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Turkey

After the Taksim revolt, whither Turkey?

- IV Online magazine - 2013 - IV463 - August 2013 -

Publication date: Monday 26 August 2013

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The explosion of anger on 31 May 2013 which has still not died down was a unique movement in Turkey. According to Interior Ministry figures, 2.5 million people took to the streets. There were four deaths and 4600 wounded, including 600 police officers. Thousands of people were held in custody, and people who took part in the demonstrations from their homes by banging on pots and pans were not included in these figures.

This explosion took place in Turkey, held up as an example of a neo-liberal paradise in the Middle East and for other developing countries. It was not the outcome of a specific social demand, as had been the case in other popular uprisings in the past, or as in the current Brazilian uprising, inspired by the Taksim resistance. To date there has been no looting.

In a climate where the intervention of a Prime Minister who thought he had consolidated his power on all levels had reached its height – interference in several aspects of daily life from flirtation to dress, to drinking alcoholic beverages and even how many children to have, people took to the streets as soon as they found out via social networks or a friend what the police had done to people opposing cutting down trees in a park in the centre of Istanbul, and in a short time their numbers rose to the millions.

The government, which had created a rather optimistic climate by undertaking a negotiating process with the Kurdish national movement, took a very hardline stance against the demonstrators. This added fuel to the fire and the number of demonstrators grew after every speech by the Prime Minister and every incident of police violence. Thus, the government succeeded in uniting all its opponents in a united front, both those who were already known as those who took part in political action for the first time. As a consequence, everything now seems to be up for grabs, as Turkey enters a critical period with elections and debates about the new Constitution.

Istanbul, 25 June 2013