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Russia

Ford-Vsevolozhsk strike continues

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The strike on the Ford assembly plant in Vsevolozhsk continues already for three weeks although management already twice announced it is broken.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ford-22.jpg>]

Photo from vpered.org.ru

The strike started at midnight November 19th after the four-month negotiations with management failed. The main demand of the workers lead by the Interregional Trade Union of Autoworkers (ITUA) is a 30% wage increase along with improving conditions and renegotiation of the collective agreement.

Management acted in a most unconstructive way, initially refusing to have any negotiations with the union "during or under the threat of strike". But after a week of strike during the top sales period it was not possible any more to cover an irretrievable fall of production using the old stocks. So management called ITUA to hold a "meeting" where it offered an 11% increase from March 2008. Yet the official rate of inflation in Russia this December already topped Ford's generosity (at 11.5%) and the union rejected the sop.

Three weeks of strike is an all-fired long term for Russia, and not just because strikes are usually stated to be illegal by courts on the employers claims. But with the current wage levels people are able just to keep their head above the water therefore they can't stop work for such a long time.

Under these circumstances ITUA made an ambiguous step: most of 1500 strikers officially went out of the strike after 3 days. But even 350 activists who were still refusing to work were enough to keep plant still. They got paid by the union. Others therefore could get 2/3 of their wages from Ford as their absence from work was now from legal point of view a "forced outage". This situation continued from November 23rd to 28th.

Although on November 28th management made an attempt to restart production. It was able to reach, by night phone-calls and bringing to the plant, about 350 workers from different shifts and stations that were not able to provide any good excuse for their absenteeism. But it turned out to be impossible to organize normal production even in one shift. During the first day of "production" just 66 cars were assembled (normal production would be 350 cars a day). Not one of these 66 passed quality control as that department was on strike.

At the same moment workers started spontaneously getting officially back on strike. Notwithstanding that the union was not able to pay this number of people, today about 800 Ford workers are on strike. Every day the union committee get about 30-40 new notifications of people joining the strike. About 600 people more are absent from work, by the different excuses, and are getting their 2/3 of wage.

On December 11th management widely announced an attempt to restart night time production ("the third shift"). This "shift" assembled yesterday about 40 cars (normally would be 90). In total yesterday 117 cars went off assembly line. ITUA claims that one third of normal production (and almost 100% of this is even faulty) is hardly a "resuming normal work of the plant".

Last day there were in total about 500-600 people working at the assembling line including office stuff and trainees. Therewith work in the paint and welding shops is recognized as dangerous for health and by sending there people without corresponding training and admittance management commits a criminal offence. According to workers who were at yesterday's "third shift": "In the welding shop there were 4 people per station instead of 11. The supervisor

tried to force us to work faster and, when he was told that there're not enough people, offended workers and added that "who doesn't like it can go on strike".

Today it's a matter of fact that Ford-Vsevolozhsk is on strike. And the results of this strike will determine a lot more than just wages of its workers. Russian workers from all regions of the country watch on the small assembling factory near St-Petersburg. Ford workers' victory will become a general victory and powerful impulse for Russian labour movement. Strikers get wage loss compensation of 500 RUR (US\$20) a day from a specially launched solidarity fund. Those who have some incomes yield compensation in favour of single parents and larger families. But today union hangs on by the skin of teeth - people are ready to fight till the end but there's tragic lack of money. Many Russian and foreign trade unions including International Metallist Federation affiliates transfer money to Ford-Vsevolozhsk union. Fundraising campaign is organized also by Labourstart.org.

You can help Ford union:

Mezhregional'nyi profsoyuz rabotnikov avtoproma (MPRA)- interregional union of autoworkers of Russia

OGRN: 1077800001102

INN: 7813202800

KPP: 781301001

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Postscript

Ford-Vsevolozhsk strike continues

The strike has now ended, as Boris Kagarlitsky explains in [this report](#).