

Turkey: Workers occupy mines against privatisation as reaction to trade union sell-out contracts grows

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Turkey is witnessing important developments that challenge the decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the corporations and the state with the help of the trade unions.

The sell-out contracts signed by Genel-İş (affiliated to the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey/DİSK) in different municipalities of Istanbul and Izmir without consulting the workers have caused a big reaction from the grassroots.

Around 500 miners, opposing the decision to privatise the mining sites of Çayırhan Thermal Power Plant in Ankara's Nallıhan district, occupied the mine during the morning shift on Wednesday. Almost all the underground workers with subsequent shifts joined in. Another 1,300 surface workers are protesting in support of the now 800 miners 350 metres underground in temperatures of minus 5 degrees.

The eagerly awaited strike of the workers of the Kadıköy municipality in Istanbul, which is governed by the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), ended with a sell-out agreement signed by the Genel-İş trade union headquarters in a secret agreement with the CHP administration and without consulting the workers. Only one minute after the beginning of the strike, the workers received a phone message that an agreement had been reached.

Following the massive reaction of the workers, the elected General-İş Istanbul Anatolian Side Branch No. 1 management organised a press statement on Wednesday and announced their resignation.

Branch President Nazan Gevher Çam Ay, who read out the press statement, said: "The branch management, which represents the will of the workers, has once again been ignored in Kadıköy Municipality, as it has been several times in the last month. The free collective

agreement, which we prepared to protect our rights and to get our rights, has been reduced once again to miserable wages by the employer and the union with a framework agreement".

Ay continued: "... we demand the resignation of the Genel-İş headquarters, which has taken its cooperation with the employer to a new level. It has lost its meaning for us to be a branch of a trade union as they sit these chairs and ignore the will of the workers. We resign as the executive committee of Istanbul Anatolian Side Branch No. 1. We will continue to fight for the workers to get what they deserve and to achieve decent living and working conditions."

In the last month, in the districts of Kartal, Maltepe and Ataşehir in Istanbul and Buca in Izmir, the collective agreements between the CHP municipalities and Genel-İş were signed in a similar way despite the workers' determination to fight. The de facto strike of the workers of Kartal Municipality after the signing of a sell-out contract was suppressed with the promise of additional protocols, which is also a trick of the trade union.

This shows that the CHP is as anti-worker and willing to disregard basic democratic rights as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The Hizmet-İş trade union of the Hak-İş confederation played a similar role in the municipalities run by the AKP. Last month, a total of 27 municipalities in Istanbul, which are run by different bourgeois parties, imposed collective agreements that condemned the workers to miserable wages.

While the net salary in these municipalities is only around 30,000 Turkish Liras (TL) (870 USD), the poverty line for a family of four, calculated every month by the Türk-İş Confederation, has exceeded 66,000 TL (1,900 USD). According to the Istanbul Planning Agency (IPA),

which is affiliated to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality headed by Ekrem ?mamo?lu of the CHP, the cost of living for a family of four in Istanbul has exceeded 71,000 TL (2,050 USD).

Moreover, the cost of living continues to erode workers' wages and living standards by the day. In October, the official annual inflation rate was 48 percent, while the independent organisation ENAG calculated it at 89 percent.

The workers must learn the necessary lessons from these experiences, which are part of an international process. The trade unions, whether pro-government or pro-bourgeois opposition supported by the pseudo-left, serve the companies and the government against the interests of the working class.

Workers must build rank-and-file committees to wrest control of their struggle from the reactionary trade union apparatus and defend and advance their living conditions against the relentless capitalist offensive.

The same is true for the miners who are waging an inspiring struggle in Ankara. The record of the Turkish Mine Workers' Trade Union (Maden-??), which is currently fraudulently claiming to be on the side of the workers in the face of their militancy, is one of complicity with the corporations and the state against the working class. One of the catastrophic consequences of this was the Soma mine disaster in 2014, in which 301 miners were massacred.

This preventable disaster was the result of decades of increasing attacks by the ruling class, with the help of the trade unions, on workers' living and working conditions and the disregard for workers' safety for the sake of capitalist profit.

A month and a half ago, the privatisation of the coal mine in Ankara, where more than 2000 families earn their living, was on the agenda. The tender, which will be finalised on December 4, does not guarantee the existing rights of the workers and states that the workers' lodgings will be evacuated within four months.

Speaking to *Anka Haber*, 16-year mine worker Erdem Özkurt said, "In case of privatisation, the fear of all our colleagues is that they will waive their existing rights. And they will be left alone with dismissal. Some of our friends are staying in lodgings, they may be evicted from their lodgings."

?lker Uçar, who has worked for the same company for 14 years, said, "If this place is sold, we do not know what will happen next. We don't know under what conditions the new company will employ us".

Selçuk Kostak, another miner, commented, "Neither the fate of any worker in the future company is clear, nor whether we will be employed or not, nor what our salaries will be. We have 850 lodgings. According to the specifications it is written that these lodgings will be vacated within four months in case of transfer; where will 850 families go?"

As a result of privatisation, workers face the same risks of dismissal, wage cuts, loss of social rights and even increased risk of death and injury in precarious conditions as in other companies.

The Soma massacre is a terrible example of this. As it slashed coal-mining costs from \$140 to \$23.80 per ton over the decade after the privatization of the mine, Soma Kumur refused to buy standard security equipment to monitor methane gas levels. That equipment would have prevented the blast.

Behind this massacre were the government, which decided to privatise the company, the ministries, which carried out sloppy safety inspections despite successive accidents, and the trade union apparatus, which suppressed the workers' anger while sitting back and watching these developments.

The miners in Çay?rhan should form a rank-and-file committee to take the leadership of the struggle into their own hands and call on other sections of the working class, especially those in other mines, for their support. The miners will find reliable allies among other workers, as well as among the municipal workers and the physicians and health workers, who went on strike for three days this month and are preparing for a five-day strike in December.

Workers must also link these fights to international class struggles. The International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has been formed to bring together struggling workers in all workplaces, sectors and countries on this basis. We call on miners, municipal workers and other sections of the working class to contact us about setting up a rank-and-file committee to take the struggle forward independently of the trade union apparatus.



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