

Turkey: Banning the strike of metal workers - Class War in the Times of War

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The rhetoric based on national security allow Erdogan Government to advance its authoritarian agenda, including the banning of strikes and protests.

“Now, on the basis of State of Emergency we instantly intervene in any place where there is threat of strike. We say no, we don’t let any strike happen here.”

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

(during the meeting organized by YASED, International Investors Association on 12 July 2017)

“So some will rise again and again to engage in a strike... Pardon me, but there will be no such thing...”

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

(during the speech at the 24th General Assembly Meeting of MÜSİAD on 7 June 2017)

“If you follow this call (call to protest Afrin operation) and make mistake to go on the streets (to protest), you will pay the price very seriously. This is a national struggle. Whatever comes ahead of us in this national struggle, we will crash it and move on, you know that. No concessions, no minimal flexibility.”

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (during his speech on 21 January announcing operation “Olive Branch”)

On 21st of January while Erdoğan was announcing military operation to Afrin, in the city of Bursa which is the heart of the automotive industry in the country (also one of the most important hubs for entire European automotive industry), as a coincidence in the same time trade unions in metal industry was announcing their strike decision which will affect the most of the industry in the same city. While during his announcement Erdoğan threatens everyone who will protest the attack towards Afrin by telling that whoever will protest against this operation will pay the price seriously, in the same way a few days after announcement of the strike in metal industry, Ministerial Cabinet published a Decree prohibiting these strikes in metal industry by telling that these strikes are harmful to national security. Because even tough, the main target of the military operation which is cynically named “Olive Branch” mainly aims at Kurdish enclave in Afrin, Erdoğan’s “real enemy is always inside”. That’s why he wants to silence any sort of opposition to war and any sort of demonstration of workers for their working conditions in the same time.

The strike decision in the metal industry is a result of ongoing collective bargaining negotiations with Metal Employers Union. Main issues of the dispute were wage increase and the duration of the agreement while unions ask for a two year agreement, metal employers were pressing for 3 year agreement. After 2015 wildcat strikes against the main union in metal sector and bad working conditions and low wages, in this bargaining term even yellow unions were more cautious. All the unions were forced by workers to take a strike decision after failure of collective bargaining negotiations. Automotive industry is the country’s biggest export item. According to a research of Istanbul Chamber of Commerce in 2016, Turkey’s 4 biggest exporters from all sectors were all

multinational automotive companies; Ford being the first one with 3,958 billion US Dollars, second is FIAT joint venture with 3,247 billion US Dollars, third one is Renault with 2,834 billion US Dollars, Toyota 2,685 billion US Dollars. (these numbers are just the amounts of the exports of these factories). But despite this enormous wealth, automotive workers working in multinationals such as Renault, Mercedes, Ford, FIAT etc, earn as low as 390 Euros per month for a 45 hour work-week. So the demands of the workers for better working conditions, overcame the political environment in the country where every sort of demand is being labelled as treason.

But then the war came to the help of unions who are reluctant to take the strike decision. Just after the launch of military campaign, rhetoric of “national security” emerged again and Türk Metal union made a declaration, telling that “we are standing next to Turkish Armed Forces with our full heart and therefore The Board of Directors of the Turkish Metal Trade Union has decided not to take action in the city squares or on the streets, taking into consideration the circumstances of our country due to the operation carried out beyond the borders by Turkish Armed Forces.”

Erdoğan was talking and preparing about this military attack for a very long time, Turkey tried to get support (or at least consent) of USA and Russia before starting this military operation. Now after a week of the start, it is possible to find many videos and images of destruction created by air strikes of Turkish army or torture of prisoners by Turkish backed Islamist militias. After the start of the war, Government kept their promise and around 400 people were detained because of their social media posts against the war, also entire executive council of Turkish Chamber of Medicine were arrested because of an anti-war declaration titled “War is a public health problem.”

War is quite instrumental for Erdoğan Government to solve their governing crisis, the rhetoric based on national security has succeeded in bringing together all sides of Turkish society and this pretext of national crisis, allow Government to advance their already authoritarian agenda, this even includes the banning of the strike of metal workers.

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P.S.

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