

Turkish government bans metalworkers' strike as war in Middle East deepens

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Metal workers continue to strike in defiance of a decree signed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on December 13.

According to the presidential decree, strikes have been postponed for 60 days because they are considered “detrimental to national security”. This postponement, like the previous ones, means that strikes are de facto banned by the government on behalf of the companies.

The ban takes place under conditions of explosive crisis. On the one hand, the minimum wage for 2025 is being negotiated and the government is trying to impose a below real inflation increase. On the other hand, under conditions of the regime change in Syria and Israel’s genocide in Gaza moving towards a regional war against Iran in the Middle East, the ruling class feels the need to close ranks. This requires the suppression of any opposition from the working class at home.

Strikes by workers at Hitachi, GE Grid Solutions and Schneider Electric factories began due to the failure to reach an agreement in collective bargaining negotiations.

Artaç Cryogenic workers were preparing to go on strike on December 19. Having rejected the offer of the Turkish Employers’ Association of Metal Industries (MESS), an influential business organization in Turkish politics, which was below even the official inflation rate, Birleşik Metal-İş Union had to take a strike decision under the pressure from the workers.

MESS offered a 40 percent raise, but workers were demanding at least 125 percent to compensate for their losses against the cost of living. As of November, the official annual inflation rate in Turkey was 47 percent, while ENAG, an independent research organization, calculated annual inflation at 86 percent.

The pro-opposition DİSK-affiliated Birleşik Metal-

İş union was forced to announce that it did not recognize the ban in the face of workers’ explosive anger. Özkan Atar, the president of the union, said in a statement that about 1,600 workers were on strike in seven factories and that another 400 members would go on strike in two more factories in the coming days.

Green Transfo, where the strike will start on December 25, is not a member of MESS and has not yet been banned from striking.

Since coming to power in 2002, Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) has issued at least 21 strike postponement decrees, effectively banning some 200,000 workers from striking. This includes banning strike decisions in the metal sector in 2018.

Speaking to *Evrensel* newspaper, striking workers said, “We are not endangering national security. It is our future that is in danger.” “Our purchasing power has never been so low,” the workers reacted, adding, “The ban has made us more determined.”

Metalworkers’ wages have fallen to the minimum wage in recent years as the trade unions have colluded with the government and companies.

The metalworkers are determined to take their struggle forward, but to do so they must take matters into their own hands. Striking workers must come forward to mobilize all metalworkers and the millions of workers wanting a decent minimum wage in a common struggle.

Birleşik Metal-İş will not organize solidarity strikes in other factories where it is present, not to mention other metal unions like Türk Metal and Özçelik-İş. The union bureaucrats are as afraid of the strike spreading as the companies. As the DİSK-affiliated union Genel-İş recently did in the municipalities of Istanbul and Izmir, contracts will be signed behind workers’ backs or the strike will be ended on the basis of the law.

Workers must organize their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions. Such a struggle should not be limited to the workplace; it must be combined with other workplaces and sectors, and with rising class struggles worldwide.

The government is attacking workers' social conditions to divert more resources to the corporations, banks and increased military spending.

Huge additional taxes were introduced last year, most of which were imposed on workers. According to the November budget implementation report of the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, the tax collected from companies in the period January-November this year increased by 13.5 percent compared to the same period last year, while the tax collected from workers increased by 119.8 percent. Taking inflation into account, this means that the tax collected from workers and employees increased in real terms, while the tax collected from companies decreased.

The government refused to raise the minimum wage in July on the pretext of curbing inflation, and workers' real wages continued to erode relative to prices. Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek insists that the minimum wage should be increased according to expected inflation, not actual inflation. This means that the real wages of both minimum wage earners and other sections of the working class will be reduced with an increase even below the official inflation rate.

DİSK-AR's report on the minimum wage for 2025 shows that the cause of inflation is company profits, not wage increases, as is the case everywhere.

According to the report, "there is profit-driven inflation in Turkey. While high inflation reduces the purchasing power of wages, corporate profits are increasing. According to data from the Istanbul Chamber of Industry (ISO) survey of 500 large companies, while corporate profits rise faster than inflation, wage incomes fall during periods of high inflation. The same is true for the share of wages and salaries in gross value added."

The minimum wage directly affects the majority of the population: "Half of the workers in Turkey are minimum wage earners. Almost half of the unregistered workers are paid half or less than the minimum wage."

The report highlights the inadequacy of the minimum wage, saying, "The minimum wage in 2024 remained below the hunger and poverty lines due to the rapid

decline in purchasing power. In October 2024, the hunger line was 20,860 TL (599 USD) and the poverty line was 72,156 TL (2,061 USD) with a net minimum wage of 17,002 TL (486 USD). In the 24 months from January 2023 to the end of 2024, the minimum wage was above the hunger line for only 4 months".

As the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine dangerously escalates and war spreads in the Middle East, the Turkish ruling elite's attack on the conditions of the working class and its growing strike movement is accompanied by the suppression of political opposition and democratic rights.

Several Kurdish mayors were unconstitutionally dismissed and replaced by trustees after Erdoğan declared that "we are trying to strengthen our internal front". Those who protest against Erdoğan for Turkey's feeding of the Israeli war machine amid the Gaza genocide have been violently arrested and mistreated.

The Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) announced that 3,128 of its members were detained in the last year and 409 of them were arrested. Most recently, 15 members of the Socialist Labourers Party, including its chairman, and 4 members of the Energy, Industry and Mine Workers' Trade Union and the United Transport Trade Union were detained on the same day as the announcement of a strike ban in the metal industry. The justification for this police state operation was not disclosed. Three of the detainees were placed under house arrest; the others were released on judicial control conditions.

A perspective is needed that links opposition to the attack on democratic rights and living conditions with the struggle against imperialist war and genocide. This means mobilizing independently of and against the capitalist political establishment and the trade union apparatus in its service.



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