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NEWSLETTER

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DEMOCRACY OR NOT?

On occasion of the meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, an intensive discussion started in the European public opinion at the end of January: is Turkey returning to democracy or not? Conservative circles hold that now after the elections a democratic regime exists in Turkey. Even some democratic sections claim that the holding of the elections, especially the victory of the Motherland Party instead of the Nationalist Democracy Party which the junta particularly supported, is a step towards democracy.

Today in Turkey progressives, patriots are waging a difficult, intense and painful struggle for the establishment of a democratic regime, braving mortal dangers to obtain the smallest right. However, instead of helping these forces and ensuring that the peoples of Turkey gain their rights and freedoms, these circles seem to act more on various political, military and economic deliberations. Concessions are given to the pressure from the USA administration who due to its own aggressive plans prefers to maintain a reactionary, fascist regime in Turkey.

To realize whether the developments in Turkey actually

constitute a step to democracy is not a very difficult and complex problem. One has only to apply to Turkey the basic criteria of the Universal Declaration and the European Convention of Human Rights.

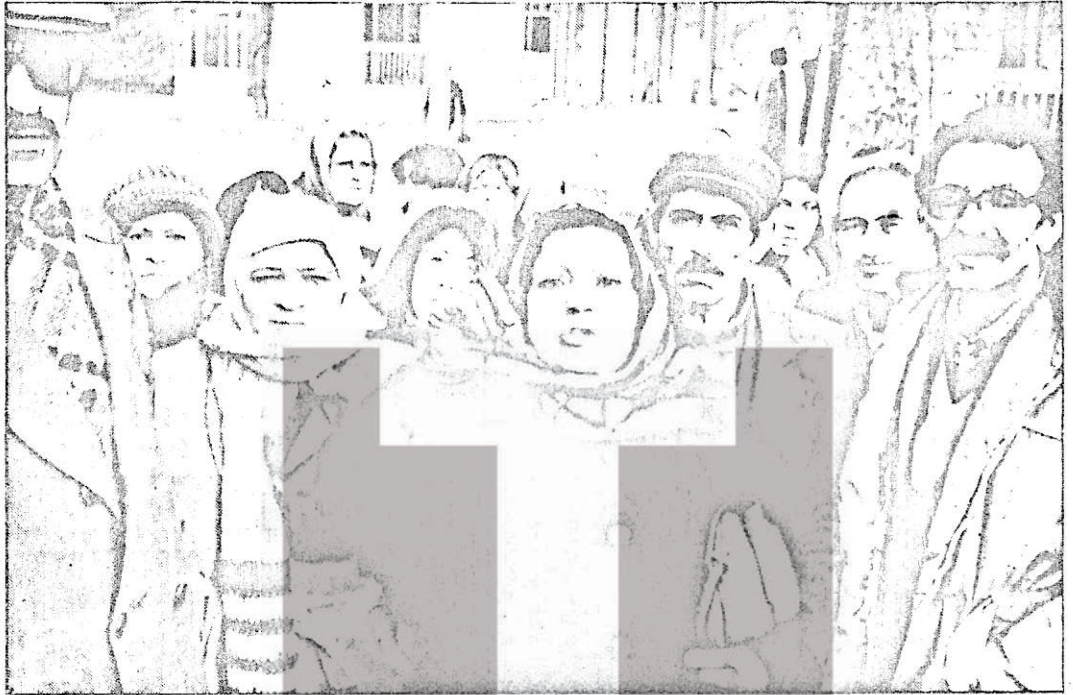
An election where only 3 parties formed under the strict supervision of the junta by persons who took part in all the crimes of the military regime, where all opposition was strictly banned and the people forced to vote - can this be considered democratic? If the people voted for the one among these three parties they thought were remotest from the junta, can this compensate for the way this party was established, its program, the personalities and tendencies of its leaders?

On the other pages of our newsletter information is given about the present situation of the political prisoners. Can such repressions on people whose only offence was to have different political views than the ruling circles be compatible with humanism, much less democracy?

February 13th is the foundation date of DİSK, one of the two largest trade union confederations in Turkey. The leaders of DİSK still "celebrate" this anniversary in prison, under harsh conditions, facing a death sentence. The leaders of the Peace Committee sentenced to long terms last November, and many of them seriously ill, are being slowly murdered by prison conditions. Since Özal took government many more journalists, men of culture have been detained or sentenced. Since November, 23 death sentences have been passed. Can these be reconciled with any concept of democracy?

To those who talk about positive changes, we have to ask: "What has really changed?" Regimes cannot be evaluated with the "good intentions" of their rulers, empty promises and vague declarations, but only with concrete facts. Those who say that they defend democracy and human rights, are friends of our people should turn their efforts to preventing the murder of people in prisons by burning, tortures or with slower means and to the granting of a general political amnesty.

RESISTANCE AND MASSACRE IN MILITARY PRISONS



Families of prisoners at Ankara Mamak Prison

During the past months, conditions at military prisons in Turkey deteriorated even further and the repressions increased. All prisoners and detainees were forced to wear prison uniforms. Some rights obtained with the massive hunger strikes last summer were annulled.

In the face of these developments, resistances started in many prisons. Prisoners refused to wear the uniforms, which according to the laws can only be obligatory for convicts. Their rightful reaction was met with unprecedented brutality, and even massacres.

At the Ankara Mamak Military Prison, the prisoners refusing the uniform were taken out to the courtyard in their underwear, in a freezing cold, and then dosed with water. As a result, many prisoners became seriously ill. At the same

they were prohibited to receive visitors. The anxious relatives of the prisoners rallied together and went to the National Assembly to talk with the president of the Assembly Karaduman, and the Minister of Justice. They asked the repressions on their relatives to be stopped and protested the inhuman practices.

Similar resistances are also continuing at the Metris and Sultanahmet military prisons in Istanbul. Refusing to wear the uniforms, some defendants came to court sessions in their underwear, sessions were adjourned. Visits from relatives were banned. At the Metris prison, some of the prisoners were placed in isolation cells, where conditions are even harder. Many prisoners are suffering from various ailments as a result of this and at the end of January 22 of them were taken to the hospital for stomach bleedings and tuberculosis.

At the Diyarbakır Military Prison the repressions reached the dimensions of a massacre. The soldiers and police attacked the resisting prisoners ruthlessly. A fire broke out at the prison, some of the prisoners were burnt to death. The bodies of 4 of the murdered detainees were given to their families, but the number of killed is reported to be almost 15. Families of prisoners wait at the gates to get some news of their relatives, but they themselves also become victims of police brutality.

The families of the imprisoned Peace Committee leaders also applied to the government for improved conditions for their relatives. As a consequence of this, Committee's president, Mahmut Dikerdem, who suffers from cancer, was taken to the hospital.

What are the actual conditions in the prisons?

The January issue of "Dayanışma" (Solidarity) printed in England published an interview with Mürvet Şenesen who came to this country as a political refugee. She is one of the leaders of the DİSK affiliated Bank Workers' Union. (BANK-SEN) as well as its National Women's Organiser.

Mürvet spent long, horrifying hours in the torture chambers of the junta and lived through the nightmares of military prisons. Her experiences, as told below, are still a daily reality for tens of thousands of political prisoners, among who are hundreds of women:

"I was detained on 25th May 1981 in a dawn raid. Seven plain clothes police officers came to my house. They took me to the 1st Branch (the political police). I was alone at home. I wanted to notify my family, but they wouldn't let me. That was the general practice, those who were detained were never allowed to tell their families, not even to send or leave them a note. Families who either learned or guessed that their relatives were at the police were denied any information by the police or, more often than not, they were turned away with a dismissive "your son, daughter, husband, wife or whatever is not here". Those detainees who died under torture were buried secretly without notifying the families. Sometimes families were told that their relatives had committed suicide. While in detention, we were not allowed to see our families at all. Nor did we have the right to have a lawyer. Even though the legal detention period was 45 days, I was kept in detention for 72 days. There were others who had been there for longer, because the detention period could be extended indefinitely by the martial law command. There were 7-8 of us women in a cold, stuffy cell without light (daylight or electricity), measuring 2.5 square meters. We were not allowed to have blankets or beds. We slept on our coats laid out on the store floor. The cells were filthy. Lice and fleas everywhere. We were not allowed to wash, not even our faces and hands, not even with cold water. Visits to the toilet were restricted and arbitrary. We often could not wait to be taken to the toilet whenever the officers chose, so many of us used empty food cans to pass urine. We soon had to learn to live in this overcrowded cell with our urine cans, mucky shoes next to our food and "beds" consisting of our coats. If we were more than 8 in the cell, we had to take turns spreading our coats on the floor in order to sleep. Otherwise we couldn't fit in.

