“We Are the Producers, We Will Be the Ones Who Govern”
Grassroots Politics in the Yeni Çeltek Coal Basin

By

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Zeynep Öztürk, candidate for the MA degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology declare herewith that the present thesis titled "We Are the Producers, We Will Be the Ones Who Govern: Grassroots Politics in the Yeni Çeltek Coal Basin" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 10 June 2025

Zeynep Öztürk

Abstract

Previous scholarship has predominantly examined the causes of workers' collective actions. This thesis shifts attention to their enduring consequences and transformative potential. Through an examination of the outcomes of a workplace-based movement, I demonstrate how these results not only facilitated continuity, but also substantially expanded the scope of the struggle. Engaging theoretical debates on the tension between productive and reproductive labor, I ask: Why and how do workers' movements extend beyond the workplace and connect with broader popular mobilizations? This approach reveals that labor movements' strategies developed in the workplace, when coordinated with those in the spheres of reproduction and social reproduction, can create sustained self-governance initiatives. To address this question, I revisit a lesser-known episode in labor history in Turkey: the grassroots movement in the Yeni Çeltek coal basin from 1975 until its suppression by state forces in 1980. Drawing on in-depth oral history interviews and archival sources, I conceptualize this movement as an exemplar of self-governance informed by Marxist labor theories. The findings reveal that the movement brought together diverse forms of labor around the political and economic centrality of coal. After improving their working conditions with community support in 1976, the Yeni Çeltek miners developed a stronger working-class identity and solidarity with both local communities and other workers. Their workplace-based organizing evolved into a broader political mobilization, a legacy encapsulated in the enduring slogan, "We are the producers; we will be the ones who govern". These findings challenge prevalent assumptions about the decline of movements after material gains, the sharp divide between productive and reproductive labor, and the ephemerality of collective action. Theoretically, this study demonstrates how principles of self-governance can effectively operate across multiple scales and contexts, sustaining their transformative impact and relevance across historical trajectories.

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Introduction

In the winter, as I walk through Suluova and the surrounding areas where the Yeni Çeltek coal mine is still in operation, the scent of coal and wood lingers in the gray air. From above, the mine area resembles a brown desert stretching toward the district centers. Reaching the nearby villages requires navigating muddy, winding roads. In the winter of 2022[1], in Kayadüzü, home to the Yeni Çeltek mine, I visit Ali, a retired miner, at his two-story village house. His family warmly welcomes me with steaming cups of tea and poppy seed buns prepared by his wife, a local specialty made possible by the region's poppy cultivation.

As a graduate student and an activist, my interest in the Yeni Çeltek case did not surprise Ali or his family, just as it had not surprised others I spoke with. The case has long drawn political interest, though academic engagement has remained limited. A documentary has been produced, and several memoirs have circulated, some of which were written by the miners themselves. A handful of books combine analysis with oral history to evaluate the events. Nevertheless, interviews were only possible through trusted intermediaries. Despite my activist identity, the miners did not know me personally.

As we settle into conversation, Ali pulls out his poetry notebook. He reads aloud a piece he wrote in the 2000s that powerfully speaks of struggle and injustice:

> The fate of false servants is heavy and broken
> I burned for no crime, for nothing at all
> May the hands that burned me crumble and fall
> What became of us, who once stood tall?
> My roses withered in the royal hall

[1] Parts of the fieldwork for this thesis were first developed in my MS thesis at METU (2022).

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The streams turned to ash
Let the burners' edicts be read (Translated by me)

The words of a miner from Yeni Çeltek, published in a 1976 newspaper, echo in my mind. They capture the collective voice of the movement at its height:

The worker toils, yet still stays poor
Will these cruelties end, or last evermore?
We must unite to claim what's right,
In gardens that bloom for the poor by right.
Will the sorrowful nightingale sing again?
He reaps great wealth with neither sweat nor strain,
Praises himself, mocks hunger and pain.
Speaking his name means a beating by power
Is his ill-gotten fortune never sate?
(Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 4 June 1976, p. 4) (Translated by me)

Though written decades apart, these poems reveal a striking continuity in miners' experiences and their emotional and moral repertoire. They both express sustained anger at injustice and a refusal to accept the naturalization of inequality, offering insight into the lasting reality of mining labor.

I ask Ali to share his own experiences at the Yeni Çeltek mine. He recalls how, after the emergence of the workers' council movement at Yeni Çeltek in 1975, miners began earning what he proudly describes as a "super wage". This material advantage, he explains, stemmed not only from the social relationships within and around the mine but also from the political and economic significance of coal in the region. The mine was located at a crossroads of sorts, physically and socially, between industrial labor and agricultural life.

Other miners often spoke of the high wages, benefits, and improved working conditions that came after the strikes, corroborating Ali's account. A key detail and the point of departure of this thesis is that these significant gains, including the 176% wage increase, were already secured in 1976, the same year the first strike occurred (Göktaş, 2018). However, the struggle did not end there as archival records, previous studies, and interviews confirm. Starting from

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this observation, this thesis examines why the miners' momentary resistance continued for over five years and how it evolved into a basin-wide labor movement.

Most existing labor history studies in Turkey have focused on the causes of large, visible strikes or have analyzed worker activism primarily through the lens of economic grievances and formal unionism. Often missing are labor movement studies that examine how grassroots committee models, such as those developed at Yeni Çeltek, emerged from and continued to reshape the everyday lives and social relations of mining communities. Movements are parts of broader, historically specific struggles over class, production, and social reproduction. However, much of the scholarship on social movements has overlooked the "totality" of class struggle: how economic, political, and cultural labor factors intersect across the workplace, the community, and the home (Webber, 2022, pp. 1195–1196).

The main question guiding this thesis is: How did the committee-based model at Yeni Çeltek generate a form of collective power that survived and expanded beyond the immediate material gains of 1976? What does this reveal about the wider dynamics of labor, community, and resistance in Turkey's changing political economy? To begin answering this question, we must first understand the broader political economy of mining in the region.

Established in 1955 in the Suluova district of Amasya, northern Turkey, the Yeni Çeltek coal mine was built to provide energy for the local, state-owned sugar factory. The factory and mine formed the core of a centrally managed production chain that influenced agriculture, industry, and urbanization in the region. The coal mine played a decisive role in the lives of various groups, including small sugar beet farmers, seasonal sugar beet transporters, factory workers, and mine workers. However, within this production system, there were significant differences among workers. Factory workers had relatively secure jobs, while mine workers and seasonal workers mostly came from poor villages and worked under insecure, low-wage conditions.

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Labor relations in the region were shaped by political patronage and corporatist connections between the state and trade unions, which deepened social stratification and inequality (Koç, 2025).

This background on the political economy and social history of the region demonstrates that the Yeni Çeltek movement was not an isolated or spontaneous event, but rather the result of interconnected economic, social, and political forces. Against this backdrop, the Yeni Çeltek movement emerged in 1975 when miners and local residents began organizing against poor working conditions and low wages. Through waves of strikes and the formation of workplace and popular committees, the movement expanded beyond the mine to challenge the political and economic order. By 1979, these efforts had culminated in direct action against the coal black market and the establishment of a system for the collective management of coal production and distribution. The movement ended with state suppression via a military coup in 1980[2].

Drawing on this history, and by analyzing secondary literature, oral histories, archival sources, and field observations, I examine the movement as a multi-scalar struggle, including control over workplace decisions, fair distribution of coal, cooperation between productive and reproductive labor, and local participation in resource governance. These efforts challenged and reconfigured both community relations and cultural structures, which were shaped by, and in resistance to, local and national labor regimes. In light of these factors, I argue that the

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[2] On September 12, the armed forces overthrew the civilian government, citing political instability and economic crisis. The military suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, banned political parties, and imposed martial law, suspending trade union activities and allowing only right-wing unions to re-emerge. This period saw widespread repression, arrests, and restrictions on civil liberties (Kahveci and Nichols, 1995, p. 6).

movement's ability to transcend narrow workplace demands, organize democratic control over production and daily life, and serve as a significant component of broader nationwide labor struggles made it necessary for the state to violently suppress it. Thus, the reasons for the movement's growth and suppression were fundamentally intertwined.

Understanding this period is essential to contextualizing the current state of labor relations in Turkey. The current configuration is marked by widespread precarious work, declining union influence, rising informality, and the tightening grip of state and corporate actors over labor conditions (Çelik, 2015).

Historical Context: The 1970s and the Significance of the Yeni Çeltek Case

The global movements of the 1970s introduced new organizational forms, such as workers' councils, community-based institutions, and grassroots assemblies (Hardt, 2023, pp. 8–11). In Turkey, the 1970s also saw the rise of labor movements alongside Marxist organizations and political parties. In the second half of the decade, Devrimci Yol (Revolutionary Path) was the most prominent example of these new organizational models. Devrimci Yol became the largest mass leftist movement of the period by building its organization around people's resistance committees (Bora, 2017, pp. 670–671). The Yeraltı Maden-İş (Revolutionary Miners' Union), which cooperated with Devrimci Yol, stood out in the mining sector for its unique structure based on workers' councils. The movement that developed in Yeni Çeltek was part of a broader political trend connected to these organizations.

However, the mining sector in Turkey has historically been shaped by state control. Official strikes were either restricted or banned until the 1970s (Nichols & Kahveci, 1995). Despite these restrictions, miners often engaged in disruptive grassroots actions. The first instance of

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miner-led self-governance in Turkey occurred in 1969 when workers took over the Alpagut mine in Çorum. The first official strike occurred in 1976 when miners went on strike at the Yeni Çeltek mine. During the second half of the 1970s, waves of strikes occurred and worker militancy increased in various sectors (Göktaş, 2018).

These strikes and acts of grassroots resistance in the mining sector occurred within a political economy characterized by state intervention. As Keyder (2011) points out, Turkey was characterized by two main features between 1960 and 1980. First, the allocation of economic resources, such as credit, licenses, and state contracts, was highly politicized. Rather than following market logic, the state distributed resources according to political priorities. Second, the state promoted income redistribution by raising wages, supporting agricultural prices, and expanding social benefits in order to create a broad domestic market. However, by the mid-1970s, this developmentalist model was already under pressure due to the global oil crisis and accelerating domestic inflation (2011, pp. 181–185). Meanwhile, state-led industrialization and centralized energy planning positioned coal as an essential to national development (Çelik, 2023).

I examine the Yeni Çeltek self-governance movement as a product of the era's political and economic structures, as well as part of the broader wave of labor movements during that time. The case offers a unique perspective on how coal's central role shaped political and economic structures and how these structures were confronted by committee-based mobilization.

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Theoretical Framework: Collective Action and Self-Governance as the Dual Pillars of Resource-Based Political Mobilization

One of the main pillars of my analysis of the Yeni Çeltek case is literature that highlights the structural leverage miners possess due to their central role in energy infrastructure and industrial

production. For example, Mitchell's (2008) concept of "carbon democracy" asserts that the spatial and technological features of coal allowed miners to disrupt national economies and advance democratic demands. Similarly, miner movements in Turkey have played a direct and influential role in the political arena since the mid-1970s (Boratav, 2002). This relationship is a mutually constitutive process. For example, Eroğlu (2025) builds on this notion by analyzing how "resource-making" in Zonguldak involved not only extraction but also nation-building and played an influential role in the formation of the Turkish state.

Examining these dynamics on a smaller scale, labor process theory (Burawoy, 1979) further reinforces this perspective by illustrating how underground mining, characterized by danger, interdependence, and piecework systems, fosters mutual reliance and collective decision-making. Consequently, miners have historically formed tight-knit communities with a strong sense of collective identity, class consciousness, and moral entitlement to their labor (see Tilly, 1998; Nash, 1979; Taussig, 1980). However, as many scholars have concluded, these processes of transformation are complex and highly context-dependent, both historically and spatially. For instance, Quataert (2006) points out that, due to late proletarianization, strong rural ties, and hybrid worker identities in Turkey, worker resistance frequently remained episodic and defensive. It rarely developed into transformative class politics until the legal framework of unionization and collective bargaining emerged in the post-1960.

Nevertheless, the relational dynamics that drive these processes cannot be easily captured either by focusing solely on the workplace or by relying exclusively on historical trajectories. Baglioni et al. (2022) enrich this framework by showing how labor regimes are co-shaped by spatial, social, and economic hierarchies, including gender, race, and global inequalities. This broader perspective enables the analysis of labor movement dynamics within factories and in agriculture, services, and the informal sector, as well as across different regions and countries.

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Linking collective action and self-governance

As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, collective action can emerge from the interaction between broader structural scales and lived experience. In the context of Yeni Çeltek, I will argue that the significance of self-governance practices can be revealed by analyzing their relationship to experiences of collective action. Marxist scholars conceptualized self-governance as a transformative process that facilitates workers' reclamation of agency over their activity, particularly through workers' committees, which are organizational forms of collective decision-making in the labor process. This early theoretical lineage runs through Marx's (1996) reflections on the Paris Commune and continues in the work of Gramsci (2000) and Luxemburg (2012). They viewed councils and committees as foundational mechanisms for workers' control- structures capable of challenging the capitalist organization of labor and prefiguring alternative social relations. They also view committees as "micro-structures" through which political subjectivities are formed and collective power is exercised. Negri (2017) suggests that committees are "constitutive" precisely because they actively dismantle existing power structures and create new forms of cooperation and social organization, inspiring future struggles. This continuity is historical in origin because economic structures and organizational forms are shaped and reshaped throughout history (pp. 837, 849).

A central debate within the Marxist literature on self-governance focuses on the concepts of alienation and class consciousness. Italian workerist perspectives, in particular, made a significant contribution by grounding analyses of class behavior in lived experience. These perspectives highlight how everyday resistance to economic rationality and the technical division of labor can serve as a basis for the emergence of new forms of class consciousness based on experience (Wright, 2017, pp. 3-4). Building on this, recent literature incorporates reproductive labor- work necessary for maintaining and reproducing the workforce and society, such as caregiving, housework, education, and community support- into the analysis. This

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literature investigates how productive and reproductive labor can form alliances within self-organizing practices. This approach has also helped reframe the working class as a diverse and intersectional group, emphasizing the varied experiences, identities, and forms of struggle that influence collective organization and consciousness. Some of this literature explores how collectively produced and managed resources, such as land, infrastructure, or social practices, can offer alternatives to capitalist commodification, while also examining the limitations of these alternatives (see, Azzellini, 2024; Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; De Angelis, 2022; de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010).

My analysis of why the Yeni Çeltek case expanded and gained continuity draws on two interconnected perspectives. First, it focuses not only on moments of collective action, but also on everyday processes of committee-based organization. Second, it shifts the focus from the point of production to reproduction to analyze how self-governance practices transform collective formations and coal, an important resource, into commons.

Research on class formation has shown that other transformative factors are also crucial. For instance, leadership can lay the groundwork for movements (Selbin, 1993). In the Yeni Çeltek case, the continuity of the movement might have weakened without such leadership. Leaders also played an important role in framing mutual aid within ethical-political frameworks, particularly when forming alliances with different groups. However, mutual aid became a decisive factor in the movement because lessons learned during collective action were more easily internalized (Öztürk, 2025).

Guided by a multi-scalar perspective rooted in lived experience, I examine how workplace-based actions by Yeni Çeltek miners spread and persisted throughout the region. Initially, the pressures faced by miners posed obstacles to collective action; however, these pressures ultimately became points of resistance, enabling miners and the broader community to

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recognize their shared interests. Through a process of collective learning, the experience of collective action evolved into self-governance and broader political mobilization. My analysis centers on these everyday processes of committee-based self-organization, exploring how the lived experiences of collective action in Yeni Çeltek gave rise to new forms of political subjectivity and an enduring labor movement.

Methodology

In this thesis, I employ a qualitative, oral history-based approach to reconstruct the experiences and memories of the Yeni Çeltek movement. My research is based on seventeen in-depth interviews and three field visits conducted in 2013, 2022[3], and 2025. My interviewees included miners, their families, villagers, teachers, union representatives, and activists from that period. Participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling, with a focus on individuals with direct experience of the movement. I analyzed the interviews using thematic and archival content analysis. Initially, I identified themes by looking for contrasts and repetitions. Later, I incorporated missing information and elements of the local language to add depth and nuance to my analysis.

In this study, I apply a methodological approach that foregrounds historicity and the interrelation of multiple socio-spatial scales and units of analysis. This approach conceptualizes political mobilization as a dynamic, non-linear process. The scales and units of movements are socially produced through conflict, negotiation, and restructuring (Swyngedouw, 1997). These scales and units are also deeply intertwined with historical contexts because political struggles based on schemas (such as self-governance) and resources (such as coal, labor, and political

[3] These interviews are reframed, retranslated, and reanalyzed within a new theoretical framework, using different conceptual tools and embedded in a distinct analytical narrative.

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organization) both shape and are shaped by geography. This approach links workplace struggles with broader domains of social life. I therefore conceptualize Yeni Çeltek not simply as a mine, but as a mining basin which is a socio-spatial formation that extends beyond the workplace to encompass community and labor.[4]

I situate this research within the tradition of militant research, that is, research with, rather than on, communities of struggle (Juris, 2007). In this spirit, oral history becomes not only a tool for gathering testimony but also a strategy for generating politically relevant knowledge alongside movement participants. The aim is to support contemporary efforts to reimagine self-governance practices within history of labor movements. Oral histories reveal how the past lives on and shapes memories, emotions, and meaning. They show how the past is carried into the present (Grele, 2006).

While I cannot be sure of the concrete contributions of my research, many participants appreciated having their memories, traumas, and experiences recognized as historically significant. Several expressed gratitude that their stories are still being listened to, remembered, and shared.

Beyond documentation, the research process itself became a form of social reconnection, rekindling contact among participants who had lost touch and prompting renewed dialogue and gatherings. In this sense, oral history momentarily reactivated the community it once shaped.

This reactivation was mutual. The research also reshaped my own relationships. Through discussions with comrades, some joining me in the field, we formed a network of scholars and activists focused on self-governance movements like Yeni Çeltek. I continue to engage with

[4] For a detailed theoretical discussion of schemas and resources shaping social action, see Sewell (1992), who argues that events can transform the very structures that organize social life.

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the movement participants and learnt from their experiences. This ongoing process of co-producing academic and political work, grounded in solidarity, culminated in a jointly published book.

I organized this thesis into two main chapters and a conclusion. In the introduction, I outline the study's general framework and research objectives. I situate the Yeni Çeltek movement within the history of labor movements in Turkey, outline the primary research questions, and present the thesis's theoretical and methodological approach.

First, I examine how collective action emerged in the Yeni Çeltek coal basin through the interplay of class formation, labor conflict, and organizational innovation. I analyze how workplace organizing transformed fragmented and clientelist labor relations, fostering new forms of class subjectivity and solidarity among miners and their communities (1.1). Next, I discuss how these dynamics extended beyond the workplace as grassroots committees and community networks enabled broader participation and fostered political legitimacy. This expansion enabled the organizational practices and identities formed in the mine to adapt and translate into wider social spaces, facilitating alliances with groups such as peasants, women, and seasonal workers (1.2).

I then demonstrate how these developments enabled a redefinition of coal as a collective resource and how collective control over its production and distribution disrupted dominant capitalist relations in the region. I explore how the movement's dual strategy of linking workplace struggles with broader forms of community mobilization made it possible to integrate the productive and reproductive spheres based on the strategic use of coal (2.1). Building on earlier workplace and community mobilization dynamics, I demonstrate how the consolidation of collective practices resulted in workplace self-management and the formation of coal as a commons (2.2).

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By structuring the thesis in this way, I aim to provide a comprehensive and multi-scalar analysis that illuminates not only the internal dynamics of the Yeni Çeltek movement, but also its broader implications for understanding grassroots self-governance, labor, and resistance in Turkey.

