Lessons of the Turkish miners’ struggle in Ankara

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Following a meeting held on April 28 between the Turkish ministers and the rank-and-file union Ba??ms?z Maden-?? (Independent Miners Union), it was announced that all demands of Doruk Mining workers had been accepted. It was reported that a portion of the workers’ unpaid wages had been paid, and that the remainder would be paid by mid-May.

In a statement, Gökay Çak?r, chairman of the Ba??ms?z Maden-??, said, “This covers not only salaries but also severance pay and all other employee benefits. Payments to all workers who wish to leave their jobs and are entitled to severance pay will be made within 15 days. The company has given its word on this.”

The miners’ struggle provides important lessons for the developing struggles of the working class internationally. On April 13, more than 100 miners, led by the Ba??ms?z Maden-??, began a march from Eski?ehir to Ankara to demand wages and benefits that had been denied them for years. They covered the approximately 190-kilometer route on foot in nine days, reaching the capital where they continued their struggle.

The miners’ decision to take their fight to the capital meant that the class struggle had made its way onto the national agenda. In addition to the support of the population in Ankara, workers, intellectuals, and artists across the country publicly expressed their solidarity with the miners. The bourgeois press and political establishment were also forced to put the miners’ struggle on their agenda—with the aim of preventing it from sparking a broader movement within the working class.

Amid the impact of the US-Israeli war against Iran and the economic devastation caused by the ongoing high cost of living, the fact that a spark in the class struggle mobilized massive popular support revealed the real concerns of the ruling class. For this reason, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government launched a relentless assault on the democratic rights of workers and their leaders in an effort to suppress this struggle, which had developed outside the control of the trade union confederations that had adopted a hostile stance toward miners from the very beginning.

Ba?aran Aksu, an organizing specialist of the Ba??ms?z Maden-??, was imprisoned shortly before the march began in Eski?ehir. When the workers reached Ankara, they faced violent police oppression and a blockade. Their constitutional rights to protest and march were violated. The police attacked them with pepper spray and detained them en masse, along with Aksu and Çak?r. The workers responded to the repression by biginning a hunger strike and calling on the entire working class to support the struggle. In response to the call, statements of support came from factories, while the Ankara Medical Association took action to address the miners’ health conditions.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) called on the working class in Türkiye and internationally to defend the miners and labor leaders. Articles published on the WSWS were released in numerous languages and speeches delivered at the International May Day Online Rally specifically highlighted the struggle of the Doruk Mining workers and condemned the state repression.

The miners’ courage and determination in the face of state repression demonstrate how objective conditions drive the working class into the struggle. In a speech after the agreement, Ba?aran Aksu said, “Workers who had been suppressed for 16 years through political mechanisms, administrative mechanisms, and yellow unions reached out to us as a last resort.” In the past period, The Türkiye Maden-?? (Turkish Miners’ Union), affiliated with the Türk-?? confederation, acted as an accomplice to the corporation in the process of depriving miners of their rights.

Aksu explained that anti-communist propaganda had failed, stating: “They spread propaganda and hurled threats—calling us traitors, dangerous, aggressive, terrorists, or whatever else came to mind—just to keep workers away from us.”

The capitalist system’s insoluble contradictions, which fuel imperialist war and the rise of authoritarianism, are also intensifying the class struggle everywhere. Workers are being forced to pay the price of the war and militarism, while social spending is cut and social wealth is transferred to banks and corporations. As mass layoffs, rising living costs, and declining wages drive workers into poverty, the wealth of a handful of capitalist oligarchs soars to unprecedented levels. Precarious and dangerous working conditions are becoming widespread, workplace deaths are on the rise, and democratic rights are being eliminated to suppress workers’ growing resistance to

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these unbearable conditions.

The struggle of Doruk Mining workers, which followed wildcat strikes by Polyak miners and Migros warehouse workers that ended with gains this year, is part of an emerging workers' movement sparked by these objective conditions and will serve as a source of inspiration for future struggles.

Indeed, on April 29, immediately after the miners' struggle ended with gains, approximately 2,000 workers at Do?ta? Furniture in Biga, Çanakkale, and Kelebek Furniture in Düzce walked out to demand the promotional benefits they were entitled to under their contract. The workers, whose demands had long gone unanswered by the company, had witnessed the resistance of Doruk Mining workers over the previous two weeks and realized that they have to fight to secure their rights.

The necessary lessons must be drawn. First and foremost, a workers' movement can only develop in Türkiye and on an international scale if it is independent of—and in opposition to—the trade union apparatus, which functions as an extension of management and the state.

The appalling conditions facing workers have been created by the collaboration between trade unions and corporations and the state over decades. In a statement on X, the Human Resources department of Y?ld?zlar SSS Holding—the owner of Doruk Mining, which has close ties to government officials—admitted that they had carried out attacks against miners "in constant communication with the Türkiye Maden-?? union, which holds the necessary authority under the law."

It has become clearer than ever that D?SK confederation, controlled by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "opposition" parties, is essentially no different from other confederations. Like their European trade union allies, they serve the function of suppressing the class struggle from the "left."

The fact that the D?SK leadership, which played ostrich in the face of these struggles and the arrests of workers' leaders, has lost its credibility in the eyes of the masses is an expression of the radicalization of the class struggle. The fact that 11 unions within D?SK have issued joint statements in support of the miners indicates that the development of the independent labor movement threatens the dismantling of these bureaucratic apparatuses.

Another lesson workers must draw is that to advance their struggle they must appeal not to the governments or the political establishment but to other sections of the working class to mobilize their collective power. It must not be forgotten that the state apparatus, which accepted their demands and acted as a "guarantor," has sought to violently suppress the miners. This demonstrates that such promises cannot be trusted.

If the miners' struggle had remained isolated in Eski?ehir, defeat would have been inevitable. Union leader Çak?r pointed out the importance of class solidarity, stating: "We launched the protest with 150 workers, but we saw that 86 million people were on our side."

The fact that miners have regained rights denied to them for years through struggle is an important achievement. However, making these gains permanent requires reorganizing the economy to prioritize human needs over private profit. Addressing the miners, Ba?aran Aksu himself acknowleged the limitations of trade-unionist perspective, stating, "Even if it is the Independent Mining Workers Union, a union is ultimately a tool that accepts exploitation."

Workers must link their struggle for social and economic rights to a broader fight aimed at ending capitalist exploitation. Mines, conglomerates, banks, and other key sectors of the economy must be nationalized under workers' control. This means fighting for workers' power and international socialism.

The fact that capitalism is a global system and the working class is a global class demonstrates that this struggle can only be waged on an international basis. Workers are facing a global capitalist offensive that can only be fought back with a global strategy and organization. The nationalism promoted by the union bureaucracies serves to divide workers and plays into the hands of the capitalist ruling elite.

In his statement following the arrest of independent textile union B?RTEK-SEN leader Mehmet Türkmen, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks rank-and-file worker running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the United States on a platform for "rank and file power," declared, "Corporations operate globally, and their attacks are coordinated across borders. Our response must be the same."

The global working class—objectively unified by production, supply chains, and communication technologies—constitutes the social force capable of resolving the fundamental problems facing humanity on the basis of a socialist program. The way forward lies in making this immense power politically conscious and organized. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is being built to respond to this urgent need.

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