

The struggle of the metalworkers of Turkey for bread and freedom: Obstacles, promises, and prospects

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The Turkish metal industry has just gone through four months (early October 2019 to early February 2020) of fierce negotiations between the bosses and the trade unions over the collective agreement for the period 2019-2021. This was no ordinary collective bargaining process, but one that contained explosive potential, for reasons explained below. We think that sharing this instructive Turkish experience with proletarian socialists in the region and around the world is worthwhile. Levent Dölek is the Deputy Chairman of DIP (Revolutionary Workers' Party), which was deeply immersed in the strike.

The industry-wide collective negotiations between MESS (the Association of Employers of Metal Industrialists) and trade unions has always been a major battlefield of class struggle in Turkey between the most powerful representatives of the capitalist class and the most organised and vanguard battalions of the working class. The metallurgical industry lies at the heart of the Turkish economy. 178 of the largest 500 corporations countrywide, according to the classification of the Istanbul Chamber of Industry, are active in this industry. Of the largest 20 corporations of the country, a full 17 are from this branch of industry. The number of workers employed by the metal industry reaches up to 1.5 million. While companies that are members of MESS employ around 10 per cent of the total number of workers in the industry,

they control more than half of the net sales of the sector.

The 186 factories affiliated to MESS employing 130 thousand workers are not only the heavy guns of this sector (with an additional 7 thousand workers employed in 16 factories members of EMIS, the other important employers' association in the industry), they realise one fourth of the turnover and 39 per cent of the exports of manufacturing industry at large. Trade union density is close to 18 per cent in the industry. This is of course quite low. However, the average for workers in the country overall standing at 9 per cent, metal achieves twice that rate. And trade union density is not decisive on its own: we see metalworkers always at the forefront of class struggle from Kavel, where workers struck before the right to strike had been legislated in 1963, to the insurrection of 15-16 June 1970, when close to 150 thousand workers took over the city of Istanbul to protect their unions, and from resounding strikes and political action in the late 1970s all the way to the recent rebellions against the yellow union dominant in the industry in the 21st century, most recently in 2015, of which more below.

When the decisive forces of the two classes thus confront each other, even an ordinary collective bargaining process ignites a more serious conflict than usual. Moreover, we should remember the concrete context in which these collective negotiations unfolded: world capitalism has been going through a depression since 2008 and this crisis has manifested itself in all its gravity in Turkey within the last two years. So the significance of this process was not confined to the industry, but rather concerned the two classes at a more general level, the question of who will pay the price of the economic crisis being decided above all in these collective negotiations. On the other hand, we must remember that these negotiations were being conducted under the despotic regime of Erdoğan, who, in all frankness, declared publicly several times that he was making use of the state of emergency instituted in the wake of the failed coup of July 2016 “to facilitate the affairs of the employers”. This meant banning all strikes above a certain size for years now (a more detailed picture will be provided below). This aspect of Erdoğan's despotism has constantly been overlooked internationally simply because the international media represents interests in the imperialist countries that approach this special aspect of Erdoğan's repressive regime with approbation, if not active instigation.

The flexibilisation assault of capital

In the collective negotiation process, MESS tried to impose a series of measures that aimed at the flexibilisation of work. The drive to compensation of hours over the week, month and year and the extension of the probation period for new workers from 2 to 4 months, as well as the attempt at indexing fringe benefits to performance (thus pretending intensity of work is the same thing as productivity), this way pitting workers against each other, were all part of the proposals of MESS. These are all measures that do away with certain acquired rights and they form part and parcel of the strategic assault of capital on the working class as a whole in order

to lay the burden of the crisis on labour. In effect, TOBB, the umbrella organisation bringing together all representatives of the capitalist class had already demanded in 2019 the same measures to be implemented with a view to “ameliorate the business environment”.

