

After acquittal in Gezi Park trial, Turkish state re-launches prosecution

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Last Tuesday, a Turkish court acquitted nine defendants in connection with their alleged roles in the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul and across the country. Seven of the 16 defendants live abroad and were tried in absentia. Arrest warrants for those seven have been lifted and they are expected to be officially acquitted if they return to Turkey. The verdict also released Osman Kavala, the only defendant in prison since 2017.

The defendants—including businessman Osman Kavala, exiled journalist Can Dündar, exiled actor Memet Ali Alabora and architect Ay?e Mücella Yap?c? of the Chamber of Architects’ Istanbul branch—were accused of “attempting to overthrow the government of the Turkish Republic” in a “coup attempt.” The plaintiffs included President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and several of his ex-ministers, including Ali Babacan and Ahmet Davuto?lu, who left the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to found new parties.

The charge alleged links between peaceful protests such as the Gezi Park movement and coup attempts backed by foreign states and financial speculator George Soros.

Legislators of the opposition Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) attended the hearings to support the defendants.

What is unfolding is a politically motivated legal vendetta aimed at managing the Turkish state’s tense relations with the imperialist powers and their Middle East war policies, while intimidating and discrediting social opposition within Turkey itself. Erdo?an immediately denounced the ruling as an “attempt to acquit” Kavala and the state moved to prosecute him on new charges.

Just a few hours after the verdict, Kavala was re-arrested by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office on Erdo?an’s orders. Now he is charged with having supported the failed NATO-backed coup attempt against

Erdo?an on July 15, 2016. The First Chamber of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) also decided to investigate the judges who acquitted the defendants in the first trial.

The new charge against Kavala, based on a separate investigation, is “involvement in the coup attempt” of 2016, which Ankara blames on US-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen.

Erdo?an said: “There are Soros-like people behind the scenes trying to stir up things by provoking revolts in some countries. The Turkey branch of this [Osman Kavala] was in prison, but they dared to acquit him.” He also called the Gezi protests a “despicable attack just like military coups... just like attacks by terrorist groups.”

For years, Erdo?an has repeatedly tried to blacken the Gezi Park protests as the beginning of the NATO-backed coup attempt in 2016, while continuing to wage war in Syria and beyond in coordination with the imperialist powers.

Attacks on the Gezi Park protests as linked to NATO coups are a political falsification aimed at discrediting social opposition based primarily in the working class. The Gezi Park protests, coming amid mass working class protests against Egyptian President Mohammad Mursi, opposed plans to remodel the Taksim Square-Gezi Park area of Istanbul, a historical site of opposition to NATO and its allied governments in Turkey, as a shopping mall. The protests soon became a focus of broader discontent with the AKP’s authoritarian policies and rising social inequality. In June-July 2013, they mobilized at least 2.5 million people in 79 cities.

It was, however, a heterogeneous movement, mobilizing youth and layers of workers as well as a broad cross-section of the urban upper-middle class. Taksim Solidarity, a protest platform bringing together 80 middle-class associations and petty-bourgeois parties, met with Erdo?an during the protests and worked to strangle the

demonstrations—blocking protesters from orienting to a broader working-class movement and tying them to the perspective of a deal with Erdoğan.

While its principal target in this regard is social opposition in the working class, the AKP government is trying to threaten and discredit all political opposition by concocting legal proceedings against prominent members of the middle class milieu that joined or supported the Gezi Park protests.

Osman Kavala, owner of the Kavala Group, is a millionaire businessman since the 1980s. His companies reportedly had business ties with NATO, the Turkish Armed Forces and the Istanbul Police Department. He is a leading pro-European Union philanthropist and participant in several foundations, including the Open Society Foundation of the American-Hungarian billionaire George Soros. His arrest has been strongly criticized by European political and media establishment since 2017.

Mücella Yapıcı, a leading member of Taksim Solidarity, wrote after the protests for *Sol News*, a publication of the Stalinist Turkish Communist Party, and later declared her support for the Kurdish-nationalist HDP.

Dündar was arrested in November 2015 on charges of espionage and aiding terrorism, after *Cumhuriyet* published videos in June 2015 showing the gendarmerie stopping a Turkish intelligence truck convoy taking weapons to NATO-backed Islamist groups in Syria. Erdoğan publicly threatened Dündar, declaring, “The individual who reported this as an exclusive will pay a heavy price for this.”

The arrest of Dündar came as Washington and the other major imperialist powers completed their move to abandon Islamist militias and adopt Kurdish nationalist militias as their main proxy force inside Syria, provoking a bitter conflict with the AKP government.

Dündar has lived in exile in Germany since June 2016. He is editor-in-chief of a web radio station, *Özgürüz* (“We are free”). Then-German President Joachim Gauck invited him to the presidential Bellevue Palace in November 2016.

Another key goal of Erdoğan’s relentless legal campaign against Kavala is to threaten and pressure bourgeois opposition forces linked with imperialism. Kavala’s supporters in the Turkish bourgeoisie and imperialist ruling classes hailed the initial acquittal and condemned Erdoğan’s attempts to mount a new trial against Kavala. Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (CHP)

said the “acquittal of all the defendants in the Gezi Park trial is a true source of joy and restores trust in the Turkish judicial system.”

The US embassy in Turkey hailed the Gezi Park trial ruling, tweeting: “We have followed the trial of Osman Kavala and other civil society activists closely, and welcome today’s court decision to acquit and release the defendants.”

The re-arrest of Kavala has provoked broad criticisms in imperialist media. An article in the *Washington Post* stated: “The whipsaw developments raised new questions about political pressure on Turkey’s judiciary and refocused attention on the government’s incessant pursuit of its perceived opponents.”

While German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Kavala’s re-arrest was “incomprehensible from every point of view,” a European Union spokesperson said: “The lack of credible grounds to re-arrest Osman Kavala and to continue his detention pending different charges further damages the credibility of Turkey’s judiciary,” adding that “Judicial proceedings cannot be used as a means of silencing critical voices.”

The concocting of judicial proceedings on fraudulent charges is politically reactionary. However, the attempts by the CHP, HDP and the imperialist powers to posture as democratic by criticizing this trial are false and shot through with hypocrisy.

Even as they posture as defenders of “critical voices” like Dündar and Kavala, the imperialist powers work relentlessly to jail, persecute and silence WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. Broad layers of workers recall the bloody NATO coups in Turkey in 1960, 1971 and 1980, as well as the recent coup attempt in 2016. After decades of US-led imperialist wars of aggression in the Middle East, the NATO imperialist powers’ democratic pretensions have no credibility whatsoever.

The only force that can establish a democratic regime and put an end to show trials and wars around the world is the international working class, mobilized in opposition to imperialist war and the capitalist system from which these wars arise.



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