

The murder of Turkish worker Erol E?rek demands an independent investigation

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Erol E?rek died on Friday, May 9 after being beaten by bodyguards and security guards in front of the Çal?k Holding company headquarters in ?i?li, Istanbul. E?rek had gone there to demand his compensation, which he had not received from Çal?k Holding for 10 years, despite court rulings.

E?rek's murder is a crime against the entire working class and an indictment of the capitalist system. His death, which must be considered beyond the company's specific hatred and animosity towards one worker, confirms that the lives of workers have no value in the eyes of the ruling class.

Workers must demand an independent investigation into this crime and call for accountability, not just from the security guards but also from a company with close ties to the government. This must be part of a broader struggle to seek justice for the thousands of workers who are victims of occupational homicide or die from work-related causes every year, and to prevent such deaths worldwide.

E?rek worked as an electrical-electronics technician at Çal?k Holding's textile factory in Turkmenistan from 2004 to 2009. In 2009, he was laid off without compensation amid the global financial crisis. Unlike other workers dismissed during the same period, who were paid by the company through the relevant ministry in Turkmenistan, E?rek was not paid. Çal?k Holding told Erol E?rek to claim his receivables from the Turkmenistan Ministry of Textile Industry, citing the "statute of limitations".

In 2010, E?rek filed applications with the ministry, state officials and the President of Turkmenistan. After failing to receive a response, he filed lawsuits for compensation against Çal?k Holding.

E?rek won all the lawsuits he filed against the company but was still not paid his compensation in the 10 years that have passed. In a difficult financial situation, he was charged with "slander" by Ahmet Çal?k, owner of Çal?k

Holding. The court acquitted E?rek.

On May 9, E?rek went to the Çal?k Holding building to discuss his compensation, but was not allowed in. Tensions broke out between himself and bodyguards waiting outside the building. He shot a video there, explaining his victimisation. In the video, shared on social media, he said, "I have not received my compensation for 10 years. I have been struggling for my rights. All I ask is that they give me what I am owed."

E?rek put his gun to his own head. He was then attacked by the guards of the holding company. The guards, said to be around 10 people, took the gun away from E?rek and beat him for several minutes. E?rek was hospitalized and later pronounced dead.

A total of six people, including a police officer, were detained in connection with the incident. Six people were brought before a judge in the evening, charged with "intentional killing". Four people were arrested, while two other suspects were released under judicial supervision.

The prosecutor's office stated in the referral letter that the company's security guards beat E?rek, hitting him on the head and back with the handle of the gun they had taken from him. They then took him to the corridor next to the holding company's security room, where they handcuffed him behind his back. He was then taken to hospital by police to obtain a report on the assault, where he collapsed.

E?rek's family said they wanted to cover up the incident by calling it a "heart attack" even though he was beaten to death.

Çal?k Holding has experienced rapid growth under the rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002. According to the company's financial and annual reports, Çal?k Holding regularly received investment incentives from public sources. Between 2015 and 2023, this totalled \$95.68

million. The current monetary value of this is approximately 3.78 billion Turkish liras.

Ahmet Çal?k is ranked 25th among Turkish billionaires on the 2025 Forbes list, with a fortune of \$1.5 billion. According to Forbes, “In terms of contract value, Calik Holding's pipeline of construction and energy projects amounts to around \$7 billion.”

Çal?k Holding has grown rapidly in many sectors, including energy, telecommunications, finance, textiles, construction and media, through privatisations, construction tenders, foreign agreements and favourable loan conditions. However, it reportedly paid no taxes to the state between 2019 and 2024.

The incentives, tax breaks and growth the company has received reflect the transformation of the Turkish economy into an oligarchic structure and a kleptocracy in recent decades, as has happened in many other countries. The owner of the company, whom Erdo?an calls “our Çal?k”, has strong ties to the government.

Last year, Çal?k Holding came to the spotlight with a massacre of workers during a natural disaster. A massive landslide occurred at the Çöpler Mine of Anagold, owned by the US-based Canadian company SRR Mining, in the ?liç district of Erzincan. While nine workers were killed, 10 million cubic meters of waste soil containing many toxic substances such as cyanide and sulfuric acid was released. The Canadian company's junior partner (20 percent) Lidya Madencilik, which made it easier for the Canadian company to circumvent legal procedures, was owned by Çal?k Holding.

As reported by the WSWS:

Worldwide, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that nearly 3 million workers die worldwide each year from work-related injuries and diseases. Roughly 330,000 of these are the result of traumatic injuries, while more than 2.6 million are caused by chronic occupational illnesses, such as cancer, circulatory failure, and respiratory disease. The global death toll is rising—up more than 12 percent since 2000. These staggering numbers do not include the millions of people who have died from COVID-19 over the past five years.

Workers must not tolerate these deaths or dangerous working conditions. They must defend their own lives and

the lives of their friends. However, this struggle cannot be left to the judiciary. In the Soma mine disaster of 2014, in which 301 miners lost their lives, the owner of the company involved served just eight days in prison for each worker killed. Throughout the trial, both prosecutors and judges were replaced. Yet no official responsible party was sentenced.

Workers cannot trust the union bureaucracies that have collaborated with the government and corporations for decades in regressing working and safety conditions. Workers need their own independent rank-and-file committees and investigations to challenge abuses and investigate accidents at work.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has called for an independent investigation into the crushing death of 63-year-old US machine repairman Ronald Adams Sr. at Stellantis' Dundee Engine Complex in southeast Michigan, on April 7, 2025.

The IWA-RFC exposed the collaborative role of the United Auto Workers (UAW), issuing the following statement:

There must not be another cover-up. An inquiry independent of Stellantis, the United Auto Workers (UAW) apparatus and state authorities is essential to uncover the truth, expose systemic safety violations and prevent future deaths. It must gather testimony from Dundee workers, autoworkers at other plants, safety experts and others with relevant knowledge. Such a workers' investigation is crucial to laying the basis for genuine rank-and-file oversight over safety and production conditions in the factories.

This investigation, launched in the US, must be embraced in Turkey and around the world and expanded with an independent investigation into E?rek's murder. We call on our readers to send messages of support to this campaign and to contact us to establish rank-and-file committees in their workplaces.



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