

# Turkish coal miners march to Ankara for their unpaid wages

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Hundreds of coal miners at Doruk Mining set out on a march to the capital, Ankara, on Monday, March 13, to demand unpaid wages and severance pay.

The workers, members of the Bağcımsız Maden-İş (Independent Miners' Union), gathered in front of the mining facility in Eskişehir on Sunday, spent the night there, and set off early in the morning. They will walk approximately 140 kilometers (87 miles).

Doruk Mining, a subsidiary of Yıldızlar SSS Holding—which operates the Yunus Emre Thermal Power Plant in the Mihalgöçük district of Eskişehir—once employed over 1,200 workers.

Following the military coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the facility was seized based on allegations of ties to the coup, and a trustee was appointed. The mine and power plant, which had been managed under the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) for many years, was transferred to Yıldızlar SSS Holding in December 2022.

Hundreds of workers were laid off and forced to take unpaid leave, with the workforce reduced to approximately 300. Accrued wages and severance pay were withheld.

Bağcımsız Maden-İş announced the following demands prior to the march:

- Immediate payment of wages owed for months
- Full compensation for workers unfairly dismissed
- An end to the imposition of unpaid leave and prevention of workers being suspended from work without their consent
  - Ensuring working conditions that comply with Occupational Health and Safety standards
  - Reinstating workers fired for union membership
  - Nationalization of the mine and guaranteed job security

The march began amid President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his government's escalating efforts to suppress the working class through the courts, and its US imperialist ally's war of aggression against Iran. While over 90 percent of the Turkish public believes the war against Iran is unjust, Ankara signed the Riyadh declaration condemning Iran's right to self-defense.

In this atmosphere, Baran Aksu, an organizing specialist

with the Bağcımsız Maden-İş union, was imprisoned on Thursday, April 9, shortly before the miners' march in Ankara. He was released on Monday.

Aksu had been summoned over his support statement for Esra Işık, who was arrested for protesting the conversion of forest and agricultural lands in Akbelen, Muğla, into a mining site. Aksu voluntarily went to give his statement. The court interpreted mention of his intention to participate in the miners' protest as "evidence" of a "risk of flight" and issued an arrest warrant.

Aksu had also been detained during the Polyak mining strike in İzmir. His treatment shows that the rights of the working class to freedom of expression and to organize are being criminalized.

On Saturday, Doğan Akan, a staff member of the Legal Unit of the Bağcımsız Maden-İş, who was protesting Aksu's arrest, was also arrested. In both arrests, constitutional freedoms were disregarded, and the law was applied arbitrarily. There was neither an action that could serve as grounds for arrest nor any suspicion of flight.

In a statement issued following Aksu's arrest, the Istanbul Bar Association emphasized that the action was contrary to the case law of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights.

The mistreatment of Baran Aksu continued in prison. Aksu's lawyers reported that during his first 48 hours of detention, their client had no access to clean drinking water, was deprived of basic necessities, and faced severe hygiene issues.

Aksu and Akan began a hunger strike on Sunday to show solidarity with the miners and to protest prison conditions.

In a letter published by Umut-Sen (Hope Union), where he serves as the organizing coordinator, Aksu wrote:

Unfortunately, in our country today, speaking the truth to the public is being framed as inciting hatred and hostility or spreading misinformation. As a result, every kind of struggle for rights is being

criminalized under these labels. These struggles are being suppressed, silenced, and intimidated in the interest of corporate profits and the regime's so-called higher interests. ...

Those responsible for our arrest are those we upset during the Migros resistance, those whose hypocrisy we exposed during the Akbelen and Alagöz resistances, those we frightened through the Polyak resistance, and ... [the distress] our struggles have caused across all ruling classes—from holding companies to yellow unions and the regime.

Aksu noted that his arrest was also motivated by the aim of breaking up the Doruk miners' march and intimidating the workers.

As rising living costs and inequality have pushed social anger to breaking point, the government is responding by escalating its attacks on democratic rights. The strikes by Polyak miners and Migros warehouse workers demonstrated the potential spread of a militant workers' movement that the union bureaucracy could not control.

An indictment was recently prepared against Mehmet Türkmen, general secretary of the B?RTEK-SEN (United Textile, Weaving and Leather Workers' Union), who was arrested in mid-March in a similar crackdown. The prosecution is seeking a prison sentence of 1 to 3 years for Türkmen, as well as a ban on holding union leadership positions and a political ban.

Türkmen's "crime" was exposing the dominance of the capitalist oligarchy and the political nature of the judiciary in a speech delivered to workers in Gaziantep. Both Türkmen and Aksu were arrested on the grounds of "inciting the public to hatred and hostility" due to such statements.

It is the class struggle itself that is on trial in the person of independent union leaders opposed to the pro-government and pro-corporate union apparatus.

In Türkiye, the working class's right to strike and organize has been under severe pressure since the early 1920s. With the "Law on Associations" enacted in 1938, class-based organization was completely banned. While the working class's right to strike was won through the wildcat Kavel strike in 1963, major struggles would also be waged for independent trade union organization.

As Ankara prepares for war amid escalating imperialist aggression led by the US and NATO in the Middle East and the Black Sea region, it is taking measures against potential opposition from the working class and attempting to suppress the class struggle through judicial rulings. However, the class struggle cannot be eliminated by decrees and bans; for this reason, the government is increasingly

resorting to authoritarian methods and even violating the already severely restricted constitution.

As May Day, the international day of working-class unity, struggle, and solidarity, approaches, the workers must respond to war, the trampling of democratic rights, and attacks on wages and social rights by building independent rank-and-file committees in every workplace, mine, and neighborhood. These committees should aim to actively support the Doruk miners and other workers' and peasants' struggles, and to forge ties with their class brothers and sisters on an international scale.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) calls on all workers to fight for the following demands in defense of democratic rights, which are an integral part of the struggle for workers' power:

- All prisoners of the class struggle and political prisoners—including Ba?aran Aksu, Do?ukan Akan, Mehmet Türkmen, and Esra I?k—must be released.
- Enterprises that usurp wages, violate safe working conditions, and lay off workers must be nationalized under workers' control.
- Resources must be redirected from war and big corporations to spending on urgent social needs.
- The US and Israeli war against Iran, the invasion of Lebanon, and the genocide in Gaza must be halted immediately and unconditionally.
- All US armed forces in the Middle East must be withdrawn, and the military bases—including those in Türkiye—that form the infrastructure of imperialist domination must be closed.
- The NATO summit scheduled for July in Ankara must be cancelled; Türkiye must withdraw from NATO; NATO must be dissolved; and all resources devoted to militarism and war must be redirected to meet the needs of society.
- All sanctions and economic warfare against Iran and all other countries must be ended.
- All war criminals must be held accountable.



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