creed, nationality, region and city can become member of the council.

23. How does a People's Council make decisions?

There are several possibilities to decide in the People's Council.

The first possibility is to gather all council members to decide. At the beginning, all those who are present vote about the agenda. The issues on the agenda should be discussed with the greatest possible participation before the council takes a vote. A decision is taken by a majority vote.

When the number of members is too large, the delegates take the decision according to the same procedure.

These delegates should bring in the thoughts and proposals of those they represent into the meeting. The members should know about the meeting of the delegates and they should have the possibility to express their will to the delegate. The delegates should go from door to door to personally address the people. The should prepare thoroughly for the meeting by discussions with the people and thinking about the possible results.

24. What is a delegate?

A delegate represents a section of the people in a particular area or neighbourhood. Delegates bring the wishes and demands of residents to the Council and report its decisions back to them. Their work is not confined to Council meetings: they must understand the problems people face locally and help to find solutions.

At the beginning, the People's Council can take decisions through discussions involving all its members. As membership increases, this becomes impractical, and a system of elected delegates must be introduced.

The form of this system depends on the area in which the council works, and from the nature of its activities. The delegates can be divided according to streets or parts of the neighbourhood, but other forms are possible as well. It's decisive that the system reflects the will of the people as good as possible. In the beginning, the People's Councils will develop different forms in different places, but the basic idea remains the same.

25. What are the tasks of delegates?

The tasks of the delegates are:

• Identify the proposals, wishes and demands of the people they represent and bring them before the council.

• Attend meetings of the People's Council.

• Report the council's decisions promptly to the people they represent.

• Ensure that decisions are carried out and take an active part in implementing them.

• Invite residents who support the council, including those who are not yet members, to share tasks and responsibilities.

Delegates must keep the council's work active, encourage initiatives and help it address a wide range of problems.

Delegates must remain close to those who elected them so that representation does not degenerate into bureaucracy. If members cannot attend a council meeting, delegates should meet them before or afterwards to exchange information. Otherwise, members risk becoming detached from the council.

26. What qualities should delegates possess, and how are they selected?

Delegates should be honest, considerate people who have earned the confidence of their neighbours. They must be attentive to people's problems and prepared to work towards solutions.

Delegates must be capable of representing the people. Their character, way of life, relations with neighbours and commitment to the interests of the people should demonstrate their suitability.

Delegates are not nominated, they will be appointed by the members of the People's Council. Delegates for a People's Council in a working area can be elected by the inhabitants of the several streets, for instance. The members should discuss the candidates and then vote who is sent to the council. If possible, those should be elected who really do the work and who have understood the necessity of the People's Councils. The People's Council may in no way develop bureaucratic mechanisms because it differs from the institutions of the powers that be because of its vividness.

Appropriate forms of participation should be available to cultural, sporting and other associations active in the area. Provision should also be made for families of martyrs and prisoners, and young people should be able to elect representatives.

27. Can associations participate in People's Councils?

Yes.

Religious and regional associations, sports clubs, cultural organisations and associations of small shopkeepers bring together different sections of the population. Their participation can greatly strengthen the councils.

These bodies can bring forward the problems and demands of different communities. Mutual support and broad participation strengthen collective action and enrich the work of the council. The council should welcome their involvement.

Some members of existing organisations will also join the council, while continuing their previous activities. What matters is that all participating organisations understand the needs and problems of the neighbourhood.

28. Does a People's Council need an executive committee?

The People's Council needs a body responsible for implementing its decisions. Without clear responsibility, essential work may be left to others and agreed solutions may never be put into practice. An executive committee should therefore be established.

The executive committee implements council decisions and assesses the results. When urgent circumstances make it impossible to consult the full council, it may take appropriate decisions, but remains accountable to the council for every action.

The executive committee is chosen from among the delegates and elected by them.

Without an executive committee, a People's Council cannot work effectively.

29. How is the executive committee elected?

The executive committee is elected directly by the council from nominated candidates. The council also determines its responsibilities.

Members should have enough time to carry out their duties, as the committee must meet regularly and respond to emergencies. To keep its work manageable, the committee should consist of between three and nine people.

The members will have substantial responsibilities. Delegates should therefore elect capable, committed and politically conscious people.

30. What are the tasks of the executive committee?

The executive committee has the following responsibilities:

• Implement council decisions through its own work or by assigning tasks to others.

• Organise activities and assess the work carried out.

• Support participants in the council's work and encourage others to become involved.

• Coordinate activities when circumstances change or problems arise.

• Represent the council and local residents in dealings with other institutions.

• Convene extraordinary meetings in emergencies.

31. Can the executive committee make decisions?

Yes. The executive committee can make decisions within the limits established by the council.

The People's Council is the highest decision-making body in its area. The executive committee implements its decisions in accordance with the regulations. It may take independent decisions only in circumstances defined by the council, when immediate action is needed, such as during accidents or fascist attacks.

The executive committee acts in the name of the People's Council, never above it. It must explain its actions and report any urgent decision to the council as soon as possible.

32. Does a People's Council need subordinate bodies?

The council needs specialised committees to deal with particular areas of work as its activities develop. These may include women's, cultural, media, small-business, sports or technical committees. They can also work to defend the legitimate interests of particular sections of the population.

Such committees can help develop people's culture, address problems facing young people, organise education and respond to attacks. They strengthen the Council by taking responsibility for clearly defined tasks.

Temporary committees may also be formed for specific projects, such as improving the water supply or organising a concert.

Committees widen participation and expand the Council's work. Members who take initiative and responsibility gain experience in organising and governing themselves.

33. How can People's Councils defend people against attacks?

We confront a state that has made war against the people a central part of its policy. Fascist gangs and the Mafia attack residents. When we demand our democratic rights, we face truncheons and guns; lives and property are destroyed. Are the people expected to stand by in fear and remain silent? A disorganised people have little means of defence. By organising in People's Councils, residents can develop collective ways to protect themselves.

The People's Councils organise the justified defence of the people against the forces which attack them and oppress them in the neighbourhoods. The working-class areas are almost besieged by the police. On top of it, there are the fascists of the "Grey Wolves" who want to silence the activities of the people. And then there are the different Mafia gangs which constitute a danger to the people.

Organising is necessary for us to be able to defend ourselves against these attacks. The councils will find out the whereabouts of the fascist associations, the collaborators and the traitors, they will isolate them and dispel them from the neighbourhood. This is justified organising to defend the people. The resistance in Gazi against the attacks and the massacre or an unforgettable example. The people in the People's Councils should think about defence of their regions and discuss how the people can be enabled to defend itself effectively. When this is not done, the people can easily be scared.

Of course, the bodies of the People's Council cannot wage the fight against oppression alone. They rather organise the reactions of the masses in their own area and they direct the people's anger against the attacks.

34. How are council and committee decisions implemented?

All members of the People's Council and the committees bear responsibility for implementing the decisions. The responsibility of the delegates and the board members is even bigger, they must be even more willing to sacrifice.

Two important principles in realising the council's and the board's decisions are collectivism and discipline. The activities should be carried out with the broadest possible participation of the members, and it may not happen that decisions are not carried out because of indecisiveness.

Those in the bodies who bear functions should delegate tasks to the masses and keep an eye on the realisation from the beginning to the end. They should help the people when they have difficulties with their work. Only in this manner will the masses be further educated for the struggle, and new members for the council's organs will arise.

For example, when the council decided to organise a manifestation, tasks come up like making banners, posters, advertisements and entrance tickets. Many people should be involved in these tasks. The committee, set up for arranging the manifestation, co-ordinates the entire organising and delegates small tasks to many people. Only then is a successful implementation of decisions possible.

