May Day marches, clashes around the world

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International Workers' Day was marked by widespread protests against austerity and attacks on workers' rights, with major clashes with police in Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, and in cities across Asia and Europe.

The biggest confrontation between workers and state forces came in Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey, after the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan banned marchers from entering the city's central Taksim Square, the site of violent repression of anti-government protests last summer.

The authorities mobilized nearly 40,000 police, shut parts of the public transportation system, and set up steel barricades to divert marchers away from the square. Despite police firing tear gas and water cannon, thousands of demonstrators defied the government ban.

Nearly 100 people were injured and at least 200 arrested, according to press reports from the city. There was fighting in the Okmeydani district, a working class area, where marchers chanted the name of Berkin Elvan, who died March 11 after 269 days in a coma. The 14-year-old was hit by a police tear-gas canister fired during anti-government protests last year.

The government permitted 200 trade unionists to enter Taksim square to lay a wreath commemorating the deaths of 36 workers in 1977, when right-wing gunmen attacked a huge May Day gathering there. Workers' protests were banned in the square from 1977 to 2010, and Erdogan reimposed the ban last year amid mounting unrest in the country.

There were widespread protests across east, southeast and south Asia, where industrial development over the past 30 years has created the largest working class in the world. Thousands marched in Seoul, Taipei, Hong Kong, Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Singapore and Phnom Penh.

In Manila, the Philippine capital, workers burned an effigy of President Benigno Aquino outside the presidential palace, accusing him of corruption and attacks on democratic rights. They chanted against rising prices and the replacement of regular employees by temporary workers.

In Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, more than a thousand workers defied a government ban on protests and fought with security forces. Several dozen workers were beaten near a downtown park. The country's fast-growing apparel industry has been hit by a wave of strikes.

Some 100,000 workers rallied in Jakarta, capital of Indonesia, demanding an increase of 30 percent in the minimum wage, and concessions on housing, education and public transportation. Union leaders have sought to curb working class unrest, expressed in a wave of strikes and in growing popular hostility to all the right-wing parties contesting the country's parliamentary election.

There were sizeable protests against austerity policies across southern Europe, with large turnouts at Syntagma Square in Athens, in major cities in Italy, including Milan, Turin and Rome, and in Barcelona, Spain.

The largest demonstration in Europe took place in Moscow, where the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin staged a May Day parade in Red Square, the first since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. More than 100,000 took part.

Similar demonstrations were held in Simferopol and Sevastopol, the two main cities in Crimea, and in regional cities across Russia, as far east as Vladivostok.

The crowds were large, including 100,000 in Simferopol, the Crimean capital, and an estimated two million across the country, according to the trade unions.

The turnout showed popular hostility to the anti-Russian campaign by American and European imperialism over Ukraine, as well as giving a glimpse

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of the increasing social tensions within Russia, between the working class and the wealthy oligarchs who are the political base of Putin's rule.

There were demonstrations in the Western Hemisphere as well, with thousands marching for immigrant rights in Los Angeles, and protests in many Latin American countries.

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