

Strikes in Istanbul expose CHP, Turkish unions and pseudo-left parties

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Recent strikes in Istanbul in the municipalities controlled by Turkey’s opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) have strikingly exposed the CHP and the reactionary role played by the nominally “opposition” trade unions and pseudo-left groups that support it.

The Genel-?? union affiliated to the D?SK federation brazenly betrayed the Maltepe municipality workers strike. As the strike exposed the CHP’s anti-worker orientation and threatened to spread to broader sections of workers angered over the ruling elite’s homicidal response to the pandemic, Genel-?? rapidly moved to shut it down. Union leaders signed a sellout deal with employers behind the backs of the workers and against their will.

While workers were still voting on the deal, the union announced on social media that the lowest wage, including bonuses, was set at 4,700 TL (US\$640) and that the strike was over. Fully 525 workers voted to continue the strike, only 42 workers voted to end it. Despite this overwhelming (over 90 percent) support for continuing the strike, D?SK officials signed the agreement.

On February 23, more than 1,500 workers had gone on strike in the municipality of Maltepe after months without a contract, demanding compensation for losses in wages and social rights over many years.

From the beginning of the strike, the CHP municipal administration lied about workers’ demands and provoked the district’s residents against the workers. While Maltepe Mayor Ali K?l?ç has claimed he had offered 47 percent raises, workers replied that this percentage only involved about 30 workers. The real offer was only an eight percent raise.

Striking municipal worker Ahmet Bozkurt showed his payroll to the *Gazete Duvar*, stating, “My salary is 3,100 Turkish lira [US\$420], including food and travel payment. I am paying 1,300 liras for house rent. It reaches 2,000 liras with bills. We also want to live humanely. I also

struggle to raise my children well and to ensure that they receive a good education.”

Bozkurt also stressed the impact of the pandemic. He said that during the pandemic, at least 1,000 workers in Maltepe were infected with coronavirus, and one died.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to attacks on the living and social conditions of the working class. Millions of workers faced imposed “unpaid leaves” at half the minimum wage, that is, at hunger wages. The rapid increase in prices of basic necessities, especially food, added to the decline in income and the growth of unemployment.

Garbage was not collected in Maltepe due to the strike, and piles of rubbish emerged in the district. The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (?BB) administration led by CHP Mayor Ekrem ?mamo?lu worked to break the Maltepe municipality workers strike and started to collect garbage in the city—pitting ?BB workers against their class brothers and sisters in Maltepe.

As workers denounced and opposed these strikebreaking efforts, the ?BB claimed that it had respected the right to strike but had to collect garbage for public health reasons. Moreover, CHP officials joined these strikebreaking operations and mobilized a petty-bourgeois mob of 100 people to physically attack the strikers, who were trying to prevent garbage collection. This was a serious warning for workers that bourgeois opposition parties will not hesitate to resort to fascistic methods against workers.

The union treachery in Maltepe comes shortly after a sellout in Istanbul’s Kad?k?y district, where the ?BB again tried to break the strike by collecting garbage. On February 16, nearly 2,300 workers of the CHP-run Kad?k?y municipality struck after contract talks broke down. Kad?k?y Mayor ?erdil Dara Odaba?? claimed that a 38 percent raise was offered, while workers said that they were actually offered a seven percent raise.

The Kadıköy strike was also betrayed by the same DİSK-affiliated Genel-İş union, which has close ties with the CHP. It worked to isolate the strike and then secretly signed a sellout with CHP officials.

The union is desperately maneuvering to avoid being overrun by explosive anger among the workers. It has decided to strike in three other municipalities in Istanbul in March, setting different dates for each: in Kartal Municipality on March 4 and in Beşiktaş Municipality on March 15. However, they suddenly reached an agreement in Ataşehir, before workers were to strike on March 2.

The same union has repeatedly blocked strikes by suddenly signing sellouts, as in the CHP-affiliated Istanbul municipality of Üsküdar, where it signed a paltry three to four percent raise.

These experiences underscore the critical necessity of the workers themselves building their own rank-and-file committees to take direct control over their struggles. This would allow them to coordinate and unite their strikes and appeal to other sections of the working class and to Istanbul residents for support. Otherwise, the unions clearly plan to repeat the Kadıköy and Maltepe betrayals.

The unions have prevented the unification of all these strikes and strangled them by presenting workers with a fait accompli before other municipalities went on strike. DİSK thus worked to prevent a unified movement of the working class, not only against the CHP but also the entire political establishment and the capitalist system they defend. DİSK and the CHP are so close that in almost every general election, a DİSK chairman becomes a CHP deputy.

The CHP's reaction to these strikes shows that if it comes to power, it will be no less hostile to workers struggles than the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). It exposes the illusions peddled by petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties about the CHP. Throughout the strike, members and sympathizers of the CHP and pseudo-left parties waged a smear campaign against the workers on social media, accusing "unskilled" workers of demanding exorbitant wages, being AKP puppets, and harming the "struggle for democracy."

They repeatedly asked why there were strikes only in CHP municipalities, insinuating that the strikes aided the AKP.

These strikes also exposed the reactionary role played by the middle class pseudo-left groups around the CHP-led bourgeois opposition, vindicating the exposure by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Many pseudo-left parties, such as the Left Party (formerly the Freedom and Solidarity

Party, ÖDP), the Labor Party (EMEP) and the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP) backed CHP mayoral candidates, including Ekrem İmamoğlu in the 2019 local elections.

Left Party leader Alper Taş ran as a CHP candidate for the Beyoğlu district of İstanbul, with the support of the far-right Good Party. During the Maltepe strike, the Left Party claimed its support from workers, but its representatives paid a friendly visit to CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu in his office.

While the AKP government and the media it controls tried to use the strikes as a propaganda tool against the CHP, they also feared that these strikes would escape the unions' control and trigger a broader explosion of the class struggle.

As strikes against herd immunity and austerity policies increased in January, the AKP responded to the Boğaziçi University student protests with violent police state repression. This reflected its fear of coming mass struggles and the possibility that these could develop into an international struggle against the capitalist system. In fact, the AKP and the CHP agree that strikes must be ended before they get out of control.

The betrayals of the Maltepe and Kadıköy municipal strikes contain critical lessons for the working class. The most important is that the only way forward for workers is through the building of their own independent socialist and internationalist party, i.e., a Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). No other political tendency exposes and fights the entire political establishment, including the CHP and its pseudo-left supporters and trade unions, and advances a revolutionary socialist perspective for the working class.



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