

North Cyprus- General Strike against Neoliberal attacks

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In the last two months Northern Cyprus has been shaken by the mobilization of the public sector employees. Two general strikes, with an 100% rate of participation each, mostly among teachers and professors, two massive demonstrations and many smaller where the answers against the neoliberal policies of the Turkish Cypriot overnment.

The living standards of public employees has been under attack for the last two years. The CTP (Turkish Republican Party) former government, that considers its self «left-wing» and progressive, tried to pass some measures, but did not manage to do so because every time it tried it faced mass strikes and demonstrations.

So, the new government , headed by Serdar Denktash's National Unity Party (UBP, a nationalist neoliberal party), undertook the task of passing those measures. Other than nationalist policies that were imposed in education (changes in the books, imposing the teaching of the Koran in schools) now it is attacking the wages and benefits of public employees. On October 28th it passed the Act of Salary, Wages and extra allowances, an act proposed by CTP 9 months ago, but it did not manage to do so under the reaction of the trade unions.

Benefits and Wages Act

Under this law the first salaries of an employee is cut by 350 € which results in first-time employees in the public sector living in poor conditions, living with a wage smaller by 1/3 from the original.

The attack moves on to people already employed, by cutting existing benefits for holidays, owners of university degrees, heavy and unhealthy employment, etc

The new legislation also changes the way that promotions are given, excluding the factor of seniority and help to the service, and introduces a new evaluation system, that is full of holes and allows criteria that have to do with personal relationships and similar criteria.

Finally the new law attacks the right of representation by the trade unions. According to the new law, the unions will have no say on the negotiations for collective conventions

Turkish Cypriot workers answer en masse

The t/c trade unions, especially those of the public sector are among the most massive and aggressive. They fought grave battles in the last ear and they won. With the change of government and the CTP controlled unions joined the demonstrations, since CTP is now out of the government

On October 28th , the day when the act was announced in parliament, the unions called for a general strike and a march to the Turkish Embassy and the t/c parliament. In some branches, like the teachers, the participation reached 100%!

A few days later UBP announced that the vote for the act would be on November 23.

The union's response was quick. This time 28 unions called for a strike and a march to the parliament. Again the participation was massive. In the demonstration 5,000 workers demonstrated for 10 hours! In the beginning outside the parliament where they were attacked by the police's riot squad, and the outside the police headquarters where 16 trade unionists and strikers were held until late at night.

Several detachments of riot police were waiting for the demonstrators outside the parliament, and with no provocation attacked them with teargas, pepper spray and arresting people. 16 were arrested and then let go after the act was voted in the night.

«Immigration» act

The unions call the new act the «immigration» act. They say that it is part of a coordinated attack on young t/c's. If it is implemented the public sector will become a theatre of corruption and the living standards of its employees will decrease rapidly. So young t/c's will have to immigrate in order to find better living conditions.

Important lessons for the left

This law was the most important factor that pushed the CTP to go into elections last April, and lose them.

Now the UBP passed the law and shows clearly that mere changes in government don't change anything. In 2010's presidential elections in the north, will the UBP win?

The UBP won this year's elections because the workers punished the CTP for its economic policy. It is the same policy (or a worse one) that UBP tries to implement. This proves that both parties have no real difference between them, and both work for the capitalists.

The duty that exists, is the building of a new left formation. A left that will lead decisively the defensive struggles that are needed, and that will move on to a counter-attack against neoliberal policies, and the building of a socialist society

Left Ideas have a great influence in t/c society and trade unions, but there are some conclusions that need to be deducted, so that the new left will be built. This was evident on the last elections, when 2,4% percent of the electorate voted for BKP-Yasmin, a new left formation, while a 20% abstained from voting, a percentage that shows that people in the North, are searching, maybe for the first time at such an extent, for a new and dependable left alternative.

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