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Chapter 1
Paths Toward Collective Power: Collective Action as a Force for Social and Spatial Transformation

In this chapter, I examine the first phase of the movement, focusing on the emergence of collective action, strikes, and protests. I explore how miners and local residents challenged existing power structures to pursue new organizing possibilities. Rather than viewing collective action as merely a response to economic hardship, I demonstrate how it developed from lived experiences of class relations, the vulnerability of existing labor regimes, and the adoption of innovative organizational and protest strategies.

1.1. Emerging from Cracks: Unionization and the Formation of Workers' Council

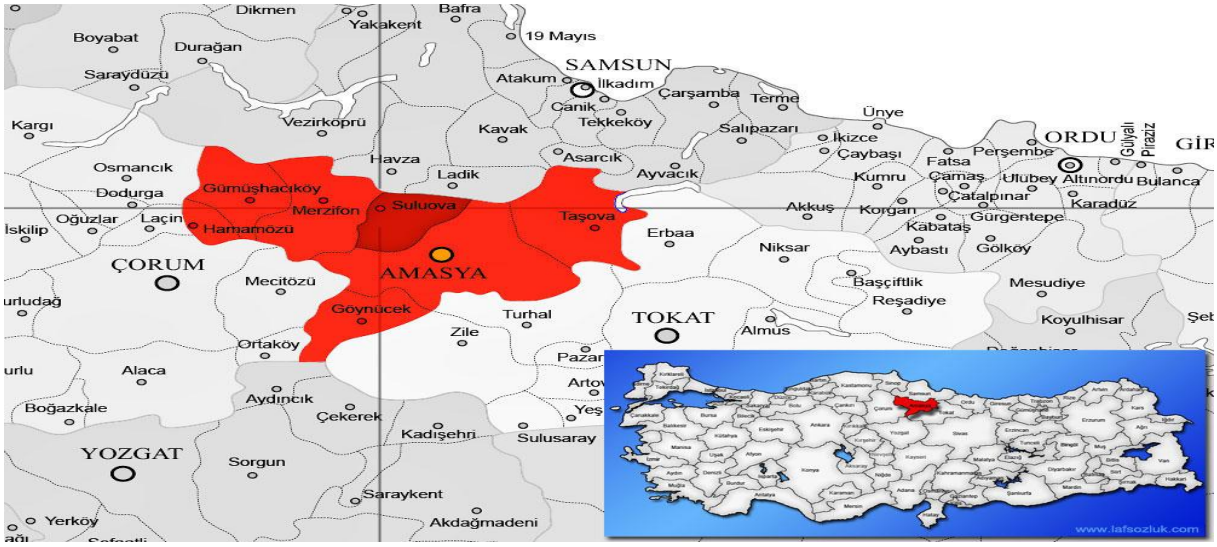

Figure 1. Location of the Yeni Çeltek coal basin

Before 1975, the Yeni Çeltek miners were represented by the Amasya Miners Union, a local trade union under Türk-İş that was closely aligned with the state. However, this union failed to represent the interests of workers or address their grievances (Koç, 2025, p. 437). According to

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oral histories, key workplace decisions, such as job assignments and wages, were made informally based on personal connections rather than democratic procedures. The union president, whom interviewees referred to as Satışoğlu, held all the authority and controlled the mine autocratically; the union only served to reinforce his power. As Salim (miner, 2022) explains,

> When I first started at Yeni Çeltek in 1970, the workplace was authoritarian. Satışoğlu ran the mine as if it were his personal domain. What he said was law, and no one, not even the governor, could challenge his authority. Workers who followed his orders had no problems, but anyone who stepped out of line risked being fired or even beaten by his enforcers. Wages were very low, and there was no real union. The Türk-İş only reinforced Satışoğlu's power.

As Salim describes, decisions about hiring, firing, and discipline were based not on transparent rules, but on loyalty, personal connections, and informal deals. Moreover, Satışoğlu had power beyond the mine. He was connected to local mafia families that were involved in the black-market coal trade. This meant that he could control the workplace. This influence even affected the lives of the miners' families. Some of the miners' wives, for example, reportedly worked in Satışoğlu's home. This created a system of dependence and reinforced a hierarchical order.

Salim emphasized a perception echoed by many miners: "Not even the governor could challenge his authority". A thorough examination of the oral histories reveals that Satışoğlu's seemingly unassailable authority was not merely a personal attribute, but rather a meticulously cultivated and sustained construct. State officials and employers deliberately tolerated and sometimes actively supported his rule. In practice, Satışoğlu's system functioned much like a subcontractor, controlling labor force and specific parts of the coal extraction process underground and managing workers on behalf of employers. Approximately twenty percent of

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the employers were private, and eighty percent were state-owned. This arrangement was advantageous for the parties involved because it maintained a system of informal, personalized authority that ensured low wages and limited job security while containing labor unrest. The apparent predominance of a single individual was, in reality, the result of a more extensive collaborative effort among union leaders, state actors, and local business interests.

The consequences were far-reaching. The patronage regime enforced discipline but it also created deep divisions among workers. Interviewees consistently noted that job assignments, wages, and security depended on personal loyalty, which discouraged trust and cooperation. Loyal workers received benefits and protection, while dissenters faced exclusion and punishment. Naim (miner, 2022) recalled that this atmosphere of humiliation and tension "ultimately set the stage for organized resistance."

As scholars have demonstrated, the struggle for collective control over the labor process has been a hallmark of miners' organizing efforts throughout history. The workers' demands encompassed not only increased wages but also the acquisition of influence over pivotal elements of their labor, including hiring practices, job assignments, the equitable assessment of output, and the regulation of working hours. In contrast to the discipline typically imposed in factories, mining frequently exhibited resistance to such centralized control. The effectiveness of this system was contingent upon the convergence of two factors: the presence of shared expertise and the establishment of collaborative networks among the laborers (Tilly & Tilly, 1998, p. 49).

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However, as demonstrated by my analysis of Yeni Çeltek, these structural conditions alone were insufficient to facilitate collective transformation. The absence of novel forms of institutional leadership impeded the capacity of workers to transcend their fragmented position. As Hodson (2001) observes, workplace regimes characterized by flexibility and informality,

even in contexts where personal interactions are pronounced, do not inherently promote collective action (2001, pp. 170–175). At Yeni Çeltek, the absence of clearly defined regulations and the predominance of loyalty-based incentives have contributed to the exacerbation of divisions and the erosion of solidarity among workers. In this sense, the phenomenon of fragmentation, in conjunction with informal authority, has been demonstrated to be a potent tool for suppressing worker organizing, comparable in efficacy to direct repression.

A significant turning point in this regard occurred in 1975 with the establishment of the Yeraltı Maden-İş trade union at Yeni Çeltek. It is noteworthy that Yeraltı Maden-İş did not emerge through grassroots mobilization at Yeni Çeltek; rather, its entry was facilitated by former union president Satışoğlu, who, following conflicts with Türk-İş and the employers of the Yeni Çeltek mine, brokered an agreement and directed miners to join the new union (interview, Çetin Uygur, the president of Yeraltı Maden İş, 2013). This observation suggests that the organizing efforts at Yeni Çeltek emerged not from spontaneous rank-and-file action, but rather from fissures within the established union–state–capital alliance. In its nascent stages, the movement drew upon the leadership of trade unions.

After Yeraltı Maden-İş gained official recognition, Satışoğlu did not achieve his goal of becoming branch president, as the union quickly introduced a council-based structure. The leadership positions, including the branch president, were now to be filled through elections. An analysis of interviews reveals that workers initially expressed caution toward committee activities, including elections, workshops on worker rights, participatory meetings about daily work, film screenings, reading and listening sessions.

However, as the miners observed their peers assuming leadership roles or participating in collective decisions, many described a gradual increase in confidence. This growing

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participation, as reflected in multiple interviews, contributed to a sense of shared purpose among the workers. As Fevzi (miner, 2022) articulated,

> We found ourselves in a position where we had to fight for our rights, we learned about unions through activities and education, we learned what unions are... We really liked that.

From the union perspective, the goal was not solely to acquire authority but to ensure the efficacy of the organization through active involvement (Yearltı Maden İş constitution, 1976). As elucidated by Çetin Uygur, the union's general president, in 1976:

> [W]e chose to establish internal bodies that would give voice to workers at the grassroots level, grant them real decision-making power, and make the organization truly functional. This is the Workers' Council, and we are the first to implement them (*Cumhuriyet*, 1976, p. 4) (Translated by me).

To articulate this perspective in theoretical terms, as Antonio Negri (2017) contends that the formation of workers' councils is best understood as "a process of destitution of old power and the constituency of a revolutionary subject". This perspective posits that the formation of workers' councils is not a sudden event, but rather a continuous transformation through which the collective agency of workers is constructed and expressed in practice (2017, p. 835). Similarly, classic theorists such as Gramsci posit that councils are not static entities, but rather represent a social and educational process (2000, pp. 79–81).

This perspective is further elaborated in the words of Ahmet (miner, 2013): "If starting a task requires one effort, sustaining it takes three". This local saying reflects the idea that the challenge of organizing a council lies not in its beginning, but in forming, sustaining, and developing it over time.

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Figure 2. An image from a council meeting. In the background, there is a sign that reads, "980 workers, united like a clenched fist".[5]

In the winter of 1976, the newly established collective bargaining process was initiated. The council, comprising the 66 elected miners from 1980, participated in the negotiations for the first time. However, their demands were not met, leading to the decision by the miners to initiate a strike in May. The primary motivation behind the strike, as articulated by miners, stemmed from the disparity in wages between the mining sector and other industries. Specifically, the average wage in the basin was recorded at 52 liras, whereas at Yeni Çeltek, the average wage for miners was only 40 liras (Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 1 June 1976, p. 4). Consequently, the establishment of the workers' council and the decision to strike can be interpreted as being significantly influenced by material interests. As Hamdi explains (miner, 2025),

> Previously, salaries were very low. Everyone supported Yeraltı Maden İş because we believed it would defend workers' rights… but, of course, first we workers defended our rights… We learned it through organizing.

[5] Bürkev, 2025, p. 38

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Hamdi also mentioned these organizational activities had become an integral component of daily work life, taking place during breaks, on the half-hour walks to and from the mine, and even underground. The employment of verbal decision-making processes promoted expeditious engagement, particularly among illiterate miners. Furthermore, literate workers disseminated union newspaper articles to the group. It is evident that the council-based organizing initiatives transcended the limitations of a conventional technical structure, emerging as a social process intricately interwoven with the daily work routines of miners.

As the first strike approached in April 1976, this novel organizing form was subjected to testing. The miners engaged in the organization of pickets, the distribution of responsibilities, and the involvement of family members and the broader community. The strike lasted a month, which meant that workers had to go to the workplace every day, stay there during work hours, and do so without pay. Since they needed to cover daily expenses like lunches and other strike-related costs, community support became essential. However, this phenomenon cannot be fully explained by material needs alone. The miners reflected on the unity and elation that characterized the strike, including shared meals, dancing, and intellectual workshops on strikes and labor movements. Furthermore, this was an active process not only for the miners but also for those offering support. Donations, for example, were announced by reading donors' names aloud over a megaphone, much like at a village wedding, so that each supporter was thanked and often received applause from the crowd (Fevzi, miner, 2022).

After the first strike miners achieved significant gains: Job descriptions and corresponding wages were defined, changes to job descriptions without the consent of employees were prohibited, a 176% increase in base wages was implemented, seniority-based wage increases, skill-based wage increases, and wage increases based on the difficulty of the work performed have been introduced, and a rule requiring the maintenance of the current number of employees (980) has been established. The agreement also included extensive social rights such as

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additional pay for night work, meal allowances, clothing allowances, and education allowances for employees with school-aged children (Göktaş, 2019, p. 68)

Figure 3. The Yeni Çeltek miners on strike for the first time in 1976. On the banner it says: Organize, unite, protect your right. You will destroy the employers' throne. Strike is your last gun, use it. God willing, you will gain your right.[6]

Alongside this first strike, the subsequent armed clash between Satışoğlu's group and the miners was frequently recalled by the interviewees. The violent confrontation initiated by Satışoğlu during the strike was directly linked by interviewees to the fact that, when the new collective bargaining contract would be in place, he would no longer profit from the informal privileges and control he previously enjoyed. This would reduce Satışoğlu's room for maneuver and cut off the sources of income and influence that stemmed from his ability to distribute jobs, favors, and access to black-market coal. A particularly noteworthy aspect of the case pertains to the response, or lack thereof, exhibited by the relevant state authorities in the aftermath of Satışoğlu's assault. When violence erupted, law enforcement arrived at the scene only after a significant delay (*Cumhuriyet*, 1976, p. 9).

[6] *Cumhuriyet, 1 June 1976.*

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As Ahmet (miner and council member, 2013) explained, "we had nothing to rely on except our pickaxes…and the people who came to support us." In such contexts, the necessity of collective self-defense can foster stronger bonds of trust and mutual support. These bonds may constitute the groundwork for subsequent forms of collective action[7]. The state's apparent reluctance or delay in intervening during the conflict appears to have compelled miners and their supporters to rely primarily on their own resources and solidarity. As Fevzi (miner, 2022) recalled,

> [I]t was a battle for the union's survival here. Either Satışoğlu would kick out Yeraltı Maden İş, or we, who love Yeraltı Maden İş, would keep it here... Women from the village came with their shovels and picks to the conflict... Such an organization, such a sense of commitment. Look, a willingness to die for it. That's how our struggle actually became what it was.

This demonstrates how collective action transformed the union into a genuine, community-rooted institution, and how moments of confrontation can rapidly accelerate the development of a collective sense of commitment. In other words, transformative events are not simply the result of underlying structures; they also serve as generative moments (Sewell, 1992, p. 20).

Ali, for example, refers to this transformation as "waking up":

> We woke up…we understood there is a big difference between worker and employer… it was like we couldn't contain ourselves anymore…

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[7] See, Williams (2016).

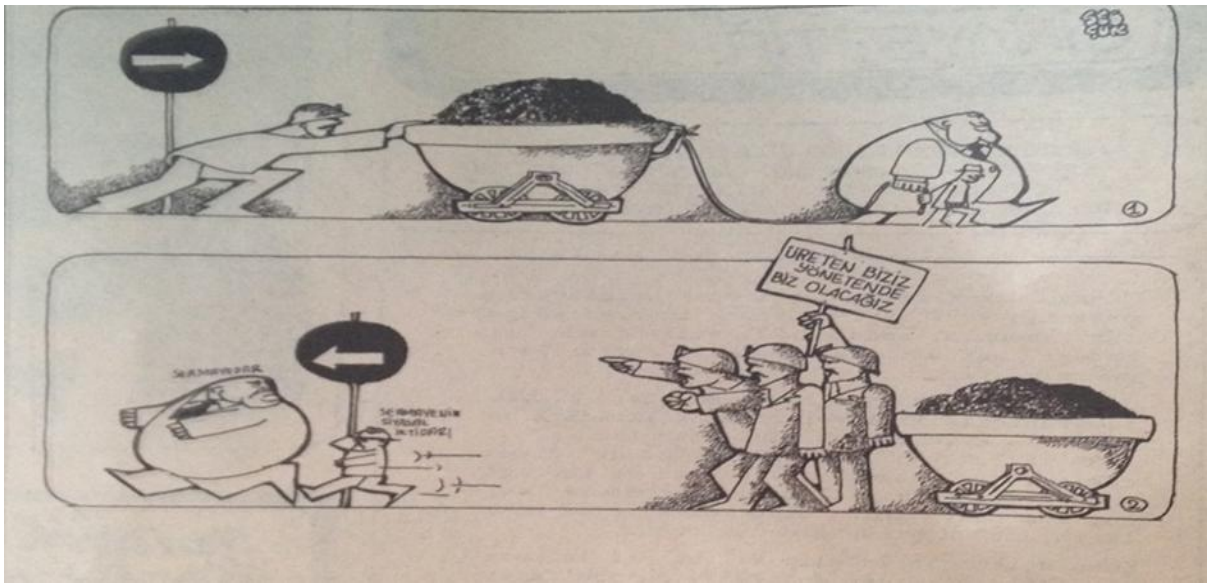

Figure 4. A cartoon summarizing the division between workers and employers. The arrows indicate the direction of historical movement and highlight the process of change that occurs when workers organize collectively.[8]

Refik says that he gained both "self-confidence" and "mutual trust" after this:

> We all gained self-confidence. We also gained trust in the organization model [of Yeraltı Maden İş]…we started to recognize themselves as workers.

The lasting impact of these events is still evident in the memories and everyday lives of participants today. Many interviewees described how the sense of efficacy forged during these moments of collective action continues to shape their perspectives and relationships. As Fevzi (miner, 2022) says:

> I still think about what we can achieve when we are united… Life goes on the same way even today. We continue without giving up, without getting tired. Now, at around 70 years old, here I am talking with you like this *(he* laughs*)*.

[8] The Voice of Miner Workers- the newspaper of Yeraltı Maden İş- November, 1975, p. 7.

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Thus, the first year of council-based organizing (1975-76) led to two major outcomes: First, miners came to recognize and demonstrate their collective capacity, not only achieving material improvements but also developing a new sense of efficacy which for many, endures today. Second, this organizing sparked the emergence of a broader solidarity that extended well beyond the mine, actively mobilizing the surrounding communities. As Fevzi (2022) noted:

> It was as if we [the miners] weren't the only ones on strike, but the people of the region. It was such a grand, spectacular, beautiful strike... Then the region reached such a point that... the focus shifted to the organization at Yeni Çeltek.

These outcomes raise an important question: how can collective actions rooted in the workplace expand to initiate far-reaching changes across an entire region?

1.2. Beyond the Mine: Circulating Collective Action Across the Community

Theorists have debated how structures move beyond their original boundaries. When applied to social movements, does expansion mean replicating existing organizational forms in new spaces? As theorists like Tilly (1984) and Wolf (1999) say, movements are powerful when they adapt to local realities instead of forcing their own organizational structures on others. While movements can be rooted in specific areas such as workplaces (often structured through trade unions) effective movements "scale up" (Cox, 2018, p. 6). This is possible because structures are not static templates, they are resources and rules that can be reinterpreted, modified, and enacted differently as circumstances change (Sewell, 1992, p. 17).

Archival sources and interviews reveal, in Yeni Çeltek, organizing beyond the workplace did not begin with the immediate establishment of people's committees modeled after workers' committees. Instead, it emerged through informal interactions and everyday relationships. By

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1976, the mine and the miners had become a center where organized knowledge, experience of struggle, and political language crystallized.

After the expulsion of Satışoğlu, miners had promised that coal would no longer be funneled directly to black-market dealers; instead, everyone would queue outside the mine and have equal access to coal. Drawing on this, the workers' council decided on two main goals: organizing effective resistance to the coal black market and serving as an example for other workers, peasants, and the poor to organize and claim their own rights (Ahmet, miner, 2013).

As Cox (2018) observes, the power of movements lies in their ability to connect the "ordinary" and the "collective," transforming everyday interactions into sites of solidarity and struggle (2018, pp. 3, 11). In Yeni Çeltek, this linkage was constructed primarily through the miners' role. Miners brought home the political knowledge, organizing skills, and shared language they had gained through union and council activity. These exchanges usually took place informally in homes, coffeehouses, and village public spaces. As Fevzi (2022) recalls, the oral tradition was powerful:

> Educational activities about class struggle, organization, and the contradiction between labor and capital were spread by the workers of Yeni Çeltek to neighboring towns and villages. Those who listened learned as much as they could, and they shared what they knew... We would go to the cafes and distribute newspapers. There was tremendous sympathy and interest everywhere.

Fevzi's account illustrates how miners actively translated and adapted political ideas to local experience, acting as mediators between broader movements and local realities (Tilly, 1984; Wolf, 1999). Archival sources and interviews reveal, these realities centered on two main elements: mutual aid and daily conflict resolution.

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Before the council organization at Yeni Çeltek, mutual aid was linked to mining mainly through personal or family connections that shaped employment opportunities as many miners emphasized when sharing how they started working in the mine. After the 1976 strike, the workers' council began to intervene directly in hiring decisions. As Ahmet (miner, 2013) put it:

> We prepared the list of those who would be hired and gave it to the employer. Whoever the employer chose from the list was already our person… But, there were two conditions we set: first, they had to be poor and in need of work, and second, they couldn't be an enemy of labor.

As understood through Ahmet's account although they could not directly control the hiring process, they managed to do so through the tactic they developed. However, achieving this required establishing stronger recruitment links outside the workplace. In pursuit of this goal, and also to create opportunities for miners' social activities, Yeraltı Maden-İş, in cooperation with the militants of the Devrimci Yol organization[9], which had grown stronger in the region by 1978, carried on an association called the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant-Youth Associations (DIKG-DER) in 1977. From then onwards, the workers' council would ask the association members who needs a job, the association then would make recommendations to the council (Emin Yüksel, trade union lawyer, 2022). The association rapidly expanded to other districts and villages, largely due to the influential roles played by miners and local revolutionary activists. As Fevzi (2022) recounts,

[9] Devrimci Yol's central organization was based in Ankara, but it deployed its trained militants to various provinces across Turkey. These militants were often activists who had come to the forefront during the processes of student self-governance struggles in universities. The goal was to help generate localized movements shaped by the specific conditions of each area, with the ultimate aim of uniting them in a broader revolutionary process. In this sense, militants embodied and practiced forms of intellectual, political, and ethical leadership in a horizontal manner. Devrimci Yol's core strategic perspective was what it called the "strong arms of the people" approach. According to this vision, revolution would not be carried out by elites of a political party but by the multiple and diverse forces of the people, if the people so willed (*Devrimci Yol*, 1978).

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> Because in Yeni Çeltek there are people from every village, every district, every neighborhood… That's how it spreads so quickly. It's like a fishing net: you throw it in, and it expands…

Other mutual aid activities in everyday life now began to be organized through these associations. People who organized around them started to intervene in local service disruptions such as transporting water during shortages, helping farmers during busy periods, organizing repairs to schools and mosques, and cleaning public spaces (Mahmut, villager, 2022).

Moreover, in disputes, such as between neighboring farmland, before commonly mediated by village headmen, association members began to act as mediators in some villages. Another common site of conflict, in terms of family issues, was the coffeehouse, where male workers often spent their free time. Gambling and sometimes excessive drinking were widespread in these spaces. These practices often had certain consequences for family life, especially for women and children, leading to financial hardship or domestic violence. This became a point both demanded by women and one that connected them to association activities. Women began to bring complaints about their husbands' problems and bad behavior to trusted association members (Mehmet Kök, Devrimci Yol militant, 2022).

Teachers and students also began to play a greater role by organizing discussion sessions in these associations around Marxist texts, revolutionary literature, and novels such as Germinal. As Halil (student, 2025) and Cemil (teacher, 2022) noted, these gatherings were tried to be grounded in local realities and directly linked to ongoing struggles. Intellectual activities were not undertaken in abstraction, but as part of a search for concrete solutions to immediate social problems, in line with Devrimci Yol's approach (*Devrimci Yol*, 1977, p. 13.). Thus, the movement in Yeni Çeltek had become a process of complex collective formation where different political views, social positions, and local worldviews intersected.

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Tensions between local miners and the student revolutionaries illustrate the frictions embedded in this intersection. Some workers were skeptical of young cadres who idealized struggle in overly theoretical terms and spoke a political language disconnected from lived experience. As certain miners stated in the interviews, slogans were not enough what mattered was rootedness in the terrain of everyday life. This friction revealed the limits of ideological centers attempting to implant themselves in local geographies, but also opened up a space for mutual learning and transformation. Ahmet's (miner, 2013) narrative captures this dynamic:

> They said: let's bring revolutionaries and make them miners. No! They all came, but none could convince me. Why ruin a revolutionary underground? I need that person outside. There are other friends who could become revolutionaries instead…I won't send militants underground…workers must become militants.

In this sense, the process exemplifies Gramsci's concept of the "organic intellectual," in which revolutionary initiatives arise from individuals embedded in everyday life rather than being imposed from above (Gramsci & Forgacs, 2000, p. 425). Homes, coffeehouses, and village squares began to emerge as new arenas of politicization, where the boundaries between workplace and broader society were blurred.

However, two problems initially targeted for resolution remained unresolved: first, the persistence of the coal black market. Black-market dealers would arrive and purchase coal in bulk, leaving little for the broader community. The workers' council was unable to stop this, as a small group of miners supported the black market, making it risky to provoke conflict within the mine. Furthermore, black-market actors held significant power across the basin, while the movement's influence outside the mine was still limited. Thus, this problem would continue until 1979.

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Second, the insecurity faced by sugar beet farmers due to the low purchase prices set by the state, and by seasonal workers because of precarious working conditions in the region. When the miners launched their second major strike in 1978, this issue was on their agenda. The protest atmosphere resembled the first strike, but the objectives had broadened. Ahmet (miner, 2013) explained:

> We rang the strike bells because it was necessary…to set an example for other workers. We want to show that what we seize by force is what we get. Otherwise, they wouldn't give it to us. If the issue were only about Yeni Çeltek, they would have quietly given us what we wanted, just as they did at Satışoğlu. But we said 'no.' We want a world governed by producers. I still insist on this.

Ahmet's reflections reveal a crucial turning point in the movement's outlook. By 1978, he saw the strike not merely as a means to secure immediate economic benefits for Yeni Çeltek miners, but as part of a larger moral and political project aimed at transforming broader social relations across the region. Importantly, Ahmet underscores that the movement was not motivated by narrow self-interest or personal gain; instead, it sought to set an example for other workers and challenge structures of exploitation that extended beyond the workplace. His insistence on "a world governed by producers" speaks to a collective vision that prioritized solidarity, social justice, and the democratization of economic life.

After the second strike in 1978, the miners demanded and achieved rights that went beyond wages: stronger job security, a slower work pace, limits on overtime, and the abolition of the performance-based wage system. All these rights were won to improve health, safety, and work-life balance. At the same time, provisions such as the abolition of the performance system aimed to facilitate council operations, strengthen solidarity, and reduce competition (Öztürk, 2025, pp. 468–469).

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Figure 5. Miners carrying a banner on May 1st that reads, "We are the producers; we will be the ones who govern"[10]

That year, along with the first mass May Day rally in the region organized by Yeraltı Maden İş, and the start of sugar beet producers' rallies, a concerted effort was launched to organize seasonal yaba workers (seasonal workers who load sugar beet pulp). When I inquired into the miners' involvement in organizing a demonstration for sugar beet farmers and *yaba* workers, Hamdi (miner, 2025) replied:

> People supported us during the strikes… We had to support them in return. The villagers should also receive a fair price when they sell their sugar beets…They are also producers, don't they? Those who produce should govern.

One miner, Sadık (2013), had previously worked as a *yaba* worker and joined Yeni Çeltek in 1977, after the council movement had begun. Drawing from his own experience, he emphasized the importance of supporting the struggles of other workers.

[10] Aysan, 2013, p. 192.

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Yaba workers, among the most precarious and marginalized groups in the basin, began to set their own wages through collective actions. This was an important step, as many aspired to become miners themselves, bringing them into closer contact with the council and the associations. Some even demonstrated the importance of council control over hiring by later being recruited as miners at Yeni Çeltek through the collective decision of the council (Bürkev, 2025, p. 95).

By the end of 1978, as miners and their allies formed stronger organizational practices and networks of solidarity, those in power began to perceive the movement as a direct threat to their established hierarchies of authority, economic control, and local order. According to the interviewees, by 1978, the government was closely monitoring council leaders and the movement, regularly surveilling strike preparations and meetings. During this period, state forces intensified their targeting of miners and local activists. As Gerstenberger (2022) observes, capitalist states employ various forms of violence, both direct and indirect, to regulate labor forces and subdue social movements. However, collective organizations exhibit a capacity for response, adaptation, and resistance (2022, p. 354).

Popular organizations have the capacity to implement innovative new forms of social life and security in the face of violence. This context facilitated the formation of people's resistance committees by a segment of the basin's population, organized in associations. These new forms of collective action and protest materialized in Yeni Çeltek, where funerals for miners and revolutionaries killed during the conflict began to transform into protest sites. Additionally, people's resistance committees initiated the organization of night patrols and, on occasion, small spontaneous collective actions, such as square meetings for self-defense. Camouflage became a common tactic: during the day, miners appeared as ordinary workers, but at night, they transformed into committee members and armed guards. Seasonal workers also

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participated significantly in these resistance committees (Mehmet Kök, Devrimci Yol militant, 2025).

Figure 6. A leaflet prepared by Yeraltı Maden-İş, showing miners collectively carrying a coffin. The slogan on the left is "We are the people, we are reborn"[11]

The narratives suggest that the resistance committees' sense of collective efficacy is deeply rooted in longstanding communal traditions of protection and solidarity. Ahmet (2013), for example, recalls:

> We were people who protected our town, our village… No one could harass a woman in the neighborhood, we were Anatolian young men. Yeraltı Maden-İş told us, 'You're going to do this in an organized way from now on. Until now, you were doing it individually'.

As Ahmet's account suggests, the phenomenon of politicized self-defense did not emerge in a vacuum but was rooted in pre-existing practices of protection and solidarity among the populace. These practices underwent a gradual reorganization and politicization process through the agency of the movement's new structures. It is important to note that women also

[11] Aysan, 2013, p. 192.

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played a role in the execution of these tactics. Necmi (miner, 2022) provides the following account:

> At a funeral, a gendarmerie captain pointed out two revolutionary militants. My wife was standing in a group of 10-12 women. I told the militants, 'The captain is pointing at you. Quick, get among the women and go to our house'.

The invisibility imposed by socially constructed gender norms in the context became an important tactical element. As de Certeau argues, everyday life is an arena where resistance and invention persist in hidden or mundane forms (as cited in Highmore, 2002, pp. 157–160). This tactical foundation appears to have ensured the survival of the movement at critical moments. Sopranzetti (2018) similarly describes a form of invisibility that functions as a tactical advantage in political struggle, providing activists with protection and secrecy (Sopranzetti, 2018, p. 216).

As noted by numerous interviewees, participating in demonstrations posed significant challenges for women from the outset. It was more difficult for them to be visible in protest actions outside the immediate circles of their families, such as supporting miners' strikes. For some women, especially those who crossed boundaries to engage in open political activism, participation demanded a more explicit negotiation of gendered expectations and risks. Fatoş (2025), a university student and one of the few women Devrimci Yol militants in the region, recalls:

> We achieved something very difficult. They said women wouldn't get involved in such things... They gossiped that we were sleeping with communists... But we went [to the demonstrations] anyway.

For miners' wives, another challenge was the demands of housework and caregiving. As Ayşe (2013) explains:

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> With all the housework and the kids, I couldn't really join the demonstrations. But there were quite a few other women who did… I mostly made tea and took it to the night shifts.

Political mobilizations are always collective, but never homogeneous. The conditions under which women or the precariously employed negotiated within the movement and against the boundaries set by the existing traditional order. Nevertheless, as the interviews show, these limits are not absolute. Women's actions, even when circumscribed, can shift norms and open new possibilities, as the photo illustrates below:

Figure 7. Women in May Day demonstration in Merzifon, a district in the basin, in 1980.[12]

The spread of collective action was a process of translation and adaptation across social boundaries, shaped not only by formal organizations but also by everyday tactics, solidarities, and creative social maneuvering. Power structures played a key role in shaping this trajectory. From Sewell's (1992) perspective, the "transposability of structure" allows practices developed in one domain to be reactivated in others.

[12] *Demokrat*, 8 June 1980.

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This shift extended beyond protest events, highlighting how ordinary people carved out spaces of resistance through everyday acts, such as carrying tea, organizing coal distribution, standing night watch, reading newspapers aloud in coffeehouses, or women conveying grievances to committee members. These practices reveal how class struggle was woven into daily life, giving rise to novel forms of subjectivity and contestation, not only within the sphere of production but also that of social reproduction (Bhattacharya et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the strength and limits of collective action were shaped not just by miners' unity, but also by the incorporation of other social actors, including peasants, students, teachers, women, and seasonal workers, into the movement over time. This chapter has examined how workplace-based organizing in Yeni Çeltek between 1975 and 1978 expanded into broader collective action, giving rise to new protest repertoires. The practices of solidarity, legitimacy, and moral commitment continued to evolve. These were grounded in self-realization, class identity, and a growing sense of collective efficacy; especially after major collective actions. This transformation set the stage for the movement's next phase (1979-1980), when collective control over both the production and circulation of coal intensified. In the following chapter, I examine how a movement rooted in workplace organizing developed into a broader project of collective governance.

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Chapter 2
Disrupting Capitalist Circuits Through Collective Control of Coal

In this chapter, I examine the political economy of coal in Yeni Çeltek, treating coal not only as a material resource but as a contested terrain where value, control, and collective life were redefined. During the period between 1979 and 1980, collective power reshaped the region's social and economic landscape, challenging dominant capitalist logics of extraction and distribution. The dismantling of the coal black market and the intensification of collective control over production and circulation led to the occupation of the mine and the implementation of workplace self-management. These changes were made possible by the mobilization and integration of both productive and reproductive spheres.

2.1. The Dual Strategy of Self-Governance Practices

Coal was the economic backbone of the region, connecting the mine to local industries, households, and agricultural activity. This central role became even more significant between 1979 and 1980, when the cooperation of workers and people's committees succeeded in shutting down the coal black market in 1979. With the end of the black market, coal could now be distributed fairly and directly to people in need, rather than being hoarded or sold at inflated prices (Bürkev, 2025, p. 94).

Nevertheless, the persistence of the coal black market until 1979 reveals two key dynamics. The first is related to the tension among the miners themselves: a group of workers, some from families involved in black market activities, resisted eliminating these illicit networks. The workers' council was constantly negotiating this line, as coal distribution after the sugar factory quota was filled (the remaining 20%) was managed at the mine's gate, where anyone, including

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black market dealers, could purchase coal. When the council attempted to block sales to these dealers, it sometimes provoked conflict within the workplace, as well as risks outside, since these dealers had ties to local mafia networks and could escalate violence (Ahmet, miner, 2013).

This tense negotiation persisted until late 1978. By that time, the resistance committees had developed both the organizational and tactical capacity to mobilize mass support through people's committees and deploy local armed militants as a strategic deterrent. This dual approach mirrored Devrimci Yol's strategy in the region: combining broad-based mobilization with targeted tactical strength (Bora, 2017, p. 671).

By 1978, Devrimci Yol had become the most influential Marxist revolutionary organization in the region. The organization of people's resistance committees reflected its broader strategy of building grassroots structures for self-defense and mass mobilization. Devrimci Yol's engagement with the area was established primarily through its close cooperation with the Yeraltı Maden-İş union since 1976. By this time, a significant number of local residents had begun identifying themselves as members or supporters of the organization, as many interviewees noted. In practical terms, Devrimci Yol's engagement included supporting the formation of resistance committees and acting as a bridge between different segments of the local working population, particularly miners and agricultural workers (Devrimci Yol, 1977).

The local embeddedness was particularly evident in the practical tactics employed during coal sales. For example, people's committees would gather strategically at the sales point, creating public visibility, while armed local militants, often young men from the area, remained in the background as a deterrent. With this collective presence, coal was distributed fairly to the public in order, and black-market dealers were excluded. The council and the weighmaster would inform the dealers: "The revolutionaries and the union no longer allow sales to you" (Hamdi, miner, 2025).

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This illustrates a form of political leadership that, by 1979, had become increasingly visible as both collective and deeply rooted in grassroots mobilization and factors that enabled the movement to adapt itself to continue. Rather than being embodied in a single charismatic leader, leadership here was constituted through networks of resistance committees, alliances between different actors, and the active participation of local people, particularly through the political collaboration between Devrimci Yol and the Yeraltı Maden-İş union[13]. In Gramscian terms, this can be understood as the construction of a new "historical bloc," in which leadership is exercised not only through command or coercion, but also through building consent, forging alliances, and organizing the routines of everyday life (Gramsci & Forgacs, 2000, p. 424).[14]

It has been observed that during this period, a particular form of political leadership emerges, one that is intimately intertwined with the economic preeminence of coal. Rather than being clearly separated, the movement's political leadership appears to have been shaped by its capacity to organize and oversee the distribution of coal, particularly by regulating access and limiting black-market activities.

Linking this to the limits of workplace-centered strategies for social change, the effective resolution of the black-market problem depended on connecting workplace struggles to broader popular mobilization, across scales that linked labor organizing inside the mine to wider circuits of community action. This exemplifies the dualities inherent within the movement, linking production, reproduction, and social reproduction. It therefore updates the class struggle by

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[13] See, for a discussion of leadership and Devrimci Yol, Erdoğan (1998).

[14] Marxist tradition, while sometimes overemphasizing the role of the vanguard, ultimately situates the success and effectiveness of leadership not merely in the strategic use of resources or direct attempts to seize state power, but in how class struggles are historically and collectively articulated. In recent decades, it has become evident that participatory forms of collective leadership have played a key role in sustaining movements and ensuring their resilience, as they foster broader participation, facilitate the creation of new alliances, and allow for greater flexibility and adaptability in the face of external pressures (see Sotiris, 2022, pp. 323-324).

combining both the reproduction of the capitalist system in Marx's sense, "societal reproduction" (see, Brenner and Lasslet, 1989, p. 383), and the role of unpaid forms of labor in the reproduction of labor power.

The viability of capitalist production systems relies on a fundamental infrastructure of social reproduction that takes place in areas such as care, family, education, health, and social relationships. All of these forms of labor ranging from preparing meals and raising children to providing healthcare, emotional support, schooling, and public services are what make waged production possible (Fraser, 2017, pp. 22–23).

In 1979, women in the Yeni Çeltek basin were primarily engaged in domestic care work and subsistence agriculture. As industrial mining expanded and men entered the wage-labor force, women's unpaid labor at home and in the fields became essential to sustaining the household (Fatoş, student, 2025). This division of labor was not simply about who did what. Instead, it reflected the gendered infrastructure that supported the region's proletarianization.

Girls, in particular, took on a disproportionate share of household and agricultural responsibilities. This included not only the care for younger siblings and elders but also the support of their brothers' education by undertaking tasks that under alternative circumstances, would have been shouldered by the boys themselves. Despite this, girls still maintained access to education widely (Cemil, high school teacher, 2022). In effect, this reproductive labor underwrote the making of the male industrial worker. They ensured the continuity of daily life and facilitated the pursuit of education by boys, which subsequently prepared them for entry into the workforce.

If women's reproductive labor provided the essential foundation for the functioning of the existing order, what did it mean when this labor began to support the coal-centered infrastructure of the movement itself? Care work, when mobilized collectively, can become a

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powerful infrastructure for movements (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014, p. 101). This dynamic was clearly observable in the struggle against the coal black market in Yeni Çeltek, where women collectively mobilized to stand in line for coal and, at times, to physically occupy the distribution sites. Their presence constituted a direct intervention in the process of resource allocation and effectively disrupted black-market practices while ensuring a more equitable distribution of coal. In these moments, reproductive labor that was traditionally associated with maintaining the household (like securing fuel for the home) became collective. The supposed apolitical nature of caregiving was inverted: it became a means of sustaining struggle under conditions of threat. This reflects that a powerful movement emerges when organizational forms actively bridge workplace and beyond (Bhattacharya et al., 2022).

Winning the fight against the coal black market created new circuits of mutual aid and symbolized a model of community-driven economic management. Consequently, coal emerged as an indispensable element in establishing connections across diverse spatial scales. The elimination of the black market based on committee organization demonstrated that collective struggle over coal could achieve tangible results (Ahmet, miner, 2013). By 1979, the workers had elevated the organization of the workers' council to a new level. Technical problems and emergencies were resolved through collective decision-making. Wages and bonuses were calculated transparently and monitored collectively to ensure fairness. Decision-making processes were participatory (Ahmet, miner, 2013). Important issues, such as layoffs, were openly discussed and decided upon collectively. For example, if someone made a mistake, they helped each other solve the problem. Ali (miner, 2022) recalls one such instance:

> There was a worker who burned the water pump twice in a row. Normally, he would have had to pay for the damage or be dismissed. But we solved the problem collectively. Was it really just this worker's fault? No. According to the collective agreement, a person can only work eight hours underground. On that day, because another worker couldn't make it, he ended up working

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> two extra shifts after his own. How could he be expected to avoid mistakes? Besides, what if the pump burned out because of low voltage? Is that his fault? No. We didn't let him get fired. I was on the disciplinary committee. We never let anyone get dismissed for such mistakes.

