

TURKEY

The restrictions that the Government of Turkey places on the rights of public sector workers are so severe as to merit Turkey's removal from the GSP program, on that single basis alone. To illustrate the restrictions placed on all public employees, this statement will focus on the Turkish government's blanket prohibition on the rights of Turkish teachers to form unions and to bargain on wages and conditions of work.

Right to Organize

Commenting on the right of Turkey's 500,000 teachers to organize, the 1989 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices compiled by the State Department sums up their status in one sentence: "Under Turkish Law, teachers employed by the State may not organize".

There is now no organization in Turkey that represents actively employed teachers. There is an association not a union, of retired teachers and teachers who were fired after 1980, called EGIT-DER. This Association claims that it also has 30,000 honorary members who are active teachers. By law, these honorary members can not become full members. In fact, active teachers that are identified as sympathetic to EGIT-DER are subject to reprisals from the government. (See below.)

EGIT-DER has asked the government to allow it to become a bona-fide teachers union. In a press interview on May 1, 1990, Minister of Education Avni Akyol summed up the government's attitude towards the organization of a teachers union:

Reporter: Minister Akyol, twenty-three teachers will apply to the Governor of Ankara in May for approval to form a teacher's union. What is your view of their action?

Akyol: I have no view. Teachers like others must act according to the law.

Reporter: Both the principles of the International Labor Organization and other international agreements that Turkey has signed are known to provide teachers as well as other civil servants the right to establish trade unions. Why should not this have a bearing on what our laws say?

Akyol: Turkey is not a colony. The ILO conventions are not applicable to Turkey. As we do not interfere with the ILO, it should not interfere with us. If a teacher does not obey our laws and relies on the authority of someone else's laws, I would question his professional conduct.

Reporter: What is your view of actions by teachers that seek the establishment of unions.

Akyol: While I am not against this, people who teach our children must respect the law... In today's constitution, there is no such right for teachers.

It is not only illegal for teachers to establish a trade union in Turkey, but there is ample evidence to prove that the Government has systematically harassed the officers and members of EGIT-DER in an effort to force the group to cease operations.

- The Ministry of Education has sent inspectors throughout Turkey to ascertain the names of honorary members of EGIT-DER. Those suspected of being members are questioned closely by school administrators and told to stop supporting the group. In some cases teachers who have refused to renounce their support for EGIT-DER have been transferred to remote areas.

- The Ministry of Education has audited the financial records of EGIT-DER on four separate occasions since its founding in 1988. These audits have taken place without prior notification. They are not common practice with other groups.

- Police closely watch the movements of EGIT-DER officers within Turkey. The government has refused on a number of occasions to permit EGIT-DER leaders to travel overseas to attend meetings of professional teachers groups and teachers unions. Such contacts would help EGIT-DER to improve its operating procedures and generate international support used to convince the Turkish government to allow teacher unions in the country. In addition, EGIT-DER must receive prior government approval before representatives of foreign organizations can speak at its meetings. In May, 1989, the government refused to allow a representative of the American Federation of Teachers to speak at EGIT-DER's first national congress. Police closely monitor all visitors to EGIT-DER offices.

It is not uncommon for police to make uninvited appearances at a EGIT-DER meetings and video-tape the proceedings. At times, police have not approved the holding of such meetings. For example, EGIT-DER had plans to hold a meeting of its branch officers on May 12, 1990. Participants had travelled from various parts of the country to Ankara for that purpose. On May 11th, the Governor of Ankara notified EGIT-DER that he denied permission for the meeting for reasons of "national security".

MSD

Conditions of Work

Turkish teachers have no way to negotiate with the Ministry of Education over their conditions of work. For example, the government makes unilateral wage decisions. Turkish legal experts note that the one law that governs the operation of the civil service does not provide real protection but instead serve more as a set of disciplinary guidelines. Enforcement of the law is on arbitrary basis.

CONCLUSION

Because of its clear policies with regard to workers whose profession is teaching, the AFL-CIO urges that Turkey lose the privileges associated with the Generalized System of Preferences.

NOTES ON TURKEY

1. Country Reports for 1989, Pg. 1272.
2. Our translation of National Press Agency text.

Report of Committee to Arrest the Problems of the Workers
Employed in Garment Industry

ENGLISH VERSION

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