

Municipal workers must build rank-and-file committees to fight sell-out contract

23,000 workers on strike in Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Turkey

Bahadır Çelik
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On Thursday, May 29, 23,000 workers at the IZELMAN, IZENERJİ and EgeSehir companies of the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (İzBB), which is under the administration of the Republican People's Party (CHP), went on strike. Negotiations between the Social Democratic Public Employees' Union (SODEM-SEN), representing the municipality, and the Genel-İs union, affiliated with DISK, had failed to reach an agreement for nearly five months.

The municipal administration's latest wage increase offer was 29.16 percent, while the workers demanded a 60 percent increase. The workers are also demanding "equal pay for equal work," meaning that their salaries should be equal to other workers doing the same job in the municipality, and security workers should not be excluded from the collective agreement.

In recent years, workers in Turkey, as around the world, have suffered sharp losses in real wages and living standards due to the rising cost of living and the growing social offensive of the ruling class. In April 2025, the official annual consumer inflation rate of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) was 38 percent, while the independent organisation ENAG put it at 74 percent. In previous years, real inflation, as measured by ENAG, had long been above 100 percent.

CHP officials have launched a public smear campaign, claiming that the workers "do not appreciate our offer when the minimum wage is 22,000 lira." Commenting on the strike, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Cemil Tugay said that the workers' "demands are not reasonable given the current economic conditions and the municipal budget."

By implementing the government's policy of lowering real wages, the CHP shows that it is a bourgeois party as

hostile to the working class as the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). At the beginning of the year, when the government raised the minimum wage for 2025 by 30 percent, below the official inflation rate, and pensions by 15.75 percent, the CHP hypocritically condemned it.

"I call on the working class to use its power of productivity," said CHP leader Özgür Özel at the time. Speaking at his party's rally in Bursa last week, he said that "the minimum wage had eroded due to inflation during the first four months of the year" and that there should be an interim increase in the minimum wage. He added that his party's agenda for June would be an "interim increase" in the minimum wage, and that they would visit trade union confederations in this context. The minimum wage has only been raised once a year for some time now.

The rally in Bursa was one of a series organised in various provinces under the banner "The Nation Owns Its Will," following the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul's CHP mayor and presidential candidate, on corruption allegations. Following his detention, mass protests against the government erupted across the country, with the CHP taking the lead and reining in the movement. İmamoğlu, whose university diploma—a requirement for presidential candidacy—was cancelled before his arrest, is believed to have been eliminated from participation by the government on the basis of allegations that did not warrant arrest.

On the day the strike began, Özel met with his ally, the president of the DISK confederation, Arzu Cerkezoglu, and called for a union movement under their control: "We invite all workers who value themselves and their labour to organise in unions and become unionised. Unorganised

labour is exploited. If you are not unionised, you are condemned to the minimum wage. The more workers who are unionised, the further they move away from the minimum wage.”

These statements are completely hypocritical. The CHP imposes low wages on workers in municipalities under its administration, collaborating with the Genel-Is union, which is affiliated with DISK. Recently, strikes in many Istanbul, Bursa and Izmir municipalities have ended with sell-out contracts signed by union leaders behind the backs of workers.

In recent weeks, the BURULA? company, which is owned by Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, and the Demiryol-Is union signed a contract quickly after the workers went on strike. During the strike, Mustafa Bozbey, the CHP Mayor of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality, had dismissed the workers’ demands, which were based on the inflation rate, as “unaffordable.”

Over the past year, collective bargaining negotiations between SODEM-SEN, which represents CHP municipalities, and Genel-Is have resulted in sell-out contracts that disregard the determination of workers to fight and their demands.

The strike at Kartal Municipality in Istanbul ended on the fourth day when the Genel-Is trade union headquarters accepted a sell-out agreement without the knowledge of the workers and against their will. The workers wanted to continue the strike, but the union suppressed the struggle by promising an additional protocol.

Last-minute sell-out agreements were signed by Genel-Is headquarters in Istanbul’s Ata?ehir and Kad?köy municipalities. Following a massive reaction from workers, the elected management of the Genel-Is Istanbul Anatolian Side Branch No. 1 organised a press statement and announced its resignation.

The anti-working-class alliance of DISK/ Genel-Is and CHP administrations is not limited to sell-out contracts. While the Genel-Is management did not make any statement about the allegations that the CHP-ruled Besiktas Municipality received permission from the ministry to lay off 500 workers, it remained silent in the face of the dismissal of about 170 workers from the municipality. It also did not participate in the protest actions of the dismissed workers.

Workers in CHP-run municipalities, including Seyhan, Efeler, Maltepe, Besiktas, SiSli, Kadikoy, Edirne and Karabaglar, organised protests against late and partial salary payments. The Genel-Is bureaucracy attempted to control the workers’ reaction by organising perfunctory

demonstrations and preventing the protests from spreading to other municipalities.

In the face of a violent attack on their social conditions by the capitalist political establishment in collaboration with the trade union apparatus, workers’ democratic rights are under threat as well. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently announced that a strike ban in the municipal sector is also on the agenda, citing the piles of rubbish left behind by Besiktas Municipality workers who were not paid their wages and effectively stopped working.

Municipal workers in Izmir should learn the necessary lessons from these experiences. Resistance to the Erdogan government’s attack on social and democratic rights cannot be achieved by turning to the CHP—which represents the same ruling class and implements similar policies—or by relying on the union bureaucracy.

Workers all over the world are facing increasing attacks on their social conditions by the political establishment, which is seeking to transfer the social wealth they produce to a capitalist oligarchy for use in war preparations. Governments and local authorities are collaborating with the trade union apparatus to suppress class struggle and impose these attacks.

Against the onslaught of corporations and governments and union sabotage of their struggles, workers must unite across workplaces, industries and countries. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the organizing vehicle needed by the developing upsurge of the working class. We call on the municipality workers and other workers entering struggle to contact us and form such committees.



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