



İlerici kadınlar derneği

progressive
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NEWSLETTER

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SUPPORT TO TURKISH INTELLECTUALS

The manifesto signed by over 1400 Turkish intellectuals stating their observations and demands with regard to a democratic regime in the country has had broad repercussions in the country and the world.

The junta replied to these demands by interrogating all of them and finally establishing a lawcase against 56 persons. The Higher Educational Council announced that there will be investigations about the university teachers who signed it.

On the other hand, intellectuals of many countries declared their support with their colleagues in Turkey and protested the repressions they were subjected to. Among them are Costa Gomes, former president of Portugal, two former prime ministers, Anker Jørgensen of Denmark and Bruno Kreisky of Austria, P. Wastberg, the president of the World PEN Clubs, from Britain the chairmen of the Labour and Liberal Parties, from the USA former minister Ramsey Clark, Nobel laureate Prof. N. Chomsky, singer Pete Seeger, from Greece composer N. Teodorakis and poet Y. Ritzos, from France retired general Sanguinetti and over 2000 other well-known intellectuals.

This support will contribute immensely to the difficult struggle of the intellectuals and people of Turkey.

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EUROPEAN WOMEN MOBILISE FOR PEACE

Women play an important role in the growing peace movement in Europe, constituting in some countries over one half of peace activists. While attempts increase to lead to the world into a nuclear catastrophe, to start "star wars", to produce new types of mass extermination weapons, and the new USA missiles are being deployed in Europe, women are rolling up their sleeves and waging a counter-offensive to sweep these dangers off the face of the world. A poster of Dutch women shows a woman in wooden clogs kicking the Cruise missile. Indeed, women in all countries, in all cities of Europe are daily dealing new kicks on the American missiles with thousands of new initiatives - big or small. And the sum total of all these forms an unbelievably strong force. In spite of all the danger, the women of Europe are full of enthusiasm and energy. Their confidence in their own strength and optimism increases with each day. Women fighting for peace are at the same time working to exchange experiences with each other, to ensure the unity of all the peace forces and to acquire broader information about the dangers to peace.

In June and July two activities took place in Europe to reinforce these efforts. The first was the women's "Peace School" organised by the WIDF and hosted by the Bulgarian Women's Movement, and attended by the representatives of 34 national organisations from 22 European countries, USA and Canada and 5 international organisations. The participants discussed the tasks of women for peace and disarmament, the questions of peace education and ways of organising more massive peace movements. In the Peace School, where they were both the teachers and the students the participants had the chance to have informal discussions on many other subjects, to benefit from each others' experience, to learn and to get new ideas. This novel initiative of the WIDF will undoubtedly play an important role to intensify the European women's struggle for peace.

The "European Women's Peace Week" held in GDR's capital Berlin between July 1st-7th was another activity organised by the Democratic German Women's League bringing together women from many peace movements in 23 European countries, USA and Canada. The WIDF was represented with a delegation headed by Freda Brown. Mrs. Leticia Shahani, the secretary of the UN Women's Committee spoke to the participants about the importance of women's participation in the peace struggle and the preparations for the UN Conference to be held in Nairobi next year to evaluate the women's decade and draw future strategies. As an example of the significance GDR attaches to the peace movement, high level government representatives participated in the meetings and gave information about GDR's peaceful foreign policy and work for the rights of women and answered questions. The participants found the possibility to learn more about the concrete and constructive proposals and initiatives of the Soviet Union, GDR and other socialist countries for peace and disarmament.

A highlight of the week was the visit to the memorial in Ravensbrück, where the nazis had built a women's concentration camp. To see this camp, where the sufferings caused by fascism and war and been experienced in their most brutal form, confirmed the utmost necessity to strengthen the struggle so that such things can never happen again.

Another women's activity is continuing at present in Sweden. Hundreds of women are camping around the building in Stockholm where the European Disarmament Conference is taking place. The aim is to convey to the representatives of governments the European women's firm demand for peace and to apply pressure on them to take concrete steps at this Conference.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY ARE INTERTWINED

In the last couple of years a current that calls itself feminist has been developing in Turkey. The feminists are, according to their own words, few in number. They also say that the small groups of mainly intellectual women cannot as yet be considered as a movement. Their main activities up-to-date have been to publish articles in various newspapers and journals. A short while ago, they also formed a company called "Women's Circle", whose aim is reported to translate and publish foreign feminist publications, organise exhibitions, conferences, etc.

Feminist groups as such are appearing for the first time in our country. That this coincides with the present stage in Turkey can be explained mainly by two factors: first the deprivation of the democratic, progressive women movement of its right to work openly, and secondly, by the belated effects of the feminist movements that developed in the West at the end of 1960's and the 1970's. Hence the frequent references in their writings to such well-known American feminists as Kate Millet, Betty Friedan, etc.

Obviously, the women of Turkey have to bear heavy burdens. It is not necessary to make deep inquiries to prove that they are treated as second-class citizens, their influence in social and political life is practically non-existent, and that they are discriminated in every field. Feminists criticise this situation and defend that efforts should be made to change it. It is not possible to oppose this just reaction, nor many of their demands concerning women, such as equality in jobs and wages, that motherhood be considered a social function, etc. Although important differences exist among feminist writers, the majority oppose repression and exploitation, and announce to be on the side of peace. These are all very positive of course. However, feminists divide the world into two camps, not as the repressors and

the repressed or provokers of war and anti-war forces, but as men and women. They disregard the necessity in solution of the women problem of the priority of creating the necessary material conditions and providing them opportunities in employment, education, housing, health, and further- in the case of Turkey- of fighting against fascism and establishing the conditions where women can freely express their demands and organise. They come up with individual and abstract solutions and attempt to change the mentality of the people and "transform their conscience" before the implementation of any radical social transformations. Even their proposed form of organisation consists of small groups of women, instead of a movement including broad masses.