This example illustrates how the workers' council prioritized collective responsibility over individual blame. They addressed problems through mutual support. As a result, the workplace became more participatory, as well as a source of solidarity and protection for the miners. Another outcome of this experience was that workers became more active in their daily negotiations with foremen, who were acting on behalf of employers. As Hamdi (miner, 2022) explained,

> The foreman would come and say, "Today, you need to dig out this much coal." But we were the ones doing the work. If we couldn't meet the quota, we would tell him, "I can't extract that much today." If he was convinced, that would be the end of it. If not, he would insist. Eventually, we would reach an agreement.

This example shows how collective organization gave workers the power to negotiate more confidently, rather than simply submitting to top-down demands.[15]

Because the wage increases obtained through strikes were relatively high, the miners had established a solidarity fund to provide mutual support in cases of illness, death, or other emergencies. Following the dissolution of the coal black market, coal distribution changed significantly. Instead of individuals coming to the mine on their own, people's committees would come directly to the mine to collect coal and deliver it by truck to different villages. The

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[15] This bargaining power in daily negotiations with foremen may be linked to the larger-scale negotiations that abolished the bonus system in the 1978 collective bargaining agreement. By removing the pressure to maximize output for individual bonuses, this change altered the daily dynamics of workplace authority. This suggests that institutional changes at the bargaining table directly impact everyday power relations in the workplace, reinforcing a culture of solidarity that prioritizes collective well-being over individual productivity.

coal would be weighed and sold publicly to ensure transparency. The miners' solidarity fund was established to cover the transportation costs associated with delivering coal to the public.

Consequently, a proportion of the wage increases obtain through collective bargaining was redistributed to the broader community that had supported the miners during the strikes. In addition, the committees responsible for the coal distribution would encourage buyers to donate any surplus coal. The coal would subsequently be collected and redistributed to those in need. In this process, money and coal itself became a central media of solidarity. Some miners began donating part of their three-ton annual coal allowance, guaranteed as a social right in the first collective agreement of 1976, to schools, teachers' associations, and impoverished residents identified by people's committees. The distribution of these donations would be conducted collectively.

A significant segment of the labor force involved in this new phase of coal sales comprised students and unemployed youth who served as committee members residing in various districts and villages. The second group consisted of seasonal workers, known as *yabacı*, who were among the most precarious laborers in the region (Mehmet Kök, Devrimci Yol militant, 2025). These practices established a significant connection between the main productive labor force, the miners, and other groups, including students, unemployed youth, and seasonal workers. These diverse groups' participation in coal distribution and related activities exemplifies how self-governance transcended the mine, linking core productive labor with auxiliary and communal labor. Thus, the distinction between primary production and supporting roles became blurred, creating a more inclusive, community-oriented governance model.

These endeavors to assert control over coal have led to a reinterpretation of its social significance. The value of coal has been shown to extend beyond the confines of individual labor or market price, being instead embedded within the fabric of social relations. This

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redefined value has the potential to serve as a foundation for the emergence of alternative forms of governance. This resembles also what Azzellini (2017) describes in the Venezuelan context as communal forms of power, where local assemblies and production units formed the backbone of an emerging grassroots form of governance (Azzellini, 2024). In the case of Yeni Çeltek, this type of communal system is characterized by coal and mutual aid networks, as well as the circulation of embedded value. It also became a focal point for organizing and mobilizing people across social and spatial divisions, thereby strengthening the movement's capacity for collective action.

De Peuter and Witheford (2010) describe such a system, in which the creation of one form of common ownership facilitates the development of others, as a self-reinforcing system. In Yeni Çeltek, the coal distribution was instrumental in supporting school construction, infrastructure repairs, and other community projects because committee members organized through the coal distribution began to organize widely and participate in these types of projects as well.

By 1980, the initiatives governing coal production and circulation, as well as the process of political mobilization, had reached a new stage. The miners transitioned to a form of self-management by occupying the workplace, which they called "actual production."

2.2. Radicalizing Collective Resource Control

Burawoy and Krotov (1995) describe miners' working conditions as a "community of fate," in which their physical survival and emotional bonds depend on close collaboration (1995, p. 119). This highlights the dangerous nature of mining, regardless of the form of workplace organization. In the case of Yeni Çeltek, this shared fate was vividly captured by Ali's (miner, 2022) recollection:

> The workers you see in the underground are closer to you than your mother, father, or family. Ultimately, we are very dependent on each other for safety.

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> When we support each other there, this friendship continues outside as well. That's why miners don't abandon each other… if you look at the contacts saved on my phone today, 80% of them are miners.

Furthermore, miners attribute a kind of "vitality" to coal. They believe, for example, that they can sense the resource, and that their tools move on their own (Nash, 1979; Rolston, 2013). It reflects an almost living quality they ascribe to the resource they extract, allowing miners to engage with it creatively and organically. Hamdi (miner, 2025) explains it as follow:

> You have to know how to extract the coal. There is a technique…but you have to feel it.

It appears that miners share similarities in their experiences due to their working conditions: They have a shared destiny based on safety and similar responses to the mysterious underground world. How should we understand the nature of this collective experience and the forms of collaboration it produces in relation to self-management?

Certain interviewees described workplace control and self-management at Yeni Çeltek as "actual production." This issue can be addressed by examining Marx's (1976, 1993) distinction between labor and labor power. According to Marx, this distinction is essential to understanding exploitation under capitalism. While workers are paid for their labor power, capitalists extract surplus value from labor that exceeds its worth. Tronti (2019) builds on this analytical distinction to shed light on how workers can change capitalist social relations. Tronti posits that the workers' labor power is the starting point for social change because it is inherently productive (2019, pp. 183–185).

Therefore, we might interpret the two general features of miners' collective experience mentioned earlier as signs that their labor possesses antagonistic potential that has not been fully absorbed by the capitalist production process. This also fosters the capacity for collective action that can challenge the logic of exploitation itself. From this perspective, "actual

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production" can be understood as the moment when workers regain control of their labor, transcending alienation[16]. Consequently, labor power ceases to be merely a commodity for sale and becomes the basis for collective subjectivity, that is, self-management. As Hamdi (miner, 2025) puts it when he describes the self-management process in 1980,

> We are the ones who produce, we are the ones who know the techniques, we are the ones who ensure safety, we are the ones who calculate our wages. After doing the hardest part, after producing…what is left in management? If we are the ones who produce, then we became to manage as well. This is actual production.

Refik (miner, 2022) similarly puts it as,

> We said, if we are producing, then we should be the ones governing. We are the producers, so isn't it our right?

As can be seen, the self-management process brought about lasting shifts that can be described as a de-alienation of miners' consciousness regarding their labor and collective agency. However, it is important to understand these shifts as part of an ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome. Considering the experiences of self-organizing practices at work or collective actions prior, particularly strikes[17] to the 1980 transition to self-management reveals that self-management and collective organization reinforced and expanded each other dynamically and mutually.

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[16] In *Grundrisse*, Marx (1993) explains that alienation does not refer to the objectification itself, but rather to how, under capitalism, human labor and its products become forces that are external and not under our control. This makes alienation a historically specific condition, not a universal one. For Marx, alienation is deeply connected to the capitalist way of working, especially because workers are separated from the goods they produce, their own labor, and each other (209-211).

[17] As mentioned earlier, the experience of collectively resolving technical problems without waiting for managerial intervention, the participatory approach to wage calculation and discipline, and the creation of solidarity funds for community support.

Figure 8. A monumental worker figure wearing an apron with the word "strike" on it, featured in the union newspaper.[18]

As illustrated above, as pressure on the movement increased, the early cartoons were replaced by clearer and harsher images. Examining how self-management in this context was initiated reveals that another collective bargaining process paved the way. From January to March of 1980, the workers' council and the employer engaged in collective bargaining. However, the employer refused to compromise on any of the workers' demands. In response, the workers launched another strike in April (Göktaş, 2018, p. 73).

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[18] Aysan, 2013, p. 194.

Figure 9. Miners' strike in 1980

This time, however, the employer retaliated by locking out the workers and closing the mine, claiming that operating it was no longer profitable. This closure was arbitrary and violated the Labor Law and the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (Göktaş, 2018, p. 72). At this point, the close alliance between the state and capital became apparent. The regional governor began making public statements in local newspapers alleging that collective actions elsewhere in Turkey were instigated by the Yeni Çeltek miners. The Minister of the Interior ordered the governor to shut down the Yeni Çeltek mine. Furthermore, the Minister of Culture stated, "We will deal with the workers after dispersing them," and the Minister of Energy openly admitted, "We closed Yeni Çeltek because it posed a danger" (2018, p. 73).

The dual role of the state as both the primary employer and as the enforcer of order, appears to blur the lines between economic and political power, thereby suggesting that the repression was driven not solely by the protection of private capital but also by concerns regarding the state's own managerial and political authority. This situation sparked strong reactions from the miners. As frequently noted in interviews, the sense of having been wronged remains vivid to this day. The miners emphasized the contradiction between the employer's claim that the mine was

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unprofitable and the statements made by state officials. For example, Refik (miner, 2022) explained:

> We did not accept the employer's decision to shut down the mine. We told them, "Go if you want…we know you are lying about making a loss." We said, "We will prove that you are not losing money here." When we were organized, we were strong. For instance, we had a slogan: Workers, peasants, youth; united for revolution! They were afraid of this slogan.

This suggests that the fundamental antagonism between labor power and capital, often described as the engine of social conflict and change, may be more complex because the state did not merely act as the guardian of capital, but also pursued its own political and managerial interests. It appears that the miners' move toward self-management was perceived as a potential threat to state authority, since it refused to separate economic activity from collective decision-making processes [19].

