

The judgement in the show trial of Öcalan and the policies of the PKK

Justus Leicht
19 July 1999

Two weeks have gone by since the passing of a death sentence in the show trial of the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Abdullah “Apo” Öcalan. The judgement, along with the whole trial, was a complete travesty of justice. Together they made clear not only the depths of contempt on the part of the Turkish state for the Kurdish people but also the utter ineffectiveness of the nationalist perspective of the PKK in defending the democratic rights of the Kurds.

There were virtually no limits to Öcalan's debasement. He praised Turkey as a democratic state, expressed his admiration for the founder of modern Turkey Kemal Atatürk and described the soldiers who had fallen in the struggle against the PKK as “martyrs”. The extent to which he went is apparent in the two speeches he gave in his own defence, which his lawyers have posted in their entirety in English on the Internet.

He commented as follows on the same Turkish army, which according to its own reports killed over 100 PKK fighters in the course of the trial alone (according to the PKK the Turkish troops employed poison gas): “In our day, when the relationship between the army and democracy is under study, the fact that the army has taken upon itself to be the protector of democratic norms, at a time when everyone wants more democracy for themselves, is of course connected with the security of the country. However, the army's ability to perceive that even this security for which it is responsible is connected with democracy, is a high-minded approach worthy of respect.”

It has learnt so much, it would no longer carry out a putsch or establish a military dictatorship: “Today the army is not a threat to democracy, but on the contrary a force that guarantees that democracy will move on to the next stage in a healthy manner and continue working.”

The Turkish chiefs of staff could not have put it better.

Öcalan urgently appealed to the state to make use of the services of the PKK: “Just as much as the 21st Century will be lost for Turkey if we don't judge matters right, a correct judgement will not only relieve Turkey from this its

haunting key problem but will even empower it to become the leading country of the region in the coming century... Especially the advance towards a leading position in the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkan region and Central Asia will be obstructed by an escalation of the [Kurdish] problem. [...] If the Kurdish question is resolved the military power of the PKK will be in service of Turkey both in Turkey and abroad.”

The Turkish state could acquire the PKK for a rock bottom price. As requirements, alongside an amnesty for himself and his guerrillas, Öcalan named the legalisation of the PKK: “What must be given in return is what is being given in most parts of the world and must inexorably be given, what cannot even be regarded as a concession, the most natural democratic and cultural rights, most of which are even in force de jure.”

There are many who are of the opinion that Öcalan's statements were wrung from him through the use of torture or drugs. Even if that were the case it has not prevented the PKK from continuing to describe him as their “leader” and “chairman” and identifying themselves with his declarations. A statement by the Presidential Council of the PKK (July 6) criticised the death sentence as “unacceptable both to the Turks and the Kurds” and then continued: “If we do not want to go through a centuries-long conflict and really favour a peaceful solution then we must respond to the peace offer presented by our President.”

In a statement which is half complaining and half threatening and with a detectable undertone of desperation, the PKK calls upon the Kurds to blindly follow it and Öcalan: “President Apo and the PKK, both of whom you know well, are still fighting to defend the interests of the Kurdish people. President Apo has always only lived for his people and did not accept to live through a single day when he was not working for the interests of our people. It is due to this that the Kurdish people have become the expression of a single reality. No force can separate them from each other. No matter what they say or do, this reality will always remain.”

Here considerable doubts are in order. Disagreements have already emerged between the PKK and Maoist groups that, up until now, had subordinated themselves largely without criticism in a “United Front of Revolutionary Forces”. It is also doubtful to what extent the PKK is able to exert any control over especially embittered Kurdish youth in its ranks.

Over the past weeks a number of attacks have been carried out against targets such as parks or cafés in which innocent civilians were injured or killed. Nobody has declared responsibility for the attacks. It is not known if those responsible came from PKK circles or if the attacks were provocations carried by fascist or state forces. The PKK has recently expressly warned its members against carrying out suicide assassinations and to ensure that the civilian population is not drawn into the conflict. Previously they had called upon the Kurds “not to allow themselves to be provoked”. According to his lawyers Öcalan himself had condemned a number of violent actions (apparently without effect) carried out in his defence and at the same time warned the state that when minimal concessions were not made then he would probably lose control over the Kurds and no longer be of use to the Turkish state.

Recently a number of newspapers have reported that there are deep divides inside the PKK itself. Its political arm in Europe is keen to give up the armed struggle and establish a deal with the state at all costs while its military wing in Turkey seeks to escalate the armed struggle. If that is the case then it is probable that the organisation will only hold together up until Öcalan's fate is resolved one way or the other, i.e. until the death sentence is carried out or not.

Only one thing is absolutely clear: there will be no end to the repression of the impoverished Kurdish masses. Largely disregarded by the western media, other political conflicts are taking place in Turkey that have little to do with the fate of Öcalan.

Over the past weeks and supported by domestic and international banks, the IMF and the World Bank have dictated a veritable horror catalogue of social attacks to be carried out by the companies and employers in Turkey. A massive wave of privatisation is anticipated; in order to repay debts the income of the state is to be raised while expenditure, inflation and interests rates are to be lowered; the economy is to be opened up to international capital and factory costs lowered. To this end the state has until now been seeking to implement a drastic cut in wages for the already low-paid public sectors workers, as well as drastically increasing the age of retirement—a measure which, according to the trade unions, will plunge hundreds of thousands into poverty.

Unemployment and moonlighting are already very high

and only a few workers are in receipt of any sort of unemployment insurance. About 40 percent of the population are still employed on the land, which contributes just 15 percent to the country's GNP. “Development” plans for agriculture within the framework of the “GAP” (south-east Anatolia) project, an important sponsorship by the IMF and the EU, would mean increased productivity on the part of the large-scale farmers and at the same time ruin for many poorer farmers—especially in the Kurdish occupied areas of south-east Turkey.

Under such conditions, where the broad majority of Turkish and Kurdish workers and peasants are to be ruthlessly driven into even greater poverty and misery, Turkey's ruling class requires national chauvinism as urgently as it seeks to maintain an hysterical police state atmosphere based on the so-called terrorist threat. This is the objective basis for the “lack of tolerance” on the part of the state of which Öcalan and the PKK continually complain.

No serious help for the Kurds can be expected from the European governments upon which the PKK has pinned its hopes. This was already clear by the manner with which these countries helped to deliver Öcalan to his hangmen. For these governments the Kurdish question is a means of exercising pressure, in particular to oppose the influence of the US, as well as keeping under control the millions of Kurds living throughout Europe. They have no real interest in spoiling their relations with Turkey, which is their bridge to central Asia. All of the fine-sounding statements on the part of the EU will be rapidly forgotten as soon as Turkey takes a few cosmetic measures regarding human rights, opening up its economy and turning politically towards the EU. This was already clear during Öcalan's trial, which the Europeans expressly praised as being “fair”.

Neither an escalation of the “armed struggle” nor diplomatic intrigues will assist the Kurds in establishing their democratic rights. They must unite with the Turkish and international working class on the basis of a socialist perspective to do away with the source of suppression and poverty—the profit system itself.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact