

WSWS demands Turkey release Max Zirngast, Hatice Göz and Mithatcan Türetken

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The *World Socialist Web Site* demands the immediate and unconditional release of Austrian graduate student and journalist Max Zirngast and two Turkish left-wing activists, Mithatcan Türetken and Hatice Göz, who were detained September 11 by the political police of the right-wing authoritarian regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on trumped-up charges of support for terrorism.

Anti-terror units dragged Zirngast out of his Ankara apartment at 5 o'clock in the morning, arresting the two Turkish citizens, also in Ankara, at the same time.

After being held incommunicado and interrogated for 10 days, Zirngast, Türetken and Göz were finally formally arrested and remanded to custody by Judge Fatih Yilmaz, who claimed that, despite the authorities' "investigations" being incomplete, their conviction on the offense of "being members of a terrorist organization" was likely and that the defendants posed a flight risk.

Pre-trial detention in Turkey is a form of legal limbo that can drag on for years without defendants ever being brought to court.

Zirngast has written regularly on Turkish politics for the Austrian publication *re: volt*, the German daily *Junge Welt* as well as the US website *Jacobin*. His articles have criticized the reactionary and despotic measures of Erdogan and his ruling Party for Justice and Development (AKP).

He has also contributed to the newspaper of Toplumsal Özgürlük Partisi (TOP—Social Freedom Party), whose members, Mithatcan Türetken and Hatice Göz, are charged along with him.

Zirngast is quoted in the Turkish media as forthrightly telling the prosecutor and the judge: "I am a socialist, I defend universal values."

Among the accusations mounted by the police against

Zirngast was that he possessed Marxist literature, including books by the well known Turkish Marxist and Communist Party founder Hikmet Kivilcimli, who died in 1971. He pointed out, in his defense, that he had lectured on Kivilcimli's work as part of a course on "Political ideologies in Turkey" at the Technical University of the Middle East, where he is a graduate student in political science.

Students at the university have protested his arrest, writing on Twitter last Thursday that he is "a valuable member of their student union."

"In addition to all the left-wing publications at my home, there are also many publications that are more likely to be associated with right-wing ideology," Zirngast told the court. "You can even find literature and art. I am a researcher. In my home there are about 300 books and other publications. In my apartment in Austria, there are twice as many books. But the police only took books related to left-wing ideology."

The rest of the "evidence" against him consisted of pictures on his cell phone of a "terrorist organization," i.e., Kurdish separatists.

Zirngast also refuted the prosecution's charge that he was the "Ankara leader of the TKP/Kivilcim," pointing out that there is no such organization. "I cannot be a member of an organization that does not exist," he said.

His attorney, Teoman Özkan, cited two court decisions from 2012 and 2015 that also affirmed that no such organization exists. Its name also fails to appear on Turkey's lengthy list of alleged "terrorist" organizations.

Murat Yilmaz, another attorney representing Zirngast, stated, "The investigation did not provide anything concrete against my client, just a few of his articles. He is being prosecuted for his thoughts and imprisoned for his social contacts."

Meanwhile, the Social Freedom Party (TOP) charged that the arrest of Zirngast and its two members was part of an attempt by the Erdogan government to suppress legal socialist political activity. It said that the party was in the midst of submitting papers to attain legal status, enabling it to participate in elections, when the raids were carried out, and that the arrests followed a long period of harassment by the Turkish secret police.

Zirngast made it clear that he was not a member of any political party in Turkey, but supported those that shared his ideas and had written for the TOP publication and attended those activities of the party that interested him and contributed to his research.

This latest anti-democratic crackdown coincides with the police state measures undertaken by the Erdogan government against the mass protests by construction workers at the site of a new Istanbul airport, where strikers were brutally attacked, hundreds were arrested and 24 of them remain imprisoned on the orders of a Turkish court.

The only “crime” committed by these three political prisoners is that of criticizing and exposing the crimes of the Erdogan government. They join thousands of others imprisoned for similar offenses, most of them jailed pending trial and convicted of no crimes.

According to the Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF), 237 journalists and media workers are currently behind bars in Turkey, while over 150 newspapers and television stations have been shut down by the Erdogan regime.

Among the government’s latest actions is the shutting down of the television channel Haytin Sesi TV, which advanced socialist views. Its owners and general director have been sentenced to three years and nine months in prison on charges of propagandizing for terrorist organizations. Prosecutors accused the station of supporting both the Kurdish separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Islamic State, which are at war with each other in Iraq and Syria.

That similarly absurd charges have been leveled against Max Zirngast, Mithatcan Türetken and Hatice Göz is a measure of both the reactionary character of the Erdogan regime and its increasing desperation in the face of a deepening economic and political crisis and the growth of the class struggle in Turkey.

The *World Socialist Web Site* demands their release, along with that of all Turkish political prisoners, and

calls for the widest mobilization of workers and youth all over the world to fight for their freedom.



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