

Oppose the arrest of political prisoners Ahmad Mammadli and Afiaddin Mammadov in Azerbaijan!

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22 May 2025

An international petition has been launched for the release of Ahmad Mammadli and Afiaddin Mammadov, political dissidents arrested in Azerbaijan.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), regardless of our political differences with the pair, demand the immediate release of Mammadli and Mammadov, as well as all other political prisoners who are being persecuted by capitalist states around the world.

Mammadli, a dissident journalist, trade unionist and human rights defender, was detained late on May 6 and arrested on May 7 on trumped-up charges of “intentional injury,” according to a petition announced by the Socialist Laborers Party in Turkey.

Mammadli is known for his work in Azerbaijan first in the student movement and later in the labor movement. He was the chairman of the now-banned D-18 (Democracy 1918) party and one of the founders of the “Workers’ Table” union. The D-18 opposed Azerbaijan’s fratricidal conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

According to the petition, Mammadli was tortured in detention, denied food for three days, and subjected to electroshock interrogation to force him to reveal his phone password.

Mammadli has faced state repression before. On September 19, 2022, he expressed his opposition to the war with Armenia on X/Twitter, describing President Ilham Aliyev as a “dictator with blood on his hands” and stating that “it is the duty of a democratic Azerbaijan to prosecute those who incite hatred between peoples.” He was sentenced to 30 days of administrative imprisonment following his statements opposing the war efforts of Baku.

Like Mammadli, Mammadov is one of the leaders of the D-18 party and a co-founder of the “Workers’ Table.” He was sentenced to eight years in prison after a prolonged period of detention from September 2023.

In court, Mammadov declared that the “knife attack” charge against him was fabricated: he was forcibly handed a knife by

the police during his detention, witness statements were contradictory, and no evidence was presented during the court proceedings. “Accusations of crimes we did not commit are punishment for our opposition to the ruling class,” he said in his defense, drawing attention to the political nature of the charges.

According to the petition, Mammadli and Mammadov were also targeted because the Workers’ Table union organized strikes by motorcycle couriers in Azerbaijan. Following the strikes, union members were also detained on trumped-up charges.

Human rights violations by the Aliyev regime in Azerbaijan are not isolated. It is reportedly common practice for the regime to criminalise and silence its opponents by making allegations of drug use, extortion and injury against them.

According to the 2024 report by Amnesty International, independent oversight is almost completely banned in Azerbaijan, where civil society organisations, independent media outlets, and human rights defenders are severely repressed. Critical journalists and activists are arrested on fabricated charges of “smuggling” and “illegal entrepreneurship.” Those who participate in peaceful demonstrations are imprisoned on false “drug-related” charges, while complaints of torture and ill-treatment go unpunished.

On May 7, Reuters reported that Ulviyya Ali, a journalist with the independent Meydan TV, had been arrested alongside six colleagues on charges of “smuggling.” The journalists describe all of the charges as politically motivated and fabricated. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has reported that 24 journalists and media professionals are currently imprisoned in Azerbaijan.

Strategically located in the Caucasus near the Caspian Sea, the Republic of Azerbaijan borders Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Iran. As a former Soviet republic, it has been ruled by an authoritarian regime controlled by the Aliyev family since 1993. The current president, Ilham Aliyev, is the son of Heydar Aliyev, who was the general secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and head of the Stalinist regime from 1969 to 1982.

In its ultimate betrayal of the October Revolution of 1917, the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the USSR in 1991, leading to the creation of bourgeois states based on the interests of new capitalist oligarchs. Aliyev also used his position inside the Soviet state to establish an authoritarian and clientelist regime in Azerbaijan.

In 2003, Aliyev senior handed over power to his son in a sham election organised during his visit to the United States, when he was seriously ill. This process was essentially the result of the tacit agreement and direct involvement of Washington and Moscow. Many independent observers have described Ilham's "election" to the presidency with 76 percent of the vote as a political stunt, accompanied by forged ballots, ballot box rigging, voter suppression, and systematic violence against the opposition.

The Aliyev regime has become a partnership of interests between Azeri capitalist oligarchs and Western energy monopolies, with the state machinery acting as a tool to protect the interests of this minority.

At the same time, it has been strengthened by the foreign support received in exchange for providing geostrategic services to NATO's imperialist powers. Today, Azerbaijan's rich oil and gas reserves have made it a major energy supplier to Europe, reducing its dependence on Russia—a country that has been targeted with sanctions by the US and EU as part of the war over Ukraine. Azerbaijan is also seen as a critical country in Washington and Tel Aviv's plans for the total domination of the Middle East and war preparations with Tehran, given its proximity to Iran.

Azerbaijan, which has increased its military and strategic cooperation with Israel in recent years, is complicit in the Gaza genocide by feeding the Zionist war machine with oil supplied through Turkey. According to a report by Oil Change International from August 2024, Israel imports almost 99 percent of the oil it uses, with Azerbaijan being the main supplier, providing 28 percent of the crude oil going to Israel.

The Aliyev regime also has a military-strategic alliance with NATO member Turkey's government led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, promoted by the nationalist rhetoric of "two states, one nation." Ankara played an important role in Azerbaijan's military superiority in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Baku and Ankara advocate the opening of a corridor ("Zangezur Corridor") between Turkey and Azerbaijan through Armenian territory.

The Erdoğan government is also proceeding with a plan for a presidential dictatorship that is gaining momentum. State repression, which for decades has mainly targeted the Kurdish nationalist movement and leftists, has recently extended to the Republican People's Party (CHP), the party of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded the Republic in 1923.

The politically motivated arrest last March of Ekrem İmamoğlu, presidential candidate and mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality on behalf of the CHP—a pro-NATO

right-wing bourgeois party like Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP)—was part of a comprehensive attack on democratic rights, especially the right to vote and be elected. İmamoğlu was ahead of Erdoğan in the presidential election polls.

Amid a mass mobilization across the country against this state crackdown, nearly two thousand people who exercised their constitutional right to protest were detained and over three hundred protesters were jailed for long periods of time.

As in Turkey, the authoritarianism in Azerbaijan is part of a global phenomenon that has been accelerated particularly since the second inauguration of US President Donald Trump. In the face of deepening crises of the capitalist system, growing geopolitical tensions, and intensifying class antagonisms, ruling elites are resorting to waging wars abroad and class warfare at home. Attacks on the working class are escalating everywhere in order to transfer more wealth to corporations, banks and oligarchs, and to finance increased military spending.

These policies cannot be imposed on the working class by peaceful, democratic means. In the face of growing opposition from workers and youth, capitalist states in the service of the ruling class are resorting to more police violence, censorship, arrests and judicial manipulation. The targeting of Ahmad Mammadli and Afiaddin Mammadov is an expression of this international process in Azerbaijan.

The most significant manifestation of this global wave of repression is the ongoing imprisonment of Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotyuk. He has been detained since April 2024 for defending the international unity of the working class against imperialism as well as the capitalist oligarchic regimes in Ukraine and Russia. Since then, the ICFI has been waging a global campaign to free Bogdan.

The fight for democratic rights is inextricably linked to the fight against imperialist war and the capitalist system that produces it. Rather than making futile appeals to imperialist or capitalist governments, this struggle must be based on the mobilization of the international working class on a revolutionary socialist programme. The ICFI and its national sections are fighting for this perspective. Contact us to build an ICFI section in Azerbaijan and other countries.

Sign the petition for the freedom of Ahmad Mammadli and Afiaddin Mammadov.



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