

Wildcat strike by sanitation workers against CHP administration in Maltepe, Turkey

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Sanitation workers in the Maltepe municipality of İstanbul, where the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) won the mayoralty in the March 31 local elections, launched an indefinite wildcat strike last month. The workers said provisions of their collective bargaining agreement were not being carried out, and they denounced layoffs imposed by the municipal administration.

Some 500 workers, members of the pro-opposition Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK), went on strike in response to the layoff of four workers in October. They launched a sit-in at their workplace. Maltepe Mayor Ali Kılıç (CHP) responded by calling in the police to attack the workers with tear gas and batons. Three workers were detained.

The police attack came just one day after a violent police assault on a protest by laid-off metal workers in Eskişehir.

The CHP based its layoff decision on a decree issued by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government during the state of emergency imposed after the failed coup in 2016. The resort to this anti-worker measure by the nominal opposition party has exposed the fraud of the CHP's claims to oppose the decree.

The Maltepe sanitation workers' struggle comes amidst an upsurge of the class struggle internationally, from strikes by US autoworkers, teachers and miners to mass protests in Chile, Lebanon, Iraq and many other countries, including Turkey.

The main driving force behind this international movement is the growth of social inequality. Among OECD countries, Turkey follows Chile and Mexico in income inequality. According to the 2016 report by World Inequality Database, the top 10 percent of the Turkish population takes in 53.9 percent of the national

income.

Simultaneous with the Maltepe municipal workers' strike, workers in other municipalities, including Üsküdar, Ataşehir, İstanbul, Aliağa, İzmir and Aydın, and hundreds of workers at factories elsewhere are striking or protesting against austerity and layoffs.

Last Monday, with the participation of other units of the municipality, hundreds of workers and their supporters marched to the municipal building in Maltepe and demonstrated in front of it.

As the piles of rubbish accumulate in the Maltepe district and public support increases for the sanitation workers, CHP officials are seeking to incite residents against the workers with lies. But they were forced to renegotiate the workers' demands with trade union officials.

The CHP's İstanbul leader Canan Kaftancıoğlu, a close aide of newly elected İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, along with Maltepe Mayor Ali Kılıç and DİSK officials who campaigned for the CHP in the local election, met in the CHP's İstanbul headquarters for more than five hours. They then put forward the same proposal, which violates a contract reached last November, with an offer of a mere \$45 monthly wage increase. Most workers earn close to the minimum wage of \$400-\$450 a month.

The workers set up a ballot box to vote on the offer last Tuesday and overwhelmingly rejected it by a margin of 62 percent. Sanitation workers, joined by civil works department workers, are continuing their struggle against austerity and job cuts, demanding the reinstatement of laid-off workers.

Both the ruling AKP and the CHP are seeking to isolate and derail the workers' struggles, which underscores the growing fear within the Turkish ruling elite that the worldwide wave of class struggle could

erupt within Turkey. Police attacks and other authoritarian measures are a harbinger of the intense pressure that will be brought against the mass struggles that will erupt in the coming period.

The struggle of the Maltepe sanitation workers is yet another indictment of the pseudo-left and the trade unions. They supported the CHP and Ekrem ?mamo?lu, the favored representative of influential sections of the Turkish bourgeoisie that are linked to imperialism, notably the T?S?AD business association. These forces depicted the CHP and ?mamo?lu as “progressive” alternatives to the AKP and Erdo?an.

While the Labor Party (EMEP) called for a vote for the CHP in ?stanbul, Ankara and ?zmir, the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) ran its leader as a CHP candidate in Beyo?lu, ?stanbul. It bears political responsibility not only for the CHP’s latest attacks on workers, but also for its agitation against Syrian refugees in Istanbul and across Turkey and its support for Turkey’s invasion of Syria.

As for D?SK, while its officials in ?stanbul went all out for the CHP in the elections, it is now seeking to calm down opposition among workers against both the unions and their allies. Presented as an “opposition” force by the pro-CHP middle-class pseudo-left, D?SK is another obstacle for workers in their struggle against social counterrevolution and war.

In a clear indication of D?SK’s pro-company character, on October 11-13, D?SK Chairwoman Arzu Çerkezo?lu participated in a forum in Antalya held jointly with the heads of pro-government trade union federations and the Confederation of Employers’ Unions of Turkey, one of the main organizations of big business, and one that is endorsed by the Erdo?an government.

Gathering together bitter enemies of the working class, this forum was organized to discuss how to suppress growing opposition within the working class. At the forum, held amid the Turkish military operation in Syria, stepped-up repression of political opposition and mounting social attacks on the working class, Çerkezo?lu showed her trade union’s anti-worker face.

With the following words, she thanked the government and the parasitic capitalists who owe their wealth to the exploitation of the workers: “I think this meeting, which brings together social partners and government officials, will be useful. I would like to

thank everyone who contributed to this meeting, in an environment where negotiation and channels for dialogue are increasingly being weakened.”

The only way forward for workers in Turkey in their struggle against austerity, layoffs and war, and for their fundamental social rights, is to establish their political independence from the ruling establishment, including the trade unions and pseudo-left parties that represent affluent layers of the middle class. For this, it is necessary to form rank-and-file committees and adopt an international socialist perspective to link their struggles with those of their class brothers and sisters around the world.



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