

Kurdish Institute

HOMAGE TO YILMAZ GÜNEY



A Look at *Yol* with Costa Gavras

The following is an interview with film director Costa Gavras, who along with Yilmaz Güney, won the 1982 Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for his film, Missing.

A World To Win: As another distinguished filmmaker, how do you evaluate Yilmaz Güney's accomplishment in cinema, especially as reflected in *Yol*? Perhaps you could also comment on his other films as well.

Costa Gavras: First let me tell you that it wasn't through *Yol* that my friends in Paris and particularly at the Cinemateque came to know Yilmaz—we knew him since *The Herd*. If you go to the Cinemateque museum, the image you see there is what Yilmaz means for us; for a small number of people, Yilmaz was already one of the important directors, the most important Turkish director. He became known worldwide with *Yol*, because in *Yol* he shows the Turkish way of life, without the least contrivance . . . it is not only pro or con like many movies, he just shows how life is and *Yol*, I think, is probably one of the most pro-Turkish movies ever made. I know some Turkish people are against the movie because they think it shows the bad side, some bad parts of the Turkish way of life and social relationships, but I think what is really extraordinary is the way we see them, we understand them. We probably would condemn them, but after all the most important thing is that we understand them and we can see another, different culture. As far as that is concerned, I consider Yilmaz the most important Turkish director, and I'll add to this that I don't know all the others. But of the few Turkish films I've seen, this one is the most powerful. It won him international recognition. What he accomplishes as a film director is that he succeeds in recreating reality, and he treats it in an almost documentary manner. You know that you are

looking at actors playing a part, and that the story probably didn't happen, but at the same time you are convinced, you link it to life, to everyday life, and this is the strongest accomplishment in film for a film director. After this comes the, let's say, political aspect, or the social aspect—I'm speaking about the director's accomplishment. They are linked, but I don't know if I've answered completely your question.

AWTW: Could you speak to the themes, imagery and metaphors Yilmaz uses in *Yol*?

Costa Gavras: Yes. The analogy he uses is that people are being freed from a prison—it's like a people, a

whole people, a whole country living in a certain kind of prison—then they become free to go around and they meet their families, they meet the country, they meet freedom, and this freedom finally, because it's a momentary freedom, becomes a drama for them. I think this is the first analogy. The other analogy he makes with freedom is the dead horse; that comes back again and again. And the extraordinary thing is that freedom always ends up as a drama. . . . you cannot say to the people, "You are free, go ahead, be free." It's not enough for one man to be free, the others must also be free, must understand and respect your freedom, and

May 1982--Güney and Costa Gavras sharing the top award at Cannes.



this is a very long cultural process. I think this is probably the strongest message the movie gives.

AWTW: The oppression of women recurs as a strongly anchored theme throughout the film. How skillful is his condemnation of this, and how well do you think he succeeds in conveying his idea that social relations among people in general are concentrated and shown in the woman question?

Costa Gavras: I don't think he really takes a position of condemnation, he just shows how women are treated. How can I put it, it's like they're animals--that's a very strong word--but they're like property, man's property, and they have to obey; they have to be a certain way and they have to act in a certain way. If they don't, they are rejected, they are just killed; or they are no longer considered as human beings. They are not worthy of living. They are rejected from the moment they stop fulfilling man's wishes and beliefs; they are pushed aside and no longer deserve love or man's company. They are just rejected. So this is that close (illustrating with fingers) to being slaves, finally, to being considered a slave. I also don't think that happens only in Turkey, I think it's a problem of most of the countries. And it exists even in France in a different way, with a different approach, but you can find the same attitudes towards women.

AWTW: How do international audiences react to his portrayal of the woman's situation in Turkey, a backward, more underdeveloped country? Do they identify with it, does it correspond to their experience on a different level in the western countries?

Costa Gavras: I think in the western world there are two approaches, or let's say three. One approach is that they don't even see it. Another approach, which is probably very common, is that they see it as a problem in Turkey--some kind of wild people acting that way, coming from another place--and don't make any connection between their own way of being and acting and the way of life in the film. Then there is a third approach, in which, I think, clever people can identify with that kind of situation. Maybe it's not so dramatic,

but their feelings towards women are the same. They say to themselves, as I try to do myself, and as some friends I've spoken with: Hey, in a certain way, we are like those people, in a different place and under different conditions, but deep within ourselves we act like this with women, even if we don't kill them. . . because we can't. We can't even if we wanted to anymore--because the police would come!--but internally we are that way.

Let me tell you that there is no international success, let's say international comprehension of a movie, of any piece of art, without that kind of relationship between the viewer and the creator in which he speaks about something that concerns everyone, personally.

AWTW: There is a lot of controversy about whether this work, *Yol*, and Güney's work in general is universal or whether its strength lies in its power to unfold the particular situation in Turkey. That's something that always confronts a filmmaker.

