

# As Erdoğan government repression mounts, CHP leader Özel calls for early elections

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With the political witch-hunt of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government against municipalities controlled by the Republican People's Party (CHP) continuing to escalate, CHP leader Özgür Özel has responded by calling for early elections in November.

On Saturday, the mayors of three CHP-run municipalities, Abdurrahman Tutdere (Adıyaman Municipality), Muhittin Böcek (Antalya Metropolitan Municipality) and Zeydan Karalar (Adana Metropolitan Municipality), were detained on "corruption" charges. The operation follows the arrest earlier this month of 60 people, including Tunç Soyer, the former mayor of CHP-run İzmir, the country's third largest city, on "corruption" charges.

The politically motivated state repression against the CHP began in October last year with the arrest of Prof. Dr. Ahmet Özer, the mayor of Esenyurt in Istanbul, on charges of "being a member of the armed terrorist organization," referring to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The official justification for Özer's arrest and the appointment of a trustee in his place was the CHP's fully legal electoral alliance with the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) in the 2024 local elections, known as the "urban consensus". The CHP came first in the local elections against Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul's mayor and the CHP's presidential candidate, was ahead of Erdoğan in the polls for the presidential elections. However, on 19 March, he was detained on allegations of "corruption" and "terrorism" and subsequently arrested on "corruption" charges.

In the midst of negotiations between the Erdoğan government and the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, the government paused its violent crackdown on the DEM Party and dropped the terror charges, while corruption charges against the CHP were intensified, largely based on "confessions". This was followed by a wave of arrests of scores of mayors, councillors and party officials across the country in operations portraying İmamoğlu as the leader of a "criminal organization".

At the same time, an investigation was launched into the annulment of the CHP congress in November 2023, at which Özgür Özel was elected with the support of Ekrem İmamoğlu, on the grounds that the process was "shady". In response, the CHP convened an extraordinary congress and re-elected the current administration. However, a new lawsuit has been filed to annul this congress too. Although legal experts say it is not legally possible for a court to annul a party congress approved by the Supreme Election Board, the case was postponed until September at a hearing held last week.

In a press statement on Saturday, CHP leader Özgür Özel said: "It is clear that they no longer want to govern this country with the nation's consent. They want to eliminate the only thing left in the hands of the people—the ballot box—and they are preparing to do so. They are imposing authoritarian rule without the ballot box."

"We will not let you sit there with 29 percent of the vote, Erdoğan," said Özel, calling for early elections on November 2: "Now, this struggle is between democracy and autocracy. It is a struggle to protect the ballot box. Everyone will take their place in history. On one side are those who protect the ballot box; on the other are those who surrender to Mr. Tayyip [Erdoğan] and his fears."

Referring to the Egyptian revolution in his speech, Özel said, "You can watch those democracy squares in Turkey on TV just like you watched the square in Egypt... I know the day I will invite the nation to the streets. Think for yourself what you [Erdoğan] will become on that day. But don't make me invite this nation to the streets."

Özel's mention of the Egyptian revolution, a strategic experience for the international working class, exposes the dirty record of both Erdoğan and the CHP on this issue.

In 2011, a mass revolutionary uprising in which the Egyptian working class played a decisive role toppled the decades-old, US-backed regime of President Hosni Mubarak. The subsequent election of Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, as president on a slim majority failed to solve any of the problems that had led to

the revolution.

In the summer of 2013, Egypt's Chief of Staff, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi—backed by the US—staged a bloody coup against Morsi, an ally of Erdoğan, and crushed the ongoing mass movement, massacring thousands.

For a long time, Erdoğan continued to condemn the coup that ousted Morsi and referred to Sisi as a “bloody dictator”. As relations between Egypt and Turkey reached a breaking point, the CHP has long advocated normalizing relations with the Sisi regime. Finally, Erdoğan, as part of the US “New Middle East” plans, hosted al-Sisi in Ankara last year and adopted the CHP's line.

Immediately after Özel's speech, the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation on the grounds of “insulting the President”, “public incitement to commit a crime” and “insulting and threatening public officials in the performance of their duties”.

In his X statement, ?mamo?lu addressed “the AKP politicians, the bureaucracy under tutelage and the business world”. He expressed his concern for the future of the bourgeois state and his expectations of these reactionary forces as follows: “Do you think that a mindset which cowardly imprisons those it cannot defeat, runs away from the nation and elections, and does work with consent of foreign heads of state, will not be rejected by the nation at the first opportunity? This issue is a matter of the state's existence or non-existence, and of the nation's. It is a matter of ‘survival’.”

Both Özel's and ?mamo?lu's statements confirm once again that the CHP is a right-wing party that is oriented towards the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus, rather than towards working people. They fear that the deepening crisis caused by the Erdoğan government's policies will lead to a mass movement among the working class in defence of democratic and social rights.

The experience of the mass protests in March, which were barely contained, is still fresh. Having become the target of the Erdoğan government's anti-democratic repression, the CHP has once again proved itself incapable of resisting this and defending democratic rights. After ?mamo?lu's arrest in March, millions of workers and young people took to the streets despite the bans, but the CHP brought this movement to an end.

Contrary to the claims of Özel and ?mamo?lu, the establishment of an authoritarian regime and the elimination of democratic rights is not only in Erdoğan's and “a handful of people's” interests, but in those of the ruling class as a whole, and it is an international phenomenon. In the face of growing social inequality and class tensions and developing global imperialist war—from the genocide in Gaza to the war against Iran, the US-NATO war against Russia and the

preparations for war against China—the ruling class everywhere is turning towards dictatorship.

Donald Trump's re-election as US president and his attempts to establish a political dictatorship in line with the socio-economic dominance of the financial oligarchy have emboldened and accelerated authoritarian and fascist tendencies worldwide. Basic democratic rights, such as the right to vote and stand for election, the right to a fair trial, and freedoms of expression, assembly, and the press, are under serious threat everywhere.

Despite Özel's rhetoric, the possibility of mass opposition expanding and the development of an independent working-class movement frightens the CHP and the trade union apparatus as much as it does the Erdoğan government. Millions of workers are outraged that their basic democratic rights are being stripped away, and that they are being subjected to a violent class offensive.

For the past two years, the government has been implementing a harsh austerity program aimed at reducing real wages in the name of fighting “inflation”. The CHP, together with the unions, has pursued a similar policy in its municipalities.

Currently, despite the pro-government sell-out efforts of the trade union confederations, 600,000 public sector workers are fighting in response to a pay rise offer imposed at the rate of official inflation, which equates to a cut in real pay.

Erdoğan's commitment to increase defence spending to 5 percent of GDP at the last NATO summit means an additional 1.5 trillion Turkish Liras will be spent from the budget, escalating the attack on the working class. The CHP is as pro-NATO as the Erdoğan government and supports this program of militarism and social attack. As parties of the capitalist order, the CHP and the AKP always join hands on critical class issues.

While opposing the repression of the CHP and defending democratic rights in principle, the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group) insists that the way forward lies in building a working-class movement that is independent of and opposed to all factions of the ruling class. This means fighting for the establishment of an anti-war, international socialist movement, the Socialist Equality Party.



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