To ensure a disciplined implementation of the decisions, the People's Council appoints an executive organ which divides the work and controls it. A conduct which does not coincide with the decision at all, cannot be tolerated. For example, when a demonstration is organised with banners and slogans, there should be no slogans and no conduct which is contrary to the decisions. It should be custom to follow the will of the People's Council so every action can go according to the plan.

35. Must all members abide by the decisions of a People's Council and its bodies?

All members of the People's Council should follow the decision of the meeting, even if they voted against it.

Those who participate in the People's Council should follow its decisions. When somebody has a different view about a decision and then refuses to carry it out, he in fact rejects the People's Council as a whole. It's therefore impossible to sometimes follow the decisions, and sometimes not. This would be contrary to the will of the people and harm them.

All members with a different opinion than the majority should nonetheless work seriously for the implementation of a decision. During the discussions, everybody has the right to make proposals and to defend them freely, but when a final decision is made, this should be followed. Those who do not, who in stead try to defer it, violate the decision, show an individualistic attitude, acts undisciplined and show disdain for the People's Council. Such an attitude is unacceptable, because the authority of the parliament is harmed when its decisions are trampled upon.

36. What should members of political organisations do if a decision conflicts with their ideology?

It should always be clear that no institution or organisation can dictate a decision to the people's parliament, under no circumstances. A political or other organisation can present its proposals to the People's Council, but they cannot force decisions, because the members will discuss all proposals, they will evaluate them and then take an independent decision, on their own.

Also members or sympathisers of organisations that do not agree with a council's decision should respect and honour this decision. They are a conscious part of the population and see the necessity of mass organisation. Especially they should show great discipline and direct their thoughts on preserving, establishing and developing the organisation. That's why they should accept the will of the people.

If an idea won ground which is contrary to the ideas of a political organisation, this organisation should explain the eventual problems to the people. If all who do not agree with a decision carry out their own policy because their ideas were not accepted, the People's Council would not be able to work. The organisations should address the emerging problems on a long term and intend to educate the masses further.

In exceptional cases the People's Council could take decisions in the progressing struggle of the people who in fact serve the contra-revolution, thus endangering its own foundation. In these rare situations, all people's forces have the right to act contrary to these decisions. However, one may not forget to find out the reason for this false decision.

Such an exception will however hardly occur when appropriate and persistent mass work has been carried out before and when the revolutionaries are really rooted in the neighbourhood and the masses. False decisions can only be prevented by passing on the right ideas to the masses.

37. What is gained when people learn to govern themselves?

Confrontation is the best school for the people. The masses learn best when they make their own experiences.

When the working masses see the resistance or participate in it, they learn what brings political success and how to achieve it. Depending on how the People's Councils and their committees work together, the people will become conscious of its political power. People will learn how to rule themselves by discussing their problems, working at solutions, engaging in active resistance and achieving (limited) success. They will see that they do not need politicians, nor the bourgeois parliament, for their self-organising.

It is essential for self-rule that the millions of value creating people believe in their self-determination capability, showing this by turning away from the bourgeois politicians and institutions, the parliaments, courts, regional administrations, bureaucrats like the governors and councillors, thus demonstrating their independence. An act of standing up, replacing the bourgeois culture of authority by the own authority.

This is the essence we have to grasp.

When this is not realised, we cannot speak about self-determination in this country, now exploited and oppressed by a fascist regime, a country where the people have no rights. But when the People's Councils learn - through practice and their own experiences - to rule themselves, confidence in the own capacities will grow.

D. Challenges, solidarity and future development (Questions 38–50)

38. What problems may arise as People's Councils develop?

There are answers to these questions on several levels:

A. Problems, caused by the people's enemies

The present system wants to prevent that the people stand up for their own interests, solving their own problems. They will try to paralyse the People's Councils, putting it out of order.

This is all obvious. The system will try to estrange the people from the People's Councils by using the mass media, provocateurs and fascist organisations. They will attempt to discredit the councils. The people's enemies will use every conceivable method of terror and demagogy to achieve this. Although their tactics might change, their goal remains the same.

They will claim that underground organisations lead the People's Councils, that they just want to instrumentalise the people, that they only consists of Alevis or other groups. That's why openness and determination of the People's Councils are important. It must be clearly said how the situation is like, what we want and what we propose. Determination and frankness are the most important means against the doubts and fears of the value creating people, caused by the lies of the present system.

B. Problems, stemming from the people themselves

To begin with, the division of tasks could be too naïve, too perfectionist, premature or too slow.

The People's Councils are meant to be lasting institutions. That's why they should not be set up in haste, they would be limited to a small circle and possible dissolve again after a few meetings. During the initial phase, a lot of attention should be paid to addressing the broad masses, contacting suitable local institutions and organisations and carrying out joint activities.

We must not waste time and we have to accelerate our work.

On the other hand, we should not be tempted to fall intoo naïvety and easy-going, into a superficial way of work and harmful small group-building. Like haste, we have to avoid a too perfectionist approach which could postpone the establishment of the councils into the far future.

The founding phase should be quick, but careful.

Furthermore, problems could emerge in the beginning because of mistrust among the people. When the purpose of the People's Councils is not yet fully understood, there could be splits. An attitude of mistrust could also be found with persons who are already active. This can be seen as rather natural in a sense, and we should approach such mistrust with in a grown up manner, aimed at integration. An attitude of determination and openness creates a necessary base of trust.

Especially the experiences of people with the previous attitude of rivalry of the left organisations, causing problems in joint actions, lead to mistrust and pessimism. There will be fears that the People's Council will also become an arena of the left organisations where they will fight their small wars. An open style of police can take away these fears in time. An attitude of exclusion is not appropriate in such cases. Continued work at convincing people is needed.

And then, it is the system which makes people into individualistic, selfish, mistrusting, scared, lazy, pessimistic and estranged creatures. These characteristics could lead to unnecessarily exaggerating smaller problems and abuses, and drawing personal problems into the council's work.

We cannot prevent such problems, but we should act in a constructive and balanced manner in such situations. Even more important is our determination to solve these problems and the exemplary function of our own way of life.

C. Problems, stemming from the attitude of the left

As far as the left has not turned away from a way of working which could not be understood by the people, it still stuck in rivalry, putting its particular group interests in front of the public interests.

And so situations could emerge in which the left organisations do not contribute to a solution because they got hung in formal controversies. We should try to be as warm-hearted as possible, but be careful for destructive and splitting elements as well. These negative attitudes of political organisations should get no room in the initial phase of the People's Council.

39. Will People's Councils always be founded in the same way?

No.

Of course, the founding processes will show similarities, but there will also be special patters, depending on:

• The anti-fascist potential in the neighbourhood

• The dimension of the problems and their causes

• The social and cultural structure of the neighbourhood

• The size of the neighbourhood

• The activities of the reactionary and fascist forces

• The way the people are organised

• The specific characteristics during the initial phase

• The experiences of the people in previous confrontations and the capability of organising, connected with this.

We should not look too much to the founding of councils in other places. We should rather take the specific characteristics and problems of the own region as a start and try to mobilise the social dynamics of the area, without ignoring the experiences of other councils completely. In as far as groups of society are involved in the founding, they determine the character of the organ, and not different political cliques.

40. Is the name "People's Council" important?

Yes, we should consequently insist on this name.

Even when there occur problems with the choice of a name, we should stick to this one. The idea of a council indicates the necessity of organising the broad masses and describes the essence and actual characteristics of the desired form of organisation. Letting this essence go means rejecting self-rule by the people. That's why all those who agree in principle, cannot speak out against this name.

Names like this do not appear from nowhere, they say something about the contents, the character and the way institutions work. One does not first think about a name before plan the institution. On the contrary, the appropriate organisation is worked out carefully first, then a name is given. The world "people" is important because it indicates that no group in society is excluded. But what does "council" mean? The word "council" describes the meeting of people's delegates in an area who discuss certain issues, vote about them and take care of implementing these decisions.

People's Councils aim at organising the whole people, and this should be reflected in the name. In these councils, the people take responsibility for its own fate, taking back its autonomy which has been oppressed for hundreds of years. It's obvious that the name should be in accordance with this responsibility and determination.

The notion of councils is not alien to our culture traditionally and historically. Councils can be found in many fields of society, for instance in village life, family life, in communal administrations and also in state politics. The people can deal less with notions like "Platform", "Initiative" or "Coordination" and such names would lead to several unclearities in the initial phase.

41. Should People's Councils have rules and regulations?

Yes, they should.

The councils represent the appropriate form of organisation of the people. The people will meet to solve several problems, decisions will be made and implemented. This type of organisation involves

hundreds, maybe thousands of people. Decisions have already been made which should be accepted by all.

The rules should be summarised in one or two pages of official regulations, understandable for all. A certain discipline should be maintained, so people will not act as they please and it will become impossible to listen to each other. Permanent quarrels, lack of discipline and direction will lead to the dissolving of the councils in a short time.

What might these regulations look like?

They should address principal questions like the goals of the People's Councils, the desired activities, the composition, the regularity of the meetings and the way decisions are made. Furthermore, coordination structures, permanent sub-committees, the implementation of decisions and the rights and duties of the members could be addressed as well.

42. What problems may arise in the activities of the councils?

In a time of exploitation and oppression, we have to reckon with several kinds of attacks, especially fascist attacks.

There could also emerge other problems:

a) The name of the People's Council should not be used for groups and activities except when this is decided by the council because this could harm the trustworthiness, the legitimacy and the democratic character of the council.

b) There could emerge quite different problems within the council's work in which the "bureaucratisation" of the elected organs pose the biggest problem. This emerges when a lifeless, ignorant and spiritless form penetrates everything instead of a lively and productive bond between the people and the council. This is the biggest problem because all the problems which were described can in principle be solved through a non-bureaucratic structure.

When members or delegates fail to attend meetings, or communicate decisions to residents too slowly, the Council cannot fulfil its essential functions and practical activities suffer.

c) Another problem emerges when the delegates or committees take the workload of all decisions on themselves, or when they - on the contrary - only feel responsible for taking decisions. The implementation of decisions must be carried out by all members and delegates, with the largest possible participation of the people.

In the early stages, relatively few people may be active, leaving much of the practical work to them. Provided the delegates avoid serious mistakes, the problem can be overcome by drawing more residents into the Council's activities.

Other problems arise when people rely on issuing orders and demanding obedience. Responsibilities should be agreed through voluntary commitment and a shared purpose. Those who struggle with their tasks should receive support; otherwise the Council risks losing its energy and initiative.

d) Successful activities can lead to complacency and triumphalism. On the other hand, the growth of the organisation and a sudden increase in participation can cause new problems, leaving activists discouraged. In such cases, one assumes - erroneously - a linear progression of life and resistance. However, there is a long way to go, and nobody should allow to be deceived by success. The work, the tasks and the discipline should be taken seriously. Joy and the belief in the people must always be maintained.

Until exploitation, humiliation, oppression and fascism have been eradicated, neither setbacks nor successes should cause us to lose sight of reality. We must reject both defeatism and triumphalism.

43. How can the continuity of a People's Council be secured?

The existence of the People's Councils can be secured by sincerity, determination, solidarity and the will to fight.

The struggle establishes trust. In struggle, the councils will earn the trust of the broad masses and the People's Council will be established as an institution. The council can also discuss the problems of people who are not members and make suggestions. When these suggestions are put into practice, new members can be won.

When a seat on the Council becomes vacant, new people can take up the responsibility, allowing the people's struggle to continue under the leadership of their people's parliament.

The struggle will not develop in a straight line. There will be difficult periods and setbacks. Trust in the people must remain a basic principle as we address these challenges.

