

The mother of all struggles – a weekly news review

[9:41 am 14/08/2021](#)



Sarah Glynn

After Monday's stark warning from the International Panel on Climate Change, it is tempting to see everything else as a distraction from the mother of all struggles – the fight to save mother earth. But if this ultimate struggle is to succeed, we need to find an alternative course of action: not technological wizardry, but a different way of living that allows us to share the resources that we already have in abundance. The capitalist era has created societies premised on ceaseless growth. That is a basic tenet of capitalism. But in a finite world, growth must have limits. At the same time, the fatal logic of a system that promotes an insatiable demand for profit has been demonstrated by capitalism's failure in the face of Covid 19. If capitalist society cannot work

in the common interest to vaccinate the world against a deadly virus, how can it hope to stop climate change?

As more and more people come to a frightened realisation that the way we live now is fundamentally unsustainable, indeed suicidal, so more people will also come to realise the need for alternative social models. The good news is that these models exist and many of the ideas are already being put into practice. But those trying to live a different way face constant opposition from dominant forces that benefit from the status quo. Those who have been searching for an alternative model have taken hope from social structures being built up by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, and defence of the Rojava revolution is an important part of the struggle for humanity's future; as is every struggle for a more equitable distribution of resources and for the prioritisation of well-being over profit and economic growth.

This is not to pretend that the social system in North and East Syria, as currently practiced, is ecologically sustainable. It is not; and dirty oil plays an important part in the region's economy. But they have created a pervasive recognition that social values – including respect for the natural world – should dictate economic practice, and not the other way around. The region's bottom-up direct democracy allows these ideas to begin to be put into practice and enables people to implement developments that benefit their community. This has inspired people around the world.

Of course, none of this is appreciated by the Administration's military partners in the United States. They are trying to get the Administration's leaders to make compromises with conservative opposition groups and to create an arrangement more like the neighbouring Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Last week, the Autonomous Administration spoke about their recent meeting with President Macron in Paris, noting that he promised French assistance "to establish political stability". We can be pretty sure that Macron, too, would not see "stability" as including any alternative to capitalist dominance.

The publication of the Climate Change report was accompanied by appropriately apocalyptic weather. In Turkey, drought and wildfires have

been followed by catastrophic floods and mudslides along the Black Sea coast that have left at least 38 people dead and very many more unaccounted for. Turkey rides roughshod over environmental concerns – especially if these are perceived to be getting in the way of profitable development – and has not even ratified the Paris Agreement. (They object to being classified as a developed nation and so missing out on funding available for developing nations.) The exceptionally heavy Black Sea rain was made hugely more damaging by years of development that channelled and blocked natural water flow.

Instead of addressing underlying problems, the Turkish government continues to focus on perceptions. The Radio and Television Supreme Council has agreed fines for broadcasters who gave coverage to the fires, including for discussing this planned censorship. One of the two board members from the opposition People's Republican Party (CHP) was excluded from the meeting for 'bias' simply for informing the public that this was on the agenda.

Of course, it is not just in Turkey that political leaders have shown themselves too concerned about short-term vested interests to act to prevent climate change, even though that means dooming their own grandchildren. It is this blind commitment to greed in the ruling elite that is the driving force behind the many attacks on society that characterise this week's news – as also for so many other weeks.

As climate change makes whole areas of the world unable to support their population and creates a situation where more nations will go to war over limited basic resources, it is clear that even greater numbers of people will be forced to become refugees. But, as we saw in Turkey this week, the world is far from ready to accept this. On Tuesday, an eighteen-year-old Turk lost his life in a knife fight between locals and Syrian refugees in the poor working-class district of Altındağ in Ankara. In response, hundreds of people formed vigilante gangs to attack Syrian homes and businesses. Ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves (linked to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) that props up the Turkish government) came into the area to help ignite violence, and the police have been accused of doing little to stop the attacks. Refugees who had been living in the neighbourhood that came under assault have now been forced to

abandon their homes and move into temporary shelters, with one telling Mezopotamya Agency, “We are under temporary protection, but there is no protection. We need help. It was hell last night. The children were scared out of their minds.”

Nothing can excuse this inhumanity, but the blame has to be shared by those other governments who have been happy to make a deal for Turkey to accommodate the refugees from Syria and keep them out of the rest of Europe. Politicians across Europe have also exploited populist anti-immigrant rhetoric, and nowhere is immune from the growth of violent xenophobia. Germany, the principal supporter of the EU’s shameful refugee deal with Turkey (which I looked at in a previous article) has its own anti-immigrant vigilantes, and the German Interior Minister reported 1,620 attacks on refugees in 2019, including 128 attacks on refugee shelters.

Violence against immigrants has to be understood alongside the ongoing violence against the Kurds. It is another facet of Turkey’s growing fascism. As with the attacks on the Kurds, a spotlight needs to be shone on the actions – and inactions of the Turkish police, and also on the politicians. For the MHP, all non-Turks are potential targets, but for President Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) the position is more complicated. For them, the refugees are political pawns that can be used to gain leverage in Turkey’s relationship with Europe, and also enhance Erdoğan’s status as a leader of the Islamic world. And the CHP is equally calculating. They have been canvassing for popular support with promises to return the refugees to Syria within two years. Calling on people not to attack refugees but to elect politicians who will remove them according to a timetable, is hardly calculated to promote tolerance, let alone any more brotherly or sisterly feelings. Only the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) refuses to get on board the anti-immigrant bandwagon. They are also the only party with serious proposals for the peace that is necessary for people not to need to become refugees in the first place. As Party co-chair, Parvin Buldan, explained in her speech to the people of Bingöl yesterday: “If you say yes to war... people are forced to leave their country... as a result... Millions of people came to our country. Our task is to give them the right to a humane life and finally send them back safely to their

own country as soon as the situation in their country improves. Not to beat them...”

