



Annual Conference 2019

FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY UNDER AUTHORITARIAN RULE



Saturday 9th February 2019

10:00 - 17:00

NUT Headquarters
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Update on Turkey

When Erdogan and the AKP came to power 16 years ago, they promised democracy and a better life. But as the fear of losing elections and falling from government increased, so did their attacks on civil liberties and oppressive policies.

At first the Gulenists were complicit in the AKP's oppression. Later, when their corruption was exposed they fell into disagreement with the Gulenists. Both wanted to stay in power. Erdogan, wanting to cover up billions of dollars worth of corruption, sought to secure his grip over government. It was at this juncture that there was an attempted coup led by the Gulenists, and Erdogan triumphed in this conflict.

But Erdogan and the AKP's attacks on civil liberties and human rights escalated after the coup attempt. He didn't just attack the Gulenists, he attacked all opposition. Using the failed coup as a pretext he declared a state of emergency.

The Media

TV channels, newspapers, radios, webbased news sources and magazines were all shut down. Journalists were imprisoned. Turkey became the biggest journalist prison in the world. Attacks and pressure on the small number of opposition newspapers continues. For example, Evrensel newspaper was recently fined 42,000 TL - the politics of terror and intimidation continues.

The Rule of Law & the Judiciary

The Rule of Law has been set aside and the legal system has been hijacked. Erdogan, equipped with his new presidential powers, is able to dismiss and appoint judges at will. Judges are no longer able to make judgments against Erdogan. Those judges that contradict Erdogan have been labelled as 'terrorists' and imprisoned. Judges no longer make independent decisions for fear of repercussions.

Women

The women's struggle for equality is under the seige of police brutality and tear gas. Violence against women is on the rise, with an increasing number of women being murdered every year. Sexual assault and child abuse is increasing. Women's rights are also being attacked. There is a reduction in women's refuges, pressure on women to reconcile when leaving abusive relationships, increasing exclusion of women from social life and employment, and legal protection for abusers, going as far as pardoning rapists who offer to marry their victims.

Academics

Academics have been purged, many are imprisoned and thousands have been blacklisted preventing them from being employed in the private and public sector. The teaching of evolution has been banned and religious education added into the school curriculum. Many university lecturers have been sacked and Imams have taken their place teaching in Turkey's universities.

Environment

Attacks on the environment and green spaces are relentless. The government is not just failing to address the need to protect the country's biodiversity and but it is actively destroying the country's natural environment. Parks are bulldozed to make way for more and more shopping malls, and high rise luxury residences. Forests are destroyed to build roads, bridges and most recently a new airport. The promise of producing electricity is used to leave countries previously unspoilt areas of natural beauty under water dams.

Workers Rights

Workers rights are suppressed through police brutality and attacks. Most recently over 500 workers at the new Istanbul Airport construction site were arrested in the middle of the night and 34 were detained in custody following a protest against the employer's failure to pay outstanding wages, the poor food served on site, unreliable transport, working conditions and unaddressed health and safety concerns. These workers were labelled 'terrorists' by President Erdogan.

In recent years many strikes have been banned on the pretext that strikes pose a national security threat. Erdogan has no tolerance for workers seeking to protect their rights, and has already declared to businesses that that he will ban future strikes too.

What economic crisis?

Economic downturn and the resulting crash is causing increasing poverty and hunger across the country. Despite this reality the President is telling the world that there is no economic crisis. He is circulating false news, and relying on political posturing and lying to entrench his corruption, oppression and dictatorship.

Political Freedom and Minority Rights

Suppression of democratic opposition continues. It was claimed that the state of emergency targeted the Gulenists, however including the HDP co-leaders and MPs nearly 3,000 politicians have been imprisoned. Most are facing life imprisonment. The Kurdish regions in particular, have had their locally elected leaders/mayors removed by decree and replaced with pro-AKP administrators. As a result the Kurdish people have found themselves under seige, with arbitrary curfews, military operations, intentional destruction of Kurdish towns and massacres in the South East increasing.

Regime change

Having marginally won the 24 June 2018 election, the President was able to establish his new regime. He took leadership of the wealthiest organisations in the country. He appointed himself the chair and his son-in-law deputy chair of these companies. Under the new regime, everything is at the discretion of the Erdogan.

There is now a dictator ruling Turkey. If the UK respects democratic norms and human rights, it must withdraw all support for Erdogan – failing to do so makes it complicit in Erdogan's dictatorship.

We call on friends of SPOT to support our campaigns and our activities. It is essential that we organise and strengthen solidarity across progressive organisations, not least trade unions, campaign groups and activists both in the UK and Turkey.

About the Conference

Turkey's ruling powers are pushing the country towards a dictatorship and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's attacks on democracy are impacting all sections of society. With this increasingly authoritarian regime, the state of emergency has become normalised and entrenched in law, an executive presidency created, independent media outlets shut down, academics and public-sector workers purged and criminalised, attacks on Kurdish regions intensified, opposition politicians arrested, violence against women on the rise, discrimination and hate crimes against LGBT increasing, the environment being destroyed and so the list goes on.

Meanwhile, world leaders watch unflinching, continuing to sell weapons and tip-toeing around

Turkey's human rights record. But the battle for democracy and workers' rights in Turkey goes on and provides a ray of hope. And we know that democracy maybe denied but it is not yet lost.

This 3rd Annual SPOT Conference provides an opportunity to hear from those who have seen and experienced the reality of life under Erdogan's authoritarian regime and invites you to find out more about what we are already doing to build international solidarity and call to account both the Turkish state and the complicity of our own government.

For more information about this event and/or to get involved contact us.



Solidarity with the People of Turkey (SPOT) is an umbrella group made up of progressive organisations, campaign groups and trade unions in England. In a globally connected world, our aim is to support those struggling for democracy and fundamental freedoms in Turkey, whilst also strengthening democracy and worker's rights in the UK.