Class structure of Gezi Park protests and so called “fascism” in Turkey

Summary

In Gezi Park protests, people who join the anti-government actions all over Turkey always chant that slogan: “Damn with fascism”, or this: “Shoulder to shoulder against fascism”.

If the slogans should be taken seriously, then we have to ask this question: Is Turkey ruled by a fascist regime? If so, how can we define fascism? And how can we compare the “classical” fascist experiences such as Germany’s and Italy’s with Turkey’s? If fascism is defined by only “using violence”, then it is very easy to say that all the regimes that use violence are fascist.

Fascism first and foremost has to be defined through classes’ relations. It is important to focus on the roles of the three major classes in capitalistic society: working class, capitalist class and middle class (or “petit bourgeoisie”).

The classical fascist regimes such as Germany and Italy show us that fascist regimes are results of some extraordinary conditions such as: The Great Depression of 1929, rising of the militancy of the working class movements, elimination of the condition of the surplus production, dramatic decline of the life standard of middle classes and the “political crisis” of the Left (the impact of the Communist International).

Impoverished middle classes built up the “body” of the fascist regimes mostly in Germany and Italy, but note that fascism is not a middle classes’ regime! It is a regime, first and foremost serve in favor of the capitalist classes by using and mobilizing middle classes against the working class movements in order to atomize and demoralize them so that accumulation of capital continues to exist.

From this point of view, we’ll try to explain “fascism” in Turkey within the context of Gezi Protests. We’re going to answer some important questions such as: what were the roles of the big capitalist classes, middle classes and working class in the protests? And Gezi Protests were a really “nightmare” for the capitalist classes?

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First of all, I send my best greetings to all of you.

Because of having troubles in taking visa, I could not have chance to attend this conference. Thus I ask you to accept my excuses.

**Class structure of The Gezi Park protests**

Today, 1 year and 5 days passed from the uprising which began in Gezi Park and spread throughout Turkey. The first analyses about the uprising became antiquated in some way when time passed. At the moment I think we are in a convenient time for making even-tempered analyses.

The first analyses after the popular uprisings throughout Turkey underscored that this was a “middle class” uprising. This could be understood in some way, because there was a different mass which is not seemed a “working class”. There wasn’t a working class uprising in a “classical” meaning. That is why all analyses tend to explain that this is a “middle class” uprising.

In the beginning, this demonstration, depending on the “right to the city”, primarily having an anti-capitalist goal, but after a very short while it spread throughout the country. According to the Ministry of Interior official reports, more than 2,500,000 people from 80 cities of the country went out to the streets and demonstrated against the government. To be honest, we faced a rebellion which is not seen in Turkish history before!

The main issue of this rebellion of course people’s reaction for Prime Minister Erdogan and his government’s policies. In this way, Gezi protests include an anti-authoritarian character. At the beginning it started as a small reaction against capital hegemony in the public sphere, and by time it gained an anti-authoritarian character.

Besides of not being a “classical” working class event, the uprisings of course included a class character. Because the compositors were mostly students, unemployed people and workers, especially “white collar” workers. Yes, Gezi was not an organized and political working class event; but all protestors were both today’s and future’s workers and unemployed people! There was a mass which includes unprotected people that lack of hopes from their future, and angry with the government’s policies. Not only economical way, anti-authoritarian character gave Gezi a “middle class” color. What I want to say is that Gezi uprising was against a neoliberal and conservative government. It was a rebel against the government’s policies on people such as how many births they will give, what time they will stop buying alcohols, abortion issue, not punishment to the physical force to the women, government’s authoritarian stance of all democratic events and the Prime Minister’s “dyed-in-the-wool” behavior. That is why political commentators turn to “middle class” term to define the
uprising. But when we put aside the reaction of people on the government’s repressive practices, we face “wage workers” which consist of a giant mass in the protests.

Today even the high-paid working class, trying to find a life area in the capitalist exploitation system is unprotected, not having any hope about their future. On the other hand, the “middle class” becomes “workers” day by day, so how can we call all of them as “middle class”?

Gezi was different from Egypt and Tunisia. In these countries proletarians as an organized and political class played a key role. But in Turkey, proletarians joined the uprisings not as an organized and political but on an “individual” basis.

I want to considerate this issue by not “middle class” or “working class” discussion, I want to take it into consideration in another ways, and this is Turkey’s sovereign power’s "civil war".