There has been a growing tendency for violence to become normalised at all levels of Turkish society. This week, the CHP filed a criminal complaint against an AKP Deputy Mayor who called for CHP politicians to be hanged; and contributors to an online Clubhouse chat room, set up by AKP supporters, cheerfully discussed poisoning political prisoners, especially followers of Fethullah Gülen. One of the most enthusiastic supporters of this idea was “a journalist with close ties to Erdoğan who has recently been appointed to the board of the state-run TRT broadcaster”.

Not that the Turkish government needs encouragement in order to make life even harder for political prisoners.

As has been said many times, Turkey can commit abuses because, despite international rhetoric about universal human rights, they suffer no political consequences. Even criticism is muted. Germany has just rejected the asylum applications of two academics who had been given six-year sentences by the Turkish courts for participation in political protest. The German court claimed that Turkey’s prison system was organised according to European Court of Human Rights decisions, and, in an echo of Turkish ‘justice’, used the fact that the academics were “highly politically engaged” as a reason for this rejection.

In the real world, conditions faced by Turkey’s political prisoners are going from bad to worse. In the F-type prisons, unlike the dormitories of the past, prisoners are kept isolated with very limited human contact. Figen Yüksekdağ, former co-chair of the HDP, who has now spent almost five years behind bars, explains in a new interview for Yeni Yaşam, “We’ve not been able to talk with any friends for the past one and a half years, not even allowed to chat when we’re exercising. But still, even in the F-type prison, we improvise methods of contact, find ways to have our voices heard. Creating the opportunity to call out to one another is actually one constant activity in our daily lives... Our only contact with the world is through visits by lawyers and family, which have been restricted due to the pandemic.” The politically-

inspired rumours that blamed the forest fires on the Kurds have encouraged extra repression of prisoners, including physical beatings.

Every week there are political detentions in Turkey, so that this almost ceases to be seen as news. Yesterday morning over a hundred people were detained in house raids in four different cities. Typical charges include 'spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation' on the basis of social media posts.

This week's other international news story has been events in Afghanistan. As most of the world watches in horror while the Taliban take over control, Turkey continues to seek strategic advantage by trying to agree an arrangement to run Afghanistan's international airport. If the Taliban needed reassurance that Turkey is sympathetic to hard-line violent Islamist militants, they wouldn't have far to look.

The news is full of stories about both the Islamist gangs that Turkey has installed in the parts of Syria it has occupied, and of continuing activities by ISIS, whose growth depended on Turkish support. It is not a coincidence that a crisis in the dominant capitalist system is occurring at the same time as the expansion of movements that claim to offer an alternative. These alternative movements also manage to combine their claims of otherworldly salvation with some lucrative exploitation here on earth.

While the Taliban have been happy to monopolise the world's opium supply, Turkey's mercenary gangs have concentrated on looting and extortion. Hawar News Agency reports that "Thirty-three citizens and 35 families were abducted by the Turkish occupation forces and affiliated mercenary groups in Afrin villages and districts just in a week." Often abductions are used to extort ransom, but they also contribute to the general rule of terror.

ISIS continues to carry out attacks in both Syria and Iraq. The Washington Kurdish Institute produces a weekly report that looks at the territories where control is disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Federal Government of Iraq. This week's reported ISIS actions include: the kidnap of four workers, one of whom was beheaded; repeated attacks that

have caused seventeen villages to be evacuated; a fake checkpoint between Maxmur and Hewlêr, where five travellers were kidnapped and three injured; the kidnap of a Kurdish shepherd; and the destruction of numerous electricity pylons. On Thursday, the Syrian Democratic Forces announced that they had prevented a mass escape of ISIS prisoners who had dug tunnels under their prison in Hasakah.

Across the border in Iran, where dictators exercise their power in the name of a different form of violent Islamism, protests and brutal government crackdown continue as the regime fails to provide the most basic services. And the banning of foreign Covid vaccines is producing predictably disastrous consequences. Videos show piles of body bags and rows of freshly dug graves.

Iranian Kurds who are politically active are not even safe outside Iran. Last week I wrote about the assassination in Sulaimaniyah of a member of the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK). Last Saturday, the body of another Iranian Kurdish political activist was found shot dead in a hotel room in Hewlêr. Mousa Babakhani was a member of the (Iranian) Kurdistan Democratic Party's Central Committee, and had been abducted two days earlier. This followed a report of an Iranian plan to assassinate fifty Kurdish journalists and activists who had escaped to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

These weekly reviews can often feel like a litany of doom and gloom, but they are also a record of a people who have never ceased to resist and to struggle for something better. That resistance will be celebrated on Sunday, the anniversary of the beginning of the PKK's armed struggle against the suppression of Kurds in Turkey – a struggle that has opened possibilities for a more sustainable world. Whatever form the struggle takes, we cannot afford to give up.