Costa Gavras: Yes, there's nothing more particular than *Hamlet*, from Shakespeare, nothing more particular, and also nothing more international and universal, and we can say the same thing with the Greek tragedy and all the classics. The more it is particular, the more it is universal.

AWTW: Is there anything else you would like to say about the skill of the movie in terms of the imagery, the cinematography?

Costa Gavras: What is quite interesting in this movie is the kind of parallel cutting of the different stories one after the other, starting together and then diverging. At the end you come out of the theatre and you have all of them in your head. They're all together at the same time because in a certain way they're all telling the same story from different angles, from different situations and characters; but after all they're the same story.

AWTW: Would you comment about Seyit, the man who killed his wife in the snow, and how that character's anguish and contradictions are portrayed?

Costa Gavras: I would say he was the most Güneyan character. I think Güney identifies to some degree with

this character, with his strength, his tenderness, with the violence he is capable of and also the lyricism; because the scenes in the snow--Seyit's whole relationship with his wife and their going from one place to another--are one of the strongest images in modern cinema. You can find that kind of lyricism in Soviet movies in the early years before Stalin, and in Japanese movies. I think the western world doesn't know how to do this anymore because I'm afraid that with the pragmatism in which we are living more and more, we are losing our primitive poetry. Not just our sense of poetry. . . but in the human being there is a poetry, and I think it is leaving us because of too much civilization.

AWTW: This character, Seyit, loved his wife but he also felt compelled to follow tradition, which required killing her.

Costa Gavras: He leaves one prison, as we were saying at the beginning--the real prison--and then he goes to the other prison, the prison of family, the prison of tradition, and is destroyed because of the second prison, which is probably stronger than the first one, finally. It turns out to be a drama. . . and he has to kill his wife.

AWTW: What do you think Güney is saying in the last scene of *Yol* in the train, when Seyit is on his way back to prison by himself, looking out of the window and clearly is in agony?

Costa Gavras: The impression it left me with--first I would like to say how strong this movie is, to be able to remember all these scenes after over two years--what you are talking about is called being alone, meaning that he doesn't succeed in really freeing himself. He's caught, he's more caught than ever because not only is he in this small space but the train is moving so fast he can't leave it. In other words; here is society gripping him so forcefully, enclosed in itself and in its customs and traditions and going at such a pace, such a great speed, that he can't change it, get away, get out. Along this theme, he can also see himself in the window, see his acts, but at the same time he cannot get rid of them, of that whole environment.

AWTW: In regards to his development culminating with *Yol*, how



Yol

did it compare with *The Herd*, *The Wall*, and some of his previous movies like *The Poor Ones*?

Costa Gavras: I think with movies you can't say this one is better than that one. . . they have different subjects, they were made with a different kind of passion and have a different universality. *The Herd* for example--I think a lot about *The Herd* now, because I saw it a month and a half ago. And I was really very strongly taken by the movie and by the content and by the images--I think it's very close to *Yol*. *The Wall* is very strong also. . . comparisons between movies is something I don't like to get into--it's like human beings; you have to take them one by one, to examine them, to see what they have, the approach, the intentions, what is the interiority, the kind of poetry they can have. I don't think movies are like marathon runners. You can't compare them, this is

better than that, like football teams.

AWTW: Yilmaz did have definite political tendencies--he was a revolutionary and he considered himself a communist. He was opposed to the atrocities the Soviet Union is committing now, and at one point he supported Mao, particularly when Mao was attacked after his death. But the question always confronts the politically conscious artist: Is it possible to make movies that are both revolutionary and artistically powerful, which speak to a very broad audience?

Costa Gavras: I don't think you need to be ideologically in this or in that particular party to be able to make powerful movies. I think first of all you have to have the talent. I used to speak sometimes with Yilmaz about his political feelings--we didn't always agree about it. But what I've always said is that Yilmaz was coming from a completely different reality

than mine, here, or ours, here. So the solutions he was trying to find in that particular reality sometimes had to go through communism or Maoism--and I can understand that, because it's like getting back to the problem of the prison--the people are in prison without freedom. Yilmaz was like a man, like the Turkish people in prison. When a man is in prison he tries to break out through different ways: through the window, through the ceiling, through the doors, so he tries communism, he tries this, he tries that. He can try and then one day he'll find the real way to get out to freedom. So I consider Yilmaz to be someone like this, trying. Whatever his position was, he was right, because it came from a very profound, sincere feeling and necessity to free himself and free his people. ■

An Autobiographical Sketch

(These excerpts are from an interview with Yılmaz Güney which appeared in the 1 October 1982 issue of the Revolutionary Worker, weekly newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.)

I was born in a rural area. My parents were poor peasants. And at the same time, they were Kurdish. So I was conditioned by the rural ideology, the peasant ideology, which was mainly, essentially, a bourgeois ideology. But to be born among and to live among the poor peasants, and especially to be part of an oppressed nation, the Kurdish nation, influenced my views. And that influence pushed me to search for something. I didn't know what. I didn't even know what its name would be, but still I was searching for something. And in the beginning of the 1950s I met some elements; for example I heard Nazim Hikmet's poems (the Turkish communist poet) on the Spanish Civil War. In 1952 there was a broad communist arrest in Turkey, and there were some poets among these people so I heard their poems. Of course all these coincidences were illegal. It was just through some people I met. But it wasn't scientific socialism really, it was rather idealistic, it was rather utopian. No one talked about the working class, no one talked about Marxism-Leninism, no one talked about dialectical materialism. It was just some literature about humiliation, about poverty, and about the necessity to change that course of life. But they didn't explain whom we had to fight, how we had to fight, with which ideology we had to fight, there was none of that. Then under that influence I started to

write short stories and I started to talk myself and that's how I happened to have my first contact with the political police.

In 1955, for a short story I had written (I was still in school) I was sent in front of the court for communist propaganda. It was rather a short story, full of feelings, but I had a very long trial and in 1961, I was convicted to 2 1/2 years in jail and exile. But during the trial in 1957 I had to leave Adana, my city, where I had passed my adolescence and where I had studied, and I went to Istanbul to find the Communist Party because, despite the fact that I didn't know really what it was, people called me like this, so I went to Istanbul. But I was deceived. Every communist I met disappointed me. At the moment I didn't know how to explain this, what name to give to this deception. It was not until 1972 when I was again in jail and I started to study, that I was able to give the name to that deception. Then I knew that I was deceived by *revisionism*. But at the moment I didn't know Marxism-Leninism. I don't mean that I know it perfectly now, but I started to study it. So between 1961 and 1963, I was in jail and exile and after 1963, a new period started in my life.

In 1963, I started as an actor. I had planned in jail to become an actor, the most famous one in the country, in order to put into practice all my aims. So I made all the calculations; I developed all the tactics in jail; and once I was out, I applied them one by one. So already in 1965 I was one of the most popular, I was one of the actors at the top. I can't say the films that I acted in were revolutionary or democratic films, but all of them were popular films.

They reflected the suffering, the ill-being of the people and their regard and feelings. Many of them, of course, had some errors in the ideological or the political sense: some of them were reformist; some could be called anarchist; some had some lumpen aspects. But all that experience permitted me to have broad and very tight relations with people, with the masses.

Between 1965 and 1966, I started to feel a strong anguish. I wasn't happy with what I was doing. In 1966 I tried to be more choosy about the films that I acted in, and I acted in positive films. But at the same time, for financial needs I had to act in some negative films, because, since I had started to be an actor, my real goal was to be popular, to be able to make films myself. But the only way for me was to have first of all an actor's career. So after 1966, I decided to be myself behind the camera, to put into practice my real aims. So in 1968 I had my first attempt.

In 1968 after my first attempt as a filmmaker, I went to make my military service which lasts 2 years. That was a very important change in my life, the military service, because for the first time, for 2 years I had the possibility to read systematically. That doesn't mean that I didn't read before, but I didn't read systematically. The practical concerns of the cinema had the most weight in my life, whereas in the military I was able to read systematically books by Lenin, Marx and Mao. I was ready to make a very important step forward once my military service would be ended; and that's what happened in 1970, when I finished the service. I made my first important film, *The Hope*. But to make this film, to fi-



The Herd

nance its production because I was the producer, at the same time I was obliged to act in many gangster films to earn money to finance my own film.

At the same time my political searches led me to have contacts with various political movements; since I didn't have a clear position, I had various contacts. At that time, we had various movements; we had student movements, we had workers movements against the reactionary forces, so I had solidarity with them. I helped them, and in 1972, because they arrested the members of one of the organisations which I was helping, I went to jail also for helping them. But this arrest in 1972 was really the turning point in my life, because in jail, thanks to the illegal network, I was able to learn Marxism-Leninism. I learned about re-

volution, about revisionism, about the Soviet Union. At the moment I was still not ready to call the Soviet Union social-imperialist but I knew it wasn't a socialist country. At the same time, I learned how to distinguish between the adventurist tendencies, the trends of some petty bourgeois movements and what a real socialist movement should be. I learned about the leading role of the working class and I changed also my personal attitudes in life into a revolutionary attitude. And as for the cinema, also I started to think in detail how to make films from now on. So I had a clearer and a deeper view of cinema in theory. Once I was out, in 1974, I was ready to make again a very important step forward in my cinema career as a filmmaker. But I was able to finish only one film, *The Friend*, and while I was shooting the

second one, I was put again in jail in 1974.

Between 1974 and 1981 I was in jail, and in the jail I wrote novels, short stories. But I also had political writings and I tried to make films five times. The first two weren't very successful but the latest three of them had international success since I was more into their preparations. Those are: *The Herd*, *The Enemy* and *Yol*, the last film. And *Yol* is again the one which belongs even more to me because I did all the editing of the film. Now I have more means than before, but I'm in exile. That is to say that, with these means, if I were able to make films in my own country, I could do something different and even better. But from now on, what I will be able to accomplish will determine my artistic character. ■

Güney on "the language of art"

(Excerpt reprinted from the Revolutionary Worker, weekly newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 1 October, 1982).

