

Turkish protests grow as Erdogan calls counter-demonstrations

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Protests against the Islamist government of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan grew over the weekend, as Erdogan called counter-demonstrations by his supporters next weekend and warned that his ability to tolerate the protests “has a limit.”

On Saturday, tens of thousands of protesters filled Taksim Square in Istanbul, a week after police withdrew from the square after a failed attempt to crush protests against Erdogan’s plans to remodel the historic area in downtown Istanbul. Fans of the Besiktas and Fenerbahce football clubs had called on their supporters to join the demonstration, one of the largest so far in Taksim Square. Protesters chanted, “Erdogan, resign!”

Police and protesters clashed in the western Istanbul neighborhood of Gazi, however, with police firing water cannon after protesters reportedly taunted police.

In the capital, Ankara, police attacked a group of approximately 5,000 protesters Saturday night around 10:30 p.m. in Kizilay Square with barrages of tear gas and water cannon. There were reports of at least two injuries yesterday, after clashes continued in Ankara through the night and into early Sunday morning.

Turkey’s national doctors’ union said the protests had left two protesters and one policeman dead, and almost 4,800 people injured across the country. This figure includes approximately 600 injured police officers.

Protesters held another major rally in Taksim Square yesterday afternoon, as protests continued in cities throughout the country. They chanted, “Erdogan, resign!” and organized songs and dances in various locations on the square.

The Taksim Square rally was called by the Taksim Solidarity Platform—a group of academics, architects, environmentalists, and members of the opposition CHP (Republican People’s Party), who have tried to lay out

conditions for a deal with Erdogan to wind down the protests.

The maneuvers of the Taksim Solidarity Platform—and those of the union bureaucracies, pseudo-left groups, and nationalist parties like the CHP—point to critical issues of political perspective confronting the protest movement.

The protests have become the focal point of broader hostility to Erdogan’s policies, including attacks on democratic rights, rising social inequality, and support for the reactionary US-led war in Syria. Numerous commentators have compared the Taksim Square protests in Turkey to the 2011 Tahrir Square protests in Cairo, which launched revolutionary struggles against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Stark differences exist between the two struggles, however. Above all, in February 2011, the working class in Egypt intervened, launching a series of powerful mass strikes that brought down Mubarak. These were directed against Egypt’s state-controlled unions and escaped the control of its opposition parties.

The only way forward for opposition to austerity, war, and democratic rights in Turkey is a fight to similarly mobilize the working class in struggle against the Erdogan regime, independently of and against the unions and the bourgeois opposition. To the extent that the Turkish protests have not advanced such a perspective, they have remained under the political influence of reactionary forces in the union bureaucracy and the CHP. They are seeking a deal with Erdogan to avert a revolution and increase their weight in Erdogan’s maneuvers with imperialism.

Erdogan is seeking to exploit this situation to rally supporters of his Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) for a crackdown against the protests. Yesterday the AKP called pro-government counter-

demonstrations in Ankara and Istanbul for next Saturday and next Sunday, respectively, as Erdogan went on a three-city tour to Mersin, Adana, and Ankara.

In Adana, where a policeman allegedly fell to his death from a bridge while chasing protesters, Erdogan denounced protesters for having “martyred” the policeman.

He also attacked calls for police involved in brutal repression of the protests to resign, slandering protesters as terrorists: “We won’t sacrifice our police to their wishes. We cannot leave the streets for anarchists and terrorists to roam.”

Pro- and anti-Erdogan protesters had clashed the night before, the second such clash after Erdogan supporters attacked a group of protesters in Erdogan’s home city of Rize on Thursday.

Speaking in Ankara as police attacked protesters, Erdogan said: “We remained patient, we are still patient, but there’s a limit to our patience. Those who do not respect this nation’s party in power will pay a price.”

Erdogan also made empty attacks on major banks or governments in North America and Europe, in response to fears that they might place pressure on him to compromise with the protesters, for instance by holding up lending and threatening to increase interest rates on Turkish debt.

He said, “The interest lobby should better behave itself. This lobby exploited my people for years. We have shown patience for a long time. I am not saying this only for one bank or two, but for all whoever is making this lobby. Those who have started this fight against us, you will pay the price heavily. Those who tried to let the stock exchange collapse: Tayyip Erdogan has no money there; if it collapses you will also collapse with it. The moment we discover stock exchange speculation, we will ram it down your throat.”

This is, however, bluster from a government whose foreign policy is closely aligned with Washington’s Middle East wars, above all in Syria, and which depends on international banks to fund Turkey’s current account deficit.

At the same time as Erdogan made these remarks, other Turkish officials cynically sought to dampen down conflicts with the protesters, in line with demands in the Western press.

Istanbul Governor Huseyin Avni Mutlu, under whose orders the police brutally attacked protesters last week, issued absurd messages on Twitter to protesters in Taksim Square and nearby Gezi Park: “Young people, I hear you spent a peaceful morning in Gezi Park with bird songs, the buzzing of bees, and the smell of linden trees. I would like to be with you.... Even if we cannot agree with one another, it is obligatory for us to share our problems by looking into our eyes humanely and with justice; every individual is worthy and special.”

Turkish officials also criticized the *New York Times*’ decision to run a full-page ad from the Gezi Democracy Movement criticizing Erdogan in its Friday edition. In a letter responding to questions about the ad from the Turkish daily *Hurriyet*, the *Times* wrote: “We publish this type of advertising because we believe in the First Amendment, which affords us the right to publish news and editorials, but just as important, guarantees the public’s right to be heard.”

The *Times*’ invocation of constitutional rights and freedoms—as it supports the Obama administration, which is escalating domestic spying and building up the apparatus of a police state—is empty and cynical. There can be no question that the *Times* posted this ad in line with the calculations of sections of the US foreign policy establishment, who hope to use pro-imperialist elements within the protest movement for their own purposes.

As Turkey’s EU Minister Egemen Bagis, a former lobbyist in the United States, sarcastically noted: “When I read the *New York Times*’ answer with a mention of the First Amendment, I had tears in my eyes, I was really touched.”

Bagis noted that when the *Times* was approached with plans to carry an ad denying the Armenian genocide in Turkey, it declined to do so.



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