CHP, D?SK union collaborate against Turkish municipal workers strike

Hasan Y?ld?r?m
20 March 2022

Last month, municipal workers in the Seyhan district of Adana in Turkey, with 800,000 population, rejected a miserly contract offer by the local administration and voted to strike. For weeks, they have defied pressure from the bourgeois opposition Republican People's Party-led (CHP) municipal administration and the D?SK-affiliated Genel-?? union.

The Seyhan Municipality workers' determined stance and insistence for a strike for better wages and benefits form part of an emerging movement in the working class in Turkey and internationally against the economic and social consequences of the deadly pandemic policies and war in Ukraine.

According to data from the Labor Studies Group, at least 106 wildcat strikes occurred in just the first two months of 2022. The average annual number of wildcat strikes in the previous five years in Turkey was only 97.

The workers opened a Twitter account independent of the union and posted a video on February 23, stating that the municipality offered 5,256 Turkish liras ($355) to office workers and 5,555 TL ($375) to cleaning workers for a month. However, when union dues and benefits such as food, travel and fuel money are subtracted, the offer is only 4,253 TL ($285), the official minimum wage in Turkey. Workers demand a net salary of 6,000 TL and benefits, though this is also currently insufficient to live properly.

While living costs have surged in recent months, real wages have fallen dramatically. Official annual inflation reached 54 percent in February, while the real inflation rate was 123 percent, according to the independent Inflation Research Group (ENA Group). Prices, which have risen worldwide due to the effect of the pandemic, have skyrocketed even more after the war in Ukraine, fueling social anger and protests.

According to the pro-government Türk-?? union confederation, the poverty line for a family of four in Turkey reached 15,140 Turkish lira (currently $1,030) in February. The "hunger limit" (monthly food expenditures required for a family of four to have a healthy, balanced and adequate diet) rose to 4,552 Turkish lira ($310), more than minimum wage.

In the same video, Seyhan Municipality workers said, "there was an attempt to hide the fact that we are on the minimum wage. As Seyhan Municipality workers, we decided to strike because it was impossible for us to live on these wages in an environment while a 115 percent hike in electricity was imposed."

After the strike vote, the CHP municipal administration intensified pressure on the workers. Some of them were exiled to different departments within the workplace. While it was revealed that 35 workers were exiled on February 28, they emphasized that it is illegal to impose such a reshuffle.

As the CHP seeks to drive the growing social anger over the increasing cost of living, bad straits and widespread impoverishment behind itself with a populist rhetoric for the 2023 presidential elections, it implements the very same policies in its municipalities against the working class with President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government. This applies to austerity as well as to ignoring the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

Last year, Kad?köy Municipality and Maltepe Municipality workers' strikes in Istanbul were suppressed by collaboration between the CHP and the Genel-?? union. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Ekrem ?mamo?lu, who was supported by the pseudo-left organizations in the 2019 local elections, acted as a strike breaker.

Last month, the strike in Istanbul's Bak?rköy Municipality, where the CHP is also in administration,

© World Socialist Web Site

resulted in a real-wage loss with a raise far below the official inflation rate. It had started after the CHP offered workers a contract with 0 percent raise.

Akif Kemal Akay, the mayor of Seyhan Municipality, spoke on local television on March 17, making clear the political establishment's contempt for workers. He said, "Since they have taken a decision to strike, they receive minimum wages now. Everyone has a mind. People should accept these offers. But here is no need for the illiterate to sit and think."

He added, "There is no municipality in the Mediterranean region that gives more than we do. All can make a living, but Seyhan workers cannot make a living? [Workers] say, 'We fail to make ends meet.' There is no measure of living. If you get too much salary, you may not be able to make end meet."

These words sum up the indifference of the bourgeoisie, of affluent middle class layers in the top 10 percent of the population, and of their political representatives, to the living conditions of millions of workers, who make up the overwhelming majority of the population.

Speaking to *Sol Haber*, a municipal worker said that workers also decided to strike in Çukurova, another district of Adana, where CHP is in power. However, it was canceled on the very same day under intense pressure from the municipal administration and the intervention of Genel-??.

Workers' statements make clear that anger towards both the unions and the pseudo-left forces that support them and the CHP is sharply increasing. Workers told *Sol Haber*: "The Seyhan Municipality, which deems us to be entitled to these inhumane conditions, and the union, which does not speak up enough, are guilty in the eyes of the workers."

They added, "In fact, there are reactions against D?SK and the leftists. Workers ask, is this why we joined the union? There are those who say that it would be better if the union did not exist. Many people want to resign in this process."

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), Seyhan Municipality workers emphasized that they do not trust the union. They stated that pressure was increased every day for them to abandon the strike, but the majority were still in favor of strike action. One worker stated that all establishment parties are united in targeting workers' rights and conditions.

When a WSWS reporter explained that they should take the struggle into their own hands by forming a rank-and-file committee independent of the union that is against the strike and is in favor of the municipal administration, workers warmly welcomed this proposal.

On Saturday, workers launched a social media campaign with the hashtag "Seyhan Workers Demand Their Rights." Many workers in different industries and areas supported the campaign.

The problems and struggles of Seyhan Municipality workers are the same as those of hundreds of millions of workers in Turkey and around the world. The accelerating decline in living standards and growing social inequality cannot be stopped by appealing to established parties or trade unions that defend the existed social order and the interests of the ruling class. A fundamental change in social conditions is required that can only be brought about by the international working class.

Seyhan Municipality workers should form their own independent rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, initiate the strike and mobilize support from other sections of the working class. We urge workers who agree with this perspective to contact with the WSWS to form a rank-and-file committee.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site