Turkish miners’ struggle continues under a police siege

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The struggle by Doruk Mining workers to demand their unpaid wages and other benefits—centred on a march which began in Eski?ehir and has now reached the capital, Ankara—continues with a hunger strike under police siege.

The miners’ arrival in Ankara brought the class struggle to the forefront of the national agenda. While the people of Ankara showed their support for the miners, statements of solidarity with the workers were issued in factories and public squares across the country. Dozens of actors, musicians, poets, academics, writers, and journalists—including Hüsnü Arkan, ?lyas Salman, Vedat Y?ld?r?m, Orhan Alkaya, Menderes Samanc?lar, Ataol Behramo?lu, Müjdat Gezen, Suavi, Tülin Özel, and Füsun Demirel—released solidarity videos.

The class struggle in Ankara is unfolding in the midst of an imperialist war of aggression against Iran, waged by the Trump administration—an ally of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government—in collaboration with Israel. Despite the government’s calls for a “ceasefire” and “peace,” it is effectively siding with the US and condemning Iran’s right to self-defense, while over 90 percent of the population opposes the US-Israel war against Iran.

Under these conditions, the workers’ entry onto the political stage and their potential to block the implementation of the capitalist oligarchy’s agenda are deemed unacceptable by the government. Numerous independent workers’ leaders have been arrested in recent months. The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) has called for the demand for the release of prisoners of the class struggle to be one of the main demands of the upcoming May Day.

That the struggle of just a hundred miners for their unpaid wages and other social rights has resonated so widely highlights the decisive nature of the class struggle that has been suppressed for decades, not only by state repression but also by the union apparatus and identity politics. The miners demonstrate the social power that must be mobilized for the social and democratic rights of the overwhelming majority of the people and against imperialist war.

On Friday morning, the miners attempted to march from Kurtulu? Park to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources; however, they again encountered a police blockade. Surrounded on all sides by police, the miners were met with a pepper spray attack when they attempted to cross the police barricade to exercise their constitutional right to peaceful assembly. During the initial intervention, six miners fell ill, and three were taken to hospital. The workers, under blockade, are continuing their protest by removing their shirts and banging their hard hats on the ground.

Ba?aran Aksu, the organizing specialist for the Ba??ms?z Maden-?? (Independent Miners Union), which is leading the workers’ struggle, said in his speech, “They’re afraid of the miners, and they’re right to be! When the miners march, the feet of the holding companies and the centers of power tremble. That’s the reason for this blockade. They know the misery, poverty, and hunger they’ve created. They’re engineering this so the people don’t revolt, but remain subservient.”

Ba??ms?z Maden-?? announced that they had been surrounded by approximately 1,000 police officers, called on the people of Ankara for support, and issued calls for protests nationwide, stating, “We call on all factories, offices, and campuses to be the voice of Doruk Mining workers.” At the Elastron Kimya factory in Kocaeli, workers who are members of Petrol-?? Union released a video statement announcing that they would support the Doruk Mining workers from their factories.

Miners’ demands include payment of months of unpaid wages, severance and notice pay for dismissed workers, an end to the imposition of unpaid leave, safe working conditions, reinstatement of workers dismissed for union membership, and the nationalisation of the mine to guarantee job security.

Mining workers who set out from Eski?ehir on April 13 to seek a response to their demands arrived in Ankara on Monday after a nine-day march covering approximately 190 kilometers. The arbitrary arrest of union leader Aksu just before the march began signaled what kind of response President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government was preparing to give.

On Monday, police attacked workers with pepper spray at the entrance to Ankara, detaining 30 people—including Aksu and the union’s General President, Gökay Çak?r—later releasing them. On Tuesday, 110 miners who had begun a hunger strike in an attempt to stage a peaceful protest in front of the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources were detained by police. Faced with growing public outrage over the unlawfully of detentions and the government’s oppression of workers, the miners were released after 14 hours. However, neither were their demands met nor did the threat of severe state repression subside.

On Wednesday, the workers visited political parties in parliament to seek their support. On Thursday, the workers again faced police obstruction when they attempted to hold a protest in front of the headquarters of Y?ld?zlar SSS Holding, the owner of Doruk Mining.

The union president, Gökay Çak?r, pointed out that when it comes to the rights and struggles of the working class, the law is often ignored: “[For the front of the holding company building] They say it’s private property. Yes, they’re sacred. This guy [the holding] has brazenly trampled on workers’ rights; for 15 years he hasn’t paid

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workers' severance or wages; he's ignored notice periods and severance; he holds 6,000 [mining] permits. Seventy percent of the mining sector is in this guy's hands… We've got 10 police officers per worker. What a shame! Is this law passed just for this guy? Are we slaves? Pass a slave law so we can act accordingly! What does it mean to get paid twice a year?"

These remarks exposed the mechanisms through which the government and state apparatus serve as tools for the interests of the capitalist oligarchy.

Later, the workers gathered at Kurtulu? Park with their spouses and children who said, "We've come to claim what's rightfully ours," in celebration of National Sovereignty and Children's Day on April 23. As representatives from numerous political parties and mass organizations visited the miners, the event turned into a rally.

Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Özgür Özel visited the workers, saying, "You are a good example for workers, but the regime considers this a bad example. Because the regime has positioned itself on the side of capital and against the workers." He added: "In the future, when this government changes and a true people's government [CHP] comes to power… the Turkish working class will organize, and everyone will fight tooth and nail for their rights. No one will exploit the workers' labour."

Özel's "pro-working class" rhetoric is a sham. Just this week, workers in the municipalities of Bayrakl?, Konak, Kar??yaka, and Bayrakl? in ?zmir—all governed by the CHP—staged protests to demand their rights under collective bargaining agreements. The CHP's claim to "put an end to the exploitation of labor"—as a representative of the same capitalist oligarchy as the Erdo?an government—is baseless.

The urgent task of putting an end to capitalist exploitation and private property—the root causes of social problems—requires the working class to take power into its own hands. This is the most important question raised by the struggle of Doruk Mining workers: Who controls society and the economy? The problems faced by Doruk Mining workers are, at their core, part of the broader problems of the working class in Türkiye and around the world. A fundamental solution requires the economy to be restructured on a socialist basis in the interests of society, rather than in the hands of a handful of capitalist oligarchs.

The numerous parties that visited the miners on Thursday are representatives of the same capitalist order and ruling class that the Erdo?an government is striving to protect by suppressing workers' struggles through force. Some of them, such as the CHP and the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democracy and Equality Party (DEM Party), are attempting to control the social opposition developing within the working class through illusions of social reform and democratization.

DEM Party Co-Chair Tülay Hatimo?ullar? visited the miners and stated, "We stand with the resistance of the Doruk Maden workers." While the DEM Party criticizes the government's repression of social opposition and the working class, it simultaneously promotes the illusion that the government could expand democratic rights within the framework of the negotiations being conducted between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

On Thursday, a representative of the Islamist New Welfare Party visited the workers. The day before, ?enol Sunat, a far-right deputy from the Good Party, expressed his support for the miners in a speech in parliament. In addition, many union representatives visited the miners and expressed their support.

None of these establishment parties—including the CHP and the DEM Party—or the union bureaucrats have done anything to mobilize the masses in defense of the miners. The truth is, they are just as reluctant as Erdo?an to see a mass working-class movement erupt across the country.

The government and the company are now trying to pacify the miners by deploying not only police pressure, but also the corrupt trade union apparatus. While the workers' march to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources was blocked by police force, the ministry's doors were opened to the Türkiye Maden-?? Sendikas? (Turkish Miners' Union), affiliated with the Türk-?? confederation—an organization that has been absent for years and complicit in the company's attacks on workers. On Wednesday, Minister Alparslan Bayraktar met with Nurettin Akçul, the General President of the Türkiye Maden-?? Sendikas?.

Minister Bayraktar cynically said, "Although we, as the state, provide significant incentives to support our sector, the prerequisite for the sector to benefit from this support is the protection of workers' rights and the payment of debts owed to employees. We will ensure that our fellow workers' wages are paid and that an employment environment is created where they can receive their rights on time."

Aksu, an organizing specialist with the Ba??ms?z Maden-??, reacted by stating, "Only the holding companies are being protected in this country. We cannot reach a solution without putting an end to this. Even if wages are paid, workers will continue to be exploited. The ministry is summoning the yellow union—which is responsible for this injustice—for talks."

Y?ld?zlar SSS Holding's Human Resources department also stated in a post on X on Thursday that the unpaid leave and the difficulties faced by workers stemmed from market conditions, and admitted that it had "been in constant communication with the Türkiye Maden-?? union, which holds the necessary authority under the law," during these attacks.

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. Now, in the run-up to May Day, the international day of unity, struggle, and solidarity of the working class, the Doruk miners are following the map of the same class struggle. This is, at its core, an international struggle, and it requires workers to develop a counteroffensive against the capitalist system with an international strategy and organization.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), one of the sponsors of this year's 13th International Online May Day Rally, is fighting to put an end to the way union bureaucracies everywhere divide the working class along national lines for the interest of corporations and their power, and to unite the growing workers' struggles across borders. We call on all workers to establish rank-and-file committees linked to the IWA-RFC in their workplaces, to show organized solidarity with the workers of Doruk Mining and other workers' struggles, and to participate in the International May Day Rally.

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