Oppose the arrest of Independent Miners Union leaders in Türkiye!

Ula? Sevinç
27 August 2026

Gökay Çak?r, chairman of the Independent Miners Union (Ba??ms?z Maden-??), and Ba?aran Aksu, the union's organizing specialist, were arrested and sent to prison on the evening of Wednesday, August 26, by a court in Ankara.

Çak?r was detained the previous day at the union's headquarters in Soma, where 301 coal miners were killed in a disaster in 2014, and Aksu the same day in Ankara, on the 16th day of the miners' protest outside the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. According to the union, this was the seventh time Aksu had been detained during this protest alone; Çak?r stated that he had been taken into custody six times.

The charge brought against them is "publicly inciting the population to hatred and hostility," and the "evidence" presented consists of posts from their social media accounts. The arrest ruling cited the suspects' "trade union positions" and their "capacity to direct and command masses" as grounds. What the court has admitted is clear: what is being treated as a crime is the very capacity to organize and mobilize workers.

In his statement to the court, Aksu explained that one of the posts he is being prosecuted for drew the connection between the impoverishment of the population and the resources transferred to the holding corporations and said that if speaking on the side of the workers is a crime, he would go on committing it.

"The yellow unions that say nothing about a minimum monthly wage of 28,000 Turkish lira (US$585), nothing about pensions [23,500 lira at minimum], are applauded and entertained on yachts and in penthouses, while those who sit down with workers and labourers are punished," he said. "I am proud to be part of something like that."

Çak?r, a retired miner who worked underground for 22 years, pointed out that his own pension amounts to 23,700 lira and that he and his fellow miners founded this independent union so that his workmates would not share that fate.

"My brothers working underground are being wronged," he said. "What am I supposed to defend, if not this [their fight]? If I am the chairman of this union, I was obliged to defend these workmates. My social media posts are there to defend workers' rights. I am seeing workers who cannot pay their electricity bills and live in poverty."

The union's lawyers underlined that the pair have committed no crime according to the Turkish Penal Code, and that the real subject of the investigation is the struggle being waged by miners in Ankara.

The arrests came on the same day it was announced that, on the 17th day of the miners' protest, agreement had been reached with the employer on the bulk of the principal claims. Talks between the union delegation and the holding company, which began on the evening of August 25, ended in the early hours of the following morning.

As the miners came closer to securing their demands, those who had led the struggle were thrown into prison. This is not a "legal process" but an operation to persecute workers' leaders, and to intimidate the entire working class. In every mine, factory and workplace, workers must respond by taking action independently of the union bureaucracies—which will merely stand by as Aksu and Çak?r are arrested—and by defending them.

The miners' struggle began on August 10. Part of the wages of workers at Eti Gümü? in Elaz?? and Doruk Madencilik in Eski?ehir, both owned by Y?ld?zlar SSS Holding, had gone unpaid since November 2024, and the great majority of the workforce had been forced onto unpaid leave from April 2025. A report by inspectors of the Labor Ministry established that this practice was illegal and that all wages, severance and notice payments owed since 2022 had to be paid.

But the report changed nothing. What followed was a 15-day ban on protests declared by the Ankara Governor's Office and aimed specifically at the miners, a number of rounds of detentions involving more than a hundred workers, the surrounding of miners' wives by the police at a metro station, and two workers taken to hospital after police intervention.

An investigation published by the Independent Miners

© World Socialist Web Site

Union on August 24 lays bare the real situation of a holding company that claims it "cannot pay" what it owes its workforce.

Registered in the personal name of its owner, Sebahattin Y?ld?z, are property holdings built up through 849 separate transactions, amounting—once duplicate entries are stripped out—to 18.3 million square meters. These include 16 million square meters in Gölba?? and Bala outside Ankara, described on paper as a livestock operation; hundreds of plots bought up in Dulkadir, Kütahya, around a plant whose cyanide waste pond has collapsed twice; a motel in Çe?me, ?zmir and a seven-block apartment complex in Ata?ehir, Istanbul.

According to the report, the factory buildings are not registered to the holding company as a legal entity but to the owner personally—so that even if the company goes into receivership, it appears to hold no assets against which the workers' claims could be met. According to journalist Bahad?r Özgür, reporting on Halk TV, Y?ld?z holds 2,364 mining licenses.

The union states that Y?ld?zlar SSS Holding has turned the non-payment of workers' entitlements across numerous provinces and sectors into an instrument of its own financing. The same method is applied at its Nesko, Doruk, Yunus Emre Termik, Eti Gümü?, Y?ld?z Bak?r, KMK Madencilik, Sö?üt Seramik, OEDA? and Kay Süt operations, while every ministry, above all the Energy Ministry, turns a blind eye.

Türkiye Maden-?? union, affiliated to the Türk-?? confederation and presented by Y?ld?zlar SSS Holding in its statements as the "authorized union," has collaborated with the corporation for years against the miners. Nor was it only Türk-??: the leadership of the "opposition" D?SK confederation likewise gave no support whatsoever to miners who were encircled by police in the centre of the capital and repeatedly detained over 17 days. Türk-??, with 1.2 million members, and D?SK, with 260,000, function not to mobilize their members but to prevent their mobilization.

These arrests are not isolated incidents; they aim to suppress an emerging independent workers' movement. In March, independent textile union B?RTEK-SEN leader Mehmet Türkmen was jailed for supporting S?rma Hal? workers' wildcat struggle in Gaziantep. Esra I??k, a peasant leader who defends the Akbelen forest, was jailed for exercising her right to protest. In April, Aksu was arrested over a social media post defending I??k.

In June, miners at Öz?en Madencilik in Uzunköprü, Edirne, came under armed attack in front of the security forces. That attack, in which it was only by chance that no one was injured, was a violent warning aimed at the Öz?en miners and the entire working class. The same week, construction workers demanding unpaid wages at the site of the new Palace of Justice in Ankara were attacked with knives by thugs employed by a subcontractor. The company owners who refuse to pay workers' legal entitlements and the thugs who physically attack workers act with the same confidence: the state is no neutral arbiter; it is *their* state.

This wave of attacks and the elimination of democratic rights cannot be separated from the ever-closer integration of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government into the imperialist war that the United States and NATO are escalating across the region, against Russia and Iran. Ahead of the NATO summit held in Ankara at the beginning of July, a de facto state of emergency was declared in the capital, hundreds were detained and more than 200 arrested.

In a politically directed judicial operation that is still under way, more than 30 elected mayors of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) have been jailed and the party's elected chairman removed from office. This led to a split within the CHP.

The mounting political repression is part of the imposition of a savage austerity programme on the working class in one of the most unequal countries in Europe. Türkiye has increased its military spending by 94 percent over the past decade, and the bill is being met through cuts to wages, pensions and social spending.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi–Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party–Fourth International), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), demands the immediate release of Çak?r and Aksu and all working-class prisoners, and the payment of what is owed to the miners and all workers in the same position.

To achieve this, workers must build rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the trade union bureaucracies, and unite these committees internationally under the banner of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). This struggle must be based on an international socialist programme that goes beyond the objective of recovering legal entitlements and aims at abolishing the capitalist profit system, the real source of social inequality, repression and war.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site