

Erdo?an government's wave of repression continues amid growing wildcat strikes

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Against the background of increasing social inequality and growing discontent within the working class, the Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an continues its wave of arrests and repression against the political and social opposition. These mainly target the working class and the remaining basic democratic rights.

A new investigation has been opened against Mehmet T?rkmen, the leader of the rank-and-file union, the United Textile, Weaving and Leather Workers' Union (B?RTEK-SEN), who was arrested on February 17. T?rkmen was arrested as part of the government's attempts to suppress a wave of wildcat strikes in the textile industrial centre of Gaziantep. The arrest came amid growing wildcat strikes and resistances by different sections of the working class, from textile workers to miners and metal workers.

In early February, workers in more than 20 factories in the city's Ba?p?nar Organised Industrial Zone started protests and work stoppages against the imposition of low wage increases. On February 13, the Gaziantep Governorate—fearing that the strikes would trigger a workers' movement in the region and the whole country—issued a 15-day “ban on protests” in the whole city in violation of the constitution and ordered the removal of the resistance tents in front of the workplaces. T?rkmen was also arrested on February 17 on unfounded charges of “incitement to commit a crime” and “violating labour and working life” after being detained twice.

The wildcat strikes and protests of the Ba?p?nar workers continue, albeit in a limited way due to the ban and repression, and the workers state that they will continue to fight for their rights and for the freedom of the imprisoned T?rkmen once the ban ends. However, the workers should not be under the illusion that the

end of the ban will end the pressure on them.

In fact, the arbitrary and unconstitutional nature of T?rkmen's arrest is so obvious that it seems that a new investigation is needed to keep him in prison. The statement of B?RTEK-SEN said that a new investigation has been opened against T?rkmen on the charge of “insulting the institutions and organs of the state” because of his press statement on February 14.

B?RTEK-SEN made a statement on X and reacted by saying: “Are you being insulted because he said that you are trampling on the law to the governor who banned the action of the workers who stopped work without resorting to violence in any way?”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously stated , “The only real crime is the unconstitutional ban on demonstrations by the governorate, and the arrest of T?rkmen in favour of the companies.” This “is aimed at criminalising all workers' struggles and expressions of support for these struggles.”

The Socialist Equality Group—the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—and the International Workers' Alliance of Rank and File Committees (IWA-RFC) call for the release of Turkmen and all other political prisoners.

Socialist autoworker and IWA-RFC leader Will Lehman, who works at the Mack Trucks plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania, posted a video on TikTok on Monday condemning Turkmen's arrest and calling for his immediate release.

“T?rkmen's arrest is an attack on the entire working class... Repression isn't just happening in Turkey. It's a global war on the working class. Everywhere, governments side with corporations to keep wages low and crush independent organizing,” Lehman said, drawing attention to the international character of the repression of the working class.

In 2022, Lehman, who ran for president of the United Auto Workers union on a programme of rank-and-file workers' power and abolishing the union bureaucracy, received around 5,000 votes. Lehman's video received over 2,000 likes in a short time after it was posted, while hundreds of people shared it and wrote supportive comments. The *Evrensel* newspaper published a news report on Lehman's statement.

In order to intimidate the social opposition, the government is trying to criminalise workers' struggles and support for them, while at the same time trying to show legal political organisations as an extension of a "terrorist organisation".

In an operation against the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK), a coalition of parties led by the Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), 51 people were detained on "terrorism" charges in house raids in 10 cities across Turkey last week. While 30 of the detainees were arrested, 13 were placed under house arrest. Eight were released on judicial control conditions. Among those arrested are journalists Elif Akgül, Ercüment Akdeniz and Yıldıız Tar.

"We have been informed that there is an HDK case and HDK investigation process involving around 6,000 people. 1,600 of them are our citizens living in Istanbul," said Şekender Bayhan, Labour Party (EMEP) Istanbul deputy.

Contrary to the claims of the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, the 20th High Criminal Court in İzmir ruled on December 7, 2023 that the HDK was not an illegal organisation. The 2nd Criminal Chamber of the İzmir Regional Court of Appeals also upheld the decision that the HDK was legal, making the decision final.

The Erdoğan government has also stepped up its crackdown on the CHP, which emerged as the first party in last year's local elections by forming an alliance with the DEM Party in several electoral district, and its presumptive presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

The increased pressure on the two major parties in parliament, which received a combined 20 million votes last year, and their political allies, comes amid the Erdoğan government's negotiations with imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan. Yesterday, DEM Party delegation visited

Öcalan for the third time. Öcalan has been expected to make a statement on disarming the PKK.

The government is using the judiciary under its control as a tool to intimidate political opposition, while targeting legal organisations that oppose it. This is why the board of the Istanbul Bar Association is facing terrorism charges.

The charges are based on the Istanbul Bar Association's statement on the killing of two journalists who were reportedly targeted by Turkish drones during clashes between the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army and Kurdish forces (YPG/SDF) in northern Syria in December. The prosecution claimed that the journalists were "terrorists" involved in the clashes and saw the Bar Association's designation of them like "journalists" as grounds for crimes of "publicly spreading misleading information" and "making propaganda for a terrorist organisation through the press and broadcasting".

In the statement subject to the investigation, the Istanbul Bar Association had stated: "According to the information reflected in the press, journalists Nazım Dağtan and Cihan Bilgin lost their lives as a result of the attack they were subjected to while following the developments in Syria on 19 December. Targeting members of the press in conflict zones is a violation of International Humanitarian Law and the Geneva Convention."

Under conditions of escalating imperialist war and intensifying class struggle, governments around the world are turning to authoritarian regimes. This global trend, accelerated by Trump's return to power in the US, is the response of the ruling classes to the deepening crisis of the capitalist social system. The only way for the working class to defend democratic and social rights is to unite and mobilise on the basis of an international socialist programme against the capitalist system and all parties that defend it.



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