

Turkey: The way forward for mass protests against Istanbul mayor ?mamo?lu's detention

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21 March 2025

Mass protests erupted following the detention of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor and potential presidential candidate of the Republican People's Party (CHP) Ekrem ?mamo?lu on Wednesday morning, over allegations of terrorism and corruption. They continue to expand. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets across the country to protest the use of the judiciary as a weapon by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government.

The main demonstration took place in Istanbul, where large crowds defied the Istanbul Governorate's ban on protests. Despite the CHP not issuing any call for protests on Wednesday, mass demonstrations broke out. After the protesters defied the ban, the CHP leadership also organized rallies in Saraçhane, where the municipality building is located, on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. The CHP announced that it would hold rallies in 35 provinces on Friday evening.

The protests have particularly mobilized university students. In Istanbul, students from Istanbul University, Marmara University, Galatasaray University, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Bahçe?ehir University, Y?ld?z Technical University, and Istanbul Technical University marched on campuses and in city centers.

In Izmir, students from Dokuz Eylül University moved their protest from the campus to the streets of Buca. On Thursday evening, students overcame police barricades in front of Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) provincial building to continue their protests.

In Eski?ehir, students from Anadolu University and Eski?ehir Osmangazi University, as well as from Uluda? University in Bursa, protested ?mamo?lu's detention with marches. Protests were also held in Adana, Amasya, Çorum, Trabzon, Antalya, and many other cities, with workers joining alongside students.

In the capital Ankara, Middle East Technical University (METU) students faced a violent police attack, leading to clashes. METU students held a press statement on campus with slogans such as "Government, resign!" While attempting to march to the Ministry of Justice, students were

met with tear gas from the police. The METU action committee, which decided to boycott classes, called on all universities to join the boycott.

The Socialist Equality Group and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), support the mass protests and boycotts and call for their expansion. Workers must mobilize to defend students and democratic rights, and students must turn to the working class by reaching out to factories and workplaces.

Broad masses of workers, facing worsening inflation, dire living standards, and increasing exploitation, are ready to fight but are being restrained by both bourgeois opposition parties and trade union confederations. Recent challenges to Erdo?an's strike bans by metalworkers and the outbreak of numerous wildcat strikes demonstrate this.

The call by workers at ?ZSU, the water and sewage administration under the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, to bring the mass protests to the working class is significant. On Friday, a workplace representative of Tüm Bel-Sen, affiliated with the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (KESK), read a press statement declaring:

From here, we call on our class brothers and sisters in the workplaces and factories, especially in all the municipalities where we work. We call on all the professional and democratic mass organisations, workers, labourers and all the sections of the public, especially the trade unions and labour organisations of which we are members, to unite for a strong and common struggle, to win our common future by deciding on a general strike and general resistance against unjust and illegal practices and the usurpation of the people's will.

The protest movement needs a clear political perspective and leadership. This will not be provided by the CHP, which fears the protests spiraling out of its control and spreading to

workplaces, turning into a mass mobilization of the working class.

On the contrary, the CHP's initial response to the detention of ?mamo?lu and over 80 others was to gather in party offices. The CHP leadership's main call was to direct the masses to the presidential primary scheduled for Sunday, where ?mamo?lu is the sole candidate.

However, neither government pressure nor the CHP's electoral calls could stop the mass protests, forcing CHP leader Özgür Özel to address protesters in Saraçhane on Thursday evening with the following words: "From now on, no one should expect the Republican People's Party to do politics in salons; from now on, we are in the streets, in the squares."

Özel added: "The streets are ours, the squares are ours, without breaking and destroying, without burning and destroying, but without cowering. They say to me: 'Are you calling for the streets?' Yes! Yes! Yes!... We will not sit at home, hungry, unemployed, insecure. We are not going to sit in our homes while you keep our elected in jail."

Özel announced an extraordinary congress on April 6 in response to the government's claim that the CHP's previous congress was invalid and raising the possibility of appointing a trustee to the party.

Erdo?an, who remained silent for nearly two days, attempted to downplay the protests in a statement on X on Thursday evening. Hinting that there was no question of a fair trial and that the verdict had already been rendered, Erdo?an said: "If you pay attention, the opposition, including the CHP, the media and other structures, can never respond to the allegations made by the judiciary on the issue of diplomas, corruption and theft. Instead, they confine the issue to political slogans and try to deceive the nation."

In another statement on Friday, Erdo?an threatened to shut down the CHP, saying: "Unfortunately, under the current administration, the CHP is rapidly losing its status as a party that conducts politics on legitimate grounds due to its asymmetrical relations with illegal organizations, corruption up to its neck, attitudes that encourage putschists, and problematic discourses that provoke street terrorism."

The ineffective protest ban in Istanbul was extended to the other two largest cities. The governorates of Izmir and Ankara announced a ban on all protests and gatherings from March 21 to 25. These steps, like the ban in Istanbul, violate the constitution and fundamental democratic rights, signaling the government's move toward a de facto state of emergency nationwide.

The Erdo?an government also imposed unlawful restrictions on the Internet to suppress protests, and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) fined or suspended programs on TV channels such as NOW TV,

Sözcü TV, Halk TV, and TELE1 for their coverage of ?mamo?lu's detention.

The government is attempting to impose martial law on social media. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced on Friday morning that 326 "suspicious account managers" had been identified, with 54 "captured." Yerlikaya stated that 53 people were detained during Thursday night's demonstrations.

For some time, the government has been taking steps to criminalize and violently suppress all forms of opposition and mass protest. New investigations have been opened related to the 2013 Gezi Park protests, which saw millions participate nationwide against police-state oppression.

Journalist ?smail Saymaz was detained on the same day as ?mamo?lu in connection with an investigation into the Gezi Park protests, accused of "aiding an attempt to overthrow the Turkish government." Saymaz, who stated that he was fulfilling his journalistic profession, was sentenced to house arrest.

Key factors driving the masses to the streets to defend democratic rights are enormous social inequality and deteriorating living conditions. The CHP leaders are making promises in their speeches to end poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. However, a potential CHP government would act in the interests of the same ruling class represented by Erdo?an and against the working class and youth.

The CHP's support for Finance Minister Mehmet ?im?ek's anti-worker program and its alignment with the European Union, which is pursuing a similar program to fund militarism and the war in Ukraine, demonstrate that it stands against this struggle.

The aspirations of the working class and youth for a democratic regime and social equality require a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the ruling class, which reflects in the political sphere its dictatorship over the economy. This can only be achieved by ensuring the political independence of the working class, which produces all social wealth, from pro-capitalist parties and by mobilizing it on a socialist program. Join the struggle for this perspective and the building of the Socialist Equality Party!



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