

Turkish presidential hopeful sentenced to prison

Ula? Ate?çi

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A local court has sentenced Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu of the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) to 2 years, 7 months and 15 days in prison and a political ban, for allegedly “insulting” public officials.

The prosecutor found the sentence insufficient and immediately appealed to a higher court. If the verdict is confirmed, İmamoğlu will lose his office and may not be able to run in the 2023 presidential elections. For the verdict to become final, it must be approved by higher courts.

The antidemocratic character of “defamation” cases and “political ban” decisions in Turkey is clear, and the interference of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government in İmamoğlu’s case is undeniable. Shortly before the verdict, the judge of the court was replaced; the daily *Cumhuriyet* published a photo of the new judge with an AKP (Justice and Development Party) executive. It was also revealed that the prosecutor is a nephew of an AKP mayor.

The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in Turkey condemns this decision, a product of pressure from the Erdoğan government, as an obvious attack on basic democratic rights. However, our principled opposition to this decision and to Erdoğan’s police state measures in no way diminishes our opposition to the bourgeois opposition parties led by the CHP.

The conviction of İmamoğlu, a major potential rival of Erdoğan, comes as Turkey moves towards presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023 amid a deepening economic, social and geopolitical crisis.

Erdoğan, at odds with his NATO allies over the war against Russia in Ukraine, has already announced a new ground invasion against US-backed Kurdish nationalist forces in Syria—an operation backed by CHP and its official allies. Moreover, last week Erdoğan further escalated tensions with Greece by stressing that Turkey’s newly developed ballistic missiles (“Tayfun”) could hit Athens.

The government’s aim to suppress growing class tensions amid an unprecedented rise in the cost of living plays a critical role in its escalation of nationalism, militarism and

police state measures. This week, workers at the Bekaert steel plant in Kocaeli went on a wildcat strike, defying Erdoğan’s presidential ban on strike action on the grounds of that it is “threat to national security.” Indeed, preventing an explosion of working class opposition is as much a concern of the bourgeois opposition as it is of the Erdoğan government.

The origins of the İmamoğlu case date back to 2019. Speaking in France that year, İmamoğlu accused the government of using public resources for its own benefit in local elections and stated that they “wanted to win the election in Istanbul by having it canceled by a Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) decision.”

As the candidate of the Nation Alliance, a coalition of the far-right Good Party and the CHP, İmamoğlu narrowly defeated his rival from Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) in local elections held on March 31, 2019. After the YSK, pressured by the AKP, ordered a re-vote of the elections, İmamoğlu won a landslide victory, raising his margin of victory from 13,000 to 800,000.

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu targeted İmamoğlu upon his remarks in France, stating: “I am telling the fool who went to the European Parliament and complained about Turkey. This nation will make you pay for this.”

İmamoğlu responded to Soylu by saying: “Those who canceled the elections on March 31st are fools, let him focus on that first.”

A lawsuit was thereupon filed against İmamoğlu with the demand for imprisonment and political ban on the grounds that he called the members of the YSK “fools.” İmamoğlu argued that he did not mean YSK members and that he was responding to Soylu.

On Wednesday, shortly before the verdict was announced, İmamoğlu called on voters to gather in Sarayhane, where the Istanbul municipal building is located. “Istanbul and Turkey will protect its will today, just as it has protected its will before,” he declared. At the rally held after the verdict, İmamoğlu was joined on the platform by Good Party leader Meral Akşener, as well as leaders of pseudo-left groups such

as Labour Party (EMEP) and the Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P). They rallied behind the CHP in 2019 local elections.

Declaring the ruling “null and void,” ?mamo?lu pointed to the presidential elections, saying: “We have hopes for 2023. In order to carry our nation to brighter days, we will defeat the mentality that is trying to damage this country in the elections in 2023. We succeeded in Istanbul, we will succeed in Turkey.”

On Thursday, in the same place, a rally titled “The nation is claiming its will” was called jointly by the bourgeois opposition (the “Table of Six,” a new name for the CHP-led Nation Alliance). Beyond ?mamo?lu, CHP leader Kemal K?l?çdarolu, Good Party leader Ak?ener, Erdo?an's former top leaders Ali Babacan (DEVA) and Ahmet Davuto?lu (Future Party), as well as representatives of the Islamist Felicity Party and the Democrat Party attended and spoke. Istanbul police put the number of people attending at 25,000, while Istanbul municipality claimed over 200,000 attended.

Declaring that Turkey is at a “crossroads,” ?mamo?lu signaled his presidential candidacy in 2023, stating: “We have to make a choice between those who accept the sovereignty of the nation and those who have an allergy against the national will. For this, I will be the most hardworking member of the ‘Table of Six.’”

He also added, “I am not scared of them and the null-and-void decisions they dictate. I have no judges, prosecutors or courts to rely upon. I have you behind me. I have the patriotic leaders of this table and the alliance of Turkey they established ... Believe me, 2023 will be very beautiful.”

These claims, supported by numerous pseudo-left organizations, have nothing to do with reality. ?mamo?lu, like the “Table of Six” as a whole, does not represent a “progressive” alternative to the reactionary Erdo?an regime, but a right-wing rival. This is summarized by the fact that the alliance includes two parties that broke away from the AKP; the Good Party, which broke away from the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), an ally of Erdo?an; and the Islamist Felicity Party, from which the AKP emerged.

This alliance speaks for a rival pro-NATO faction of the Turkish ruling class and is as incapable as the Erdo?an government of solving the fundamental social and democratic problems facing the masses of workers and youth.

The political and media establishment in the US and Europe condemned the conviction. US State Department spokesman Ned Price said Washington regretted and was disappointed by the ruling, while the German *Bild* and the British *Independent* referred to ?mamoglu as Erdogan's main rival without hiding their sympathy for him.

It is a sheer hypocrisy for the US-led NATO powers and

the pliant media they control to talk about “democracy.” NATO, which has been waging wars in the Middle East for thirty years with the complicity of the Turkish and Kurdish ruling class, destroying entire societies, are now threatening all of humanity with a nuclear annihilation through their proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. Moreover, these powers have been ardent defenders of the Erdo?an government for many years.

For some time they have supported the bourgeois faction opposing Erdo?an, mainly because of growing conflicts with Ankara on geopolitical issues, including the war with Russia.

Significantly, CHP leader K?l?çdarolu recently visited Washington, London and Berlin and met with powerful political and financial figures. The “Vision” program recently announced by the CHP was almost a repetition of the projects of T?S?AD, Turkey's main business confederation. The Table of Six's newly prepared draft “constitution” still ignores fundamental democratic and social problems—especially the Kurdish question—facing millions of working people in Turkey.

Both Erdo?an and the CHP have a long history of attacking basic democratic rights and using the judiciary against its opponents. By backing Erdo?an's proposal to lift parliamentary immunity of deputies from the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the CHP paved the way for their imprisonment. Moreover, after the 2019 local elections, the CHP and its allies were largely silent as many HDP or Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP) mayors elected in Kurdish provinces were undemocratically removed from office by the government.

Former HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirta?, who has been in prison for six years thanks to CHP complicity, made a statement on the verdict, referring to the CHP's dirty role in their imprisonment. He, however, again declared: “It is not too late. Now is the time to resist together and win together.”

The way forward is not to support another pro-imperialist right-wing faction of the ruling class against the Erdo?an regime, but to establish the political independence of the working class from all factions of the bourgeoisie. This means building the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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