

Defend Bo?aziçi University students against police state repression!

Sosyalist E?itlik
1 February 2021

Sosyalist E?itlik (Socialist Equality Group) strongly condemns the police attacks and detention of more than 150 students yesterday at the Bo?aziçi University in İstanbul and in İzmir.

Police attacks on students around Bo?aziçi University and in İzmir began yesterday at noon. They continued as hundreds of police armed with rifles entered Bo?aziçi University, responding to a call by its rector, Melih Bulu. They detained students who continued peaceful sit-ins on the pretext that they were violating a 9 p.m. pandemic “curfew.” Snipers were placed atop buildings across the university, and helicopters flew overhead.

According to an Istanbul Governorship statement, a total of 159 students were detained, while reportedly a group of around 20 other students who tried to deliver a press statement in İzmir were also attacked and detained.

Police state repression of student protests started on the new year, after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan appointed Melih Bulu, a candidate for nomination by Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the 2015 general elections, as rector of Bo?aziçi University. It aims to intimidate and suppress growing social opposition within the working class and among youth. The ruling class fears that its murderous response to the pandemic and vast levels of social inequality will trigger a social explosion in the working class.

Students called a protest in front of the Bo?aziçi University for yesterday, after two students were arrested and two others placed under house arrest on Saturday. This unlawful attack on students was carried out on the grounds that LGBTI+ flags were used in a picture of the Kaaba in Mecca during an exhibition at the university that involves around 300 works of

students on Friday.

After a social media campaign launched by the Bo?aziçi University Islamic Studies Club, Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu and Rector Melih Bulu made statements directly targeting students. Subsequently, five students were detained and two were arrested on charges of “degrading or inciting the public to enmity and hatred.”

In the news about the police raids on various clubs at the university, the media tried to undermine the sympathy felt by large sections of the public for the protesting students by denouncing them as supporters of a “terrorist organization.”

The arrest of the students sparked an outcry on social media, and a protest was called in front of the university for Monday. However, this constitutional and peaceful act was banned, based on the one-month prohibition of demonstrations and protests announced by the Istanbul Governorship on January 5. This was aimed against the initial student protests, on the pretext of “pandemic measures.” Dozens of police violently attacked and detained students who walked quietly towards Bo?aziçi University yesterday afternoon.

In mass defiance of the police state repression, the hashtag “We will not look down” rose to the top on Twitter after the police shouted “No mass walking” and “look down” during the detention of the students. In the evening, more than 500,000 tweets were posted protesting the police attack on Bo?aziçi University students.

The governorship’s statements that “the pandemic is not over yet” and the protest “will endanger public health” is hypocritical. While Bo?aziçi University students were attacked by the police around the campus, the Islamists of the Anatolian Youth Association (AGD) were making a mass press

statement in Beyazıt Square, Istanbul, to slander the student protests on the pretext of “insulting the Kaaba.”

The hypocrisy does not end there. Shortly before the students were beaten and detained on the pretext of the pandemic, President Erdoğan himself attended, via video conference, the mass provincial congresses of his Justice and Development Party (AKP) in four provinces, saying: “I would like to thank you very much for bringing them together in closed halls right now in Adana, Antalya, Bursa and Muğla despite this pandemic. Thank you for filling the halls.”

However, it was the bourgeois opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) that opened the way for the attack that the government unleashed against the students. On Saturday, CHP spokesperson Faik Öztrak declared: “We cannot accept any attack or humiliation against the holy values of humanity. We strongly condemn this vile provocation. We expect visible and invisible responsibilities to be revealed as soon as possible.”

The position of the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), which has stated its “support” to the student protests, is equally hypocritical. While calling for the government to meet the students’ demands, the HDP officials visited the Islamist Felicity Party, which is closely related to the AGD, declaring that the meeting would make a “great contribution to democratic alliance in Turkey.”

The forces the HDP is set to visit before announcing its “democracy program” on February 8 include the CHP, the Future Party and the DEVA Party, an AKP split-off. It was announced yesterday that Oğuzhan AYGÖREN, a founding member of the DEVA Party led by former Economy Minister Ali Babacan, has been appointed as the advisor of Melih Bulu.

This exposes the political bankruptcy of the bourgeois opposition parties, behind which the pseudo-left forces have lined up. These forces, who, like the Erdogan government, defend the interests of the ruling elite, are completely incapable of defending democratic rights.

As emphasized in the international online meeting titled “The way forward for Boğaziçi University protests” organized by the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey on January 17, for youth the turn now is to the working class, the only social force that can defend democratic rights, on the basis of an international

socialist program. The defense of democratic rights is only possible within the framework of a program that aims to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society.

The Erdogan government’s violent crackdown on student protests took place as the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 2.5 million and official deaths exceeded 26,000, as a result of the “herd immunity” policy that prioritizes the profits of the ruling class.

This human cost is accompanied by a collapse in the social conditions and living standards of millions of workers. As part of an international resurgence of the class struggle against the deadly response to the pandemic, strikes and protests by workers against social attacks such as layoffs and forced “unpaid leave” are rising in various sectors. These are closely monitored by the Erdoğan government.

The fact that the ruling class sees a mass movement of the working class approaching and is trying to suppress it with preemptive repression is reflected in the statement made by Devlet Bahçeli, Erdoğan’s ally and the leader of the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). He declared: “It is not a matter of students or the rector. The main point is to socialize and politicize a possible upheaval that would involve universities.”

The Socialist Equality Group calls on workers to join the fight against the pandemic and social attacks with the struggle to defend democratic rights. Actions of solidarity should be organized for the immediate release of arrested and detained students. The police state repression of students is a rehearsal for coming attacks on the working class.

The struggle against the drive to dictatorship and authoritarianism can only be successful on the basis of the revolutionary socialist program defended and developed by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) based on the international working class. The way forward is to build the Socialist Equality Party as the Turkish section of the ICFI.



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