

Letter on the Turkish prison crackdown

23 December 2000

To the WSWs,

As someone of Turkish background born on Cyprus, I want to express my opposition and outrage at the brutal repression carried out this week by the Turkish government against the country's prisoners.

In 1974, Turkey's ruling class made full use of the actions of the Greek fascists, who carried out a successful coup d'etat against the government, and invaded and divided the island of Cyprus. The then Turkish prime minister Ecevit called it the "Cyprus Peace Operation". Notwithstanding the suffering inflicted upon the Greek section of the Cypriot community, Turkish Cypriots, whom Turkey claimed to be acting to protect, have suffered and continue to suffer as Turkey acts to impose directly and indirectly via the all but appointed Denktash administration, the partial annexation as a fait-accompli.

This week the same Social Democratic prime minister, Ecevit, now in coalition with the fascist Grey Wolves, ordered a ferocious military assault upon Turkey's political prisoners in 20 jails across the country "to save their lives," calling it "Operation Return-to Life".

During the military rule of 1980 to 1984, and the subsequent semi-military regime, thousands of leftists, mostly university students, intellectuals and young workers, were thrown into jails across the country. In a twisted irony, the present government says it "fears" the overcrowded prisons have resulted in "communal living" and the opportunity for the "terrorists" to organise within the jails.

These "terrorists" are more victims of the country's anti-democratic rule than anything else. In any country where there is some semblance of bourgeois democracy, they would not be in jail in the first place. For example, a court has just sentenced a group of youth this week to up to 15 years in jail for staging a protest occupation of the Izmir central branch premises of the centre right True Path Party (DYP)!

In an attempt to isolate the inmates and break any solidarity, the new so-called F-type jails have been built, and plans have been made for over a year to transfer prisoners to these jails. F-type prisons are essentially for solitary and small group confinement. Human rights organisations in the country and abroad have damned the new cell based prisons, and opposed any transfer of prisoners to them.

Only days before bloody assault began, the justice minister said there would be no transfers to F-type jails. According to Turkey's Human Rights Association at least 25 inmates have lost their lives. But it is not really known how many are dead, or what is happening to the inmates as the armed forces are not allowing any media anywhere near the jails. There is a media ban on information regarding F-type prisons and the hunger strikes. Newspaper *Radikal* and Star television station are under investigation for breaching the ban and "giving more time and space than necessary" to such news, and "therefore acting as propagandists for the terrorists".

The government has been on a smear campaign to create public support for the bloodshed that is taking place. Health Minister Osman Durmush, the same fascist who tried to refuse blood from Greece and Armenia during the earthquake, declared that hunger strike was a hoax, and those who were medically examined were found to be healthy. However, Ankara Medical Association (ATO) general secretary Tufan Kaan said that upon examination, all 24 hunger strikers sent to Ankara, had symptoms consistent with hunger strike. Some have been without food for up to 60 days.

The authorities claim that "the state has not been able to enter prisons since 1991" and that the jails have been turned into "nests of terrorism". But in an interview with the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, former Bayrampasha prison prosecutor, Necati Özdemir said: "By stating that it has not been able to enter prisons for nine years, the state is lying. I was there body and soul as a

prosecutor of the state”. He maintained that there has been no terrorist activity or atmosphere of terror created by the political prisoners, and that the operation was against the rule of law.

He continued: “They call them terrorists. That depends on what you understand by “terrorism”. What I understand by terrorism is that one tries to make another be like him by force... On the one hand you will pardon murderers, thieves and rapists and on the other you will treat political prisoners differently, this is unheard of anywhere in the world.” The government has just passed an amnesty, which specifically excludes political prisoners.

And there were others. The police declared that they had evidence of two ‘terrorists’ making plans on mobile phones while in prison, yet they could not produce any. They also declared they found Kalashnikov rifles in one of the prisons. (The Kalashnikov assault rifle was a “favourite” with state prosecutors during the junta years, as it proved in and of itself, that the “anarchists”—the term “terrorist” was not in fashion then—were Russian-backed communists trying to demolish constitutional rule.)

A former minister for justice stated in a recent interview that he did not find any of the police claims credible since one had to go through x-ray inspection to have access to the section of the prison mentioned.

The people of Turkey still continue to suffer the worst of social and human rights abuses under bourgeois rule, which historically could never establish any sort of “class equilibrium” or policies of class concession as happened in the post war years in Western Europe. Their methods in the final analysis have always been brutal coercion.

To add insult to injury, the humanists among the Western bourgeoisie are forever shedding tears and pleading that the human rights abuses in Turkey should be stopped. Who is doing it and why are not questions in which they are interested, for to do so would be self-incriminating. Insofar as they offer any, their explanations are steeped in chauvinism and racism—that somehow the brutal coercion is not an outcome of extreme class antagonisms but rather is a trait, characteristic of Turkishness.

Regards,
YO, Australia



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