Anger erupts as strike by 2,100 miners in Turkey is effectively banned

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1 August 2025

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an has issued a decree postponing for 60 days the strike by 2,100 miners scheduled to begin on Friday August 1, on the grounds that it would be “disruptive to national security”.

The strikes were due to start at Eti Maden facilities in the provinces of Ankara, Eski?ehir, Kütahya and Bal?kesir, and on August 8 at the headquarters of Turkish Coal Enterprises. They were organised by trade unions affiliated with the Türk-?? confederation amid collective bargaining negotiations between public sector workers and the government.

The strike is effectively banned by the government—which in this case is also the workers’ employer. According to the Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining Law, strikes cannot be restarted after a postponement of 60 days. If no agreement is reached during this period, the contract will be determined by the High Arbitration Board (YHK), which is controlled by employer and government representatives.

The ban came amid mounting class and international tensions. The working class is becoming increasingly impoverished due to rising living costs. Fundamental democratic rights are under attack, and war is intensifying in the Middle East.

In Turkey, negotiations on the 2025-2026 Public Framework Protocol, which sets out wage and benefit increases for over 600,000 public sector workers in Turkey, has continued between the Turkish Heavy Industry and Service Sector Public Employers Union (TÜH?S), representing the government, and Türk-?? and Hak-??, representing the workers’ unions.

At the third meeting held on Friday, July 18, TÜH?S raised its offer to 24 percent for the first six months and an increase in line with inflation for the following six months. This means that workers will continue to become poorer in real terms in the face of rising living costs. The corporatist union bureaucracy, which has imposed government offers on workers and helped suppress the class struggle during contract periods for decades, is afraid that the rapid acceptance of a sell-out agreement could trigger a militant workers’ movement.

Therefore, Türk-?? was forced to organise a work stoppage protest on July 17. This strike affected state institutions and organisations including railways, highways, mines, power plants, ministries, universities, and hospitals. It was the first work stoppage of this magnitude undertaken by Türk-?? since the general strike on January 3, 1991.

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. ENAG’s calculation of the real annual inflation rate had remained above 100 percent for a long time.

Many public enterprises have not yet been banned from striking by the government, and strike notices continue to be posted.

On 2 August, it was announced that strikes would begin at the Turkish Coal Enterprise and the Mining Research and Exploration Agency mines. Although no date has been specified, a strike notice has been posted at the General Directorate of Highways and strikes are planned to take place at almost 500 of the company’s sites. Another strike is expected to begin at Middle East Technical University on 7 August. Strike notices have begun to appear at State Water Works facilities.

Before the strikes began, the unions had hoped that the government would offer more in its fourth proposal, and were preparing to push the sellout contract on the workers. However, the government surprised the union bureaucrats by maintaining the initial six-month pay rise at 24 percent in its fourth proposal on Tuesday, and by withdrawing its offer to increase wages in line with the inflation rate for the subsequent six months.

Under the new proposal, TÜH?S offered increases of 11 percent, 10 percent and 6 percent for the second, third and fourth six-month periods respectively.

In response to this open challenge, the Türk-?? bureaucracy held a press conference on Wednesday in an attempt to calm the growing anger of workers and quell demands for a strike. Turk-?? General President Ergün Atalay presented the documents of the government's withdrawn offer. According to these documents, which bear the signature and handwriting of Labor and Social Security Minister Vedat I??khan, a 24 percent wage increase was proposed for the first six months, and for the second six months, an increase based on the actual inflation rate, which was 16.67 percent.

On Thursday evening, Atalay met with Vice President Cevdet Y?lmaz and signalled that he would sign a sell-out agreement at a rate significantly lower than the workers' demands. He said "We exceeded the 11 percent target for the second half of 2025, but did not reach 16.67 percent. The offer is not 100 percent positive, but it appears to be close."

However, 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 percent increase for the following six months.

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. The decline in the wages of public sector workers over the past five years is comparable only to that which followed the violent social offensive implemented after the military coup backed by NATO on 12 September 1980.

The government's withdrawal of its wage offer, the banning of the Eti Maden strikes, and the complicity of the trade union apparatus indicate that the bourgeoisie's attack on the living conditions of the working class, particularly wages, will intensify.

The government's claim that it lacks the resources to increase wages is a lie. It is pursuing class warfare against the vast majority of the population, including the working class and retirees, in order to transfer resources to the banks, large corporations, and military spending.

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.

Erdo?an's ban on the strike on the grounds of "national security" reveals that "national security" and "national interests" refer to the interests of the ruling class. It demonstrates the connection between the Turkish bourgeoisie's preparations for war in the Middle East, its militarist agenda and its war against workers.

Since coming to power in 2002, Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has issued at least 22 strike postponement decrees, effectively banning over 200,000 workers from striking. If strikes continue, it is highly likely that the government will ban them in the coming period, and that the bourgeois state's repressive apparatus will be used against workers.

Last week, workers at the nuclear power plant construction site in Akkuyu, Mersin, protested against their working conditions and months of unpaid wages, while gendarmes attacked them with water cannon vehicles and batons. The workers' attempts to repel the attack and their resistance are evidence of a growing militant spirit.

Public sector workers must prepare for upcoming strikes and the government's attacks on democratic rights, particularly the right to strike and protest. This requires building rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy, engaging in struggle, including going on wildcat strikes for common demands, and reaching out to other sections of the working class in Turkey and internationally.

The International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees provides the organisational tool necessary to unite and advance the growing movement of workers around the world in opposition to the union bureaucracy. Contact us for help establishing a rank-and-file committee in your workplace.

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