Another priority of MESS was to extend the period of the collective contract from two to three years. The insistence on this owes to a calculation that longer periods between collective negotiations provides the opportunity to the capitalists to reduce the wage raises to be given to workers, especially in times of inflation, which is now precisely the situation Turkey finds itself in. Moreover, times of collective negotiation are periods when the attention of workers to matters of struggle over the division of the value produced increases and they become much more militant in their demands than ordinary times. For the capitalists this is a moment when “social peace” is disrupted. Hence the capitalists want this to occur as infrequently as possible.

The workers’ struggle for bread

A struggle is unfolding day by day to decide who will pay the bill that the crisis has presented society at large with. Real wages are falling in all industries under the pressure of an army of unemployed of 7 million (officially 13 per cent, though the real rate is much higher). The threat of unemployment is being put to use for the flexibilisation of work. And in an environment where the official minimum wage is, so to speak, indexed to the hunger level, the working class also shoulders the taxation burden almost single-handedly.

In its ideological struggle against the labouring classes, the bourgeoisie performs all kinds of intellectual tricks to hide from view the gravity of the economic crisis. But when comes the time of collective bargaining and workers’ rights are on the table, then the first excuse the spokespersons of the capitalists take refuge in is always the economic crisis. MESS insisted on how difficult life was for its member enterprises under conditions of crisis during the bargaining process. However, Ulrich Bastert, manager of Mercedes, which produces buses and trucks in Turkey, confessed during an industrial fair in Hanover, probably thinking he was off the radar of Turkish trade unions, that because of the depreciation of the Turkish lira over the last two years, they were doing very well in their Turkish business!¹

Mercedes is no exception. The members of MESS usually consist of companies that pay their workers’ wages in a depreciating Turkish lira, but export a major part of their products and hence are paid in dollars or euros. The same picture emerges from the balance sheet of the companies affiliated to MESS.

¹<https://www.dunya.com/sectorler/otomotiv/bastert-kriz-gecici-turkiyenin-gelecegine-guveniyoruz-haberi-428072>.

The metalworkers' struggle for freedom

Naturally, capitalists are bitterly aware of the strategic importance of the metal industry not only in the economy but also in class struggle. The part metalworkers have played in the enjoyment of trade union rights by workers, in the winning of the right to strike, in the signing of collective agreements that are advantageous to workers in the past is clear for all to see. The military dictatorship that was born of the 12 September 1980 coup d'Etat took the initiative of restructuring the trade union sphere in the interests of the capitalist class, after serious gains by the working class as a result of big fights in the two decades of the 1960s and the 1970s.

As the new labour and trade union laws were being prepared in the shadow of the military dictatorship in the early 1980s, the chairman of the Confederation of the Employers' Association of Turkey (TISK), the umbrella organisation to which MESS is also affiliated to, said in blatant relaxation, "up until today, it was the workers who laughed, now it's our turn to have a laugh". The military junta imposed outright prohibitions of strikes in certain industries and gave the government powers to "postpone" strikes under the pretext of a threat to "national security" and "general hygiene". However, this so-called "postponement" is, in effect, a ban, since 60 days after the decision is made by the council of ministers the bargaining process is sent to so-called "High Arbitration". Thus the strike is over once the decision of postponement is made.

The military dictatorship also shut down the class struggle confederation of trade unions DISK (the Progressive Confederation of Trade Unions). In tandem with DISK, the vanguard union in the metallurgical industry, Maden-Is, an affiliate of the former, was also banned. The leader of the latter union, who was the founding president of DISK in 1967 as well, had been assassinated by the fascists abetted by the "deep state" only two months prior to the coup of 12 September. Under these circumstances, MESS aided Turk Metal, a very weak organisation before the 1980 coup, to become the dominant union in the metal industry. With DISK and Maden Is shut down, the extremely popular leader of the latter assassinated, and the other leaders in prison for 11 years, Turk Metal was deliberately and in planned fashion made the domineering power among the unions in the metallurgical sector, working hand in glove together with MESS. This is a yellow union in the real sense of the word. It uses mafioso practices to quash opposition within and has commercial activities in alliance with, of all business partners, MESS itself!

After the release of the DISK unionists in the early 1990s, Maden-Is naturally resumed its activity. A part of its erstwhile membership had taken refuge in the 1980s in a small union called Otomobil-Is to protect themselves from becoming captive to the yellow union that Turk Metal was. Unification was achieved between the once legendary Maden-Is and the modest Otomobil-Is under the roof of DISK. The new united union was called Birlesik Metal-Is ("Birlesik" means "united"). However, even the "united" union was small when compared to the giant of a union that Turk Metal is in proportion to the rest of the Turkish union movement. Just

to give the reader an idea of the relative size of the two unions, let us remind the reader that in the bargaining process this time, Turk Metal represented more than 100 thousand workers, while Birlesik Metal only 10 thousand. There is also a third union, quite insignificant in size, though it sat at the bargaining table during the negotiations this time. It is under the complete hegemony of Erdogan's party, the AKP, and works quite like the labour department of that party rather than a union.

So Turk Metal is a creation of the 1980 military regime as a breakwater in the most militant sector of the Turkish working class. And this was the result of a plan that MESS, and at its head the Koc Holding Company, the largest capitalist group of Turkey, with the open support of the junta, executed hand in hand with the unionists of Turk Metal. Although a great majority of unionised metalworkers were recruited to Turk Metal in the 1980s, partly because they did not wish to fall prey to a process of deunionisation, from 1998 on, Turk Metal, given its class collaboration and its heavy-handed maffioso tactics towards independent minded workers, was attacked by the vanguard forces within its membership. There was an outright revolt against the leadership of Turk Metal, but due to the timid attitude of the then leadership of Birlesik Metal, the revolt was soon absorbed by the bureaucratic structures of Turk Metal.

Then came another wave in 2012. The workers of the German brand Bosch and the affiliated Rexroth factory resigned from Turk Metal and passed over to Birlesik Metal. A similar movement was started at the French joint venture car maker Renault with factory occupation, but this one was unsuccessful. The most powerful wave was experienced in 2015, when the part of ice-breaker played by Birlesik Metal, as a result of whose strike some factories got better raises than others, there was an almost generalised revolt among the workers of Turk Metal. There were wildcat strikes observed for several weeks at some factories, and factory occupations in some of these factories. Renault was at the vanguard of the movement. But the movement embraced many enterprises among which Tofaş (the joint-venture of the Italian Fiat in Turkey), Turk Tractor, Ford Otosan (the joint venture of Ford), Arçelik (the world-renowned Turkish white goods brand, also known as Beko), and many large factories within the components industry. In many factories the entire work force resigned from the union. But the fact that in order to enjoy the rights gained by a collective contract one needs to be a member of the union that has signed the contract and that the collective contract had already been signed for a period of two years, in addition to small concessions from MESS and some maffioso repression on the part of Turk Metal, pushed the workers back to the yellow union. However, nothing could have been, or has been, the same as before after the 2015 revolt.

Up until then, shop stewards (workers' representatives) had been appointed from above by the union bureaucracy. Now elections were held for workers to elect their representatives. Attention was paid that the representatives did not only work hand in hand with the ruling bodies of Turk Metal, but that they also received in

their action the consent of the rank and file. In some factories, it was even the leaders of the revolt against Turk Metal that were elected representatives. When the time for the next round of industry-wide collective bargaining came in 2017, under the pressure of the rank and file and fearful of a new rebellion, Turk Metal, as well as Birlesik Metal, declared a strike. However, both strikes were banned by the government, as the strike of Birlesik Metal had been in 2015. But this time the High Arbitration Board was not brought in and the sides settled for raises that were indisputably higher than earlier rounds of negotiations.

