

Erdo?an government escalates the class war over minimum wage

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The Minimum Wage Determination Commission will start working this week on setting the 2026 minimum wage, which affects millions of workers' families in Turkey.

The minimum wage has become the main front in the war waged by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government against the working class, in line with the demands of financial capital. Faced with growing discontent over rising living costs and the insistence of companies and the government on suppressing wages, the maneuvering space for union bureaucracy is shrinking. It is trying to conceal its complicity and keep workers under control.

In Turkey, the decline in real wages with trade union cooperation has narrowed the gap between the minimum wage and the average wage. According to a report prepared by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (D?SK), the average wage was 2.25 times the minimum wage in 2012 but fell to 1.56 times in 2022.

The gross minimum wage, which was 80.6 percent of per capita GDP in 1974, fell to 43.6 percent in 2025. According to the same report, 11.2 million workers in Turkey (62.5 percent of the workforce) earn wages that are 20 percent above or below the minimum wage. Other wages, as well as unemployment benefits and many other social benefits, also fluctuate in line with the minimum wage. This decline in the living standards of the working class and growing social inequality in Turkey is mirrored worldwide over the past half-century.

As of November, the official annual inflation rate in Turkey was 31.07 percent, while ENAG, an independent research organization, calculated annual inflation at 56.82 percent. Turkey ranks first in inflation among European, OECD, and G20 countries.

According to Eurostat data for 2025, Turkey ranks 25th among 30 European countries in terms of the lowest minimum wage.

In previous years, the government increased the minimum wage by the official inflation rate or a few points above it, and workers suffered a loss equal to the difference between real inflation and official inflation. However, following the 2023 presidential elections the offensive intensified with the appointment of Mehmet ?im?ek as Minister of Treasury and Finance to impose the severe austerity program demanded by international and domestic financial capital. Increases are now based on the target inflation rate rather than the actual official inflation rate. This has exacerbated the real wage loss.

In 2024, while official inflation reached 44.38 percent, the government only increased the minimum wage by 30 percent. Despite high inflation over the past two years, no interim increase to the minimum wage was implemented in July. An increase below the official inflation rate is also planned for the coming year. Various banks are announcing how much they want the minimum wage to increase under the guise of a "forecast." HSBC announced that it expects a 20 percent increase. Last year's rate was also dictated by financial capital.

The government and capitalist oligarchy are waging war on workers' living conditions, claiming that wage increases fuel inflation. In reality, inflation is driven by rising budget deficits, interest payments, military spending, and corporate profits. Last year, while official inflation rose by 44 percent and the minimum wage increased by 30 percent, the budget allocated to the defense and security sector was increased by 80 percent.

The reason the government is suppressing wages is to offer capitalists, who are under global competitive

pressure, a cheap labor market with high rates of exploitation. A recent article on the *World Socialist Web Site* drew attention to the shift of production in Turkey “to Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) in Egypt, where the minimum wage is less than one-third of that in Turkey (the monthly minimum wage in Egypt is approximately \$150, while in Turkey it is \$520).”

The largest trade union confederation, Türk-İş, did not attend the signing ceremony last year out of concern for restoring its reputation and calming public anger following the minimum wage increase, and announced that it would no longer participate in the commission. Türk-İş President Ergün Atalay stated, “We have been in an unfair commission for 50 years.”

The 15-member commission includes five representatives from employer union (TİSK), five representatives from the largest labor union confederation (Türk-İş), and five government representatives. The votes of the government and employer representatives are sufficient to determine the minimum wage. The government made a proposal to Türk-İş on Monday to continue this charade. Labor and Social Security Minister Vedat Işıkhan proposed reducing the number of government representatives from five to one during his meeting with Atalay.

The second largest confederation, the pro-government Hak-İş, proposed that the commission consist of 15 members: 7 “worker representatives,” 7 employer representatives, and 1 independent chairperson. It was requested that other confederations (Hak-İş and DİSK) join the commission alongside Türk-İş.

The “opposition” DİSK, meanwhile, proposed at a press conference on Monday that the minimum wage be indexed to at least 60 percent of per capita GDP. According to this, DİSK’s minimum wage demand for 2026 amounts to approximately 40,000 Turkish Liras (TL). According to Türk-İş’s November calculations, the poverty line for a family of four has risen to 97,000 TL per month, meaning that even a household with two workers cannot reach the poverty line. Moreover, neither DİSK nor other confederations will do anything to seriously mobilize their members for even a 40,000 TL demand.

Whether pro-government or opposition, the common concern of the union apparatus is not low wages but of the growing anger among the working class spiraling out of their control.

Although they will issue various calls for protest, as they did last year, this will stem from an effort to control the growing opposition of the working class and preserve their reputation. The demands they put forward at press conferences or token actions are empty calls, begging the government. Far from raising questions about how the working class will fight for these demands to be met, they serve to suppress these questions.

Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal advocates in its program for “automatic adjustment of wages in line with inflation” and “reduction of working hours with no loss of pay.” To realize these demands, which require mass mobilization, workers must take matters into their own hands, build rank-and-file committees independent of the trade union bureaucracy, and combine the struggle for better wages and living conditions with the struggle for workers’ power based on social needs rather than private profit.



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