

Turkish security forces massacre political prisoners

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1 October 1999

On the night of Sunday, September 26 security forces stormed the central prison in the Turkish capital of Ankara following the occupation of the prison by left-wing political prisoners. In the ensuing bloodbath at least 10 prisoners were killed and dozens of others were badly wounded.

The events in Ankara sparked off rebellions in a number of other Turkish prisons. Prisoners have entrenched themselves and taken between 70 and 90 prison staff as hostages. They are demanding the prosecution of those responsible for the September 26 massacre, improved prison conditions and an end to the isolation of political prisoners.

Various human rights organisations in Turkey have condemned the actions of the security forces as a “massacre”. Further bloodbaths are being prepared as huge numbers of security forces surround the occupied prison buildings. The social democratic head of government, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, declared that the “authority of the state” must be respected, “whatever it takes”.

There are a number of indications that the rampage on September 26 by security forces was a cold-blooded, planned action by the state. For years the state has sought to break up large groups of organised, left-wing political prisoners. The prisoners themselves, well aware that isolation from their comrades would leave them at the mercy of the caprice and torture methods of the prison warders, have conducted a series of hunger strikes, rebellions and hostage seizures to block transfers.

A few days prior to the assault on the central prison of Ulucanlar in Ankara, prisoners boycotted roll call and stayed in their cells to oppose transfers. The prison authorities refused to allow the prisoners access to lawyers or relatives.

Shortly before flying to Washington for talks with President Bill Clinton, Ecevit met with President Demirel and the leaders of his coalition government partners, Mesut Yilmaz of the conservative ANAP and Vice Premier Devlet Bahçeli from the fascist MHP. According to a report in the *Milliyet* newspaper, they spoke about “measures to deal with violence” in the prisons.

The official reason given for the police assault was a search for weapons. Roughly at the same time as the storming of the prison a number of prisoners' relatives who had gathered outside the prison were arrested.

According to reports from lawyers, doctors and relatives of the prisoners, autopsies of the dead men only began a day later, on Monday. Legal representatives were denied access to the bodies. Nevertheless reports emerged that the dead prisoners had had their throats and faces slashed, and their arms and legs were broken.

After a delay of six hours the wounded were transferred to hospitals, only to be further assaulted as they lay on stretchers. According to the human rights organisation IHD up to 300 relatives, lawyers and human rights activists were picked up by the police at demonstrations which took place after the events of September 26.

The prisoners who were attacked were for the most part affiliated to Maoist organisations. Imprisoned members of the Kurdish nationalist PKK, following instructions from their leadership, handed themselves over to the police.

The state attack on leftist prisoners stands in stark contrast to its treatment of the small number of Mafia and fascist gangsters who are behind bars. One week previously, in a conflict between rival Mafia gangs, seven prisoners were killed, fourteen warders were

taken hostage and a prison wing was set on fire. The security forces did not touch a hair of the Mafiosi, whose leaders pay the fees necessary to live in luxury inside the prisons. This should not come as a surprise, since the fascist MHP party openly represents their interests in parliament.

Just a few weeks ago a proposed amnesty law for all torturers, fascist murderers and extreme right-wing Mafia gangs collapsed in the face of popular opposition. According to the *Turkish Daily News*, the prison authorities cynically responded to appeals by relatives for a new prison by saying, “Wait until the amnesty comes into effect, and then there will be room enough for the left-wing prisoners!”

As Ecevit's comments make clear, the massacre at Ulucanlsar was aimed at demonstrating the strength of the state and intimidating any opposition. For millions of Turkish workers, the state was discredited by the catastrophe arising from the recent earthquake. Moreover, the government has, against the will of the masses of working people, bowed before the IMF and World Bank and passed a package of laws to drastically curtail social spending and escalate the privatisation of industry and the service sector.

The earthquake of August 17 exposed the corruption, greed and mendacity which characterises the political and business establishment of Turkey. Politically and economically bankrupt, dependent on credits and investments from international banks and concerns, the Turkish ruling classes can offer only more exploitation, poverty and social polarisation for the masses, despite all its talk of “democracy”. Under these circumstances the growing specific weight of extreme right-wing tendencies in the state apparatus and the turn to fascist-type measures are inevitable.



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