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Turkey

Cost of potato vs cost of a bullet

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It would not be too wrong to suggest that there was a strong workers' movement in Turkey in the last decade. Especially while the economy was growing fast, workers' demands for better wages and working conditions were also present. This can be observed through some major spontaneous workers uprisings such as the one in the auto industry in May 2015 or airport construction workers from 2018. [1] But actually it is a general trend much more than a few random major uprisings, over last 10 years, there were many actions of the workers in order to gain new rights and advance their rights which were much less visible and attracted much less attention.

One way to observe this trend, is to look at the development of wages compared to US Dollars currency rate and annual inflation rate. In the graphic below, if we take gross minimum wage, average daily earnings, annual inflation rate and yearly average US Dollars exchange rate in 2009 all as 100, you can observe how each of these grew. It is here quite evident that until 2018, both the gross minimum wage and annual average of daily earnings grew much more faster than the annual inflation rate or annual average US dollars exchange rate. So it would not be so wrong to say that the working class in Turkey was on the offensive in order to gain new rights and advance their working conditions and wages until 2018. This offensive was not usually organized by any organization and unfortunately mostly overlooked by the radical left as well. So it did not turn into a political leftwing movement and this was a lost opportunity for the radical left.

https://npa31.org/IMG/jpg/graphic_turkey.jpg

By 2018, this situation had changed. In mid-2018, Turkey experienced sudden increase of foreign currencies and huge inflation together with job losses. So the actual economical crisis for Turkey started much earlier than the COVID-19 pandemic. And the working class movement which was on the offensive in order to gain new rights during last decade while economy was also growing, now has retreated back to defence in order to protect their existing rights, jobs/wages, or against dismissals, in order to get their unpaid wages or severance payments etc. The pandemic has only amplified this trend.

During the pandemic, Turkey did not experience a lockdown similar to European countries, factories were still working by risking the lives of workers but due to lack of demand and lack of supplies for some products, there were massive stoppages in the production. As a response to this, the government introduced a short-term work benefit scheme. In this scheme, the government paid 60 per cent of average gross income as net with a cap of 4381 TLs - 498 Euros per month, according to the government's own declarations 3,7 million workers benefitted from this short-term work scheme. But this benefit had strict conditions that excludes some workers. That is why for those who cannot benefit from this short term work benefit the government introduced another scheme where employer can send worker to unpaid leave and the government would pay 1171 TLs - 133,23 Euros per month. Around 1,2 million workers benefitted from this. But the amount of money given by this benefit is far from even covering the basic needs. The real effects of the crisis on the employment probably will be seen by September once this government support ends. Together with the expected wave of mass dismissals, a wave of defensive struggles can be expected as well.

That is why the government is also trying to manipulate workers' reaction by trying to win them to the ranks of nationalistic and military mobilization. In mid-August, on a TV interview with Ministry of Economics, when he was asked about fastly increasing foreign currency, he replied by talking about the costs of military operations by adding of course these would have affects on economy and citizens should bear that cost. In 2019 Erdo an also said something similar by telling that "I am asking to those who talk about price of eggplant, potatoes, peppers, do you know the cost of a bullet?"

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Thus there is now there is a much bigger duty standing in front of the left in Turkey, to connect the workers' grievances and struggles for their daily needs with their struggle against the government's aggressive nationalistic and militaristic policies.

PS:

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[1] See "[Turkey's Defiant Working Class: From Offense to Defense](#)".