

Bill paving the way for the killing of stray dogs in Turkey becomes law

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A bill that paves the way for the mass killing of stray dogs was passed in parliament late Monday night. The bill, introduced by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), achieved a quorum with the support of its fascist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party.

The law was passed despite overwhelming public opposition. According to a survey conducted by KONDA, 85 percent of the population oppose the killing of stray animals, while only 15 percent say "stray dogs can be put down if necessary".

The bill includes grounds such as stray dogs endangering "people's physical integrity, life safety and standard of living", restricting social life, causing tension between people, causing traffic accidents, attacking farm animals, etc.

According to a statement by Agriculture and Forestry Minister ?brahim Yumaklı at the end of May, there are an estimated 4 million stray dogs in Turkey. According to an Anadolu Agency report, there have been 3,534 road accidents in the last five years in which 55 people have died as a result of stray animals.

Under conditions in which the Israeli genocide in Gaza is escalating into a Middle East-wide war and the cost of living crisis is deepening, the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is putting this issue on the main agenda to polarize the working class and youth to deflect the growing social opposition.

"When All Else Fails, Blame the Dogs," writes author and journalist Kaya Genç in the *New York Times*. Genç writes that "[F]or the government, this is not really about the dogs" and goes on to say, "Mr. Erdogan long ago mastered the art of scapegoating. In his more than 20 years in power, he has pointed to intellectuals, journalists, refugees and others as the source of Turkey's troubles. With the economy

faltering and after a poor showing in spring municipal elections, he and his party have again been looking for somewhere to redirect people's ire."

Before this bill was introduced, the main topic of discussion among the masses was the cost of living and the need to raise wages. According to the survey conducted by Asal Research between July 10-17, 64.6 percent of respondents answered "the economy and the cost of living" to the question "what is Turkey's most important problem," while only 0.5 percent answered "stray dogs."

With annual inflation officially over 70 percent as of July, the Erdoğan government only intensifies its austerity measures. Prices have continued to rise because of a massive increase in taxes on basic goods. However, the government has refused to raise the minimum wage, the salary received by nearly half of all workers. This means that other wage levels generally will not increase.

The draft law proposes the abolition of the current "capture-neuter-release" method, claiming that it brings the stray dog population to an "uncontrollable point." Instead, it proposes that stray dogs will be taken to rehabilitation centres by municipalities and housed until they are adopted. For this reason, the new method is called "capture-neuter-hold-adopt."

However, the contested Article 5 of the proposal paves the way for the killing of stray animals that "pose a danger to human or animal health, whose negative behaviour cannot be controlled, who have infectious or incurable diseases or whose ownership is prohibited."

In a joint statement, the Turkish Veterinary Medical Association, the Turkish Medical Association, the Turkish Bar Association and the Turkish Dental Association drew attention to this and said: "The obscure language such as 'provided that human, animal

and environmental health is taken into account' in Article 1, '... subject to legal exceptions' and '...that may arise for human and environmental health' in Article 4, and 'legal and medical' in Article 6 of the bill leave the door open to euthanasia and take the decision-making power out of the hands of the veterinarian."

"According to the proposed law, it is forbidden to release animals that have been trapped and rehabilitated. However, if the 4 million figure in the proposal is accepted, the current shelter capacity meets only 3 percent of the need. In this case, the question of what will happen to the trapped animals raises concerns," the statement said.

The joint statement adds: "Contrary to claims, the euthanasia/culling method, which is presented as a solution to reduce the dog population, is not successful, whereas all new scientific studies and field applications in different countries are in full agreement that sterilisation is the most appropriate method to reduce the number of dogs."

The increase in the stray dog population is mainly due to the failure of the municipalities, which were obliged by the 2004 law to sterilise and release the dogs, to comply with this obligation.

Çağrı Mert Bakır of *Evrin Akademi*, a reputable website on science in Turkey, states: "According to the law passed in 2004, all 1389 municipalities in Turkey are required to establish shelters that will also serve as sterilisation centres; however, in the intervening 20 years, no shelter has been built in 1200 of these municipalities, and there are more than 1000 municipalities that have not performed even one sterilisation in 20 years."

This situation highlights the role of the bourgeois opposition parties as well as the Erdoğan government in the creation of the current situation.

Based on successful practices in other countries, veterinarians and scientists emphasise that the implementation of a comprehensive sterilisation, vaccination and release or adoption, and the imposition of severe sanctions for the release of adopted dogs onto the streets, can solve the problem in a short period of time. The example of the Netherlands has shown that curbing and even eliminating the problem of stray dogs can be achieved by implementing an effective vaccination, sterilisation and adoption programme.



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