RW: In the film *Yol*, that point you just mentioned in relation to the backward attitudes of men is well demonstrated, even among the revolutionaries that are portrayed in that movie. One question that is posed by this approach is, in what way is it possible to put forward positive or heroic characters; in other words, one of the criticisms that I've heard of the film *Yol* is that it exposes the reality of the situation, of the oppression, of the masses' problems and so forth, but it lacks, in terms of a dramatic personage in the film, a clear heroic role.

Yılmaz Güney: No, there is no clear heroic role.

RW: Perhaps you could comment on that.

Yılmaz Güney: To this criticism I have just one answer. What others understand from a positive hero is completely different from what I understand as being positive, because in my film there are lots of positive aspects. But me, I try to see and I try to show what's positive in a negative hero or in a negative situation because the contradictions always exist together; that's what we call the unity of opposites. Let's take some examples from the film: Seyit lets his wife die in the snow, but at the last moment and since the beginning he has an inner contradiction; he isn't sure of himself. He has an inner anguish and

at the last moment he tries to save his wife, and when she dies, he has a very strong sorrow, a deep pain, and afterwards the remorse destroys him; he has a very strong remorse. That's very positive for me. Or Mehmet, the one who is killed by his in-laws. That man has based his life on lies. He was lying, but he changes, not suddenly, he changes slowly, and he has the courage, the guts to say the truth. He has the courage to say, yes I'm guilty, because of me, because of my running away, it's because I was a coward that my brother-in-law died. He has the courage to say it to his in-laws, and before that he was a liar; that's something very positive. Or let's take that Kurdish young man whose family lives in a smuggler's village. That boy had the courage to say, I'm not going back to the prison; I'm taking all the risks, I'm going up in the mountains like my brother whom they shot down. In that sense, what I understand as being positive and what I'm trying to show as positive in life is the change, is the transformation, is the modification, is the process. I don't have a static view of positive and negative like some others do, I'm trying to show the germs, the embryo of positiveness in what is seen as being negative. So I don't accept that criticism. In everything that's negative you have the hope, you have the future, you have the embryo of what is positive for tomorrow. . . .

RW: What role do you see your films and more generally revolutionary art playing in the development of the revolutionary movement

in Turkey and in other countries?

Yılmaz Güney: My departure point is class struggle, the struggle of the working class to conquer the political power, and this struggle has different paths: we have a political struggle; we have an economic struggle; and you also have the cultural and ideological struggle. On the one hand, the artistic and in particular the cinema activity seems to be part of just the third way, it seems to be just part of the cultural, the ideological struggle, but it's also a political struggle at the same time because through cinema it's possible to work on people's emotions and motivations and their consciousness. It's possible to orient those emotions towards revolution, but in itself, the artistic movement, the artistic works can't pretend to have all the functions of the political struggle. It must be completed by some political work, there must be some supplementary political work to complete its effect. It's not right to search in art all the tasks, all the functions of the political struggle; one shouldn't try to put in art all these tasks, all these functions. The artistic activity just makes it easier for the political movement but one shouldn't try to impose the entire role of the political struggle on the artistic work. It has to be completed by some accurate political activity, writings, explanations, interpretations.

And on the second hand, we just must take into consideration the existing conditions and from that point calculate correctly to what au-

dience we must try to send our message, and we must try to have the broadest audience possible. One can make a work for a narrow audience but that narrow audience is more or less composed by people who already have a certain consciousness, of some people who already have some knowledge. So me, I choose always to address myself to a very broad audience. That's my aim, and I have fixed it since the beginning. In that sense, some people, some comrades, bring very narrowly viewed criticism to my work. They don't understand that I'm trying to reach broad masses; and they don't understand that art has its specific field and you can't expect art to have all the tasks and functions of political movements. But those criticisms are not important for me. And in that sense the success *Yol* had and is having now--*Yol* is being seen by broad masses--it's not a coincidence. I did it deliberately this way.

Art by itself doesn't make the revolution, but an artist who has a correct political line, who has a correct political view of the world, can through his works have very broad and strong links with the people, with the masses. And those links may then be very political. In that sense, art can be useful for political agitation, for political propaganda; but I refuse to consider agitation and propaganda in the arid, in the dry sense of the term--then it's not art. And in this sense when you have a real revolutionary art, you influence not only the masses but you influence also the other artists. You have prepared the field for political consciousness. In this sense art is a weapon, art is an arm; but art has its own specific language, the language which only belongs to art. One must respect *totally*, absolutely, that language. If you don't respect the language of art then this weapon kills *you*. It has a boomerang effect. ■



"We Lost Yılmaz Güney"

*By A. D.

The Distinguished Artist and
Cinematographer
The Brave and Daring Revolutionary
Fighter Who Has Won the Hearts of
Millions of Labourers

On September 9, 1984, the great artist Yılmaz Güney died of stomach cancer in Paris where he had been living as a political refugee. After a ceremony and revolutionary salute of thousands of labourers, his body was buried in Pere Lachaise Cemetery, the burial ground of the heroes of the Paris Commune. Yılmaz' final request was: "I'm cold, cover me with the blanket of the Communards."

Certainly the death of Yılmaz Güney, who stood on the side of the international proletariat even in his final breath, is no ordinary death—it is a lofty and dignified death. Both the proletariat and the people of Turkey and the international proletariat and the oppressed people worldwide are obliged to resolutely uphold Yılmaz' revolutionary legacy; the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and its indispensable component part, the communist movement of Turkey, must know how to draw the necessary lessons from this noble and honourable death.

At the time of his death, various organs of the bourgeois press have

*member of the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist)

published headlines such as "Head of State Without a Throne" concerning Yılmaz Güney. In fact, this phrase has a touch of truth to it. Yılmaz Güney does have a righteous fame both in Turkey and on the international level—he is loved by millions. This is one of the major reasons for the ferocious attacks on Güney by the Turkish ruling classes and their servants, open or disguised, who had failed to buy him off by offering him money, wealth, luxury and status and who then resorted to slander, hoping to minimize the damage inflicted on these reactionaries by his art and his struggle.

Yılmaz Güney was, above all, a great artist, a masterful film director and screenwriter. He had also distinguished himself as an accomplished novelist and a short story writer. He is a man who had a profound grasp of the realities of the class struggle in Turkey and around the world, who, as an undaunted fighter for revolution, took a stand on the side of the people and revolution and against imperialism, social-imperialism and all reaction, who used his art as a powerful weapon to this end. Yılmaz Güney significantly contributed to the advancement of the struggle of the oppressed in Turkey for people's democracy and independence.

Obviously Yılmaz Güney did not have a thoroughly proletarian revolutionary line, neither in his ideology nor in his art. What characterises his art and his essential line of struggle is the revolutionary democracy of the petit bourgeoisie. He was a consistent anti-imperialist, patriot,

democrat and a consistent revolutionary—however, he was not a consistent communist. Although he resolutely upheld certain principles of Marxism-Leninism, he did not grasp its universal truth nor did he extend it to the concrete practice of the revolution in Turkey. Thus he failed to transcend the petit bourgeois revolutionary democratic line and merge with the communist line and the communist movement. As a matter of fact his efforts to put out journals with an artistic/political content (such as *Güney*, *Ekim*, and *Mavis*) and his efforts to form an independent group with his followers were a reflection of this in practice.

But despite all of this, another important aspect of Yılmaz Güney as a great artist and master of filmmaking was that through his social practice he was influenced to a great extent by communism and he was growing increasingly closer to communist ideology and politics. Even though he did not unite ideologically, politically and organisationally with the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist, a component part of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, this influence of the communist position is shown by the fact that he declared the Party's heritage to be Marxist-Leninist, that he firmly defended revolutionary violence, and that he tried to defend the legacy of Mao Tsetung against the various revisionist attacks, especially those by the Party of Labour of Albania. In fact this is one of the reasons that counterrevolutionary trends hiding behind "socialist" or "communist"

masks, along with various petit bourgeois opportunist trends, never ceased to slander Güney's politics and ideology even as they tried very hard to win him over.

Why then, did Yılmaz Güney—who maintained his antiimperialist, patriotic, revolutionary and democratic stand until the end of his life, who, defying all kinds of personal interests, status, comforts and luxury,

never betrayed the people and the revolution, who never surrendered in the face of numerous attacks directed against him—fail to make the qualitative leap to embracing the communist movement? Certainly the objective and subjective reasons are numerous. Nevertheless, one of the most important reasons is that the communist movement of Turkey, due to certain mistakes and weaknesses in its own

During long years in prison



ranks, has not fully played the historical function that it should have played. This was a significant factor in preventing Yılmaz Güney from embracing the communist movement.

This negative aspect in relation to the proletarian movement and ideology does not, however, overshadow Yılmaz Güney's revolutionary art and struggle, which are an indispensable part of the revolutionary art and struggle of the people of Turkey. Therefore it is the task of everyone on the side of the people and revolution to uphold his revolutionary legacy. Communist revolutionaries especially must firmly uphold those aspects of the work and life of Yılmaz Güney that were strongly influenced by communism and expose and condemn any distortion of them.

Yes, Yılmaz Güney is dead. But in fact, he is now immortalised in the struggle of the people of Turkey of various nationalities for People's Democracy and independence!

