

600,000 public sector workers in Turkey oppose contract imposing wage cuts

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Negotiations are ongoing for the 2025–26 Public Framework Protocol (PFP), which sets out wage and benefit increases for over 600,000 public sector workers in Turkey. The wage increase offer of the Turkish Heavy Industry and Service Sector Public Employers Union (TUHIS), the official representative of the government and public employers in negotiations, is pushing workers into struggle as their real wages are eroding in the face of the rising cost of living.

TUHIS announced a 16 percent increase for the first six months. The Turk-Is and Hak-Is confederations officially demanded that the minimum daily wage be increased to 1,800 lira, followed by a 50 percent increase in the first six months and a 25 percent increase for the following six months. However, after meeting with union bureaucrats, TUHIS increased the raise for the first six months by only 1 percent, to 17 percent, which is an insult to workers. For the second six months, the pay rise was increased from 10 percent to 12 percent.

Workers' anger and opposition to the proposal is overwhelming. The pro-government Turk-Is confederation was therefore forced to announce an "action program." Accordingly, on June 26, workers did not work until noon. On July 3, protests will take place in front of the provincial offices of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). On July 8, workers will stay at their workplaces until morning, and on July 17 they will stop work for one day.

Defence industry workers, whose right to strike is legally restricted, organised mass protests in Eskisehir, Istanbul, Kayseri and Kocaeli. On Thursday, workers from the Istanbul Shipyard and the military sewing workshop broke through a police barricade and blocked

the E-5 (D100) highway during a march after work. Similar scenes were seen on Friday in Kocaeli, where workers from the Golcuk Naval Shipyard also blocked the D100 highway.

Public sector workers in Turkey, like other sections of the working class, are facing class warfare measures by the government, by municipalities under both the AKP and the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and by companies, aimed at suppressing wages and eliminating social benefits.

Public sector workers have been engaged in increasingly militant struggles despite the union bureaucracy, while private school teachers have been marching from Istanbul to Ankara since June 25 to demand basic wages and social rights. In Izmir, a city of 4.5 million people, 23,000 municipal workers went on strike for seven days at the end of May against the miserable contract imposed by the CHP municipal administration. In Izmir's Buca municipality, also run by the CHP, around 1,700 workers walked off the job in mid-June over their unpaid wages and other compensation. In both municipalities, workers fought against the strike-breaking municipal administration and the union bureaucracy.

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) announced the latest official annual inflation rate to be 35.41 percent. However, ENAG, an independent organisation, calculated this rate to be 73.88 percent. Previously, ENAG's calculation of the real annual inflation rate had remained above 100 percent for a long time.

The average wage for public sector workers is currently around 37,500 TL (Turkish lira), and a 17 percent raise would raise it to 43,875 TL. But this is not even half the average poverty line for a family of four. According to a study conducted by Turk-Is, as of June 2025, the total amount of necessary monthly expenses

(poverty line) for a family of four for food, clothing, housing (rent, electricity, water, fuel), transportation, education, health and similar needs is 85,065 TL.

In a statement to *Evrensel*, a worker at the State Hydraulic Works reacted to the government's offer as follows: "We don't demand much. In the previous periods, we were getting a salary at the poverty line. Now it is a little above the hunger line, a little above the minimum wage. We want it to be at least at the poverty line."

According to data reported by writer Erhan Bilgin, who commented on the Istanbul Chamber of Industry 500 company statistics on *Evrensel*, the decline in the wages of public sector workers in the last five years is only comparable to the decline after the NATO-backed military coup in 1980. The post-coup capitalist assault on social and economic rights led to a general strike by public sector workers in 1989, and wages in the public sector peaked in 1993 following these struggles. According to the data, the wages of public sector workers have fallen to one third of what they were in 1993 (in terms of purchasing power), and have almost halved under the Erdogan governments since 2002.

While the working class is in economic decline, social resources are being transferred to corporations, banks and militarism. According to the 2025 Global Wealth Report published by Switzerland-based UBS, Turkey stood out last year as the country with the largest increase in the number of US dollar millionaires. Turkey had 7,000 new dollar millionaires in 2024, the highest increase worldwide with a rate of 8.4 percent.

This has only been possible by increasing the exploitation of the working class and clawing back its social conditions. According to the Gini coefficient of wealth inequality cited in the same report, Turkey ranks ninth in the world, with a value of 0.73 by 2024.

The social attack on the working class is inextricably linked to militarism and war. At the last NATO summit in The Hague, leaders agreed to increase defense spending to 5 percent of GDP. Erdogan emphasized his commitment to this target, saying, "In fact, we are one of the countries closest to reaching 5 percent." This foreshadows continuing attacks on the working class.

In 2024, Turkey's defense spending to GDP ratio was 2.09 percent. Turkey's current defense budget is 800 billion TL; in order to increase spending to 5 percent,

an additional 1.5 trillion TL would need to be allocated to defense. This would mean further cuts in social spending and a further increase in taxes, which are mainly collected from working people.

The government's social austerity program is also increasing unemployment. According to the DISK Research Center's unemployment report, the number of broadly defined unemployed increased by 2.5 million in the last year to 12.6 million. This is the second worst figure in the past 137 months (more than 11 years). Broadly defined unemployment has been hovering above 30 percent for the last two months.

Attacks on workers' wages and social rights, the transfer of wealth to the oligarchy, and the diversion of public funds to militarism are worldwide phenomena. This trend has accelerated in the US since Trump returned to power and goes hand in hand with attacks on democratic rights everywhere. However, the same capitalist crisis that gives rise to these attacks also provides an objective basis for growing opposition and resistance among the working class and young people.

The critical issue in all these struggles is political leadership and perspective. The parties of the capitalist order, whether pro-government or "opposition," and their associated trade union apparatuses, direct the struggle for wages and social conditions and against genocide, imperialist war and dictatorship into the dead-end channels of the existing socioeconomic and political system.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group) calls on public sector workers and other sections of workers and youth who have entered the struggle, to reject this political yoke imposed on them and to build their own parties and organizations based on an international socialist program. This means fighting for the building of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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