

Thousands of couriers at Turkey's largest e-commerce platform Trendyol launch wildcat strike for wages

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26 January 2022

Thousands of car couriers working as independent delivery contractors at Trendyol, Turkey's largest e-commerce platform, rejected a miserable wage raise offered by the company and stopped work across the country yesterday.

After last year's strikes and protests by delivery workers against harsh working conditions and low wages in countries such as Brazil and Germany, this strike is part of a growing wave of militancy within the international working class.

Skyrocketing living costs and the thousands of preventable deaths caused by the homicidal response of governments around the world to the COVID-19 pandemic are driving growing sections of the working class into struggle.

While educators and students in America and Europe organize strikes and protests against the unsafe reopening of schools, wildcat strikes are erupting one after another in Turkey. In recent weeks, Çimsata? metal workers, Divri?i iron mine workers and most recently Farplas automotive part workers in Gebze have stopped working due to wage disputes. While thousands of doctors went on strike on January 21, a broader health care workers' strike is planned for February 8 across the country.

Like their colleagues around the world, couriers working in Trendyol have been essential workers during the pandemic. With its numerous product types, Trendyol is one of the top five e-commerce companies in the region of Europe, the Middle East and Africa, with the number of orders exceeding 1 million per day. While the number of Trendyol's online customers was 9.2 million in 2019, this number increased to 19.3 million in 2020 and 30 million in 2021.

According to BloombergHT, Trendyol, most of whose shares were acquired by China-based Alibaba in 2018, had a market value of \$16.5 billion in 2021, becoming the first company in Turkey to cross the \$10 billion mark. Founded in 2010, Trendyol's market value was \$1 billion in 2018.

The company announced on Monday an 11 percent insufficient pay increase rate for 2022, whereas official figures place inflation at 36 percent in Turkey. An independent research institution ENAGrup announced that the actual rate was 82 percent. This prompted thousands of couriers to take action in anger. Hundreds gathered in front of Trendyol headquarters in the Maslak district of Istanbul and announced that they would stop work indefinitely if their demands were not met.

In addition to a 50 percent raise, couriers are demanding a reduced workload, less work pressure from the company, and guarantees that employees who joined the wildcat strikes not be sacked. Yesterday, thousands of couriers organized themselves via social media. They refused to deliver products in cities all over the country, including Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, Antalya, Samsun, Tekirda?, Eski?ehir, Mu?la, Diyarbak?r and Siirt.

While Trendyol has notified its customers that there are "delays in deliveries due to extreme weather conditions" amid heavy snowfall in many cities, couriers stated that this is actually due to their work stoppage. According to the posts shared from the couriers' newly opened Twitter account, many who support their struggle are sending messages of denunciation to Trendyol and state that they will not shop there anymore.

Couriers gathered in city squares with car convoys and made public statements. After mass protests on the European (Yenikap?) and Anatolian (Maltepe) sides of Istanbul, a press statement was also made in front of FOX TV.

Trendyol management claimed that car couriers received a monthly salary of 10,000 TL with the last 11 percent raise, while couriers made clear that this amount includes their monthly mandatory expenses.

According to a statement made by Trendyol Express couriers on social media, they have fixed expenses such as car traffic insurance, comprehensive coverage, vehicle maintenance, tire change, motor vehicle tax, vehicle fuel, their own social security and meal expenses, which amount to 6,500-7,500 TL monthly. Couriers stated that the amount they received was below even the minimum wage, which rose to 4,250 TL with a 50 percent increase for 2022.

A public statement read by a courier representative in Yenikap? stated: “As it is known that we cover every expense from our meals and accounting expenses to our insurance, the increase of 1,000 Turkish liras, however, does not even cover our monthly fuel expenses.”

It continued: “Trendyol Express has made it a must to consider long-term loan debts [for cars] in addition to our expenses. As Trendyol Express couriers, our expectation from Trendyol and Trendyol Express is to revise the wage raise and to forward a rational offer to more than 9,000 couriers, taking into account the current economic situation.” It added: “We will continue to show our reaction to Trendyol, which states that it will not take a step back from the situation, by closing car contacts.” Car couriers also announced that they will organize a “massive action” today.

In addition to overall inflation, the price of a liter of gasoline, which directly concerns the couriers, increased from 7.30 TL to 14.10 TL, that is, nearly 100 percent within a year.

Although Turkey stands out with its inflation rate, the surge in prices is a global phenomenon. This is, in fact, a by-product of the response of capitalist governments around the world, led by the United States, to the COVID-19 pandemic. While trillions of dollars have been poured into financial markets since the pandemic began, workers in nearly all countries have been forced back to unsafe workplaces to pump out profits for financial and corporate elites.

The failure to take the necessary scientific public health measures to end the COVID-19 pandemic and the intensifying exploitation of the working class stem from the same root cause: the unhindered drive of the capitalist ruling class to accumulate private wealth. The fight against the pandemic is inseparable from the fight against the rising cost of living and social inequality.

An international working class movement is emerging globally on this same objective basis. It needs to be united through the building of independent rank-and-file committees based on an international socialist program. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), initiated last year by the International Committee of the Fourth International, is responding to this burning need of workers.



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