

Turkish Erdoğan government crackdown on political opposition and journalists escalates

Barış Demir, Hasan Yıldırım
29 January 2025

Pro-opposition Halk TV journalist Barış Pehlivan, anchor Seda Selek, and the channel's managing director Serhan Asker were detained on Tuesday in Turkey, while programme coordinator Kürat Ouz and editor-in-chief Suat Toktaş were detained on Wednesday over a programme broadcast by Halk.

Selek and Asker were released on judicial control conditions, while Pehlivan, Ouz and Toktaş were requested to be arrested.

The journalists are accused of influencing the judiciary by broadcasting their interview with an expert appointed for investigations related to the Republican People's Party (CHP) and made public by Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (CHP).

İmamoğlu is seen as the favourite candidate against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a possible presidential election. New investigations have recently been opened against İmamoğlu, who is currently facing the risk of being banned from politics due to an indefinite judgement.

Ten professional organisations, including the Association of Journalists, issued a statement condemning the detention of the journalists. "This month alone, 14 journalists have been arrested... Today, instead of standing up for freedom of the press and freedom of expression, the political establishment, the government and, unfortunately, the judiciary are acting as an instrument of threat and a mechanism of intimidation against journalists," the statement said.

The latest crackdown on journalists comes as the Erdoğan government steps up operations against the CHP as well as the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), and left-wing parties such as the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) and the Socialist Labourers Party. On Wednesday, a trustee was appointed to the DEM Party-run Siirt municipality, while 34 members of the ESP, including its leader, were

arrested last week. This brings to eight the number of DEM Party's municipalities where unconstitutional trustees have been appointed since the March 2024 elections.

The increasing repression of the Erdoğan government is part of a worldwide tendency of the ruling classes to turn to authoritarian regimes under conditions of imperialist war and growing social inequality. Ankara faces growing opposition from the working class at home as it fights for a share in the war of plunder in the Middle East, deepened by the genocide in Gaza and regime change in Syria.

After winning every election since 2002, Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came second to the CHP for the first time in the local elections in March last year and is still trailing in the polls. While the CHP did not campaign on workers' social grievances, including the rising cost of living, or on Israel's NATO-backed genocide in Gaza, it was an undeserving beneficiary of the growing anger against the government on these issues.

As government repression escalated after the local elections, CHP leader Özgür Özel initiated a process of "détente" and "normalization" with Erdoğan. The DEM party then became part of a new "peace process" with Erdoğan on the Kurdish question, amid a growing crackdown on elected mayors. The negotiations, in which Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), plays an important role, aim, as in previous attempts, to ensure the reactionary alliance of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisies in the reshaping of the Middle East under the leadership of US imperialism.

The latest wave of repression by the government shows the bankruptcy of all perspectives that attribute a progressive role to this or that faction of the bourgeoisie. Already last May, the Socialist Equality Group declared that the claims of the bourgeois opposition that "peace and democracy" would be developed on the basis of reconciliation with the Erdoğan government are a fraud,

stating:

At the heart of this ruling class consensus, of which the trade union bureaucracy is a part, is the need to intensify the social offensive against the working class and to suppress social opposition from below. In conditions where, on the one hand, NATO-backed Israel is intensifying the genocide in Gaza and provoking a Middle East-wide war against Iran, and, on the other hand, NATO-backed Ukraine's war with Russia is raising the danger of a nuclear conflict, war abroad is everywhere accompanied by class war and the elimination of democratic rights at home.

Perspectives based on an orientation towards and alliance with this or that political faction of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie and the upper middle class, which are deeply linked to NATO and imperialism, and which put forward false nationalist solutions under capitalism, are bankrupt.

The increasing pressure and investigations against CHP started at the end of October with the arrest of Istanbul Esenyurt Mayor Prof. Dr. Ahmet Özer, on charges of "being a member of PKK/KCK armed terrorist organisation", and the appointment of a trustee in his place. Two weeks ago, Istanbul Beşiktaş Mayor Rıza Akpolat was arrested on corruption charges. At the same time, following Erdoğan's order, some CHP municipality accounts have been levied on the pretext of paying social security premium debts.

CHP leader Özgür Özel announced on Tuesday his party's roadmap against these developments. Özel's statement was in preparation for early elections to be held in 2025. He announced the CHP's presidential candidates would be Kamal Kılıçdönmez and Ankara Metropolitan Mayor Mansur Yavaş.

The repression of political opposition and journalists is increasing in the context of the deepening social offensive of the bourgeoisie against the working class. The government's fiscal policy and attacks on wages and social rights have brought the social anger within the working class to the point of explosion.

Despite the rising cost of living, in July the government refused to raise the minimum wage, which determines the wages of the majority of the working class. In December,

the minimum wage was raised by only 30 percent, below the official inflation rate. In December, Turkey's official annual inflation rate was 44 percent, while ENAG, an independent research organisation, calculated annual inflation at 83 percent.

For the working class, the fall in real wages is accompanied by rising taxes. According to the November budget implementation report of the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, the tax collected from companies in the period January-November this year increased by 13.5 percent compared to the same period last year, while the tax collected from workers increased by 119.8 percent.

In these conditions of explosive class and political tensions, the government's wave of politically motivated arrests has extended to the film industry. Actress manager Ayşe Barış, who was recently detained on charges of "monopolising the sector", was arrested on Monday.

Barış is accused of "aiding and abetting an attempt to overthrow the government or prevent it from carrying out its duties" by organising artists and actors during the anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013, which attracted millions of people across the country. The charges against Barış also include "influence campaigning", which is on the government's agenda to implement but does not yet exist in law.

The resurrection of the Gezi Park trial and the recent increase in police state repression is a sign that any democratic opposition to the government and mass protests will be criminalised and violently suppressed. This is above all a threat to the working class, which is seen as the main threat by the ruling class.

The leader of the fascist Nationalist Movement Party, Devlet Bahçeli, clearly expressed this threat in his speech on Tuesday with the following words: "We are aware that the calls to take to the streets, the provocations for resistance are invitations to either a coup or a rebellion... If you have the courage, take to the streets and we'll see. If you have the curiosity to play with fire, try it and we'll see how you fare."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact