

Turkey: Massive police operation against protesters

Stefan Steinberg
2 June 2014

A massive police force of around 25,000 was mobilized Saturday to prevent demonstrators from reaching Istanbul's central Taksim Square. The demonstrators had assembled to commemorate one year since the beginning of the Gezi Park protests, which began as an environmental protest but rapidly developed into a confrontation between broad layers of the population and the Islamist government led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

On Saturday police, supplemented by 50 water cannons with police helicopters flying overhead, cordoned off Istanbul's central Taksim Square and the surrounding Gezi Park. Ferry services were halted across the Bosphorus in the afternoon to prevent passengers from crossing from the Asian to the European side of Istanbul, where Taksim Square is located. The metro station at Taksim Square was also closed.

Despite the cordon a few hundred demonstrators assembled on the Istiklal Caddesi shopping street which leads to Taksim Square. They chanted "Resign, murderer AKP," referring to the ruling Freedom and Justice Party (AKP). Police fired teargas at the crowd, forcing demonstrators to retreat. Riot police and plain clothes police provocateurs then intervened to viciously break up the peaceful demonstration.

Videos and photos show the security forces deploying water cannons and tear gas against the demonstrators. Protesters, including young women, are seen being dragged away by heavily armed riot police, their arms twisted behind their backs, pain visible in their faces. An estimated 120 protesters were arrested on Saturday, with journalists also intimidated by the security forces. Over a dozen were injured in clashes with police.

The latest demonstration of state violence comes just a week after two protesters died at the hands of police

following widespread demonstrations and protests in the wake of the May 13 Soma mine disaster. (See: Ten days since the Turkey mining massacre: Government and unions try to evade responsibility)

One 20-year-old protester told the press, "We want to remember the dead of Gezi and Soma, but we are not allowed into Taksim. What is this for a state?" A 29-year-old teacher criticized the government: "Erdogan has split the country ... Anyone who demands his human rights is to be arrested."

Police also used water cannons and tear gas to disperse protests in the capital city of Ankara and in the southern city of Adana. Smaller protests also took place on Sunday, with police once again intervening violently. A total of over two hundred people were arrested in the course of the two days.

Following the initial Gezi Park protests last summer, Erdogan declared that the police would clamp down violently on future demonstrations. In the ensuing year, at least twelve protesters have died at the hands of the state and thousands have been prosecuted for participation in protests. Meanwhile, not a single member of the security forces responsible for the death and injury of protesters has been prosecuted.

On Friday, Erdogan once again warned that protesters would confront the full force of the state if they attempted to assemble. In a speech in Istanbul, Erdogan declared, "If you go there, our security forces are under strict orders, they will do whatever is necessary from A to Z. You won't be able to go to Gezi like the last time. You have to obey the laws. If you don't, the state will do whatever is necessary."

The contempt for, and fear of the working population of Turkey on the part of the government was exemplified by Erdogan's contemptuous dismissal following the deaths of 400 miners in mid-May.

Erdogan described the Soma mining catastrophe, which was a direct result of the drive for profit encouraged by his government, as a “usual occurrence.”

One of his advisors, surrounded by body guards, was photographed a few days after the mining disaster kicking and lashing out at an anti-Erdogan protester who lay defenseless on the ground.

The isolated character of the Erdogan regime was also underlined by its recent decision to censor and close down internet social networks such as Twitter.

In his Istanbul speech last Friday, Erdogan claimed that the victory of his AKP party in municipal elections on March 30 meant he now had a free hand to proceed against his political opponents.

In fact, the victory of Erdogan in the recent elections is entirely due to the political bankruptcy of the Turkish trade unions and political combinations such as the Taksim Solidarity Platform.

The Turkish unions—the Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) and the Confederation of Public Workers Unions (KESK)—have continuously blocked any struggle to mobilize the deep opposition to the Erdogan regime and to social inequality that exists in the working class. Following the Soma mining disaster, thousands of miners took to the streets accusing the bureaucrats of the Mine Workers’ Union of Turkey of being “lackeys of the mine boss.”

For their part, the Taksim Solidarity Platform (a coalition of various bourgeois “left,” environmental, and pseudo-left groups) has repeatedly sought to negotiate with Erdogan on the basis of the most limited demands.

Now, as opposition and hatred of the Erdogan government is erupting in sections of the working class, those involved in the Taksim Solidarity Platform are seeking to subordinate the growing social opposition into support for one or another of the bourgeois factions opposed to the regime.

Against this background, the increasingly beleaguered Erdogan regime has received important support from abroad. In his speech at the US Military Academy in West Point last Wednesday, US president Barack Obama announced that Turkey would be a key partner in his proposed “Counter-Terrorism Partnerships Fund.” One of the main aims of the fund is to provide finances and training for the Syrian opposition groups active inside Turkey which are intent

on implementing the US plans for regime change in Syria.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact