

WE ENDED THE RESISTANCE AT ÖZAK TEXTILE

BUT UNTIL OUR DEMANDS ARE ACCEPTED

OUR FIGHT WILL CONTINUE

1- WHAT HAPPENED AT ÖZAK TEXTILE,

WHY DID THE WORKERS TAKE ACTION?

Özak Tekstil workers started to unionize with our union at the beginning of November 2023. Öz İplik-İş Union has been the union authorized and organized in Özak Tekstil for 7 years. During these 7 years, however, there has been no cruelty left for the workers at Özak Tekstil, including dismissals without compensation, forced labor for 18-20 hours a day, pressure, mobbing, harassment and threats against women workers.

In this so-called unionized factory, which manufactures for international brands such as Levi's, Zara and Hugo Boss, while workers were experiencing all these violations of their rights, the union in charge of the workplace not only remained silent in the face of all these injustices and persecution, but also worked as the Human Resources department of the factory to suppress the workers' reaction and objections to these oppressions and to intimidate the workers.

The representatives of this union in Özak, which we know closely from other factories where it is organized, from taking minutes against the workers on behalf of the boss, to acting as witnesses for the boss in court against the workers who are their own members when workers who are dismissed without compensation sue the workplace, are the crutches of the brutal exploitation, oppression and slavery order imposed by the boss on the workers.

We are talking about a factory where even 10-12 year veteran workers are paid minimum wage, where workers faint while working due to overproduction and compulsory shifts of up to 18-20 hours a day, where women workers are made to work from 8 in the morning until 3 at night, where the shuttles leave them far from home at that time of night, where they sleep for three hours and then come back to work.

We are also talking about a factory where women workers are harassed by some masters and union representatives, and when women object and want to complain, they are threatened with slander, silenced and fired without compensation...

In this factory where Öz İplik-İş has been authorized for 7 years, the last 4 years of these 7 years have been spent with the workers' struggles to get rid of this union. Previously, at the beginning of 2020, workers resigned from Öz İplik-İş collectively and switched to another union, but the boss and Öz İplik-İş representatives collaborated and again forced workers to resign with threats of dismissal and unpaid leave and made them members of Öz İplik-İş.

Özak Tekstil is such a factory, Özak Boss is such a boss and the so-called union in this workplace is such a union.

Özak workers resigned from Öz İplik-İş in early November 2023 and started to organize in our union, BİRTEK-SEN, against this oppression, mobbing, slavery and pro-boss, collaborative union system in the workplace.

In the factory where 700 workers work, more than 500 workers became members of our union in a short period of two weeks.

When the memberships started, factory managers and Öz İplik-İş representatives set up persuasion and interrogation rooms inside. Dozens of workers who had become members of our union were dragged into these interrogation rooms one by one and forced to resign from our union and rejoin Öz İplik-İş with pressure and threats of dismissal. Some women workers were threatened with their private lives and families. And finally, when one of our female worker members refused to resign as a result of these threats and pressures, she was fired. When the dismissals started, more than 450 workers who were tired of these pressures and threats and knew that the dismissals would continue, quit their jobs and started resistance.

## 2-WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE RESISTANCE STARTED?

On the third day of the resistance, at the boss's request, the governor of Urfa imposed a 4-day protest ban across Urfa, and with the governor's instructions, workers who were waiting in front of the factory were harshly intervened, and our union leaders were detained. We were not even allowed to wait in front of the factory. The ban ended, but despite this, the entrance and exit of the street where the factory is located was illegally blocked with gendarmerie barricades, again on the instructions of the boss. We were not even allowed to enter the street of the factory. While workers who are members of our union were not allowed in front of the factory on the grounds that "it is forbidden to enter the street", only workers who were breaking the resistance were unlawfully let in with the instruction of the factory manager and the cooperation of the gendarmerie. Every time we objected and reacted to this unlawfulness and discrimination, of which the gendarmerie was a part by abusing its duty, we were subjected to harsh interventions with gas, tomahawk and baton attacks, and we were detained collectively many times.

In the following days of the resistance, the provincial mufti's administration, the Chamber of Industry and Chamber of Commerce administrations, and the AKP mayor Zeynel Abidin Beyazgül joined the governorate, gendarmerie and police in their hostility towards workers and collaboration with the bosses.

