

Turkish metalworkers must prepare rank-and-file committee led strike against wage misery!

Hakan Özal
26 December 2025

The sector-wide collective bargaining negotiations between the unions Türk Metal, Birleşik Metal and Özçelik and Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries (MESS) for the 2025–2027 period ended without agreement on December 8. In the contract struggle covering more than 150,000 workers at over 200 workplaces there is widespread anger and determination among metalworkers to fight MESS's imposed misery-level wage offer.

In the MESS group agreement negotiations, workers face global firms and Türkiye's largest industrial corporations: in the automotive sector Tofaş (Stellantis), Renault, Ford, Mercedes and Man; and in white goods and electronics Arçelik, Bosch and Siemens.

MESS's latest offer is only a 10 percent wage increase for the first six months, below even the six-month official inflation rate (13 percent). MESS has offered no increase rates for subsequent periods, while seeking to extend the contract duration to three years and cut bonuses and health benefits.

Given MESS's significant weight in Turkish economy and politics, this offer is an escalation of the attack on workers' living and working conditions. MESS's imposed misery contract is closely linked to the Erdoğan government's decision Thursday to raise the 2026 minimum wage by only 27 percent to 28,075 Turkish Liras (650 USD) leaving it below the "hunger threshold."

The 2026 budget adopted in recent days deepens austerity under the rhetoric of "fiscal discipline." While military and security spending are sharply increased and social expenditures cut, tax amnesties are extended to companies, massive interest payments are made to a

tiny financial oligarchy, and budget deficits are loaded onto workers' shoulders. Meanwhile, real wages for workers and retirees are being driven down to meet the demands of international monopolies and preserve the competitiveness of the domestic bourgeoisie.

The escalating offensive on wages, jobs and working conditions is the ruling class's response to the global crisis of the capitalist system. From imperialist centres to the rest of the world, governments serving a financial oligarchy are implementing the same programme: social devastation imposed on the working class to finance preparations for war and to transfer wealth upward. Resistance is growing within the international working class.

The determination of metalworkers to fight found expression in the mass rally organised by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK) in Gebze, Kocaeli, on December 21. DİSK leaders also held a march from Istanbul to Ankara on Sunday under the slogan "justice in income and tax."

Yet the attitude of DİSK's leadership should not mislead workers. Like the other confederations, the DİSK apparatus is not mobilising its membership for genuine mass resistance against the Erdoğan government's intensifying austerity program; rather, it engages in covert cooperation with the government and seeks to placate workers' opposition with token actions.

The chants heard at the rally—"We don't want a misery wage," "Occupation, strike, resistance," and "Factories will be MESS's grave!"—and the enthusiastic turnout of metalworkers reflected their readiness to confront MESS and any government attempt to impose a strike ban. While not yet formally

announced, officials of Birleşik Metal, affiliated with DİSK, told the rally they would initiate a strike process in mid-January.

Due to opposition from rank-and-file workers, no union was able to sign the contract imposed by MESS. Türk Metal, affiliated with Türk-İş and representing more than 140,000 workers in the negotiations, has not even announced a token strike decision. The Türk Metal bureaucracy staged symbolic protests—leaving black wreaths at MESS offices and banging cutlery on tables—but these actions aim more to control workers' anger than to force companies to improve their offers.

Workers have staged effective warning actions at many factories. As of 16 December, mass marches were held at shift entries and exits at TOFAŞ, Renault, Ford Otosan, Arçelik and other major metal-sector workplaces; applause protests took place in canteens and shuttle areas.

Birleşik Metal, representing roughly 11,000 workers in the negotiations, organised one-hour work stoppages at MESS member workplaces on December 18 and 25.

To advance their struggle, metalworkers must draw lessons from past experiences and seize the initiative.

During the 2015 rank-and-file uprising known as the “Metal Storm,” about 20,000 workers defied Türk Metal's betrayals, occupied major factories such as Ford, Renault and TOFAŞ, formed their own action committees and mounted a wave of resignations from the union. In those workplaces where Birleşik Metal had authority, the union prevented solidarity strikes.

In the 2023–2025 group bargaining struggle, not only Birleşik Metal but also Türk Metal were compelled to announce strike decisions to contain pressure from the factory floor. Yet both unions signed sell-out contracts a day before the announced strike dates, sparking eruptions of anger at many factories.

At the end of 2024, when Birleşik Metal and MESS failed to agree on a contract covering Hitachi, GE Grid Solutions and Schneider Electric, the government responded with a decree of “postponement”—in effect a ban. In defiance, some 2,000 workers at dozens of factories continued to carry out strikes in practice.

Metalworkers have seen firsthand the betrayals of previous contract periods and the unions' fear of a

strike that might slip beyond their control. Today every union is attempting to buy time in the hope of forcing through a new sell-out deal with only a minimal improvement in wages.

This is an international phenomenon. Rising rank-and-file opposition to IG Metall's agreements that have approved wage erosion and layoffs in Germany's auto and metal sectors—and the strengthening search for independent worker initiatives and rank and file committees at Bosch, Mercedes and Volkswagen—make clear that union bureaucracies' function of containing working class struggle within the system is coming under strain.

Globally, trade union apparatuses serve to suppress workers' struggles in line with corporate needs under the guise of “competitiveness.” In response, workers face the task of taking their struggles out of the hands of union bureaucracies and reorganizing them from the rank-and-file based on an international strategy.

The International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) was founded to respond to this need worldwide. It is being built as an instrument of international unity and struggle of workers in the metal sector and beyond against companies, their governments and the trade-union bureaucracies that serve them. We call on metalworkers who agree with this perspective to contact us to build rank-and-file committees.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact