

# Freedom for Freedom of Expression rally Istanbul, 10–12 March 1997

THIS THREE-DAY event was organised and hosted by the *Freedom of Thought* initiative, a 200-strong group of artists and activists. There is a multiple trial in progress in Istanbul; writers, musicians, actors, journalists, lawyers, trades unionists and others are being prosecuted by the State Security Court. Twenty-one international writers attended the rally; most are members of PEN but three travelled on the invitation of Amnesty International (A.I.), including myself.

More writers are imprisoned in Turkey than in any other country in the world<sup>1</sup> but “the real question (is) not that of freedom for a writer. The real question is that of the national rights of the Kurds.”<sup>2</sup> The annexation of Kurdistan, the attempted genocide and continued oppression of the Kurdish people are three of the major scandals of this century. Historically, the British State, if not prime mover, has had a pivotal role.<sup>3</sup> At one point ‘we’ needed a client-state “to secure (‘our’) right to exploit the oilfields of Southern Kurdistan,” and so ‘we’ created a country, gave it a king, and called it Iraq<sup>4</sup>. ‘Our’ active participation in the assault on the Kurdish people continues to the present where ‘we’ retain a leading interest in diverse ways, e.g. client-state of the USA, member of NATO, member of the European Union, etc. Turkey itself “is now the number two holiday destination for U.K. holidaymakers thanks to superb weather, great value for money accommodation, inexpensive eating out and lots to see and do”.<sup>5</sup>

Prisoners are routinely tortured and beaten in Turkey, sometimes killed. Rape and other sexual violations occur frequently. In the Kurdish provinces the mass murders, forced dispersals and other horrors practised by the security forces are documented by a variety of domestic and international human rights’ agencies. People have been made to eat excrement. From Kurdish villages there are reports of groups of men having their testicles tied and linked together, the women then forced to lead them round the streets. There are files held on children as young as twelve being subject to the vilest treatment. This from a 16-year-old girl detained not in a Kurdish village but by the police in Istanbul:

They put my head in a bucket until I almost drowned. They did it again and again... They tied my hands to a beam and hoisted me up. I was blindfolded. When I was hanging I thought my arms were breaking. They sexually harassed me and they beat my groin and belly with fists while I was hanging. When they pulled down on my legs I lost consciousness. I don’t know for how long the hanging lasted... They threatened that they would rape and kill me. They said I would become paralysed. The torture lasted for eight days.<sup>6</sup>

The young girl was later charged with being a member of “an illegal organisation”. Germany, USA and U.K. are among those who compete to supply war and torture implements to the Turkish security forces, who learned about the efficacy of the hanging process from their Israeli counterparts. A student we were to meet later at Istanbul University was once detained for twenty-four hours and during that period she too was tortured.

There exist “152 laws and about 700 paragraphs ...devoted to regulating freedom of opinion”. The Turkish Penal Code “was passed in 1926 ... (and is) based on an adaptation of the Italian Penal Code ... (Its) most drastic reform was the adoption in 1936 of the anti-communist articles on ‘state security’ from the code of Mussolini. Only in April 1991 were some changes made through the passage of the Law to Combat Terrorism.” Before then, and up until 1989

court cases against the print media had reached a record level with 183 criminal cases against 400 journalists... at least 23 journalists and editors in jail with one of them receiving a sentence of 1,086 years, later reduced to 700 on appeal. The editor of one (well-known journal, banned by the Ozal dictatorship) was prosecuted 13 times and had 56 cases brought against her. She was in hiding at the time the journal *7* appeared in July of 1990. One of her sentences amounted to 6 years, 3 months. Despite international appeals and protests the Turkish government refused to reverse her sentences. No left-wing or radical journal was safe from arbitrary arrest, closure or seizure of entire editions. Police persecution extended into the national press and included daily newspapers. Authors and publishers of books were victimised. In November 1989 449 books and 25 pamphlets were burned in Istanbul on the orders of the provincial governor... (and up until) 1991 189 films were banned...

During the following two years came

the liquidation of journalists, newspaper sellers, and the personnel of newspaper distributors, as well as bombing and arson attacks against newspaper kiosks and bookstores... (In 1992) twelve journalists were murdered by ‘unknown assailants’ (and) in most cases, the circumstances point to participation or support by the state security forces. (In 1994 writers and journalists were sentenced to) 448 years, 6 months and 25 days... There were 1162 violations of the press laws (and) a total of 2098 persons were tried, 336 of whom were already in prison... The security forces interfered with the distribution of press organs, attacked their offices, and arbitrarily detained publishers, editors, correspondents and newspaper salesmen.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly before the last Military coup, in the spring of 1991, I took part in a public meeting organised by the *Friends of Kurdistan*.<sup>9</sup> I intended publishing a version of my ‘talk’ in written form but it never worked out. In the talk I looked at parallels in the linguistic and cultural suppression of Kurdish and Scottish people, and that was a mistake.<sup>10</sup> Parallels between the two may be of some slight functional value from a Scottish viewpoint but when we discuss the Kurdish situation now and historically we are discussing the systematic attempt to wipe from the face of the earth a nation of some 30 million people.

