

Wildcat strike at Çimsata? defies company, Turkish police and unions

Ula? Ate?çi
15 January 2022

The wildcat strike of metalworkers at the Çimsata? factory in Mersin has continued since Wednesday, defying efforts to end the strike by the company, the state and the Birle?ik Metal-?? 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.

This wildcat strike, closely followed by large sections of workers, is part of a growing global working class movement against the cost of living and deadly pandemic policies.

Çimsata? workers receive many supportive messages on social media from other workers across Turkey. Health care workers protesting their insufficient wages in Mersin said, “We are with the Çimsata? workers,” while U?ur Tekstil and Özak Tekstil textile workers in ?anl?urfa posted a video, stating: “We salute their resistance.”

Workers, whom police evacuated from the workplace on Thursday, are continuing their struggle in front of the factory. While many drivers passing by on the highway sound their horn to support the strikers, they chanted, “No work and no bread, no peace,” and “Occupation, strike, resistance!”

As President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government has long ignored the constitutional right to assemble and demonstrate, police told the workers: “Go and get your legal permissions. You are now in a public space, and it is in our jurisdiction.” A worker replied, “Am I not the public, or am I not a citizen?” The workers did not leave the front of the factory despite threats of assault and detention.

The workers, who did not take a step back in the face of the threat of the state, now face threats of dismissal from the company. Twenty-five workers were notified via a mobile phone message that they were dismissed without

compensation. In response, the metalworkers declared that the wildcat strike would continue until those sacked were reinstated.

Birle?ik Metal-?? union, affiliated to D?SK, then issued a statement sharply criticizing the metalworkers, targeting the striking workers and their supporters. In the statement, it denounced unidentified persons “foreign to metalworkers, unaware of the union struggle ... and the difficulties of the contract process,” who it said were in discussion with and affecting the strikers.

The union statement hailed a raise in the average wage to 6,025 Turkish lira as of September 1, 2021 as a great success. In fact, Türk-??, Turkey’s main trade union confederation, reported that the poverty line for a family of four rose to 13,070 TL (\$940) in December 2021 and the real annual inflation exceeded 80 percent. This shows that the contract Birle?ik Metal-?? is boasting about in fact reduces workers to poverty.

The union also claimed: “This contract, which was concluded for approximately 11,000 members in 44 factories affiliated with 33 enterprises, was highly welcomed in the sector and among our members.” The reality is exactly the opposite.

While very few workers, who were actually union officials, supported the so-called “victory” tours of the unions in the factories, workers from all unions protested on social media.

A worker from the Demisa? factory in Bilecik summarized this situation on the Metalworkers’ Association’s Facebook page: “In all factories, no one is satisfied except the union lackeys. Unions’ claim that ‘workers welcomed the contract with enthusiasm’ is a lie. Even the critical comments made under the [social media] posts are deleted by [unions].”

A worker from the Mercedes factory in Istanbul stated: “Nobody at the factory is satisfied with this contract. Everyone grumbles. But no pain no gain. We have to stop

waiting and take action!”

Birle?ik Metal-?? lies in its statement, saying: “The whole process, from draft preparation to negotiations, from strike decisions to signing the contract, was carried out with high [member] participation, on a level found in very few unions, taking into account the common demands of the factories.”

Last summer, three unions announced their draft contracts and demanded just under a 30 percent raise for the first six months. The surging inflation in the following months and the depreciation of the Turkish lira led metalworkers to demand a revision in the draft contracts. However, the unions refused this demand. Moreover, none of the unions, including Birle?ik Metal-Is, put the contract to a vote or received workers’ approval.

A striker told *Siyasi Haber*: “Supposedly, the contract was not signed without asking workers, but Birle?ik Metal-?? union, to which we are affiliated, accepted an increase of 27 percent without asking us and signed the contract. We told our union that they should not do such a thing, and we did not accept it.”

He continued, “In response, we decided to rally and walk out. They said it was not legal. We know what will happen to us. Whatever the cost, we intend to last out.”

Stating that the unions sold out the workers, he concluded: “No union stands behind workers. As you can see, we are alone here now. There are no unions here. After this time, we do not recognize the unions that signed the contract by ignoring us. They shouldn’t have done this. The unions sold out the workers.”

The workers state that their basic demands in going on a wildcat strike are “a decent wage, healthy work and living conditions.” Unrestrainedly exploited in dangerous conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are fighting back against the capitalist politics of mass infection and death.

The Birle?ik Metal-?? statement also rejected Çimsata? workers’ demands as unacceptable, declaring: “In Mersin Ç?MSATA?, one cannot bring a new contract to the agenda by refusing the signed group contract agreement based on some workplace-specific demands. This violates the current group contract order and union functioning.”

While the union claims, “The fact that some circles create different expectations and perceptions on our members is an effort to pit our members against the union,” the workers and the union are objectively on opposite sides of the barricade.

Çimsata? management sent this union statement to striking workers and threatened them with it, which only

underlines the cooperation between management and the unions. The Çimsata? wildcat strike once again reveals that the unions are not “workers’ organizations” but an anti-working class tool in the service of management.

This statement of the union, which aims to divide workers and end the strike, reflects the panic caused in the ruling class, the state and the unions by the Çimsata? workers’ courageous fight. As social inequality, the high cost of living and deadly pandemic policies become intolerable for millions of workers, defenders of the capitalist order fear that opposition within the working class will erupt in a mass movement.

This also reveals the anti-working class character of the middle class pseudo-left parties that are organically tied to the unions. Alpaslan Sava?, a leader of the Stalinist Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) and an expert at Birle?ik Metal-??, shared the union’s statement on Twitter, exposing his party’s anti-worker position.

The Pabloite Revolutionary Workers’ Party (D?P), an enthusiastic backer of Birle?ik Metal-??, also published an article before the union’s statement, declaring: “If Birle?ik Metal-?? union is to lay claim to its pro-class-struggle history, it should not evaluate the actions in Çimsata? and other actions in future as against the union, but should break its silence and mobilize its forces for the success of the struggle.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges metalworkers and other sections of the working class to cast off the yoke of the unions and form independent rank-and-file committees at their workplaces to take charge of the struggle. They must organize solidarity actions with Çimsata? workers and come to the defense of the striking workers against the state, corporate and trade union pressure.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact