

Istanbul Mayor ?mamo?lu on trial: A political, not legal, case

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The trial of 402 defendants, including Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) Mayor and Republican People's Party (CHP) presidential candidate Ekrem ?mamo?lu, began on Monday.

Of the defendants, 107 are under arrest and have been charged with establishing and managing a criminal organization, bribery, laundering criminal proceeds, fraud against public institutions and organizations, bid rigging and other crimes. The 3,900-page indictment—completed 237 days after ?mamo?lu's detention on March 19, 2025—seeks a prison sentence of up to 2,430 years for ?mamo?lu.

The first series of hearings is scheduled to run four days a week for 45 days. This phase, set to conclude in April, will yield an interim ruling on the defendants' detention status. According to the court's target schedule, the case is expected to conclude in approximately 4,600 days—that is, 12 years.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi (Socialist Equality Party) characterized this case from the outset not as a corruption trial but as part of a sweeping political operation aimed at eliminating fundamental democratic rights—including the right to vote, the right to a fair trial and freedom of the press. The trial proceedings have only confirmed that assessment. Workers and all defenders of democratic rights must demand the release of those held as political prisoners in this case.

Who drafted the indictment makes the political character of this operation unmistakably clear. The process was set in motion when Ak?n G?rlek—who had previously served as Deputy Minister of Justice under President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an—was appointed Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor in October 2024. G?rlek prepared the indictment, then was appointed Minister of Justice on February 11, shortly before the

hearings began. ?mamo?lu's presidential campaign office drew attention to this on Wednesday: "It is the President who wrote this script and gave the orders. It is the former prosecutor with the mask of a politician, who received those orders and carried them out, sustaining all these illegalities. The reward for the operations: a ministry post."

The charges contained in the indictment are, as the WSWs has previously reported, constructed around portraying the CHP—the party that received the most votes nationwide in the 2024 local elections—along with its municipal operations, electoral activities and presidential candidate, as a criminal organisation. Polls conducted prior to ?mamo?lu's detention and arrest had indicated he could defeat Erdo?an in a presidential election.

The first two days of proceedings concretely confirmed concerns regarding the trial process itself serving a punitive function and the absence of any guarantee of a fair trial.

The Silivri District Governorate banned all meetings and demonstrations in the vicinity of the Marmara Closed Prison, where the hearings are being held, from March 1 through March 31. Requests to broadcast the hearings live on state-owned television were denied. The number of journalists permitted to observe was restricted to just 25, five of whom were foreign correspondents.

The right to defense was also openly curtailed. No more than three lawyers may represent each defendant in the courtroom. On the first day, after defense attorneys requested that proceedings begin with ?mamo?lu, the presiding judge announced that ?mamo?lu would be heard last. ?mamo?lu sought to raise a procedural objection but was not given the floor. Tensions escalated, and the public gallery was

subsequently cleared. When ?mamo?lu was finally permitted to speak, he described the case as “one of the most significant political trials in the history of the Republic of Türkiye” and stated: “I am the presidential candidate of the party that will come to power at the first election. I have spent a year in solitary confinement in a 12-square-meter cell.”

Former CHP Member of Parliament Aykut Erdo?du disclosed that he had been held in a single-person cell for 10 months and was permitted only two hours of computer access per week to review a 4,000-page indictment. This is a stark illustration of how the right to a defense has been rendered effectively meaningless. The defendants’ motions to recuse the judges were also rejected en masse.

The use of the judiciary by the government as an instrument to suppress political opposition is not new. These methods, previously deployed above all against Kurdish politicians, leftists and the opposition press, are now being directed at the CHP. This is a development that signals a qualitative escalation in the establishment of a dictatorship. Yet this process has objective foundations that extend beyond the mere blocking of ?mamo?lu’s candidacy: The primary target of authoritarian regime-building is the growing opposition to war, militarism and austerity within the working class.

But the CHP, which represents the interests of the same ruling class, is also a pro-NATO and pro-European Union (EU) bourgeois party. Following ?mamo?lu’s arrest, during the mass protests that erupted across the country, it attempted to rein in this movement, steer it toward an electoral dead end and seek grounds for reconciliation with the government. It is impossible for the CHP to consistently defend democratic rights due to its class nature.

This judicial operation, the Erdo?an government’s step-by-step dismantling of democratic rights, and the global rise of authoritarian tendencies are not independent phenomena. All are products of the insoluble and deepening economic, social and political crisis of the capitalist system. Ruling classes across the world are shifting the burden of this crisis onto working people while resorting to ever more authoritarian methods to suppress working class resistance.

Trump’s second presidency in the United States—in which he has moved to dismantle the Constitution and

construct a presidential dictatorship, waging war on the working class, including immigrants—has accelerated and emboldened these tendencies globally, including in Türkiye. Erdo?an has pressed ahead with domestic repression without a word of criticism from Trump, whom he addresses as “my friend,” while Türkiye has largely aligned itself with Washington’s “new Middle East” strategy under the full domination of US imperialism. As the US and Israel wage an illegal war of annihilation against Iran, the Turkish political establishment offers nothing beyond rhetorical criticism.

Deeply integrated into NATO and international finance capital, and fearing above all the opposition rising from within the working class, the political establishment is either complicit in or a passive bystander to the trampling of remaining constitutional and legal norms at home—even as its principal allies dismantle international law abroad. A consistent struggle in defense of fundamental democratic rights demands a frontal assault on the wealth, power, and imperialist ties of the ruling class.

The decisive force in the struggle against dictatorship is not bourgeois opposition parties or courtrooms—it is the working class. Last year’s “No Kings” demonstrations in which millions took to the streets against Trump, this year’s mass protests against ICE, strikes against austerity across Europe, the militant actions of Migros warehouse workers and Polyak miners in Türkiye—all of these reveal the objective potential of the international working class.

The critical question is the mobilization of this force, armed with a revolutionary political perspective based on an international socialist strategy. We urge all those who agree with this perspective to join the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi—the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)—and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



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