

# Erdogan government suspends elected Kurdish mayors

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On Monday, the Interior Ministry suspended Mardin Metropolitan Mayor Ahmet Türk, Batman Mayor Gülistan Sönük and ?anl?urfa Halfeti Mayor Mehmet Karay?lan—who are from the Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party)—and appointed trustees to replace them.

In the March 31 elections, Türk, Sönük and Karay?lan had won with 57, 64 and 39 percent of the votes, respectively.

Türk, Sönük and Karay?lan, whose applications to participate in the elections were found to be in accordance with the law, were suspended on the grounds that they have *unascertained* prison sentences for “membership of an armed terrorist organisation” and are under investigation. This means that the government of Recep Tayyip Erdo?an is once again unconstitutionally replacing the judiciary.

The appointment of trustees to replace elected mayors is a blatant attack on basic democratic rights. The Socialist Equality Group condemns this anti-democratic police state repression and calls for the reinstatement of elected mayors.

The latest trustee appointments follow the arrest last week of Professor Dr. Ahmet Özer, the Mayor of Istanbul’s Esenyurt Municipality of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), on charges of “membership of the armed terrorist organisation PKK/KCK”, and the appointment of a trustee in his place. Özer, a Kurdish sociologist/academic, had been nominated as a candidate as part of a collaboration between the CHP and the DEM party. In June, Mehmet S?dd?k Ak??, co-mayor of Hakkâri municipality from the DEM party, was suspended and the governor of Hakkâri was appointed as trustee.

Since 2015, the Erdo?an government has made intensive use of this unlawful practice, which de facto

abolishes the Kurdish people’s right to vote and be elected.

The report published by the DEM party in December 2023 stated that 93 mayors elected on March 30 2014 were arrested and trustees appointed in 95 municipalities; 43 mayors elected on March 31, 2019 were arrested and trustees appointed in 48 municipalities; and currently 17 mayors, seven MPs and 14 other leaders are in prison.

The police violently attacked the protests organised in different provinces after the appointment of the trustees and arrested hundreds of people. It is reported that 75 people were arrested in Batman, 16 in Halfeti, nine in Mardin and seven in Van. The press reported that police officers covered their faces with ski masks or medical masks and detained many people, including journalists and children, by beating them.

The police state repression in the Kurdish provinces comes in the context of Erdogan posing as a defender of the Palestinian people while continuing to feed the Israeli war machine that is committing genocide in Gaza and expanding its war into Lebanon and Iran, further exposing the government’s hypocrisy.

In its first statement after the trustee appointments, the DEM Party Central Executive Committee pointed out that the attacks by the government on democratic rights will escalate: “The trustee coup is a problem of democracy and freedom for 85 million people, and if it is not prevented, it will not be limited to Kurdish provinces nor to the municipalities that have been usurped so far.... Everyone must raise their voice and objection at the highest level against this illegitimate coup approach.”

Before the government’s wave of trustee appointments, Turkey had witnessed important developments. Two weeks ago, Devlet Bahçeli, the

leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the fascist ally of the “People’s Alliance” led by Erdo?an, made an unprecedented statement in which he suggested that Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), should be released from isolation, make a speech in parliament and “shout that terrorism is completely over and the organisation has been disbanded”.

After Bahçeli’s statement, supported by Erdo?an, Öcalan—who has been in prison almost 25 years—was allowed to meet with his nephew Ömer Öcalan, DEM deputy for ?anl?urfa, as a sign of lifting the 44-month isolation imposed on him. These developments were interpreted as the beginning of a new “peace process” with the PKK, which Ankara had been trying to suppress since 1984.

However, just one day after Bahçeli’s speech, while Erdo?an was in Russia for the BRICS summit, the PKK carried out a bomb and gun attack on the Ankara facilities of the state-owned strategic defence company Turkish Aerospace Industries Corporation (TAI). This was followed by the government’s appointments of trustees.

Despite these developments, Bahçeli said on Tuesday that he stood by his proposal, adding that “the exploitation [by the CHP of the appointment of a trustee to replace] Ahmet Türk is an insidious ploy to drive a wedge between ?mral? [Öcalan] and the DEM party”. In other words, Bahçeli, Erdo?an’s ally, expressed his support for a harmonious political relationship between Öcalan and the DEM Party.

Türk, who has been replaced by a trustee three times so far, responded to Bahçeli by emphasising his party’s search for reconciliation with Erdo?an and Bahçeli: “What is important for us is that there is an environment of dialogue. If we are having a dialogue with the CHP today, this is for to meet, talk and discuss with all political parties in Turkey and come up with a formula that will help solve the problem. We will also meet Mr Bahçeli if they have really effort to solve the problem and work for a democratic future. So nobody is in a position to exploit us.”

The escalation of the Erdogan government’s reactionary attack on elected mayors and the political opposition shows the bankruptcy of the perspective of the Kurdish nationalist movement, which welcomes a new “peace process” with the government. Workers

and youth must firmly reject such claims, which ascribe a progressive role to right-wing bourgeois forces allied with imperialism and Zionism.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) has explained, the Erdogan government’s attempt to reach an agreement with the PKK over Öcalan has nothing to do with the pursuit of democratic rights and peace. The Turkish and Kurdish bourgeois nationalist leaderships, both allies of US-NATO imperialism, are trying to consolidate their positions and advance their reactionary interests under the conditions of an escalating war in the Middle East.

The political forces allied and complicit with US-NATO imperialism—which for decades have turned the Middle East into a bloodbath, support Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and are preparing for a regional war against Iran—are structurally incapable of solving any fundamental democratic and social problems. This task falls to the working class, which must be united on the basis of an international socialist programme against imperialism and its regional proxies.



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