

Striking Çimsata? workers appeal for support against Turkish police repression

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The wildcat strike by Çimsata? metalworkers in Mersin continues, defying the pressure of the company, the state and the trade union. Hundreds of workers stopped production on Wednesday, rejecting a sellout contract between the Turkish Employers Association of Metal Industries (MESS) and three unions representing approximately 150,000 workers.

The strike, which emerged as a rebellion against the union, is a part of a working class movement developing on a global scale. In strikes and protests stretching from the US to France and other countries, workers and youth are opposing the criminal “herd immunity” policy pursued by governments in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Çimsata? is affiliated with Çukurova Holding, one of Turkey’s largest companies. The action at the factory, which employs about 830 workers, began as production stopped for two hours after the sellout agreement was reached on Wednesday morning. Then, starting from the 4:00 p.m. shift on Wednesday, production was completely stopped, and workers occupied the factory. Workers in the next shifts also came to the factory and joined the action.

According to the sellout contract signed by the unions without a vote or approval by the workers, there will be a 27.4 percent raise for the first six months and an inflation rate raise for the second, third and fourth six months. This is well below the annual inflation rate in Turkey, which reached 36 percent in December. The independent Inflation Research Group (ENAgroun) announced that real annual inflation reached 82 percent. Outrage at this deal sparked the wildcat strike at Çimsata?.

After the start of the strike, Birle?ik Metal-?? officials came to the plant but failed to persuade workers to return to work. The workers continued the strike, chanting: “We burned our boats, there is no way back.”

Workers’ demands were rejected in the meeting of company and union managers, together with the two

representatives elected by the workers. These demands involve an additional 35 percent raise for the first six months; payment of overtime wages at 100 percent on weekdays and 300 percent on weekends; a 100 percent increase in benefits; supplementary health insurance to cover workers’ families; full payment of bank promotions; the right to a tea break; and no sanctions for the wildcat action.

Workers state that they work under pressure in the factory and that “everything is forbidden.” They say that it is cold inside the factory, the roof leaks, their right to go to the toilet is restricted, and they cannot take a day off even for funerals. In short, they are subjected to unrestrained capitalist exploitation and work in appalling conditions. Moreover, their health and lives are threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Çimsata? workers to expand their action by forming a rank-and-file committee independent of the pro-corporate unions. Workers forced to work in dangerous conditions as the Omicron variant spreads should raise demands such as the closure of nonessential workplaces, with full income for workers affected until measures are put in place to bring the pandemic to an end. The elected committee should call for solidarity strikes by sending delegations to factories in Mersin and across Turkey.

Çimsata? management sent a threatening text message, trying to force workers back to work. It stated: “We announce that you will be held responsible for the daily loss of 5 million Turkish lira and any damages that may arise due to your illegal act, which you started by stopping work at 4 p.m. on 12.01.2022 and turned into a workplace occupation, and that the necessary penal sanctions will be applied.”

Management thus claims that the company suffers a loss of approximately 6,000 Turkish lira per worker every day. However, with the new contract, workers’ average

monthly salary is even below 6,000 TL.

According to the Türk-İş, Turkey's main trade union confederation, the poverty line for a family of four rose to 13,070 TL (\$940) in December 2021. And "monthly food expenditures required for a family of four to have a healthy, balanced and adequate diet (the 'hunger limit')" rose to 4,010 TL (\$290).

Speaking to the daily *Evrensel*, a Çimsata worker replied to the company's message: "The bosses say their daily loss is 5 million TL. They say they will cover the loss from the workers. But they do not share one day's profit with the workers. We, the workers, make this production, and they make a killing at our expense. What we want is a wage raise at the rate of real inflation."

The company appealed to the state for help against the workers. A large number of police and an anti-riot water cannon, as well as the district governor and police chief, came to the factory.

State officials forced the workers to end the protest under police pressure, but the workers refused to back down until their demands were granted. Police then threatened to intervene and forced the workers to evacuate the workplace. Workers continued their struggle in front of the factory.

Another worker speaking to *Evrensel* called on all metalworkers to mobilize. "Protests must be spread both for solidarity and to protect our bread. All our metalworker brothers and sisters who are affected by the contract, especially in Bursa and Kocaeli, must show solidarity. This process concerns all metalworkers. For everyone to win, we need to go into action together."

Unions are trying to prevent this wildcat strike in the strategic metals industry from triggering a broader working class movement against the rising cost of living and deadly pandemic policies.

After the signing of the rotten contract and the outbreak of the wildcat strike in Çimsata, officials of the Birleşik Metal-İş union affiliated to DİSK and Türk Metal union affiliated to Türk-İş immediately started to visit all factories. Seeking to appease the workers, they lied on their social media posts that the workers welcomed the agreement with "enthusiasm." However, the reality is exactly the opposite.

On the Facebook page of the Metalworkers' Association, metalworkers from many factories across the country expressed their solidarity with Çimsata workers, calling for a struggle in their own factories.

A worker from the Aksaray Mercedes factory reported that the workers did not go to listen to union officials who

came to the factory after the signing of the contract, saying: "Aksaray Mercedes workers showed their reaction to the union's local chair, who did not come to the factory on the pretext of the pandemic for two years. 200 of the 1,000 workers attended the meeting, and 800 workers rejected participation. He gave a speech to 200 people and left the factory without convincing anyone."

A Sarkuysan metal worker in Kocaeli said: "They [union officials] tricked us! They said, 'Everyone is happy [with the contract], but only you are not.' We replied, 'We will go on strike.' They said, 'You will be alone!' Now, we have seen the situation. Çimsata workers were not fooled, they are in action. We must also take action as soon as possible."

In April 2020, more than 600 workers at Sarkuysan walked out and shut down production, after they had been forced to work despite coronavirus infections among workers.

A worker from the Bosch factory in Bursa said, "Man lives with dignity and dies once. We must stand by Çimsata workers who set out for an honorable and fair working life. This is not just their cause but all of us."

A Renault autoworker in Bursa underlined the parasitic character of the union bureaucrats. "You are actually a huge nobody who makes a living on the dues coming from the sweat of the worker."

A worker at the Arçelik factory in Ankara said: "Today, [union official] İbrahim Biçer came to the factory to make a statement. Everyone was told to go out [to listen him], but most people remained at their places and did not go out. ... Everyone is brooding, no one is satisfied [with the contract]. I got a good feeling this time. Those who have given up hope in Türk Metal, we will unite and be the hope for each other. We will take matters into our own hands!"

The anger boiling in the factories signals a major working class movement emerging in Turkey and internationally. Metalworkers and other sections of the working class should organize solidarity actions with Çimsata workers by forming independent rank-and-file committees at their workplaces, and they must come to the defense of the striking workers against the state and corporate threats.



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