

The Making Of An A

THE ATTEMPTED assassination of the Pope in Rome shocked the world. But it would be a mistake to seek the causes of this tragic deed in the psychology of the gunman.

Mehmet Ali Agca is the product of a configuration of social and economic forces which turned him into a neo-Nazi. But observers who have flown to Malatya, the capital of an eastern province of Turkey from which Agca originates, have concluded that but for the cleavages in his local society he could equally well have turned into a militant Leftwing activist.¹

The polarisation of political affiliations in Turkey is the result of poverty and the defence of power by those who now control the wealth. Agca was one of the unwitting tools of the Right. Ironically, he gave vent to those frustrations created by poor employment prospects by seeking refuge in the ideology which nurtures the conditions of material deprivation.

IN THE two years before the *coup* last September, 5,241 people were murdered. The military takeover was not a result of the desire among the generals, for political power. The politicians had failed to give democratic direction to the country, the economy was in ruins and people were turning to extremist ideologies.

Disputes were settled with guns, and the civil police could not enforce law and order. So the tanks rolled. Metin Munir summarised the sorry situation in his country:

*"Inequities in wealth, unjust land distribution particularly in Eastern Turkey where the Kurdish minority lives, unemployment, inflation and lack of opportunities for the young are a few of the causes of terror."*²

Agca is the product of the eastern provinces, the poorest end of Turkey which has been all but ignored by the Ankara elites.

Land reform is urgently required. The World Bank says that Turkey has one of the most inequitable distributions of land. The politicians avoided taking any action to upset the landowners.

Now, however, the military regime is determined to push through land reform. Chris Sherwell reports that they may succeed in overriding the objections of the landlords – the agas – where the political parties failed:

*"The main target areas are the east and south-east of the country. In these regions almost 750 villages fall completely or partially under the ownership of individuals or families. Even the dwellings where landless peasants live are owned by these agas, some of whom own literally dozens of villages."*³

Agca's family lives in one such mud-and-brick house. Yet there are vast tracts which could provide employment and food for the poor. But without ready access to the land, the peasants are locked into poverty and driven into the towns in search of jobs that do not exist.

As a result, urban areas have exploded in size. The population of Malatya, on the railroad just west of the Euphrates, has more than doubled in the past 20 years.

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION has encouraged sectarian violence among ethnic and religious groups. Sixty people died in Corum last year in riots and looting which matched the daily scenes enacted in Belfast: the root causes are similar, only the names are different.



THE HIT MAN:
Mehmet Ali Agca

NEWS ANALYSIS
BY
Fred Harrison

OUTFLOW OF WORLD Foreigners in C

	Aged 15-64 (000s)	Labour force (000s)
1970	1,944	1,863
1971	2,320	2,195
1972	2,598	2,360
1973	2,871	2,590
1974	2,997	2,517
1975	2,884	2,284
1976	2,765	2,108
1977	2,842	2,046
1978	2,739	2,025

Foreigners in in the Sept.

Turks	1,24
Yugoslavs	62
Italians	59
Spaniards	18
Portuguese	10
Greeks	25
Others	1,07

Total 4.14

SOURCE: Financial Times, 7.8.80

The parallel with Ireland does not end there, however. Turkey – like Ireland – has had to export large numbers of its unemployed workers. Germany has been the favoured destination, but the collapse of the global economy in 1974 generated an extra layer of psycho-social tension.

For landless peasants from the villages could no longer aspire to relatively well-paid jobs in Europe. Although they continued to migrate to Germany, employment was not readily available, and German trade unions were demanding that "guest workers" should be sent home. (See table).

For the Turks, however, there were no jobs to return to in their homeland. The pressures built up into widespread urban terror. By 1980, the German Embassy in Ankara estimated that between six and seven million of the 45m population wanted to emigrate to escape poverty and terror.⁴

Some of these alienated citizens will find sanctuary in the land reform planned by Gen. Kenan Evren's Government. An irrigated area of 7,500 hectares in Urfa is about to be rented to 4,500 families; additional land nearby will eventually be sold on easy terms to landless peasants.

Altogether, the plan envisages the settlement of 550,000 landless families on farms. But is this enough to stem the violence?

THE EDUCATIONAL system is regarded as an important instrument for eradicating terror in Turkey. The assumption is that a careful rewriting of the textbooks will instil the appropriate attitudes for a peaceful, prosperous republic.

This educational philosophy is a legacy from Kemal Ataturk. But filling people's heads with words is not an adequate substitute for filling their rumbling bellies with food.