Looking at these waves of struggle, it is clear that more recently metalworkers have risen in revolt against the breakwater system that the military regime of 1980 established, in collusion with MESS, in the metal industry, albeit not with a well-thought out plan and in full consciousness of the cause. This system rises on three legs: the employers' association MESS, the government (possibility of the ban on strikes and the High Arbitration Board), and Turk Metal as a yellow, maffioso union. So the struggle of the metal workers since 2012 has been one of freedom against this despotic system. The recent 2019-2020 industry-wide bargaining process once again brought the metalworkers face to face with the shackles of this despotic system established in 1980 and amply put to use by the AKP government forty years later.

Modifications and fortifications in the established order of bargaining shaken by the metalworkers' struggles

By 2019, in the wake of the successive waves of 1998, 2012, and 2015, MESS no longer had the self-confidence of earlier days. The breakaway of EMIS as a splinter group from MESS during the 2015 strike is an example to teach a lesson. In the factories where the resistance of the work force is high, a rupture with MESS is always an alternative, since the management of robust enterprises with a high rate of profit may, under certain circumstances, opt to abandon MESS in order to reduce friction with the work force and prefer a more compromising process of collective bargaining in the future.

The Turk Metal leg has been seriously shaken up and has started to limp. Although the waves of revolt seem to have finally been contained and the ranks closed, the bureaucracy is now taking each and every step taking great care under the pressure of the worker rank and file.

It is only the strike bans and the High Arbitration Board that are intact as instruments of the capitalists, but there also there are some inroads and the political cost of using that trump card has risen. Birlesik Metal went to the Constitutional Court after the strike ban of 2015 and the Court has found that the arbitrary recourse to a strike ban was a clear violation and even went so far as to impose on the government damages (to the ludicrous sum of 50 thousand Turkish lira or around 7 thousand euros). Another union in the glass industry also won its case in the

Constitutional Court, so that an important jurisprudence has already been formed regarding the unlawful nature of such arbitrary strike bans. This obviously puts the government on its defense and provides workers a legal basis that creates a sense of legitimacy regarding approaching strikes. In a certain sense, then, even the government leg has not escaped unscathed from the worker rebellions of the recent period.

Down but not out. As the last round of collective bargaining of 2019-2020 was approaching, the system established to contain the vanguard of the Turkish working class under the military regime of the early 1980s was still in place despite all the inroads caused by the metal workers since 2012. The bosses' front tried to mend its cracks as it was preparing for the approaching battle. Before the collective bargaining process started, MESS took the initiative of reunification with EMIS and covered considerable ground towards a final agreement.

There was not much that MESS itself could do regarding the Turk Metal leg. So IndustriALL, the international umbrella organisation that brings together all manufacturing industry unions around the world, was brought in as a last resort. A protocol was signed between Turk Metal and Birlesik Metal that came to reduce the vulnerability of the former. This protocol, signed under the auspices of IndustriALL, stipulates that the two unions will not try to organise in each other's turf, i.e. neither union will make an attempt to organise workers in a factory if the other union is already organised there. Even children can understand what the real import of such a provision is, given the fact that during the waves of revolt of 1998, 2012, and 2015, there were recurring desperate attempts by the rank and file of a multitude factories under the control of Turk Metal to go over to Birlesik Metal. Very few of these succeeded in the end for reasons referred to above, whereas only a handful (such as Bosch-Rexroth and Bekaert) made the breakthrough. However, a recurring wave there was. No converse flow was ever seen, i.e. no factory ever tried to break away from Birlesik Metal and join Turk Metal. So it is plain as daylight that IndustriALL mediated between the two unions in order to tie the hands of Birlesik Metal so that a replay of 2015 would not be in store this time. It is not difficult to understand why the abominable bureaucracy of IndustriALL would be involved in such a dirty operation: as the reader will have noticed, Turkey is an export platform for many large car and white goods corporations of imperialist countries, so a serious rise in wages in the metallurgical industry would hurt the interests of these very corporations who harbour such cunning and accommodative relations with the top crust of bureaucrats of international trade union umbrella organisations such as ICTU and the sectoral federations, including IndustriALL.

