

Strikes and protests for wages grow as inflation surges in Turkey

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Millions in Turkey are struggling to make ends meet in deep poverty as food and energy prices continue to surge and the attack on the living conditions of the working class grows.

As of August, Turkey's official annual inflation rate rose to 80 percent. ENAG, an independent research organization, calculated inflation at 181 percent. According to Trading Economics web site, Turkey's official inflation ranks fourth in the world after Zimbabwe, Sudan and Syria.

Turkey's high inflation is part of surging prices globally, triggered by the massive printing of money by central banks around the world to transfer wealth to the super-rich amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and escalated by the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. But this has been exacerbated by the fiscal policy of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government, which defends corporate profits at the expense of basic social needs.

The ruling class has imposed the main burden of the crisis on the working class. While the Turkish lira continues to depreciate and the prices of all goods, especially basic necessities, rise constantly, workers' purchasing power is constantly eroded by wage increases far below inflation. Even the "hunger limit"—the monthly food expenditure of a family of four in Turkey—is above the minimum wage, which rose less than 30 percent in July to 5,500 Turkish liras (TL).

The pro-government T?rk-?? union confederation announced that the poverty limit at the end of August became 22,440 TL and the hunger limit (monthly food expenditure for a family of four) was 6,890 TL.

The minimum wage has become an average wage for millions in Turkey. According to a December 2021 report by the pro-opposition D?SK union confederation, 64 percent of all workers in Turkey (12.5 million workers) earn minimum wage or slightly above. Seventy percent of private sector workers earn just the minimum wage.

Moreover, 3.4 million workers (18 percent of all workers) earn less than the minimum wage. The vast majority of them are refugees and migrant workers subjected to brutal exploitation. According to a survey conducted by the Consumer Rights Association in March, 90 percent of Turkey's population lives below the poverty line.

Millions of working people are increasingly unable to meet their most basic needs. In the first six months of this year, the number of households that can only pay their electricity bills with social assistance rose to 2.3 million.

Among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member states, Turkey has seen the highest increase in energy prices in the last year. According to Euronews, the Turkish state-owned petroleum pipeline corporation's (BOTA?) natural gas wholesale price rose 1,330 percent for electricity generation, 997 percent for industrial use and 216 percent for residential use.

As of September 1, there has been a 20.4 percent price increase in gas and a 20 percent increase in electricity for households. While millions are asking how they will be able to heat their homes this winter, there has been another 50.8 percent increase in gas and 50 percent increase in electricity in industrial facilities. This shows that new energy price hikes inflate the prices of virtually all goods, including basic necessities.

Amid high inflation, wage increases very rapidly lose their effect. "They raised the minimum wage by 1,250 TL [in July]. We said 'Okay!' and then everything else went up," a Has ?elik metalworker told the daily *Evrensel*.

On the other hand, Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati, the spokesman of the profiteers in the Turkish banks, boasted: "Despite these developments, which started with Russia's intervention in Ukraine on February 24th and have continued to have a strong impact until today and have captured the whole world, Turkey

has achieved significant successes.” According to the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK), the Turkish banking sector’s profit in the first six months rose 400 percent compared to last year, to 169 billion TL.

As the ruling class escalates its social counterrevolution with the pandemic and the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine, the class struggle is also sharpening.

The wave of wildcat strikes in the first months of this year began to revive as of last August. Amid growing working class militancy, TPI Composite and Standart Profil workers managed to force the companies and unions to accept their demands by walking out.

September is also witnessing a wave of new strikes and protests. Physician assistants in university hospitals went on strike across the country on September 15–16, after they were excluded from the new “supplementary payment regulation” of the Health Ministry and did not receive an additional wage increase. This year, physicians and other health workers in Turkey have repeatedly gone on nationwide strikes.

Meanwhile, 562,000 subcontracted municipal workers across Turkey are demanding official job security. At the call of the Association of Subcontracted Municipal Workers (TABİB), workers organized a demonstration in Ankara on Sunday. They are demanding job security, abolition of compulsory retirement, a raise based on real inflation and to receive the 52-day bonus given to all public sector workers.

Private school teachers, who work for around minimum wage and without job security, are also mobilizing to demand job security and base pay equal to that in the public schools. Public school teachers are also opposing the “Teaching Profession Law,” which forces them to take exams and be subject to “career ladders.”

Bourgeois opposition parties led by the Republican People’s Party (CHP), which criticizes the Erdoğan government over the cost of living, are revealing themselves to be as hostile to the working class as the government in the municipalities they control. Recently, Yılmaz Büyükerem, the CHP Mayor of Eskişehir, denounced workers demanding a raise, calling them “provocateurs” and threatening to fire them.

Workers at the CHP-run Kadıköy municipality in Istanbul will strike due to the failure to reach an agreement in contract negotiations covering 2,300 workers. Unless the DİSK-affiliated Genel-İş union agrees to a last-minute sellout, the strike will begin in two months.

In 2021, a strike at the Kadıköy municipality ended in a

sellout not approved by the workers. During the short-lived strike, the CHP-run Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB), whose mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu’s election was backed by various pseudo-left parties, tried to break the strike by collecting garbage.

After being targeted by Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, 43 workers dismissed from İBB on the grounds of “security investigations” are continuing their protest in front of the municipality, demanding their reinstatement.

In a statement on contract talks in district municipalities in the city of Izmir, the Genel-İş union has warned that there might be strikes in several municipalities. Talks are underway covering 294 workers in Dikili, 1,400 in Buca, 1,580 in Bornova and 1,250 in Bayraklı.

The DİSK and Genel-İş unions’ statements emphasize the need for an agreement without going on strike. Genel-İş has betrayed recent strike votes in many CHP-run municipalities; in many places, it helped impose raises well below even the official inflation rate.

These strikes and protests, involving ever-broader sections of workers, are part of a growing movement in the international working class. Everywhere, workers face the same problems and the same urgent demands stemming from capitalism and war: regular wage increases at the rate of real inflation to compensate for the cost of living; the nationalization of energy companies, private health care and education institutions; an end to war and military spending.

The struggle for these demands requires the unification of all workers at workplaces, at the national and world level, independent of the pro-corporate and pro-state unions. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the means for workers to unite in such an international struggle. We call on all workers in struggle to contact us to build such committees in their workplaces.



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