

Kartal Municipality strike in Turkey exposes CHP, DISK and the pseudo left

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The collective bargaining negotiations and strikes in municipalities run by the Republican People's Party (CHP), which came out on top in the local elections on March 31, reveal the destructive role played by the CHP and the so-called "opposition" unions and pseudo-left groups supporting it.

On October 30, 2,000 workers in Kartal, a municipality of about half a million people in Istanbul, went on strike.

(The X posting caption reads: "Kartal Municipality workers went on strike by hanging a banner saying 'There is a strike in this workplace'. Workers protesting the sell-out agreement cut the trade union logo from banners.")

The action went ahead after talks between the Genel-?? Trade Union (affiliated to the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey/D??SK) and the Social Democratic Public Employers' Union (SODEM-SEN)—which represents the CHP municipalities—failed to reach an agreement that could be imposed on the workers.

On the fourth day of the strike, the Genel-?? Trade Union headquarters accepted a sell-out agreement without the knowledge of the workers and against their will, which led to a huge reaction and the continuation of the strike. Other CHP municipalities in Istanbul responded by sending garbage trucks to Kartal to break the strike.

In the face of the growing anger of the workers, Kartal branch management had to announce that they did not accept the agreement. The anger spread to other municipalities where collective agreement negotiations are ongoing. In addition to Kartal, the branch administrations of Maltepe, Ata?ehir and Kad?köy municipalities in Istanbul were forced to announce that they would stop work indefinitely as of November 4.

However, on Monday morning, faced with the danger of the strike spreading beyond its control, the Kartal branch management announced an end to the strike in exchange

for the promise of an "additional protocol" in January or February and no dismissals.

This was an attempt to defuse workers' anger and prevent the strike from spreading to other municipalities.

The union leaders signed an agreement that imposed a daily gross wage of 1,430 Turkish Liras (TL) (US\$42), whereas their own proposal was for a daily gross wage of 1,900 TL (US\$55). With this agreement, the workers' net monthly wages were only around 30,000 TL (US\$875). However, the workers wanted their wages to be 41,000 TL (US\$1,195) per month, as they had demanded in the draft.

Even the demanded figure meant that workers would continue to live in poverty in the midst of the ongoing cost of living crisis. According to the October report of the Türk-?? trade union confederation, the hunger threshold, meeting the minimum monthly food needs of a family of four, was 20,000 TL, while the poverty threshold was over 66,000 TL. According to the report of the CHP-run Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the cost of living for a family of four in Istanbul is 71,000 TL.

A worker told the newspaper *Evrensel*, "The CHP, which calls itself the opposition party, wants to implement the current government's policy on the minimum wage, we have a problem with this demand. The opposition party, which says 'the minimum wage should not be less than 30,000 liras', is trying to finish this job with a base of 30,000 in its own municipality".

Another worker said, "Our demand is a very reasonable demand. The wage we demand is far below the poverty line, but the municipality is trying to condemn us to the hunger line."

Criticizing the government, CHP leader Özgür Özel said in July, "The salary increase is based on the figures of TURKSTAT [Turkish Statistical Institute]. We are facing an open betrayal of the poor and low-income people in Turkey by a state institution." In reality the policy of

reducing real wages in the face of massive inflation is part of a ruling class offensive supported by the CHP and other bourgeois parties.

The reaction of the CHP to the strike shows that it is as much an enemy of the working class as the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This exposes not only the CHP, but also the pseudo-left parties and the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) which collaborated with it in the elections.

The Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P) had formed an unprincipled electoral alliance with the CHP. CHP leader Özel had explained this as follows: "We worked with T?P as follows. They did not nominate candidates in places where the CHP was running neck-and-neck and where there was a risk of losing."

In the face of the growing opposition of the workers, the trade union confederations of D?SK, Türk-?? and Hak-?? issued a joint press statement in the beginning of July demanding "an increase in the minimum wage" and "fairness in taxation". Following these statements, the trade union bureaucrats organised different regional rallies. The rally organised by Türk-?? in Ankara on October 20 was attended by more than 100,000 workers.

The sell-out contract signed by SODEM-SEN and Genel-?? against the demands of the workers of Kartal Municipality and the strikebreaking is only the latest incident that exposes the hypocrisy of the CHP and the trade unions. There is no doubt that similar conspiracies are being hatched against the workers for possible strikes in other municipalities. This is the result of the long transformation of the trade unions all over the world into extensions of the corporations and the state.

For decades, the trade unions affiliated to D?SK and other confederations have imposed a policy of impoverishment on the workers. This attack, which has escalated in the last few years, has led to growing resistance by workers, as in Kartal.

According to TURKSTAT data, annual inflation rose by 48.58 percent in October. According to the calculations of the independent Inflation Research Group (ENAG), the real annual inflation rate is 89.77 percent. Real wages have fallen dramatically as the government, public and private sectors set pay rises for workers and pensioners based on official inflation.

After refusing to raise the minimum wage in July, affecting millions of workers, the government is now preparing to raise it to a figure below the official inflation rate in January. Meanwhile, the huge profits of the banks

and big business continue to fuel inflation. Amid the escalation of war in the Middle East, the Erdoğan government is increasing military spending from 970 billion liras to 1.6 trillion liras (about US\$45 billion) in the 2025 budget.

Opposition within the working class to these attacks has reached the point of explosion. In 37 municipalities run by the CHP and AKP, collective bargaining negotiations have not been concluded because even the limited demands of nearly 50 thousand workers have been rejected by the trade unions.

Recently, thousands, including workers from Bornova, Buca and Bayraklı municipalities in Izmir; Mamak, Etimesgut and Çankaya municipalities in Ankara; Maltepe, Kartal, Avcılar, Kadıköy and Ataşehir municipalities in Istanbul, have protested for decent wages and working conditions.

The struggle of the municipal workers in Turkey is part of the international struggle of the working class, which is facing social attacks such as wage cuts and lay-offs everywhere. In Germany, Volkswagen, with the support of the trade unions, is preparing to close at least three factories, putting tens of thousands of workers out of work. In the US, 33,000 Boeing workers have been on strike for almost two months after twice rejecting a union-backed sell-out contract. In retaliation, the company has announced 17,000 job cuts. In both places, workers are continuing the struggle by forming rank-and-file committees that are part of the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The experience of the Kartal Municipality strike underlines the urgent need for workers to build grassroots committees to take control of their own struggles, independent of the unions. These committees will enable workers to coordinate and unite their strike and call on other sections of the working class to support them. We urge workers in municipalities preparing for strike action to contact us to set up a rank and file committee.



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