Regarding the political leg, the AKP government, and subsidiarily MESS, benefited from the force of precedents created in other collective bargaining processes that took place immediately prior to the metal negotiations. The bargaining process with both workers of the public sector (including for-profit productive enterprises in industrial, agricultural and transportation sectors) and for public employees (i.e.

civil servants), the latter lacking anyway the right to strike, were all concluded with infinitesimally small raises. So was the petroleum workers' collective contract, who work for a refinery privatised some time ago and sold to the Koc family, the largest conglomerate of Turkey we also met in the motor industry above, but who do not by law have the right to strike because oil is a "delicate" sector from the "nationals security" point of view. This last instance is of special importance as a threat to the metalworkers, since at the end of the process, the High Arbitration Board gave the workers a lower raise than what the bosses had already offered! Thus the Board was made a perfect scarecrow! Finally, although a decision handed down by the Constitutional Court is, legally speaking, binding on the government, this is true only under a functioning system. Under Erdogan's despotic regime, disregarding jurisprudence and even explicit legal provisions has become common practice. This despotism was really what MESS based its confidence upon in the final analysis. So the fact that to ignore that side of Erdogan's despotism is a class attitude comes out all the more strongly in this specific case.

MESS bases its strategy on a strike ban

Against the background of the economic crisis and under the present conditions, the metalworkers' strike had the potential of growing over into a struggle joined not only by the rest of the working class, but the toiling population at large. The status quo established in the metal industry by the military regime had interpenetrated with the despotic regime whose leader kept boasting for banning strikes and publicly declared that the AKP government was using the State of Emergency for smoothing the way forward for capitalists. The fundamental strategy of MESS was to drag the negotiations on towards a strike, to have Erdoğan ban the strike and then look towards the High Arbitration Board to conclude the collective contract in their favour, including the measures of flexibilisation and extending the period of the contract to three years.

The strike ban was at the centre of this strategy and yet was also the most vulnerable link of the chain. If in response to a strike ban, metalworkers stuck to their decision to strike, the entire strategy of MESS would have been broken at its weakest link and both MESS and the government would find themselves facing the paradox that was their most scary nightmare: how does one ban a strike that has, by definition, been transformed into a wildcat strike or, in other words, an unlawful strike? In 2015 MESS and the government had already confronted this paradox and had become paralysed. At the beginning of that year, the strike that Birlesik Metal had declared on the basis of the closest compliance with the legal procedures for staging a strike according to the legislation in force in the country had been banned by the government on the very first day the strike was launched. Birleşik Metal complied with the government's decision. But only three months later, there broke out a wildcat strike with partial factory occupation at the Renault and Tofaş (Fiat) factories, which lasted two weeks. This was the movement of rebellion against

the yellow union, Turk Metal, that we referred to above; it was so powerful that a popular nickname for the strike was the “metal storm”, after the name of a best-selling Turkish novel of those years. Since this strike was not started within the confines of the law, obviously it could not have been banned.

The mass character of the strike and the workers’ unity, as well as the perfect legitimacy of the movement, raised its cost to the government very high. As a matter of fact, MESS gave in to many demands of the workers, although the collective contract of that round had already been signed. There were additional material gains compared to the contract signed earlier. But even more importantly, no sanctions were imposed on the workers for their perfectly unlawful action in the nature of a wildcat strike with occupation. Thus the workers gained the right to strike, so to speak, by waging a strike.

As the 2019-2020 bargaining process entered the last lap, so to speak, everyone was expecting a strike decision from both Turk Metal and Birlesik Metal. It was also understandable why Turk Metal would try to project a more combative image both during the action within factories (work to rule, marches on the factory premises etc.) and when demonstrating on the streets. MESS was not impressed by the loud rhetoric of Pevrul Kavlak, the president of Turk Metal, but felt extremely satisfied when he added that they would fight for their rights within the limits of the law, dropping a hint of the possibility of a strike ban in passing. Everything was going according to plan. As for Adnan Serdaroglu, the president of the class-struggle union Birlesik Metal, it was also in the nature of things, given that his rank and file is more militant, that he should often lash out at MESS and declare that his union would simply disregard the strike ban. MESS certainly expected Serdaroglu to act in line with the spirit the IndustriALL memorandum of understanding and refrain from instigating another “metal storm”.