The stability of the councils depends on how well we fulfil our tasks. When we do not work hard enough to secure the function of the council, to promote the participation of all members and expand the field of work, the people will not notice that something new has emerged. In this case, the council will not be a mass movement institution and it will not last long. So stability depends also on the quality of our analyses and our policy leading to the desired form of the councils.

44. Do the councils address only economic or political problems?

No.

All economic, political, social, cultural or moral problems of ordinary life are of interest to the People's Council. This is the organisation that addresses all problems of the people and therefore all matters of the people are an issue for the council. The councils can neither ignore the problems of infrastructure, nor the health problems, the problem of prostitution, nor the worries of a prisoner's mother. The councils are set up to deal with all these problems.

The problems faced by the people have worsened in economic, political, social, cultural and moral terms.

The infrastructure of the streets, the water and electricity supply and the sewers, the struggle against drugs, gambling and prostitution, the creation of playgrounds, looking for a job for an unemployed person, kindergartens, health care, schools, funeral ceremonies for the martyrs, the support of helpless people, the defence of the people against the attacks of official and civic fascist forces, the people's education and the cultural manifestations - all these are issues which are of interest to the people, and they should thus be of interest to the People's Council as well.

45. Do People's Councils concern themselves only with their own areas?

The answer is no.

A People's Council should be sensitive to the problems of workers, civil servants and the youth in other areas, especially if these are working-class areas. The council should support solutions for economic, as well as political problems in these areas.

For example, when in a neighbouring area a struggle is waged against the problems of infrastructure, this has to be supported by the People's Council. It should not withdraw to its own area of interest when in a neighbouring area, or somewhere else in the city, workers are murdered. The same goes for problems in the rest of the country, because this is the country the members of the People's Council live in.

The system tries to split the working people in many ways. We all know this. That's why it is a special duty for the council to unify the people, mobilising all of them to address the problems.

46. What does the "unity of the people" mean? Is it the same as the unity of the left?

Securing the unity of the people means uniting a broad segment of the people's forces who have become aware that they are the people and that they have to fight to solve their problems.

The unity of the people is not the same as the unity of the left. They would be identical only if the majority of the people were organised by the left. Unity among left-wing forces working in different sections of the population is a step towards popular unity, but the two must not be confused.

When the left does not want to set itself apart from the people, they will have to take part in the organising of the people. As is known, large parts of the people are not organised themselves. This is used by several system parties, sects and groups to claim them for themselves. In these organisations, the people denies its interests and values by accepting directions from above. In this way, it gets estranged from recognising its own reality. It must be unified in an organisation of itself, based on its own interests.

Those who reject such an organisation are either afraid of the self-determination of the people, or estranged from the people. All political institutions at the side of the people should participate in founding the People's Councils and support them. The political organisations and the democratic institutions should be aware of not reciting their thoughts and demands to each other, they should submit them to the people. The councils are the place where this can be achieved, and when a group rejects these councils, it essentially rejects the contact with the people. It does not trust its own ideas, or it does not care about organising the people.

The People's Councils should organise the unity of the people, together with the revolutionaries, democrats, patriots and other forces which live in the area. This is the decisive point from the beginning, because when left-wing organisations are part of the people, and part of its organisation, they will participate in the councils anyway and present its views there. And thus the unification of the people in the councils will be of importance to the unification of the left as well.

47. How should political groups discuss disagreements within the People's Council?

It is natural for people to hold different views on an issue, and each view may contain something valid. Everyone attending a meeting has the right to present proposals and seek to persuade others.

After a theme has been discussed sufficiently, a decision is made. Discussions will go on until a decision is made, then they are ended and all will go to work to implement the decision. If the discussions are continued after a decision has already been made, the council will become a "debating club". An offended attitude of those whose proposals have not been accepted cannot be accepted and tolerated. All have to work to implement decisions with their whole strength.

Later, those who have carried out the decisions can discuss the quality of the decision, and when people are interested, the council can address the issue once again.