It is doubtful if any form of oppression exists that has not been carried out on the Kurdish people and I think the scale of it overwhelmed me. I combined some of the elements of my talk with those of others of the same period, and published an essay.<sup>11</sup> I now give an extract from my notes for the talk, as a brief introduction to how things were for Kurdish people before the September 12 military coup back in 1980:<sup>12</sup>

*“The Turkish Republic set up its apparatus for the repression of the Kurdish people soon after it was founded. Following the War of Independence, during which they were acclaimed as ‘equal partner’ and ‘sister nation’, the Kurdish people found their very existence was being denied. The authorities have since sought to destroy everything which might suggest a specific Kurdish identity, erecting an entire edifice of linguistic and historical pseudo-theories which supposedly ‘proved’ the Turkishness of the Kurds, and served as justification for the destruction of that identity.*

*These theories have become official doctrine, taught, inculcated and propagated by the schools, the universities, the barracks, and the media. The authorities banned all unofficial publications that tried to even discuss the sub-*

*ject. Historical or literary works, even travellers’ tales published in Turkish and other languages, were all removed from public and private libraries and for the most part destroyed if they contained any reference to the Kurdish people, their history or their country. All attempts to question official ideology were repressed.*

*It is estimated that 20 million Kurds dwell in Turkey and the Kurdish language has been banned there since 1925. In 1978, of all Kurdish people over the age of six, 72% could neither read nor write. The publication of books and magazines in the language is illegal. The Turkish authorities purged the libraries of any books dealing with Kurdish history, destroyed monuments and so on. All historical research into Kurdish society was forbidden. An official history was constructed to show the Kurdish people were originally Turks. Until 1970 no alternative research could be published. Thus officially the Kurds are purest Turk.*

*The Turkish authorities have systematically changed the names of all Kurdish towns and villages, substituting Turkish for Kurdish names. The word ‘Kurdistan’, so designated from the 13th century, was the first to be banned; it is regarded as subversive because it implies the unity of the scattered Kurdish people. Among the literary works I presume proscribed in Turkey is my 1949 Penguin edition of Xenophon’s *The Persian Expedition*. In his translation Rex Warner not only refers to ‘Kurdistan’ but he refuses to suppress Xenophon’s encounters in 400 BC with the ‘Kardouçi’.<sup>13</sup> Remember that Kurdistan is colonised not by one country but by four, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria; and Xenophon’s account also would have been anathema to such as the Syrian authorities whose Chief of Police*

*published a Study (in November 1963 which) set out to ‘prove scientifically’ that the Kurds ‘do not constitute a nation’, that they are ‘a people without history or civilization or language or even definite ethnic origin of their own’, that they lived ‘from the civilization and history of other nations and had taken no part in these civilizations or in the history of these nations.’ (He also) proposed a 12-point plan: 1) the transfer and dispersion of the Kurdish people; 2) depriving the Kurds of any education whatsoever, even in Arabic; 3) a ‘famine’ policy, depriving those affected of any employment possibilities; 4) an extradition policy, turning the survivors of the uprisings in Northern Kurdistan over to the Turkish Government; 5) divide and rule policy; setting Kurd against Kurd; 6) a cordon policy along the lines of an earlier plan to expel the entire Kurdish population from the Turkish border; 7) colonization policy, the implantation of pure and nationalist Arabs in the Kurdish regions to see to the dispersal of the Kurds; 8) military divisions to ensure the dispersion; 9) ‘collective farms’ set up for the Arab settlers who would also be armed and trained; 10) a ban on ‘anybody ignorant of the Arabic language exercising the right to vote or stand for office’; 11) sending Kurds south and Arabs north; 12) ‘launching a vast anti-Kurdish campaign amongst the Arabs’.<sup>14</sup>*

*Media organs are the property of the official language in Turkey, and the Kurdish people are kept starved of outside news. Kurdish intellectuals are expected to assimilate, to reject their own culture and language, to become Turkicised. A person from Kurdistan cannot be appointed to fill a post without the prior approval of the political police. Kurds are not nominated for jobs in the Kurdish provinces; the authorities try always to separate them from their own country.*

*All business is conducted in the language of state and Kurdish speakers must use interpreters. Literature produced in exile, beyond the Turkish borders, is not allowed into the Republic. Kurdish writers and poets have had to write in Turkish, not simply to ensure publication but*

State Security Court, 12/3/97



because they were unfamiliar with their own forbidden language and culture. The Turkish novelist Yasar Kemal, whose books are to be found in just about every library I've ever entered, is actually a Kurd.

A group of Kurdish students once published a tract demanding that incitement to racial hatred be made a punishable offence and were charged with having claimed that there was a Kurdish people, thereby undermining national unity. They published the tract in response to various anti-Kurd threats made publicly from right-wing sources, including one nationalist journal implicitly threatening the Kurdish people with genocide.

For a brief period a group called the organization of Revolutionary Kurdish Youth (DDKO) was tolerated by the authorities; this group set out to inform public opinion about the economic, social and cultural situation; organizing press conferences and public briefings, publishing posters, leaflets etc., focussing attention on the repression within Kurdish areas; its monthly ten-page information bulletin had a print run of 30,000 which was distributed amongst Turkish political, cultural and trade union circles, as well as in Kurdish towns and villages. Eventually 'news' about what was happening to the Kurds filtered through to the media and the public and there were protests against the repression. Six months before the military coup of March 1970 the leaders of the Organization were arrested and after it all 'left-wing parties and organisations were outlawed'.

But from 1975 new youth organizations formed, known generally as the People's Cultural Associations (HKD), concentrating on educating their members and helping peasants and workers who were in conflict with the authorities in one way or another. A policy of terror and ideological conditioning was implemented by the Ankara Government which in the words of Turkish sociologist Ismail Besikçi managed to "make people believe he who announced 'I am Kurdish' was committing a crime so heinous that he deserved the death penalty". Dr Besikçi was put on trial for the crime of 'undermining national feelings' and 'making separatist propaganda'.

In the same talk I drew attention to an interview Ismail Besikçi had given while in prison awaiting yet another trial. He had remarked of the German prosecution of the Kurdish Workers' Party (P.K.K.), that the one thing established was the existence of a "secret agreement between the NATO alliance and Turkey, in relation to Kurdistan". Germany has now fallen into line with the Turkish State and has declared the P.K.K. an illegal organisation, even to sport their colours is a criminal offence. The victimisation of Kurdish people has spread outwards, it is as though we are witnessing the attempted criminalisation of the entire diaspora.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout Europe there are incidents being reported by monitoring agencies. In November in Belgium "100 police and members of the special intervention squad ...raided a Kurdish holiday centre ...The Ministry of Justice claimed (it was) used by the P.K.K. as a semi-military training camp." Nobody at all was arrested. But forty people were deported to Germany. on February 2 of this year (1997) "the Danish television station, TV2, revealed that the Danish police intelligence service (PET) had written a 140 page report on meetings of the Kurdish parliament in exile which took place in Copenhagen in March 1996 (and the transcript ...ended up with the Turkish authorities."<sup>16</sup>

Here in the U.K. Kani Yilmaz is halfway into his third year in Belmarsh Prison, London. He came from Germany in October 1994 at the direct invitation of John Austin Walker M.P., to meet with British MPs and discuss cease-fire proposals between the P.K.K. and the Turkish armed forces. In a shameful act of betrayal the British State responded by arresting him.

Germany wants him extradited and Turkey waits in the wings. Sooner or later they will find a way to sort out 'the extradition problem', thus the British can hand him back to Germany who can hand him back to Turkey. or else they might just cut out the middle man, this would be their ideal situation.

Olof Palme of Sweden was assassinated more than 10 years ago; it so happens he was also the only European leader who ever confronted the Turkish State at the most fundamental level, by "recognising the Kurdish people as a nation and (committing) himself to attaining recognition of their rights."<sup>17</sup> It would be comforting for some people to suppose that the British and other European Governments and state agencies act as they do through sheer cowardice. Unfortunately I doubt if this is the case.

Clearly the Turkish State has in place the means of authoritarian control for which many of our Euro-state authorities would cut off their left arm. In certain areas they begin to draw close, for example in matters relating to asylum and immigration, their punishment of the most vulnerable of people; the beatings, the killings, the torture that takes place in prisons and police-cells. And not too long ago

on 14 February 1997, the (British) government attempted to introduce a private members' bill, the Jurisdiction [Conspiracy and Incitement] Bill, which would have had the effect of criminalising support for political violence abroad. It was only defeated when two left Labour MPs, Dennis Skinner and George Galloway, unexpectedly forced a vote on the third reading and caught the government unawares, as they were relying on cross-party support for the Bill.<sup>18</sup>

In October 1996 came the *Lloyd Report*, published "with very little publicity and only a brief press-release, an inquiry into counter-terrorist legislation ...set up jointly by Home Secretary Michael Howard and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Sir Patrick Mayhew. Such is the terrorist threat," says the report "that not only is permanent legislation desirable to combat terrorism, but past powers need to be further widened and strengthened." The expert commissioned by Lord Lloyd "to provide 'an academic view as to the nature of the terrorist threat' (was) Professor Paul Wilkinson of St Andrew's University" and his 'view' provides Volume 11 of the report whose

new definition of 'terrorism' is modelled on the working definition used by the FBI: 'The use of serious violence against persons or property, or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public or any section of the public, in order to promote political, social or ideological objectives.'<sup>19</sup>

No later than one month after its publication, "amid allegations of financial losses" the *Mail on Sunday* named the professor as "Terrorist expert in college

cash riddle". Then came the more interesting information, that Professor Wilkinson was 'believed to work for the British security services and the CIA.' There is one thing established by the fact that Wilkinson is still commissioned for work as sensitive as the *Lloyd Report*, this is the contempt held by the British State not just towards the public but its elected representatives.

It was something of an open secret before this and readers of *Lobster* magazine have known of his pedigree for at least ten years, in particular his "inept role in the state's attempt to discredit Colin Wallace in the 1980s."<sup>20</sup> This was when "disinformation was run into the Channel 4 News office" by Wilkinson, two members of the UDA plus "a former colleague of Wallace" at the Information Policy unit in HQ Northern Ireland.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding any of that his credibility is undiminished and as I write,<sup>22</sup> one of Scotland's two 'quality' newspapers, *The Herald*, features his 'academic view' that "to defeat their terrorist tactics, British and Irish security must target the god-fathers of the IRA's crimes" and not give into such tactics as "bringing a complex transport system to a halt... Any group of clever dicks in an open society could achieve that..."

The juridical system in Turkey may be complex but its central purpose seems straightforward enough, it sanctifies the state and protects it from the people. Following the 1980 coup and throughout the next decade changes in the law took place, the mechanisms for the suppression of Kurdish people altered. For the Kurds it became one nightmare after another. The level of state-sponsored terrorism degenerated to a point where sometime between 1981 and 1983, in Diyarbakir prison, forty Kurdish youths were tortured to death for refusing to say "I am a Turk and therefore happy."<sup>23</sup>

We have to respect the fact that it was not until 1984 that the Kurdish Workers Party (P.K.K.) began its armed struggle. If we do not then we play into the hands of the Turkish propaganda machine. The new Constitution came into existence in November of 1982 and an indication of the potential repression is available there, eg. this from the opening Preamble:

no thought or impulse [may be cherished] against Turkish national interests, against the existence of Turkey, against the principle of the indivisibility of the state and its territory, against the historical and moral values of Turkishness, against nationalism as defined by Ataturk, against his principles, reforms and civilising efforts

Not only is the possibility of democracy denied at the outset, it is illegal even to think about something that might be defined by the Constitution as "against Turkish national interests". The system is so designed that any Turkish Government, courtesy of the Constitution, is in thrall to a higher authority: the National Security Council (i.e. the Military).

# Freedom for Freedom of Expression rally

continued

Some might argue that 'Turkish-democracy' is designed solely to suppress the Kurdish population and it would be presumptuous of me to argue the point, especially with Kurdish people. But if justice is ever to be achieved by the Kurds in Turkey perhaps it will come about only through the will of the majority of the people, and the majority is Turkish. Münir Ceylan, one of the contributors to *Freedom of Expression* in Turkey, also makes the point that

if you analyse the Anti-Terror Law carefully, it is obvious that (it) is intended to destroy the struggle for bread, freedom and democracy not just of the Kurdish people but by our entire working class and working masses."

It seems unquestionable that among Turks there has been an increase in solidarity with the Kurdish people, and also a willingness on the part of many to confront one of the world's most ruthless state-machines. The courage and perseverance of Dr Besikçi surely have been crucial in this. Next to Abdulla Ocalan, president of P.K.K., the National Security Council of Turkey appears to regard this sociologist and writer as its most dangerous enemy, perhaps even more dangerous than the so-called 'Islamic Threat'. He is not Kurdish, but Turkish. Since 1967 he has been in and out of court and has suffered "arrest, torture, jail, ceaseless harassment and ostracism".<sup>24</sup> Now 57 years of age he has spent nearly fifteen years of his life in prison. Each time an essay, book or booklet of his is printed he is given a further term and so far the aggregate stands at more than a 100 years. Under Turkish law his publisher is prosecuted simultaneously and so far has received sentences in the region of 14 years. Less than two years ago the two men "were abused (and) physically assaulted while being conducted from prison to the court ...(and their) documents ...rendered useless..."<sup>25</sup>

Obviously there is a distinction between the people of a country and its ruling authority. The Turkish State is not representative of the Turkish people and neither is the British State representative of myself and Moris Farhi from England who was there in Istanbul on behalf of PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee. My invitation to the *Freedom for Freedom of Expression* rally came from Amnesty International (U.K.), by way of Scottish PEN. Although not a member of either body I was glad to accept. There were twenty-one foreign writers present and each of us would have been conscious of the relationship to Turkey held by our individual countries: Netherlands, Germany, U.K. and Sweden supplied two apiece; one each from USA, Mexico, Canada-Quebec, Palestine, Finland and Russia, while seven came from Israel. The multiple trial of writers, artists and others which is now in process derives from January 1995 when

Yasar Kemal was tried in Istanbul's No.5 State Security Court regarding one of his articles which was published in *Der Spiegel* magazine. On the same day, intellectuals gathered outside the court in support (and) decided to collude in the 'crime' by jointly appending their names to (that and other) articles and speeches alleged to be 'criminal'. The "Initiative Against Crimes of Thought" was born (and) a petition started. Within a short time the signatures of 1080 intellectuals from various fields had been collected (and they) co-published a volume of articles entitled *Freedom of Expression*. Under the Turkish Penal Code Article 162: Republishing an article which is defined as a crime is a new crime, and the publisher is to be equally sentenced...<sup>26</sup> On 10 March 1995 the 'co-publishers' voluntarily presented themselves before the State Security Court to face charges of 'seditious criminal activity'.

Thus the state authorities were challenged at a fundamental level, leaving the Turkish Government "with the old dilemma: either democratise the law and the Constitution or face the opposition of Turkish and world democratic opinion, and the stench of another major scandal".

There is scarce room for bureaucratic manoeuvring in the Turkish system and if a 'crime' has been committed there is little option but to prosecute. If not then the Prosecutor himself is open to prosecution.<sup>27</sup> So far the *Freedom of Thought* initiative has forced the hand of the authorities to the extent that the State Security Court has had to bring to trial one hundred and eighty four people. It is known as the 'Kafka Trial' and has been described as "the most grotesque farce in Turkish legal history". Even so, the state makes use of its power and "for the accused (it is) likely to result in twenty months' prison sentences". Some of them are already in receipt of suspended sentences for earlier 'criminal' thoughts or statements and their periods of imprisonment will be even longer.

The next step taken by the campaign organisers was to produce an abbreviated form of *Freedom of Expression*, and then invite international authors to sign up as 'co-publishers'. In principle the repressive nature of the Turkish legal system does not allow foreigners to escape the net, even on foreign soil. By using a network based on PEN International Writers-in-Prisons and other human rights' agencies the campaign's organisers managed to obtain the signatures of 141 writers as 'co-publishers' of the booklet. But this time the State Security Court declined to prosecute "on the grounds that (they) would not be able to bring (the international writers) to Istanbul for trial...because such an 'offence' does not exist in US or English law".

So the campaign organisers took it yet another stage further, they invited some of the international writers to come to Istanbul in person, then present themselves at the State Security Court. Again using the network of PEN and other human rights' agencies they asked that invitations be issued on their behalf. In all there were twenty one of us present; poets, filmmakers, novelists and journalists. Interest in the 'Kafka Trial' has escalated within Turkey; at each public engagement there was a full-scale media presence.

On Monday morning more than half of us were in court to witness the trial of an actor, one of the 1080 Turkish writers, artists and others who signed as "publishing-editors" of the original *Freedom of Thought* in Turkey, the collection of writings by authors either already in prison or due to stand trial. Yasar Kemal has received a 20-month suspended sentence for his own contribution to the book. But the actor's trial was postponed until May, presumably when no international observers will be present. Meantime he continues rehearsing a joint production of Genet's *The Maids* and Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* and hopes to be at liberty to take part in the performances.

Following the postponement some of us were due at Bursa Prison; the authorities were allowing us to visit with Dr Besikçi and his publisher, Ünsal Öztürk. Others were scheduled to meet Isik Yurtçu, a journalist imprisoned at Adapazara. Then permission was reversed by the authorities, we could make the journey if we wanted but we would not be allowed to speak to the prisoners. It was decided we would send a 'symbolic' delegation and a majority of us volunteered to make the journey, but places were limited to three and two went to Bursa Prison. Louise Gareau Des-Bois was nominated to visit Adapazara. She is Vice President of Canada-Quebec PEN and also speaks a little Turkish; seven years ago the Quebec centre seconded a Kurdish PEN resolution concerning Dr Besikçi. When she arrived at the prison the authorities reversed their previous reversal and she was allowed to talk with Isik Yurtçu through a fenced area for nearly twenty minutes. What disturbed her most was the great number of young people behind bars, some little more than boys.

We were in court for a second occasion with Moris Farhi who was signing his name to the abbreviated *Little Freedom of Thought*. The State Prosecutor dismissed his declaration out-of-hand. The third time we arrived at the State Security Court a dozen of us were there on our own behalf. But a heavy contingent of police had been instructed not to let us enter the gate.

The prosecuting authorities were refusing to accept our statements, not even if we sent them by registered post. We held a Press Conference outside on the main street and signed our statements in front of the television cameras. Münir Ceylan was there with us. He is a former president of the petroleum workers' union and from 1994 served twenty months imprisonment for making statements such as the one quoted above. Recently he received a further two year sentence and expects to be returned to prison any day now. His case has been taken up by A.I., supported by the Scottish Trades Union Congress. He and others walked with us to the post office, in front of the television cameras, where we sent our signed statements by registered mail.

If the authorities continue to refuse our names alongside those of the Turkish writers and other artists who have been on trial already then the initiative's organisers will attempt to have the State Prosecutor charged with having failed "to fulfil the constitutional commitment to equality of treatment". It is a bold campaign and puts individuals at personal risk; some have been threatened already, some have experienced prison, others expect it sooner or later. On the same afternoon we had a public engagement at Istanbul University. A forum on Freedom of Expression had been organised by students and a few sympathetic lecturers. About twenty young people came to meet us then escort us to the campus; four of their friends are serving prison sentences of 8 to 12 years for 'terrorist' activities.<sup>28</sup>

Every day at Istanbul University between one and two hundred police are on campus-duty and the students have their bags searched each time they enter the gate. Along with us on the bus came Vedat Turkali,<sup>29</sup> a famous old writer who spent seven years in prison for political activities many years ago, and is now domiciled in England (and remains a socialist). When we arrived we discovered not only had the forum been cancelled by the Security Forces, they had shut down the actual university. More than two thousand students had gathered in protest outside the university gates. We were instructed to link arms and march as a body, flanked by students on either side, straight to the gates of the university.

Hundreds of police in full riot-gear were also present. I could not see any tanks although they have been brought in on other student-protests. When we got to the gates they circled and sealed us off. Some student-representatives, lecturers and the media were allowed into the circle with us. The cancelled forum had become the focus of a mass student demonstration, the underlying concerns being the current withdrawal of subsidised education and the continued victimisation of the student population. Some held banners, an act of 'terrorism' in itself, and were requested to fold them away, not to provoke the situation.

After negotiations with the Security Forces it was agreed that an abbreviated Press Conference could take place with the international writers and that statements might be broadcast to the students via a loud-hailer. Demonstrations are illegal in Turkey unless permission has been granted by the Security Forces. Many people have given up seeking permission; instead they organise a Press Conference and invite everybody. A female student opened the meeting then Sanar Yurdapatan<sup>30</sup> spoke, calling for everyone to stay calm, no blood should be spilled under any circumstances. Pelin Erda, lawyer of the four imprisoned students, spoke next (one of her own relatives was raped during a period of detainment). A dozen or so international writers was present, each of us was introduced, but the situation was very tense and time restricted; two of us were delegated to speak, Joanne Leedom-Ackerman (Vice-President International PEN) and Alexander Tkachenko (President of Russian PEN). Then we had to leave at once, linking arms and returning quickly the way we had come.

There was no news of any bloodshed although we

did hear that a disturbance and arrests had taken place in the area of the post office, after we had left the scene earlier in the day. That evening we attended a reception held for us by the Istanbul Bar Association. A few lawyers are among those openly expressing their opinions on the issue of *Freedom of Thought*. We met Esber Yagmurdereli, lawyer, writer and playwright, at present “appealing against a 10-month sentence (for referring) to the Kurdish minority”. He is also under suspended sentence from an earlier case; if he loses the appeal he will face “imprisonment until 2018”.<sup>31</sup>

It was at the same reception we heard that Ünsal Öztürk, Besikçi’s publisher, had just been released from prison. He came to our last official engagement, described as “a meeting of writers and artists organised by *Turkish PEN*, The *Writers’ Syndicate of Turkey* and the *Association of Literarists*. However, there was little opportunity of a meeting as such. Twelve or more people spoke from the platform during the two hours, including some of the international writers. For some reason Öztürk was not invited to speak. Nor for that matter was Vedat Turkali. I mentioned to a member of *Turkish PEN* that it might have been worthwhile hearing what Turkali had to say and was advised that in Turkey there are ‘thousands like him’, whatever that might mean.

I thought it also of interest that Sanar Yurdatapan was not invited to speak. Yurdatapan and his brother, his secretary and a translator, were our four main hosts and escorts throughout the 4 to 5 day visit, ensuring we remained together in the various awkward situations. He is one of the central organisers of this campaign and has served a previous term of imprisonment. He also led an international delegation to probe the notorious Guclukonak massacre of “eleven men travelling in a minibus”. According to official sources they were killed by the PKK, but the “investigations left little doubt that government security forces carried out the killings”.<sup>32</sup>

We also met Ünsal Öztürk socially on the last night, his wife was with him. They sat at our table for a while, giving information through an interpreter to Soledad Santiago of Mexico-San Miguel PEN; she hopes to take up his case through the PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee, given that Öztürk is not himself a writer. Like Münir Ceylan and others, Öztürk is liable to re-arrest at any moment and I found it difficult to avoid watching his wife who seemed to be doing her best not to watch him too often and too obviously.

The next morning it was time to fly home to freedom and democracy. For the flight into Turkey I had been advised to take nothing that might be construed as political - in particular ‘separatist’ - propaganda. For the flight to Glasgow via Amsterdam on Thursday afternoon I was also careful. I did buy three English-language newspapers from a local vendor. One carried a report on the introduction of torture in USA prisons; the other had a front-page-lead on the arrival of a new prison-ship off the south coast of England, which may prove good news for Turkey’s justice minister, who recently complained of

a negative atmosphere about Turkey. But now we will monitor human rights in Europe. The only thing Europe does is criticise Turkey. However, from now on we will criticise Europe.<sup>33</sup>

In a previous essay<sup>34</sup> I drew attention to the *Statutes of the Human Rights Commission*, in particular Article 18, referring to ‘ethnic groups’. I was arguing that the language itself is exclusive and that the victims are not being empowered: ‘we’ may have “a duty to encourage ethnic groups” whose culture is under attack but not to stand aside and let ‘them’ fight back in whatever way they deem necessary. I would much prefer it if ‘we’ were advised that ‘we’ have a duty not to interfere when ‘they’ (the ethnic groups) try to resist the oppression. At a public meeting<sup>35</sup> I quoted Rajani Desai of the *Federation of organisations for Democratic Rights*<sup>36</sup>

There are certain basic differences between human rights, civil liberties and democratic rights. Human rights is a term best left to refer to what the United Nations has incorporated in the Charter of Human Rights and to understand the motives within that Charter. It relates to the notion that certain atrocities should be objected to on grounds of humanity. But if you actually look at its history and practice, it has been associated with the determination of the imperialist countries, or the more advanced countries as they are called, to use the human rights’ issue in order to negotiate better terms, or to impose something on third world countries or on one of their own members with whom they may be having some problems. (Civil Liberties) are mentioned in the Constitution of India which is actually an 80% replica of the British Act of 1935 for colonial India, which Nehru said at the time was a document for imposing slavery on the Indian people.... The “fundamental rights” in the Constitution of India are not available to 95% of the Indian people today...

Genuine ‘democratic rights’, unlike civil liberties or human rights, “asserts the rights of the people to struggle against exploitation or oppression”; the right to defend yourself under attack, empowerment, self determination. And, as Desai also argues,

the democratic rights’ movement cannot be a movement of intellectuals only. It has to have for its backbone the working class and the peasantry, employees, women and students - working people generally

If I have a position then it derives from the significance of the distinction between ‘democratic rights’ and ‘human rights’. I accept the right to resist oppression and that this right is inviolable. The people of Turkey and/or Kurdistan will resist oppression in whatever way they see fit. I can have criticisms of the form this resistance sometimes takes but I am not about to defend a position that can only benefit their oppressors.

Almost nothing of contemporary Turkish writing is available in translation via ordinary English-language U.K. or U.S.A. publishing channels. As far as I know, not even Besikçi’s work has managed to find a publisher.<sup>37</sup> At the Press Conference organised by Amnesty International (Scotland) and Scottish PEN on the morning after my return, the one and only journalist present at the venue was a slightly embarrassed young man from *List Magazine*.<sup>38</sup> A couple of weeks before my visit to Istanbul *The Scotsman* newspaper had included the following snippet in a rare U.K. report on Turkish domestic affairs:

Turkey’s armed forces have intervened three times in the past 37 years to restore law and order in the country and to safeguard its secular nature.

## James Kelman April 23, 1997

### notes

- 1 Current report from PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee.
- 2 Dr Ismail Besikçi’s KURDISTAN & TURKISH COLONIALISM; *Selected Writings*
- 3 With France and Iran (Persia), the USA stayed somewhat in the background
- 4 Ismet Sheriff Vanly’s “Kurdistan in Iraq”, collected in PEOPLE WITHOUT A COUNTRY: *the Kurds and Kurdistan*, edited by Gerard Chaliand (Zed Books 1980)
- 5 *Evening Times*, Glasgow, 21 April 1997, encouraging its readership to “fly to Turkey this autumn”.
- 6 Amnesty International report
- 7 *Voice of Kurdistan*, where this information is taken
- 8 *The Kurds and Kurdistan: THINKING IS A CRIME*, a report on Freedom of Expression in Turkey, published by The International Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan (IMK E.V.).
- 9 At Edinburgh University
- 10 In mitigation, I had prepared for an audience I assumed would consist almost exclusively of Scottish people, but more—roughly half—were Kurdish exiles.
- 11 *Oppression and Solidarity*, in the collection SOME RECENT ATTACKS (A.K. Press, Edinburgh 1992)
- 12 Except where stated, and with apologies to Kendal, all information is lifted (and lifted directly) from a collection of essays published by Zed Press in 1979, reprinted a year later after the fall of the Shah of Iran, with an extra section: PEOPLE WITHOUT A COUNTRY: *the Kurds and Kurdistan*, edited by Gerard Chaliand; Kendal’s essay is entitled “Kurdistan in Turkey”
- 13 He spells this ‘Curdachi’
- 14 See 5, the essay by Nazdar, “The Kurds in Syria”.
- 15 For evidence of this read almost any issue of *Statewatch* journal “...monitoring the state and civil liberties in the UK and Europe” (take out a subscription, c/o PO Box 1516, London N16 0EW). A public meeting was held earlier this year in London on the issue of “the Criminalisation of the Kurds in U.K. and Europe”.
- 16 Information from *Statewatch* vol 6, number 6
- 17 *PSK Bulletin*, number 6, for information on the South African/Turkish connection
- 18 *Statewatch* vol 7 number 1
- 19 *ibid*, for an extended discussion on this
- 20 *Lobster* 32; for its comment on the *Mail on Sunday* report
- 21 Linked directly to the British security services (MI6 in the early 1970s, MI5 after that). See *Lobsters* 16, 19 for information on Paul Wilkinson and see also *Lobsters* 10, 14 and others for a fuller account of the whole murky area. Wilkinson is erstwhile colleague of far-right ‘terrorist experts’ such as Brian Crozier and Maurice Tugwell. Subscribe to *Lobster* c/o 214 Westbourne Ave., Hull HU5 3JB, U.K.
- 22 22 April 1997, following the day of transport stasis in London
- 23 See Dr Ismail Besikçi’s KURDISTAN & TURKISH COLONIALISM; *Selected Writings*
- 24 *ibid*
- 25 See 6
- 26 Press releases by the *Freedom of Thought* initiative
- 27 This is only as I understand it, as a layperson
- 28 Which I believe revolves around unfurling a banner in parliament
- 29 A pseudonym adopted by the writer
- 30 Musician/composer, and one of the leading activists
- 31 A.I. report Turkey: *No security without human rights*.
- 32 *Kurdistan Information Bulletin* no 34, Jan. 1997. Just more than four weeks after the event, on 16th April, Yurdatapan was detained at Istanbul Airport then held at the Anti-Terror Branch of police HQ.
- 33 *ibid*
- 34 See 10
- 35 Organised by Amnesty International and entitled: “The pen is mightier than the sword”; held in Edinburgh, April 1995, in support of Taslima Nasrin who was also on the platform
- 36 Unfortunately I no longer have this reference but Desai’s article, as far as I recall, was published in *Inqilab*; the London-based journal of the South Asia Solidarity Group
- 37 His KURDISTAN & TURKISH COLONIALISM; *Selected Writings* is published by the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee and Kurdistan Information Centre, London
- 38 A Scottish events and entertainment listings magazine