

Turkey: Erdogan government sacks Hakkari mayor amid growing state repression

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On Monday, the Interior Ministry suspended Mehmet S?dd?k Ak??, co-mayor of Hakkari (Colemêrg), from the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party, formerly HDP), and appointed Hakkari Governor Ali Çelik as a trustee. Ak??, against whom there is no final court decision, was detained on charges of membership of a "terrorist organization" (i.e., the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK).

After more than 10 years of delay, the case was finalised only two days after Ak?? was arrested and he was sentenced to 19 years and 6 months in prison. The process and timing of the trial is proof that this case is entirely political and directed by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an. The prosecutor who opened the case is a fugitive on charges of involvement in the 15 July coup attempt, and there are reports that the secret witness who testified against Ak?? was coerced by the police.

This arrest and the appointment of a trustee to replace an elected mayor is an attack on basic democratic rights. This reactionary practice, which President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government has systematically resorted to after 2015 by dismissing dozens of elected Kurdish mayors, effectively eliminates the right of the Kurdish people in particular to vote and be elected.

In its first statement after the raid in Hakkari, the DEM party said: "The government, which has been defeated every time by the will of the people, has once again resorted to the way it knows best: usurpation of the will and coup d'état. ... Ak?? has been arrested in Van, our municipality has been occupied by the police. ... We call on all those who are in favour of democracy to take an open stance against this coup."

The leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), Özgür Özel, said in a statement on X: "[W]e reject the

appointment of a trustee on the basis of a case that started 10 years ago and is still ongoing," adding, "What is happening is that the will of the people of Hakkari, which was manifested only 2 months ago, is being ignored. The appointment of a trustee must be withdrawn. We are on the side of democracy and the will of the people and against the trustee approach!"

However, this first appointment of trustees after the March 31 local elections, in which Ak?? took office with 48.92 percent of the vote, is part of the police state repression that escalated after the so-called "détente" meeting between Erdo?an and Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Özgür Özel on May 2.

Hundreds of people have been arrested across Turkey following May Day demonstrations. In Istanbul, more than 70 people were arrested and sent to prison for protesting against the closure of Taksim Square. Five were arrested for protesting against the Erdogan government's cooperation with Israel in an earlier demonstration.

This was followed by heavy prison sentences for politicians in the "Kobani trial," including former co-chairs of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirta? and Figen Yüksekda?. Twenty-four defendants were sentenced to a total of 408 years and 3 months imprisonment on various charges.

Following the DEM Party's call to start a "vigil" in front of the municipalities and protest against the decision, an unconstitutional ban on demonstrations and marches was announced in Hakkari, Igd?r, Tunceli, Mu?, A?r?, Batman, Siirt, Mardin, Bitlis and Van. Despite the ban, protests were organised in the Kurdish provinces and across the country. Police attacked demonstrators with tear gas in several places, including Hakkari.

Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP)

came second to the CHP for the first time in the March 31 local elections, losing millions of votes amid a cost-of-living crisis and growing public discontent over the government's cooperation with Israel over the genocide in Gaza.

In his April statement on the DEM party municipalities, Erdoğan signalled that the appointment of trustees would continue: "It would not come as a surprise that those who try to touch our unity and integrity with such provocative actions will be dealt with in the same way as they have been dealt with before on the basis of the law. Everyone should be prepared for this."

The latest state crackdown on Kurdish politicians comes as the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria, controlled by the US-backed Kurdish nationalist People's Defence Units (YPG), prepares to hold local elections on June 11. Ankara considers the YPG, the PKK's sister organisation in Syria, a "terrorist organisation."

Erdoğan threatened a military operation against the planned elections, saying, "We are closely following the aggressive actions of the terrorist organisation against the territorial integrity of our country and Syria under the pretext of the referendum. We have made our policy on this issue very clear before."

Erdoğan added, "Turkey will never allow the separatist organisation to establish a 'Terroristan' in northern Syria and Iraq, just beyond its southern borders. Faced with a fait accompli, we did what had to be done before and we will not hesitate to act again if we are faced with the same situation."

After the Kurdish forces became the main US proxy force in Syria, the government—horrified by the prospect of a Washington-backed Kurdish state on Turkey's southern border and the possibility of this encouraging similar tendencies within Turkey—ended the "peace process" with the PKK in 2015. Since then, military operations in Syria have been accompanied by a crackdown on Kurdish politicians at home, carried out with the support of other bourgeois parties, including the CHP.

The Erdogan government has ordered the Turkish army (TSK) to invade Syria three times to crush Kurdish nationalist forces, and it still controls the northwest of the country with its Islamist proxies. The first was Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016,

the second was Operation Olive Branch in January 2018, and the third was Operation Peace Spring in October 2019. Before the 2019 operation, the mayors of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van were dismissed and replaced by trustees.

According to a report released by the DEM Party last December, at least 22,818 party members have been detained since 2015. Over 4,300 have been arrested, including co-chairs, deputies, provincial and district co-chairs, party officials, and members.

The report stated that 93 co-mayors elected on March 30, 2014, were arrested and trustees were appointed in 95 municipalities; 43 co-mayors elected on March 31, 2019, were arrested and trustees were appointed in 48 municipalities. Currently, 17 co-mayors, seven deputies and 14 members of the party leadership are in jail.

The mounting attacks on democratic rights and political opposition go hand in hand with the policies of war, genocide and attacks on the working class by the ruling classes around the world. While NATO-backed Israel is intensifying the genocide in Gaza, a Middle East-wide war is being provoked against Iran. At the same time, NATO forces are escalating their war against Russia in Ukraine, threatening a nuclear conflict.

The war orientation of the ruling class and its attacks on democratic rights stem from the global crisis of capitalism. The struggle against this cannot be fought by appealing to the government or other factions of the ruling class. The way forward is to mobilize the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme, as the only social force that can secure the release of all political prisoners, consistently defend democratic rights and stop genocide and war.



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