

Eyewitness report of metal factory occupation in Turkey

7 January 2009

On December 22, some 450 metal workers at a mid-size metal processing company, Sinter Metal, located in Istanbul barricaded themselves inside the factory to protest the announcement of massive job cuts.

On December 19, three days prior to the factory occupation, management laid off 37 workers. Sinter workers reacted by joining the Union of United Metal Workers (Birlesik-Metal).

On Monday, December 22, management locked the gates barring workers from entering the factory. While they were waiting in front of the factory workers started to chant slogans expressing their anger. Shortly afterwards management announced the names of 400 workers who were to be dismissed.

Workers then climbed over the factory gate, entered the plant and occupied it. The occupation continued for two days and after legal threats the workers decided to continue their action in front of the factory. Since then Sinter workers have been picketing in front of the factory.

Below we are posting a news report sent to the World Socialist Web Site by a reader from Istanbul.

I am a professional journalist based in Istanbul.

As a part of my job I visited Sinter Metal factory, located in Umraniye, in a slum of Istanbul, which was occupied by its workers on December 22.

I paid a visit to Sinter Metal workers on the first day of the occupation.

Listening to the Sinter workers was like travelling back in time to the early years of the industrial revolution.

The Sinter Metal workers used to work seven days a week and 10 hours a day, although such inhuman working conditions are clearly against the current labour law.

In return, the Sinter Metal workers received the minimum wage, i.e., YTL503 (US\$332) a month, in a

country where the hunger threshold for a family of four is YTL740 (US\$488). Together with overtime work (actually, they used to receive no money for most of their overtime hours) they were still receiving less than YTL700 (US\$462) a month.

Although on paper weekend working wasn't compulsory, on weekends they were all rushing to the factory aware of the fact that not doing so meant that their employers had a bad opinion of them.

Between shifts they had only a 15-minute rest period, just long enough to drink a small glass of tea.

When this very short rest period came to an end they were warned by an announcement, coming from the "top," asking them to start working immediately.

The sintering process requires working with powdery metals and heating ores. It is important that workers can take showers after their work. However, they faced problems with the showers as their employer frequently punished them by cutting off water or letting only cold water flow during cold winter days.

It is not difficult to sense their sincere commitment to their jobs and a future at the factory. They are all anxious to prevent their children going hungry.

"We want to keep our jobs," they all said. At the same time they added, "We want our rights to be respected as well."

In the end, the Sinter Metal workers took a stand against conditions very much resembling the brutal conditions of 19th century capitalism, and like their predecessors decided to fight for their rights.

N.A.

Istanbul, Turkey

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