

Wildcat strikes erupt among thousands of municipality workers in Turkey

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Workers at Buca Şmar ve ŞnŞaat Sanayi Teknik Hizmetler AŞ (BUCAMAR), a subsidiary of the Buca Municipality in İzmir run by the Republican People's Party (CHP), occupied the municipal building on Tuesday after not receiving their salaries for approximately three months. The İzmir Branch No. 6 of the Genel-ŞŞ trade union, affiliated with the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DŞSK), of which the workers are members, stated that approximately 1,800 workers have receivables worth at least 200,000 Turkish lira each.

Workers at Merbel AŞ, a subsidiary of the CHP-run Konak Municipality in İzmir, went on a work stoppage on Wednesday over months of unpaid wages and collective bargaining receivables. At the CHP-run KarŞŞyaka Municipality, where workers have been staging protests for over a month due to unpaid wages, 1,780 workers went on wildcat strike on Wednesday.

KarŞŞyaka Municipality workers staged a protest on Tuesday. Speaking to *Evrensel* during the protest, one worker said, "I couldn't even buy my child a school bag. I'm living on credit because my salary hasn't been paid."

Buca Municipality workers have been staging various protests, including walkouts, for months due to irregular salary payments and accumulated receivables. Despite promises made by Mayor GŞrkem Duman, the workers' receivables have not been paid. When it was announced during a meeting with the mayor on Tuesday that only a partial payment would be made, the workers occupied the municipal building. The workers are demanding immediate payment of at least two months' salaries.

DeŞer YŞldŞz, Chair of the İzmir Branch No. 6 of the Genel-ŞŞ Trade Union, made a statement in front of the Buca Municipality Building, saying: "Our fellow

workers have not been paid their wages properly for about three months, and in some cases, not at all. At the same time, the six months of payments due under the Collective Bargaining Agreement, which should have been paid about a year ago, have not been paid."

In addition to İzmir, municipalities in Istanbul and across the country are mired in debt, and workers' wages and social rights are increasingly being targeted. Municipal workers cannot rely on either the union apparatus, which has repeatedly sold them out, or the promises of CHP-run municipalities, which have proven to be just as hostile to workers as those run by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

In 2024 and 2025, numerous collective bargaining processes between the Social Democratic Public Employers' Union (SODEM-SEN), representing CHP-run municipalities, and the Genel-ŞŞ union resulted in sell-out agreements that disregarded workers' demands and their determination to fight for them.

The strike by 23,000 workers employed by ŞZELMAN, ŞZENERJŞ, and EgeŞehir, subsidiaries of the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality (ŞzBB) under CHP governance, which began on May 29, was a prime example of this. The strike ended on its seventh day with an agreement imposed on the workers without their consent, and no gains were secured for the workers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* stated the following after the İzmir strike: "Another important lesson that workers should take away from the İzmir strike is that trade union leaders cannot be trusted, no matter how sharp their rhetoric."

This warning is still valid today for the struggles of municipal workers in Buca, Konak, KarŞŞyaka, and elsewhere. The way forward lies in workers organizing independently in their own interests against capitalism

and on the basis of an international strategy. Workers must take matters into their own hands and build rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy to fight back against the austerity attacks of corporations and political institutions.

Following Mehmet Şimşek's appointment as Minister of Treasury and Finance in 2023, the high interest rates imposed to supposedly "curb inflation" further enriched the wealthiest segments of society while increasing the debt burden of the state and municipalities. After two years, there has been no significant decline in inflation, while the real wages of workers and retirees have fallen. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) announced the latest official annual inflation rate as 33 percent. ENAG, an independent organization, calculated this rate as 65 percent.

The government declared war on the working class by raising the minimum wage below the official inflation rate at the beginning of the year, followed by social attacks on public sector workers during the summer months. The salaries of both 600,000 public sector workers and nearly 4 million public employees and 2.5 million retirees were once again crushed by inflation, with the cooperation of trade union confederations.

The CHP strictly implements Şimşek's policies in municipalities where it governs. Targeting workers' wages and receivables, and widespread layoffs, are part of this.

The severe austerity measures and intensified exploitation imposed on millions of workers and retirees in the public and private sectors are aimed at enriching the capitalist oligarchy, aided by tax amnesties and incentives, and at financing militarism. The cost of the Turkish ruling class's military spending to pursue its reactionary interests in the Middle East is being paid for by attacks on workers' social conditions.

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.

The intensifying class war against the working class is closely linked not only to militarism but also to the construction of a presidential dictatorship. The wave of

strikes in Izmir is taking place under conditions where the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is escalating its attacks on the CHP and fundamental democratic rights.

Workers who are fighting for their wages and social rights must also raise their voices against this anti-democratic oppression. Because the construction of an authoritarian regime targets the working class above all else. And a democratic regime based on social equality can only be established through the independent political mobilization of the working class and its seizure of power.



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