

The international significance of Erdoğan's preemptive coup against the CHP in Türkiye

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25 May 2026

The regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Türkiye is staging a preemptive political coup before the eyes of the entire world. Erdoğan first removed the elected leadership of the Republican People's Party (CHP)—the main parliamentary opposition party and leading party in the polls—through a politically motivated court ruling, then ordered riot police to forcibly seize the party's headquarters.

What is unfolding in Türkiye is not a purely national event but a manifestation of an international collapse of democratic forms of rule rooted in the deepening crisis of the capitalist system. US President Donald Trump, having lost the November 2020 elections, mounted a failed coup on January 6, 2021, seeking to remain in power illegally. Erdoğan, for his part, is attempting to forestall a likely defeat in the next elections by neutralizing his principal rival.

Workers and youth must oppose this preemptive coup—which threatens fundamental democratic rights and whose target is ultimately the working class.

The Turkish working class is entering this struggle in a mood of explosive opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza and the US war against Iran. In the first days of the war against Iran, workers at the Polyak mine in İzmir tore down a gendarmerie barricade and seized control of the mine. Last month, Turkish politics was dominated by the struggle of Doruk Mining workers in Ankara.

Though polls show that more than 90 percent of the Turkish population opposes the war against Iran and the presence of US military bases in Türkiye, Erdoğan has effectively aligned himself with the Trump administration's aggression in the Middle East and continues to facilitate the flow of oil from Azerbaijan to Israel. Across the Middle East, the overwhelming majority of the population is seething with anger at

their ruling elites' collaboration with US imperialism and Israeli Zionism.

Erdoğan and his allies are working to suppress the emergence within the Turkish, Middle Eastern and international working class—already battered by a severe cost-of-living crisis—of a movement against genocide and imperialist war.

The repression directed at the CHP has a historically unprecedented character. The CHP is not a Kurdish political movement that has been violently suppressed throughout the history of the Republic, nor is it a left-wing party. It is the party of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded the Turkish Republic in 1923. The judicial coup that has ousted its leadership under Özgür Özel and restored Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu—who has assumed the role of “His Majesty's loyal opposition”—amounts to a declaration that, amid explosive class and international tensions, even the mildest political opposition will not be tolerated.

Özel's limited criticisms of Trump's wars and his tepid statements of public support for the Doruk Mining workers in Ankara were intolerable not only to powerful factions of the Turkish bourgeoisie but also to Washington and the European capitals, who have made no significant criticisms of his ouster by Erdoğan. This created the conditions for Özel's ouster by Erdoğan, with the complicity of factions of the CHP itself led by Kılıçdaroğlu.

Both Erdoğan and the imperialist powers have reasons to support Kılıçdaroğlu as a new leader of the CHP, as a weak and ineffectual candidate deeply committed to supporting imperialist war. In the 2023 presidential election, which he lost badly to Erdoğan, Kılıçdaroğlu ran an openly pro-NATO campaign, with the backing of the Kurdish nationalist movement (now DEM Party) and pseudo-left groups.

The closing of ranks of Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu behind this preemptive political coup reflects the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie and its alignment with imperialism. Washington and the European imperialist powers view Türkiye, as ruled by the Erdoğan government, as a critical ally for their interests across the wider region. In addition to joining Trump's "Peace Council" for Gaza, Erdoğan has deepened his cooperation with Britain and France in NATO's war against Russia. He is also continuing to keep refugees in Turkey on behalf of the European Union.

It is no coincidence that Erdoğan held phone calls with Trump both before Şimşek's arrest and before the latest judicial operation against the CHP. He does not expect anything more than token statements from his European allies, who have declared war on the working class's living conditions to finance military spending in their own countries and attacked democratic rights.

Özel's response to Erdoğan's unlawful operation to remove him as CHP leader underscores that democratic rights cannot be defended under the leadership of a bourgeois party like the CHP. As the leader of a party bound by a thousand threads to imperialism and finance capital, Özel swiftly capitulated to the preemptive coup despite his initial rhetoric of "resistance." He talked to Kılıçdaroğlu—after first refusing to do so—then accepted the court ruling he had vowed to reject and vacated the party headquarters he had pledged never to leave. He has now called for a new CHP party congress and new elections.

Indeed, while Özel has clearly fallen afoul of the major NATO imperialist powers, he is no anti-imperialist figure. During the mass protests that erupted following the March 2025 arrest of Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor and CHP presidential candidate Ekrem Şimşek, Özel declared his party's commitment to strong relations with NATO. The party's Iran report submitted to NATO last autumn essentially reproduced US-Israeli propaganda and served to legitimize imperialist aggression in the region.

This is a demonstration of the limitations imposed by the CHP's bourgeois character. Like Kılıçdaroğlu or Erdoğan, Özel fears above all else the emergence of a working class movement threatening the foundations of the capitalist system and bourgeois rule.

The ruling elites in Türkiye and across the Middle East sit atop a social powder keg. As Türkiye ranks among the most unequal societies in Europe, the polarization between the working class and the bourgeoisie has reached unprecedented dimensions. The Erdoğan government's policies, enriching a financial oligarchy while driving workers into destitution, only intensify class tensions and the threat of social revolution. The domination of the capitalist oligarchy over economic and social life, under conditions of expanding global war, is incompatible with democracy even in its most limited form.

The Erdoğan regime's operation against the CHP further exposes as a brazen fraud the claim—promoted by the DEM Party, the CHP and pseudo-left tendencies—that the very same government can resolve the Kurdish question through "peace and democratization."

As Leon Trotsky explained in his theory of Permanent Revolution, in countries of belated capitalist development, no faction of the bourgeoisie in the imperialist epoch is capable of establishing a democratic regime or establishing independence from imperialism. The task of building a regime that stops imperialist wars and secures the basic democratic rights of the Kurdish people and all other oppressed masses in Turkey and across the region falls to the working class. This means the struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

The crisis in Türkiye underscores that there is no solution within the existing institutions to the collapse of bourgeois democracy that is unfolding at the global level. The capitalist system—which gives rise to dictatorship, social inequality and imperialist war—cannot be reformed. There is no path forward other than the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class and the establishment of workers' power and socialism. This requires the construction of a revolutionary leadership: the International Committee of the Fourth International and its national sections, the Socialist Equality Parties.



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