We had to give our statements blindfolded and under torture. When we were at the police under detention, they routinely blindfolded every person immediately after he or she was taken out of the cell. The interrogation lasted for days and at each session we were subjected to all kinds of torture, ranging from beatings, "fālaka" (beating of the soles while hung head down), electric shocks to all but mainly genital parts of the body, to sexual assaults, including electric shocks to the vagina and the nipples. Sometimes they hung us from under the armpits to hooks or rings at the ceiling and left us in this position, with our feet barely touching the floor for hours. In the time we were not subjected to physical torture, we were forced to listen to and often watch others (male or female) being tortured. Another "game" they played with us was to tie our hands and feet together and squeeze us in a lorry tyre so that they could roll us across the hall to each other like a ball, touching all parts of our bodies with their truncheons and their hands. That amused them tremendously. They often brought wives or husband or other relatives (especially elderly parents) of the detainees and tortured them in front of their eyes, sometimes even threatening to kill them. These are roughly the conditions under which detainees were "questioned", made to "confess" and then arrested. We had to sign our statements prepared by the police blindfolded and without reading. The police always reserve the right to take any prisoner they like back to the detention centre, even after they are convicted. For the prisoners this clearly means going back to torture. And so all prisoners live in a constant threat of being taken back to police. It is not only that. In the prison the soldiers arbitrarily raid the wards, search them. The prisoners are treated like soldiers in a barrack and subjected to military discipline. Once a month the heads of the male prisoners are shaven, and even this occasion is used as an additional opportunity for beatings... Family or legal visits were only 10 minutes a week... Even this was banned often with the slightest excuse, and sometimes this ban lasted for months. In many cases the prisoners were denied the most essential documents, including indictments, related to their trials. The wards were cold and damp... The food was scarce and inedible. Many became very ill, especially with T.B.

They even deny them their medicines. There is food on sale at the prison shop, but prices are very high. Only those whose families can bring money can buy food from the prison shop. We were allowed to go out 5 days a week for 20 minute periods in the prison yard surrounded by high walls with a limited view of the sky above. The prison authorities used any excuse to prohibit almost anything: visits, outings, buying goods from the prison shop, getting and reading newspapers, drinking tea, correspondence, etc, and extended these bans for any length of time... Some of the women prisoners were pregnant and gave birth to their babies in prison. The babies had to endure the appalling conditions of the prison wards - cold, damp, stuffy without any fresh air. We were not allowed to have a stove for heating the milk and food for the babies, washing them or boiling their nappies... Once a week there was hot water in the prison, but not on a regular basis. When we had hot water, each ward had access to it for a mere 15 minutes. There were at least 20 women in even the smallest wards, so we had to develop an unusual skill of washing under 1 minute each! We often had to finish with cold water..."

The force of solidarity

Mürvet succeeded to face all these conditions with a strong resistance and not to submit to the junta. Now she continues her struggle abroad. At the end of December, another prominent woman, Berin Uyar, the editor-in-chief of the "Women's Voice" journal was released, albeit temporarily, after 2.5 years of imprisonment. However there are still hundreds like them in prisons. Reha İsvan, who although approaching sixty staunchly defended peace against the fascist tribunal, Fethiye from Ankara who does not refrain from protesting tortures and prison conditions at every court session despite her damaged backbone, Vildan, the mother of two at Gölcük, Ülkü who lost her baby under torture at Diyarbakır, they and many other continue to suffer these conditions, but never bow their heads.

Solidarity is a strong weapon to save these brave women and men from prison. Let us use it much more strongly to save their lives and ensure a general political amnesty in Turkey.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- One of the first official declarations of the new prime minister, Turgut Özal, has been that they will "develop the middle strata". Now everyone in Turkey is wondering who the middle strata are. They are obviously not the workers, but it seems state employees cannot come into this category either. It was announced that 551 thousand state employees only managed to survive in 1983 by borrowing 22 billion Turkish liras from the Savings Bank. In the first 5 days of January 20 thousand queued to get new loans.
- Agricultural producers also had their share in the new package of price rises. The price of artificial manure rose by 60%. The president of the Turkish Agricultural Society declared that small producers were condemned to hunger. After the new price hikes, many experts prognose a sharp drop in agricultural production in Turkey.
- An OECD report announced that, with an estimated ratio of 17% Turkey would be among the first three member countries with regard to unemployment in 1984. In the meanwhile, a government speaker stated that the number of the totally and partially unemployed had reached 8 million.
- A research by Yol-İş (Road and Construction Workers' Union) states that 1100 workers died in work accidents in 1983. Out of a total 56 thousand such accidents, 27 thousand occurred in the construction sector, which was followed by the mining and textile branches.
- As a consequence of increasing unemployment and poverty, new children join everyday those millions who already are in need of public assistance. The homes for such children are simply in a horrible state. In his first months in power, junta chief Evren used to make a lot of promises about these homes, but they came to nothing like all the other promises and conditions deteriorated in fact. For example last month 207 children in such a home in Istanbul were hospitalized with food poisoning after eating the left-over stale turkeys which a supermarket "donated" after the new years' eve.