

Istanbul police declare de facto state of emergency against May Day celebrations

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On the orders of the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an, the Istanbul Governor's Office declared a de facto state of emergency Tuesday morning, closing Taksim Square to May Day celebrations.

According to the statement, metro, metrobus, tram and bus services will be restricted from the early hours of May 1. Public transport will be largely suspended in the Beyo?lu district, where Taksim Square is located, as well as in districts such as Be?ikta?, Fatih and ?i?li; main roads will be closed to traffic and crossings of the Bosphorus between the Anatolian and European sides will be blocked.

In addition to traffic measures that will paralyse the centre of Istanbul, the Governorate showed that it was preparing for a street war by asking the municipalities to collect rubbish bins and stones from the streets. It asked the Road Maintenance Directorate to have a certain number of construction machines and trucks ready at designated points.

These measures are a show of force by the Erdo?an-led state apparatus against protesters on the international day of struggle of the working class. They have the same purpose as the police-state repression of anti-genocide and anti-war demonstrators by the ruling elite in the United States, Europe and around the world—to intimidate the opposition and the working class.

Taksim Square has a symbolic meaning for the Turkish working class. On May 1, 1977, 34 people were killed and 136 wounded by gunfire during celebrations in Taksim Square. The fact that no one was held accountable for the massacre reinforced the perception that it was a state reaction to the growing class struggle.

After years of struggle, the Erdo?an government was

forced to reinstate May Day as a public holiday in 2009 and to allow May Day to be celebrated in Taksim Square in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The rallies held in these years with the participation of hundreds of thousands demonstrated the falsity of the government's claim that “the area was not suitable for celebrations” since 2013.

In late May 2013, Taksim Square was occupied by demonstrators for nearly two weeks during the Gezi Park protests, which erupted against the government's authoritarian policies and social inequality and involved millions of people across the country.

The government, which survived with the help of bourgeois opposition parties and trade union confederations, declared the Gezi Park protests a “coup attempt” and repeatedly prosecuted and imprisoned the main organisers.

The government sees the reopening of Taksim Square for demonstrations as a vendetta and a challenge, just like the Gezi Park case, and the demonstrations are illegally banned.

The Constitutional Court (AYM) recently ruled that the closure of Taksim Square to workers on May Day in 2014 and 2015 violated the constitutional right to freedom of assembly.

Following this decision of the country's highest court, some trade unions and professional organisations pointed to Taksim Square as the place for the May Day rally in Istanbul at the beginning of April. They were followed by several pseudo-left parties.

The governor of Istanbul, Davut G?l, said that no mass celebrations would be allowed in Taksim Square on April 23. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya also issued a statement on April 29, claiming that “Taksim Square and its surroundings are not suitable for meetings and demonstrations”.

Yerlikaya claimed that “this area, where the flow of vehicles and pedestrians is very intense, makes it difficult to take security measures and poses serious risks to the protection of personal rights and freedoms”. The baselessness and hypocrisy of the minister’s claims is shown by the measures taken by the Istanbul Governorate to paralyse the whole of Istanbul.

Yerlikaya also tried to brand the demonstrators “terrorists” and to legitimise possible police violence by saying, “We will never allow terrorist organisations that make calls on social media to turn the celebrations of the Labour and Solidarity Day on 1 May into a field of action and propaganda.”

This is a global phenomenon that is intensifying. The NATO forces led by the US are waging war against Russia in Ukraine, genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza, and making preparations for war against Iran and China. War abroad means war at home against the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class.

In the US, university students and academics are being slandered as antisemites and violently arrested by police for protesting against the Biden administration’s support for genocide. In Europe, governments are engaged in a similar campaign of repression and witch-hunting. In Germany, the vilification of anti-Holocaust protesters as antisemites laid the groundwork for the highest number of arrests of Jewish citizens for political activism since the fall of the Nazi regime.

In Turkey, despite Erdoğan’s hypocritical statements of condemnation, the government remains complicit in the Gaza genocide by continuing critical steel and oil exports to Israel and allowing support for Israel from NATO bases in the country. Protests against this meet with violent police attacks. Last week in Istanbul, police attacked demonstrators protesting against German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier for his complicity in the genocide.

In Turkey, as everywhere, this policy is “bipartisan”. The call of the bourgeois opposition led by the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the trade-union bureaucracies and the pseudo-left groups behind them to celebrate in Taksim Square has nothing to do with mobilising the working class against imperialist war, genocide and their source, capitalism. The aim is the opposite.

In the March 31 local elections, the CHP and its

unionist and pseudo-leftist allies, who came first as the unjust beneficiaries of the popular opposition, tried to keep the growing class tensions within the borders of the capitalist order.

The Socialist Equality Group strongly opposes this arbitrary government attack on the democratic right to assemble and demonstrate and fights for the political independence of workers and youth from the pro-imperialist bourgeois opposition, the trade union bureaucracy, and the pseudo-left. We call on our readers to join the International Committee of the Fourth International’s online rally on May 4, which represents the struggle for socialism against imperialist war and capitalism.



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