The mufti even banned Özak workers from entering the mosque where workers go every day to pray and use the restroom and toilet.

Military reinforcements were brought in from neighboring cities and the Özak workers were expelled from the OSB. In the 80 days since the beginning of the resistance, there have been repeated violent interventions and many male and female workers have been beaten. During the resistance we were subjected to collective detentions many times and 190 detentions were made. The detention periods of our union leaders and worker representatives were extended and they were taken to court with the demand for arrest.

Despite not falling under the jurisdiction of the labor court, a scandalous decision was taken to ban protests in and around the Özak Tekstil factory.

After the 56th day, when it was no longer possible to continue in front of or near the factory in Urfa, we decided to move the resistance to Istanbul, in front of Özak Holding, together with 10 other workers who volunteered.

But the anti-worker and boss-collaborator recklessness of the government and the local authorities at its command did not leave us alone in Istanbul. Our fellow workers and union leaders, along with those who were with us for support, were detained twice collectively.

In Zeytinburnu, where we set up our resistance tent last week and where Özak Holding is located, the district governorship imposed a one-week protest ban. On the same day, we moved the resistance to the front of Özak Tekstil in Başakşehir/İkitelli, but before an hour had passed, the Başakşehir district governorship also issued a ban and we were detained again.

This government and the local authorities at its orders, who could not fit the Özak Workers, who exercised their constitutional right to choose a union against the pressure of the boss and the yellow union, who were collectively dismissed for this reason and who have been resisting against this worker hostility for 80 days, into Urfa, did not fit the workers into Istanbul either.

All the forces of this system, with its governor, district governors, law enforcement, judiciary, mufti, all institutions representing the power and the state, literally declared war on the Özak workers who were seeking their rights by violating their own laws and the constitution for the interests of an anti-worker boss who trampled on the constitution and the legal rights of workers.

Of course, it was not only the Özak boss who saw the resistance of Özak workers and their unionization in BİRTEK-SEN as a threat. We know very well why the capitalist forces in Urfa and the region and the government and its local apparatuses, which have once again shown that they are in their service, attacked the Özak workers and our union so hostilely and why they are so afraid.

Because the successful end of the resistance of the Özak workers and the organization of BİRTEK-SEN here would disrupt the plans of those who want to make the region the Bangladesh of Turkey, a slave center based on cheap workforce. Because the resistance of Özak workers and BİRTEK-SEN was a great danger for this cheap slavery order that they wanted to control with bosses and government collaborator unions.

The resistance of the Özak Textile workers went down in history as one of the most striking examples of a government and the official institutions under its command doing everything they can to show how anti-worker and boss collaborator they are.

### 3- THE GAINS OF RESISTANCE

However, despite all the obstacles and all the impossibilities, the Özak workers, together with our union, showed extraordinary determination, courage and an epic resistance that lasted for 80 days and will not be forgotten even if 80 years pass.

We may not yet have achieved our demands for the reinstatement of the dismissed workers and the recognition of their right to choose a union. But the Özak resistance has already taught a lot and gained a lot for hundreds of thousands and millions of workers who want to be condemned to slavery and the collaborator union system.

The resistance of the Özak workers has shown what kind of unity, what kind of union and what kind of understanding of union struggle the workers need. But most importantly, it has also shown once again how all the bosses and the government are united against workers seeking their rights, and that we need strong unity and organization in the struggle against these forces, not in a single factory, but in many more factories, in organized industrial zones and at the level of basins.

For the first time, as a result of the determined struggle and resistance of the workers and our union, 96% of the dismissed workers at Özak Tekstil, a factory that has dismissed hundreds of workers without compensation since its establishment in Urfa 13 years ago and has never paid full compensation to a single worker in its history, have received their severance and notice pay and annual leave in full. For the remaining 24 workers, lawsuits for reinstatement and union compensation have been filed.

Also, as a result of the determined struggle we continued together with the workers, the impact of our resistance beyond the borders of the country, and the pressure we put on the international brands that Özak Tekstil manufactures, especially Levi's, Levi's was forced to cut orders and announced that it would completely cut off its relations with Özak Tekstil if these violations of rights are ended and the demands of the workers and our union are not accepted.