The watchword of the metalworkers: Kavel!

All these plans were upset by the resolution of the metalworkers to stage a strike! In the very midst of the MESS bargaining process, the general assembly of the largest branch of Birlesik Metal in the working class city of Gebze, which also happened to harbour a great majority of the enterprises that were affiliated to MESS, convened and elected, on the initiative of a new and combative generation of workers that considered the Kavel experience (of which more below) as their guiding light, a new, class-struggle oriented leadership. This was not simply a change in the leading personnel. Immediately after the change of leadership, strike committees were set up for the MESS process. In the training provided for the strike, the legal procedure was given scant attention and the great bulk of the time was devoted to the processes leading to and during the Kavel strike and to its consequences. This was a metal strike back in 1963, when the ancestor of the present Birlesik Metal, which we have already alluded to above, bearing the name of Maden-Is, engaged in strike action although the right to strike had not yet been enshrined in the legislation. This had

been a very militant wildcat strike that finally won its demands.

The Kavel spirit turned the prospect of the strike ban into a highly risky venture for MESS. One week before the date declared (5th February) by Birlesik Metal for launching the strike (Turk Metal had decided on a strike but deliberately refrained from indicating a date), MESS moved forth to create the conditions for the mutual signing of the collective agreement. It went back on its demands regarding the acquired rights of the workers (on matters such as flexibility or the three-year contract) and gradually increased its offer for the wage rise from the 6 per cent it had insisted on throughout months of bargaining all the way to 15 per cent (as opposed to Turk Metal's demand of 24 per cent and Birlesik Metal's 34 per cent). Having had long deliberations lasting many hours with Turk Metal, they invited Birlesik Metal to offer both unions an additional 2 per cent, thus bringing up the total raise to 17 per cent. The leadership body (Steering Committee) of Birlesik Metal agreed. However, the class struggle traditions of Birlesik Metal forced, as ever, the board to consult the representatives of the rank and file. It had to convince those factories that had adopted the watchword of Kavel as their guide.

The factories of Gebze said no to the agreement and voted to continue the plans for the strike to be started on 5th February, with less than a week to go. That same night, the central body empowered to decide on the course to be followed, the so-called Central Bargaining Board, composed of the Steering Committee, the branch leaders and shop stewards (workers' representatives) formally took a vote and decided to strike on the date indicated. The workers chanted "Everywhere Kavel, everywhere picketing". When the rumour spread, many workers at Turk Metal factories who had taken to heart the 17 per cent agreement once again turned all their attention to the Birlesik Metal strike. There was now another way forward that was possible.

Cancellation in Ankara of the decision of the factories in Gebze

However, what transpired later demonstrated that the leadership of Birlesik Metal itself had become part and parcel of the status quo that needed to be got rid of. Rather than preparing the workers for the strike, the Steering Committee of Birlesik Metal decided to divide the forces of the strike at the threshold of the class war and thus destroy the power created by the resolution of the rank and file in the factories. The Gebze branch, the largest one as we have already noted, was split into two branches by the central administration. To add insult to injury, the leadership that had lost the recent general assembly was made the caretaker executive body of the new branch thus established. There was even talk, among the workers, of "administrators" being appointed to the leadership of the new branch, an allusion to Erdogan's blatantly despotic practice of appointing provincial governors, called "administrators", in place of the elected mayors of Kurdish cities. Then came the

news that the leadership of Birlesik Metal was invited to Ankara by the Minister of Labour. Birlesik Metal signed the collective agreement on terms almost identical to those accepted by Turk Metal.

