

Turkish government escalates crackdown on left-wing parties, LGBTQ+ associations and media outlets

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In pre-dawn raids on 42 addresses across 11 provinces on September 15, coordinated by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office, 39 people were detained, among them Mertcan Titiz, co-chair of the Socialist Refoundation Party (SYKP), which operates within the Kurdish nationalist DEM Party.

The investigation, which is based on the statement of a so-called “confessor” (police informant), is reported to target 52 people in total, a significant proportion of whom previously worked within the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP). This marks a further step in the campaign to criminalize left-wing organizations, following the imprisonment of 77 ESP members in February 2026. The raids are the culmination of a wave of attacks that has escalated over three days.

On September 12 and 13, simultaneous operations were carried out in 15 provinces, including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Ayd?n and Mersin, targeting LGBTQ+ associations, activists and a number of businesses. According to Justice Minister Ak?n G?rlek, the investigations, given the name “My Family Is Safe,” cover 162 “suspects,” nine associations and 13 businesses. Twenty-six people were detained in the Istanbul-based investigation. In Ankara, members of the executive and auditing boards of Kaos GL, Turkey’s first officially registered LGBTQ+ association, were seized in house raids. In Izmir, 16 of the 18 people detained were remanded in custody.

The authorities justify the operation as “the protection of children and the family.” G?rlek stated that they were carried out directly in line with President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s vision of a “Decade of the Family and Population, 2026-2035” and Presidential Circular No. 2026/4, published in the Official Gazette on May 2, 2026. The circular lists “de-genderization” among the “harmful currents” threatening the institution of the family and “generations.”

LGBTQ+ people and organizations have long been made a target by Erdo?an’s ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP). This is a deliberate policy of scapegoating, aimed at diverting the mass anger arising from the deepening economic crisis and the government’s social attacks. But the legal precedents being established here—the power to shut down

associations, block accounts and detain their officials on grounds of “obscenity,” “public order” and “national security”—are being built to be used against the entire population and, above all, against the working class.

Indeed, the wave of censorship rapidly extended far beyond LGBTQ+ organizations. On September 12, the websites of Kaos GL and Velvele were blocked, along with the social media accounts of figures such as journalist Y?ld?z Tar and lawyer Levent Pi?kin.

On September 13, a further 32 accounts belonging to university student groups were shut down. The same day, a ruling extended the blocking to cover the critical press and human rights organizations. It was based on Article 8/A of Law No. 5651, which invokes “the protection of national security and public order,” and targeted X/Twitter accounts, including those of the daily *Evrensel*, with some 850,000 followers, Amnesty International T?rkiye, Academics for Peace, the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), Umut-Sen and the Ali ?smail Korkmaz Foundation. According to the list compiled by the Freedom of Expression Association, the ruling covers at least 50 X and 15 Instagram accounts. Previously, the X accounts of *soL Haber*, which has a comparable following with *Evrensel*, were blocked along with many other left-wing social media accounts. *soL Haber* is the web organ of the Turkish Communist Party (TKP), while *Evrensel* is a daily associated with the Labour Party (EMEP). Umut-Sen is among the X accounts that have been blocked.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has long insisted, the principal target of the Erdo?an government’s police-state measures is the working class, which has begun to move into struggle against the soaring cost of living and social attacks. In recent months Ba?aran Aksu, a leader of the Independent Miners’ Union (Ba??ms?z Maden-??) and Umut-Sen, has been detained and imprisoned repeatedly. Most recently he was jailed together with Ba??ms?z Maden-?? Chairman G?kay Çak?r; the two were released after 10 days amid widespread protests and after Aksu began a hunger strike. These measures are part of the increasing use of police-state methods against workers, especially miners.

The Erdoğan government's escalation of repression is a product of its efforts to suppress class contradictions that are heading toward an explosion. Social inequality has reached immense proportions in Türkiye, one of the most unequal countries in Europe. According to August figures from the pro-government Türk-İş confederation, the minimum food expenditure required by a family of four—the “hunger threshold”—has risen to 37,388 liras, while the minimum wage remains at just 28,000 liras. Low wages and rising living costs are accompanied by unpaid wages, which have played a significant role in triggering the recent miners' actions. To this must be added the growing toll of workers sacrificed on the altar of capitalist profit. According to the Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly (İSİG), at least 2,105 workers, 94 of them children, were killed in workplace murders in 2025; in the first eight months of 2026 alone, the figure reached 1,509. Türkiye also leads Europe in workplace deaths.

The resistance of the working class to these conditions is also growing. At the Smart Solar Technologies plant in Aliağa, Izmir, after 98 percent of the workers resigned from the pro-corporate Tes-İş union, affiliated to Türk-İş, and organized in Enerji-Sen, affiliated to DİSK confederation, seven workers who had led the organizing drive were sacked. The workers halted production on September 11 and occupied the factory for four days.

The DEM Party, which is part of and endorses the negotiations between the Erdoğan government and imprisoned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan, revealed the inconsistency of its own position as it condemned the latest operations and the blocking orders. A statement issued from the party's X account declared: “At such a historic moment, when Türkiye is discussing peace and a democratic solution, it is unacceptable that a different section of society is targeted every day and that the voices of politicians, rights defenders, journalists, writers and academics are being silenced.”

The statement went on to demand “more law, more democracy and more freedom” from the Erdoğan government. This is a futile expectation, and it serves above all to thoroughly mislead workers and young people about the role of the Erdoğan regime amid the intensifying imperialist war in the Middle East. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi—Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party—Fourth International), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, have explained from the outset that the Ankara-PKK agreement is not a “peace process” but a reactionary alliance between the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeois leaderships, subordinated to imperialism's new redivision plans in the Middle East.

The Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), 35 of whose mayors have been jailed since March 2025, and the New Party (Yeni Parti) that split from it are also utterly incapable of defending democratic and social rights. These pro-imperialist

bourgeois parties are ready at any moment to reach an accommodation with the Erdoğan government and with the right-wing parties that have broken from it, and they fear above all an independent mobilization of the working class.

What unites all these parties and places them against the working class, against genuine peace and against democracy is their loyalty to the interests of the bourgeoisie and to NATO imperialism.

The NATO summit held in Ankara on July 6-8 this year took place under conditions resembling a state of emergency. It convened amid the war against Iran launched by the United States and Israel on February 28, 2026, which has continued with new waves of attacks in September; the escalating NATO war against Russia in Ukraine; and the ongoing genocide in Gaza. These wars and the accompanying rearmament require the intensification of political repression and social attacks against the working class at home. The growing nullification of the right to vote and to stand for election, mounting censorship, the criminalization of left-wing and oppositional organizations and the suppression of workers' struggles are the domestic extensions of this war preparation.

The WSWS and Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi oppose this repression and demand the immediate release of all those imprisoned and detained, the lifting of the access bans and the dropping of all political investigations. We unconditionally defend the right to political activity and organization of the targeted organizations, whatever our political differences with them.

These rights can be defended only through the mobilization of the working class based on rank-and-file committees established in the workplaces, independently of the trade union bureaucracies and all the bourgeois parties. The defense of democratic rights is inseparable from building the international struggle of the working class on the basis of a socialist program against imperialist war and the capitalist system that gives rise to it.



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