

Novartis India Ltd. sacks 400 employees to break trade union

In the last few years, workers at Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis' operations in India have been subjected to rights violations, where the local management refuses to engage with the long-established union. The conflict has now escalated: 400 employees were laid off without a prior discussion. A letter from May 2021 to Novartis CEO Vas Narasimhan also went unanswered.

Since it was formed in 1984, the Novartis Employees Union (NEU) in India has enjoyed a constructive relationship with management. In January 2017, the union and management agreed on a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS), whereby both parties commit to meet three times a year to solve grievances. Not only was this not followed; management unilaterally tried to change employment conditions instead of using the established collective bargaining process. The MoS expired in December 2018 and the NEU submitted a new charter of demands in March 2019. But the management has refused to meet with the union to continue collective bargaining.

In their quest to bust the union, management manipulated the appraisal system to be used in a punitive way against union members and even as base for unfair dismissals. Management also informed newspapers about planned dismissals before informing workers and the union. Against the public position of the Novartis' chairman of the board, management in India used the Covid-19 pandemic to enact mass dismissals.

The union says that they have tried all possible avenues to rebuild relations and trust, but that management continues to disregard agreed protocols and honour the written agreements and understandings.

In a joint letter Swiss union Unia, human rights organization MultiWatch and IndustriALL Global Union called on the CEO of Novartis, based in Switzerland to intervene and *“to work with the management in India and remind them of the global social commitments of the Novartis group. These violations are a serious black mark on the image of Novartis. However, with your commitment, the damage can be healed, and our organizations are ready to assist that process.”*

The letter was sent on May 11, 2021 to Vasant Narasimhan, M.D., Chief Executive Officer, and Steven Baert, Chief People & Organization Officer Novartis. Till today we have not received an answer.

On February 11, 2022, 400 employees were laid off without prior consultation. In a statement, the Novartis Employees Union strongly criticized the dismissal: *“Our employer Novartis India Limited has unceremoniously on 11th February 2022 without following the due process of law and denying the Principle of Natural Justice consisting of adequate notice, fair hearing and no bias, have terminated all our Sale Promotion Employees.”*

We call on Novartis to engage now with the unions in order to protect jobs and workers' rights.

#NovartisSmashesUnion #injusticebynovartis #novartisterminates400employees

For requests, comments and support, please contact us at the following address:
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