

STRIKE!

PUBLICATION OF THE UNION OF SYNDICALISTS, WARSAW GROUP

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Don't Be A Scab!

Comrades from Great Britain initiated an outreach campaign to Polish workers who were candidates for scab labour during a recent postal strike.

Activists from ZSP Warsaw visited a local employment agency which hires postal workers for work in Great Britain and Ireland and leafleted potential employees. They also spoke with workers from the local post office whom they supported during a recent strike.

The message may be a tough one for people who are just looking for a job but it needs to be promoted.

Employment Agency Breaks Law: ZSP starts info campaign

A colleague wrote to tell us that a work agency which recruits people for the local automobile factory promises work conditions which it doesn't fulfill.

WorkWonders agency is in charge of finding workers for the FSO Factory who are willing to work for 9 zloty an hour, or 360 euros per month. No experience is necessary they say. The agency encourages people to work extra on Saturdays, although without overtime pay. The claim that workers will be paid for this work from the factory cash register on the day of work but our colleague had to wait about 3 months for payment, which was made in contradiction to the law on overtime.

The agency also claimed that people could choose their shifts, which turned out not to be true. In addition, workers were forced to work mixed shifts. According to the labour code, if someone is not given 11 hours rest between shifts, they can also get overtime work.

Members of ZSP visited the agency's office in Warsaw and leafleted potential employees. A letter was sent to management, the State Labour Inspectorate and to the professional organization of work agencies.

Work agencies in Poland are required by law to state working hours in contracts. The law on temporary employment and work agencies however was amended in July and now keeping evidence of working time is the job of the company using the agency. This means that both sides, the agency and the firm where the work is done, are trying to pass the buck on this issue. In the case of our colleague, there was no such possibility as even his contract was signed before July and was not concluded in accordance with the law.

ZSP promised to monitor the situation with WorkWonders and will try to see if anybody else working for them has been deceived.



New Union Federation Formed

Members of the Union of Syndicalists, Poland are anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, anarcho-communists and libertarian communists. They may belong to a different unions, depending on prior affiliation or local situation. If they are not members of a libertarian or anarcho-syndicalist union but rather a mainstream one, they should fight to promote grassroots unions, non-hierarchical organization and anarcho-syndicalist ideals inside that union. Where possible, they can form encourage workers to join an anarcho-syndicalist union.

Non-affiliated members of ZSP formed the union federation KFP – the National Workers' Federation. After months of discussion and work, a statute was adopted at the end of August. The first workplace signed up 19 people in September and, as soon as the resolution and statutes are legalized, hopefully more workplaces will be set up.

The KFP is organized using radical principles of direct democracy; there is no chairperson or leaders and all representatives work by a clearly defined mandate.

KFP also organized a commission to work with foreign workers and irregular workers in Warsaw. So far, contacts are made with Russian construction workers. Some of them had already come in contact with KRAS-IWA in Moscow.

We will send out more information as things develop.

Polish Bus Drivers' Quasi-Victory

In August 2007, municipal bus drivers in the city of Kielce went on strike. The workers are opposed to privatization plans for the company as they feared their jobs would be lost. Members of the Union of Syndicalists tried to make contact with the workers on a grassroots level and had just issued a statement and decided on a wider campaign when all of a sudden the strike was over. The mayor of the city decided to form a "workers' company" instead, a form of privatization which has been used to stop strike actions and cheat workers in Poland since widescale privatization began. We were sceptical, and, as it turned out, the company will most likely fire a quarter or a third of their workforce by the end of the year.



Anarchist and libertarian news agencies around the world have had news of a victorious bus drivers' strike in Poland. Although some people think that the drivers "have control" over the company, what they really have is a bunch of stocks and a business in debt which will have to be restructured.

The drivers fought bravely, even when cops and private security guards came to rough them up. 17 days into the strike, after workers had even managed to occupy offices and had to be violently removed, the mayor, who had vowed never to give into the strikers, suddenly announced that the workers could run the company and that they'd be guaranteed a monopoly in the city (despite the fact that this isn't legal).

For those workers' activists who support the capitalist workers' shareholder schemes called workers' companies, this means that "the workers had the company in their own hands". The reality of the matter is a little different.

Unfortunately, most reprints of this information cut out the authors caveat; even the fans of workers' companies added a note that it has yet to be seen what will come of this. As they should: activists of this group who were working under a similar scheme got fucked and the main guy even was fired from the "workers' company" which in fact got, like most of them do, dominated and run by the former managers and new investors.

Although we can say that the bus company in Kielce probably will not be sold to an "outside investor", and thus some people may avoid losing jobs in the short term, the following puts a different light on the picture:

According to Polish privatisation law, when a "workers' company" is formed, this means that 15 per cent of shares are given to the workers for free. A company of this sort can be a worker-management partnership or a partnership with an outside investor. Even where workers are to have at least 51 per cent of shares, this does not mean any real collective workers control. Richer workers, with capital, can purchase more shares becoming majority shareholders. Workers with little money often chose to sell their shares after an obligatory holding period.

What about the price of the shares? Well, the company has to be valued. What if the workers can't afford the shares? The deal can fall through.

Initial estimates have been made for the Kielce bus company and prices are high. The restructurers from the union now are raiding the workers' aid funds (left for those who have accidents or are sick) to pay for the capital. Good thing that the companies or unions don't control pension funds here - they'd be the first to be raided.

What about debts? Well, turns out the workers have to pay them off. Usually they have to go to a bank which gives them loans -if they adopt a restructuring plan. They have to usually pay off debts over 10 years. During this time, the enterprise usually has to undergo austerity programs which can mean lower wages for the suckers who are paying off the company's debts.

Such a privatized company now can no longer have losses, especially has it will have to repay

its debts or have its property foreclosed.

Most recently economists have calculated that with this bus company's costs, to reduce losses and repay debts, 150 of the 600 bus drivers - that is 25% of the staff, will have to be fired. And that's what probably will happen - because that's what's happened in similar cases. If costs rise, additional people may have to be fired.

Although there are no municipal bus companies using this form of ownership in Poland, many local intercity bus companies have this structure and it usually doesn't work too well for the workers. In many cases, the introduction of a workers' company has led to many firings and the hiring of new wage laborers. At least in one bus company, worker "owners" (each with a miniscule share), were fired and rehired as independent contractors after being forced to register their own companies!

Unfortunately, many people don't have basic information about these schemes or are so desperate to keep their jobs that this all seems like a good idea to them. Not to mention the fact that they don't know the difference between workers' cooperative self-management (based on the principles of equality, not capital) and worker participation in capital.

The "victory" here is that the workers kept fighting despite everything, and acted in solidarity. In this case, we admired the workers in this struggle and see it as a victory in spirit. But is it a real victory?

We hope that something good will come out of this all, but there is a sad history of such schemes. Most of them wind up in the hands of the old management who either fuck the workers or sell off all the assets and liquidate. The statistics on this are very sad and show how the overwhelming majority of all these schemes ended up in the hands of management or liquidated. We know that many people made a fortune by getting rid of the workers, by forcing the company into the ground and getting them to sell their tiny stocks for nothing - and then selling or renting assets like real estate. Some people from Solidarity were even involved in such scams, including people related to the Kaczynskis.

ZSP WARSAW

About us

ZSP was formed in March 2007. Since the founding conference, part of the main activity of ZSP has been to set up the basis for its functioning and to find some new people. Currently there are people from 8 cities involved and, after our December 2007 Congress, we will probably start wider campaigns to build the movement and the organization.

The publication of ZSP is a paper called Zaplata; one issue was released for May Day and a second one is due by the end of the year. Zaplata is given out for free, especially in places where there may be a workers' struggle such as in Puck where our member was in constant contact with hospital workers, in Opel during a strike action or at the nurses protests in Warsaw. Besides dealing with topics related to working life, Zaplata gives legal advice and ideas for organizing.

Local groups may also publish newsletters if they feel the need. So far, the Warsaw group has started also a local publication.

Many members of ZSP are active on the Internet portal CIA which is the biggest anarchist/left portal in Poland. Recently LabourStart has begun to add reports are labour struggles from CIA but unfortunately the local editors are not very internationalist and tend to choose only news about local labour struggles.

ZSP has also launched an Internet portal called "Pracownik" which it will be heavily promoting soon.

ZSP is thus currently more in the outreach phases, although it has already participating in some actions.

A small account of some of the activities of the Warsaw group:

At the end of April we hosted the Ideas and Action conference in Warsaw before May Day. One concrete thing that came out of that was a plan to work together with Slovak comrades to agitate in the automobile industry. Our colleagues in Silesia are in contact with some autoworkers, as are



people in Warsaw. We also spread information about conditions in the auto factories, including info about the Czech Republic where one comrade works and where many Polish workers are sent. We hope to develop this project more after our Congress.

ZSP Warsaw organized a May Day march in Warsaw which was reported on national TV and media.

During the nurses action in Warsaw, ZSP was visible and helped with providing drinks and toiletries to the women there.

