

“No rest for the union officials from now on!”

Amid surging wildcat strike wave in Turkey, union bureaucrats accuse workers of terrorism

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Last week, thousands of workers from different sectors in many industrial cities across Turkey joined a surging wave of wildcat strikes against the rising cost of living as part of a growing global movement. Workers are increasingly openly confronting not only companies, but also the trade union apparatus and the state forces.

The main trigger for this new wave of strikes was that the increases in the first paychecks of 2024 were far below expectations, even below the official inflation rate.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), the monthly inflation rate in January 2024 alone was 6.70 percent compared to the previous month and the official annual inflation rate was 65 percent. But the Inflation Research Group (ENAG), an independent organization, stated that inflation in January 2024 was 9.38 percent and annual inflation was 129 percent. Workers facing losses in real wages are being driven into struggle against the trade union apparatus.

Workers at the Eti Aluminium factory in Seydi?ehir, Konya launched a mass march on February 7, stating that the company's offer of a wage increase was below the inflation rate. They slowed down production and continue to protest in front of the factory.

The struggle is waged in defiance of the Öz Çelik-?? union. Speaking to the daily *Evrensel*, a worker said, “Don't think that the union started this action. They got scared when we opposed the 56 percent wage increase. They were afraid that we would also change the union. They are here with us out of necessity.”

Protests by public sector workers demanding wage increases also continue despite state repression and targeting of trade unionists.

Defense industry workers, members of the T. Harb-?? union, and workers at the Turkish Rail Vehicle Industry Inc. (Türasa?) factories in many provinces, members of the Demiryol-?? union, have been demonstrating for the past month to demand additional wage increases. But their demands were refused.

Public sector workers who are members of the Eski?ehir and Istanbul local branches of T. Harb-?? union have called for a mass rally in Ankara. On Saturday, they were forced to leave their buses and were prevented from entering the capital city by the police force. Some of the workers made a statement at the place where they were stopped, while those who were able to enter the city made a statement at Ulus Square. They chanted slogans such as “Workers are here, where is the union?” and “We don't want a yellow union!”

Alaattin Soydan, chairman of T. Harb-?? union, attacked the workers in a way that reveals the anti-working class character of the trade union apparatus. He accused the workers of being terrorists, stating, “There is a desire to create chaos in the country before the local elections... In this context, what are the branch chairs trying to achieve by taking the workers to the streets? What dark forces are instructing them?”

A worker from the Istanbul branch of T. Harb-?? told the *Evrensel*, “Our chairman has declared us terrorists... We will raise our voices, we will get our rights, we will not let these union officials see the light of day, and we

will send them out of their seats! No rest for the union officials from now on!"

Other strikes and demonstrations that took place in Turkey last week include:

- Workers of Portakal Plastik in Çayrova, Kocaeli, have protested against the non-implementation of the wage increase in terms of the new contract by chanting slogans at the entrance and exit of the shifts and continued their protests in the canteen.

- At the Mersen factory in Kocaeli, where 61 workers are employed in defence industry sector, production was stopped following the dismissal of four workers who became members of the Birleşik Metal-?? union.

- Workers at the Cemre Shipyard in Yalova protested against a low wage increase. They said that the shipyard bosses agreed among themselves to give low wage increases and stressed that the workers should unite against them.

- Workers from different companies in the Tuzla shipyards area of Istanbul also organised a work stoppage and march against low wage increases.

- Sub-contracted workers at the construction site of the SASA polyester factory in Adana walked off the job because the wage increases were too low. It is reported that 67 of the workers were dismissed after they insisted they be given the same level of wage increase as at the main company.

- Hundreds of workers at Mita? in Ankara and M?CHA in Izmir in the metal sector stopped production, declaring that the wage increases in the contracts had not been implemented.

- The workers of Erciyas Steel Pipe in Düzce and Mersin have been on strike since January 31, while workers at ?ahinkul Machinery in Bursa have been on strike since December 21.

- Özak Tekstil workers in ?anlıurfa who resigned from the pro-corporate union and became members of the independent Birtek-Sen, demanding better wages and benefits, continue their protests. Since November 27, they have been staging work stoppages and protests despite state pressure, most recently in front of the company's headquarters in Istanbul and the stores of various international textile brands that the company manufactures. As a result of the protests in front of the headquarters of the holding company in Istanbul, two district governorships imposed a "special" 7-day protest ban. Workers who wanted to make a statement

were detained.

Last week also saw a new wave of wildcat strikes in the southeastern city of Gaziantep over low wage increases. The strikes started on February 5 at Ender Aluminium and Key Textiles, which produces yarn, and was followed by textile and weaving factories such as Milat Hal?, Selçuk ?plik, Yasin Kaplan Hal?, Burteks, Bulut Tekstil and Zafer Tekstil. Some of the strikes ended with additional wage increases and some with no wage increases at all.

Gaziantep has become an industrial centre in recent period, particularly in the textile industry. In August last year, there was a wildcat strike wave in the city. In the textile industry, which is labour-intensive and where wages are seen as the main competitive factor by the corporations, it is seen as crucial for the ruling class to suppress the struggles of the workers that lead to partial gains to prevent them from setting a precedent.

This growing wave of strikes in Turkey is part of a global movement that is becoming explosive in the midst of the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

To take their struggle forward, workers must build their own independent rank-and-file committees and unite them on a national and international scale on the basis of a revolutionary programme of class struggle. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides workers around the world with the means needed for this struggle.



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