48. Should People's Councils in the countryside and the cities work together?

Yes.

People's Councils should establish links with one another. Over time, a coordinated structure can be developed in the countryside and the cities.

Because our problems have one mutual cause, the system. When the economic, political and military forces of this system unite their strength, why should we not unite to solve these problems? By uniting, we will become even stronger and we will gain strength to solve our problems. The people's interests the same everywhere and the struggle, waged by the People's Councils, should be united throughout the whole country.

Of course, every council has its own particular problems, but this is no reason not to support each other. A decision of a certain region can be supported by other councils in different ways to make a solution easier.

Not just the councils should maintain mutual relations, the workers, peasants, civil servants, the youth and others should as well. They can develop joint activities, for instance when there are price increases, massacres or accidents.

49. Can People's Councils be established outside residential neighbourhoods?

Yes.

People's Councils can and should be established wherever the people live and work. Workers, peasants, civil servants, students, artists and other sections of the population can establish councils of their own.

Councils are not only instruments for residents of working-class neighbourhoods; they are instruments for all working people.

Every section of the population has the right to speak out and make its own decisions. All must defend themselves against economic and political oppression. To do so, people who work in the same field need organisations. Trade unions and other existing organisations have a role, but they do not remove the need for wider forms of popular organisation.

50. Is the establishment of People's Councils urgent?

Yes, this is a very urgent matter.

People are searching for answers to their problems and for leadership they can trust. In reality, they are also searching for their own strength and capacity to organise. They are looking for People’s Councils. Revolutionary leadership should help people organise and act for themselves.

People must recognise that the strength they seek lies within themselves. Otherwise, a handful of enemies of the people and their spokespeople will continue to deceive them, obstruct their way and preserve the existing order.

Urgent tasks are awaiting the People's Councils to solve our problems, to act for a humane and dignified life, for our rights and freedoms, for an alternative to the existing system, for self-determination of our fate and our future, for the leadership of the people by the people, for developing our own strength, for fraternity, unity and solidarity. The People's Councils will politicise the people, they will develop a people's movement, thus taking an important position in the struggle. The development and expansion of the councils depends on the activities, led by the revolutionaries.

People will defend and expand the People’s Councils when they meet real needs and avoid serious errors in leadership.

The People’s Councils must be established urgently. We must devote our energies to this task. A broad and determined struggle is needed to accelerate their foundation and expansion.

Conclusion — Why We Need People's Councils

From our perspective, People's Councils are necessary because working people must be able to act together and decide about their own lives. A problem that appears individual — an electricity cut, a child's exclusion from school, an unaffordable medicine or arbitrary police checks — is often shared by a whole neighbourhood. Faced alone, these problems are difficult to overcome. Through collective discussion and organisation, people can make common demands and work towards practical solutions.

People's Councils bring together workers, women, young people, pensioners, small shopkeepers and other residents, regardless of national origin, religion or political affiliation. They must not simply speak in the people's name: the people themselves should identify problems, elect accountable representatives, make decisions and take part in carrying them out. Their strength lies in voluntary participation, openness, solidarity and work that meets real needs.

For us, the experience of Gazi shows that the unity expressed in moments of resistance must be sustained through lasting organisation. The same solidarity needed to oppose injustice is also needed to improve housing, education, healthcare, employment and cultural life. Councils can challenge attempts to divide the people and help develop confidence in their own collective abilities.

We therefore see People's Councils both as means of addressing immediate needs and as schools of people's democracy. They enable people to learn how to organise, exercise responsibility and defend their rights together against exploitation, fascism and neglect. Their success is measured not by declarations but by whether the people recognise the council as their own, participate in its decisions and see those decisions put into practice.

PEOPLE'S COUNCILS

Born from the resistance that shook Gazi in 1995, the People's Councils emerged as organs of collective organisation, solidarity and struggle. This book traces the path from massacre and uprising to organised popular power, showing how the people created their own democratic structures in the midst of repression and resistance.