ZSP contacted the owners of a restaurant franchise after workers there complained about violating their rights. We were demanding that they include clauses in their franchise agreement that would insure workers' rights. At first the owners of the restaurants, a vegetarian operation called "Green Way" were denying what people were saying but we promised to organize a campaign called "Green Way – no Way" and boycott it. When news of this got out, workers from Green Way started sending information around, including information to vegetarian portals that the meals labelled vegan weren't really vegan. We made contact with some local employees and decided to send a film crew but the bosses seemed to get scared and promised to control the franchises which were acting incorrectly. We left contact

information at the restaurant locally and promised to monitor the situation and organize a campaign if something happens.

ZSP also made contact with workers in Hewlett Packard who were discriminated against and who have awful conditions, most of them being agency employees. We will continue to try to agitate in that workplace.

ZSP members took part in a solidarity action for striking postal workers and spread information about current law and negotiation about the liberalization of postal services to the workers, explaining what the government is up to.

These are some of the activities of ZSP. In addition, the Warsaw group has helped set up the National Workers' Federation and organized a union group in one workplace which rejected the boss's works council. Part of the work included informing people of the differences between work councils and unions and getting people aware of their rights.

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ZSP STATEMENT

Why we are Boycotting Coca Cola

We joined the boycott of Coca Cola to protest its poor records on human and workers' rights. We strongly believe that consumers should not financially support corporations which have bad policies, in particular bad labour policies. We find some of the past acts of Coca Cola corporation to be morally unconscionable and are outraged that they try to lekcewazyc the incidents. Among the problems that inspire our protest are:

- Supporting the apartheid regime in South Africa
- The murder of 8 unionists working in Guatemala Coca Cola bottling factories in the late 70s
- Repression of unionists in Mexico and El Salvador
- Refusing to obey a court order to reinstate 50 unlawfully fired workers in Peru
- Forcing workers to work overtime and for less than minimum wage in Chile
- Supporting the Abacha regime in Nigeria
- The murder of 8 unionists in Colombia
- Denying residents use of formerly community water resources in Chiapas
- Pay discrimination against black employees in Atlanta (court ordered Coke to pay \$190 million dollars in compensation to 2000 black employees)
- Refusing to live up to 1990 promise to use bottles with partly-recycled plastic
- Pumping excessive ground water in India and producing toxic fertilizers
- Repression of unionists in Turkey
- Intimidating workers in Indonesia
- Bad labour practices in St. Petersburg and the UK leading to recent strikes

etc, etc..

It is clear from the list that Coca Cola has poor labour practices around the world and has had

financial interests in supporting repressive regimes. That's why we say no to Coca Cola.

The Coca Cola Company is only one of many companies which abuse workers rights. By joining the boycott, we are not implying it is the only company which should be boycotted. We are hoping that the boycott will grow in strength in Poland as it has in other countries and show people that they can send a message to greedy and unethical corporations through their consumer choices and activism, in this case, by supporting the boycott.

ZSP

The Situation in the Health Care Industry

(extract from article published on libcom.org)

The health care system in Poland is in deep crisis for many reasons. The amount of the GNP spent on health care is on the bottom of the list of OECD countries and is kept low as a policy of forcing the system into the ground as a way to introduce privatization. The system is also rife with corruption.

Salaries for doctors and nurses are notoriously low. There are no standard salaries, and what one earns often depends on numerous factors, but all too often, health care workers earn about half of the national average wage, often around 250-300 euros a month. Some workers get by only because they work extra shifts but in many cases, this overtime is not voluntary; the health care system is the victim of a brain drain with many of Poland's

professionals having gone abroad in search of a better living. In many hospitals, people have to work more and more – even up to 80 hours a week – just to keep the hospital operating.

The state, which usually pretends to want to maintain the health care system, in fact does everything possible to push towards privatization. Many hospitals are charged with “poor management” and then debt collectors are sent to them. The government has been encouraging and empowering these debt collectors to go to hospitals and repossess equipment and even to evict them. While it is true that some hospitals are in deep debt or are seriously mismanaged, the government's stance has done nothing to help them. In place after place, the government has closed down hospitals and clinics, overloading those that remain. Private hospitals have been moving into some of the hospitals abandoned by the state.

Since the publication of this article, we have got a new government which promises to speed up privatization in industry, introduce flat taxes for personal income tax and which is changing its views on health care privatization all the time.

In fact, we see that doctors who gave in their notice often were rehired as “independent contractors” without certain benefits and in order to avoid paying them overtime. We will see how the labour situation develops. Keep an eye on portals such as anarkismo.net or libcom for updates on the situation.