

NEWS BULLETIN

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WORKERS' AND PEASANTS STRUGGLE IN TURKEY WINS PACE

The privatization of state-owned enterprises is going on for more than two decades in Turkey. The working class of Turkey has struggled against these privatization efforts for a long time.

These privatization efforts of state-owned enterprises together with the expropriation process of the working classes as well as a decline in labour rights and in the purchasing power of wages are being carried out according to the interest of imperialism. These attacks on labour rights and impoverishment caused a reaction of the working class which forms about 64% of the entire labour force in Turkey (there are about 16 million wage-salary earners in Turkey).

In 2013, the privatization of Yatagan (Mugla province) and Catalagzi (Zonguldak province) thermal power plants (CATES) came into consideration. The workers of the power plants and of the state-owned coal mines - providing the power plants with the necessary coal - started a series of protests within the context of the struggle against privatization.

The coal mine workers are going to be negatively affected from the privatization of the power plants as well, because these power plants use the coal produced in the nearby mines. After the privatization of the power plants it is expected that the private owners will abandon the use of local coal in order to produce cheaper energy, causing a decline in the demand and therefore in the coal production of the mines. This would result in a decrease of the employed workers there.

Workers' Party leading to struggle

The Workers' Party (Turkey) stood at the side of the workers from the beginning of the privatization debate. The party started a campaign already in August-September 2013 to support the workers.



In October, the struggle of the Yatagan and Catalagzi workers reached a new level. The struggle of the workers combined the labour movement with the Republican movement that has been going on in Turkey for several years and that reached its peak in the June Uprising.

The most chanted slogans in the demonstrations in Yatagan as well as in Catalagzi were “We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal”, “Government Resign” etc. in the June Uprising, it were exactly these slogans dominating the marches. As in the June Uprising, the marching workers are carrying Turkish flags and banners with anti-imperialistic mottos.

The local population of both Zonguldak and Mugla participated and supported the struggle of the thermal power plant workers as well.

Campaign against the privatization of CATES

The Workers' Party (Turkey) started a campaign against the privatization of CATES – the thermal power

plant in Catalagzi- in late August. Mehmet Akkaya, Secretary of Trade Union and Workers' Bureau of the Workers' Party and member of the Central Committee, stated in a press release that CATES was the first thermal plant of modern Turkey. He went on to note “the modern republic built it in Çatalagzi to use the coal of Zonguldak as fuel. In this manner, while they were giving a contribution to the energy accumulation, coal was increasing in value. The modern Turkish Republic state built facilities like this, but the privatization-friendly government now that works on behalf of imperialist powers demolishes, sells, and closes them.”

Akkaya also addressed the negative impacts of the privatization in terms of workers. He said that the selling of CATES would not only cause workers to lose their jobs. Also it would turn workers into minimum waged slaves, losing the power of unions and the potential for collective contracts. Regarding the intended privatization, Akkaya said “this is the destruction of our coal industry”. Akkaya stressed that energy is a strategic sector that must only be in hands of the government, and added that because they knew this, the founders of the republic had established the energy sector as conducted by the state.

On the 28th of September 2013, the Zonguldak Provincial Organization of Workers' Party organized two protest marches against privatization. In the demonstration in the city center, Vice-Chairman of the Workers' Party – Hasan Basri Ozbey – hold a speech. Ozbey emphasized that the Workers' Party will not allow the power plant to be sold and that the plant belongs to people of Zonguldak.

The workers of the Yatagan Thermal Power Plant are protesting as well

Meanwhile, the workers of the Yatagan plant in Mugla province in southern Turkey began a struggle against the privatization of their own plant as well. The white-collar workers participated in the struggle as well.

In the beginning of the struggle, the workers established a resistance tent in front of the thermal power plant. The tent was visited by representatives of several organizations; political parties, democratic mass organizations and trade unions being among them. 14 organizations declared their support for the struggle.

Besides the resistance tent, the workers started a petition campaign against the privatization. Within weeks, they got the support of about hundreds of thousands of citizens (the total population of Mugla is 850 thousand).

After a series of protests, on September 25, workers of the power plant, together with the mining workers and local people took to the Sodra Mountains.* This was a symbolic action to warn the AKP government. In this action, the leaders of the worker movement stated that they had to climb mountains in order to be heard by the government. This is seen as a reaction to the negotiations of the government with the separatist organization PKK.



March to Ankara

On 7th of October, workers of the Yatagan power plant began a march to Ankara. During this march they made demonstrations in various cities on the way to Ankara. Protest actions were carried out in Mugla, Aydin, Izmir, Usak, Afyon, Sivrihisar. The provincial organizations of the Workers' Party stood by with the workers and supported their demos in all of these cities.

On 10th of October, the workers reached Ankara, capital of Turkey. Here the marching workers met several workers and representatives of several trade unions, political parties and democratic mass organizations.

In Ankara, the power plant and mining workers marched towards the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the

national parliament. Here, riot police established a barricade. The workers, along with other protesters began a sit-in act and held a press statement.

On October 11, Yatagan workers realized a visit to the Mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. The workers, denouncing AKP government policies, declared in the presence of Ataturk that they pledged themselves to fight back against those who attempt to destroy the acquisitions of the Republic.



The rising peasant movement in Turkey

The second pillar of the labour movement in Turkey is the peasant movement.

About 40% of the people in Turkey are still living in rural areas. Many of the peasants in Turkey are not land owners. Many of them do not even have a land register for their own houses. They are living and working on land owned by landlords and they earn just enough to make a living.

An important development on this issue has been seen in 2013. In spring of this year a law for the unification of land has been passed. The aim of this regulation was to unificate the asunder lands of peasants to increase the rural productivity. But the implementation of this regulation under AKP government, resulted in the growing of the landlords even stronger. The landlords claimed the small pieces of lands of the peasants as their own and got the land registers for these lands using faked-up evidences.

Recently, the people of two villages rose up against these developments. One of them are the peasants in the Turkmenaci village in Bismil, Diyarbakir. The peasants began a legal struggle against the implementation of the regulation in favor of the landlords. The court stopped the unification of the lands due to the reason that the peasants were victimized in the implementation.

Another struggle within the peasant movement nowadays is the struggle of the peasants in Urfa. The peasants of several villages began a struggle with the motto “we demand our land”. They founded an association named “Association of Landless Peasants”. The landless peasants are planning to conduct a public meeting after the announcement of the foundation of the association as well.

The Workers' Party (Turkey) stood side by side with the peasants in Diyarbakir and in Urfa and gave them legal support as well as support in organizing. The daily newspaper Aydinlik and Ulusal Channel helped in moulding the public opinion in favor of the peasants.

Footnote:

* The phrase “to take to the mountain” (dağa çıkmak) in Turkish is a metaphor for rebelling. It refers to escaping from the administration as well as the practice of guerilla warfare.

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