Turkish government arrests opposition and Kurdish deputies

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In a new attack on democratic rights moving Turkey towards authoritarian rule, Enis Berbero?lu of the bourgeois opposition Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and Leyla Güven and Musa Fariso?ullar? of the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) were stripped of their parliamentary mandates last Thursday, by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government backed by the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

All three deputies were arrested and jailed on the same day. Only Berbero?lu was released on Friday, until July 31, on the grounds that he can legally benefit from measures implemented in April to protect prisoners from COVID-19. Güven and Fariso?ullar? were sentenced on "terror" charges, of "being a member of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party]" in September 2019. They were sentenced to six and nine years in prison, respectively.

This "measure" unconstitutionally excludes political prisoners from the right to protection from COVID-19 across Turkey and in its prisons.

Elected as a deputy in June 2015, Berbero?lu was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment in 2017 for giving the daily *Cumhuriyet* a video of trucks carrying weapons supplied by Turkish intelligence to Islamist "rebel" groups in Syria in 2014. He was re-elected in the 2018 elections, but his prison sentence of five years and 10 months was later endorsed by the Supreme Court in September 2018.

While these rulings could be suspended until the end of the parliament session, the Erdo?an government suddenly decided to implement them last week.

On Thursday, in its first statement on these events, the HDP called them a "coup" and issued "a call to unite all democratic forces against this aggression and arrogance targeting all social groups," adding: "Stopping this aggression against our people today is the shared duty of us all as the opposition. We call on everyone to fulfil this duty."

HDP co-chairs Pervin Buldan and Mithat Sancar held a press conference Saturday, at which Buldan said: "This coup is directed not only against the parliament but also our elected mayors," referring to the latest attack on HDP municipalities in May. The government dismissed five more HDP mayors; as a result, the HDP governs only 14 of the 65 municipalities it won in the 2019 local elections.

The Kurdish-nationalist HDP is orienting not only to the CHP, the Turkish bourgeoisie's traditional party of rule, but to two AKP split-offs, the Future Party of former AKP Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto?lu and the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) of former AKP Economy Minister Ali Babacan. Sancar stressed that "all other democratic forces should also be aware of their responsibilities."

Asked about the CHP, the HDP leaders said, "we still maintain our insistence that the solution is through a line of struggle that covers not only the CHP, but all democratic forces."

This line was also endorsed from prison by Selahattin Demirta?, the jailed former HDP co-leader, who declared: "By drawing lessons from the past, we should be able to make bolder and bigger political moves, broader and more open alliances for democracy, freedom, peace and economic prosperity."

However, the CHP's response to the AKP onslaught exposes that this undeclared alliance aims not to defend democratic rights, but to advance the reactionary agenda of a faction of the ruling class. CHP leader Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu was silent on the HDP deputies' fate on Thursday, only tweeting: "Enis Berbero?lu's being stripped of MP status is a result of the July 20 Civilian Coup [in 2016] process, this disregards the will of the nation. We will continue the struggle for democracy to secure justice, rights and the law."

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While K?l?çdaro?lu criticized the government's policy following the NATO-backed military coup against Erdo?an on July 15, 2016 as a "July 20 civilian coup," the reality is that the CHP pushed for national unity behind the AKP at the time. Similarly, the HDP complained about its exclusion from the "national consensus" between the AKP, CHP and MHP after the July 15 coup.

Moreover, the government can only attack these deputies thanks to the CHP's collaboration with AKP and MHP. In 2016, the CHP voted for an AKP constitutional amendment removing HDP deputies' parliamentary immunity; several HDP leaders, including Demirta?, are still in jail since 2016. While the CHP always supported the Turkish army's operations in Syria and in Turkey against the Kurds, Davuto?lu and Babacan helped carry out the Erdo?an government's attacks on the working class and on Kurdish people for 15 years.

Ultimately, both HDP and CHP are right-wing bourgeois parties both unwilling and incapable of defending democratic rights. They are not less bankrupt and reactionary than the AKP. Their aim is to install a new government more openly aligned with the NATO imperialist powers in the interests of Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie; Erdo?an is responding to this political challenge by stepping up attacks on the potential alliance emerging against him.

According to a recent poll made by Avrasya Ara?t?rma, while total votes of the AKP-MHP alliance are less than 45 percent, an open or tacit alliance between the CHP (30 percent), the far-right Good Party (10 percent), and the HDP (10 percent) could take 50 percent of all votes if elections were held today. However, the Future Party and DEVA could gain only 2.3 and 3 percent, respectively.

The AKP government's attacks on the bourgeois opposition undoubtedly involve a desperate attempt to divert growing social anger among workers at the AKP government's negligent response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to stem the AKP's own collapse in the polls. It is also bound up with broader conflicts, however, between Ankara and its NATO imperialist allies, especially over the Syrian and Libyan wars.

The Turkish government recently accused Washington and Paris of using the Syrian Kurdish National Council, an affiliate of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by the Barzani family in Iraqi Kurdistan, to "legitimate the YPG-PKK" and to build a "terror state" in Syria. Ankara regularly denounces the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria as a terrorist organization and views any enclave in Syria controlled by the US-backed YPG as a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity.

Speaking to *Rudaw* on May 28, HDP's co-leader Buldan pointed out these tensions, saying, "the AKP has also come out against Rojava [the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria] and the independence referendum in Bashur [the Kurdistan Region of Iraq]. This means [the attacks] are not only associated with us and our party."

Last month, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavu?o?lu declared: "Amid efforts to create a statelet [in eastern Syria], now US efforts to integrate [the YPG] into the political systems are proceeding. In particular, they are trying to integrate the YPG with the SKNC." He added, "We won't allow the creation of a terror corridor, and we will not allow the legitimization of terrorists there."

Speaking to France24 on May 25, Erdo?an's spokesperson ?brahim Kal?n pointed to Turkish-French conflicts as they support rival sides in the Libyan civil war, adding: "In Syria, we have disagreements as well not only with France, but also with the United States, because both are supporting the PYD-YPG which is the PKK's Syrian branch. … The PYD/YPG's main agenda is to create its own Kurdish enclave in Syria."

Commenting on this interview, PKK Executive Committee member Murat Karay?lan stressed that his organization was determined to reach a deal with other Kurdish-nationalist groups under US and French auspices, stating: "A few days ago, Turkish presidential spokesman ?brahim Kal?n said in his statements about Rojava: 'They are trying to establish a place for the Kurds there, we will never accept this,' so the United States and France should not help the [Kurdish] forces there."

Events are yet again vindicating warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site*: no faction of the Turkish or Kurdish bourgeoisies can defend democratic rights. There can be no fight for democratic rights without a struggle against imperialist war and for socialism. The way forward is to build an independent political movement in the working class of all ethnicities in the Middle East, fighting for workers' power and the perspective of international socialism.

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