#### 4-ÖZAK TEXTILE BOSS'S ATTITUDE

As you know, Özak Tekstil management, which has not responded to our calls for dialogue since the beginning of the resistance and has not taken our union as an interlocutor, held a meeting with our union for the first time on February 1, due to the impact of the resistance and the pressure of the brands. But unfortunately this was the last meeting.

In this meeting, the employer's side proposed a phased formula for the reinstatement of the workers, conditional on the resumption of production. On our other two demands, they were completely uncompromising and negative.

Following this meeting, we held meetings with the workers to evaluate the boss's proposal and the results of the meeting. As a result of these meetings, we emailed the management of Özak Tekstil with the results of these meetings and our demands in writing.

In our comprehensive response to Özak management, we wrote in detail the views of the workers and the conditions under which we could reach an agreement.

We said that all the workers we met with insisted on the unconditional and simultaneous collective reinstatement of all workers who wanted to return to work.

We said that if our demands for reinstatement and recognition of the right to choose a union were accepted, we would be willing to be flexible on our demand for wages for days spent outside.

One of our most important demands was that the conditions for the reinstatement of the workers and our three demands be signed in a mutual protocol. However, due to the employer's negative attitude on this issue, we made a different suggestion in order to avoid a blockage in the dialogue and solution process and to serve the solution. Instead of signing a protocol with us, we said that it would be sufficient for us if the employer declares publicly that the demands we want to be included in the protocol are accepted and that they give assurances on this issue, and if the brands also commit this in writing.

Because if there is no agreement that will eliminate these violations of rights and allow workers to return to work, Levis will leave the factory completely and this will mean the closure of the factory in Urfa. The report written by international independent inspection organizations that came to Urfa and met with all sides during our resistance also reveals the rights violations and the justification of all our demands. After this report is shared with the public, not only Levis, but also the brands that produce in Özak's factories in Malatya and Istanbul will be withdrawn.

We repeatedly called on the employer to prevent this from happening. We said: don't cut orders, don't close this factory, take the workers back to work, give up your attitude that doesn't respect the legal rights of the workers and their choice of union.

We did not even stop there, we wrote to Levis to insist on staying instead of withdrawing and to take more responsibility for forcing the employer to come to an agreement.

But despite all these well-intentioned efforts and all our calls, the Özak Tekstil management responded with a long e-mail signed by the Social Responsibility Manager, which, despite such obvious violations of rights and unlawfulness, was extremely arrogant, blaming all the responsibility on the workers and our union, as if we had committed all the crimes that the workers were subjected to, written in accusatory language and completely closing the path to dialogue.

The sole basis for their response, which they wrote with a strong self-confidence and with the utmost arrogance despite their guilt, is the report they had the Ministry of Labor inspectors write.

The Ministry of Labor, on the instructions of the Özak boss himself and with the aim of writing a report that is exactly what the boss said it would be, neither the workers nor our union, as the aggrieved and complaining party, knew anything about the inspection, and not a single one of the 450 workers and members of our union who were dismissed during the inspection was interviewed.

The government, which mobilized all state forces from governors to district governors, from gendarmerie to police, from judiciary to mufti, in order to protect an anti-worker and anti-union boss and to suffocate the resistance of Özak workers fighting for their constitutional rights, also included the Ministry of Labor in these scandals.

Following the latest ban decisions of the district governorships, we are ending our tent resistance in Istanbul as of today.

However, we will continue to do our very best with the same responsibility to ensure that the dismissed workers are reinstated, that the workers' right to choose a union is recognized and that Levis continues to produce in this workplace and that the factory is not closed.

Despite the latest response from Özak Tekstil management, which was written in hostile language and ended all dialog, two days ago we wrote another letter to Levi's making the same call.

Today, on its 80th day, we are ending the resistance, but our resistance will continue. Our campaign and struggle against both Özak Tekstil and Levis will continue in the same way until all dismissed workers are reinstated and given the right to choose a union.

If this effort does not yield results and Levis and other brands are withdrawn and the factory is closed due to this anti-union and anti-worker attitude of the Özak employer, we declare that we will continue to hold Levis responsible for the union compensation of the workers at the international level and that we will continue our struggle in every legitimate, de facto, democratic and legal way to eliminate this victimization.