

Turkish unions, business groups back crackdown on Taksim Square protest

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The Turkish ruling elite is closing ranks around Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's crackdown against protests. Threatening to send the army against the population, Erdogan has sent riot police to violently clear Taksim Square, arresting hundreds of protesters Tuesday.

WSWS supporters in Turkey reported that 20 business groups and trade union federations took out a full-page advertisement in Turkey's major national newspapers, calling on Taksim Square protesters to go home. Signatories included the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), the Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (TURK-IS), the Turkish Tradesmen and Artisans' Confederation (TESK), and the Turkish Banks Association (TBB).

The statement attacked protests as damaging to Turkey's interests, writing: "The protests have gone beyond their real purpose, as marginal groups have used it to create unrest in the country and instigate conflict among people, providing ground for developments to be used for bad intentions against our country. We ask our citizens to get back to their daily lives, so that progress on the issue can continue."

Although riot police were responsible for the bulk of the violence—killing several protesters and injuring 5,000—the statement criticized the protesters as violent, lecturing them that "breaking and burning the property of others as well as insulting them cannot be interpreted as the use of rights in any legal system."

The Turkish ruling class, with the support of Washington and the European capitals, is trying to crush the protests, which started last month against Erdogan's plans to remodel Gezi Park, which is adjacent to Taksim Square. The protests escalated, mobilizing broader layers of urban youth hostile to rising social inequality and to Erdogan's Islamist

policies—including his unpopular participation in the US-led war in Syria, as well as anti-democratic bans on alcohol sales.

Erdogan's brutal crackdown is alienating broader layers of Turkish society. Poll ratings for his Justice and Development Party (AKP) have fallen from over 50 percent to 35 percent. Cengiz Candar, a political Turkish political analyst, said that the AKP is closing ranks in the face of the popular resistance: "His party members are not in a state of debating anything now. They are on a war footing."

Clashes between police and demonstrators took place Wednesday in the early morning hours. Thousands of protesters staged demonstrations in Ankara and Eskisehir, and were dispersed by police forces firing gas bombs and water cannons.

Under these conditions, the Erdogan government is desperate to rapidly end the protests, before they draw in broader social layers—and above all, the working class, which in 2011 toppled US-backed dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia. In this it enjoys the full support of the NATO powers.

Erdogan's regime enjoys NATO support due to its central role in promoting Islamist opposition forces in the bloody US-led proxy war in Syria. Turkey is emerging as the keystone of a US-backed regional alliance of Sunni Islamist regimes fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad—a war ultimately directed at US-led regime change in Iran, and securing US imperialist hegemony throughout the Middle East.

Sinan Ülgen of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Brussels told German public international broadcasting service *Deutsche Welle*, "Turkey—at the end of the day—is a NATO member; it is part of the NATO alliance. Unless things acquire or jump to a really different dimension of democratic

abuse, the West will continue to work with Turkey.”

Deutsche Welle commented, “The Turkish prime minister—a key interlocutor on Syria—has been weakened domestically. But according to Carnegie’s Ülgen, although Erdogan faces widespread domestic opposition, he will likely remain an ‘indispensable’ partner for Western countries in Syria.”

The central obstacle to the development of working class opposition to the Erdogan government and its pro-war policies is the reactionary role of the unions and the Turkish bourgeois and petty-bourgeois “left.” They are hostile to any struggle against the Erdogan government and the NATO powers.

The Turkish unions—the Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) and the Confederation of Public Workers Unions (KESK)—played a key role, mobilizing only 5,000 workers on Monday after having issued a general strike call. This gave the union bureaucracy and the Erdogan government confidence that there was no imminent risk of a mass working class uprising if the regime launched a crackdown on the protests.

More broadly, the various bourgeois “left” and pseudo-left parties active in the Taksim Solidarity Platform have sought negotiations with Erdogan and presented only the most limited demands, concentrating on the remodeling of Gezi Park. This blocked any struggle to mobilize the deep opposition to war and to social inequality that exists in the working class.

Under these conditions, the Erdogan regime is proceeding with a crackdown. Dozens of Turkish protesters were being held by the government Wednesday, after nation-wide raids against groups deemed responsible for the demonstrations. The raids targeted members of parties including the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) and the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP).

According to *Hurriyet Daily News*, the detainees will face interrogations over the next four days, and many will be charged with “organizing violent protests and calling on people to attend illegal demonstrations.” The number of individuals arrested in the raids has been estimated at 200 to 500, though the figure could be higher.

Erdogan's regime is also moving to strangle the expression of opposition on the Internet. Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc cited the need for legal “deterrents” to prevent social media users from

“inciting crime, spreading lies and disinformation.”

A new form of passive resistance, dubbed the “standing man” protest, spread across Turkey this week in the aftermath of the brutal crackdowns launched by the regime. The protests involved hundreds of demonstrators standing, motionless and silent, in public spaces.

The “standing man” protests are being widely publicized in the bourgeois media, because such silent individual protest poses no threat to the Erdogan regime, to the US war drive in the Middle East, or to the capitalist order. For this reason, the “standing man” protests are being promoted in the bourgeois media and on the Taksim Solidarity Platform’s Twitter feed.

The Erdogan regime also gave its seal of approval to the “standing man” protests. Deputy Prime Minister Arinc said they were “civilized” and “pleasing to the eye.”

“We should encourage such protests within the law,” he added.

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