

Turkish government moves to ban Kurdish-nationalist HDP

Ula? Ate?çi**19 March 2021**

Prosecutors filed a case Wednesday at Turkey's Constitutional Court to ban the Kurdish-nationalist People's Democratic Party (HDP). The same day, HDP deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlio?lu's parliamentary mandate was stripped over statements he made on social media. These draconian attacks on democratic rights, targeting a party that won nearly 6 million votes in the last election, provoked protests in cities across Turkey.

Support is collapsing for President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its far-right ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), as they implement a "herd immunity" strategy on the COVID-19 pandemic. With 3 million cases and 30,000 dead, even according to highly-manipulated official figures, the AKP has fallen to 36 percent in recent polls, and the MHP to only 8 percent. On March 2, Erdo?an pledged "extensive work regarding changing political party and election regulations" in response.

The AKP and the MHP both called to ban the HDP. In early March, MHP chairman Devlet Bahçeli declared, "If Turkey is a state of law, the closure of the HDP is urgent, vital, a must." AKP parliamentary group deputy chair Cahit Özkan claimed that Turkey's entire population was demanding the banning of the HDP. He said, "Eighty-three million people [in Turkey] desire the closure of this party both politically at the ballot boxes and legally within the constitutional order."

Prosecutors also demanded 684 people related to the HDP be banned from politics. They allege that these individuals are linked to the KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union), an umbrella group including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, and the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in Iran. The PKK is banned in Turkey as a terrorist organization.

Prosecutors state: "Like parties previously closed down by the Constitutional Court, the HDP is completely under the control of the PKK/KCK, and it has been revealed that it is a so-called legal offshoot of the PKK."

Yesterday, in coordinated raids in Istanbul, Turkish police

arrested 10 leading members of the HDP as well as Human Rights Association (IHD) co-chairman Ozturk Turkdogan.

HDP leaders Pervin Buldan and Mithat Sancar condemned the state's move to ban their party as a "coup" against "the people's will." Buldan said, "My call to all forces of democracy is the following: Whatever is done to us today will be done to you tomorrow. Standing up against it together is a responsibility of us all." She called to "teach the AKP a lesson at the ballot box as soon as possible."

The International Committee of the Fourth International is irreconcilably opposed to these attacks on fundamental democratic rights. Its opposition to Erdo?an's police-state measures targeting the rights of Kurdish people and of the HDP does not, however, signify any lessening of its opposition to the bankrupt politics of Kurdish nationalism. This bankruptcy is now glaringly exposed. The HDP has tacitly backed not only the Kurdish militias' alliance with US imperialism, but also the "herd immunity" policy of the ruling class in Turkey, as across Europe and America.

The "forces of democracy" to which the HDP appeals include the imperialist powers and a coalition of Turkish bourgeois opposition parties led by the Republican People's Party (CHP). These include the CHP, the far-right Good Party, and 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.

While the European Union (EU) stated their "deep concerns," the newly-installed Biden administration in Washington also criticized Erdo?an's policy. US State Department spokesman Ned Price said Washington is "monitoring the initiation of efforts to dissolve the People's Democratic Party [HDP], a decision that would unduly subvert the will of Turkish voters, further undermining democracy in Turkey."

Babacan, Davuto?lu and CHP leader Kemal K?l?çdar?lu all condemned the case against the HDP. K?l?çdar?lu stated, "Developments have shown once again that there is no democracy in this country."

The HDP's pseudo-left sister parties in Europe also called on their governments to defend "democracy" in Turkey. The German Left Party called on Chancellor Angela Merkel to "take the diplomatic initiative and put pressure on the Erdo?an government to stop attacks on the opposition in Turkey," while the French Stalinist Communist Party demanded France and the EU impose sanctions on the Erdo?an regime and support "forces of democracy."

All these forces have in fact established a record as proven enemies of democratic rights and of the working class in Turkey and the Middle East.

The Turkish bourgeois opposition parties' statements against the persecution of the HDP are shot through with hypocrisy. While Davuto?lu and Babacan were henchmen of Erdo?an for years in his drive to build a police state, the CHP voted an AKP constitutional amendment removing HDP deputies' parliamentary immunity. As a result, several HDP leaders, including Selahattin Demirta? and Figen Yüksekda?, have languished in jail since 2016.

As for the imperialist governments and their pseudo-left accomplices, they have supported the US-led war drive in the Middle East initiated with the Gulf War and the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Their war drive not only devastated the Middle East, inflaming ethnic conflicts and attacks on democratic rights, but undermined workers' wages and health care in their own countries. As a result, over 1 million people in America and Europe are dead of COVID-19.

Last month, Biden launched a missile strike on Syria, killing 17 people, to signal that Washington intends to continue the imperialist rape of the Middle East even as hundreds of thousands of its own citizens die due to its herd immunity policy on COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the imperialist war drive in the Middle East have exposed the bankruptcy of capitalism and the inability of any nationalist perspective to resolve the great problems posed to humanity today, which are international. The only force with a progressive solution to these problems is the international working class, mobilized on a socialist basis against war and for a scientifically-based, global medical response to the pandemic.

The various factions of the bourgeoisie in Turkey are all indissolubly tied to imperialism. Erdo?an responded to Biden's missile strike by issuing a pathetic appeal to Washington and the EU for support, titled "The West should help Turkey end Syria's civil war." He asks Biden to renew a struggle for "democracy, liberty and human rights" by militarily backing his government in the dirty war in Syria.

Boasting of having created "safe zones" and stopped "irregular migration" to Europe, by bombing Syria and building concentration camps for millions of refugees,

Erdo?an asked in return that Washington and the EU not support the Kurdish nationalists. He wrote, "Primarily, we expect the West to adopt a clear position against the YPG, the PKK's Syrian branch."

The People's Protection Units (YPG) are the PYD's armed wing and the central force in the US- and European-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia.

The Biden administration has however so far refused to discuss Erdo?an's requests, and instead made clear that it will continue to support Kurdish forces in Syria. A State Department statement issued at the end of January, just after Biden took office, said, "The United States remains in close coordination with local partners in northeast Syria, including the SDF."

Ever since Washington and its European imperialist allies began employing Kurdish forces as their main proxies in Syria, the Erdo?an government began targeting the HDP, fearing an attempt to establish a separate Kurdish state inside Turkey's present borders. In 2016 HDP deputies' parliamentary immunity was removed. Since then, over 15,000 people have been detained and 6,000 arrested for being HDP members or supporters. Last June, HDP deputies Leyla Güven and Musa Fariso?ullar? were stripped of their parliamentary mandates.

Amid expectations of renewed imperialist aggression in the Middle East under the new Biden administration, Erdo?an is again escalating this reactionary policy, targeting the HDP.

The defense of the democratic rights, health and lives of Kurds and of all people cannot, however, be subordinated to manoeuvres of any of the bourgeois nationalist factions. This defense requires the international mobilisation of the working class against war, imperialism and the herd immunity policies of the capitalist class.



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