



# Turkey: Victory to the strike of the metal-workers!

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On the morning of January 29, in Turkey 15,000 workers in the metal industry downed tools. The left trade union confederation DISK (Devrimci ??çi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu - Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Unions) had called for a nationwide strike in 40 factories. These include many multinational companies such as Schneider, Alstom and Mahle.

The reason for this strike is the negotiation of a new collective agreement for the period 2014-16, between Birlesik-Metal Is, which is part of DISK, and the employers' federation, MESS.\* The struggle is made more difficult by the fragmentation of the unions. Although relatively few workers are unionised, there are a lot of unions, many of which are closely tied to state interests.

Thus, Turk-Metal, which is close to the employers, has already agreed to extend the term of an agreement from two years to three, and to a continuing decline in wages. By contrast, Birlesik-Metal Is has demanded a substantial wage increase and a reduction in wage differentials in the metal industry generally. The MESS insists on maintaining the existing very poor working conditions as well as the extension of the agreement to three years. Also, under their proposed contract, the starting salary for new workers would be barely higher than the minimum wage (400 euros per month).

There were large majorities for a strike at workplace meetings, in recent weeks, despite the repressive laws in Turkey. Under these, once a strike started, there are essentially only two possible outcomes; either an agreement is quickly reached, or the strike is prohibited. If there is no agreement, the union loses the legal right to continue to engage in collective bargaining.

On this occasion even before this could happen, the government decided to ban the strike. For this, a specific article was created in Turkish law, namely that strikes that endanger the "overall health or national security" are declared illegal. This is what happened on January 30, a day after the strike began. The workers were told to return to work, otherwise they would all be dismissed. In response three of the plants affected were occupied by workers and meetings were called for January 31 to decide on the next steps. It is not excluded that the occupations will be maintained and the strike will continue. If this is the case, this strike has to be conducted not just as a "normal" union dispute, but as a political strike if it wants to achieve success. So far, though, leftist groups and many unions in Europe have expressed their solidarity only on paper.

In Germany, the engineering union, IG Metall is in negotiations right now, dealing with many companies that are on strike in Turkey. How many German workers there know about the direct connections between their interests and those of the Turkish workers? Some certainly, but the leadership of the IG Metall has done nothing to emphasise these common interests and that could take the wind out of the sails of the strikers. Over the past few months, the IG Metall bureaucracy even wrote conciliatory letters to the DISK, asking the confederation to hold back on action.

Therefore, it is important that oppositionist trade unionists in Germany mount campaigns for solidarity and information! Why should we not take up the demands of our Turkish brothers in the current round of negotiations when the boss is in principle the same?

The dispute in Turkey is also simultaneously a struggle for democratic rights. A government that said after the death of

300 miners in 2014, that in such work you have to expect accidental deaths, has no legitimacy, to prohibit a strike for "health reasons".

Even though this strike of 15,000 workers is one of the largest in recent years, it may be crushed if there is no political solidarity. What is needed in such a situation is for the Turkish left to summon up spirit of the Gezi Park protests! On the streets and squares, demonstrations and meetings should be held to support the union's demands and once again put in question the survival of the government, which only stays in power through massive repression.

That the union DISK has declared this strike is a step in the right direction. All wage earners, all the currents of the labour movement should support this, mobilising their members to jointly defend the occupied factories against attacks by police and military! This strike is no longer only about industry-specific requirements, but the defence of basic trade union rights. Since this government prefers to use military force rather than negotiation, political solidarity strikes, if necessary up to the general strike in defence of trade union rights, will be needed to enforce the demands of the Turkish metal workers.

\*In an earlier version of this article, a reference to the pro-employer union Turk Metal, was unintentionally applied to the employers' federation, MESS, our apologies for this error.

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