

Euzkadi-Labor Union SNRTE, Germanwatch and Food First Information & Action Network (FIAN)

Headquarters:	Mexico-City (SNRTE) / Bonn and Berlin, Germany (Germanwatch) / Heidelberg, Germany (FIAN)
Established:	1935 / 1991 / 1986
Website:	www.germanwatch.org / www.fian.org
Number of employees	20 / 14 / 50
Number of members:	1000 / 500 / 3500
Area of activity:	Independent labor union / Environmental and development politics / Right to food
Main objectives:	The Euzkadi-Labor Union SNRTE represents the tire workers interests of the traditional Mexican brand Euzkadi. Germanwatch promotes German and European politics and corporate behavior which is aligned to the concept of sustainability for North and South. FIAN promotes the right to food and the worldwide promotion and defense of economic, social and cultural rights.

Summary

The campaign of Germanwatch and FIAN, in close collaboration with the Mexican labor union Sindicato Nacional Revolucionario de Trabajadores Euzkadi (SNRTE), was directed against the unlawful closure of a Continental tire factory. That the campaign succeeded to get through its claims and to achieve the reopening of the factory can be attributed to a number of factors: strategic intelligence and resistance of the Mexican union, efficient German-Mexican collaboration, dialog with the Continental management, successful lobbying and good media work.

Reasons for the submission

In December 2001, the German tire manufacturer Continental shut down the Euzkadi factory in El Salto near Guadalajara, Mexico, and fired 1164 workers. The reason for the closure was a dispute between the management and the Mexican labor union SNRTE. New labor agreements which obliged employees to work twelve-hour shifts led to the dispute. With no conciliation on the horizon, Continental decided to shut down the factory. Thereby the company violated Mexican labor law which stipulates that authorization must be obtained to shut down a factory. Thus, the lay-off of the workers was unlawful.

The campaign goal of Germanwatch and FIAN, working in close collaboration with the Mexican labor union SNRTE, was to revoke the breach of law. Unlawfully released workers should be enabled to return to work and get compensation for the salaries they were deprived of during the time the factory was closed. To achieve these goals, the NGOs combined different strategies and applied them in Germany as well as in Mexico.

Germanwatch and FIAN assisted the workers in the defense of their labor rights vis-à-vis the Mexican Government and urged the latter to pressure the company to apply Mexican law. At the Mexican parliament and the judiciary as well as at the German Government and with members of parliament in Berlin, the NGOs argued the unionists' case with numerous writings and conversations.

Mexican unionists visited Germany three times to present their case to the company and to publicly bring forward their arguments. Germanwatch and FIAN organized meetings with the top management of the group but also with various German and European politicians. These recurring dialogs helped to soften previously entrenched positions.

In 2002, Germanwatch along with the Mexican labor union filed a complaint to the German OECD Contact Point due to the violation of the OECD Guidelines. The Mexican unionists repeated the submission at their National Contact Point. The OECD Guidelines constitute a set of voluntary recommendations to multinational enterprises that adhering governments promote among enterprises operating in or from their territories.

In cooperation with the Critical Shareholders the NGOs acquired the shareholders' right to speak at the Annual General Meeting (this right can be assigned to a third party). For three years in a row, the Mexican unionists as well as FIAN and Germanwatch brought the difficulties in Mexico to the attention of the convened owners of the company and the business press, and requested the chairmen of the board to accept accountability. The campaign brought the case successfully into the media. Leading German and Mexican Newspapers (amongst others Frankfurter Rundschau, La Jornada) reported regularly on the case and television stations (WDR, ARTE) broadcasted documentaries.

Results of the campaign

The combination of different strategies and the effective North-South cooperation turned out to be the key to success. After a three-year long strike and the pressure built up by the campaign Continental caved in to the demands of the workers. The principal demands were met: the reopening of the Euzkadi-plant and the preservation of the jobs. Furthermore the workers became fifty percent co-owners of the tire plant. At the end of February 2005, the Euzkadi-factory was reopened and in early August production restarted.

What happens next?

Germanwatch and FIAN want to use their experiences for future work. A brochure about the Euzkadi case as well as a manual containing hints for corporate campaigns is planned. A legal analysis should provide evidence on how northern corporations can be held accountable in their home country for labor and human rights violations in the South.

Detailed submission: www.publiceye.ch/nominierungen

Further information and links:

- www.germanwatch.org
- www.fian.org