

Turkish police round up young protesters for use of social media

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6 June 2013

Turkish police have rounded up dozens of young protesters in the western port city of Izmir on charges of “encouraging rebellion,” “inciting public hatred” and spreading “misleading and libelous information” for their use of Twitter and other social media during the mass demonstrations that have swept the country over the past week.

The *Hürriyet Daily News* reported that 29 people were arrested Tuesday night and early Wednesday. It quoted an attorney and provincial secretary of the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) as saying that those detained were all “young kids” between the ages of 18 and 24.

In total, police raided 38 homes looking for those suspected of spreading information on Twitter and other social media that was considered illicit by the Turkish authorities. They are still searching for at least nine more people to arrest.

The attorney, Sevda Erkan K?l?ç, told the Turkish daily that the supposedly incriminating Twitter posts involved people urging others to protest and saying things like “let’s meet here” or “the police are coming” or asking for doctors to come and attend those injured as a result of police repression.

Parents and family members of the detained youth gathered outside the offices of the Izmir Security Directorate’s Smuggling and Organized Crime branch where those arrested were being interrogated, demanding their release and protesting their arrests over nothing more than expressing themselves.

“They say that they have shared similar posts as well, that the whole country did it, so they ask, ‘Why is it our children who experience such treatment?’” said the attorney.

The mother of one young girl told the Turkish daily *Zaman* that the family had brought her to the police

station after police had notified them, but that she had merely re-tweeted a call for help from someone in an Izmir neighborhood during the protests.

Police reportedly tracked down those they arrested through their IP addresses.

There was also speculation that the police reacted to the posting of photos and YouTube clips of helmeted riot police gratuitously beating young people by an Izmir sea wall and grabbing young women by the hair and hitting them with their batons.

Izmir, a city of over 4 million, has been the scene of some of the largest demonstrations and most violent repression since a protest over the government’s move to bulldoze a central Istanbul park and replace it with a shopping mall sparked a nationwide eruption. Police in the city were backed by plainclothes thugs wielding nail-studded sticks in attacking demonstrators.

The arrests of youth for using social media was accompanied Wednesday by a further escalation of violent repression in the capital of Ankara, where police unleashed tear gas and fired water cannon against a mass demonstration composed predominantly of thousands of workers who poured into Kizilay square as part of strikes and protests called by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DISK) and the Public Workers Unions Confederation (KESK). A number of injured demonstrators had to be taken to hospitals.

The arrests and police attacks gave the lie to statements issued the day before by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc and Turkish President Abdullah Gül making partial apologies for the police violence of the past week and claiming to be open to the demonstrators’ concerns.

While clearly concerned about the threat posed to the government by the spreading protests and anxious to

defuse them, the Turkish state continues to rely primarily on raw repressive force.

Social media has played a prominent role in the Turkish protests, in no small measure because of the failure of much of mainstream Turkish media to cover the demonstrations. The government has effectively intimidated much of the print and broadcast media through the arrests of journalists and other acts of repression. Some television stations broadcast cooking shows and nature programs at the height of the mass protests.

In a public statement delivered on Sunday, before he left Turkey for a four-day tour of North Africa, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced Twitter as “a scourge,” declaring, “The best examples of lies can be found there.” He added, “To me, social media is the worst menace to society.”



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