

New minimum wage in Turkey: A declaration of war on the working class

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26 December 2024

The announcement by Labour and Social Security Minister Vedat Isikhan on Tuesday of a 30 percent increase in the minimum wage by 2025 to 22,104 liras net (US\$630) is an open declaration of war by the government against the working class.

This step, taken in line with the demands of finance capital, is the price the government wants the working class to pay for the preparations for war in Syria and the Middle East.

“We have tried to determine the most balanced level by evaluating the macroeconomic and conjunctural dynamics as well as the suggestions of our workers’ and employers’ representatives,” Işıkhan said when announcing the minimum wage.

Erdoğan, who in previous years had announced the minimum wage himself and turned it into a political show, briefly said “Good luck to our country and nation” on X and added the next day: “We have kept our promise not to crush our working people with inflation.

This has nothing to do with reality. In November, the official annual inflation rate in Turkey was 47 percent, while ENAG, an independent research organisation, calculated annual inflation at 86 percent. Moreover, the failure to raise the minimum wage in July has severely eroded the real wages of millions of minimum wage earners and other workers.

Given that about half of registered workers in Turkey earn the minimum wage and millions of unregistered workers earn much lower wages, the new minimum wage means further impoverishment of workers in real terms.

The announced minimum wage is slightly above the starvation threshold of 20,652 liras and well below the poverty threshold of 66,976 liras for a family of four as calculated by the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş) at the end of November.

In a press statement on Wednesday, Ergün Atalay, the head of the Türk-İş Confederation, reacted to the new minimum wage by saying: “We have been in an unfair commission for 50 years. We will not participate in the commission that sets the minimum wage unless there is no fair arrangement.”

The fact that Türk-İş did not attend the signing ceremony and announced that it would no longer participate in the Commission is nothing more than a desperate attempt to

compensate for its loss of prestige in the eyes of the workers and to appease public anger.

In reality, the decades of accelerating impoverishment of the working class would not have been possible without the cooperation of the trade union confederations with the companies and the government. This cooperation is not limited to the pro-government confederations Türk-İş or Hak-İş.

The so-called “opposition” Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK) is also part of this process. In its statement, DİSK said, “The government and capital have once again unilaterally determined the minimum wage. Millions of workers and their families have become even poorer with the minimum wage increase, which is even below the official inflation rate, which nobody believes. This minimum wage, announced in a hastily organised meeting where workers were not even represented, is null and void. The working class will repulse this imposition of misery by organising and unionising”.

The Republican People’s Party (CHP), on the other hand, is taking unprecedented steps to channel public anger over the government’s attack on the minimum wage.

“I congratulate the management of Türk-İş for not attending the impromptu meeting and call on the working class to use its power of productivity,” said CHP leader Özgür Özel. The CHP announced that it will organise a protest rally in Ankara on Saturday.

The statements of DİSK and CHP are completely hypocritical. The CHP imposes miserable wages on the workers in the municipalities under its administration. The struggles of the workers in the municipalities of İstanbul and İzmir have been broken with the cooperation of the DİSK-affiliated Genel-İş union.

Neither the parties of the bourgeois establishment nor the trade unions offer a way forward for the workers. The bourgeois opposition wants to turn social anger into political gain and come to power through early elections. The union bureaucracies, on the other hand, are aware that they can no longer keep the working class under control and that their room for manoeuvre is shrinking in the face of the hardening attacks of the ruling class. Even if the trade union confederations call for a protest or even a general strike, the workers should not

trust them and must take matters into their own hands.

The minimum wage increase is the fulfilment of the promises made to the global markets and investors months ago by the Minister of Finance and Treasury Mehmet Şimşek himself. It is also an expression of the Erdoğan government's determination to continue its social attacks on the working class in order to finance its budget deficits.

This is a global phenomenon and is directly linked to the escalation of militarism, which threatens a world war with the use of nuclear weapons. While the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine is dangerously escalating, the war in the Middle East is spreading in the midst of the genocide in Gaza, and the US is stepping up preparations for war against China, all the ruling elites are stepping up attacks on the social conditions of the working class and democratic rights at home.

Therefore, the Erdoğan government announced that it will allocate a record budget to the defence and security sector in 2025. According to Vice-President Cevdet Yılmaz, a total of 1 trillion 608 billion liras will be allocated to the defence and security sector in 2025. In other words, while the minimum wage will increase by only 30 percent, the budget allocated to the defence and security sector will increase by 80 percent.

Expenditure on militarism is aimed not only at advancing the interests of the ruling class abroad, but also at consolidating the state's security apparatus against the "internal enemy", the working class. The working class is being made to pay for this. 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.

This war against the working class is not only aimed at their living and working conditions, but also directly at their lives. On Tuesday, another workplace death was recorded, showing that not only the labour power of the workers but also their lives are cheap. In Balıkesir, 11 workers were killed and 7 injured in an explosion in a factory that produces explosives for use in mines. According to the reports of the Workers' Health and Safety Council, at least 1,708 workers were killed at work in Turkey in the first 11 months of this year.

The escalation of militarism and the war on the social conditions of the working class at home go hand-in-hand with the abolition of democratic rights and the construction of an authoritarian regime.

On December 13, Erdoğan banned a strike by metal workers on the grounds that it was "detrimental to national security", but the workers defied the ban and continued the strike. 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. Finally, a large number of members of the Socialist Labourers'

Party, including its leader, were detained on allegations of being members of a "terrorist organisation", signalling that left-wing political activity will be treated as "terror".

Workers must counter this international attack, which stems from the deepening crisis of the capitalist system, by developing their own international strategy and parties. This struggle must be waged independently of and against the parties of the capitalist order and the pro-corporate trade union apparatus. The only political tendency that puts forward such an international revolutionary strategy and organisation is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

In the *Transitional Programme*, the founding document of the Fourth International published in 1938, on the eve of World War II, Leon Trotsky wrote:

The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the politics of the capitalists which, to a considerable degree, like the politics of their agents, the reformists, aims to place the whole burden of militarism, the crisis, the disorganization of the monetary system and all other scourges stemming from capitalism's death agony upon the backs of the toilers. The Fourth International demands *employment* and *decent living conditions* for all.

Trotsky added: "Against a bounding rise in prices, which with the approach of war will assume an ever more unbridled character, one can fight only under the slogan of a *sliding scale of wages*." And he raised the demand for "an automatic rise in wages in relation to the increase in price of consumer goods." Workers must link the fight for these transitional demands against the cost of living with the fight for workers' power against war and capitalism.



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