

Turkey's Prisons - Shining Trenches of Combat

For many months now the political prisoners in Turkey have been waging a life-and-death battle against the imperialist-backed regime there. Several thousand political prisoners, living in hell-holes notorious the world over as symbols of torture and repression, have risen up in struggle against the efforts of the country's rulers to force them into even more oppressive conditions. The government is trying to move the political prisoners into new prisons, called F-type prisons. Here the prisoners will be kept in small cells, many with a single prisoner in solitary confinement, while none contain more than six prisoners. The aim of the new prisons is to isolate the prisoners, break their spirit of resistance and turn the prisons from schools of resistance into schools of submission.

Millions around the world have become familiar with the conditions in Turkey's prisons through the films of the Kurdish film-maker Yilmaz Guney, who himself spent many years in prison. Guney's films, like *Yol* and especially *The Wall*, vividly depict the unbearably harsh conditions of life in Turkey's prisons, which became synonymous with arbitrary and cruel authority. Domestic and international human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have documented torture in the prisons and repeatedly issued denunciations of the regime for violations of international standards of human rights in its treatment of prisoners.

Perhaps in part borne out of the



Umraniye Prison. Banner says "Let's Dedicate Our Lives to the People's War."

brutal treatment the prisoners received, another characteristic of prison life was also unforgettably depicted by Guney: the boundless solidarity and tender camaraderie of the prisoners, as they sought to carry on dignified lives in conditions designed to rip away every shred of human dignity.

Now, the Turkish government is acting forcefully to move the prisoners into the even more oppressive conditions of the F-type prison system. In October 2000, as the government began manoeuvres to implement the new prisons, the political prisoners counter-attacked. First a few hundred, then

many hundreds more, launched hunger strikes to expose the government's manoeuvres and to rally domestic and foreign public opinion against the government's strategy. In the battles that followed, many dozens have lost their lives. Yet, as AWTW goes to press, the prisoners are valiantly carrying on their fight. Comrades from the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist) - TKP(ML) - a participating party in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), have played a leading role in this struggle. Also taking part in launching the battle have been members and supporters of the Revo-



Family protest and mourn the death of Ender Can Yildiz.

lutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKPC) and the Communist Workers Party of Turkey (TKIP), neither of which is a Maoist organisation.

POLITICAL PRISONERS
- "OBSTACLES" ON
THE PATH OF
RENEWED GRANDEUR

The political prisoners occupy a special place in the political life of the country. Mass upsurges that rocked the country in the late 1970s and have punctuated political life since then have left many thousands of political prisoners in Turkey. Many had also been imprisoned for participation in, or support for, the revolutionary warfare being waged there, in particular that led along the lines of people's war by the TKP(ML) as well as the war against national oppression waged by the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK). Both of these are banned organisations. Long years of fascist repression of these various struggles has resulted in an explosive mix of thousands of revolutionary political prisoners of different political stripes in a couple of dozen major prisons scattered across Turkey.

In standing together against

April 2001

Comrade Ender Can Yildiz had been a leading member of the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist), including a member of its Central Committee. On 18 April 2001, he joined the over 60 others who by then had given their lives in the battle being

waged by the political prisoners of Turkey. He was buried amidst a sea of red flags, with revolutionary slogans punctuating the air. His mother Hanife led the funeral procession. The frail elderly woman had wrapped a red ribbon around her head, with the words "Ender Can is immortal" written carefully in black. When asked by a British reporter how she felt about the death of her son, she carefully chose her words, "My son didn't lose this fight. He won and I'm proud of him. We will keep fighting until victory."

The TKP (ML) Bureau Abroad released a statement on Comrade Ender Can Yildiz's death, which declared:

"Comrade Ender Can Yildiz was arrested in 1985, when he was carrying out struggle among the student youth. He was sentenced to 12 years and 6 months imprisonment. He persisted in the struggle for communism in Metris and Canakkale Prisons. He was released in 1990 and took his struggle to the mountains. He took part in the People's War led by our Party, the TKP(ML). He was a leading cadre of the TKP(ML).

"He was captured by the enemy as a prisoner of war in 1995, for being a TKP(ML) Central Committee member, and the enemy demanded his execution. He persisted in his struggle in the Diyarbakir, Malatya and Elbistan prisons and in the Sincan F-type prison.

"Comrade Ender Can Yildiz was a symbol of communist resistance. His time in prison was spent in total resistance and years and days of constant struggle under torture, interrogation and imprisonment. He defeated the enemy in its own den. He was the symbolic flag of fighting, resisting and winning.

"He persistently defended and carried out the line of the TKP(ML) in every circumstance and was an active defender of the Maoist science."

the cruel repression meted out by the prison authorities, the prisoners have developed deep, cherished bonds of solidarity, camaraderie and mutual respect, despite sometimes sharp political differences. The prisons were turned into schools of revolution, marked by fierce debate and struggle over the direction of the Turkish revolution. They became centres of learning, where peasant youth arrested for something as simple as speaking Kurdish to soldiers might learn to read using Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*, or where political novices brought in under the draconian "anti-terror" laws for mere possession of a leaflet by a banned organisation learnt to become Marxist political organisers or military strategists. The prisons became centres of internationalist solidarity, closely following revolutionary struggles around the world. The political prisoners in Turkey have, for instance, raised their voice at every crucial point in the eight-year struggle to defend the life of Communist Party of Peru Chairman Gonzalo.

Most of all, the prisons are a centre of unyielding resistance to the reactionary regime. Bit by bit the political prisoners have steadily won the respect of everyone in Turkey that ever harboured dreams that life under the bourgeoisie and generals was not the best possible world. Guney's great film *Yol* provocatively raises the question facing prisoners on day release, of just how much freer they really are when let out into the larger society, where the social roles imposed on people trap them within the less visible walls of class relations. This and other films also reflect the exceptionally weighty role that political prisoners have played in Turkey for many years.

THE F-STYLE PRISONS - FRONT LINES OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Long ago the Turkish government developed plans to break the spirit of the political prisoners by introducing the new F-type isolation cells, and in fact built some of the new prisons back in the early and mid-1990s. According to the evidence compiled by a variety of independent observers, including judicial experts, doctors, human rights groups and journalists, the F-type prison system amounts to a gross violation of international human rights.

The cells are small and have just

enough room for bunks and a table. There is a toilet with a tap just above the toilet basin, so that the toilet doubles as a shower. Some cells have television sets, but these can only be operated by the prison authorities through a central control panel. The prisoners, in other words, have no control over when and what they watch. There are no facilities for exercise or sport, and no access to a library or canteen. The prisons have few, if any, external windows and there is no natural light in the cells. The prisoners will, therefore, be kept in artificial light, which will also be controlled by the prison authorities. Each cell has a door that leads to its own 16 square metre courtyard, which is enclosed by high walls. The government says that the prisoners will have no more than one hour a day access to this yard. In practice, however, access is granted only at the discretion of the prison authorities. The cell doors will be kept closed night and day, and meals will be delivered under or through the doors.

Turkish government propaganda describes these cells as being "nicer than a hotel room". In response, the prisoners have stopped referring to their "cells", and now sarcastically call them their "rooms". A report on the first F-type prison, Kartal Soganlik, by Human Rights Watch concluded that, "apart from weekly family visits lasting half an hour, prisoners are locked down 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with no social or even visual contact with any other person outside their cell". The entire system is thus designed to impose extreme conditions of isolation upon thousands of political prisoners. Does anyone doubt that the practice of torture, whose widespread usage has been confirmed even by the European Union, flourishes under conditions of such secrecy? They hope terror will race through the head of an isolated political captive every time the cell door creaks open.

To counter the broad international and domestic criticism of the F-type prisons, the government has claimed that they are to be used only against "a small handful of terrorists". In fact, the prisons are the leading edge of a broader and more ambitious reactionary attack. While the F-type prison legislation states that those convicted of "acts of terrorism" will be housed in the prisons, in fact the Anti-Terror Law is so broad that one can be convicted

under its provisions merely for possession of a leaflet by a banned organisation. What's more, the overwhelming majority of political prisoners in Turkey have not been convicted of anything at all! They are merely on remand awaiting or standing trial, which often takes many years.

Everything about this new prison system reflects the fact that the repression of the political prisoners is linked to the goal of strengthening the rulers' hold on society in general and of subduing political resistance throughout the country.

THE POLITICAL PRISONERS - A HARD NUT TO CRACK

The government initially attempted to impose the F-type isolation system in 1991, but this was met with a mass, courageous struggle by the prisoners. By official count, 17 prisoners lost their lives in the unequal struggle, but the prisoners' cause inspired broad support, and the government, exposed and humiliated, was forced to back down.

In 1996, the government again tried to introduce the F-type isolation system. Yet no sooner had they issued a ministerial circular ordering the system's implementation than an upsurge of resistance broke out once more. A hunger strike swept through the system, during the course of which 12 prisoners died, and broad solidarity developed. Once more, the government, bruised and shaken, had to back down.

So in 2000, when the Turkish authorities announced that they were yet again going to introduce the F-type prisons, no one had any illusions about whether the prisoners would resist. Nor did anyone have any illusions that the ruling classes were launching this attack lightly. Having been forced to back down on the new prisons twice already, making a third attempt clearly indicated that the government was determined that this time it would see this offensive through to the bitter end.

What underlay this perhaps foolish determination on the part of the Turkish authorities was their reactionary fantasy of assuming a greater role in the imperialist division of labour, as power relations in the Near East undergo significant shifts, combined with a sense of urgency in dealing with heightening instability in Turkey.



Map of Turkey showing the location of the main political prisons.

TURKEY - CAUGHT BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The ancient city of Istanbul fittingly bestrides the Bosphorous Straits, the ancient border between East and West. Indeed, the city now looks much like many other urban giants of the Third World: a "Western-style" island of glittering steel and glass skyscrapers casts its shadow over vast shanty-towns, which provide refuge for millions from the hinterlands of largely "Eastern-style" peasant agriculture. However, the position Turkey occupies, between imperialist West and oppressed East, is unique. Turkey, though a semi-feudal, semi-colonial oppressed country, is a key member of NATO, the US imperialist-led military alliance centred in Europe, and has been a long-standing applicant for membership of the European Union too. Indeed, until not much more than a century ago, the Ottoman Empire, centred in today's Turkey, ruled over substantial parts of Europe itself.

This unique position and history, bestriding East and West, fuels grandiose fantasies on the part of the Turkish ruling class. They have faithfully served their Western imperialist masters, now mainly the US, for decades, and dream of expanding their role as regional gendarmes.

As part of NATO, Turkey had for decades been a front-line bulwark

against the then social-imperialist Soviet Union. During these years Turkey's rulers secured for themselves a special place in the Western alliance military division of labour, and built up what some consider the fourth largest army in the world, complete with a modern well-equipped air force. With the collapse of the USSR, Turkey's rulers were concerned that this position would be lost. But the Gulf War saw Turkey once again play a key part in the Western military effort, offering its youth up as cannon-fodder for the imperialists. Turkish airfields were a vital

base for bombing runs against Saddam Hussein's regime. Afterwards, Turkey's military prowess was again drawn on in the Balkans conflict, where it has fielded large numbers of troops.

There have, however, been some shifts in Turkey's role since the collapse of the USSR. It now plays a forward role on behalf of the US in establishing roots in Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc.). Its role has been key with regard to capturing control of the vital oil fields being developed in this region, and US military aid has been

"...So, in short, each one of our comrades and loved ones, at this very moment, is in the midst of putting into practice their responsibilities towards our family, people, revolution and history, along with their devotion to self-respect and our values and principles written in blood. So in this respect, it is blatantly clear that the length of the days and the harshness of the conditions during our resistance cannot be put forward as excuses. The task has to be shouldered; if not, one is going to roll into the quicksand of treachery or carry water to the water-mill of tyranny and exploitation by slyly reaching out to the so-called middle road.... So we said: Even if one person remains alive in this fight, those who are locked onto the heavens with determination to resist, fight and to win will inevitably find themselves embracing the victory dance."

- from Cafer Tayyar Bektas

(A TKP(ML) Death-fast fighter in Sincan F-type prison, published in *Revolutionary Democracy*, 16-28 February 2001. Cafer Bektas has since died in the struggle.

stepped up as a consequence. In addition, in the last few years Turkey has strengthened its relations with the Zionist rulers of Israel, and has now become one of their most important partners in the region.

The position of Turkey as a bulwark for imperialism in the region has thus been reinforced, not diminished, over recent years. The Turkish rulers nonetheless face some serious obstacles on their path to accomplishing their reactionary fantasy of expanding

Turkey's regional position.

Not least of these has been the intransigent rebellion of the Kurdish masses, concentrated largely in the south-east of the country. The Turkish military has been instituting a programme of ruthless repression in large parts of the country in their efforts to subdue the resistance forces led by the PKK. At the heart of their tactics was drying up the "sea of the people" in which the guerrillas have tried "to swim": this meant, in short, depopu-

lating much of the Kurdish countryside to cut off support for the Kurdish resistance. More than 3000 villages have been burned to the ground, literally disappearing. Millions of Kurdish peasants have been driven into the swelling shanty-towns of Diyarbakir, Ankara, Istanbul and the other large cities. Despite this, vast areas of Turkey remain unsubdued.

In 1999, with assistance thought to come from the CIA and Israel's Mossad, or perhaps both, as well as

"Let's Dedicate Our Lives to the People's

25 November 2000

What follows is the ceremony speech given by a TKP(ML) death-fast fighter in Sagmacilar Prison. The ceremony was held when the prisoners converted their hunger strike into a death-fast and formally put on the red headbands to denote that they were now on a death-fast. The speech was originally published in *Revolutionary Democracy*, No. 22, 16-31 December 2000. (Note: "Trench comrades" refers to comrades from other organisations that are involved in the political prisoners' battle.)

I salute you all with the strength that we draw from the international proletariat and the oppressed peoples of the world. I salute you all with the strength that we draw from our scientific ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. I salute you all with the red colour of the international flag that is rising from the Andes, Himalayas, Naxalbari and the Munzurs.

Comrades and trench comrades; revolution is like the rose-faced baby born screaming in the midst of the painful writhing of the woman. At the end of a long and painful revolutionary war, we will see the birth of this rose-faced baby and through a series of revolutions, proletarian cultural revolutions, we will raise it and ensure its development. ...all the way until we reach a classless, borderless communist society free from exploitation; that perfect world, the golden age of humanity. We are going

through a new and painful period within the revolutionary war; a period in which we are fully engaged so as to achieve this utopia.

At the same time, this is a sharp period, during which the question of what it means to be a revolutionary is being re-tested ideologically, politically and organisationally. Every revolutionary individual, organisation or party that fails to meet the demands of such a sharp period will not be able to keep up with the rhythm of the revolutionary wave that is rising on the world stage and thus will either slip and fall or will be left dragging in its wake.

The responsibilities that we, the imprisoned fighters and political prisoners, are shouldering have further increased as a result of the cell attacks, which are within the framework of the strategic policies of imperialism and fascist dictatorship. The imprisoned fighters, who have never shown any hesitation in shouldering their responsibilities, are continuing to take up their responsibilities today. Over the past year, having gone through a series of battles, some small and some large, we have now reached the summit of our fight to win by undertaking our death-fast assault. In scaling this summit, some of us have been given the task of fighting in the front lines by our parties....

Comrades, trench comrades; at this moment, whilst I am speaking here before you, I feel just as emotional as I felt on the day that I was entrusted with this task. I feel the enthusiasm and

the passion of a guerrilla, a people's warrior, pounding the enemy positions with hundreds of bullets, then not having realised how hot the barrel of his rifle has become, he licks it and burns his tongue.

Wherever we are and in whatever conditions, the feeling that we are experiencing is the enthusiasm of the guerrilla, which is the product of our common spiritual shaping. This is the passion and enthusiasm of locking into revolutionary base areas of political power under our battle-cry: "Let's Dedicate our Lives to the People's War", in defiance of the attacking policies of fascism, which are aimed against the political power that we hold in our sights. This is the passion of knowing that we are pounding the very same target that the guerrillas are pounding.

Alexander the Great, when describing the superiority of his army in battle, said: "My soldiers are fighting not to die but to win."

For a fighter, this is an important point that needs to be grasped. Geronimo, who has taken his place in our souls and in the history of the souls of the oppressed, despite not having written any books about the art of war and the history of war, makes the following statement: "without there being the gate of death, there cannot be a revolution in the wheel of life." This is also a second important point that needs to be grasped by a revolutionary warrior. It is, therefore, necessary to make sac-

more direct help from its long-standing rivals in the Greek intelligence services, Turkey finally managed to capture PKK leader Ocalan, dealing a sharp blow to the Kurdish struggle. The generals at the heart of the Turkish power structure wanted to follow this up quickly and turned their attention to another big obstacle looming on their path: the thousands of political prisoners. By beating down the political prisoners, the imperialist-backed rulers of Turkey were hoping to follow up

the blow to the Kurdish struggle with a punch to these front-line fighters of the oppressed, intimidating larger ranks of the society and tightening their grip throughout the society in general.

The Turkish rulers were not, however, operating from a position of strength. Despite the rulers' pretensions to European status, Turkey is an oppressed country. Many millions of its people are impoverished peasants tilling the land of absentee landlords in semi-feudal conditions, while millions of others swell the urban shantytowns, providing a constant source of fuel for revolutionary struggle.