After Turk Metal had signed the agreement and Birlesik Metal was still resisting, the leadership of the latter criticised the former for having signed an unsatisfactory agreement. Now, after the leadership of Birlesik Metal themselves signed the same agreement, they started to say that the conditions accepted were better than those given to public workers or civil servants or others!

The basic reason why the metalworkers involved in the MESS process wanted to strike was not, anyway, related to wage rises. It was the strike ban and the fact that the poor raise that was being offered was done so under the pressure exerted, behind closed doors, by the High Arbitration Board. Adnan Serdaroglu, the president of Birlesik Metal, had earlier challenged a possible strike ban and declared they would certainly disregard it. But at the Ankara meeting he signed a document which would have been attainable even if the strike was banned and the agreement went to High Arbitration. Moreover, the same union leader had lambasted the AKP government in every speech he gave. But after the agreement in Ankara he extended “special thanks” to the Minister of Labour, who represented at that table the threat to ban the strike!

The MESS strike and the bourgeois parties

Although it never materialised, the MESS strike nonetheless displayed a political character by the very nature of the process it went through. At the turning point of the process, that is to say, the meeting in Ankara, where the Birlesik Metal leadership capitulated, the government was present in the person of the Minister of Labour, in all probability to level threats against Birlesik Metal, not only that of banning the strike, but other threats as well. However, the political significance of the MESS strike should be understood in a much broader framework. The orientation of Erdoğan and the AKP cannot be assessed in simplistic terms as the manifestation of an authoritarian political practice.

The situation is much graver: under conditions of deep crisis in the economy, the capitalist class is putting to use Erdoğan’s despotism almost in unmediated, pure fashion as an apparatus of class struggle in order to bring down real wages and raise profit rates (this is presented as an increase in the productivity of labour in the arguments of the bourgeoisie). For an economy that suffers from a chronic structural problem of a large current account deficit, capital inflows into the country are a vital necessity. These inflows include not only so-called “hot money” but foreign direct investment (FDI) as well. The incentives and exemptions provided to foreign capital are only part of the story; the other aspect that makes Turkey attractive to foreign corporations is the cheap and flexible labour force. The despotic regime ensures that these conditions are sustained and even improved for imperialist capital.

The bourgeois political opposition (in particular the supposedly social democratic

Republican People's Party (CHP), the newly formed İyi Parti, a splinter group from the fascist movement that acts as an ally to the CHP, and the Bliss Party (SP), a more conventional strand of the same tradition as Erdoğan's AKP) pretends that it supports the economic grievances of the labouring masses since it is, after all, the major opposition to the government, but has now been exposed for what it really is during the MESS negotiations. The contradiction in their discourse is clear for all to see: this opposition constantly reiterates that foreign capital has lately been remaining aloof to Turkey because of the violations of universal legal norms by this government. Hence it recommends observance of the principles of the rule of law so as to improve the "business environment" and to inculcate confidence in the "investor". But the same opposition will not raise a finger when it is a question of the government trampling upon all legal logic when it arbitrarily invokes national security in order to ban strikes and thus blatantly violates the decisions of the Constitutional Court as well.

This silence of the opposition has created a multiplier effect that amplified many times the pressure of the despotic regime over the workers. Moreover, the opposition acts as the agency that markets the capitulation of the union bureaucracy as rational bargaining behaviour. The television channels and newspapers ideologically tied to the CHP simply condoned the capitulation of the bureaucracy as "a good deal".

The MESS strike and socialists

At the end point, when the Birlesik Metal leadership capitulated by signing practically the same agreement as the yellow union, a role similar to the bourgeois opposition was undertaken by the reformist wing of the socialist movement. The so-called Communist Party of Turkey (no relation to the historic party established at the time of the Comintern) and the Freedom and Solidarity Party (the ODP, now renamed the Left Party, probably after Die Linke in Germany) simply remained silent in their capacity as political parties and contented themselves in their media with publishing the press communiqué of the Birlesik Metal leadership. The reason is obvious: they wish to continue supporting the union bureaucracy for their own interests. In the process they also thereby remained silent on the threat of the ban strike by Erdogan! The party that is more active than the previous two within the working class took an even worse position by joining the leadership of the new Gebze branch established by the central leadership in order to weaken the new class struggle leadership of this largest branch (see above).

