

# 200 people jailed as mass protests continue in Turkey

**Ula? Ate?çi****26 March 2025**

Some 1,500 people have been detained and 200 sent to prison across Turkey as mass protests continue against the arrest of Istanbul Mayor and Republican People's Party (CHP) presidential candidate Ekrem ?mamo?lu last week.

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Sar?chane Square on Tuesday, where over 1 million gathered on Sunday to protest the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an after ?mamo?lu was arrested and sent to prison. Protests continued on Monday, while school boycotts and mass demonstrations by university students have grown. The CHP announced the next rally in Istanbul will be held on Saturday in Maltepe Square.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced on Tuesday that a total of 1,418 people have been detained since March 19. On Tuesday alone, 174 people were arrested and sent to prison in Istanbul. Four people were arrested in Kocaeli and ten in Izmir.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group, SEG), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), and the *World Socialist Web Site* condemn the arrests and detentions and demand the immediate release of all political prisoners.

Among those arrested are several journalists and leading members of the Labor Party (EMEP), the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), the Left Party, the Communist Movement of Turkey (TKH) and the Social Freedom Party (TÖP).

On Wednesday morning, many others were detained in Istanbul, Bursa and Adana as the police continued their house raids. Among those detained was academician Levent Dölek, deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (D?P) and representative of educators' union, E?itim-Sen at Istanbul University.

Dölek was detained for "violating the law on meetings and demonstrations" by participating in a one-day work stoppage organized by E?itim-Sen in solidarity with the ongoing student boycott at universities. The governorships of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir unconstitutionally declared "protest bans" last week but they were overturned by the defiance of the youth and working masses.

Students from several universities in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir started a school boycott on Monday to defend democratic rights and protest the government. Faculty members of the

Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara organized a march to protest the operation targeting E?itim-Sen for its strike.

University students, who have been organizing marches and demonstrations for days despite police repression, staged one of the largest student protests in Istanbul in decades on Tuesday. According to news reports, the students' joint protest march was two kilometers long.

CHP leader Özgür Özel declared that the Erdo?an government's "coup attempt" against ?mamo?lu has been defeated, stating: "The coup attempt on March 19 was to install a trustee appointed by an indigestible coup plotter who could not defeat the elected ?stanbul mayor. We sincerely thank the tens of millions of people they did not take into account for defending the will of ?stanbul and defeating the coup."

However, ?mamo?lu was unlawfully removed from his post as mayor and sent to prison, and it is unclear whether he will be able to run for president in the next elections. The CHP is the founding party of the Turkish Republic established by Atatürk.

?mamo?lu, the only candidate in the CHP's presidential primaries on Sunday in which 15 million people participated, had his university degree, a requirement for candidacy, revoked the day before he was detained.

In his remarks to Tuesday night's rally, Özel addressed Erdo?an and demanded ?mamo?lu's hearings be broadcast live on state-owned TRT channel. On Wednesday, Erdo?an signaled that the crackdown on the CHP would continue, implying that the ruling in the case of ?mamo?lu had already been made.

"?stanbul Metropolitan Municipality and some district municipalities [run by CHP] seem to have written the book on cannibalism when it comes to theft. The extent of the shame that began with the irregular diploma [of ?mamo?lu] and continued with the bribery and extortion ring that wrapped around the whole city like an octopus has been revealed with the latest operation," Erdo?an said, adding, "All kinds of illegality, including corruption, amounting to 100 billion liras, have been revealed."

He continued: "Moreover, these are the crimes that the judiciary accused them of based on information coming from inside the CHP. Bigger ones will follow... Instead of shedding

light on the allegations, the CHP leadership preferred to play cheap politics and tried to create chaos in the country by taking people to the streets.”

In reality the CHP did not take the people to the streets, but did its best to control the masses who took to the streets spontaneously, seeking to prevent the movement from radicalizing and subordinating it to capitalist rule.

On Tuesday, Finance Minister Mehmet ?imsek and Central Bank Governor Fatih Karahan held an online meeting with many investors from North America, the United Kingdom, Europe and the Middle East to reassure finance capital. The Central Bank is estimated to have sold around US\$26 billion in three days as the Turkish lira plunged against the US dollar after ?mamoglu’s detention last week.

“The increase in inflation expectations will not require a second increase in the minimum wage for the time being,” said ?im?ek, pointing out that the price of the financial turmoil will be paid by workers who have been subjected to a severe austerity. Official annual inflation was 39 percent in February.

The sharp decline in the living conditions of workers and youth played an important role in the eruption of mass anger against the Erdo?an government over the detention of ?mamo?lu. The austerity program led by ?imsek, which the CHP supported, has led to a severe decline in real wages. This has provoked wildcat strikes in many sectors, from metal workers to miners, textile workers to construction workers. Most recently, on Tuesday, hundreds of workers at the construction site of the strategic Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Mersin, a joint venture with Russia, walked off the job because they were denied a wage increase for the new year.

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan traveled to Washington on Tuesday for a two-day official visit. After talks with his US counterpart Marco Rubio, the State Department issued a statement saying the secretary of state “expressed concerns regarding recent arrests and protests in ?Turkiye.”

This was a purely token response. As the Socialist Equality Party (US) has explained:

Operating on the basis of the fascist theory of the “State of Exception,” the Trump administration is carrying out a deliberate and systematic plan to establish a presidential dictatorship.

Trump, who himself ignores the Constitution and judicial rulings in the US, had a phone conversation with Erdo?an three days before the detention of ?mamo?lu. Afterwards, Elon Musk’s X/Twitter blocked access to dozens, perhaps hundreds, of accounts in Turkey that publicized the protests and police violence.

The Trump administration’s stance is closely related to

Turkey’s important role in US plans to recolonize the Middle East and plunder Ukraine.

The US State Department stated that Rubio “requested ?Turkiye’s support for peace in Ukraine and the South Caucasus,” and reiterated “the need for close cooperation to support a stable, unified, peaceful Syria” against “destabilizing Iranian activities.” “Good place, good leader, too,” Trump declared on Tuesday, referring to Turkey and Erdogan.

Meanwhile, the CHP seeks to allay the fears of not only the Erdogan government but also the Turkish bourgeoisie of the possible eruption of a revolutionary working-class movement, while trying to reassure its NATO allies and win their support.

In an interview with CNN after the mass protests began, CHP leader ?Ozel declared, “We are working for our country, and we support a strong alliance with NATO and integration with the West,” referring to Washington and other NATO capitals.

Speaking to the BBC on Wednesday, he lamented the lack of opposition to Erdo?an’s regime from his British ally, Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer, stating: “We feel abandoned... What kind of friendship is this, what kind of sister party is this? How can we defend democracy together?”

The CHP’s orientation to the Labour Party, one of the major parties of British imperialism, is revealing. In fact, Starmer does not stand for democracy in Britain or elsewhere and pursues an agenda of imperialist war and class warfare in the face of popular opposition. As the Socialist Equality Party (UK) has stated:

Starmer is determined to prevent a peace deal in Ukraine, is drenched in the blood of the Palestinians and seeking to impose savage attacks on the working class to fuel a forced march to war with catastrophic consequences.

The working class must mobilize independently to defend democratic rights and its social conditions. The way forward is to oppose all the parties of the capitalist establishment and their imperialist allies and turn to the European, American and international working class and its revolutionary vanguard, the Socialist Equality Parties affiliated with the ICFI.



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