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Cononavirus pandemic and workers' struggles

Right to strike “confined” in France

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For several days SUD-Solidaires has denounced the lack of protection that continues in call centres. [1] Despite the *confinement* (lockdown), tens of thousands of people must continue to go to work to perform non-essential services, without the minimum of protection. Note that all of this is in complete contradiction with the maximum of five human interactions recommended by the government.

It seems very strange to us to continue to do customer service for companies like Lidl. The absolute need for the country to continue and have thousands of employees moving about for this type of activity remains an enigma for our union. Some companies offer telework, but it remains very underdeveloped despite the emergency. Major contractors, although with public capital, such as EDF, ENGIE (a billing service) reject its implementation for security reasons. Commercial security obviously takes precedence over public safety.

Hello corona?

In Belfort (Burgundy-Franche-Comté region), where this pandemic is very widespread, cases of coronavirus have been diagnosed all over the town. Our union asked for the maximum site security in order to preserve the health of employees. It seemed all the more important since some of them precisely work for the green (state) information number on COVID-19.

For our union, telework should have been imposed by management from the start, respecting all of the recommendations, or even strengthening them given the situation in the region. The reality of this centre of the world number one in the sector, Teleperformance [a transnational considered as world leader in multi-channel management of the outsourced customer experience, with its head office in Paris] is quite different since from the start our union team had to force through everything: reduction in the number of teleoperators per room, the availability of hydroalcoholic gel, more regular disinfection of work equipment and compliance with safety distances both in break spaces and in production spaces. At the moment, we don't have protective gloves, and no masks to move around and work. Even the possibility of working on a fixed station was only given last Wednesday, after the walkout. Worse, the management and the debriefing of listening was done without the appropriate distances

To obtain this advance, our union had to call a walkout of the employees last Wednesday (March 18) and trigger a right of information. So far we can say that all of this remains fairly common at the moment in view of the danger posed by employers to thousands of employees.

Police everywhere, health nowhere!

The management of Teleperformance, instead of meeting us to find a quick solution and to secure the situation, preferred to call the police to stop the walkout. The police have chosen to obey the management and ban the right to strike in the company by escorting the employees into work...

The police explain this choice to go against the right to strike by claiming that the rally was unauthorized and dangerous. However, as videos show, the employees had greater distances between them than on the production

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site. It seems obvious that there is a contradiction between the fact of prohibiting a gathering of more than 10 people outside, while we allow a grouping in a confined space of more than 50 people inside.

While our alerts were not heeded by management and state officials, our fears turned out to be true, as a case was announced the following day. It is likely that this person in the course of his duties was regularly in contact with several employees, including at their workstation. The site had to be closed for a major cleaning on Thursday morning (March 19) and will no doubt be reopened tomorrow.

What will the police say now? We reaffirm more than ever that our lives are worth more than their profits!

24 March 2020

PS:

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[1] Sud-Solidaires is a national group of trade-union federations, known for its radicality.