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Strikers Force Russian E-Commerce Giant Wildberries to Rethink New Rules

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Denis Voronin / Moskva News Agency

Russian e-commerce platform Wildberries on Thursday announced a three-day suspension of controversial new rules that make employees financially liable for goods returned by customers after its staff launched a nationwide strike, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

New rules introduced by Wildberries this month made employees liable for the costs of any defective items that were returned as well as for those that were dispatched to the wrong buyer. The company justified the move by saying that in 98% of such cases, staff mistakes were to blame.

Wildberries employees launched a nationwide industrial action Wednesday to protest the new rules — a move which prompted the company to close several pickup points, claiming their owners had chosen an "uncivilized form of dialogue."

A mediation attempt convened by State Duma deputy Dmitry Gusev was attended by

representatives from company staff, but not by Wildberries management.

“Thanks to the dialogue and feedback mechanism with [owners of] pickup points and entrepreneurs, more than 10,000 incorrect fines … were canceled,” a Wildberries representative said.

Related article: Staff at Russian E-Commerce Giant Wildberries Begin Protest

The owners of several pickup points in different Russian regions reported that Wildberries had refunded the fines they had been made to pay, although some owners of striking pickup points reported being threatened and receiving visits from police.

Russia’s biggest online marketplace had said the system making employees and owners of pickup stations liable for costs of defective or fake items returned by customers was a bid to protect the suppliers and brands selling goods on its platform.

For one employee, the new system resulted in a deduction of up to 500,000 rubles ($6,581) from their wages, according to Forbes.

This is the third successful strike Russian unions have held since the war with Ukraine began. Ikea employees and Delivery Club couriers negotiated more favorable working conditions after staging countrywide strikes in the summer and fall of 2022.

Wildberries is one of the largest online marketplaces in Russia and has services in 15 European and Central Asian countries. The company boasts more than 48,000 employees and has profited from the so-called “gray imports” that circumvent sanctions imposed on Russia following the country’s invasion of Ukraine.

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