HANDS OFF TURKISH CLASS WAR PRISONER BAŞARAN AKSU!



BY WILL LEHMAN
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I condemn in the strongest terms the arrest of Turkish independent union leader Başaran Aksu.

On April 9, 2026, Aksu—Organizing Coordinator of the independent rank-and-file union Umut-Sen and an organizing specialist for the Independent Mine Workers' Union—was seized in a police raid and had his home searched. He has been jailed on fabricated charges of "spreading misleading information" and "inciting hatred and enmity."

Aksu's real "crime" is that he has been on the front lines of wildcat strikes by mine, warehouse, and other workers demanding unpaid wages and fighting the destruction of their communities and environment by billionaire holding companies. The courts even cited his intention to join a union protest as proof he was a "flight risk."

This is a blatant political attack by the Erdoğan government, acting on behalf of the corporations and their NATO backers. It is aimed at crushing any independent organization of the working class.

Aksu's arrest follows the detention of other independent leaders and activists like BİRTEK-SEN leader Mehmet Türkmen and villager and forest defender Esra Işık. It comes amid violent attacks on Polyak miners, Migros warehouse workers, textile workers, and many others who have dared to organize outside the official union apparatus.

A clear pattern is emerging: the corporate oligarchy, the state, and a completely integrated union bureaucracy are moving to terrorize workers and break an insurgent, independent workers' movement before it spreads. These forces are terrified because such a movement threatens their profits, their privileges, and the entire social order they defend. The same basic conflict exists in the United States, where the UAW bureaucracy collaborates with the corporations and the government to impose sellout contracts and suppress rank-and-file opposition.

It is time to revive the working-class traditions of solidarity. An injury to one is an injury to all! We must look back to the great labor defense campaigns of a century ago, when workers across continents rallied to defend comrades persecuted anywhere—when meetings were held, petitions circulated, picket lines formed, and workers walked off the job to say: a worker jailed in Istanbul or Chicago is our brother, our sister, our comrade. The labor bureaucracies in Turkey and here—whether it is DİSK, the UAW apparatus, or the AFL-CIO—will not lead such a fight. They have turned their backs on persecuted workers again and again. It falls to rank-and-file workers everywhere to act on this tradition and make it a living reality today.

Petitions and appeals to the politicians and bought-and-paid-for union bureaucrats won't do a bit of good. We can't keep ramming our heads into the same walls. We've got to take the power into our own hands. This means building from the ground up independent rank-and-file committees in every workplace—democratic organizations run by us workers ourselves, accountable to the shop floor, not to the corporations or the state. These committees, working under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), are the means by which we can coordinate strikes, defend leaders from repression, organize international solidarity, and prevent betrayals by the

existing union apparatus. They put power where it belongs: in the hands of those who produce society's wealth.

I am calling on UAW members, on all autoworkers, miners, warehouse workers, teachers, and other workers in the US and internationally to raise their voices and act. Demand the immediate and unconditional release of Başaran Aksu, Mehmet Türkmen, Esra Işık, and all class war prisoners in Turkey. Bring their case into every local, every plant meeting, and every picket line. The struggles at Polyak, the Migros warehouses, the auto plants, and logistics hubs are not separate national issues; they are fronts in a single global class confrontation.

Hands off Başaran Aksu. Free all class war prisoners now. The power of labor is international—and together, organized independently and democratically, we can defend our comrades and build the movement that will end capitalist exploitation and repression once and for all.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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