

“The union has been betraying us for 20 years”

Management-union collaboration ends Çimsata? wildcat strike in Turkey

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16 January 2022

The wildcat strike of metalworkers at the Çimsata? factory in Mersin has been ended as a result of management-union collaboration. Workers are expected to return to work today.

Hundreds of workers stopped production and occupied the factory on Wednesday, rejecting a sellout contract between the Turkish Employers Association of Metal Industries (MESS) and three unions representing approximately 150,000 workers.

The Birle?ik Metal-?? union, affiliated to the D?SK confederation, Türk Metal affiliated to Türk-?? and Özçelik-?? affiliated to Hak-?? confederation, accepted a 27 percent increase rate, which is even below their own draft contracts. Metalworkers at Çimsata? and workers at other factories demanded a larger raise during the negotiations.

However, the unions refused, even though real annual inflation exceeded 80 percent according to ENAG, an independent research organization.

The workers, who started the work stoppage on Wednesday, confronted not only the company management, but also police and the Birle?ik Metal-?? union. Workers continued protesting outside the factory after police pushed them out of their workplace on Thursday.

As the cost of living skyrockets and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government escalated its deadly pandemic policies, Çimsata? workers’ defiance of company-union collaboration and state pressure set an example that could mobilize workers in other factories. The government, MESS and the trade unions therefore mobilized to suppress this danger.

The company reportedly texted 12 workers to say they were sacked without compensation. This was followed by other efforts by management to divide workers and end the struggle.

A factory manager sent a video message to workers, stating: “Let’s start the negotiations with a committee we will establish among the workers. Go back to work on Monday.” He also asked workers to apply to join this so-

called “committee.”

Afterwards, management sent workers another SMS, claiming: “Thank you very much for your intense requests to participate in our Improvement Committee that we will establish. The first demands submitted are listed as follows; 1) Roof repair, 2) Improvement in the physical conditions of our mosque, and 3) A revision in the food distribution area of our cafeteria.” Thus, management once again rejected all the workers’ demands, including an additional 35 percent raise and the reinstatement of sacked workers.

Meanwhile, the Birle?ik Metal-?? union issued a statement attacking the strikers and their supporters. It denounced unidentified persons “foreign to metalworkers, unaware of the union struggle,” who it said were in discussion with and affecting the strikers.

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.”

The union also targeted the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), claiming: “The fact that some circles create different expectations and perceptions on our members is an effort to pit our members against the union.” In reality, unlike organizations that claimed to support the strike but proposed a policy for the unions, the WSWS exposed the bureaucracy’s pro-capitalist role from the outset of the strike, calling for workers to expand the strike and form an independent, rank-and-file committee.

Management-union collusion against the strike was evident when Çimsata? management sent this union statement to strikers and threatened them with it.

This collaboration continued on Saturday morning. Mehmet Kurt, the unions’ chief shop steward at the workplace, spoke to the workers gathered before the factory, declaring: “I have done what you said until now. But from

now on, you will act as I say. Now I will determine the course of events. This negotiation will be conducted through four [union] representatives [at the factory].”

Then these union officials sent striking workers home and met with management.

Afterwards, the shop stewards wrote workers on WhatsApp, saying: “We had a meeting with the employer and agreed that physical conditions [at the factory] would improve. It was also agreed that the dismissed colleagues will also receive compensation, provided that labor peace is ensured. The situation of those who were dismissed can be reevaluated in the future, if they show goodwill. You will go back to work. In the next process, the first interlocutors will be union representatives. Consider the information from them.”

This was an agreement no different than the sellout contract without the consent of the workers, by the Birle?ik Metal-?? and other unions last week. Even worse, the dismissed workers were not reinstated. But the attempts of workers unwilling to accept this agreement to mobilize other workers failed.

The initiative passed from the workers to the union and the company, after shop stewards who demanded an end to the mass protest in front of the factory on Saturday, were invited to meet with management. In the absence of an independent rank-and-file committee to unite and mobilize the strikers to fight for their demands, the strike was ended by management-union collaboration.

A Çimsata? worker told the WSWS: “We said we should form a committee, but this failed. Normally, the work would start on Sunday midnight, but the management took it to 8 a.m. on Monday. Most likely, they will let us in and give a speech under the supervision of security forces, and management.” The worker stated that the unity among workers in favor of a strike was broken after the above-mentioned message of the union’s chief representative.

The worker noted that this strike showed the workers that Birle?ik Metal-??, which is enthusiastically supported by the pseudo-left forces, is no different from Türk Metal union, which has an openly right-wing leadership. He said, “Dozens of workers say, ‘if we go back to work, firstly we will settle accounts with the union before the employer.’ Birle?ik Metal-?? is no different than Türk Metal.”

He continued, “Workers say, ‘These guys [union officials] have been betraying us nonstop for 20 years. They make money on workers. They receive 160-170 liras dues from us monthly. Workers are looking at the union with a vengeance right now.’”

The worker agreed when a WSWS reporter said that there was no difference between the union officials except for their ties with different parties in the political establishment,

the function of the unions being to serve corporations and the state, suppress the class struggle and ensure the continuation of capitalist exploitation.

“We are fighting not only for wages, but also against the moral pressures of the management,” said the worker. “Workers are freezing inside the factory in this cold winter,” he added, pointing to appalling working conditions.

WSWS reporters noted that this strike emerged amid a growing international movement of strikes and protests against social inequality, rising living costs, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Asked about the ruling class’ homicidal response to the pandemic, which has led to millions of deaths worldwide to keep non-essential production running, he denounced the Turkish government: “They lowered isolation period [from 10] to five days. The company says come and work after five days.”

When more than 100 cases emerged at the Çimsata? factory in September 2020, in contrast, all workers were quarantined at home and the plant was shut for two weeks.

Stating that he agreed with the WSWS that metal workers should take matters into their own hands by forming an independent rank-and-file committee, the worker said that the fact that this strike did not spread to other factories, as during the 2015 strikes, weighed on the strikers. “There was no spread to other factories, which was instrumental in the withdrawal of workers,” he said.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warns Çimsata? workers must be prepared for further retaliatory actions by the company, such as new layoffs. Workers should form an independent rank-and-file committee to repel such attacks, defend their demands, get their dismissed colleagues back and call on other metalworkers to follow the same path.



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