

Journalists in Türkiye take to the streets against censorship and arrests

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On Saturday, hundreds of journalists and thousands of others took to the streets in at least 10 cities across Türkiye, including Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Diyarbakır and Adana, to protest the escalating attacks on the press by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) reporters and supporters joined the marches in Istanbul and İzmir.

The protests were called by press organizations including the Journalists' Union of Türkiye (TGS), the Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC), the Press Council, the Contemporary Journalists' Association (ÇGD), the Press, Printing and Publishing Workers' Union and the Dicle Fırat Journalists' Association. They came on the eve of the first anniversary of the appointment of a trustee to the TELE1 channel and shortly after the government seized Halk TV through a trustee on October 14. The demonstrators marched under the slogan "Enough is enough, we can't breathe! No to censorship, the news must be free."

In Istanbul, protesters gathered in Kadıköy and marched to the district's Pier Square. Workers from TELE1 and Halk TV joined the march, during which the names of jailed journalists were read out one by one. Protesters chanted slogans such as "A free press cannot be silenced" and "Journalists in prison, fund swindlers free."

In Ankara, journalists marched from Kolej Square to Sakarya Street, chanting "İsmail will get out and write again," a reference to *BirGün* reporter İsmail Ar?, jailed on October 21 on the baseless charge of "publicly disseminating misleading information." A message from Ar? was read out at the rally. He noted that he had been arrested for the second time in a single year, at the same courthouse and on the same charge. "Let us do our job," he said.

In İzmir, journalists gathered in front of the Türkan

Saylan Cultural Center. After a statement was read, they marched to the statue of Zübeyde Hanım and laid down their pens in protest. WSWS supporters at the protest held placards reading "Freedom for journalists and the press" and "Freedom for Bogdan Syrotyuk, sentenced to 15 years in Ukraine for his anti-war writings."

The protests come as the attack on the press reaches a new stage. In roughly 20 months, trustees have been appointed to 10 television channels, including Flash Haber TV, Ekotürk, Habertürk, TELE1 and, most recently, Halk TV. Access to the websites of T24, Mezopotamya Agency and JINNEWS has been blocked. According to the Freedom of Expression Association (İFÖD), at least 1,270 X accounts were blocked in September alone. They include the accounts of *Evrensel*, *soL Haber*, *Kısa Dalga*, *bianet*, *T24* and *Halk TV*.

X, owned by billionaire Elon Musk, complied, making the accounts invisible in Türkiye. Even the accounts of İFÖD itself and of its EngelliWeb project, which documents internet censorship, were blocked.

Arrests of journalists are also mounting rapidly. According to the Independent Communication Network (BİA), seven journalists were arrested between July and September. In the first three weeks of October alone, at least seven more were jailed. According to the list kept by the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), 29 journalists and media workers are currently behind bars, while journalist İsmail Saymaz is under house arrest. The main instrument of these arrests is Article 217/A of the Turkish Penal Code. Known as the "censorship law," it came into force in October 2022 and criminalizes "publicly disseminating misleading information."

The case of İsmail Ar? clearly shows how this law is

used. In 2024, Ar? reported that relatives of Ebubekir ?ahin—former head of the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and now general manager of Türk Telekom—had been given managerial posts at RTÜK. In January this year, he reported that ?ahin’s daughter had been appointed to the Competition Authority without taking the civil service exam. ?ahin responded by filing a compensation suit against Ar? and BirGün. Ar? is also on trial for “disturbing the peace” over a message he sent ?ahin asking him for comment on the story.

The latest complaint, which led to his arrest, alleged that Ar? had shared a report on ?ahin’s ties to Osman Ar?kan Nacar, a fugitive figure in the investment fund scandal that erupted in September and froze the savings of more than 450,000 people. According to his lawyers, the complaint does not even specify what was supposedly “false.” Although Ar? went to the prosecutor’s office voluntarily to give his statement, he was jailed on the pretext that he posed a “flight risk.”

Journalist Murat A??rel, who had been placed under house arrest over his comments on the fund scandal, was jailed on October 19. He was charged with “unknowingly aiding a criminal organization” in a money laundering investigation targeting the family of New Party (YEN? Parti) deputy Mustafa Sar?gül. According to reports, A??rel is being prosecuted over a story he never published, based on information sent to him that he was unable to verify.

The fund scandal exposed how senior figures in Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) and circles close to the government had profited from the fraud. Amid mounting public anger, the government has targeted not the senior officials suspected of involvement, but the journalists who reported on them. Halk TV was taken off the air on the very morning that jailed presidential candidate Ekrem ?mamo?lu, seen as Erdo?an’s strongest rival, was due to present his defense for the first time in 19 months.

While the working class is being impoverished by the soaring cost of living and falling real wages, the capitalist oligarchy in Türkiye has concentrated immense wealth and power in its hands. This goes hand in hand with ever closer collaboration with US and NATO imperialism, which the overwhelming majority of the population opposes. To suppress the growing opposition among workers and youth, the government

is dismantling freedom of expression and of the press.

The global turn to authoritarian forms of rule, which finds its most concentrated expression in Trump’s drive to establish a dictatorship in the United States, is the product of the deepening crisis of the world capitalist system. As the WSWS has explained, the escalation of imperialist war and the mass protests spreading across Europe and internationally are two sides of the same crisis.

Everywhere, the ruling classes are responding to growing opposition to war, militarism and austerity with police-state measures. In Ukraine, a NATO proxy and close partner of Türkiye, a court sentenced 27-year-old socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk to 15 years in prison on August 10 for “high treason under martial law.” He had opposed the US-NATO proxy war against Russia from the standpoint of the international working class.

The WSWS demands the immediate and unconditional release of the jailed journalists, of Bogdan Syrotiuk and of all political prisoners. The trustees appointed to media outlets must be removed and the internet access bans lifted at once. In this struggle for fundamental democratic rights, journalists and all defenders of press freedom must turn to the working class in Türkiye and internationally, which is paying the price of war and austerity.



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