

Ankara cracks down on opposition to Turkish invasion of Syria

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As Turkey's military operation against US-backed Kurdish forces in Afrin, Syria entered its fourth day, at least 50 people have been arrested across Turkey. These include Kurdish politicians from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the third-largest party in the Turkish parliament, 10 of whose deputies have already long sat in jail.

They are suspected of participating in or preparing to organize protests, or sharing messages on their social media accounts against the ongoing Operation Olive Branch. Based only on this, the Turkish government accuses them of being supporters of a "terrorist organization," i.e. the Kurdish nationalist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian extension, the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Arrest warrants have been issued for dozens of people accused of "provoking Kurdish people to take to the streets by sharing provocative and misleading photographs" about Turkey's ongoing Operation Olive Branch in Syria's Afrin, which is controlled by the PYD.

The charges against them—including "insulting officials," "inciting hatred and enmity among people," "insulting the president," "overtly humiliating the Turkish people, government and the military organization" and "promoting terrorist organizations"—are punishable by long years in prison.

Investigations were launched by chief public prosecutor's offices of cities across Turkey, including Ankara, Van, Diyarbakir, Mardin, Mus and Istanbul, just after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened any opposition to the Turkish invasion of Afrin in a speech. Speaking to his supporters on Sunday in Bursa, one of Turkey's main industrial cities, Erdogan announced the launching of the witch-hunt: "Whoever takes to the streets on the call of HDP,

KCK and PKK should know that our security forces will keep a tight rein on them and they will pay a heavy price."

The nationalist and militarist fever being whipped up in unison by the Turkish bourgeois media came amidst ever growing anger in the working class over worsening economic and social conditions, including the elimination of democratic rights under the state of emergency declared by Erdogan after the failed NATO-backed coup attempt of July 2016.

Rising anger among some 200,000 metalworkers has already forced the Turk-Metal trade union, one of Turkey's most right-wing unions, to go on strike on February 2. Thousands of metal workers, led by 5,000 workers at French car manufacturer Renault's plant in Bursa, went out on a wildcat strike in May 2015, in a rebellion against the same union.

At a joint press conference yesterday of the Turkish-European Union Joint Advisory Committee, leading representatives of the business organizations and trade unions declared their support for Operation Olive Branch. In a statement, they said, "We defend, and side with, our government's decision to protect our national security."

Meanwhile, the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Union (KESK), largely dominated by pseudo-left forces who support the pro-Kurdish HDP, opposed the Turkish invasion of Afrin, saying in a written statement that "following the threats of the President that 'we can come unexpectedly overnight', we, as the country, have now proceeded from the state of emergency to a state of war."

The Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK), tied to the bourgeois Republican People's Party (CHP), has kept silent on the military intervention.

The union's support for the Turkish invasion does not come as a surprise. All the bourgeois parties and their petty-bourgeois supporters are backing Operation Olive Branch against the Kurdish nationalists in Syria.

On January 20, CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu declared his party's support for the invasion: "We are totally confident about our brave army and give full support to the operation. What we care about is the security of our borders. No countries would want a terrorist organization on their border." At a press conference at CHP headquarters in Ankara the next day, CHP vice chairman and spokesperson Bülent Tezcan similarly hailed the invasion: "Our glorious army has initiated an important operation. Our support is full. We stand behind this operation as the nation and will continue to do so."

The fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the main ally of Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), also voiced support for the invasion. At a January 21 press conference, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli told reporters, "There is no other way to clear our borders from terror," adding, "The operational partner of the United States should be rooted out. The PKK, the PYD ... should be cleared from our borders."

Meral Aksener, leader of the ?Y? Party, a split off from the MHP, also declared her party's support on Twitter, writing, "Our full prayers are with our glorious army and heroic soldiers in the Afrin operation."

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), however, attacked the operation as the "start of an invasion" of Afrin, calling on the people to "show their democratic reactions."

This provoked a sharp response from Erdogan, who threatened: "You are being followed. Wherever you take to the streets, our security forces will be at your throat. You can't do whatever you want. ... Just as we root those in the mountains out of their caves, we will not let you take to the streets."

Having effectively received the full support of the Turkish political establishment, business circles, union bureaucracy and media, Erdogan reiterated his determination to "end this operation with victory in conjunction with our nation and the Free Syrian Army" (FSA). Speaking at the funeral of Non-commissioned Officer Musa Özalkan, who died in Operation Olive Branch, Erdogan said Ankara "for sure won't pay heed to what these or those say, what views this or that

country has."

Turkish sources say that three soldiers have been killed by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) during Operation Olive Branch. They did not give an estimate of FSA losses. The SDF, however, said in a statement that they killed 30 members of the Turkish army and FSA yesterday. In another press release, the SDF put the Turkish and FSA losses in the first three days of the operation at 40, with "nearly 300 wounded."



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