

# Turkish independent union leader Ba?aran Aksu arrested

Bar?? Demir  
10 April 2026

Ba?aran Aksu, Organizing Coordinator of the independent rank-and-file union Umut-Sen (Hope Union), was arrested Thursday by a court because of a public statement he had made. Aksu, who also serves as an organizing specialist for Ba??ms?z Maden ?? (Independent Mine Workers' Union) and is based in Soma, had his family home in Hopa, Artvin raided by police on Monday.

He has played a leading role in workers' struggles and wildcat strikes emerging in opposition to the union bureaucracy in Türkiye, most recently being detained during the Polyak miners' strike in ?zmir. He has long been in the crosshairs of the corporations and the state.

Ula? Sevinç, chairman of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International), condemned this political arrest in a statement on X, calling on workers to defend Aksu:

Ba?aran Aksu, like B?RTEK-SEN Chairman Mehmet Türkmen, was arrested in line with the ruling class's conscious offensive against the working class.

These workers' leaders, unlike the dominant union bureaucracy, do not act as an extension of the state and corporations. They are seen as a major threat precisely because they have been at the forefront of the initial steps of a re-emerging labor movement—because they have given expression to the revolutionary potential of the working class.

The working class must recognize that Ba?aran Aksu, Mehmet Türkmen and Esra I??k are class war prisoners, defend them, and mobilize for their immediate release.

Aksu had publicly protested on social media against the arrest of Esra I??k. I??k, a leader of the villagers' resistance against the “emergency expropriation” decree issued for Akbelen Forest in Milas, Mu?la—a case still before the courts—and against the Limak Holding of Nihat Özdemir, was arrested on Tuesday, March 31, after protesting an inspection team.

The prosecution questioned Aksu over a statement, in which he said, “Having Esra I??k arrested on Nihat Özdemir's orders

represents the highest level our independent judiciary can reach. Arrest all the Akbelen villagers, you shameless people! May those who show even the slightest sign of submission to you be disgraced.”

In his defense, Aksu stood by this statement, saying: “I believe Nihat Özdemir is an influential figure in the Mu?la region and that he played a role in what happened in Akbelen. The detention of Esra I??k, the daughter of the Akbelen village headwoman, without any evidence, is the most concrete proof of this.” Özdemir, the head of Limak—one of Turkey's largest holding companies—is one of the country's wealthiest businessmen.

Aksu was arrested on charges of “spreading misleading information” and “inciting the public to hatred and enmity.” The political character and arbitrariness of the arrest is underscored by the claim that Aksu's union activities, which meant he was not permanently residing at his registered address, gave rise to his “escape risk.”

According to the court, “Ba?aran Aksu's statement in court regarding his intention to participate in the union protest scheduled to begin on April 12, 2026, raised suspicions that he might flee and led to the conclusion that he would not comply with the judicial supervision order.” Workers at Doruk Mining in Beypazar?, Ankara, were set to gather in front of the Thermal Power Plant on Sunday, April 12, over unpaid wages, severance and notice pay, before launching a march on Ankara on Monday morning.

As Aksu was being taken into custody pending the remand hearing, he declared: “In Türkiye today, it is impossible to state the truth without committing the crime of ‘spreading misleading information,’ and impossible to expose the bloody exploitation regime in Türkiye without committing the crime of ‘inciting hatred and enmity.’ This regime rests on holding companies and yellow unions. The judiciary and the police are part of this process. They are very powerful; they are running a vast operation of robbery, plunder and extortion.”

As he was being taken to prison, Aksu defiantly challenged this unlawful ruling, stating: “This is the state of the judiciary in Türkiye—they do whatever the holding companies tell them to. We will continue to make life difficult for the holding companies.”

While Aksu's arrest was widely protested, the trade union confederations—including the ostensibly oppositional DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions)—completely ignored the arrest, doing nothing to mobilise workers in his defence.

The Istanbul Bar Association issued a statement stressing that the arrest order was in violation of the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights. The bar noted that arresting someone solely on the basis of critical public statements “without concrete and sufficient evidence” amounted to “courts becoming instruments for the suppression of trade union organizing activities,” adding that “this situation produces a chilling effect on the legitimate actors in the struggle for trade union rights.”

The charges leveled against Aksu—“inciting the public to hatred and enmity” and “spreading misleading information”—have been used with increasing frequency and arbitrariness by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in recent months against workers' leaders, journalists and political opponents.

Just before his arrest, Aksu drew attention to this mechanism as a form of the collaboration of the state, the capitalist oligarchy and the trade union bureaucracy against the working class. He said:

Mehmet Türkmen is imprisoned for the same reason; he has committed no crime. Esra Işık is imprisoned for the same reason; she has committed no crime. [DW Turkish correspondent] Alican Uludağ, [daily *BirGün* correspondent] Şmail Arç, [Contemporary Lawyers' Association Chairman] Selçuk Kozaçıl, [Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) Hatay deputy] Can Atalay, and countless others... They are in prison solely because they have interfered with these power relations, solely because they have spoken the truth.

Mehmet Türkmen, chairman of the United Textile, Weaving and Leather Workers' Union (BİRTEK-SEN), was arrested in mid-March on similar grounds for a speech he had delivered. In that speech, Türkmen drew attention to the fact that when workers resist corporations' theft of their wages and rights, they are met by the state's police—while corporate bosses are never held legally accountable for preventable deaths and injuries because of work incidents.

The real reason behind the arrests of Aksu, Türkmen and Işık is that they have exposed the savage exploitation of the working class and natural resources, the obscene wealth extracted through that exploitation and the structure of class rule designed to protect and perpetuate these capitalist relations of exploitation—and the role they have played in the growing independent workers' movement rising against this order.

It is no accident that the Erdoğan government's offensive has intensified in recent months. During this period, the United States, Türkiye's NATO ally, together with Israel, launched its imperialist war of aggression against Iran. At the same time, there has been a significant upsurge in class struggles, including wildcat strikes amid a mounting inflation and economic hardship. While the overwhelming majority of the population—over 90 percent according to polls—opposed this unjust war against Iran, the Erdoğan government adopted a stance completely contrary to the will of the people and even condemned Iran's right to defend itself against the aggression.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker who ran for the presidency of the United Auto Workers (UAW) under the slogan “transfer of power to the rank-and-file” and a leading member of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), pointed out in his solidarity statement with Türkmen to the connection between escalating authoritarianism, imperialist war and the growing workers' movement. He explained:

Türkmen's arrest is part of a broader offensive against a growing movement of workers in Turkey...

The response of the Erdoğan government, as with Trump in the US, is repression. As Turkey is increasingly drawn into the expanding war in the Middle East, the government is determined to give no quarter to any form of social or political opposition—above all from the working class. A government preparing for war cannot tolerate workers who organize independently, strike for their wages, and refuse to be silenced. The assault on democratic rights and the assault on workers' living standards are two sides of the same process, and both are intensified by the drive toward militarism and war.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on its readers to defend the class war prisoners in Türkiye—Bağaran Aksu, Mehmet Türkmen and the other detainees—and to demand their immediate release.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**