Moreover, even as the battle with the political prisoners entered its opening phases, a new threat to the Turkish rulers arose from another quarter. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had concluded that the country's financial situation was deteriorating, and required that the authorities take harsh counter-measures. A typical IMF austerity programme was imposed: taxes on consumer staples, like petrol, were hiked dramatically and social spending was cut. The value of the Turkish lira fell by 50 per cent, making foreign goods, including many foodstuffs, prohibitively expensive for the basic masses. Gross domestic product per person is set to fall over 20 per cent in one year. As the new Minister of the Economy in Turkey is himself a former IMF official, many concluded that imperialist capital was taking a more direct hand in the affairs of the country. Mass protests, including several conducted by businessmen, rocked the streets of Istanbul and the other main cities.

TWO-LINE STRUGGLE

The authorities, therefore, had to deal with the prisoners' hunger strike amidst a situation of mounting social turmoil. They had to move very carefully.

For the political prisoners, the decision to launch the hunger strike and enter into decisive battle with the regime's F-type prison plans was taken only after intense debate and struggle. Many parties and organisations opposed the initiative of launching the hunger strike. Some said it was "adventurist" because the control of the reactionary trade unions over the labour movement had, as yet, not been

broken and the mass movement was weak. Therefore, they reasoned, a revolutionary struggle by the prisoners against the state would be "divorced from the masses". Some revisionists said it would even be an obstacle to the working class. The pro-Albanian forces and others argued that the "streets should be taken as decisive", and that struggle centred in the prisons would inevitably fail. Still others preached that this struggle would overshadow the workers' struggles and would cause a deviation in the workers' movement, while yet others said that this struggle would rule out the street struggles and so did not represent a mass line. This mechanical view fixed the prisons as following in the wake of the streets, thereby failing to understand that the prisons had become a leading centre of the revolutionary movement, a front-line symbol of resistance to the regime, and that to unleash the movement in the streets the prisoners must take a leading role.

The position of the prisons on the front-lines of the revolutionary struggle was not something that was necessarily wished for or sought. But history does not only throw up battles that one might wish to fight, but also battles that one cannot avoid fighting. Whatever the desires of the different "left" forces, the prisons had objectively been thrust into the forefront of the class war in Turkey. In response to these arguments, the TKP(ML) made it clear that the state had taken up the task of liquidating one of the centres of the revolutionary movement. Any failure to act at this stage would have meant surrendering the masses to the enemy.

Other parties and organisations also argued that the hunger-strike resistance should be started only after the government storms the prisons. Again, the Maoists pointed out that the government was hoping to capitalise and build on the demoralisation and defeatism that inevitably arose in the wake of the blows inflicted on the PKK, and that the revolutionaries must take the initiative, puncture the wave of gloom and themselves decide the timing and conditions for a battle that everyone agreed was inevitable.

The rightist lines influenced the fact that the supporters of many of these parties and organisations did not initially join the hunger strike. From the beginning, the PKK leadership also

War"

rifices with the courage to die for revolution; it is, therefore, necessary to mobilise the masses for revolutionary war with the courage to die. Consequently, as Comrade Gonzalo, who is a prisoner kept in solitary confinement in the dungeons of Peru by the Peruvian state, says: "it is necessary for us to learn to carry our lives on our fingertips."

This is precisely what we are doing today. Our aim is to win, to win by fighting....

We are revolutionaries, communists; this is why we want revolution, independence, new-democracy and socialism.

This is why we are resisting against the cells, this is why we are insisting on revolutionary war.

...Chairman Mao taught us that only he who is not afraid of death by a thousand cuts can unseat the emperor; and because our leader and guide, Ibrahim Kaypakkaya, taught us to leap with everything we have into the sea of class struggle.

With this consciousness and courage, I am entering the trenches of the death-fast front. I salute you with my comradeship and my feelings of trench-comradeship. I wish all of you success in achieving days full of victory.

Long Live Our Party!

**We will Win, the People will Win,
the People's War will Win!**

**TKP(ML) Death-fast Fighter/
Sagmacilar Prison**

pulled back from this struggle. But once the battle was joined and mass support developed, the situation changed dramatically.

From the beginning, the TKP(ML) has linked the political prisoners' fight with the larger battle against the regime, and, in particular, with the necessity of overthrowing the regime through protracted people's war. In the countryside, the TKP(ML)'s armed forces, the Workers' and Peasants' Liberation Army of Turkey (TIKKO), had

carried out significant armed actions in the Black Sea area and in the Dersim region during the months the regime was setting its F-type prison plans into motion. In January 2000, an elite group of Turkish security forces had been operating in the guerrilla area, seeking revenge for an earlier attack in which an army helicopter had been shot down and several high-ranking officers, including one divisional commander, had been killed. Once again the guerrillas launched an ambush, this time killing

three and wounding several others. The TIKKO guerrillas issued a statement saying that their action was in the service of the People's War and in opposition to government moves to institute the F-type prisons.

The political prisoners themselves have raised the battle cry, "Let's Dedicate Our Lives to the People's War!" In addition to the abolition of the F-type prisons, the strikers are also demanding an end to the oppression of the Kurdish people; abolition of the

Carry the Death-fast Resistance to Victory!

Call by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist)

The following is a call to the broad masses of people in Turkey by the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist). It was issued in December 2000, as the battle hotted up in the days immediately preceding the government's massive attack on the political prisoners. Tens of thousands of copies were distributed throughout Turkey and in the Turkish and Kurdish immigrant communities of Western Europe.

The process we are now in clearly shows that the crisis of the comprador bourgeoisie and big landlords is growing deep, both politically and economically. The ruling classes are putting the financial cost for their crisis onto the backs of the workers, peasants and other oppressed people.

