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When the street appears in Kazakhstan



Sources: Fondsk

Translated for Rebellion by Juan Gabriel Caro Rivera

Mass protests have taken place in almost every city in Kazakhstan as authorities raised liquefied gas prices. This went from being worth 60 tanges to 120, that is, it doubled its price.

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Suddenly, on January 2, protests broke out in the oil city of Zhanaozen, which is part of Mangistau Oblast – southwest of Kazakhstan – in which thousands of people participated (1). On 3 January, protests spread from the Mangistau region to Aktau, where the Tengizchevroil oil company operates.

On January 4, hundreds of workers from the Tengiz oil field in Atyrau province joined the protesters. In the videos that have been posted on social media, it is clearly seen how they shout "We support Mangistau!" and then sing the national anthem of Kazakhstan. This, in turn, sparked strikes in other oil fields such as Kalamkas and Karazhanbas (2).

At first, Kazakhstan's energy minister, Magzum Mirzagaliyev, told protesters that it was impossible to lower fuel prices. On 5 January, protests spread to Alma Ata, Karaganda and Nur-Sultan. *Reuters* journalists report that from that moment on the government began to suspend the internet in several regions (3).

On January 4, the Sputnik agency reported that *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* had been restricted and that there was virtually no external communication (4).

On the same day, Kazakhstan's President Kasim-Yomart Tokaev announced that those participating in the protests "should not support the statements of individual anarchists interested in undermining the stability and unity of the nation" and that public order be respected (5). Tokaev then organized a government meeting where he called for the price of gasoline to be set at 50 tenges per liter, lower than last year.

However, the protests continued and began to take on a political tone. In the city of Aktau thousands of protesters gathered in the *akimat* square (administrative center of the city) and began to put up signs that read "Shal, ket!" (Go, old man!) (6).

According to the *Telegram* channel *Voyenny obozrevatel*, the deployment of military battalions was ordered in the country's capital, Nur-Sultan (7). This caused protesters to block roads to prevent military units from entering the city.

The main streets of the city of Alma Ata were blocked and protesters demanded the resignation of the government; the leaders called on law enforcement to take their side.

Although the protests began spontaneously, several leaders of the liberal-nationalist opposition joined them on January 3. For example, the *Democratic Party*, which is not officially recognized, and its leader, Zhanbolat Mamay, joined the rally that took place in Alma Ata (8).

The leader of the *Democratic Option* party (also not recognized by the authorities), Mukhtar Ablyazov – on whom a heavy reward weighs and who is now in exile in Paris – wrote on his *Instagram* account: "You should know that Nazarbayev will take a plane to Russia or China, but you will continue to live in Kazakhstan. All those who have committed crimes against the people will be punished" (9).

Several protesters used cars to tear down a police cordon in the northwestern Kazakh city of Aktobe, storming the city's *akimat* and demanding, along with the cheapening of gas, several demands of a political nature: resignation of the president and all *akims* (public officials), early elections in all *akims* regional and municipal, convening of a Constituent Assembly, prohibiting officials, ministers and deputies from traveling abroad, amnesty for all political prisoners, including those in exile, etc ... Among the economic demands is to reverse the reform of the retirement age, increase aid to the disabled and reduce the interest on mortgages (10).

Another of the demands raised by the demonstrators, which was one of the main demands of the workers of the Zhanaozen oil field, is to abolish mandatory vaccination. In the social networks of Alma Ata circulate manifestos where the mandatory vaccination and the implementation of QR codes are attacked. "We demand the resignation of the government and the Ministry of Health, as well as compensation for all those who have been vaccinated" (11).

On January 4, Kazakh President Tokaev again called for order and respect for public authorities: "Calls to attack the offices of civilian and military departments are a crime and can be punished. The government will not fall" (12).

Subsequently, a presidential decree was issued declaring that Alma Ata and the entire Mangistau region entered a state of emergency from 4 to 19 January. At the moment, it is impossible to enter or leave the city of Alma Ata, in addition to the fact that travel

restrictions have been imposed, a ban on the sale of weapons and ammunition and restrictions on the circulation of medicines and alcohol. A curfew has even been established that runs from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. (13 p.m.).

On 5 January, Tokaev dissolved the Kazakh government (14) and imposed state regulation of liquefied gas and fuel prices (15). The director of the Zhanaozen liquefied gas processing plant, Nakbergen Tulepov, was arrested on the crime of raising gas prices at convenience (16).

However, the protests did not cease, but intensified and a video began to circulate on the internet where the demonstrators took the *akimat* of Alma Ata (mayor's office) (17). Yerzhan Babakumarov, the mayor's bodyguard, said that all the workers had evacuated the building (18) and stated: "We have suffered an assault, but we managed to evacuate everyone, there are other employees working in their homes" (19).

On January 5, several demonstrators threw stun grenades at the Alma Ata City Hall and caused a fire (20) that spread throughout the entrance of the administrative building. They also set fire to the attorney general's office building (21).

The commander of Alma-Ata reported that there were assaults on several hospitals where medical equipment was destroyed, staff were beaten, ambulances were destroyed and the hospitalization of sick children was prevented (22). Several videos have been disseminated on the Internet where these attacks are clearly observed (23) and some demonstrators even go so far as to take away the weapons of the military (24).

In Alma Ata, the protests left 33 vehicles shattered and several fires, including 16 police cars, seven ambulances, two firefighters, seven trucks and a tanker truck (25), not to mention that more than 120 shops, 100 offices and 80 hotels were damaged. In Alma Ata, the streets leading to the residences of the administrative chiefs were even blocked and it is observed that in the surroundings there were explosions and fires (26).

On the other hand, state security forces (27) sided with protesters in cities such as Aktau, Pavlodar and Atyrau (28).

The *KazTag* news agency reported that "Kazakhstan's elites are fleeing to Europe and we know that at least ten private flights have already departed. And it seems that another five or six planes are preparing to depart" (29).

On January 5, some media went so far as to claim that at 3:00 p.m. the security forces had lost control of Alma Ata, while the city's administrative buildings were on fire and chaos took over everything. The demonstrators erected barricades and all kinds of defenses in the streets. Shops and shopping malls have been looted. Angry mobs vandalized urban infrastructure by attacking power plants and control substations.

Television channels are disconnected and the offices of the Kazakh national news agency *Mir* have been targeted several attacks (30). All regions of the country joined the protests.

Russian political scientist Boris Kagarlitsky points out that Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia suffer from similar problems. "All of these countries," Kagarlitsky says, "share the same place within the social division of labor that neoliberalism has imposed."

Notes:

1. <https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2022/01/04/i-snova-zhanaozen-ili-volnenija-v-kazahstane-55245.html>
2. <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/31638641.html>
3. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/protests-erupt-kazakhstan-after-fuel-price-rise-2022-01-04/>
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