Turkish unions call weekend rallies as anger over poverty, war and corruption mounts

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A rally will be held on November 29 in Istanbul's Kartal Square under the slogan "For a humane life, against corruption, poverty and imperialist war policies."

The joint call, signed by more than 100 unions, parties and associations, demands "justice in taxation and income, a minimum wage that allows a humane life and a fair pension." It also calls for "the removal of obstacles to union organizing, the prevention of occupational murders, an end to violence against women and femicides, and Türkiye's return to the Istanbul Convention."

The rally has been called by 14 unions affiliated with the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye (D?SK). D?SK itself, together with the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK), the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), will hold a separate rally at Tando?an Square in Ankara on December 12.

Growing opposition within the working class to poverty, social inequality and war has produced a de facto split within D?SK. At the same time, it has forced the unions and confederations to call one-day protests. But if this anger remains confined within the limits of one-day protests, it will achieve nothing.

According to official figures, annual inflation stood at 29.77 percent in October. The independent Inflation Research Group (ENAG) puts it at 45.12 percent. According to calculations by the pro-government Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-??), the hunger line for a family of four stood at 38,024 lira in October, and the poverty line at 123,856 lira. The net minimum wage of 28,075 lira, unchanged since January, is 9,949 lira below the hunger line. According to the Wage Loss Monitoring Report of the D?SK Research Center (D?SK-AR), the purchasing power of the minimum wage fell by 7,726 lira in the first ten months of the year. The minimum pension, received by millions of retirees, stands at just 23,552 lira.

Low wages are accompanied by rising unemployment. According to D?SK-AR, the number of unemployed under the broad definition rose to 12,577,000 in the July–September 2026 period, pushing the broadly defined unemployment rate to 30.9 percent. Those who do find work face death every day as companies drive to cut costs and increase output. According to the Health and Safety Labour Watch (?S?G), at least 1,930 workers lost their lives in occupational murders in the first ten months of the year. The massacre at the HABA? steel plant on November 9, which killed 19 workers, was only the latest major link in this chain of workplace killings.

The 2027 budget shows where social resources are being channelled. Of the planned 27.3 trillion lira in spending, 3.98 trillion has been allocated to interest payments and 3.45 trillion to defense and internal security. A 229 percent increase in weapons purchases is projected. Some 45 percent of tax revenues come from value-added tax (VAT) and the special consumption tax (ÖTV), which hit the poorest hardest. At least 60 percent of income tax is deducted directly from wages.

While the working class is being impoverished, immense wealth is accumulating at the other pole. This vast social inequality is the basis for the destruction of what remains of Türkiye's extremely limited bourgeois democracy. According to 2024 data from the World Inequality Database, the richest 1 percent of the population held 31.7 percent of total wealth, and the richest 10 percent held 65.6 percent. The bottom 90 percent held only 34.4 percent. According to the latest figures from the European Statistical Office (Eurostat), Türkiye, with a Gini coefficient of 43.9, is among the countries with the highest income inequality of the 34 European countries examined.

According to the list published by Forbes in March, the combined wealth of Türkiye's 43 dollar billionaires rose in a single year from $79.5 billion to $106 billion. A striking example of how this wealth was accumulated appeared on the same list. Emre Tezmen, founder and largest shareholder of Tera Yat?r?m and a newcomer to the list, was arrested in September in an investigation into investment fund fraud.

The fund scandal that erupted in September laid bare how this enrichment took place. Justice Minister Ak?n Gürlek announced that "illicit fund gains" of 187 billion lira had been identified. As of November 17, the investigation involved 498 suspects, 129 of whom are in detention. Yet this network, intertwined with the state, is being protected. Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, a former deputy chair of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), was released to house arrest on November 24 after only 19 days in detention.

The fund fraud, which directly affected some 450,000 people,

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has damaged the standing of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government, while the HABA? massacre has further intensified anger within the working class. The rally calls have also come amid ongoing workers' struggles in many sectors. Smart Solar workers in Alia?a, ?zmir, have been fighting for two months, and Volvac workers in Istanbul's Tuzla district for one month. Workers at Burgmann Packings, also in Tuzla, went on strike on October 30.

Under these circumstances, confederations such as Türk-??, Hak-??, and Kamu-Sen have not issued a single call for action. The November 29 and December 12 rallies, for their part, are the product of an effort to keep the pressure from below under control. In recent years, the D?SK leadership has become indistinguishable from the leaderships of Türk-?? and Hak-??. Amid growing social opposition and militancy, this has created the conditions for D?SK members and broader layers of the working class to move independently of the union apparatus. The calls for one-day actions are aimed precisely at reining in this tendency.

Fearing the growth of the de facto split within the confederation and a loss of control, the D?SK leadership was forced to call a rally for December 12. Both rallies are one-day events scheduled for weekends. Neither involves a work stoppage, mobilization in the workplaces or the use of the power that workers wield through production. The demands are presented as petitions to the government and parliament and as appeals for a change in policy.

In the brief call for the November 29 rally quoted above, "imperialist war policies" appears only in the slogan. What is offered is not the revolutionary socialist perspective that imperialist war is a product of the existing socioeconomic system and can be eliminated only together with it, but a futile politics of protest. Nor is there any mention of the fact that ending occupational murders, as well as the other demands couched in abstract terms such as "justice," "fair" and "humane," requires a frontal assault by the working class on the wealth and power of the capitalist oligarchy. Moreover, in the midst of the wave of strikes and mass struggles shaking Europe, there is not the slightest perspective of international struggle and unity.

The developing workers' movement in Europe and the role of the union apparatus hold important lessons. Following student and youth protests in France and Germany, nationwide strikes took place in Spain on November 11 and Italy on November 20. In France, a day of action was held on November 17. In Belgium, a national demonstration took place on November 23. In Greece, a nationwide strike was held on November 25 at the call of the Supreme Administration of Greek Civil Servants' Unions (ADEDY).

The union bureaucracies set different dates for these national actions across much of Europe. Everywhere they play a similar role: one-day strikes and actions are turned into instruments for containing anger, going through the motions and isolating struggles.

The causes driving workers and young people into struggle in Türkiye, in Europe and beyond are the same. They include mounting cuts to education, health care and social spending to finance imperialist war, state debt and interest payments; rising prices, a byproduct of NATO's war against Russia and the US-Israeli war against Iran; falling real wages; layoffs; the cultivation of fascist forces; and the accelerating turn toward dictatorship. Their global source is also the same: the capitalist profit system.

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the Socialist Equality Parties are intervening in this developing international movement of workers and youth with a clear perspective. This means building independent rank-and-file committees in factories, mines, ports, logistics hubs, schools and every workplace, and coordinating them across sectors and borders within the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). This struggle must be directed toward the preparation of a Europe-wide general strike that will pose the question of political power. It also means a struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

Workers must intervene in the November 29 and December 12 rallies to advance demands that develop the international unity and struggle of the working class against imperialist war and the capitalist oligarchies. Rank-and-file committees must be built in every workplace, independent of the union bureaucracy and rejecting the division between permanent and subcontracted workers. Preparations must be made for a general strike that is not confined to one-day weekend actions and that mobilizes the collective and industrial power of the working class ahead of the setting of the minimum wage and the budget debates. This must be part of the preparation of a Europe-wide general strike.

Such a struggle cannot be organized by making appeals to the union confederations. It can be organized only independently of them, from below. It requires an international socialist perspective directed against the capitalist profit system and the building of a revolutionary leadership. This is the perspective for which the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi (Socialist Equality Party), affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), and our sister parties in Europe and around the world are fighting. We call on workers, young people and intellectuals who agree with this perspective to contact us.



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