His death has been greeted with joy by the fascist junta in Turkey which Güney played a tremendously important role in isolating and exposing, and which had ferociously suppressed and attacked him—arresting Güney on numerous occasions and handing him years of prison sentences. On the other hand, millions of toilers who had loved him with all their heart have been overwhelmed with sorrow. In fact, while the Turkish ruling classes and their spokesmen continue upon his death to hurl their venom and slander his art and struggle, the various patriotic, revolutionary and democratic organisations, with the communist movement of Turkey in the forefront, have widely commemorated Güney in Turkey and in European cities and have strived to turn his revolutionary legacy into a powerful weapon against the fascist dictatorship.

Needless to say, neither the counterrevolutionary attacks and slanders against Yılmaz' revolutionary legacy nor the attempts to sap this legacy will prevent the people of Turkey, composed of various nationalities, and especially the communist movement in Turkey, from upholding his legacy with even more determination. ■

"He symbolised rebellion..."

Interview with Revolutionary Writer from Turkey

Nihat Behram

A World to Win: We have followed closely the events surrounding the death of revolutionary artist Yılmaz Güney, which is a tremendous loss for the people of the world. As a longtime friend and political and artistic collaborator of his, we would like to ask you more about the role that Yılmaz Güney played, who he was, and how he developed into a filmmaker and artist who devoted his life and his work to revolution.

Nihat Behram: Yılmaz Güney was an important figure for the people of Turkey. Many put his posters on their walls—a sign of rebellion for them. We will see his significance more now that he is dead, and feel the emptiness he has left behind.

I think there are several main points that must be kept in mind: he was an artist of the people, he gave courage to those who wanted to create revolutionary art—there was an atmosphere that you couldn't do it, one of "art for art's sake" among those progressive forces, and he was an inspiration to them. He made use of the opportunities he had, but he used them for revolutionary art. He could have been a big bourgeois artist if he'd wanted. When you are a well-known personality or artist you have to make a statement. In Turkey you are an outlaw—an automatic seven years in jail—if you say you're a communist. Most of the time, it's revolutionary artists and intellectuals who get it. Yılmaz Güney said, "If there's such a law, we have to dare to do something against it." Once he wrote in an article "I am a communist, a Marxist-Leninist" and got seven

years. But he said this is a blow against their law. He was slapped with the "communist propaganda" law several times, practically every time he made a speech. There are 10 million Kurds in Turkey, but they too are outlawed, they aren't supposed to write or speak in their own language, nor are Kurdish songs allowed—every other language in the world can be spoken there except Kurdish. Yılmaz said proudly he was a Kurd, which is almost worse than being a communist because you're considered a separatist. Many artists have been assimilated, hiding the fact that they're Kurds. Yılmaz saw it important to make this statement.

He got into the film industry as a worker after prison, carrying reels from one theatre to another. He met many people this way and was a part of them, not as a bourgeois, but as one of them. This helped his ability to portray people from different regions in Turkey as they are, because he knew them well. At that time polished and "beautiful," very European-looking characters were put on the Turkish stage. Güney had minor roles in some movies, but looked himself like he was more from the masses; he had a "common" face and was instantly popular because of this. During a five year period in the 60s he made 100 action type films, playing a major role. He became immensely popular.

During the second phase of his movie career he began to both play the leading role and write screenplays on social themes, which was a major development for him and made these

films very popular. What might be called the third phase was the period in which he made the three films *Seyit Han (Bride of the Earth)*, 1968, a painful, traditional story, followed by *Ac Kurtlar (Hungry Wolves)* in 1969, and then *Umut (The Hope)*, which represented the beginning of socialist realism in Turkey.

I think *Umut* was the most important film in the history of Turkish cinema, and the best one Yılmaz Güney made. The way it approaches the problem of the family, of land, the struggle of the people and relationships among the lowest sections of society, in terms of this it represents a distinction between idealism and realism, with the weight on realism. It's a true-to-life story, not a symbolic one, or a product of the imagination. The main character hunts treasures to solve his problems, and when he fails to find them, family relations and everything deteriorate, he gets closer to hopelessness and goes crazy. This is the first film in which the hero, played by Güney, is beaten, for example, instead of always being the winner, a strong leading character. Thus, you see the essential aspects of socialist realism in this movie. In it he musters all his artistic power in every detail. When Elia Kazan saw it for the first time, he said "We're up against a very powerful filmmaker." It was banned immediately in Turkey as anti-religious and "provocative," inciting the poor against the system. *The Hope* was smuggled out and taken abroad to the Venice Film Festival where it won a special award. Güney was then sued by the government for

taking a banned film out of Turkey and showing a Turkish peasant in a negative light to other countries.

Güney formed his own film company, Güney Films, and became producer, director and screenwriter. He wrote 20-30 screenplays, which were also published as books, and they were widely read by the masses as

novels. Up until 1968, he remained a popular actor, known to the masses through his films, but not so much as a political figure, as part of the movement.

1968 was a period of big upheavals—in the U.S., in France, the youth movements. This was also true in Turkey. People began to draw clearer

distinctions between different world views—such as establishing socialism through elections and social-democracy claiming the mantle of socialism. There was a section of youth who wanted to pick up the gun and fight reaction and against the revisionists.

