

A new wave of strikes erupts in Turkey as inflation surges

Hasan Y?ld?r?m
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Surging inflation, poor working conditions and deepening poverty are pushing workers in Turkey into struggle amid a rising wave of strikes internationally.

On August 5, workers at two factories of auto parts manufacturer Standart Profil in Düzce and Manisa went on wildcat strikes and occupied their workplaces, demanding an additional raise and safe working conditions. After the strike, Düzce Mayor Faruk Özlü of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) threatened the workers, declaring: “[T]his illegal action is so bad that you are in danger of losing all your legal rights before the law.”

Over 2,000 workers joined the walkouts, which ended on August 9 after the company accepted workers’ demands. Accordingly, management will give workers a further 28 percent wage increase, a 1,500 Turkish lira (TL) shopping voucher, and take occupational health and safety measures.

The wildcat strikes at Standard Profil took place amid growing working class anger and struggles in Turkey and internationally against the steadily rising cost of living and falling real wages. Official annual inflation in Turkey rose to 79.6 percent as of July. The Inflation Research Group (ENAG), an independent research organization, calculated annual inflation at 176 percent.

Management is slashing real wages for workers, who make up the overwhelming majority of Turkey’s population, by granting them raises far below the level of inflation.

According to a report by the pro-government Türk-?? confederation, the poverty line for a family of four rose to 22,280 TL (\$1,240) and the hunger line to 6,840 liras (\$380) in July. The minimum wage is only 5,500 liras. According to a survey by the Consumer Rights Association, 90 percent of the population now lives below the poverty line.

This unprecedented impoverishment actually means a massive transfer of wealth from the working class to finance capital. According to Prof. Dr. ?enol Babu?cu’s calculations, while the country’s banking sector’s profits in the first six months of 2021 was 34 billion liras, the profit in the first six months of 2022 skyrocketed 401 percent to 169 billion liras.

In the face of the ruling class’ social counterrevolution, escalated after the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, workers are increasingly fighting for better wages and living conditions. These workers struggles include:

? At the Salcomp Xiaomi electronics factory in Istanbul, 400 workers were laid off with the collaboration of the Türk-Metal union affiliated to Türk-?? when the union rejected their demand for a strike. When workers were not given the promised compensation, they occupied the factory on August 3 and then staged a protest in front of the Turkish Metal union.

? Workers at the Techomix electronics factory in Bursa who are members of Türk Metal went on strike on August 5.

? Amid a wave of wildcat strikes by Amazon workers in the UK, Turkish Amazon workers who were fired for being members of DGD-SEN, a union independent of the big confederations, began a protest on August 8 in front of Ceva Lojistik, Amazon’s Turkish warehouse in Dilovas?, Kocaeli. The warehouse employs around 3,000 workers, who earn only 100 lira more than the minimum wage of 5,500 TL. Around 600 workers gathered signatures to demand an improvement in wages and working conditions. In addition to salaries, the workers demanded steps be taken against oppression and the lack of rules, and to defend workers’ health and safety, services and meals. The

company responded by sending workers to other warehouses.

? ETF Textile workers in Istanbul were attacked by the police on August 9, the 19th day of their protest. On July 6, 330 workers were “downsized” at the factory. On July 21, workers began a protest inside the factory. On July 31, management announced the closure of the factory but did not give the workers their receivables. On August 9, management, accompanied by police, brought trucks to the factory and smuggled the goods. Police attacked the workers who protested this operation.

? On August 10, the YDA Group workers at the construction site of a financial center in Ataşehir, Istanbul, began a protest at company headquarters to demand their severance, notice pay and unpaid wages. The workers organized a march the following day, and a journalist covering the protest was detained by the police.

? At Er Prefabrik in Manisa, 80 workers went on a walkout on Thursday after the company gave them a 30 percent pay raise in response to their demand for a 45 raise.

? “Home Health and Care Workers” from the Republican People’s Party (CHP)-run Izmir Metropolitan Municipality have been protesting for two weeks in front of city hall, demanding to be reinstated. On August 8, protesting workers were attacked by police and security personnel.

? Sanitation workers at the CHP-run Beylikdüzü Municipality in Istanbul staged a two-hour warning wildcat strike on Saturday after their demands for an additional raise were not met.

? In Kartal Municipality under the CHP administration in Istanbul, workers were offered a 40 percent raise over the old minimum wage of 4,250 liras. Workers rejected this miserable offer, and later they rejected another proposal of a 50 percent increase.

? While municipal workers in Kartal are preparing to strike, workers in Istanbul’s Kadıköy Municipality have also rejected a miserable 40 percent raise. They are set to strike after a one-month mediation process.

Speaking to the press, workers criticized both the CHP and DİSK-affiliated Genel-İş union, which is run by pseudo-left groups together with the CHP. One worker said of the CHP: “Are the so-called social-democratic CHP municipalities, which say they are

marching to power, going to march to power by leaving their workers below the starvation line?” He stated that two months ago, a Kartal Municipality worker committed suicide due to economic difficulties.

The fact that a worker emphasized that the union “has no strike fund,” meaning that workers who go on strike are not paid, underscores the need for workers to establish rank-and-file committees and take control of the strike fund that belongs to them.

Genel-İş has betrayed municipal workers several times recently. In 2021, strikes in the Kadıköy and Maltepe municipalities in Istanbul were sold out by DİSK and Genel-İş. This March, the same union refused to implement the strike decision taken by workers in the Seyhan Municipality in Adana and signed a contract shortly afterwards. In the Çukurova Municipality, the strike decision was canceled the day it was taken.

The strike wave in Turkey is part of a developing movement by the international working class against capitalism. After mass protests and strikes in Sri Lanka forced the president to resign, ruling classes all over the world, including in Turkey, fear similar social explosions in their own countries. The entire bourgeois political establishment aims to divert growing anger among workers, while the trade unions do all they can to suppress the class struggle.

The way forward for workers is to organize rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracies. The International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International is fighting to unite and mobilize the objectively developing movement of the international working class against capitalism. It must be built in every factory and workplace around the world.



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