The state wants to smash the resistance of the democratic demands of the Kurdish nation and other minorities and to attack the democratic demands of the workers, peasants and students.

The fascist Turkish state also attacked the communists and revolutionaries who are between the four walls of the prisons, wanting to capture them not only physically but also ideologically and politically. There are more bloody attacks on the political prisoners now than ever in the past. For this reason they have put forward the "F-

type" prisons.

As a result of this policy of the fascist Turkish state, in the prisons the TKP(ML), DHKPC and TKIP political prisoners have put their bodies into the death-fast and have started a glorious resistance. Their belief in revolution is leading their spirit of resistance, and our Party, the TKP(ML), is certain that the communist and revolutionary prisoners will win.

The political prisoners, who are freedom's sun in the prisons, quickly mobilised their families. Revolutionary resistance against the state has had a big impact on the oppressed masses in a very short time, and has brought people into the streets to protest and fight against the state in cities across Turkey. The Turkish state has tried different manoeuvres in an unsuccessful attempt to pacify the masses, but the oppressed masses, communists and revolutionaries have been writing history with their blood.

Our Party, the TKP(ML), has saluted the communists and revolutionaries' resistance with practical actions. In Karadeniz (Black Sea area), in Dersim (Kurdistan), in Marmara (Istanbul area), and abroad the Party has mobilised all its supporters and other masses in order to unite with the struggle of the communist and revolutionary prisoners, and the Party has played a crucial role in this struggle everywhere.

In every corner of the world, waves of revolution are developing and rising. This new wave is scaring the imperialists and the reactionary ruling class. This struggle in Turkey is part of this new wave.

With the support of imperialism, in September 1992, Chairman Gonzalo (leader of the Communist Party of Peru) was captured by Peru's Fujimori regime. But imperialism and reaction couldn't stop the People's War in Peru. As Gonzalo himself said on 24 September 1992 in his speech from the cage, this is just a "bend in the road" of the People's War. Just as the Fujimori regime in Peru has isolated Chairman Gonzalo, the fascist Turkish state wants to isolate the communist and revolutionary political prisoners in Turkey.

As Maoists, the task today is to fight against collaboration and capitulation wherever we are, in the process of building people's democracy, socialism and communism, and smashing imperialism and the reactionary ruling class.

**Long Live the Death-fast
Resistance!**

Long Live People's War!

Glory to Our Party TKP(ML),

**Our Army TIKKO and Our Youth
Organisation TMLGB!**

state security courts, which are used to railroad political prisoners; and withdrawal of the IMF economic "reforms", which are causing such hardship for the masses.

As the leaders of the revolutionary proletariat have all forcefully pointed out, any significant step forward inevitably involves fierce struggle against wrong lines. Though initially the resistance was not able to unite as broadly as might have been hoped, the political prisoners were convinced of the justness of their cause, and of the necessity of their action. It would, however, take fierce, protracted struggle and sacrifice to prove them right.

THE BATTLE IS JOINED

The hunger strike started on 20 October 2000. For the first month, the media adopted an informal ban on news of the political prisoners' resistance. Indeed, no news at all appeared in the major media about the hundreds of political prisoners on hunger strike. The issue was now put squarely on the agenda: would the revisionists and social-democrats be proved right, would the masses stand aside from this battle? The answer was not long in coming.

On 25 November, 10,000 people marched from the Hippodrome in Istanbul to Apdi Ipekci Park in solidarity with the political prisoners' struggle. Two hundred lawyers marched in legal gowns, and nine of them began a hunger strike themselves. Support groups were set up among the different professions: journalists against F-type prisons, human rights activists against F-type prisons, and others. Support poured in from every part of the society, soon exceeding the expectations not only of the revisionists who had opposed the action or vacillated, but even of the revolutionaries who had launched the battle.

Also in November, inspired by the stand of the political prisoners, the common prisoners rose up, seized several prisons, took guards hostage, and demanded, among other things, an end to the brutal conditions in Turkey's prisons.

The families of the political prisoners played a particularly key role. They maintained continual vigils outside the prisons, and some even went on hunger strikes themselves.

Strong support came from the com-



Istanbul, Turkey, 20 December 2000. Demonstration in support of political prisoners.

munity of several million Turkish immigrants who are scattered across Europe, mainly in Germany. Picket lines were thrown up at official Turkish sites throughout the continent. In Rotterdam, a young Turkish man who had gone on hunger strike in solidarity with the political prisoners was stabbed and killed by the Grey Wolves, a Turkish fascist group.

The battle was heating up. By early December, subsequent waves of political prisoners had joined the hunger strike, and over a hundred had begun a death fast. Support demonstrations in the streets became scenes of bitter street fighting with the police. In Istanbul, police shot and killed a young man putting up posters in support of the political prisoners. In the Gazi Osmanpasha district of Istanbul, TIKKO forces counter-attacked by ambushing a police bus carrying anti-riot forces, killing two and wounding 11. In response, thousands of police came out onto the streets to demonstrate, waving their guns and demand-

ing intensified repression. In Ankara, a demonstration in support of the political prisoners turned into a 5-hour pitched battle with the fascist Grey Wolves and the police. It was the fiercest fighting of its kind in the city since the 1980s.

In this escalating situation, government officials suddenly agreed to conduct indirect negotiations through the well-known writer Yashar Kemal and other intellectuals. The Minister of Justice floated the idea that the F-type prisons might be postponed. This was clearly a tactic aimed at demobilising the political prisoners and their supporters, softening them up for what was to come.

The situation was complicated by support for the prisoners coming from some intellectuals and others who were arguing from a strictly human rights perspective. The resistance of the political prisoners was in danger of being narrowed by these forces, who were nonetheless allies, into a discussion over "how many square metres" of cell

space constituted "a violation of human rights" – rather than whether it was right to oppose the F-type prisons as the leading edge of the reactionary regime's broader agenda.

This fight for public opinion between the government and the revolutionary forces, in particular for the support of the middle forces in the country, was a struggle for positioning in the coming showdown.

THE ATTACK ON THE PRISONS

On 19 December 2000, the Turkish authorities assembled a massive force, consisting of police, army and the notorious "Special Team" security troops, to carry out a simultaneous attack on the political prisoners in 20 different prisons scattered across the country. Bulldozers punched holes in the prison walls so that the security forces could storm in and open fire. Sikorsky helicopters hovered overhead to jam all radio-communications between the prisoners and the outside world, so that they could carry out their vicious plans in secret.

Despite the overwhelming military force they faced, the political prisoners fought back with heroism and courage. According to eyewitness accounts, the prisoners erected barricades and fought back with simple, home-made weapons. They devised gas masks from soda-pop bottles, improvised slingshots and created Molotov-style cocktails from cooking gas. Despite the security forces' military superiority, they suffered the loss of several members and were repeatedly repulsed before the eyes of the entire world. "A Diary of Gebze Prison", an account by some of the women prisoners in Gebze Prison, gives some sense of the fighting that took place on that day.

As they carried out this cowardly attack, the Turkish regime attempted to tighten their control of information about the battle by prohibiting journalists from coming within a mile of the prisons. The Turkish State Security Court issued a decree banning "excessive" coverage of the attack on the prisoners or of the protests in the streets. At the same time, they unleashed a

flood of lies and disinformation to cover their bloody tracks, claiming that the prisoners burned themselves, whereas one of the bloodier crimes of the security forces was to cut a hole in one of the prisons (Bayrampasa) in Istanbul, and pour petrol onto the women prisoners below. This was later confirmed not only by one of the women prisoners, but also by some of the nurses in the hospital treating the injured. Yet the Turkish regime shamelessly called their military attack on the prisons "Operation Restore Life"!

Despite the much superior firepower of the state forces, the political prisoners held out for many hours everywhere, and in some of the prisons for over a day. This gave precious time for thousands of supporters to take to the streets. The London-based Committee to Stop the Repression of Political Prisoners in Turkey reported: "Street protests against the government's vicious attack erupted into violent confrontations with police and the Grey Wolf fascist forces in Ankara, Istanbul, Adana, Izmir and several other cities. Youth and members of the prisoners' families

"You Have the Support of People Around the World"

From *Rossoperaio* (a Maoist newspaper in Italy) June 2001:

"In Italy many sit-ins and other street initiatives in front of consulates and other offices representing the Turkish regime took place in the days following the massacre. They have demonstrated the internationalist unity and high consciousness among the Italian communists, revolutionaries and anti-imperialists of the importance of the struggle of the prisoners against their isolation." Following the 19 December attack on the Turkish prisons, protests took place in 23 cities around Italy. The comrades of *Rossoperaio* and others organised meetings in five cities, including a demonstration in Milan on 23 December. Several hundred people, including relatives of the political prisoners, confronted the Italian police in front of the Turkish consulate, held a minute of silence to honour the fallen martyrs, and sang *The Internationale*.

Dublin, Ireland: A number of picket lines have been held in front of the Turkish Embassy in Ireland in solidarity with the political prisoners. The Turkish hunger strike has struck a particularly deep chord in Ireland. A little over 20 years ago, the British government incarcerated hundreds of Irish republican fighters on the flimsiest of grounds under new "internment" laws. The Irish political prisoners struck back, launching a hunger strike. Bobby Sands, a young revolutionary poet and the most well known of the prisoners on hunger strike, defiantly ran for election to the British Parliament from his prison cell, and, against all expectations, won. The British establishment was shocked and outraged, but nonetheless refused to back down. Sands gave his life, but a wave of solidarity and struggle by the masses in Ireland and around the world eventually forced the British government to back down and withdraw the vicious internment laws.

Excerpt from a statement by the *Revolutionary Worker*, voice of the **Revolutionary Communist Party, USA:**

"As Maoist revolutionaries in the belly of the US imperialist beast, we stand firmly with the oppressed people of Turkey and with the revolutionary sisters and brothers of the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist). Our struggles may be on opposite sides of the earth – but we are comrades in the world proletarian revolution.

"We know that the political prisoners in Turkey are in a dangerous battle. The Turkish regime is vicious and bloody – they have learned well from their imperialist masters – and they have launched many cowardly assaults on the political prisoners.

"But people around the world have seen and have been inspired by the determined and heroic resistance of Turkey's political prisoners. As they face the latest attacks from the oppressors, the revolutionary brothers and sisters in Turkey's dungeons have the support of people around the world."

played a key part in inspiring many others to join in attacking the police armoured cars with stones and Molotov cocktails. In Istanbul's Taksim Square, 2,000 people fought a pitched battle lasting an hour and a half. The head of the police in Istanbul is reporting that the Workers and Peasants Liberation Army of Turkey, led by the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist), has carried out another ambush on Turkish security forces. On 20 December, in Okmeydani, an Istanbul shantytown, the guerrilla forces trapped a police car and wounded two policemen. A local office of the notorious Grey Wolves was also attacked, with one fascist killed and two seriously wounded."

Ultimately, the security forces used their overwhelming military superiority to re-take the prisons, and then carried out bloody reprisals. Many prisoners were immediately transferred to the F-type prisons. Amnesty International reported that the security forces meted out beatings and torture before, during and after the transfers. Amnesty also reports

that some prisoners have not been seen or heard from since the time of the attack on the prisons.

The 19 December battle was sharp testimony to the fighting spirit of the striking prisoners. If the Turkish rulers had any illusions that they could break the spirit of the political prisoners, these have been dashed. A lawyer for the political prisoners reported in the aftermath of the 19 December attack that, "All those that were on the hunger strike are continuing. Many of them are in a critical condition. Most of them were injured in the raids...." Indeed, since then many hundreds of other political prisoners, who had been stirred by the heroic resistance of 19 December, have joined the ranks of those on hunger strike. Following this decisive struggle most of the political organisations that previously opposed the hunger-strike resistance have joined in the struggle.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

In the months since the December attack, the hunger strike has contin-

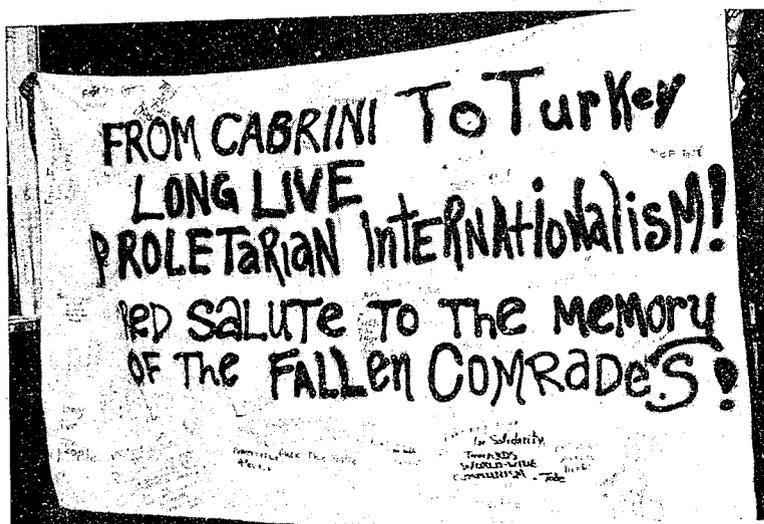
ued, and a number of other political prisoners have given their lives. The political prisoners are continuing their fight under even more arduous conditions. Support has remained strong in Turkey and abroad. In London, on hearing the news of the 19 December attack, 50 supporters seized the London Eye, a gigantic 40-story high Ferris wheel on the River Thames, stopping operations for half a day. Thousands marched through Germany and in many other cities across Europe.

One of the virtues of big battles is that they more clearly sort out friends and enemies. The European powers had previously made a big show of demanding that Turkey "improve its human rights record". In the wake of the 19 December attack, the US and European diplomats in Istanbul "regretted" the methods used in the attack, but then fully justified it, saying that it was of course "necessary" for Turkey to regain control of the country's prisons. Turkey continues to be one of the largest recipients of US military aid in the world.

Unfortunately, some human rights organisations didn't do much better: Human Rights Watch, which had done much to expose the F-type prisons and raise issues of their violation of international human rights, outrageously stated that "the Justice Ministry should clearly not be intimidated by the threat of hunger strikes or prison unrest from taking the right path of action in prison management" — thus turning upside down the truth about who was exercising torture, beatings and compulsion to "intimidate" whom.

Voices were raised in some quarters, particularly from those who had held back from launching this battle in the first place, proclaiming that the government's attack had constituted the defeat of the political prisoners. A statement by the TKP(ML) Bureau Abroad scornfully rebuked this view: "We know this line, for of course those who have limited themselves to getting some temporary rights from the ruling classes cannot and do not want to see the ideological and political victory that has indeed been won. There are never solid guarantees for concessions captured from the system."

The Committee of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) proudly declared to the comrades in Turkey's prisons following the 19 December battle: "Comrades: Your struggle has handed the enemy a political



Several banners of support were sent from the US to Turkey. Above is one from the ghettos of Chicago to the political prisoners in Turkey. It is pictured here amidst a gathering of Turkish immigrants in Europe, on its way to the streets of Istanbul.

From the Union of Communists of Iran (Sarbedaran), December 2000

"Your call tells the world that the

masses of people in Turkey and their communist and revolutionary sons and daughters will not permit the Yankee imperialists and their lackeys to stabilise and strengthen this military base of control and suppress the struggle of the people in this region, to prevent the rise of the new emerging wave of world revolution, to ensure stability and calm for the enemies of the proletariat and the people." ■

and ideological defeat. The bombs, helicopters and assault rifles of the Turkish state failed. Audacious revolutionary struggle and unwavering confidence in the masses and our communist cause was advanced. We are confident that you will continue to fight to turn Turkey's prisons into shining trenches of combat. The revolutionary masses and their Maoist vanguard parties and organisations around the world draw inspiration from your fight and stand shoulder to shoulder with you."

Bourgeois commentators regard

the prisoners' struggle with a mixture of contempt and incomprehension. They are unable to understand a perspective that doesn't enshrine an individual's own well-being as the highest good, where one's deepest allegiances go beyond a person's self and immediate family and embrace not only those who stand shoulder to shoulder with them in a common fight, not only the unknown thousands who tomorrow could face imprisonment at the hands of the Turkish state, but also the broader ranks of the oppressed in Turkey and around the world. By

putting their lives on the line, the comrades in Turkey who have been martyred or who face death today have exposed to the world the reactionary plans of the Turkish state to crush the political prisoners and deal a decisive blow to the revolutionary struggle in that country. Their self-sacrificing struggle has certainly contributed to the advance of the revolutionary struggle there.

In the subsequent months, the Turkish authorities have declared that they are granting some reforms in an effort to wind down the fight that is

A Diary of Gebze Prison

The following is an account of what happened in just one of the prisons, Gebze, when the government stormed the prisons on 19 December 2000. It was originally published in *Revolutionary Democracy* (No. 1, 16-28 February 2001), under the title "Diary of Gebze", and was written by female prisoners, comrades of the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist).

During pitch darkness, just before dawn, the owners of darkness came forward once again. There is no need to calculate how many times they came like this before, as each previous arrival has already taken its place in the annals of history.

We knew that this arrival was going to be different to all the previous arrivals. We knew fascism on its deathbed would attack us in a more frantic manner and ask us to surrender, but has anyone ever seen us surrendering to them? So when we were woken from our sleep, we were aware of the kinds of things that we could expect to experience. Despite all their viciousness, we were certain, as certain as is the dawn, that, just like those before us, we would place an anecdote in the new pages of the history books. We confronted them on their arrival with our slogans, we were declaring to all our loved ones and to humanity as a whole that we

would never surrender.

We jumped from our beds as our comrade, who was on lookout duty, chanted the slogan "Long Live Our Barricade Resistance!" The soldiers were storming the prison through the entrance doors. Barricades were erected in no time. All the preparations were completed. Within two minutes the soldiers had taken their positions on the rooftops, and they were waiting with their weapons pointing towards the dormitories. As they entered the main corridor they shouted: "We are coming, if you have anywhere to run, run... Allah! Allah!" They opened fire on our comrades who were on lookout duty in the main corridor. At that point our comrade was injured in his leg with a bullet that came out of a G-3 rifle. Under heavy fire, other comrades managed to erect a barricade at a certain part of the main corridor. Soldiers couldn't pass the barricades, so they started throwing bombs through the holes they had made through the roofs and ceilings. As the excessive build-up of gas fumes filled the air, comrades at the barricades were gasping for clean air through the side windows. Kenan Tayboran went into a coma after the injury he sustained on his head from something that was thrown through the window; nobody knows whether it was a bomb or a bullet. He was

brought into the dormitory by our comrades, he had no pulse and we couldn't get any reading of his blood pressure. With difficulty one of our comrades, who was a doctor, brought him back to life....

The comrades, trench comrades [comrades from other organisations involved in the battle] and other friends from the ninth, twelfth and tenth dormitories, who had managed to erect barricades in part of the main corridor, were continuing their resistance at their barricades and were quickly abandoning the barricades that they could no longer hold and reassembling at another point. New barricades were erected until friends/comrades from the ninth and tenth dormitories were cornered, at which point countless numbers of smoke and gas bombs were thrown at them and pepper gas was sprayed at them....

The resistance in the male dormitories lasted for 12 hours, until the capture of the death-fast resisters; it then continued in the women's dormitories. We [the women] were giving support to our comrades with the slogans we were chanting and revolutionary anthems we were singing at the barricades, until nightfall. When they headed towards our section, the numbers of soldiers on the rooftops had increased dramatically. They were try-

continuing against them, but they are trying to hold out from stepping back further. The political prisoners' struggle continues to inspire protest marches, hunger strikes and other expressions of support throughout the country and abroad. On May Day, support for the political prisoners was one of the main demands of the 20,000 people who marched through Istanbul in defiance of the police.

The fact that such a powerful revolutionary struggle erupted right in the dungeons where the enemy is supposed to be strongest has given new heart to

millions and showed that through struggle under a correct line and with a lofty perspective the world can be changed. The spirit of Mao – “nothing is difficult in this world if you dare to scale the heights” – is one that the political prisoners have truly embodied.

Even when this battle was in its initial stages, the RIM Committee observed prophetically, “As the political prisoners enter this dangerous battle, the eyes of millions will be on them, and the hearts of the oppressed the world over will beat with theirs. Much is at stake. In pre-revolutionary Russia, Lenin’s

Bolshevik Party led the political prisoners to turn every effort of the reactionary government to contain the political prisoners into an advance for the revolution — dispersing the prisoners only created more schools of revolution in new areas, while concentrating them only turned the existing prisons into mighty fortresses of resistance. So too in Turkey, the government will learn — only too late — that its vicious suppression of the prisoners, instead of leading to social peace, will prove to be a spark igniting even greater battles to come.” ■



Bayrampasa Prison - Istanbul,
after 19 December 2000 attack.

ing to enter by dismantling the barricades. Having destroyed the barricades behind the doors, they entered the empty fourth dormitory. Following a brief period of the usual search, they starting ransacking the place, especially smashing electronic goods, and they ripped female underwear and hung it on the cupboards. They then headed towards the eighth dormitory. Having loosened the supports to the barricade, they managed to make a hole just large enough for bombs to be thrown in, and they started throwing gas bombs repeatedly inside the dormitory. Comrades were stuffing the barrels of the rifles poking through the barricades with specially made wooden pegs. Meanwhile, slogans and revolutionary anthems continued without pause. As bombs started to be thrown through the canteen window, the barricade below was abandoned and a new barri-

cade was erected at the door of the dormitory on the next floor up. The barricade on this floor became the target of similar attacks. Since we didn't have anywhere else to go, we all stood together with

our arms interlinked and continued to chant our slogans. The smoke inside was so dense that we could not see anything. When they entered, they repeatedly threw bombs to the exact point where we were standing with our arms interlinked. Some comrades fainted due to the gas fumes; others were still semi-conscious and chanting slogans as they tried to hold themselves up. They started pouring water on us and beating us with truncheons in order to separate each of us from the others....

Having separated us, they then started pulling us along the corridors lined with awaiting sadists on each side, who beat us as we passed. We were then dragged to the top of the stairs and thrown to the floor below. Meanwhile, we were being beaten to a point close to death and sexually assaulted [in various ways]....

Having taken each one of us to the courtyard, they then attempted to identify the death-fast resisters. We replied by saying: “We are all on death-fast, if you want to take us, take us all.”....

Twenty-eight people [from different revolutionary organisations], who were staying in dormitory number eight and were awaiting trial, have all suffered medical problems, such as: tissue trauma, bruising, medium-scale brain trauma, bone fractures, joint dislocations and vaginal bleeding. Despite these problems they have been denied medical treatment, as all our rights have been usurped....

Yes, they came again; they took away the lives of tens of our loved ones by using the most vicious methods, but they could not take away their ideology and their hearts. Those who fell have already been replaced by others; whilst those who have red headbands on their foreheads are continuing to make history in the cells.

The owners of darkness will be brought to their knees, sooner or later. We will win!

- TKP(ML) female prisoners awaiting trial