During the first coup d'état in 1971

The Hope



the army killed many people, shutting down leftist organisations, and martial law was established. It was a period when young organisations were heavily hit by the fascist regime—including the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML), led by Ibrahim Kaypakkaya.

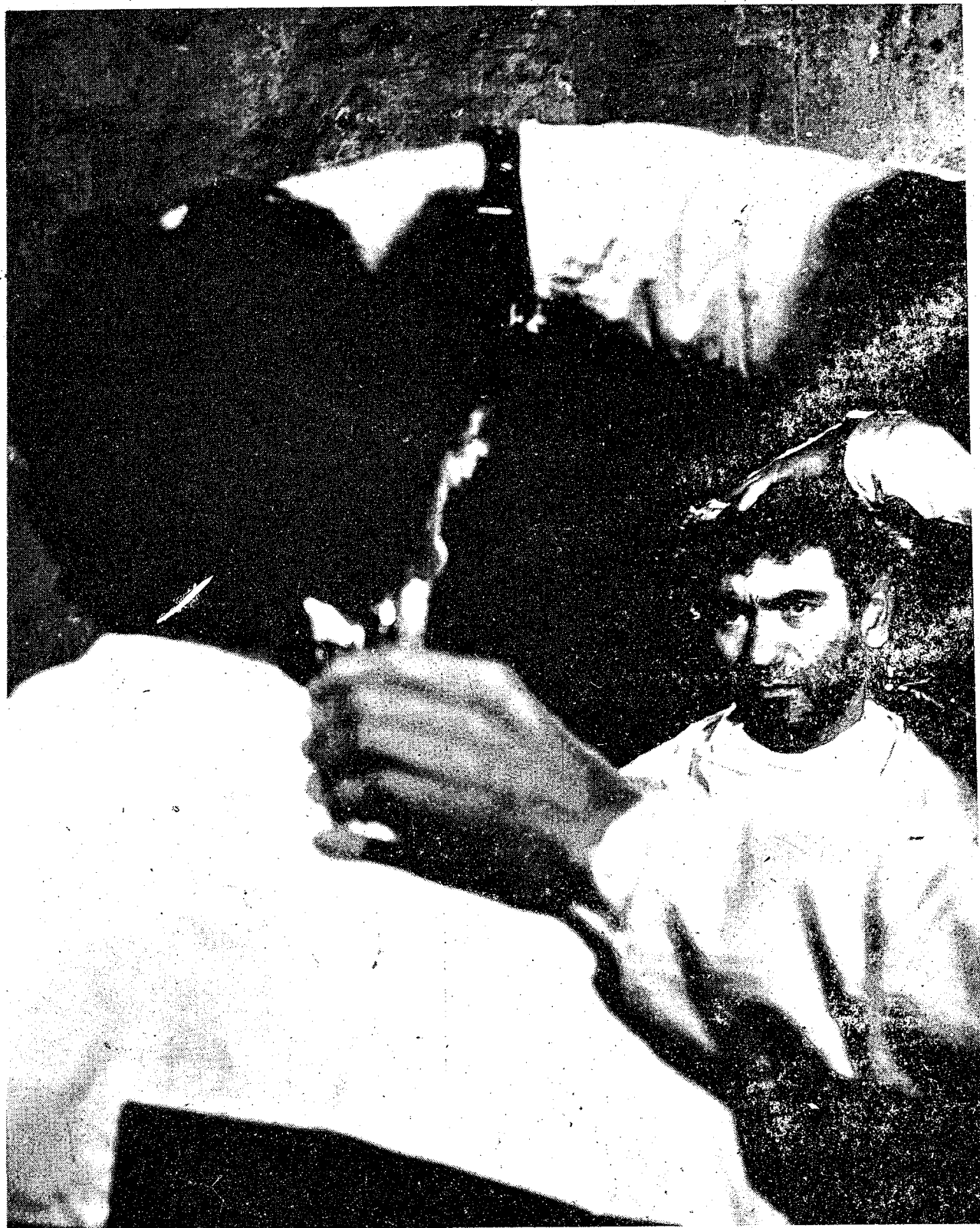
Yılmaz sided neither

with the revisionists nor the government in this turmoil, but with the youth. Some came to him to seek help in safe hiding, which was a milestone in his political development, in taking an active role in things.

After the coup, the government made an appeal to combat the "communist threat." For the first time

armed struggle against the government came into play on the political scene. The youth didn't stop their militant activity—armed struggle—but continued to fight, particularly to wage "defensive" struggle, defending themselves and the masses against the government. At that time Güney had three revolutionaries in his

The Poor Ones



house, when the "shoot on sight" law was in effect. He was arrested and put in a military prison for 2 1/2 years. I was in jail during this same time, but in another military prison. During this period an important change took place in Yilmaz Güney: he wrote a book about his past, which could be considered a self-criticism, entitled *Letters from Selimiye* (name of the prison), consisting of three long stories. He decided that from then on, he would directly take part in the struggle of his people. At the time, generally people who went before the courts took a position of surrender, afraid of repercussions, making a defense with apologies for what they'd done, etc. Yilmaz made a political defense, he said he didn't regret anything he did and that he was a revolutionary, part of the struggle in Turkey and proud of it.

