

Turkey: Hunger striking lawyers defy Erdogan's repression

written by Greg Butterfield

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Aytaç Ünsal and Ebru Timtik

Aug. 10 — The lives of political prisoners and people's lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal hang in the balance as the regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, a member of the U.S.-dominated NATO military alliance, continues its brutal repression against the left.

Today, Timtik of the Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD) is on day 221 of a "hunger strike to the death," and Ünsal of the People's Law Office (HHB) is on day 190, to demand a fair trial for themselves and the right of attorneys to do their job without being labelled "terrorists."

The death fast is a political tactic with a long history in Turkey, developed as a last-ditch effort to bring injustice to light in a country ruled by a succession of far-right military dictatorships and now by Erdogan's U.S.-backed, nominally civilian government, which many Turkish leftists characterize as fascist.

Some 17 lawyers of ÇHD and HHB have been arbitrarily arrested and jailed for representing mineworkers, teachers, political activists and others singled out for repression by the Turkish state, including well-known cases like that of 15-year-old Berkin Elvan, who was killed during the 2014 Gezi Park protests after being hit in the head with a tear gas canister fired by police.

On July 30, an official report of the İstanbul Forensic Medicine Institution called for Timtik and Ünsal's immediate release, stating that there was no basis to keep them imprisoned in their present condition. But the courts immediately overruled the medical professionals' assessment. Legal appeals have so far been unsuccessful.

Instead of releasing the political prisoners, they were kidnapped the next day to a hospital for force-feeding. This is internationally recognized as a form of torture that often results in permanent disability or death, and the Turkish state has used it

against other hunger strikers.

[According to the People's Law Office](#), Timtik and Ünsal “are at the stage where not even days or hours count, but minutes. From Turkey and all over the globe, many colleagues and people stand in solidarity with them and see their demands as their own. People support these demands and call on the authorities to end the injustices and oppression towards them. Courts of the fascist ruling party ignored these calls with their open intention to murder them.”

People have rallied daily outside the Istanbul hospital where the two lawyers are being held under armed guard as they continue to fight against “medical intervention” — force-feeding.

Actions are also organized around the world to bring attention to Timtik and Ünsal’s heroic struggle and the plight of thousands of political prisoners of the Turkish regime, including outside the seat of the European Union in Brussels, Belgium.



Protest outside Istanbul hospital where Timtik and Ünsal are held captive. Photos: People's Law Office

Attack on Grup Yorum

Already this year, [three political prisoners have perished](#) following hunger strikes and attempts at forced medical intervention: Mustafa Koçak, Helin Bölek and İbrahim Gökçek. The latter two were members of the leftist band Grup Yorum, whose musical message of resistance so frightens the Turkish ruling class that it has outright banned their concerts and continues to persecute the musicians.

On Aug. 9, Grup Yorum attempted to hold a long-planned concert in Istanbul in defiance of the government ban. The concert was meant to uphold the legacy of the

bandmates who are still imprisoned, those who died on hunger strike and the struggle of the people's attorneys.

As people began to gather for the concert, [police arrested concertgoers](#), blocked journalists and forced passersby to delete photos from their phones. The crowd resisted, chanting and raising banners demanding the right of Grup Yorum to be heard. Although the concert was not able to go forward, the organizers have vowed to continue their efforts and not be silenced.

A few days earlier, on Aug. 5, [cops arrested six Grup Yorum members](#) who were rehearsing for the planned concert and raided the group's İdil Cultural Center for the 13th time in three years.

The blood of the attorneys and Group Yorum musicians is on the hands of Erdoan. It is also on the hands of U.S. President Donald Trump and the leaders of the imperialist powers, who allow the regime in Turkey to run rampant against the working class and peasants, leftist and Kurdish movements at home, while carrying out genocidal wars on NATO's behalf against neighboring Syria and in faraway Libya.

It is urgent for leftist and workers' movements in the U.S. to join the international campaign to save Turkey's hunger strikers and support their demands.

For updates, follow [People's Law Office](#) on Facebook and [Free Grup Yorum](#) on Twitter.



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