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There is a real conflict between the “secularist-republican” bourgeoisie and “Islamic-conservative” bourgeoisie (it is now represented by the ruling Justice and Development Party-AKP) for years. It is known that this Islamic conservative bourgeoisie has been growing since AKP had come to power. The main problem is AKP-supporter bourgeoisie or bourgeoisie which supports AKP makes hegemony on the “secularist-republican” bourgeoisie. On one hand, there is the Republican People’s Party (CHP) politics which has consolidated its own supporters with secularist and republican rhetoric. In the ten-year old period, people who embrace laicism, republicanism etc. while the Turkey’s sovereign power’s “civil war” is continued, they felt that they are losing their “privilege”. The people who are called as “nationalist” were being disturbed by the conservative practices of the ruling Justice and Development Party.

I think we may evaluate the uprising issue as a “class movement” in this way. Conducting interviews such as “who were in Gezi events; what were their education” etc. can make our ideas probable error. The issue can be evaluated by Turkey bourgeoisie’s “civil war” between each other.

Now let’s look at the authoritarian actions of AKP... Maybe we can say this; AKP bourgeoisie grew after 1980s and comparing previous times there wasn’t any “obstacle” in front of this developing. What I want to say is that, there was a working class action which has been defeated and crushed by a military coup in 1980. AKP bourgeoisie grew on this crushed and depoliticized working class movement. Of course we can take into account the economic situation of the world, such as globalization. But for me, the “death” working class action was the main driver of AKP bourgeoisie’s growing. And the bourgeoisie built and consolidated itself on this ground. That is why we face a government which did not face any working class actions: AKP. There is a party which doesn’t face any working class events, and doesn’t know what is a strike, what is a trade union, what is a struggle of trade unions, what
is asking for rights etc. They do not know working class and they do not know how to struggle it without using violence and “disproportionate force”. And they welcome these kinds of events with “conspiracy theory” reflex and try to repress via hard ways. They must repress, because if they do not they have risk to lose the bourgeoisie they heavily depend on. They have approves from them while repressing the events; but they also face a paradox: if these repressed events turn to a larger social events, they will lose the ground they are standing on. AKP is trying to balance on this.

Now we have a party that produces politics saying “we can give workers their rights, and they cannot take” and also without being “trained” by class struggles.

In conclusion, AKP and Erdogan’s “dyed-in-the-wool” behavior and neoliberal-conservative policies of the party made people to come to the streets of Turkey on the 31st of May in 2013.

The dead-end of Gezi

It is not a true politics to overthrow Erdogan with “classical” street opposition practices while the largest rebellion of Turkey was not enough in throwing him and his government out of power. If we want to make Erdogan's end like Muammar al-Gaddafi, Hosni Mubarak or Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the one thing to guarantee this for the opposition is that not to stay only in the streets. We have to carry this opposition to the factories, workplaces. The Gezi did not meet with working class and did not paralyze the “high politics” and was not enough for being able to overthrow Erdogan out of power.

The situation in Egypt which overthrew Mubarak or in Tunisia which overthrew Ben Ali, was the proletariat’s key role in the events as an organized class. They weren’t “single proletarians” like in the Gezi, they deepened the crisis via protests and strikes in their workplaces and factories and the two dictators in both countries were overthrown in this way.

In these countries imperialism played a “the lesser of two evils” role: either Ben Ali or Tunisia would be lost; either Mubarak or Egypt would be lost. Turkey’s situation now is not in this level. And it does not force imperialism to settle on this “critical” decision.

The so called “privileged” and “white collar” groups of the Gezi were called as “daytime at work, nighttime at rebel”. The dead-end of the Gezi can be passed with only if this becomes opposite. In other words, if the workers will not protest only after work, they protest in their workplaces, factories the dead-end of the Gezi can be passed.

So the “re-production spaces” are not enough to fight and overthrow the government. Fights in “production spaces” with the unification of struggles are the most important ones.
Turkey’s so called “fascist” regime

These slogans often chanted in the streets: “Let’s stand shoulder to shoulder against fascism” or “Damn with fascism”. Sometimes we chanted them against the police violence of the government, sometimes these slogans were chanted while we get pepper gas from the police rifles and water coming from water cannons.

Besides everything, we should see the difference between these two things; fascism is not a political regime which depends heavily on only force and violence, but fascism tries to institutionalize the strict controls on the working class by using extraordinary force and terrorism. Fundamentally its only job is this! And it is characterized by a classical point of view, not measuring the used violence against people.

The control of the capitalist classes on the working class in “normal” times changes in these extraordinary times. Blocking or slowing down with every type of threat to the accumulation of capital is eliminated via fascism. In this case, the more important question is which class operation is on which class and which times.

In this perspective we can explain how AKP government is a “fascist” regime. First of all let’s ask this question: did or does the working class opposition –including the crisis years of 2008 and onwards– pose a real threat to the Turkey’s sovereign classes during the AKP power? The answer is NO for now and the near past. Of course serious rebels, strikes and events happened, and they are also happening; but these events did not frighten the bourgeoisie as a whole –at least up to now.

Yes, during the AKP power, working class opposition was regressed and is still being regressed, while taking into account the attitudes of the labor unions and consciousness of the working class. But every effort that AKP power is trying to block every kind of opposition should not be read as “fascism”.

AKP more precisely, actually the Turkish bourgeoisie by the hands of AKP, is eliminating laborers from their defensive positions, it is true! But the system is not crushed by powerful working class struggles, the country is not shaken by strikes, capitalists do not see nightmares about their future, and how can we say “fascism” is in Turkey then?

For today, during the Gezi events and after everything’s fine for Turkish bourgeoisie as a whole. If we take the “rhetoric” which Erdogan is using we can have wrong comments. Because the main point is staying behind Erdogan’s “rhetoric”. The question is what makes Erdogan an “authoritarian” leader? We can answer this question in such ways.

The Shopping Center construction plan in Gezi Park was cancelled because of the Gezi events; this is not very well received by Erdogan and his government. Because there was a plan of a large construction and all plans were cancelled and there became a “pessimist”
view for the future of capitalists of Turkey. Only for this acquisition, the Gezi events were a revolt for the politics of the capitalism on the public sphere.

The obstacle of Erdogan and his government is here: If Erdogan using the pressure devices fails in front of the capitalist classes his power will be shaken. But on the other hand, capitalism has a “stability” problem. It is this: if the pressure ways of the government starts a huge anger on public –it had potential and still has potential– and if it is understood that this popular anger would be more and more “expensive” than the construction, in that case it would be the best way for capitalists and government to step back. The contradiction of the government is basically here.

We know that Erdogan is creating a “one man regime”; punishing the bourgeoisie, giving instructions to governmental posts personally, trying to create public sphere with conservative values... And also we know that he does not have any responsibility to anyone. Of course there is a justification in all these comments, but I personally do not think that Turkey’s bourgeoisie which is Erdogan’s reason of the existence does not have a “real” opposition or disapproval to him.

It can be said that Erdogan is closed to the conservative part of Turkish bourgeoisie, and taking into account the fights of Turkish bourgeoisie of the two great camps, we can say that Erdogan is closed to the “Islamic bourgeoisie”. However, when it comes to the “fundamental issues”, for example the strict economic measures apply on the working class the “civil war” of the Turkish bourgeoisie is not seen! Because Erdogan is “esteemed” person in two wings of the Turkish bourgeoisie! This is very important.

I think the fight between the bourgeoisies should not be exaggerated; this is because these kinds of fights between capitalists are “inevitable” in competition situations and always will be. The important matter is how bourgeoisies have an attitude against basic issues for example attacking the working class. That is to say bourgeoisie’s attitude on the working class depending on their class benefits.

Without further ado, I want to sum up the topic briefly: On one side there is a bourgeoisie’s civil war, on the other side a civil war between Erdogan and Gulen Movement which appeared on The National Security Organization on the 7th of February in 2012. Thus we are passing from a different kind of a “civil war” process while the bourgeoisie’s “traditional” civil war is being continued. Erdogan was already “stressed”, after the Gezi events he became more “stressed”!

Government party trying to care the capitalism as a whole in this stressful political atmosphere and in these conditions its leader Erdogan became “authoritarian” as a result. In this case, we can talk about Erdogan’s being “Bonaparte” rather than being “fascist”.

Today some people evaluate the AKP’s 10 years as a “regime shift” through Kemalist reflex. But there is no “shift” or change in working class conditions! The reality is the change in the
The government’s higher classes in the 10 years. They became richer and richer. But the “lion’s share” basically got to the “Islamic bourgeoisie”. Erdogan and his party mainly tried to support Islamic bourgeoisie in this ten-year-old period. Now the main problem in Turkish sovereign classes is this: The other part of the bourgeoisie (it is called “secularist-republican bourgeoisie”) also want to be supported by the same government. That is the main problem in Turkish politics these days!

The military coup of 12th September in 1980 was a real victory for the both wings of the Turkish bourgeoisie. Since those days all capitalist classes have been growing on which depoliticized and “dead” working class movements.

As a “product” of the 12th September military coup times, AKP bourgeoisie does not know the organized class movements, as they do not know working class and today they cannot bear any kind of opposition. I think we have to read Erdogan’s “being authoritarian” in this way.

Conclusion

Fascism is an extraordinary regime of bourgeoisie. Before the explanations of Erdogan’s being “fascist” or “dictator”, analyzing sovereign classes’ contentious “civil war” (between classes or in classes) will be more meaningful.

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