Following the occupation and subsequent operation of the mine by the miners, a discourse of justification was developed in direct response to official statements. The state's discourse drew a sharp line between being a 'worker' and engaging in collective political action, treating the miners' occupation as illegitimate precisely because it blurred these boundaries. In their interviews with local and national newspapers, the workers highlighted the mine's financial profitability, particularly in terms of coal sales, contrasting this with the previous months' performance. Meanwhile, coal sales continued to be organized through people's committees as they had been since 1979. In this instance, however, the coal was sold directly to the public in its entirety. The state's designation of miners' actions as illegal, coupled with the sugar factory's inability to procure coal, resulted in a significant escalation in the level of participation in the

[19] See Rajaram (2015) for a discussion of administrative rule and the policing of boundaries between labor and political authority.

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sales process and among those purchasing coal. This expansion increased the visibility and legitimacy of the miners' actions and further embedded the practice of collective distribution within the wider community (Fevzi, committee member, 2013). Furthermore, they ensured that these achievements were publicized in the press, highlighting the statement that "all resources belong to the people" (*Demokrat*, 1980, p. 4).

This example highlights a broader theoretical point about how resources acquire meaning and value through social relations. Resources can be defined by their utility and value, which are socially constructed (Zimmermann, 1951). This manifests in a way that helps us understand that coal does not have a fixed ontology; rather, it is transformed into a resource through relationality in a process of becoming (Richardson & Weszkalnys, 2014). In this context, coal that is recirculated to support the community and its reproduction, rather than being appropriated as surplus value for capital accumulation, may partially take on the qualities of commons rather than functioning solely as a commodity, since "a commodity is a good produced for exchange, while a common is a good produced to be shared (de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010, p. 44).[20] [21]

This transformation is not automatic; it takes place through collective social labor, negotiation, and care that reframe a resource's meaning, use, and access. During the period of self-management, miners cooked their own lunches and received support from their families and the community. About 20 to 30 sheep that had been previously donated during earlier strikes were utilized for sustenance. Women played a particularly vital role by collectively baking

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[20] They illustrate it as follows: A- C-A', where "A" is association and "C" is commons, as opposed to the capitalist circuit M-C-M', with "M" for money and "C" for commodity (pp. 44-45).

[21] As scholars generally agree, forms of self-governance still operate within a market context, and important questions remain about their transformative potential. In the case of Yeni Çeltek, however, since workers' control was suppressed by the state before it could be fully established, an exploration of these debates lies beyond the scope of this study.

bread and delivering it to the miners (Fevzi, 2022). If we interpret this collective baking as a self-reinforcing force, it appears that it may have contributed to the transformation of basic materials like coal and bread into shared, politicized resources. As Federici and Caffentzis (2014) have noted, women's roles in managing resources are often essential to sustaining common goods. However, they also warn that, when such systems collapse, women bear a disproportionate burden.

As the movement advanced, it provoked increased attacks by right-wing extremists supported by state forces. First, the governor cut off telephone lines used for workplace communication. Soon after, workers came under fire on their way to work. Due to growing concerns about safety and the risk of attacks on storage facilities filled with explosives, mining operations were halted. In response, the miners began stockpiling water and food underground in preparation for a prolonged standoff. This marked the beginning of a two-month period (July-August 1980) of underground occupation and collective defense that miners refer to as "resistance" (Hamdi, miner, 2025).

It was during this period that the significance of women's contributions to the movement's sustenance became especially evident. In the absence of their husbands' wages, women were responsible for household budgets and often assumed sole childcare responsibilities while their husbands engaged in nocturnal work or underground occupations (Sevim, a miner's wife, 2022). Nevertheless, their role went beyond these responsibilities. As armed conflict became normalized and the state intensified its repression by arresting or killing revolutionary leaders and leading workers, women hid activists in their homes and provided financial support from their personal savings.

Hatice (2025), a miner's wife, recalled:

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> There were attacks everywhere. Everyone was already in hiding. We had nothing, no money, no income (referring to her husband). At the time, I only had two earrings. When the resistance committee said, "we need those earrings. It's very important," I didn't hesitate. I took them off and gave them away.

As De Angelis (2022) argues, commons are created and sustained through collective struggle, yet remain constantly vulnerable to enclosure and destruction by capital and the state (p. 650). This tension was evident in Yeni Çeltek, where escalating attacks, state repression, and material deprivation steadily undermined the miners' capacity to maintain collective control over coal as a common good. The loss of access to coal resulted in the erosion of both the material and symbolic foundations for solidarity and self-organization. As the violence escalated, approximately half of the miners opted to vacate the site to seek alternative employment opportunities. This decision was often influenced by promises from police and state officials that they would be reinstated if they withdrew (Hamdi, miner, 2025). This highlights the notion that class does not inherently constitute a homogeneous collectivity, thereby highlighting the persistent fragmentation and responsiveness of political consciousness to evolving circumstances.[22]

Baglioni et al. (2022) remind us that local labor regimes are not simply systems of workplace control and discipline; rather, they are also arenas of ongoing contestation, negotiation, and intervention by multiple actors, including the state. In the case of Yeni Çeltek, the limits of both collective resistance and the state's mechanisms of coercion and consent became evident. Even as some miners persisted with the occupation, in September 1980 the mine was surrounded by military forces, and all those inside were detained. Furthermore, throughout the basin, any

[22] While this phenomenon has been widely addressed in the literature, here I draw in particular on the work of Gramsci (1971) and Williams (1989).

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individual associated with the committees or supporting the movement was arrested (Kaplan, 2015).

The Yeni Çeltek experience illustrates the efficacy and fragility of self-governance strategies in the pursuit of transforming strategic resources, such as coal, into commons. It also exposes vulnerabilities within power structures. These empirical observations suggest that there is much to be learned from such experiences, which may also point to possible sources of hope for contemporary political mobilizations.

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Conclusion

During the 1970s, labor movements such as Yeni Çeltek had a significant influence on national debates and policy directions. The growing power and of these movements contributed to the conditions that led to the 1980 military coup, which ultimately suppressed them. An understanding of how transformative movements like Yeni Çeltek were targeted for suppression, and how their legacies and organizational logics persist, provides insight into the lasting capacity for collective action, even in the face of defeat and repression.

The overarching objective of the coup d'état was to implement a comprehensive restructuring of state institutions, effectively eliminate oppositional politics and establish a new, market-oriented economic order (Keyder, 2011, pp. 185–191). Following the coup, the transition to a new regime restructured the entire sector through privatization and subcontracting, weakening labor protections and shifting control away from workers (Nichols & Kahveci, 1995). Although the 1980 military coup dismantled grassroots experiments, their legacy of resistance persisted. A notable example of this is the Zonguldak miners' resistance (1989-1991), which evolved into a mass mobilization that contributed to electoral setbacks for the governments in power and pressured the state to adopt wage increases and populist policies (Boratav, 2002, p. 196).

Over the past decade, resurgent economic, political, and ecological crises have exposed the endurance and transformation of capitalist domination (Webber, 2022). During this period, Turkey underwent a process of capitalist restructuring that, according to scholars, resulted in "authoritarian flexibilization". This regime is characterized by precarious labor, state-aligned unions, and the suppression of independent worker organizing. Legal reforms have been identified as a contributing factor to the institutionalization of labor flexibility, the restriction of the right to strike, and the reduction of union density (Çelik, 2015; Yalman & Topal, 2019).

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One of the most visible outcomes of this new regime for miners is that accidents and fatalities in mines rose sharply between 2000 and 2014 (Çelik, 2023).

The Yeni Çeltek movement offers important insights into the enduring relevance of self-governance and grassroots organization. It provides practical lessons for those confronting new waves of flexibilization and state repression. Recent examples, such as the 2016 hunger strike by Yeni Çeltek miners and the committee-based organizing efforts following the 2014 Soma mine disaster, demonstrate the influence of these models. Together with the revival of people's assemblies during the 2013 Gezi uprising, these experiences highlight the resilience and adaptability of collective self-organization in the face of ongoing challenges.

Despite the eventual suppression of the movement in Yeni Çeltek, it left behind more than a political structure; it left a legacy of memory. Participants' recollections guide navigation of the present, not merely documenting past events. Through ongoing acts of commitment, shared values and political sensibilities established during the movement continue to shape lives today. As I have demonstrated, these relationships remain resilient beyond ideological alignment, indicating that collective practices, once experienced and internalized, can be sustained.

The movement's legacy endures not only through recollection and protest but also via formal channels. The political cadres of Devrimci Yol- the broader ideological current behind Yeni Çeltek- went on to form political parties and mass organizations in the 1990s, some of which eventually entered parliament in the 2000s. The slogan "We are the producers; we will be the ones who govern" continues to resonate today through the Independent Miners' Trade Union in the Soma coal basin.

In this thesis, I have empirically demonstrated that the continuity of labor movements cannot be explained by economic interests alone. While material needs and workplace grievances may

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be the initial catalyst, the endurance of a movement like Yeni Çeltek hinges on the ethical, political, and social meanings associated with the production and distribution of coal. These dimensions transcended the immediate context of the basin and played an ongoing role in shaping political subjectivities across shifting historical and geographical terrains.

The most significant contribution of this research is demonstrating that focusing on the outcomes of a workplace-based movement reveals its role in ensuring continuity. I have shown how a labor movement can blur the boundaries between productive and reproductive labor. Specifically, I have found that movements can create powerful infrastructures when reproductive labor is interwoven with strategies implemented at the site of productive labor. Everyday acts of cooperation, including wage sacrifices, coal redistribution, bread baking, and care work, constituted new social relations, worldviews, and ethical-political frameworks throughout the basin. Consequently, the miners' slogan, "We are the producers; we will be the ones who govern," assumed a more expansive significance.

Although self-governance movements can create powerful infrastructures, implementing them in local contexts is complex. This study faces such limitations as well. Since the narratives were constructed from the present, they may not fully reflect the effects of events at the time. Nevertheless, the narratives allow us to establish meaningful connections between past and present understandings of self-governance.

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