

Release the framed-up Istanbul airport workers!

No to pressure and intimidation against the working class!

By the Socialist Equality Group of Turkey
25 September 2018

Hundreds of Turkish construction workers at the site of a new airport in Istanbul were detained and attacked by police and gendarmes last Saturday after workers carried out legitimate mass protests the previous day. The protests began after a shuttle bus accident left 17 of their fellow workers injured. However, it was the expression of long-standing anger over workplace accidents, precarious and oppressive working conditions and the violation of basic rights.

An Istanbul court decided to imprison 24 workers, including four officials of the Construction Workers Union (KİİS) on Wednesday. The court ordered the release of the remaining 19 workers, subject to judicial monitoring.

These arrests are an attack on workers not only in Turkey but around the world. They show how, due to the police state regimes being built in country after country, including in Turkey, workers fighting to defend their rights quickly find themselves facing a political struggle.

The only “crime” of the workers—who are charged with “damaging public property,” “violating laws on assemblies and rallies,” “resisting police” and “violating freedom to work”—was to oppose the furious exploitation and work schedules the government imposed to build the airport by October 29.

Workers explain they are working under military conditions. They are put onto buses under the baton of the police, and work surrounded by hundreds of plainclothes policemen.

Media propaganda that the construction workers’ protest is an outside plot to prevent the airport from opening on October 29 is a pack of lies. The grievances of airport construction workers are well known. They

must wait for hours due to the lack of buses; dining halls and toilets are not regularly cleaned; dorms are infested with fleas and bed bugs; health care is not provided properly; salaries are not paid, and workplace accidents are covered up.

Construction workers framed by the government should be released instantly, and their demands for humane and decent working conditions granted.

This is the most widespread and militant action in Turkey since the metalworkers’ strikes of 2015; it has made the ruling class and its government very nervous. They arrested 24 workers in a blatant attempt to intimidate the entire working class.

The government and its subordinate media claim that “provocateurs” or even “terrorists” provoked the workers. The slanders of the government, the media and the judiciary only expose their fear and their impotence.

Explosions of opposition in the working class are inevitable under conditions of deep economic crisis, amid an eruption of a financial panic after US trade war threats against Turkey. Social inequality and poverty are rising in line with war preparations across the region. The political representatives of the ruling class then resort to blatant attempts to intimidate the workers. In May 2015, in an article titled “First political lessons of metal strikes,” we wrote:

Amid a deepening economic crisis and the growing danger of all-out war in the Middle East, the mass actions at the Renault factory revealed that the working class, whom decades-long policies of social austerity have turned into a

powder keg, could go off at any moment. The aims of such a struggle are not merely economic, but also political advances.

Therefore, this strike is to be seen as the beginning of a revival of the militant struggle of the working class in Turkey after a long break, as in the recent strike of US oil workers.

Since then, the imperialist wars in nearby Syria and Iraq have intensified, together with the Turkish government's war policies, and Turkey has undeniably entered into an explosive financial crisis. The collapse of the Turkish lira after Trump's trade war threats, government austerity measures, rising inflation—especially on prices for basic goods—and growing unemployment and poverty are worsening already unbearable conditions for the working class.

This upsurge of the class struggle in 2018 is an international phenomenon. All over the world, from mass workers' protests in Iran to teachers' strikes in the United States, from mass protests in Iraq to strikes in the European countries, workers are taking initial steps in a resurgence of the class struggle.

The ruling class, which is aware of this reality, has long been preparing against the working class with plans for a dictatorship and police-state rule. In Turkey, the transition to a presidential regime and the creation of a permanent state of emergency are directly connected to the preparations for war abroad and attempts to suppress mass working class struggles at home.

The role of the bourgeois opposition parties and trade unions in the government's attack on the working class should be clear. Their press and social media statements against the detention and arrest of the construction workers are only intended to keep the workers within the boundaries of order and hide the complicity of these pro-capitalist organizations.

Organizations that for years have permitted or even openly supported social attacks against the working class, only making empty public statements, do not and cannot oppose the imposition of slave labor conditions and oppression by the ruling class. These problems require a socialist movement and program based on the international working class, directly targeting the capitalist system on which these organizations rise.

Masses of workers opposed to social counterrevolution, dictatorship and war support the construction workers and are angered by their arrest. The masses of workers and youth should defend the arrested workers and demand their release.

The struggle should be combined with the campaign of the International Committee of the Fourth International demanding the release of Maruti Suzuki India workers cruelly sentenced to life imprisonment because of the frame-up mounted by the Suzuki Corporation with the full complicity of India's principal political parties and trade unions. In this way, this movement can be an important component of the revolt of the international working class against capitalism and its products—war, oppression and inequality—and of the struggle to build a socialist world economy, not for the profit of a few parasites, but to meet the needs of all people.

As shown by the increasing danger of world war and dictatorship, and growing workers' struggles in Turkey and internationally, there is an urgent need for a socialist anti-war movement by the international working class, independent from the trade unions and so-called left bourgeois parties. This movement is the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties in each country.

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