

A Turkish court unlawfully removes the CHP leadership from office

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The 36th Civil Chamber of the Ankara Regional Court of Justice ruled on Thursday that the Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) 38th Ordinary Congress, held on November 4–5, 2023, and its 21st Extraordinary Congress, held on April 6, 2025, are “absolute nullities.” The ruling removed the current chairman, Özgür Özel, and all party organs from office, and ordered Kemal K??çdarolu and the previous leadership to return to their posts. The CHP’s objections were quickly rejected by both the court and the Supreme Election Board. It also filed an appeal with the Court of Cassation.

This is essentially a political rule, made under pressure from the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and lacking any legal basis. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye and the Political Parties Law, the Supreme Election Board is the sole authority with the power to review the legality of a political party’s congress. For a regional court to exercise this authority would constitute a clear violation of the judicial hierarchy and the constitutional division.

The legal nature of the ruling intensifies its consequences to a degree that cannot be compared to those of a routine annulment. Absolute nullity means that the act is deemed never to have existed from the outset. In this context, all resolutions made by the CHP, all appointments made, and all regular and extraordinary congresses held since November 2023 have been retroactively rendered null and void.

In a joint statement, 15 bar associations clearly stated that the rule is “unlawful.” The precedent set by this rule is also extremely dangerous, as the same method could be used to invalidate any political party congress. At stake are the already limited multi-party democracy and the right to vote and be elected.

One of the key factors influencing the legal proceedings was the “effective repentance” testimony provided by Özkan Yal?m, the former mayor of the city of U?ak, who had been arrested on bribery and bid-rigging charges. This testimony was forwarded directly to the appellate court by the Chief Prosecutor’s Office. Although the ruling is based on allegations that delegates’ votes were bought with money, gifts, and job promises, these allegations have not been subject to independent judicial review or adjudication. The trial process itself has become a tool of oppression, used to achieve the desired outcome.

This rule did not emerge overnight; it is part of the government’s systematic campaign of increasing repression. It was triggered when the CHP became the leading party in the

March 31, 2024, local elections, securing more than 17 million votes. It gained further momentum when Ekrem ?mamo?lu, Istanbul’s mayor and the CHP’s presidential candidate, began to overtake Erdo?an in the polls.

Following the appointment of the current Justice Minister, Ak?n Gürlek, as Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor at the end of 2024, operations targeting elected mayors from the CHP intensified. In March 2025, Ekrem ?mamo?lu was arrested on “corruption” charges, sparking mass protests across the country which were met with police crackdowns. In September 2025, another court signaled Thursday’s rule by appointing a trustee to the CHP’s Istanbul provincial administration. Throughout this process, numerous CHP mayors switched sides and joined President Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The Erdo?an government’s onslaught on the CHP is not merely a matter of domestic politics. Traditional forms of rule are proving insufficient for governments to defend the interests of the financial oligarchy globally. They rely not on elections, the constitution, or the rule of law, but on their direct control over state institutions. The construction of a presidential dictatorship in Türkiye is taking place during such a period. This tendency did not begin recently, but gained momentum with Donald Trump’s return to the White House in the United States.

Previously, the Erdo?an government, with the support of the CHP led by K??çdarolu, had launched a judicial crackdown targeting the elected leaders of the Kurdish political movement. As a result, former party leaders, such as Selahattin Demirta? and Figen Yüksekda?, have been in prison since 2016. However, while these operations came to a halt with the start of negotiations between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in October 2024, judicial operations targeting the CHP began.

Following Trump’s return to power, Ankara largely acted in line with Washington’s imperialist aggression in the Middle East. Erdo?an condemned Iran for defending itself against the US-Israeli war, even as he joined Trump’s “Board of Peace” for Gaza. There is no doubt that Trump’s close collaboration with Erdo?an—whom he has called a “good leader” and “friend”—included suppressing the political opposition in Türkiye. Erdo?an spoke with Trump by phone three days before the arrest of ?mamo?lu. Just one day before Thursday’s court rule, the two leaders discussed Türkiye–US relations and regional issues.

Erdo?an, who is preparing to host the NATO summit in Ankara in early July, is strengthening his ties with his European imperialist

allies, though he does not expect any response from them beyond token statements. Türkiye has joined the “Coalition of the Willing” formed under the leadership of Britain and France against Russia in the Ukraine war and has established a naval headquarters in the Bosphorus with these two powers. Erdoğan continues to keep refugees in Türkiye or send them back to their home countries on behalf of the European Union. In other words, Erdoğan—who has also secured Trump’s support—believes that his imperialist allies within NATO cannot afford to abandon him under these circumstances.

The same applies to the Turkish bourgeoisie. The government’s policies, which impose poverty, low wages and precarious working conditions on the working class while enriching corporations, are increasing the financial oligarchy’s profits, wealth and confidence in the government. The working class’s growing resistance to the high cost of living and unbearable living and working conditions makes clear why the Turkish bourgeoisie needs Erdoğan’s police state. The fact that the CHP is also a representative of the same ruling class does not exempt it from these repressive measures.

The CHP leadership described the ruling of absolute nullity as a “judicial coup.” Speaking to the crowd gathered in front of the party headquarters, Özel said: “Today, an attempted coup has been carried out against the party founded by Atatürk—all so that the Republican People’s Party might be set back by the years it lost, so that the CHP would not come to power, and so that the AKP’s dark regime might continue.”

He added, “These coup plotters come through the power of the judiciary. These coup plotters do not come with tanks, cannons, rifles, or camouflage; these coup plotters come in judges’ robes and prosecutors’ robes.”

Özel announced that he would not leave the party headquarters and called for resistance against the ruling. But then he told the same crowd, “Go home now and sleep; let them worry about it.” The mass outrage that erupted following Erdoğan’s arrest last year was also quelled in this way, through controlled rallies and limited boycotts. While Özel again spoke of “the power derived from consumption,” mobilizing the power of the working class derived from production was never on the agenda. In truth, like Erdoğan’s AKP, the CHP opposes the development of an independent workers’ movement against the ruling class’s all-out assault on social and political rights.

Meanwhile, Kılıçdaroğlu clearly accepted the court’s rule, stating: “We will carry out this process in full harmony with our former party leaders.” However, the fact that he released a video the day before the ruling calling for “purification” and “self-reflection” raises the question of whether he was aware of the rule in advance. After all, if he had refused to return to office, the government’s “absolute nullity” plan would have largely fallen apart.

The Kurdish nationalist People’s Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) described the ruling as a “political oppression operation,” but its primary concern was that the rule would cast a shadow over the PKK-Ankara negotiations. This stance prioritizes the ongoing negotiation process over democratic rights. Furthermore, it continues to foster the illusion that the Erdoğan

government, which is carrying out a “political oppression operation,” could simultaneously take steps toward democratization and peace regarding the Kurdish issue. The same illusion is also supported by the CHP, which backs the negotiations.

Various nominally “left” parties continue to uncritically support the CHP and maintain a de facto political alliance with it in the face of government oppression, just as they did during the mass protests of March 2025. Last year, this served to hinder the development of an independent movement among workers and youth. Moreover, none of them has accounted for their political support to Kılıçdaroğlu’s candidacy in the 2023 presidential elections, despite his pro-imperialist and anti-immigrant campaign. The reason for this lies in these political tendencies’ orientation toward the national bourgeoisie and their anti-Marxist historical and political roots.

The social force that must be mobilized to defend basic democratic rights is the working class. Last year’s protests demonstrated that millions of working people and youth are ready to fight against the Erdoğan government’s police state repression and social attacks. This year’s strikes and resistance by workers at Migros warehouses, Polyak Mining, and Doruk Mining corporations indicate that a militant workers’ movement is emerging independent of the union bureaucracy.

The Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi–Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party–Fourth International), despite its irreconcilable political differences, opposes the removal of the CHP’s elected leadership by judicial means and the offensive on democratic rights. However, the struggle against this attack can only be advanced through a working class movement organized independently of the entire political establishment and guided by an international socialist perspective. To this end, rank-and-file committees must be built in every workplace, school and neighborhood to oppose austerity, repression and war, and the immense power of the working class must be mobilized.



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