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Oannes Journalism ist eine Marke der Oannes Consulting – Medien & Kommunikationsberatung GmbH



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Location: Munich, Germany
Category: Articles
Theme: Society, Politics
Date: 15.01.2019
Portal: www.simonjacob.info
Text duration: approx. 5 min.
Language: English

Title: *Leyla Güven: Hunger strike - one's own life as a means of pressure*

ARTIKEL QR CODE



Leyla Güven: Hunger strike - one's own life as a means of pressure

By definition, the hunger strike is a form of passive resistance of an individual or a whole group. By deliberately refusing to eat, the risk of personal injury or death is consciously accepted. This is also the difference to fasting, whose goal and purpose can be found in the spiritual or medical field. The hunger strike is mostly used as a means of protest to gain media attention, because the striker is well aware that he himself will not bring about any change with the action alone.

Hunger strikes are predominantly to be found in the industrialised countries at various social and political levels. For example, in Germany and the former GDR there were several hunger strikes in connection with the closure of mines and pits. These were grab by media very well, but ultimately were unable to prevent the closures.

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the best-known politicians on hunger strike, who fought against racism and for equal rights for the Indians. As the leader of the independence movement in India, he contributed significantly to the peaceful end of British colonial rule in India with non-violent resistance and hunger strikes.

But there are also strikes against prison conditions, such as the strike of former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Julija Tymoshenko, who was imprisoned from August 2011 to February 2014. One of the reasons for her hunger strike was, that according to her, medical care in prison was not guaranteed. In 2013, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the detention was arbitrary and illegal.

Currently, the hunger strike of Leyla Güven is coming to the public focus. Güven was elected to the Turkish Parliament for the first time in the elections of 7th June 2015. After the HDP deputy lost her place in November 2015, she continued her activities in the Kurdish citizens' initiative "Democratic Social Congress (DTK)". In early 2018, she was arrested and imprisoned as co-chair of the DTK for her criticism of the invasion of the Turkish army in the northern Syrian canton Efrin. Since then she has been in pre-trial detention at the Diyarbakir high-security prison. In the last parliamentary elections on 24th June she was elected from prison as a deputy for Hakkari province. She is the only member of parliament from the Turkish Republic to have been elected a member of parliament but has not been released from prison to carry out her duties. Güven has been on hunger strike since 8th November 2018. She demands the repeal of the prison isolation of the Kurdish PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan – because only in this way it would be possible to get the peace process between the Kurds and Turkey going on again. Article 90 of the Turkish constitution states that international treaties shall apply to Turkish laws. Isolation is not compatible with international law and violates human rights.

From a medical point of view, the refusal to eat can lead to serious health damages after only three weeks. After 69 days of refusing food, Leyla Güven, who is said to have lost over 15 kg of weight, is in a life-threatening condition. So she should not be able to ingest any liquids and suffer from speech disorders and loss of consciousness. Despite her serious health problems, she continues the protest.

Many people, including more than 150 prisoners, are said to have joined her hunger strike. Today also the two imprisoned former delegates and members of the Kurdish women's movement Selma Irmak and Sebahat Tuncel are said to have joined.

Only a few people before Güven have survived a hunger strike for so long until they died. These include Holger Meins (1941-1974) of the RAF and Bobby Sands (1954-1981), member of the IRA, who died after 66 days of hunger strike in the prison hospital. His death resulted in violent clashes between Democrats, the police and the British military in Northern Ireland.

It has to be feared that Leyla Güven's death will further erode confidence in a democratic policy of the Turkish government and lead to riots between the population and the police.

Daniela Hofmann

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Buchtipp:

Seit Jahren reist Simon Jacob durch Länder wie Syrien, Irak oder Iran. Als Angehöriger eines wichtigen Clans gelangt er an Orte, die für andere nie zugänglich waren. Dort spricht er mit Menschen, immer auf der Suche: der Suche nach Frieden, auch seinem eigenen Inneren. Seine Reise schildert auch die Schrecken dieser Kriegsgebiete. Aber mehr noch zeigt dieses Buch, dass und wie Friede wirklich möglich ist. Eine Botschaft, die vor allem in diesen Tagen Mut und Hoffnung macht und motiviert, zu kämpfen für eine bessere Zukunft und für etwas, was Simon Jacob ausgerechnet im Irak und in Syrien wiedergefunden hat: Menschlichkeit.



.....Es sind nicht die Toten, ihre zeretzten Körper und verstreuten Knochen, die mich beschäftigen. Es sind auch nicht die machthungrigen und fanatisierten Individuen, die den Opfern das Leben nehmen, die mir einen unruhigen Schlaf bescheren. Es sind die Lebenden, besonders die Mütter und Kinder, die angsterfüllt in eine ungewisse Zukunft blicken. Allein sie sind sie es wert, endlich Frieden zu schaffen! Als Akt der Menschlichkeit. In der Hoffnung, dass sie eine Zukunft haben...."

Simon Jacob, freier Journalist

AB DEM 18. APRIL 2018 IM HANDEL
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Bestellbar über

