

HDP: Turkey Bans Largest Left-Wing Party

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Phil Hearse and Sarah Parker report on the Turkish State's latest anti-democratic action.

Turkey's leading left-wing formation, the Kurdish-led People's Democratic Party (HDP), the third-largest party in parliament, was shut down on March 17 by the Turkish Constitutional Court, doubtless under instruction from President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. At the same time, in an attempt to decapitate the party, 687 of its leaders were formally banned from holding public office for five years, including many amongst the thousands of party supporters already in jail. Some of these are facing life sentences. Journalist Frederike Geerdink, a close observer of the Turkish political scene, says that 'every relevant person you can think of is on this list.'

Simultaneously the leading HDP parliamentary deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu was expelled from parliament and stripped of his parliamentary immunity, a sure sign of upcoming prosecution.

The pretext for these actions was the party's involvement in anti-government protests in 2014. In reality, it is part of long-term preparations for the 2023 local elections. The aim is to ensure majorities for Erdoğan's Islamist AKP (Justice and Welfare Party) and its allies, the fascist National Party Movement (MHP) win local authorities and mayors in areas where the HDP is strong, especially in the southeast of the country. Apparently, the MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli pushed hardest for the ban, probably calculating that without the HDP in the field, the MHP could strengthen its vote.

A few days after the ban on the party was announced, hundreds of thousands of people of Kurdish origin, and many others, demonstrated their support for the HDP during celebrations for Newroz, the Kurdish New Year. The turnout in Istanbul was massive, as it was in Izmir and also Amed (Diyarbakir) and Van in the Turkish heartland in the southeast of the country, what the Kurds call North Kurdistan.

The mobilisation in Istanbul was explicitly billed as being against fascism and against Erdoğan's decision to pull Turkey out of the Istanbul Convention, a non-binding human rights agreement of the Council of Europe against violence against women and domestic violence, which the Turkish government says is contrary to 'family values.' Violence against women and femicide [\[1\]](#) are rampant in Turkey. The withdrawal from the convention is a blatant demonstration of the patriarchal and misogynistic meaning of the AKP's version of Islamism.

Since the failed military coup in 2016, tens of thousands of regime opponents have been in jail and more than 90,000 teachers, journalists, and civil servants have been dismissed from their jobs. Anti-regime newspapers and TV channels have been closed down.

Despite the closing of many of HDP offices and the jailing of hundreds of its members, mass support for the party is still a thorn in Erdoğan's side. His government is also facing a growing economic crisis. Turkey's economic growth has been fuelled by foreign investment, which needs high-interest rates. On the other hand, the networks of AKP support and clientelism among the middle class and the poor require cheap loans, and that means keeping interest rates low. Last week Erdoğan sacked

the president of the central bank, Naci Agbal, for raising interest rates to 16%. The predictable result was a massive fall in the value of the Turkish lira on international markets, certain to promote inflation and a fall in living standards.

A central factor in the Turkish economic crisis is the profligate military spending [2], which has doubled since 2008. Turkey's AKP is an example of modern fascism in power, however, Erdoğan still has to take account of the weight and power of the military. The country's huge army is needed to maintain internal order especially against the dissident Kurdish population, but also against the Kurdish populations in Syria and Iraq.

Turkey is swivelling its arms suppliers towards Russia, who sold it a sophisticated anti-missile system, and away from the United States. Armament production is also playing an increasing role in the Turkish version of militarised accumulation.

The article by Maya Heighway Sekine linked above demonstrates the increasing 'organic composition' of Turkish military equipment, ie its turn towards hi-tech equipment like drones. Drones are less liable to be affected by the demoralisation of Turkish soldiers and have been used brutally in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq against anti-Turkish fighters and civilians alike.

The hugely wealthy Erdoğan family is deeply involved in this military industrial complex. Drone technology has been aided by a British firm called EDO MBM [3], and its exports to Turkey licensed by the British government along with other weaponry. EDO MBM makes the bomb racks that enable Turkey to turn its drones into lethal bombers.

In 2014 the HDP presidential candidate, co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş, won nearly 10% of the vote. The next year the HDP won 13% in the general election which deprived Erdoğan's AKP of an overall majority. The rise of the HDP was fuelled by the movement of Kurdish-dominated areas in the southeast of the country to create autonomous, self-governing municipalities, a move that was met with brutal military attacks in which thousands of civilians died.

Kurdish-led fighters, organised into the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), played a key role in defeating the Islamist death cult ISIS in northern Syria. Hundreds of them died in this battle, especially in the 2014 bitter fighting to liberate the city of Kobanî on the Syria/Turkey border, in which they were supported by American airstrikes. During this siege, large forces of Turkish tanks and artillery sat on the border watching, while Turkish police tried to prevent volunteers and weapons from going over the border to help the SDF.

SDF losses were much higher overall, with the figure of 13,000 dead often quoted. This is the sacrifice that the Kurdish-led SDF, which included Arab fighters and international volunteers, paid in the struggle to defeat ISIS. Nobody contests that it was the SDF that was the main force defeating ISIS.

Once ISIS had been mainly defeated and US attention waned, Donald Trump gave the green light to Erdoğan to invade northern Syria and attempt to destroy the network of liberated Kurdish-led areas dubbed by the inhabitants 'Rojava.' Rojava became the centre for a historic experiment of self-managing autonomous regions and towns, which put the issue of women's leadership front and centre of its political practice.

Now, however, the Turkish army has moved on to northern Iraq in an attempt to destroy the mountain redoubts of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) which have until now acted as the impenetrable fortress of the movement.

The banning of the HDP, founded in 2012 and bringing together a wide coalition of left-wing forces

behind Kurdish leadership, indicates the AKP's continued utilisation of the playbook of modern fascism. No space for dissent can be tolerated. War against Kurdish rights and self-determination will be deepened. And the need for solidarity with the struggle of the Kurdish people is greater than ever.

Phil Hearse & Sarah Parker

P.S.

- Anti°capitalistresistance. 25 March 2021:
<https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/turkey-bans-largest-left-wing-party>
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Footnotes

- [1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/23/turkey-outrage-rising-violence-against-women>
- [2] <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/increasing-turkeys-military-expenditure-at-what-cost/>
- [3] <https://caat.org.uk/news/building-on-the-smash-edo-successes-brighton-activists-call-to-action/>