

# Izmir mayor joins the wave of defections from CHP to Erdoğan's AKP in Türkiye

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Izmir Metropolitan Mayor Cemil Tugay, elected on the ticket of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), joined the ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) on Wednesday, October 7. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan personally pinned the party badge on him at the AKP's headquarters.

Since its founding in 2001, the AKP had never won the İzmir metropolitan mayoralty in an election. It has now taken control of İzmir—Türkiye's third-largest city, located on the Aegean coast—through non-electoral means. With Tugay, the number of mayors who were elected on the CHP ticket in the 2024 local elections and later switched to the AKP has passed 30. This unprecedented situation demonstrates that not only the AKP, but also the CHP and the New Party that split from it, regard the will of millions of voters as something that can easily be trampled underfoot.

Elections in Türkiye are already profoundly undemocratic contests between establishment parties favored by the financial oligarchy. Rendering even these elections meaningless marks an escalation in the assault on basic democratic rights, including the right to vote and to stand for office, and in the construction of a dictatorship. The working class must oppose it.

Tugay's switch is undoubtedly unprincipled and a betrayal of those who voted for him. But this and the earlier defections cannot be explained by individual failings alone. More fundamentally, they are an expression of the rot of bourgeois politics as a whole. Municipalities, as part of the bourgeois state, are not independent of the pervasive network of capitalist interests and corruption—whether they are run by the AKP or by opposition parties—and are completely beyond the control of workers.

The Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi–Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party–Fourth International) opposes the jailing of elected mayors through politically motivated judicial operations, as well as their transfer to the ruling party, based on the defense of democratic rights, including the right to vote and to be elected, and does not provide even the slightest political support to the CHP or the New Party.

Tugay was elected on March 31, 2024, as the CHP candidate, with 1,292,000 votes (48.97 percent). As part of the government's judicial assault on the CHP, a court unlawfully removed the party's elected leader, Özgür Özel, on May 21 and reinstated former chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. This judicial coup ultimately led to the founding of the New Party. Tugay resigned from the CHP on June 18, claiming that he would continue in

office as an independent. Asked in August 2025 whether he might join the AKP, Tugay had replied: "There is not even a one-in-a-million chance. I find that very inappropriate."

Tugay's defection is a product of the systematic offensive launched by the Erdoğan government after the CHP emerged as the top party in the 2024 local elections. A critical turning point came in March 2025 with the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of Istanbul and the CHP's presidential candidate. At the time of his arrest, İmamoğlu was ahead of Erdoğan in the polls. Since the 2024 elections, six provincial and 29 district mayors, including İmamoğlu, have been jailed. Eight provincial and 32 district mayors have been removed from office.

The government has used judicial operations as an instrument of blackmail to seize municipalities. Among others, Aydın Metropolitan Mayor Özlem Çerçioğlu joined the AKP in August 2025. In June 2026, the mayors of Gölbaşı, Keçiören and Haymana in Ankara followed. They were joined in early August by the mayors of Tuzla, Çekmeköy and Üsküdar in Istanbul and of Çerkezköy in Tekirdağ. In September, the mayors of Çiğli and Foça in İzmir switched to the AKP. Following the June arrest of Adalar Mayor Ercan Akpolat, during a mass protest held in Büyükdada, CHP İstanbul deputy and lawyer Mahmut Tanal told the WSW, "They mount operations against CHP mayors. [But] if [a mayor] goes over to the AKP ... any investigation is closed; a non-prosecution decision is issued," and he cited several examples.

The fate of CHP mayors who refuse to join the AKP is illustrated by a message from Sinem Dedetaş, the jailed mayor of Üsküdar, stating: "I know that I am here [in prison] for political reasons. The public now also knows about the offers that were made to me before I came here. If I had wanted to, I would not be here."

Where mayors had been jailed, oppression and threats were applied through municipal council members. Some of them were detained ahead of the votes to choose acting mayors. Members who had defected to the AKP, along with some who remained in Kılıçdaroğlu's CHP, then voted for the AKP's candidates. This is how the Üsküdar and Adalar municipalities in Istanbul passed into the hands of the AKP.

New Party leader Özel said the AKP had appointed a trustee to İzmir and "pinned a badge on a puppet." Özel now calls Tugay a "traitor." Yet it was Özel himself who chose Tugay as the party's candidate in 2024.

