

Erdogan government arrests Kurdish CHP mayor in Istanbul

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On Wednesday, the mayor of Istanbul's Esenyurt Municipality, Prof. Dr. Ahmet Özer of the Republican People's Party (CHP), was detained and subsequently arrested on charges of "being a member of the armed terrorist organisation PKK/KCK".

The Ministry of Interior announced that the deputy governor of Istanbul, Can Aksoy, had been appointed trustee of the municipality.

This arrest and the appointment of a trustee to replace an elected mayor is a clear attack on basic democratic rights. The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has long sought to stifle political opposition through such anti-democratic operations, building a police state.

This reactionary practice, which the government has systematically resorted to after 2015 by dismissing elected mayors, especially from the Kurdish nationalist movement, also means the *de facto* abolition of the constitutional right to vote and be elected.

According to the statement of the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, Ahmet Özer's communications were intercepted because his name was mentioned in "organisational documents... seized from members of a terrorist organisation". It was claimed that during the 10-year period "Özer had been in contact with PKK members many times and had contacted Kongra-gel co-chairman Remzi Kartal 14 times".

Şevket Tuci, one of the people Özer is accused of meeting, has been his lawyer for 17 years and was present during his testimony to the police and prosecutors in this case. Faik Kaplan, who made the money transfer mentioned in the accusation against Özer, said that his daughter was a tenant in Özer's house, that he paid the rent and had a rental agreement.

It was also reported that Özer was from the same tribe as Remzi Kartal, with whom he last met in 2015, and that at that time various official meetings were held with

Kartal in Europe as part of the "peace process". All this points to the fabricated nature of the charges and the political nature of the case.

Özer was elected mayor of Esenyurt on March 31 with 49 percent of the vote. Esenyurt, an industrial city with a large Kurdish electorate, is the largest district in Turkey with a population of around 1 million. Özer, a Kurdish sociologist and academic, was nominated as a candidate in the local elections as part of the cooperation between the CHP and the Peoples' Democracy and Equality Party (DEM Party). In line with this strategy, the DEM Party did not nominate any candidates in some cities and districts, especially in Istanbul, and called on people to vote for the CHP.

In his first statement, which was leaked to the press before his arrest, Özer said the following: "I am an author who has written around 40 books, some of them on regional development, some of them novels, some of them on the Kurdish question. I have published around 200 national articles and around 300 papers".

Emphasising that this was a political case, Özer continued as follows: "I am a scientist who [became] a professor at a young age, I am an academic, I have been a member of the CHP for more than 10 years, I was a candidate in the last elections, I worked as an advisor to Şamir Çelikkaleli [the mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality], I worked at the State Planning Organisation... until today there is nothing, they are trying to remove me from my post by bringing up some events from 10-15 years ago."

CHP leader Özgür Özel in his first statement said that "The treatment of a scientist, opinion leader and politician who has held senior positions in the public sector and academia for years, who received clean papers from the relevant authorities as a candidate only six months ago, and who came to office with the great favour of the voters of Esenyurt in the elections he participated in, is unfair

and the accusations are baseless.”

Özel also said, “These events are not independent of what has happened in recent weeks. We see the ugly game, the big conspiracy. We will neither be part of it nor surrender”.

The CHP leader called for a mass protest in Esenyurt on Thursday. Speaking at the rally, which was supported by the DEM party and attended by thousands of people. “Neither a condolence call to a relative nor a phone call from 10 years ago can be linked to terrorism. Erdoğan himself openly announced that Ahmet Özel would be arrested. So this was planned,” said Özel, adding that the prosecutors acted on Erdoğan’s orders.

The DEM Party condemned the operation in a statement on social media, saying, “The arrest of Esenyurt Mayor Ahmet Özer and the appointment of a trustee for Esenyurt Municipality is an open coup against the will of the people, a usurpation of the people’s will. This is a disregard for local democracy and the will of the people. We will not remain silent against this lawlessness and political coup.”

Before Özer’s arrest on fabricated charges and the appointment of a trustee in his place, Turkey had witnessed important developments. On Tuesday last week, Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the fascist ally of the “People’s Alliance” led by Erdoğan, made an unprecedented statement. Bahçeli suggested that jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan should lift his isolation and address parliament, “shouting that terrorism is completely over and the organization [PKK] has been dismantled”.

Bahçeli’s statement, supported by Erdoğan, was welcomed by the DEM Party and the CHP as the beginning of a new “peace process” with the PKK. Öcalan was allowed to meet with his nephew Ömer Öcalan, DEM deputy for Van, as a sign of lifting the 44-month isolation imposed on him.

However, just one day after Bahçeli’s speech, while Erdoğan was in Russia for the BRICS summit, a bomb and gun attack took place at the Ankara facilities of the state-owned strategic defence company Turkish Aerospace Industries Corporation (TAI). Seven people were killed, including two of the attackers. The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack.

Ankara responded with days of airstrikes on what it claimed were PKK-YPG targets in Syria and Iraq. “In the last week, 198 terrorists were neutralised,” the Ministry of National Defence said on Thursday. The Mesopotamia Agency reported that 17 people, mostly civilians, were

killed and 65 wounded in Syria as a result of air strikes. This was followed by a wave of arrests against the Kurdish political movement in the country. It was reported that 55 people were arrested in 17 provinces.

These developments come at a time when, in the Middle East, US-backed Israel has accelerated the genocide in Gaza, invaded Lebanon and is preparing a full-scale attack on Iran.

Turkey’s ruling elite is seeking to strengthen its hand at home, fearing that a widening of the war could undermine its interests in the region. Erdoğan’s statement, “While the maps are being redrawn in blood, while the war that Israel has waged from Gaza to Lebanon is approaching our borders, we are trying to strengthen our internal front,” was a clear expression of this.

Erdoğan approved Özer’s arrest and addressed CHP leader Özel, who opposed it, saying, “Why are you worried about this when our geography has turned into a ring of fire and members of the terrorist organisation are ravaging Esenyurt?”

On the one hand, the Erdoğan government advocates the release of Öcalan and reconciliation with the Kurdish movement inside Turkey in order to force the PKK to lay down its arms. At the same time, it defends the arrest of a mayor elected by the CHP-DEM party alliance on fabricated charges and continues its policy of military repression against the PKK-YPG. These are the efforts of the Turkish ruling elite to protect its interests through contradictory manoeuvres under the conditions of an escalating war in the Middle East.

The latest developments also show how hollow are the promises of the Turkish ruling elite, which is deeply bound up with imperialism, to establish democracy and peace. The way forward lies in mobilising the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme, the only social force capable of securing the release of all political prisoners, consistently defending democratic rights and stopping genocide and war.



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