

Özlem Ilyas Tolunay – Socialist, Feminist, Freedom Fighter -1975-2014

We at *New Politics* were saddened to learn and are very sorry to have to inform our readers that our good friend and writer Özlem Ilyas Tolunay, 39, died on Nov. 16 of a heart attack. We are heartsick that this young woman, a fighter for social justice in Turkey, wife and mother of a young child, is no longer with us.



Özlem was a member of the Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi (ÖDP) Freedom and Solidarity Party of Turkey and a translator and writer for its newspaper *BirGün*. Such work was also her profession. She was a committed socialist activist, a feminist, and a believer in the right of the Kurds to self-determination. While on a visit to Turkey, my wife Sherry and I had an opportunity to meet Özlem and her husband Ibrahim Tolunay, a Geography Teacher at Notre Dame de Sion French High School in Istanbul. We accompanied them to a demonstration of thousands organized by her party calling for greater democracy in Turkey where we were introduced to her comrades. We also spent some time with Özlem, Ibrahim, and their son Deniz, now four years old, and so we got to know them a little as a family.

After we returned to the United States, I continued to be in touch with Özlem and invited her to write for *New Politics*. Though we came from different political traditions, we felt that we had much in common. Özlem wrote for both the *New*

Politics journal and for our website, helping us to better understand developments in Turkey. Her article [“Turkey, the Erdogan Government and the Left Today: An Interview with Oguzhan Müftüoğlu,”](#) was published in our Summer 2013 issue of *New Politics* and her piece [“Women in Erdoğan’s Turkey”](#) appeared in the Winter 2014 issue of the journal. Just last month she wrote [“Behind the Kobane Tragedy: The Kurdish Political Movement and Turkey”](#) for our website. Translator and journalist, wife and mother, socialist and feminist, Özlem’s life was full of love for her family and friends, useful work in her society, and a deep commitment to socialism.



She was buried on Nov. 18, her coffin draped with her party’s red flag, and as a young friend of hers wrote to me, “surrounded by her women comrades, working class women, the poor, and the oppressed.”

We at *New Politics* extend our deepest sympathy to her husband Ibrahim and other members of her family, to her friends, and to her comrades. Far away as we are, like you, we will miss her.