

Union thugs assault workers in effort to suppress Turkey's wildcat strike movement

Bar?? Demir
14 August 2023

A wildcat strike movement in Turkey continues to grow in different provinces and sectors amid a worsening cost of living crisis. The workers involved are coming into direct confrontation with a trade union apparatus that serves as the labor police of the state and the corporations.

Workers in the Çankaya municipality, governed by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in Ankara, are demanding that their salaries are adjusted according to the real inflation rate and walked off the job last week. But their union, pro-opposition D?SK-affiliated Genel-??, made a deal with the municipality officials.

Workers who went to the union branch to get information about the sell-out agreement said that they were threatened and physically beaten by the union officials. After the incident, they issued a statement, "We don't want union officials who beat workers," under the signature of the "Workers of Çankaya Municipality."

According to the statement, they had gone to the branch office to find out why the agreement was being kept secret—the figures they had heard were not enough to live on—and why the decision to take action had been abandoned.

Union officials who confronted them started an argument by saying, "Have you come here to fight?" before using physical violence against them. The workers concluded their statement by declaring, "We are determined to fight against bureaucratic and anti-democratic trade unionism that takes away our right to take action against the employer."

The physical attack against the Çankaya municipality strikers is a warning to all workers internationally. The union bureaucracies who act in the service of the ruling class will resort to any means, including physical

attacks, when they are unable to suppress the growing movement of workers through various maneuvers.

This attack exposes the anti-working class character of the pseudo-left tendencies, which have close ties with the D?SK apparatus and CHP. The Stalinist Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P), the Morenoite Workers' Democracy Party (?DP) and others lined up behind CHP leader Kemal K?l?çdarolu in the presidential elections last May, promoting him as a "progressive" alternative against President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an.

The rising cost of living triggered by the pandemic and worsened by the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine has devastated the living standards of workers in Turkey. Last year, Turkish annual inflation was officially around 80 percent, while real inflation was over 150 percent. As of July this year, it officially became 47 percent. But according to the independent ENAG, it is still over 120 percent.

In the southeastern industrial city of Gaziantep, workers at Koza Hal?, ?ireci Coton and ?ireci Acrylic plants have refused to accept proposed wage increase below the real inflation rate. Around 2,000 textile workers at ?ireci have been striking and protesting since last Wednesday.

Management has threatened the striking workers with dismissal and arrest by the police to end their militant struggle for a net wage of 15.500 TL (US\$575), a holiday bonus, food aid and 1.500 TL (US\$55) for the Sunday shift. The minimum wage is only 11,400 liras (US\$420) in Turkey.

On Saturday, Mehmet Türkmen, the leader of the independent textile union B?RTEK-SEN, was detained on the demand of ?ireci management and almost 2,000 workers were informed of their dismissal by a text message. On the same day, thousands of workers

gathered in front of the factory and tried to march to the city center but were prevented by the police. In response, ?ireci workers organized a mass protest in Democracy Square on Sunday.

There is growing fear in the ruling elites that the wildcat militant action of the ?ireci workers might spread to the entire region and beyond. Representatives of the two main parties of the ruling class have joined hands to neuter the growing movement of workers. The mayor of Gaziantep, Fatma ?ahin, from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), and Melih Meriç, a deputy from the CHP, made a visit to the corporate owner, Ahmet ?ireci, and the factory. While the AKP's ?ahin tried to persuade strikers to go back to work, the CHP's Meriç asked them to make "sacrifices." Another deputy from the far-right Good Party, an ally of the CHP, attacked those backing striking workers as "provocateurs."

The ?ireci workers refused to back down in the face of this offensive and on August 13 management announced that they had accepted the demands of the strikers.

The wave of strikes and protests has also spread to Istanbul. Yesterday, hundreds of workers of A?aç A?., a subsidiary of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (?BB), gathered in front of the municipality building to demand wage increases.

The wage demands and wildcat actions of municipality workers develop regardless of which party is in power. Last week in Ankara, besides the CHP-led Çankaya Municipality workers' strike, workers at Mamak Municipality and Etimesgut Municipality—governed by the AKP and its fascistic ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) respectively—protested, demanding additional wage increases.

These wildcat strikes and protests follow the strike of 625 subway workers of Metro A? of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, which ended in two days with a sell-out contract, a wildcat strike of over 3,000 electricity distribution workers across at least five Kurdish cities, and the two-day strike of health care workers in early August.

The contracts of about 150,000 auto and metal workers in Turkey expire in September. Workers want to get rid of the yoke of the union apparatus and fight back. At the Renault plant in Bursa, autoworkers have

already begun to demonstrate their willingness to fight with some actions. They have protested the collusion between the union and management in the cafeteria by banging forks and spoons on the tables. The hated union bureaucrats were not allowed onto the floor.

The strike wave in Turkey is an integral part of an upsurge in the class struggle internationally, emerging in opposition to the union apparatus, which stretches from North America to Europe and beyond.

Workers mobilizing in Turkey and around the world face the need to organize through rank-and-file committees to unite and advance their struggles independently of the union apparatus. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the basis for uniting workers across all workplaces, sectors and countries.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact