

# Turkish independent union leader Mehmet Türkmen placed in solitary confinement

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Mehmet Türkmen, chairman of the independent textile union B?RTEK-SEN has reportedly been mistreated at Gaziantep Type E Prison and placed in solitary confinement. Türkmen was arrested on March 16 on the pretext of a speech he delivered during a visit to striking S?rma Hal? workers in Gaziantep who were demanding their unpaid wages. He is scheduled to appear before a judge again on Tuesday, May 12.

The incident came to light on May 5, when his attorney, Esmer Özer, visited him in prison. In a statement posted on X by B?RTEK-SEN, it was noted that Türkmen had been subjected to humiliating and abusive treatment and forcibly thrown into a cell after drawing attention to the case of a detainee who had been denied access to medical treatment for months, as well as other horrible conditions inside the prison. The statement posed the question: “Are you running a prison or a torture chamber?”

In a statement on X condemning the mistreatment of Türkmen, Ula? Sevinç, chairman of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International), reiterated the demand for Türkmen’s release, stating that the persecution of Türkmen was aimed at crushing the determination of all workers to fight back.

In his own statement, Türkmen described the condition of the detainee in question as follows:

There is a prisoner in my ward named Mehmet Ç?tlak, who is nearly 60 years old. Although he was in good health when he entered prison, he has been completely bedridden for the past 40 days. He has been taken to the infirmary numerous times. On a few occasions, following our persistent insistence, he was taken to the hospital emergency room.

However, this patient was only able to go to the

hospital a full month after his transfer from the infirmary. His condition has deteriorated further because he has been lying on the floor in extremely cold conditions; he has lost approximately 20 kilograms in the past month... For exactly 16 days now, even the medications prescribed by the doctor have not arrived.

Despite his discussions with prison officials, Türkmen noted that no solution could be found, forcing him to bring the situation to public attention. He added: “Under these conditions, where even the most basic human needs are not being met—where people do not have access to shelter or healthcare, and where sanitation and hygiene conditions are extremely poor—it is clear that people are not being treated with the dignity they deserve.”

Türkmen had previously drawn attention to inhumane conditions inside the prison, stating: “There are 63 of us living in a ward designed for 25 people. We sleep on mattresses laid out on the floor all the way to the entrance of the toilet and in the kitchen area. We only have hot water two days a week, and we get to shower for just 10 minutes once a week. Sixty-three people share a single bathroom and a single toilet. Two people sleep on a single bed. The sheets are filthy. Those transferred from the temporary ward are covered in sores from bedbugs.”

During a telephone conversation on Thursday between a *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) reporter and a B?RTEK-SEN official, it was reported that Türkmen had since been removed from solitary confinement and transferred to another ward.

The imprisonment and mistreatment of Türkmen is intended to suppress the independent working-class movement, which has developed outside the control of a union bureaucracy that functions as an extension of the state and corporations. Amid the US-Israeli war against

Iran and a growing risk that the conflict in the Middle East will draw Türkiye in, the government has no tolerance for any form of opposition—particularly a movement from below.

While President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government deepens its cooperation with the Trump administration and condemns Iran’s self-defense, it is attempting to contain public opposition to war with Iran, which polls indicate stands at over 90 percent. Meanwhile, rising living costs and intolerable conditions, further exacerbated by the Iran war, are increasingly driving workers to fight back. Official inflation has risen again, reaching 32 percent annually, with a monthly increase of 4 percent recorded in April.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi condemns the mistreatment and appalling conditions faced by Türkmen and other prisoners, and calls on workers and young people to raise their demand for his freedom ahead of the May 12 hearing. To this end, rank-and-file committees should be formed in workplaces and schools, meetings should be organized, and resolutions demanding freedom for Türkmen and other class war prisoners should be adopted.

The formal charge brought against Türkmen is “inciting the public to hatred and enmity”—a charge that the government has increasingly deployed in recent years against workers’ leaders and journalists. Approximately 400 workers at S?rma Hal? went on strike on March 9 to demand payment of wages that had gone unpaid for three months; Türkmen visited the workers’ picket line on March 13 and delivered a speech.

In his speech, Türkmen explained that workers across the country were facing difficulties in receiving their wages and that when they protested, they were met with police repression. He pointed out that corporations were being protected by the state in the face of both workplace fatalities and wage theft.

After his arrest, Türkmen explained: “I was arrested for saying that there is no law or justice for workers in this country, and that the law and power in this country favor the rich and the bosses. If saying that is a crime, they would have to put 80 percent of this country’s population in jail.”

Last month, the march from Eski?ehir to Ankara by Doruk Mining workers demanding their wages and other benefits—and their subsequent struggle in the capital—again demonstrated that the state serves as an increasingly violent instrument of repression on behalf of corporations and the ruling class. It further clarified the hostility of all trade union confederations—including the

pro-opposition D?SK leadership, which openly refused to support the struggle—towards the working class.

Ba?aran Aksu, an organizing specialist of Ba?ms?z Maden-?? (Independent Miners’ Union), was imprisoned shortly before the march began. When the workers reached Ankara, they faced violent police repression and a blockade. The miners—including Aksu and Ba?ms?z Maden-?? Chairman Gökay Çak?r—were detained. Nevertheless, it was eventually announced that all of the miners’ demands had been met, as they refused to back down and received massive public support.

Esra I?k, a village leader fighting against the destruction of Akbelen Forest in Mu?la by mining companies, was arrested and jailed at the end of March. On Thursday, the State Council suspended the “emergency expropriation” decree issued by the presidency regarding agricultural lands surrounding Akbelen Forest. However, she remains in custody.

?leri Devrim Yurtsever, chairman of the Shipbuilding, Maritime Transport, Warehousing, and Storage Workers’ Union (L?MTER-??); its general secretary Beycan Ta?k?ran; general executive board member Kenan Hesas; former chairman Kanber Sayg?l?; and former executives Ayd?n K?l?çdere and Hakk? Demiral have all been imprisoned since early February.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists have increased. The Turkish Journalists’ Union reported last month that 14 remain in prison due to their journalistic activities, including Merdan Yanarda?, former editor-in-chief of TELE1 tv channel; Alican Uluda?, a reporter for DW Türkçe; and ?smail Ar?, a reporter for daily *BirGün*. In the World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders on April 30, Türkiye fell four places, ranking 163rd out of 180 countries.

The WSWS calls on its readers in Türkiye and around the world to send messages of solidarity to Türkmen ahead of the May 12 court hearing.



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