Assassin

GERMAN GUEST WORKERS

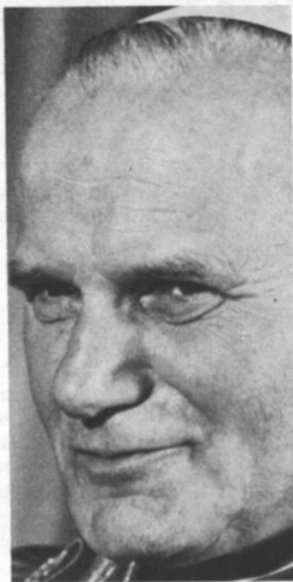
Germany 1970-78

Proportion of total labour force	Numbers employed (000s)	Un-employed (000s)
7.0	1,858	5
8.2	2,183	12
8.8	2,343	17
9.6	2,560	20
9.4	2,448	69
8.7	2,133	151
8.1	2,002	106
7.9	1,954	92
7.7	1,928	97

West Germany

(thousands)	Sept. '80	Change
79		
3.3	1,462.4	+194.1
0.6	631.8	+11.2
4	617.9	+23.5
2.2	180.0	-2.2
3	112.3	+2.5
6	297.5	+0.7
17	1,151.4	+79.7
3.3	4,453.3	+309.5

and 24.12.80.



THE VICTIM:
Pope John Paul II

That something needs to be done about taxation is beyond controversy. While the average worker pays about £25 a month in tax, doctors expect to pay only £20 and a big landowner's bill is just £4.50!⁵

TURKEY'S economic problems reach beyond her borders to threaten NATO defences. The Kurdish uprisings in the eastern provinces are recognised as peasant revolts, the direct result of landlessness.

Under 3% of the population in these provinces own one-third of the arable land. Absentee landlords wield the political influence, relying on the support of the civil authorities to maintain their coercive power. For example:

"In Siverek the main aga, or landowner in Turkey, is Mr. Mehmet Celal Bucak, whose sway extends over Siverek with its 36,000 people and about 20 villages. He traditionally delivered the votes of these people to the right-wing Justice Party for which he was a deputy. In exchange he received the backing of Ankara and the authorities."⁶

There were many such "rotten boroughs" in the Turkish political system before the *coup*.

But the hold of the landowning right-wing has weakened in recent years; the peasants, reacting by adopting the communist philosophy, have tried to marshal their forces. Kurdish nationalism has been a banner around which to rally.

This challenge is a direct threat to the stability of the state, which in turn undermines the ability of the West to protect its eastern flank. Diyarbakir, the city regarded by Kurds as the political capital of "Kurdistan," is also the site where the U.S. has an electronic surveillance complex for tracking Soviet missile launches.

UNEMPLOYMENT at 20%, while disguising serious over-employment in big state enterprises, nonetheless gives an indication of the scale of the economic problem confronting the generals.

The government may suppress the violence that is a manifestation of the humiliation suffered by millions of Turkish men and women who cannot provide their children with decent life-styles. But a rational reform of the economy is the only way to establish permanent social and political harmony.

Whether the army can gather together the brain-power to draft such a plan remains to be seen. Meanwhile, however, Turkish society will continue to spawn men like Mehmet Ali Agca, the pathetic victims of circumstances not of their own creation.

The Italian authorities will treat Agca as a criminal. The Pope has forgiven him, but this absolution was dictated by religious considerations. Could the Pope equally well have forgiven him on the grounds that the gunman was not responsible for the perverse conditions that turned him into a monster?

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5. *Daily Mail*, 11.3.81.
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Since the 1950s, the number of people fed and supported by Turkish agriculture has declined dramatically. Yet the gap between potential and actual production remains high. For example, under 3m hectares out of a potential 8.5m hectares are under irrigation.

Modern capital-intensive technology has been one reason for the displacement of farm workers. Expensive tractors are doing the work of cheap labour. As a "labour-surplus" economy, Turkey ought to prefer labour-intensive methods of cultivation, thereby freeing scarce capital for the industrial development that would provide jobs for those who simply could not be supported by the rural economy.

Instead, the great landlords have been allowed to shape agricultural policy to maximise rental income at the expense of the wages of workers.

Although the military government is taking action, there are three serious weaknesses with its strategy:

- By creating a larger class of landowners, the reform is not reallocating economic opportunities equitably. The plight of labourers who will not receive land will not be ameliorated.
- Although Turkey has now been promised a multi-billion dollar loan and aid programme, this alone will not provide the basis for a restructured economy with balanced development between the rural and urban sectors.
- Giving land to today's peasants will not solve the inter-generational problem - there will certainly not be enough land for Agca's grandchildren.

The economy needs a powerful fiscal reform. Spearheading this should be a tax on land values, to break up the large estates in favour of peasant farms, shift unearned income into the exchequer to finance vital infrastructural investments, and encourage private capital formation.