

Turkish government blocks care of Kurdish HDP's jailed ex-leader Demirtaş?

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Nearly two months after the beginning of the latest Turkish invasion into Syria to drive the Kurdish nationalist People's Protection Units (YPG) from the Turkish-Syrian border, reports have emerged that Ankara is denying medical care to jailed Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) leader Selahattin Demirtaş.

Last week, amid a growing crackdown on Kurdish politicians and newly-elected HDP mayors, Aygül Demirtaş, Demirtaş's sister and one of his lawyers, stated on social media that her brother had still not been taken to the hospital despite losing consciousness on November 26.

On December 2, she wrote on Twitter: "Our client and my brother Selahattin Demirtaş lost consciousness due to chest tightness and inability to breathe on Nov. 26 at 5:30 a.m. He was unconscious for a long time and he received first response from his cellmate Abdullah Zeydan."

According to Aygül Demirtaş, her brother asked to be dispatched to a clinic for a more extensive treatment instead of the emergency room. Moreover, "The prison doctor wanted Demirtaş to be sent to cardiology, neurology and gastroenterology departments. We, as his lawyers, asked for his immediate dispatch to a hospital."

Nonetheless, Demirtaş was not sent to hospital until his sister publicized his health condition on social media. That same evening, he was transferred to the hospital and all necessary tests were conducted. He was then brought back to the jail. According to his sister, "no life-threatening condition has been detected."

This comes amid the increased Turkish government crackdown on Kurdish nationalist politicians and newly elected mayors. Almost at the same time, HDP Viranşehir district executive Emine Aslan Aydoğan, aged 64, died in hospital. She had been in jail for 16

months.

Since the March 31 local elections, the total number of HDP-elected municipalities where trustees have been appointed has reached at least 24 out of 65, and 14 co-mayors have been arrested since. On Friday, the mayors of Muradiye, Özalp and Bağkale districts in the eastern province of Van were detained over "membership in a terrorist organization" and "making terrorist propaganda." This is the usual pretext used by the government against its opponents without any evidence.

According to a party statement, over the last two weeks, "over 150 HDP administrators, members and sympathizers were taken into custody and many of them were later arrested and jailed."

This assault on democratic rights was admitted by Turkish presidential spokesperson İbrahim Kalın on November 27 in Berlin, during an interview by Deutsche Welle's Conflict Zone host Tim Sebastian. When he asked why the HDP mayors were removed from their posts although court trials are still underway and they have yet to be convicted, Kalın said: "They will be charged of course."

This is not the first time that elected Kurdish mayors have been dismissed. The HDP has long been a target of blatantly anti-democratic acts by the AKP government and state authorities, with many of its leaders jailed for supporting "terrorism." In 2016–17, during the state of emergency imposed by Ankara after the failed 2016 NATO-backed military coup, the government ousted more than 90 HDP-backed mayors elected in 2014, replacing them with "trustees."

This crackdown on Kurdish politicians has escalated especially since the end of the "peace process" between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a strategy to use the PKK to strengthen Turkey's hand in

Iraq and Syria. The “peace process” continued in fits and starts from 2009 to 2015.

After Washington made the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG)—an offshoot of the PKK—its main proxy army in Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) government ended the process, fearing to lose its Kurdish region. It launched a bloody military assault in Kurdish towns.

Amid the AKP government’s crackdown on Kurdish towns, 4,000 people were killed and 200,000 people forced to flee their homes. In 2016, the AKP passed a constitutional amendment stripping HDP deputies of parliamentary immunity, with Republican People’s Party (CHP) support. As a result, today, the HDP’s previous leaders, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, and its several ex-deputies are still political prisoners. According to the HDP, more than 16,000 party members have been detained and at least 3,500 jailed since 2015.

The defense of democratic rights requires a principled opposition to this state crackdown and support for the freeing all political prisoners.

It does not, however, entail any support to the political program and Kurdish bourgeois nationalists. The collaboration of Demirtaş and the HDP with Washington and its European imperialist allies in Syria exposes their own political bankruptcy and hostility to democratic rights.

It is impossible to oppose the jailing and persecution of Demirtaş on a principled basis without opposing the policy of the Kurdish nationalists in neighboring Syria. There, working closely with Washington and the European powers, they have operated mass detention camps in which tens of thousands of people are incarcerated in horrific conditions, denied sufficient food, simply on the charge of being Islamic State (IS) fighters. The Syrian Kurdish nationalists’ use of their troops to serve as prison guards for such facilities is a devastating exposure of their own reactionary policy.

Inside Turkey, the HDP is politically complicit in this policy. The HDP’s current co-leader Sezai Temelli declared on Thursday: “IS is still a big danger for world and the Middle East,” and appealed for imperialist assistance against the IS: “If the international powers are a force, then they have to save the Middle East, the world and Syria from this scourge.”

Within Turkey itself, the HDP has called for closer ties with the CHP, backed it in this year’s local elections, and continued to call for an alliance with the Turkish bourgeoisie’s traditional, anti-Kurdish party of government.

In a recent interview, Demirtaş said: “The HDP should be prepared to cooperate and ally with all sections without exception within the framework of the principles of democracy and to demonstrate that it is a candidate for the administration of the country.”

This record is a further exposure of the pro-imperialist and pro-war orientation of bourgeois nationalism, and the necessity of the political unification of the working class of all nationalities in a common socialist and revolutionary struggle against imperialist war.



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