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Turkey

A new episode in the struggle of Turkish car workers

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The Turkish engineering industry has grown exponentially over the last fifteen years. From 285,737 vehicles in 2001, automotive production has grown to 1,749,572 vehicles in 2017. Turkey is the largest exporter of cars to the European Union, with assembly plants of Fiat, Renault, Mercedes, MAN, Honda, Hyundai, Toyota, Ford, etc., and a number of other companies. But the resistance and organization of workers has developed in parallel with this period of industry expansion.

In the last six years, the Turkish engineering industry has experienced major strikes, banned strikes, factory occupations and a huge wave of wildcat strikes. As the dominant union in the sector is a "yellow" union that developed with the help of army generals during the 1980 military junta, workers' actions have mostly taken place outside the union framework or even directly against the union, as in the wildcat strikes of 2015. [\[1\]](#)

Wage negotiations

In September 2019, new collective bargaining was launched in this sector, which concerns approximately 130,000 workers. These negotiations began as the government was implementing a policy of wage moderation advised by the IMF to keep wages low in order to contain inflation. For this reason, all recent agreements have resulted in very small increases; for example, 4% for pensioners, 8% for public sector workers, 8% in the textile industry, and 6% for the oil refinery owned by the conglomerate Tüpra?.

The two largest unions in the metalworking sector demanded wage increases of 24% and 34%. These two unions (Türk Metal, which comes from the fascist movement, and DISK-Birle?ik Metal I?, which comes from the left-wing tradition of the 1970s), rivals since the 1980s, tried for the first time to act jointly in these negotiations. They organised a press conference with another smaller union, as well as massive demonstrations during the negotiations. They also decided to call a strike. While Birle?ik Metal I? set the date for the beginning of the strike as 5 February 2020, Türk Metal had only decided to call a strike but without setting a date.

Shortly afterwards, Türk Metal finally signed an agreement promising 17% wage increases within the next six months.

Banned strikes

Although this increase is much higher than that achieved in other sectors, it is still much less than what engineering workers expected due to the rising cost of living. That is why the Birle?ik Metal I? union did not sign the agreement and said it would call a strike as planned on February 5. As Türk Metal represents more than 90% of the metal workers involved in collective bargaining, it is very difficult for Birle?ik Metal I? to change the agreement signed by the majority. But the union was forced to call a strike even though its management was reluctant. This pressure comes mainly from young workers who receive much lower wages and who have enormous dissatisfaction with the whole system. These young workers are not on the left (quite the contrary, in most cases) but, whatever their political allegiances, they gave the protest of the two unions a militant colour.

All the strikes called during previous collective bargaining in the engineering industry have been banned by government decrees stating that these strikes were a danger to national security. In fact, strike bans are something the president Erdoğan is very proud of, and he has boasted about them repeatedly in his meetings with employers. [2] It is almost certain that this kind of ban will come into effect for this strike scheduled to begin on February 5. The union leaders have said that they will not recognize the ban imposed by ministerial decree and that they will continue to call for a strike, even if it is banned.

Solidarity!

In the current repressive context in Turkey, this means enormous risks for many workers, including dismissals, arrests or attacks on their organisations. This is why striking engineering workers in Turkey, all of whom work for multinational companies, need greater international solidarity. In recent years, engineering workers have gone down in history with their struggle; we must all be convinced that another victory is not only possible but necessary to rebuild the self-confidence of the entire working class in Turkey.

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[1] *International Viewpoint*, 29 May 2015 "[Trouble in paradise: A cautionary tale for big capital in Turkey](#)".

[2] *International Viewpoint*, 4 February 2018 "[Class war ?n t?me of war](#)".