

Turkey begins its show trial of Abdullah Ocalan

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On Monday the trial of PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) Chairman Abdullah Ocalan before a State Security Court began on the Turkish prison island of Imrali. Ocalan is accused of “high treason” and “separatism”. Both charges carry the death sentence.

The trial makes clear what awaits national movements and their leaders when—as opposed to the Albanian KLA in Kosovo—they are unable to prove their usefulness to NATO.

After the presiding judge rejected a motion that the trial be postponed, prosecutors read the indictment. Ocalan, speaking through a microphone from a sealed glass booth, gave what was described by press reports as a “rambling” 40-minute statement, in which he acknowledged responsibility for his alleged crimes and pleaded with the court to spare his life. He pledged to transform the PKK into a non-violent political party and “work with the Republic of Turkey toward the goal of peace and brotherhood”.

Ocalan clearly showed the effects of more than three months in solitary confinement, including the first 10 days after his October abduction, when he was held incommunicado. One diplomat attending the trial as an observer said of his statement: “He went on for minutes on end with just sentence fragments, and it was impossible to figure out what he was saying.”

The PKK leader has been denied all but the most cursory consultation with his lawyers, two of whom left Monday's session early, evidently upset that they had been prevented from working out a defence strategy with their client.

The abduction of Ocalan was an act of international banditry. With the help of the American CIA, the Turkish secret police (MIT) whisked Ocalan away from the Greek embassy in Nairobi in a private plane, pumped him full of drugs and, in the dead of night, transported him to Turkey. There he was presented before television cameras in

handcuffs, at times with a blindfold over his eyes, and with two large Turkish flags prominent in the background.

Afterwards Ocalan was locked away on the prison island of Imrali in complete isolation. For weeks he was allowed no access to a lawyer despite continuous interrogations. His lawyers have been forced to work under impossible conditions. In the discussions with their client, when they were permitted at all, security personnel were always in attendance, carefully noting down every word. Only a few weeks before the start of the trial and following a string of complaints were the lawyers permitted to see the indictment and file material. Ocalan himself has been refused any access to this material.

It was not uncommon for the lawyers to be greeted upon their arrival on the island with stone throwing and punches from an angry mob. On occasion they were themselves arrested. At the same time an unprecedented wave of chauvinism and repression has been carried out against the Kurds. Thousands have been arbitrarily arrested. Lynch mobs have hunted Kurdish youth through the streets.

The media and politicians have worked to intensify the situation and have sought to trump one another with attacks on the “terrorists” and “child murderers” of the PKK.

The European governments, composed primarily of social democrats, bear the main responsibility for the turn of events. Together they had ensured that Ocalan was deprived of the fundamental right to asylum and finally delivered him into the hands of his enemy, knowing full well what the political consequences would be.

Somewhat later the social democratic government in Great Britain went one step further: Just as the state terror in Turkey, under the slogan “fighting the terrorism of the PKK”, was reaching fever pitch, the license for the satellite channel “Med-TV” in London was withdrawn because of its “closeness to the PKK”. For the Kurds in

Turkey, Med-TV is the only alternative to the nationalist Turkish channels.

The Turkish state correctly interpreted this action as a mandate to trample on democratic and legal rights to their heart's desire. The human rights organisation Amnesty International confirmed that during the pre-trial negotiations at the end of April, lawyers for Ocalan (who himself was not in the court room) were sworn at, shouted down and pelted with objects by an angry, unrestrained crowd. The police only intervened later. How and against whom they proceeded was described by Ercan Kanar, one of the lawyers at the time, in a May 28 interview with the *Turkish Daily News*:

“After the hearing, we were brought to the DGM (state security court) police station for security reasons. We were made to wait for about two hours. They later put us in a police minibus and started kicking people's legs, especially those of the women. There was barely enough room to sit in the minibus; the vehicle went too fast and stopped abruptly. People were singing march songs to provoke us. We were let out at Sihhiye. There they wanted to incite the people against us by shouting, ‘See, these are Apo's lawyers.’ But the people in the street were simply confused and didn't do anything. For what they saw was people in suits, holding attaché cases and wearing ties, being beaten by the police. We don't think that all this happened on the spur of the moment. It is not possible that the police chief is in the dark about the behaviour of his staff. We complained about these people, but have not yet gotten a response.”

Further on Kanar commented that the court had accepted 600 to 700 petitions. These came principally from so-called “families of the martyrs”, i.e. those who lost (or claimed to have lost) sons who served as soldiers or police in the Kurdish province. As to whether live coverage of the trial would guarantee that it be public, as required by law, he answered: “This is an incomplete kind of publicity. In other words, the kind of publicity described in the laws and the legal system cannot be achieved when the limits are set by a DGM prosecutor.”

The PKK continues to appeal to the European powers for support. But what have these powers done in the course of the preparations for this political show trial, for which they bear the responsibility, apart from expressing their “concern” that the trial against Ocalan be carried out “fairly”?

The European Committee against Torture has criticised Ocalan's imprisonment in isolation as psychological torture. The EU commission has sent an observer with

semi-official status. The European Court for Human Rights decided that the State Security Court cannot guarantee a fair trial because a member of the military sits in its leading body of three.

Once Ocalan was allowed such “generous” prison concessions as one hour of exercise per day, pencil and paper, a short wave radio and three-day-old nationalist daily papers with everything cut out which could be of direct concern to him, the feeble voice of criticism from Europe died out altogether.

The State Security Court, which had been dissolved in the 1970s on the grounds that it was unconstitutional, was re-established by the military four years after the 1980 putsch. Since then Turkish and international human rights organisations have demanded its abolition. Prime Minister Ecevit, however, has declared that all parties, including even the fascists, are agreed instead that the State Security Court should be “reformed”. According to the wish of Europe this “reform” should consist of replacing the single military judge by a civilian.

Such a measure would be purely cosmetic. This is clear from the case of journalist Oral Calislar, who was sentenced to over one year's imprisonment by a State Security Court because he had carried out an interview with Ocalan six years ago. The military judge voted for acquittal, while the two civilian judges voted to convict him.

Nevertheless, the stated concern of the European governments is not simply hypocrisy. They fear that the all but inevitable death sentence—and even more, its implementation—will lead to a new wave of militant protests by Kurds throughout Europe. The governments only have themselves to blame for such a development, but they will undoubtedly react as they have up to now—with a racist, law-and-order campaign and further restrictions on democratic rights.



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