In 1974 Ecevit took power, ending the military government, and a general amnesty was declared in which many people were released from jail, including Yilmaz and myself. In the 45 days he was out of jail, Güney filmed *The Friend*, which was his first film on city life, and *The Anxiety*, which is about cottonfield workers in Adana. During the first week of filming this movie, a fight in a bar broke out, in which a judge was killed. Although in court Güney's nephew said he had killed him, he was given two years for perjury, and Güney was charged with the murder, and sentenced to 19 years in prison. In prison they moved him around a lot, and tried to kill him, but he took security measures. He wrote one very good novel, *We Want a Stove, a Window and Bread*, which was important to his ideological development because in the last 50 pages he takes up the subject of social-imperialism. Among most artists whose work has any kind of social content, taking a stand against the Soviet Union is not a popular trend.

After some discussion between Yilmaz Güney and myself, we realised we had common views and goals—that we were both revolutionary writers trying to become Marxist-Leninists. I visited him in jail and we decided that I would take his ideas and carry them out on the outside. In 1979 we launched a culture journal called *Güney*, a monthly with revolu-

tionary cultural and political articles. Police repression against the journal increased, but that was generally true at the time, with martial law in some places; the fascists (Grey Wolves) were getting stronger and starting to kill people, including revolutionary writers; etc. After the first 18 issues were published, every issue of the journal was banned. Then I started managing the Güney film company, which hadn't put out many films in that period. We decided to strengthen our work in filmmaking—the results were *The Herd* and *The Enemy*. *The Herd* was the first film made on the outside and directed from jail. Yilmaz Güney wrote the scripts. The unity between us was that I believed that being part of revolutionary culture was collective work. I went to interview people and took him the material in prison. He put together the ideas, the directions for the films. Güney Films started to turn.

In 1980 the government shut down *Güney* magazine. Some of my books had been published by then and I was given prison time for an article, which was co-signed by Yilmaz Güney. In fact both us were given time for it. In addition, they gave me two years for the book I wrote on the life of Ibrahim Kaypakkaya, the founder of the TKP/M-L. We smelled the coup d'etat coming. I wasn't legal, and couldn't stay in Turkey any longer, and we had decided to get him out too. I came out in 1980; he escaped later the same year.

Many artists have become fearful, capitulating to the bourgeoisie and saying art and politics do not mix. So Yilmaz Güney is one of the very few that have taken a stand against fascism, and is probably the best known of the intellectuals in Turkey because of it. Giving the "communist sign," the fist, while accepting prizes at international film festivals, was very important and it had a big impact worldwide from Japan to Berlin to Cannes. They made a big deal about it in the bourgeois press.

AWTW: Are his more recent revolutionary films widely known among the masses in Turkey?

Nihat Behram: For a short while they can see them, then they are banned by the fascist censorship committee. Except for ten films that were smuggled out of the country, all of his

others have been destroyed. The Turkish junta is trying to wipe him out. His picture and postcards with his portrait can no longer be sold publicly in kiosks; they used to be sold all over.

AWTW: How did the Turkish press and the junta try to sum up his life and death to the masses in Turkey?

Nihat Behram: The second day after his death, there was one sentence in the papers: "He died." But *Liberation* and the French press were banned in Turkey after his death. Except for diehard fascists, they didn't dare to attack him in their columns at first. They printed a huge picture and increased their sales dramatically. But then they were forced to attack Yilmaz, he was such a popular figure. Here is *Tercüman*, a rightwing daily, for example, which writes: "Murderers die too," and "The alcoholic murderer has died before being able to spend his millions. Yilmaz Güney, the judge killer, died in despair in Paris. Why should we be sad about his family? Didn't the judge have a family too? He was a traitor until his last breath..." The headline here reads "Story of his Last Betrayal: Buriéd in Pere Lachaise Cemetery." It shows the junta's weakness, and the strength of the masses, of the folk hero, and the influence of Yilmaz Güney.

AWTW: Are there any final remarks you want to make?

Nihat Behram: Yes. Except for a handful of fascists, everyone is mourning his death. He was in close contact with the revolutionary forces; he participated in the Long March to Strasbourg and in the hunger strikes, even though he was very ill. He is like a folk hero, a myth, a part of each family because of his being against oppression, fascism, injustice, torture. Even if not fully conscious, they are so attached to him. His death is a deep pain for them—he symbolised for them the rebellion that they themselves feel. Yilmaz himself emphasised that revolution is not just a question of overthrowing the state, but of revolutionising all of society. ■