

Hundreds of thousands of public sector workers in Turkey strike against the government's miserly wage offer

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While 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, hundreds of thousands of workers who are members of unions affiliated with the Türk-?? confederation staged a one-day “work stoppage” on Thursday.

This was the first work stoppage of this magnitude since the general strike on January 3, 1991, and it affected state institutions and organisations including railways, highways, mines, power plants, ministries, universities, and hospitals. Türk-?? General President Ergün Atalay made it clear the bureaucracy did not want this to happen, but announced that they would be forced to go on strike officially on August 26 if no agreement could be reached.

This action followed Monday’s “stay-in” protest. Unions affiliated with the Hak-?? confederation did not participate in the work stoppage. According to a statement by its President Mahmut Arslan, approximately 400,000 workers covered by the contract are members of unions affiliated with Hak-??.

Participation in the strike reportedly reached 100 percent on the railways in cities such as Istanbul, Kayseri, Sakarya, and Izmir. It was also reported that production had come to a halt at the Adapazar? Wagon Factory of Turkish Rail Vehicle Industry Inc. (TÜRASA?), while the strike by locomotive engineers working on the Marmaray in Istanbul caused disruptions in services throughout the day; it was also said that Pendik-Ataköy services were not operating. Approximately 600,000 people use the Marmaray daily.

In a statement issued by Marmaray, which is under the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, it was claimed that the disruptions in service were due to “general maintenance,” and the work stoppage was portrayed as insignificant, even non-existent.

Prior to the planned work stoppage at the Turkish Coal Mining Corporation (TTK), an announcement signed by the Deputy Director of the Corporation stated that the action

constituted an “illegal strike” and threatened workers with penalties.

State hospital workers in many provinces, including Istanbul, Izmir, Kayseri and Kocaeli, staged protests against the government’s pay proposal.

A healthcare worker in Kayseri told *Evrensel*: “The wage increase offered by the government is very low. Prices continue to rise every day at the market and for many other items. During the pandemic, I couldn’t hug my children and had to work day and night. Today, we need to take action to have this meagre pay rise withdrawn. We will continue to fight for our rights until they are granted.”

University workers also joined the walkout, and a protest march was held at Istanbul University. Defence industry workers were unable to participate in the action due to a ban on strikes in the sector.

Turkish Heavy Industry and Service Sector Public Employers Union (TÜH?S), the official representative of the government and public employers in negotiations, proposed a raise for the first six months of 17 percent, for the second six months of 10 percent. Following the strike action, during the third round of negotiations held on Friday, July 18, TÜH?S increased its offer to 24 percent for the first six months. For the subsequent six months, an increase in line with the inflation rate was proposed.

Workers are demanding a minimum daily wage of 1,800 lira, followed by a 50 percent increase in wages for the first six months, and a further 25 per cent increase for the following six months. The government’s proposals for wage increases mean that workers will continue to become poorer in real terms in the face of rising living costs.

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) announced the latest official annual inflation rate to be 35 percent. However, ENAG, an independent organisation, calculated the rate to be 68 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 24 percent raise would raise it to 46,500 TL. But this is barely half the average poverty line for a family of four. According to a study conducted by Türk-İş, 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.

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

The government is using the excuse of fighting inflation and the budget deficit to justify its policy of suppressing wages. It is telling workers that increasing wages without improving these areas would be pointless.

According to a report in the *Türkiye Gazetesi*, some AKP MPs asked the Minister of Treasury and Finance, Mehmet Şimşek, whether it would be possible to increase the minimum wage every six months, as is done with civil servant salaries.

Mr Şimşek responded: “Any increases made without striking a balance between the budget deficit, the current account deficit and the fight against inflation will be temporary. We are prioritising more fundamental solutions. Otherwise, we could implement these increases, but without resolving the underlying issues, they would quickly disappear. Once we bring inflation under control, we will have reset the system.”

Şimşek did not explain why the same standard was not applied to MPs and ministers. Automatic pay rises in July increased MPs’ salaries to 229,000 lira and ministers’ salaries to 235,000 lira. Meanwhile, Erdoğan’s salary reached 252,000 lira. This means that Şimşek’s salary is 10.6 times higher than the minimum wage, while Erdoğan’s is 11.4 times higher.

The severe austerity measures and intensified exploitation program imposed on millions of workers and retirees in the public and private sectors aims to enrich the capitalist oligarchy, aided by tax amnesties and incentives, and to finance militarism.

In 2024, Turkey, whose defence spending accounts for 2 percent of GDP (800 billion Turkish liras), will need to allocate an additional 1.5 trillion Turkish liras from its budget to increase its spending to 5 percent in line with its NATO commitment. This would mean further cuts in social spending and a further increase in taxes, which are mainly

collected from working people.

Evaluating the third offer on Friday, Türk-İş Deputy Chairman and Yol-İş Union President Ramazan Aşar said, “There has been progress, and negotiations will continue toward a wage befitting the dignity of public workers. Our negotiations on issues in the sector will continue next Monday... We hope that the negotiations will continue and be resolved next week,” signalling a sell-out contract.

However, among workers who have endured decades of the unions’ suppression of class struggle and an intensifying austerity offensive in recent years, there is a growing sense that things are no longer bearable.

A railway worker from Kayseri conveyed the radical mood among workers to the *Evrensel* newspaper: “This president [Türk-İş President Atalay] will sell us out again. They always play the same scenario. But this time, we railway workers will not sign without our approval. This time we are alert. Whatever they’re waiting for, with society in such a tight spot, they’ll call a general strike and bring down Erdoğan’s government.”

The struggle of public sector workers is part of the growing struggle of the working class, both in Turkey and internationally, for decent wages and social conditions in the face of escalating capitalist attacks. This struggle is directed not only against capitalist governments and companies, but also against the union bureaucracies that collaborate with them.

In order to advance their struggle, workers must establish rank-and-file committees independent of the trade union apparatus in every workplace and adopt an international counter-offensive strategy against capitalism. In the face of attempts by the union bureaucracy to prevent effective strikes, divide and suppress the struggle, and impose sell-out contracts, it is only such committees that can unite workers’ collective power and mobilise them.

Unlike nationalist union bureaucracies, these committees will call to public sector workers in Turkey and around the world, as well as workers in other sectors, and will put forward an international line of struggle. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the organising vehicle needed by the developing movement of the working class. We call on the public sector workers and other workers entering struggle to contact us and form such a committee.



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