

Türkiye imprisons 77 members of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP), puts six members of Left Party under house arrest

Ula? Sevinç
8 February 2026

Last week, 77 of the 110 people detained in police operations targeting members of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) across Türkiye were arrested and sent to prison. This was the most comprehensive attack to date on the party, which was legally founded in 2010 and has frequently been subjected to political repression by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government. In a separate wave of state crackdown, six members of the Left (SOL) Party were sentenced to house arrest.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal, the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, has condemned state repression in its statements and demanded the release of those arrested. In its first statement about the ESP, it said, “Democratic rights cannot be defended without principally opposing increasing state repression against freedom of expression and the right to protest, as well as political detentions and arrests.”

ESP is operating within the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM). Among those arrested is ESP co-chair Murat Çepni, a member of parliament from the former Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP, now DEM Party) in the previous period. Journalists Nadiye Gürbüz, P?nar Gay?p, and Elif Bayburt from the Etkin News Agency (ETHA), as well as ?leri Devrim Yurtsever, chairwoman of the Limter-?? port workers' union affiliated with the D?SK konfederasyon, and Limter-?? leading members Kanber Sayg?l? and Hakk? Demiral were also arrested.

Lawyer Cengizhan Kara??n, a member of the Oppressed's Law Office, said, “The operation is generally based on the statements of informants. They compiled a list of 110 people by combining the statements of three or four informants.”

Kara??n said that the charges against his clients

included participating in legal commemoration events and party members sending each other money through banks. A copy of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels found during a house raid was added to the case file as evidence of a crime.

The Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, which is conducting the investigation, stated that the operation targeting individuals who are all members of legal parties, unions, and media outlets was directed against the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP), which is on Türkiye's list of “terrorist organizations.”

The operation came after Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said in an interview with *Al Jazeera* on January 29, referring to the MLKP: “The second thing is we don't want to see, it's not very well known by the world public, that not only the Kurdish PKK elements from other countries, but also the Turkish leftist elements inside Syria under the places controlled by SDF are given shelter and place to operate against Türkiye. Up to 300 people armored people (sic), they are there.”

Prior to this statement, the Ankara-backed Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) regime in Syria escalated its military attacks against the Kurdish nationalist Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), seizing control of several SDF-held areas in the northeast of the country following two neighborhoods in Aleppo. It ended in late January with a deal between the SDF and Damascus. This offensive was green-lighted by Washington, which had made the SDF its main proxy force in the regime change war in Syria. This agreement ends de facto autonomy in the region known as “Rojava” and demands SDF forces join the Syrian army.

This military offensive in Syria and the HTS-SDF talks, which have been ongoing for over a year, were part of the broader negotiations that began in 2024 between Ankara

and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The DEM Party also participated. Last year, the PKK, the sister organization of the SDF, announced that it had dissolved itself at Öcalan's instigation and withdrew its forces from Türkiye. However, Ankara demanded not only the dissolution of the PKK but also that of the SDF, fearing that *de facto* Kurdish autonomy in Syria could lead to similar demands among millions of Kurds in Türkiye.

Both the Ankara-PKK negotiations and the HTS regime's offensive on Kurds in Syria and the imposition of the SDF's liquidation had sparked debates within the DEM Party. While maintaining its membership in the DEM Party, the ESP took a critical stance toward the entire negotiation process.

The SOL Party, which takes a critical approach to the negotiation process, also faces increasing state repression and Islamist attacks. It recently launched a campaign with the slogan, "Against Sharia, fascism, and darkness: a secular, revolutionary, democratic republic" and hung banners bearing this slogan in various provinces. In response, Islamists attacked the party's Istanbul Provincial Headquarters and a district building in Ankara, writing, "Long live Sharia" on the buildings.

In a declaration announced at an event held in Ankara on January 31 under the title, "Fighting Together Against Imperialism, Sharia, and Fascism for a Secular and Democratic Türkiye", the SOL Party declared, "Today, the political Islamist regime [in Türkiye] treats the Kurdish issue not as a matter of democratization, but as a tool to consolidate its own power. US policies in the region also feed a system based on jihadist reactionary forces and ethnic-sectarian divisions."

The SOL Party, while not repudiating negotiations entirely, called for an end to the Erdo?an regime, stating, "The SOL Party is part of a tradition of struggle that advocates for an end to the climate of violence that destroys coexistence and for the silencing of weapons. A lasting solution is possible only through a genuine democratic rebirth, free from the one-man regime."

The Erdo?an government's crackdown on the political opposition underscores that the negotiations between Turkish, Arab, and Kurdish bourgeois nationalist leaderships in Türkiye and Syria have no relation to "peace" or "democratization." The negotiations seek to establish an alliance that is compatible with US imperialism's "new Middle East" aims but rival Israel's. This is most clearly expressed in Erdo?an's announcement of a "Turkish, Kurdish, Arab alliance."

President Erdo?an put negotiations with the PKK from the outset in the context of "fortification the internal front." The negotiations and the "internal front" perspective are supported not only by the DEM Party but also by the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), which faces increasing repression by the government. Opposing this bankrupt policy, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained:

In fact, the "fortification of the internal front" means subordinating the working class to the Turkish bourgeoisie's class interests and reactionary ambitions in the Middle East. In the ruling class's agenda of waging war abroad and class warfare at home, democratic and social rights are under attack, and there is no room for any "democratization" or social reform.

The claim that this process will bring peace and democracy to the Kurdish and Turkish peoples, to the Middle East and even to the global population, as advanced by Erdo?an and Öcalan, is a deception.

Workers and oppressed masses must reject this pro-imperialist process, which exploits their aspirations for peace and democracy, from an internationalist perspective and put forward their own revolutionary solution. It means uniting and mobilizing workers in the Middle East with their class brothers and sisters internationally against imperialism and its regional proxies and for workers' power.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact