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## *For information from International Miners Coordination*

Dear Friends of the International Miners' Coordination Group

Thank you very much for your letters of solidarity! Especially as the words of solidarity are really very important for us right now.

There is now a nationwide campaign to harass the representatives of the workers' teams who took part in the wave of strikes in August. First of all, the repression is directed against the leaders of the strike committees who have recently appeared. Pressure on striking miners is also increasing in Soligorsk. Representatives of the strike committee are dismissed and summoned for questioning. The houses of some striking miners were searched. The members of the strike team were informed of their future dismissal. A rally in support of the miners was dispersed in the city on 3 October. About 20 people were arrested.

Workers are also being persecuted in other Belarusian companies: at the "Naftan" factory (Novopolotsk), the Belarusian car factory (Schodino). Two strike leaders at the Belarusian metallurgical plant (Khlobin) were arrested for 12 days. In Grodno, in the next few days, courts were convened over almost thirty workers at the "Azot" factory who had organised a march through the town as part of the 25 August strike and were arrested by the police. We also send greetings from the miners of Soligorsk to all activists of the International Miners' Coordination Group! We thank you for your support! Greetings

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As these lines are written, 22 brave miners of the Oktyabrskaya mine in Krivoy Rog remain on strike underground.

Hundreds of their comrades from various mines — including women — have already risen to the surface. Their demands have only been partially met, but they remain committed to their struggle. New, desperate battles lie ahead, against capital and for a decent life for Ukrainian workers. For the first time in the history of our state, we are witnessing labour struggle and solidarity on this scale.

On 3 September 2020, the miners of the Krivoy Rog Iron Ore Plant (KZhRK), run jointly by the conflicting oligarchs Rinat Akhmetov and Igor Kolomoisky, did not come to the surface. The workers demanded higher wages, which the management decided to cut a few months

before the protests, and better working conditions. From 8 September, the "Oktyabrskaya", "Rodina", "Ternovskaya" (formerly the "Lenin Mine"), and "Gvardeyskaya" mines were on strike. Throughout September, 393 miners stayed underground in protest. Many of them were women.

This miners' strike is unique in modern Ukraine. It is one of the first to bring together the struggles of miners and workers in other industries. In particular, railway workers from the Locomotive Depot in Krivoy Rog supported the miners' struggle with their "Italian strike". Activists from the Independent Railway Workers' Union identified technical issues in dozens of locomotives and refused to work on them. On 27 and 28 September, about 10 locomotives never left the Locomotive Depot in Krivoy Rog — a powerful demonstration of solidarity with the striking miners of KZhRK. Railway workers also took part in solidarity actions in places far from Krivoy Rog, including in Nikopol and Nizhnedniproviskiy Uzel.

The Krivoy Rog miners' protest was sparked by changes in the salary structure. The miners' wages were once paid hourly, taking into account all the time that they spent underground. Recently, wages have been tied to production, and salaries have fallen sharply: the outdated equipment in the mines fails regularly, and workers are no longer paid for repairing it. But overall working conditions also played a role. The miners say that the equipment at the mines has been in use for over 30 years, with significant detrimental impacts on their health and work environment. According to human rights defenders, a worker died in a mine at KZhRK in April 2020. A court later admitted that this was due to the poor technical condition of the equipment. Finally, the risk of losing the right to a pension added further impetus to the strikes. According to the miners, more than four thousand workers will not be eligible for preferential retirement. And Ukraine's pension reform, which was adopted several years ago, hit female miners particularly hard. Instead of a possible retirement at 45, they will have to work for at least five years longer.

Many leading Ukrainian media outlets have paid particular attention to the strikers' demand to replace the management of the Krivoy Rog Iron Ore Plant. I have already written that KZhRK is jointly owned by two competing Ukrainian oligarchs — Kolomoisky and Akhmetov — who have equal shares in the business. Kolomoisky formally transferred his share to another oligarch, Yaroslavsky, but experts believe that the management of KZhRK is still appointed by Kolomoisky. By focusing on the demand to replace the mine's management, many have assumed that the strikes are part of a plot by Akhmetov to gain total control over the Krivoy Rog Iron Ore Plant.

This conspiracy theory ignores the power of the mass worker protest movement that emerged. Such a movement is dangerous to the Ukrainian oligarchy at large. Here, in the face of a mass labour movement, the ruling class is consolidating; only mass organized labour can destroy Ukraine's model of oligarchic capitalism. That is why it is not the conflict between Ukrainian oligarchs that is important for us in our analysis, but the level of organisation and the activities of the democratic labour movement, embraced by independent trade unions across Ukraine.

Krivoy Rog is the birthplace of the current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, who received record support from voters in the presidential and parliamentary elections in his hometown. The miners of Krivoy Rog had reason to count on Zelensky's support for their demands. However, both Zelensky and the President's office distanced themselves from the miners. And, at meetings between the striking miners and members of parliament from Zelensky's *Servant of the People* party, the miners were asked to express their distrust of their trade union leaders, who had initiated the strike.

Moreover, Ukrainian authorities did not take any steps to protect the striking miners from repression by the administration of the Krivoy Rog Iron Ore Plant. The administration of the KZhRK began posting personal data on the underground striking miners on social networks,

and according to the information of the Ukrainian MP Mykhaylo Volynets, the apartment of one of the underground striking miners' apartment was burgled. "In fact, the head of the plant acted as a gunner for the 'domushniki' (burglars)," said Volynets.

"Workers who are underground feel inhuman physical and moral pressure... But there is an assumption that the president faces even more pressure from the oligarchs. I think that both owners are asking him not to interfere in the situation, because that would show that the protesters are right, and the situation will change significantly", says Vitaliy Dudin, head of the legal department of the All-Ukrainian Independent Trade Union "Zakhyst Pratsi" ("Labour Protection").

The situation is developing dynamically and every day brings news. But the fact that the Krivoy Rog miners strike has resonated around the world excites and encourages us. Every class struggle gives Ukraininan workers invaluable experience. Global workers' solidarity is no longer an abstract ideal, but a very concrete reality for workers in Ukraine. Ukrainian workers thank their comrades all over the world for their unprecedented showing of support. There are still many battles ahead for true democracy and labour rights. Thes fights have been, are, and will be international.

*Oleg Vernik is Chairman of the All-Ukrainian Independent Trade Union "Zakhyst Pratsi" ("Labour Protection").*

**For more information on the Ukrainian miners' strikes, read [this piece from Wire partner openDemocracy](#).**