

As miners march to Ankara, the strike wave of textile workers in Gaziantep grows

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In Turkey, the cost of living, the efforts of the ruling class to suppress wages and the attacks on social rights, including privatisation, are forcing the working class to fight. In Gaziantep, below-inflation wage increases led to a wave of strikes in the textile factories, while the mine workers in Çay?rhan once again started a march to the centre of Ankara against privatisation.

In November, when the Ministry of Treasury and Finance launched a tender for the privatisation of the Çay?rhan Thermal Power Plant's mines in the Nall?han district of Ankara, some 800 workers occupied the mine and stayed 350 metres underground for days. Roughly 1,300 surface workers also demonstrated in support of their friends underground in temperatures of minus 5 degrees Celsius.

The tender was then postponed until March, after the miners had started a march to Ankara. The government was concerned that such an action could spark a nationwide labour struggle, when it was trying to drive down real wages.

The miners and power plant workers have started another march from Çay?rhan to the Privatisation Administration in Ankara to demand the cancellation of the privatisation tender. They oppose the privatisation on the grounds that there are no guarantees of existing workers' rights in the tender and that, as in previously privatised enterprises, they will face layoffs, wage cuts, loss of social rights and even an increased risk of death and injury in precarious conditions.

The workers must realise that, as in the previous privatisation experiences, appealing to the government is futile and the trade union apparatus is trying to prevent the workers' struggle from getting out of control. The workers of Çay?rhan should take matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees and call on other sections of the working

class, especially the miners.

The continuing cost of living crisis and the policy of reducing real wages has created enormous feelings of social opposition within the working class. The strike wave in Gaziantep testifies to the potential for the rapid development and expansion of workers' struggles.

In the last few days, workers in many workplaces, especially in textile factories, in the Ba?p?nar Organised Industrial Zone in Gaziantep have started protesting the imposition of wage increases below the inflation rate. Workers in this region have also organised multiple strikes and protests in recent years, for wages and social rights, facing arbitrary police obstructions, detentions and threats of dismissal.

Companies have announced that they will raise wages by 30 percent, in line with the government's minimum wage increase. In January, Turkey's official annual inflation rate was 42 percent, while ENAG, an independent research organisation, calculated annual inflation at 81 percent. In the first month of the year alone, prices increased by 5 percent according to official figures.

As a result of the protests, additional wage increases were granted at factories such as Ufuk Carpet, Barem Packaging and Ender Aluminium, while work stoppages continued at Çelikaslan, Yalç?n Karde?ler carpet factory and ?ireci Textile, one of the largest textile companies in the region. On Monday, the strike wave extended to the workers of Özkaplan, Bulut Synthetic and Kaplanser.

A worker from Çelikaslan told the *Evrensel* newspaper: "AKP deputy ?rfan Çelikaslan [one of the factory owners] has no right to keep so many workers waiting. If they are in such a great position, why don't they solve the problem? Mehmet Çelikaslan, another boss, is constantly threatening us. We get the lowest

wages in the market, we are forced to work on Sundays. We are not like humans”.

The struggles of the Çay?rhan miners and the textile workers in Gaziantep follow the strike movement that has developed in recent months, especially among metal and health workers.

In January, family doctors, midwives and nurses working in family health centres went on strike for five days against a new regulation which attacks their conditions and public health. In addition, all physicians and health workers across the country stopped working for one day. Family physicians and other health workers also walked out for three days in November and five days in December.

In December, Erdoğan tried to ban metal workers’ strikes by decree on the grounds that they were “disruptive to national security”, but the workers refused to back down and continued their strike.

On Monday, 183 metal workers at Chinatool Automotive in the industrial city of Gebze went on strike after failing to reach a collective agreement, while earlier strikes at Green Transfo and Kaynak Tekni?i (Lincoln Electric) continue.

Struggles for decent wages and working conditions in different sectors need to be united around a common programme of struggle. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) aims to unite struggling workers across workplaces, sectors and national borders. Contact us to set up a rank-and-file committee in your workplace and sector and take the struggle forward.



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