

Turkish government, shaken by fund crisis, attacks freedom of expression

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The fund crisis that has erupted in Türkiye, affecting some 500,000 people, has now reached Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, deputy chair of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), shaking the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The scandal could develop into the biggest corruption crisis since the December 17–25, 2013 operation, which forced four ministers to resign and threatened to reach Erdoğan himself. That operation had erupted as part of an intra-state struggle with Erdoğan’s former ally Fethullah Gülen, under the weight of mounting international tensions between Ankara and its NATO allies.

Kaya was forced to resign, under the guise of “asking to be relieved of her duties,” following allegations that she and her husband were among those who benefited from the profiteering. Erdoğan, for his part, has declared that everyone involved in the scandal will be pursued and expects the public to believe that he bears no responsibility whatsoever.

The fund crisis erupted this month when the portfolio management companies Pusula and Tera failed to make payments to investors. Numerous companies had built a Ponzi scheme by manipulating the shares they included in their funds. They did so under conditions created and tolerated by the government—and, as the Kaya case shows, with its direct involvement.

As the operations related to the fund crisis continue and dozens of people are arrested, they are being accompanied by systematic social media censorship. According to EngelliWeb, a project of the Freedom of Expression Association (??FÖD), at least 250 X accounts were blocked in Türkiye on September 24, at least 80 on September 26 and at least 150 on September 28. The general official justification was “the protection of national security and public order.” In most cases, this censorship has spread without any court order, or even legal notification. It constitutes an open attack on basic democratic rights, including freedom of expression.

Facing a severe political crisis, the Erdoğan government is at the same time seeking to suppress, through police state measures, the social powder keg on which it sits. For years, the government has used the state to enrich a financial oligarchy at home and increased military spending, while seeking to make the working class pay for both. Abroad, in line with the

reactionary interests and alliances of the bourgeoisie, Türkiye is being drawn into the maelstrom of imperialist wars and regional conflicts.

Those whose social media accounts have been blocked in recent days include the outlets *K?sa Dalga* and *Bizim TV*; journalists Hilmi Hacalo?lu, Alptekin Dursuno?lu and Razi Canikligil; *BirGün* reporters Meral Dany?ld?z and Sarya Toprak; ANKA News Agency court reporter Esra Tokat; investment and finance consultant Emre ?irin; political economist ?nan Mutlu; academic Prof. Dr. Bar?? Övgün; and Ba?aran Aksu, an organiser for the Independent Miners Union (Ba??ms?z Maden-??) and leader of Umut-Sen. The account of Yaman Akdeniz, one of the founders of ??FÖD, has also been blocked. Numerous news reports on the fund crisis have likewise been rendered invisible.

Elon Musk, the world’s first trillionaire, is working closely as the owner of X with the Erdoğan government to strip users in Türkiye of their basic rights. The model of repression being applied in Türkiye will not remain confined to that country. The fact that X, which has more than 500 million monthly users worldwide, is in the hands of an oligarch and subject to the arbitrary censorship of capitalist regimes underscores the urgent need to place social media platforms public ownership under workers’ control.

As ?lker Atamer, a lawyer specialising in Turkish and American law, has pointed out, where a court order exists, it is issued against URLs containing the username. X, however, applies the block to the user ID. As a result, new usernames that are not subject to any order are arbitrarily blocked as well. The new accounts of Emre ?irin and Ba?aran Aksu were also made invisible in Türkiye by X. In addition to X, access to accounts on Instagram and TikTok has also begun to be blocked. This wave of censorship has developed as part of the operations launched on September 12–13 against LGBTQ+ associations, student groups, left-wing publications and organisations.

The blocks were imposed within the framework of investigations conducted by the Istanbul and Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Offices. Account holders were not told which posts supposedly threatened “national security.” Nor has any official statement yet been made to the public. The only

thing those targeted have in common is that they criticise the government, whether from the right or the left. There has been no report of any pro-government account being blocked.

Erdoğan's declaration in a speech on Monday that "No one has the right to unsettle investors" points to the connection between these latest attacks on freedom of expression and the effort to suppress growing social discontent.

NEW Party Spokesperson Zeynel Emre claimed that former Minister of Family and Social Policies and AKP Deputy Chairman Kaya and his wife, İlyas Kaya, invested a total of 163 million Turkish lira (\$3.3 million) this year in various stocks, primarily Özata Denizcilik, and reaped profits more than 13 times their initial investment following the market crash on September 16, netting a total of 2.17 billion Turkish lira (\$44.2 million). The Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office filed a motion for precautionary measures regarding the couple's assets, which also include those of their children.

It is further alleged that Şekender Balçı—the son-in-law of Deputy Treasury and Finance Minister Osman Çelik and the son of Mustafa Balçı, a former board member of the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK)—served as an independent board member of Özata Denizcilik until August 31. Balçı, for whom a detention warrant had been issued, turned himself in on Monday.

NEW Parti leader Özgür Özel, alleging that the names of many former and current ministers are implicated in the fund profiteering, addressed Erdoğan directly: "... the fraud of the century, the robbery of the century. Did you know about this or not? There are two options. Either you did, in which case you are part of this racket—right at the head of it. Or, if you say you didn't, then a racket like this has been set up in this country without your even being aware of it. If you knew, you must resign. If you didn't, your capacity to govern is finished, and it is time to bring out the ballot box."

Özel is trying to channel the growing social anger against the government and the capitalist oligarchy toward his own election agenda. The failure of his calls for elections has become more evident than ever, as the AKP seizes control of a municipality run by an elected CHP or NEW Party official nearly every week. A large number of elected mayors are still in prison or have been removed from office.

Özel's policy, as set out in the articles he has written for leading newspapers in the United States and Europe, rests on promising the imperialist centres that his party can bring these explosive social conditions under control and would make a better ally. Like the AKP, NEW Party represents the same financial oligarchy that has expanded its wealth through the financialisation of the economy and financial plunder. This financialisation and the domination of the financial oligarchy are products of the global imperialist system to which all the establishment parties are bound and which they defend.

While the oligarchy makes billions through speculation, the working class is being impoverished. This wealth is not

conjured out of thin air. It is extracted through the exploitation of workers and the rollback of their social gains. The new Medium-Term Programme, which came into force this month, makes clear that the government will continue, in the name of bringing inflation under control and fiscal discipline, to suppress workers' wages and to transfer resources to corporations and armaments. Wages are melting away in the face of the soaring cost of living. While official annual inflation stands at 31.51 percent, the real rate, according to the Inflation Research Group (ENAG), is 49.03 percent.

One tragic consequence of the sharp decline in working people's living conditions came on Friday, September 25, in Ankara. At a protest held by retirees' associations in front of the Constitutional Court to demand a pay increase, Ali Şekeroğlu, a 60-year-old retired police officer, took his own life.

When he shot himself, Şekeroğlu was holding a placard that read, "Not for money, but for our dignity." At the protest, he had spoken of being unable to make ends meet, explaining that his daughter-in-law and son-in-law were unemployed and that he could not even afford the customary gift of gold for his newborn grandchild. Şekeroğlu's suicide, which sparked protests, is a damning indictment of the capitalist profit system, which forces millions of retirees and workers to live—or die—under unbearable conditions.

The fund crisis that has reached into the government, and the social and political catastrophe into which millions of people have been plunged, underscore that the problems confronting workers have no solution within the existing socioeconomic and political system or on a national basis. The struggle of the working class for better wages and living conditions and for democratic rights is therefore inseparable from the struggle for workers' power and socialism, to expropriate the financial oligarchy on an international scale.

Against the ruling class's escalating offensive on every front, workers and youth must prepare a counteroffensive by building rank-and-file committees in workplaces, neighbourhoods and schools, independent of the establishment parties and the trade union bureaucracies. This is an integral part of the fight to build a revolutionary leadership within the working class: the Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi–Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party–Fourth International), Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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