

Turkish government takes over pro-opposition Halk TV

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Halk TV, one of Türkiye’s most-watched news channels, has been taken over by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a police raid on the morning of October 14. It marks a new and dangerous stage in the Turkish ruling class’s construction of a dictatorship. The resort to such open and brazen repressive measures expresses the regime’s deepening political crisis and its steadily eroding credibility in the eyes of the population.

Halk TV was taken off the air on the morning that Ekrem ?mamolu was due to present his defense for the first time in nearly 19 months in the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (?BB) trial, in which 436 defendants are being prosecuted. ?mamolu, the jailed mayor elected from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) in the March 2024 local elections and the party’s presidential candidate, is seen as Erdoğan’s strongest rival. Prosecutors are seeking a prison sentence of up to 2,430 years against him.

During the raid, live broadcasting was cut off in a building surrounded by hundreds of police officers. Employees were turned away at the door, and management of the channel was effectively handed over to the government through the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). ?brahim Pa?al?, a columnist for the pro-government daily *Yeni ?afak*, was installed at the head of Halk TV’s management. He was also appointed trustee a year ago, when the opposition channel TELE1 was seized.

Halk TV was close first to the CHP and then, after the party’s split, to Özgür Özel’s New Party (YEN? Parti). It broadcast outside the direct or indirect control of the government. Regardless of Halk TV’s political line, this attack on press freedom and the right to information must be unconditionally opposed.

The official pretext for the operation is an investigation into bribery, bid-rigging and the laundering of criminal proceeds against the channel’s owner, Cafer Mahiro?lu, in connection with tenders of the ?zmir Metropolitan Municipality. Financial transactions involving its owner’s companies were used as a pretext to black out a news channel watched by millions. The fact that Halk TV was not even named in the prosecutor’s statement shows how contrived the justification is. The operation also came roughly a week after ?zmir Metropolitan Mayor Cemil Tugay, who was elected on the CHP ticket, defected to Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The fund scandal that has rocked the government since mid-September is driving it to ever more brazen measures. On September 17, the Capital Markets Board (SPK) decided to

liquidate 131 investment funds belonging to seven portfolio management companies. The decision froze the savings of more than 450,000 investors, most of them working people or retirees. It emerged that figures close to the government were involved in what amounted to a Ponzi scheme, built by inflating thinly traded stocks and the funds holding them.

AKP Deputy Chair and former minister Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya and her husband had turned an investment of roughly 163 million lira into 2.17 billion lira in five months. Kaya was forced to resign on September 26. According to press reports, she transferred her gains, apart from the principal, to the TMSF. Yet while numerous CHP mayors are being held in pretrial detention largely based on claims by informants, Kaya was sent home without any judicial measures after giving her statement. Earlier press reports had alleged that Kaya threatened to reveal everything she knew if the judiciary touched her. On September 24, Erdoğan, implying that he bore no knowledge of or responsibility for these illegal profiteering operations, declared: “Whoever bears responsibility will be held to account before the law.”

While the working class has been impoverished for years by high inflation and suppressed wages, wealth has been transferred to a narrow circle of capitalist oligarchs close to the government and with access to insider information. This has provoked enormous anger among broad masses of people and further eroded the foundations of the regime’s social and political legitimacy.

In this climate, police operations have not targeted the profiteers and those who enabled them, but those who exposed them. The daily *Sözcü* editor Mustafa Balç? and journalist ?aban Sevinç were arrested on charges of “publicly disseminating misleading information” over their reports on the ties between AKP spokesman Ömer Çelik and Osman Ar?kan Nacar, who allegedly fled abroad after a 20-billion-lira swindle.

?smail Saymaz and Murat A??rel, who questioned Trade Minister Ömer Bolat’s links to the funds on a *Sözcü TV* program on October 7, were placed under house arrest following a criminal complaint filed by Bolat and were fitted with electronic ankle monitors. On October 15, journalist Bahadır Özgür, who had reported on the list of 141 people whose assets were frozen in the fund investigation, was detained on charges of “violating the confidentiality of an investigation,” and access to his X account was blocked. Özgür said his report was based on a televised statement by Justice Minister Ak?n G rlek and on information made public by the prosecutor’s office.

This has been accompanied by unprecedented censorship on social media, carried out with the collaboration of X's owner, the billionaire Elon Musk. According to EngelliWeb data compiled by the Freedom of Expression Association (FÖD), access was blocked to at least 1,270 X accounts with a combined 35 million followers in September alone. The reactionary "My Family Is Safe" operation targeting LGBTQ+ people was used as a pretext to shut down the news site T24 entirely and to block access to its X account, which has 1.9 million followers. The X accounts of *K?sa Dalga* and *bianet* were also blocked. On October 14, an access ban was ordered against the X account of the Workers' Party of Türkiye (T?P), which has 582,000 followers. The T?P won more than 900,000 votes in the 2023 elections and has three deputies in parliament. Halk TV's X account, with 3 million followers, and its other social media accounts have also been blocked.

Kemal K?l?çdarolu was reinstated as CHP chairman by the "absolute nullity" ruling of the Ankara Regional Court of Appeals on May 21. A few days before the raid, he accused Halk TV of broadcasting "fake news 24 hours a day" and said that his party had filed a complaint against the channel with the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK).

The dictatorial measures at home are advancing amid a deepening economic and political crisis and in tandem with Türkiye's more direct involvement in the imperialist wars in the Middle East. The text of the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, which Erdoğan signed with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on August 7, has still not been made public, and the agreement has not been submitted to parliament. Despite this, the alliance decided in Riyadh on October 5 on the rapid deployment of military forces to Saudi Arabia. The road to joining the US-backed Saudi monarchy's war of aggression against Yemen, an oppressed country, is being paved through a process from which parliament and the public have been excluded from the outset.

On October 13, US President Donald Trump said he might ask Erdoğan to intervene in support of Saudi Arabia, adding: "President Erdogan, I think, would do as I ask."

Trump enabled Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, launched a criminal war of aggression against Iran together with Israel on February 28, and is now considering strikes on Yemen to prop up the Saudi regime. He and his policies are hated by the majority in Türkiye. Nevertheless, the government is being dragged into a military adventure in line with the reactionary interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie, which are subordinated to imperialism. To secure the home front, it is abolishing basic democratic rights. The deal between Ankara and the Kurdish movement led by the jailed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan forms part of these preparations.

The statements made on October 13 by Devlet Bahçeli, leader of Erdoğan's fascist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), pointed to the regime's need to suppress the anger building up against war, the fund crisis and social devastation.

Bahçeli demanded that Türkiye provide every kind of military support for the defense of Saudi Arabia. He ended his speech with a threat directed at youth and workers. Pointing to the French high school students who have taken to the streets against overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, austerity and police violence, more

than 6,000 of whom have been detained, he warned, "Don't be tempted by France! Don't be carried away by Western imperialism!" These words reflect the Turkish ruling class's fear that the mass movement developing across Europe, from France to Spain and from Belgium to Ireland, against militarism and its consequences in the form of social cuts could spread to Türkiye.

The bourgeois opposition, though subjected to mounting political repression, is inherently incapable of defending democratic rights. As the New Party's program shows, these parties are committed to NATO, the capitalist market and the reactionary geopolitical ambitions of the Turkish bourgeoisie. In the past the CHP, and today the New Party, have offered nothing but impotent responses that lead nowhere. Their central aim is to keep social anger under control by channeling it into elections. Above all, they seek to prevent social explosions with revolutionary implications, under conditions in which the right to vote and to stand for office is being openly violated and broad masses are losing confidence in the bourgeois electoral process.

The developments in Türkiye are part of a global trend that finds its most concentrated expression in the Trump administration in the United States. From Washington to Europe, the ruling classes are responding to growing social inequality and mounting opposition to genocide and imperialist war with escalating violence and a turn toward dictatorial forms of rule.

The struggle to defend democratic rights is inseparable from the struggle against war and against the capitalist system, the source of social inequality and war. This struggle requires an international perspective. The force that must be mobilized in it is the working class. Workers must be united across national borders, in opposition to imperialism and all the bourgeois parties, through rank-and-file committees in workplaces, neighborhoods and schools, and mobilized on a socialist program aimed at the conquest of power. This is the perspective fought for by the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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