Given this overall picture, the accusation levelled by the central leadership of Birlesik Metal at "certain political parties and groups" of "stirring up trouble in the union" is all the more significant. The union unfortunately neither names those parties nor explains the precise meaning of the "trouble" they have caused. There is one exception to this though: the fact that the previous administration of the Gebze branch lost to a new, class struggle leadership is attributed to the "manipulation" of some political parties. Within the atmosphere of "conspiracy" thus created, the

fact that the rank and file simply revolted against the class collaborationist previous administration and did it perfectly with the correct methods of workers' democracy is hidden in a mist. The fact that this new generation of workers who, with their clearly and conscientiously cast votes, put an end to the class collaboration policy, later took to heart the Kavel battle cry and the defense of the right to strike by practically striking despite the ban is simply a result of the logic of class struggle. As the DIP (Revolutionary Workers' Party), if we did indeed play a part in bringing out this political will, we would be more than happy and proud to have contributed to this new orientation! We would only add that other socialist parties and groups should play the same kind of role.

But we refuse the accusation of "stirring up trouble in the union". If anything is to be condemned, it is the attitude of backing class collaborationist policies just to keep the position of a socialist party in the branch steering committees or as professional experts in the union. Let us look at the bare facts: the bureaucratic leadership of Birlesik Metal thanked the AKP government that threatened the metalworkers with a strike ban; it kept silent as the CHP sided with MESS. But it targets socialists who, in line with their allegiance to class struggle, tried to prepare the workers for the strike and defended the Kavel method. This only attests to the bureaucratic nature of the Birlesik Metal leadership.

The international campaign of support

The DIP is a party that claims the heritage of proletarian internationalism of Marxism. It fights for world revolution and believes in international solidarity between workers of different countries. One particularly strong side of the international workers' movement is this class solidarity that is only partially and conditionally seen in the ranks of the bourgeoisie.

It was for this reason that DIP organised an international campaign of solidarity with the metalworkers strike in the form of a common petition to be signed by those in the workers' movement worldwide who are of a like mind.

This proved to be quite a successful campaign. Upwards of 200 parties, unions, associations and individual militants or intellectuals from 24 different countries apposed their signature to the same text of support for the strike and condemned a strike ban if this should happen.

The Kavel front will overcome!

If a balance-sheet were to be drawn up at this stage, the order built by the military regime of the 1980s that had been subjected to erosion in the recent period as a result of the breaches caused by workers' struggles has escaped the prospect of destruction. From the point of view of the struggle for bread, it is eminently clear that metalworkers have not been able to cover up for their losses. From the point of view of the struggle for freedom, the opportunity to bring down the scarecrow

of the strike ban was missed. But it is not true that metalworkers did not achieve any gains. By adopting the battle cry of Kavel and thereby proving their resolution, metalworkers forced MESS to step back on the issues of flexibilisation and the three-year contract. We know from the information that reaches us from factories that Turk Metal underhandedly tried to habituate metalworkers to a three-year contract and a raise of around 15 per cent. Not only MESS's renouncement of the three-year contract but also the 2 extra percentage points in the raise should be attributed to those who defended the Kavel method and the impact this made on the capitalists.

We think that the straitjacket created by the military regime of the 1980s in the metal industry is finally in a state of disintegration. Its grave-diggers will be the younger generation of workers who took the battle cry of Kavel to heart. However, in order to march towards victory, this new generation will first have to overcome the bureaucracy in the unions. For this, this vision has to be supported by heavier positioning inside the working class, stronger organising and a qualitative and quantitative leap in the practical leadership of the working class.