Although supporting the rightful demands of the feminists and cooperating with them for their achievement is definitely necessary, one danger should not be disregarded: that feminism spreads the illusion that women's situation can be improved without any deep-going economic, political and social changes in our country. Obviously such changes will not by themselves solve the problems of women. But, to claim that the oppression of women can end without them will only serve to blur the real targets.

The participation of the broad women masses in the struggle against fascism, for peace and democracy is of basic importance for its victory. And, for the large majority of women in Turkey the most burning problems today are poverty -reaching now to the point of hunger-, unemployment, tortures and brutal conditions in prisons, and the growing danger of war. At the same time, by taking part in this struggle, women will acquire new experience towards obtaining their full equality. The progressive women's movement works with this aim in view and does not separate the questions of equality and peace and democracy. As said before, this does not hinder their co-operation with feminists around joint demands. Furthermore, we believe that feminists will also realise in

life how an action for even the most simple demand strikes the walls of repression and fascism.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to look with tolerance at the attempts of some new "enthusiastic" feminists to distort facts. An example of these was the article by Nilgün Özışık printed in the April issue of "Outwrite", a British publication. While telling about the establishment of the "Women's Circle" and an 8th of March meeting they organised, Özışık chooses for some reason not to stick to the truth. According to her, the existence of a small group of feminists in Turkey in 1983, has ensured broad coverage of the International Women's Day in the Turkish press (implying that this was the first time such a thing occurred). She presents "Women's Circle" as a first initiative in the country "by women for women" and evaluates the preparation of a women's page for 5-6 months in a weekly cultural magazine as a great novelty and success.

It is not difficult to understand that Özışık has recently started to be concerned about women's problems. But one also wonders if she has not lived in Turkey in the last 1+years - considering her ignorance in the social developments of the country. Otherwise, she certainly would have noticed the expansion to almost all parts of the country, taking such varied forms as 5 thousand- strong rallies, women's marches, impromptu demonstrations and putting up posters. Neither could she avoid seeing the articles printed about the IWD and the importance of the women's movement, not only in journals of art and culture, but all the democratic press, including organs of trade unions and political parties. Even if she did not read it herself, she certainly would have heard that women were publishing a monthly journal of 36 pages called "Women's Voice" and selling it in 30 thousand copies. Undoubtedly, she would not have squeezed the Progressive Women's Organisation -with over 15 thousand members and

raising for the first time the basic problems of our women to public attention -in such a phrase as "some women's rights groups existing in Turkish history". -Or, is this "enthusiastic" feminist intimidated even by mentioning the name of PWO ? Maybe she is also unaware of the fact that even some of the now feminist women were at one time members of the PWO and a lot of their demands reflect word for word those stated in PWO's program and other documents.

Of course, there were also differences in IWD meetings organised by progressive women and that told about by Özışık- both with regard to their form and the participants. (Those women by the way still continue IWD celebrations, as well as their struggle for women's rights, though now with quite different activities than before.)

We have disappointed Özışık in yet one more point: their stated initiative to open the "first women's coffee house" in Turkey. Such a women's coffee house had already been opened in Istanbul in the 1960's, but soon turned into a sort of card-playing club for well-off ladies. We sincerely hope that the fate of the new one will not resemble that of the first.

However, in order to prevent such failures, one has to know well the conditions of the country, do not disregard the facts of the past and the present, and to think well on questions such as why the "Women's Circle" is permitted to hold only an IWD meeting while PWO members are tried with the demand of sentences up to 30 years for "crimes" such as celebrating 8th of March.

FACTS AND FIGURES

. An old worker murdered his 11-year old daughter who asked for the pocket money customary to be given to children during the religious holidays. He said afterwards: "I have no money. When she asked me for something I couldn't give her, I lost myself." The pensionist father was receiving only 24.000 TL. (US \$ 65) a month, making it impossible for him to meet even the rent and the kitchen expenses. But it was the "sweet" holidays and Zeynep like all children wished to buy candies...

. At a shoe workshop in Istanbul 9 workers were killed as a result of a fire. The average age of the victims were 19. Most of them were girls: Sevda (12), Serpil (14), Yasemin (15), Mehtap (17), Filiz (15), Sevgi (15). The workplace had fulfilled none of the conditions necessary for work security- and yet it had obtained the relevant licence! The children were working there illegally and had no social security coverage. Some of them had started to work at the ages of 9-10, but hadn't even earned enough to pay for their own funeral expenses.

In Turkey 7% of all children below 15 work. This ratio is 53% in the 15-19 age group. Their total number reaches 5 million, which constitutes 35% of the total workforce. Their working conditions are severe and wages minimal- but, they have to work.

The families of the children burnt to death were devastated. They felt themselves guilty, repenting to have sent them to work. This feeling will never leave them all through their lives.

But who are the real murderers- Zeynep's father and the families of the dead child workers, or those who keep up a 324 thousand strong army and spend annually 2.1 billion dollars on armaments, while grudging a penny to be spent for the happiness and welfare of children ? The latter, by the way, have expressed no such pangs of conscience. They have long been immune to such feelings.