

# Türk-?? work stoppage and D?SK's rallies aim to restrain workers in Turkey

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26 September 2024

The Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-??) and the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (D?SK) have organised a series of protests and rallies against the rising cost of living in recent days.

While anger among the workers and pensioners, whose real wages have decreased and impoverished in the face of the increasing cost of living over the last few years, has been accumulating, the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has announced that it will deepen the social attacks with the Medium Term Programme (MTP). The protests organised under conditions of growing social anger and opposition are aimed at controlling, not mobilising the working class.

Forced to take action due to pressure from below and growing anger against the trade union apparatus, Türk-?? organised a one-hour work stoppage and sit-in protests across the country on Tuesday between 8 and 9am with the slogan “We’re in difficulty. We can’t make ends meet”. Speaking to *BirGün*, Petrol-?? Gebze Branch President K?rm?zçiçek said, “We stopped work for one hour in all workplaces in line with the decision taken by our confederation. In some workplaces, some trade unions of the confederation only made a press statement.”

Despite the decision of Türk-??, some unions prevented workers from taking part in the action. Only a few workplaces of Türk Metal, the main union in the metal and automotive industry, organised protests. Ford workers called on the union to follow the decision to take action on X the day before.

Making a statement in Ankara, Tez-Koop-?? trade union General Secretary Hakan Bozkurt asserted, “This work stoppage is our warning to the government.”

Speaking at a protest at a railway enterprise in Ankara, Türk-?? President Ergün Atalay said: “We

signed a contract 1-1.5 years ago. The wage we got in the contract has melted down in 6 months”. This is an admission that the sales contracts signed by the unions, despite workers’ determination to struggle, have served to reduce wages in real terms.

Earlier this year, workers in public enterprises organised demonstrations in many provinces to demand additional wage increases. During their protests, railway workers demanded the resignation of Atalay, who is the leader of both the Demiryol-?? union, to which the workers belong, and Türk-??, the country’s largest trade union confederation.

In February, Alaattin Soydan, General President of the Türk-?? affiliated T. Harb-?? union, attacked workers in a statement against protests in the defence industry. He accused the workers of being terrorists, stating, “There is a desire to create chaos in the country before the local elections... In this context, what are the branch chairs trying to achieve by taking the workers to the streets? What dark forces are instructing them?”

D?SK organised the third of its regional rallies in Istanbul Wednesday, under the slogan “Enough is Enough. We can’t make ends meet. We Want Justice in Income, Justice in Taxes, Justice in the Country”. D?SK had organised similar rallies in Mersin and Izmir in the previous weeks.

Speaking at Wednesday’s rally, D?SK leader Arzu Çerkezo?lu focused on demands for the government to “increase the minimum wage and ensure fairness in taxation”. “Our demands are very clear. We want justice in income. We want a fair share of the value we produce. We want a wage that allows us to live in dignity. We want Turkey to stop being a minimum wage country. We want justice in taxation,” she said.

By saying “The reason for the dark picture we are living in is the preferences of the AKP governments

that have ruled this country for 22 years”, Çerkezo?lu is selling the lie that things will get better if Erdo?an’s AKP is replaced by another bourgeois government led by the Republican People’s Party (CHP). But the CHP is as much in the service of the bourgeoisie and as hostile to the working class as the AKP. Moreover, in this way, Çerkezo?lu tries to hide the complicity of D?SK and all trade union confederations in the decades-long deterioration of working-class conditions.

The actions organised by D?SK and Türk-?? show the failure of the union bureaucrats to suppress the anger of the workers through various manoeuvres. In Turkey, as in the rest of the world, the working class has experienced enormous impoverishment. In terms of annual inflation, Turkey has been at the top of the list in recent years. In August, the official annual inflation rate was 52 percent. In May it was 75 percent. However, according to calculations by the Inflation Research Group (ENAG), the real annual inflation rate has been above 100 percent for a long time.

Real wages have fallen dramatically as the government, public and private sectors set pay rises for workers and pensioners based on official inflation. The government’s vehement refusal to raise the minimum wage (the salary of about half the workforce) in July 2024 has accelerated this trend.

Average wages in Turkey have been gradually approaching the minimum wage. According to the “Minimum Wage Survey 2024” report published by D?SK-AR at the end of last year, the proportion of those earning close to the minimum wage (upper limit is 20 percent more than the minimum wage) has increased from 39.1 percent to 58.4 percent over the last 20 years. That is, whereas 20 years ago four out of ten people were working on a salary close to the minimum wage, this figure has now risen to six out of ten.

Besides the government and companies, the trade union confederations are also responsible for this decline. In the form of wage increases several percentage points above the official inflation rate, D?SK and Türk-?? have imposed de facto wage cuts on workers for decades.

Last week Erdo?an approved the Medium Term Programme (MTP) and put it into force. The programme, which focuses on maintaining fiscal discipline to reduce inflation and close the budget

deficit, is a declaration of war on workers’ living and working conditions. The programme accelerates the policy of turning the country into a haven of cheap and precarious labour for domestic and international companies.

The workers will not give in easily to these austerity policies, which mean more exploitation and misery. In the local elections in March, Erdogan’s AKP suffered a heavy defeat and became the second party for the first time, mainly because of the rising cost of living and the difficulty of making ends meet.

But workers cannot resist the attacks of the government and the companies by relying on the bourgeois opposition or the trade unions. What is driving the trade union apparatus to action today is preventing the outbreak of a strike movement beyond their control.

Faced with a similar attack and similar enemies everywhere, the working class needs to develop an international strategy for a counter-offensive. The 33,000 Boeing workers on strike in the US or the Volkswagen workers facing layoffs in Germany are fighting both the corporations and the government and their complicit trade union apparatus.

The international mobilisation of the working class based on common social and democratic demands requires the building of rank-and-file committees independent of the trade union apparatus. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides workers worldwide with the tools they need in this common struggle.



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