

16 students arrested in Turkey for protesting deaths of child workers

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Sixteen students who are members of the Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P) were arrested on Wednesday for staging a protest against the deaths of high school students working at Vocational Training Centers (MESEM) under the Ministry of National Education. Four teachers who are members of the Private Sector Teachers' Union were detained.

On Tuesday, students gathered in front of the conference hall of the Vocational and Technical Education Summit organized by the Ministry of National Education. Students carrying a banner reading "Children's blood is on your hands" and photos of child workers who died while working in MESEMs, were detained by the police.

Video footage demonstrates that these were arbitrary arrests provoked by an attack by private security forces and police on young people during a peaceful protest in exercise of their constitutional rights.

On Wednesday, teachers staged a protest at the same location, declaring, "We are teachers; we will not allow our children to be killed," and demanding the closure of MESEMs. Subsequently, four teachers, including the general president of the grassroots union, were detained. While the prosecutor requested judicial control and a ban on leaving the country for the detained teachers, the court rejected this request and the teachers were released.

In a statement posted on X opposing detentions and arrests, the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) pointed out the falsity of the claim of "democratization" advanced by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government through negotiations with Abdullah Öcalan, jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Calling for an independent mass movement of the working class, it declared:

Yesterday, four teachers who are members of the Private Sector Teachers' Union were detained for saying "students should not be killed by MESEM," and 16 students who are members of the Workers' Party of Turkey were arrested for the same reason. This clearly exposes both the falseness of the claims of "democratization" and the dominance of the capitalist oligarchy, which does not recognize constitutional and legal rights.

Protesting the detention and arrest of teachers and students is not enough. Education workers' unions should go on strike demanding the immediate release of teachers and students; students should support this with boycotts.

To wage a genuine mass struggle against both political pressure and the deaths and child labor exploitation in MESEMs, independent rank-and-file committees must be built in schools, and workers must take the reins of the struggle into their own hands.

Since MESEMs were introduced in 2016, at least 16 children have been victims of workplace homicides in these centers. Through MESEM, high school-aged students between 14 and 18 are made to work four days a week in a workplace for four years and receive theoretical training at school for only one day. Children officially receive a salary equal to just 30 percent of the minimum wage (6,631 TL/\$160 USD) for the first three years and 50 percent of the minimum wage (11,052 TL/\$260 USD) as a foreman in the fourth year.? In its current form, MESEM provides cheap labor to capital rather than serving as an educational model.

According to the report by the Worker Health and Work Safety Council (?S?G), 13 children were victims of workplace homicides in November alone, four of whom were under the age of 14. This brings the total number of child workers who died in the first 11

months of 2025 to 85. This figure was 71 for the whole of 2024. In November, the total number of workers who died in “workplace accidents” was 216. Every year in Turkey, approximately 2,000 workers fall victim to workplace homicides caused by intensive exploitation in hazardous conditions and a lack of preventive measures.

Built in the interests of the ruling class, which is facing a deep political and economic crisis, this authoritarian regime targets the working class above all else amid growing class tensions and social inequality. This is an integral part of the process of authoritarian and far-right tendencies gaining strength worldwide, particularly under the Trump administration in the US.

On Wednesday, police in Izmir detained five members of the Social Freedom Party (TÖP) in a raid. In a statement, TÖP said, “Police reports prepared with fabricated reasons are being used to question our party activities and fabricate crimes.” Those detained were released on Thursday. The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi opposed the police state crackdown on TÖP members and demanded the release of those detained.

These operations expose the falseness of the claims that negotiations led by Erdo?an and his fascist ally Devlet Bahçeli, with the participation of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) under government pressure, will bring democracy and peace on the Kurdish issue. The Ankara-PKK agreement is part of the US’s efforts to reshape the Middle East under its domination. This agreement, the product of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie’s search for a reactionary alliance with imperialism over new wars, has no progressive aspect whatsoever.

The fundamental democratic rights of the Kurdish people continue to be disregarded, and those who defend these rights face state pressure. One of the most striking examples of this is the Supreme Court of Appeals Prosecutor’s Office’s attempt in September to intervene in the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi’s program, which included demands defending the rights of the Kurdish people. The Prosecutor’s Office demanded that legitimate democratic demands such as “education in one’s mother tongue” and “Kurdish becoming an official language with constitutional guarantees,” be changed or removed, but the party categorically rejected this.

Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi Chairman Ula? Sevinç sent

its response along with a letter to the headquarters, parliamentary groups, and deputies of parties that describe themselves as “left” or “democrat,” including the CHP and Kurdish political tendencies. Only the Socialist Laborers Party has responded to this call so far.



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