Özel has declared that his party will win İzmir back at the first

election and take all 31 of the city's municipalities. This only exposes the bankruptcy of a perspective centered on elections. There is no legal obstacle preventing those elected on the New Party's ticket from defecting in their turn to the AKP or to any other party. Among the broad masses of voters whose electoral rights have been usurped, anger is also growing over the New Party's capitulation.

The New Party's efforts to keep mass anger under control were also evident at the protests in İzmir. Cumhuriyet and Konak squares were sealed off with police barricades and water cannon trucks after Tugay joined the AKP. The speech by the New Party's provincial chairman, Çağatay Güç, summed up his party's perspective: The reckoning would take place "at the ballot box, not in the streets." While the New Party planned to lay a black wreath at the Lausanne Gate and disperse, protesters broke through the police cordon and marched to Basmane. Güç's call to end the protest and disperse provoked anger among the protesters.

The record of Stalinist and pseudo-left forces undeniably reveals the deliberate political role they have played in preventing the development of a genuine socialist alternative within the working class that is independent of the political establishment.

The İzmir provincial organization of the Left Party (former ÖDP) called on Tugay to resign, declaring: "This city, İzmir, is not without people to stand up for it." Yet in 2023 the Left Party backed Kılıçdaroğlu, who ran a right-wing, anti-refugee and pro-NATO campaign. It continued to support him even after Kılıçdaroğlu escalated his anti-refugee rhetoric in the run-off. It gave Tugay tacit support by not fielding a candidate for mayor of İzmir in 2024 local elections. One of the party's leaders, Alper Taş, was himself the CHP's candidate for mayor of Beyoğlu in 2019. Taş now writes on X that "there is no limit to how low bourgeois politics can sink." But he says nothing about his own and his party's adaptation to bourgeois politics.

A statement by the İzmir provincial organization of the Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) declared that Tugay had "laid an ambush for the hopes of the people whose votes he received" and that he was already known as "an enemy of the workers." In 2024, however, the TİP had struck a deal with the CHP and refrained from fielding candidates in places where a victory for this bourgeois party was critical, including İzmir. In return, the CHP did not run a candidate in Gebze, Kocaeli, where TİP chairman Erkan Baş was standing, and thus backed him.

The TİP, too, had supported Kılıçdaroğlu's right-wing campaign against Erdoğan in 2023 elections. Ahead of the run-off, Kılıçdaroğlu stepped up his anti-Kurdish and anti-refugee campaign and signed a protocol with the far-right Victory Party. At that very moment, the TİP declared that it and its "1 million voters" would work resolutely for Kılıçdaroğlu's victory.

The İzmir organization of the Communist Party of Türkiye (TKP) called on Tugay to resign. It argued that those who had backed the "strongest" candidate against the AKP should question their own responsibility. But this question must also be put to the TKP itself, which lined up behind Kılıçdaroğlu in 2023. TKP's present attempt to distance itself from the CHP and the New Party should deceive no one. Its stance in the 2023 elections was not an aberration. It was the natural outcome of the Stalinist tradition of

Popular Front politics, which advocates alliances with bourgeois parties.

As the New Party is being marketed as a new trap to replace the CHP, the lessons of the 2023 elections must be stressed today more sharply than ever. The New Party openly defends the US-NATO alliance in its program. Such a party cannot defend democratic rights. While Özal assures Western newspapers that only his party can prevent an explosion of mass opposition, the pseudo-left presents these forces as the "lesser evil," or as a progressive ally against the Erdoğan regime. In this way, they seek to subordinate workers and youth to them and to bourgeois rule.

The defections from the CHP to the AKP, and the bankrupt perspective of class collaboration, raise more fundamental questions. As Leon Trotsky explained in his theory of Permanent Revolution, in countries of belated capitalist development, such as Türkiye, the bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out its democratic tasks because of its dependence on imperialism and its fear of the working class. The tasks of establishing a democratic regime, securing social equality and achieving independence from imperialism can be accomplished only through the conquest of power by the working class, as part of the struggle for world socialist revolution.

The Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi, the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, advances a genuinely independent and revolutionary political line for the working class. It bases itself on the theory of Permanent Revolution and on the lessons of the struggles waged by the world Trotskyist movement against Stalinism and all forms of national opportunism. The Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi will be built as the revolutionary vanguard of the working class, in irreconcilable political opposition to all the bourgeois parties, which are tied to imperialism, and to the petty-bourgeois tendencies that function as their "left" appendage.



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