



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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CommScope workers in Ciudad Juárez camp-in for union rights, 2015

Time period notes: *The exact start and end dates are not known.*

However, it is likely that the first action took place shortly after the workers' dismissal on 22 October 2015, and that the campaign ended around 4 December 2015, when the workers received legal recognition of their union.

22 October

2015

to: 4 December

2015

Country: Mexico

Location City/State/Province: Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua

Location Description: *Primarily outside the CommScope maquiladora in Ciudad Juárez*

Goals:

Establishment of an independent union and reinstatement of fired workers

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 016. Picketing › Camp-in
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 016. Picketing › Camp-in

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 016. Picketing › Camp-in
- 038. Marches
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 4th segment:

- 016. Picketing › Camp-in

Methods in 5th segment:

- 016. Picketing › Camp-in

Methods in 6th segment:

- 016. Picketing › Camp-in

Notes on Methods:

The start and end date of the 43-day camp-in are not known.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Maquiladora workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

CommScope workers

Partners:

Attorney Cauhetomoc Estrada

External allies:

Foxconn workers

Involvement of social elites:

Not known.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Attorney Cauhetomoc Estrada

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Foxconn workers

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

CommScope, state labor board

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known.

Campaigner violence:

Not known.

Repressive Violence:

Not known.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

3 points for success because the campaigners achieved one of their two goals, 1 point for survival since they established a legal union, and 1 point for growth because of the CommScope workers' collaboration with workers from other factories.

In 2015, when a number of maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico took a stand for better working conditions, one of the companies impacted was CommScope, a manufacturer of telecommunications infrastructure. Based in North Carolina, the company employed 3,000 workers in its Ciudad Juárez factory.

According to one of the company's former workers, the movement in CommScope began when a group of three workers, spurred by incidents of worker mistreatment, approached an attorney, Cauhetomoc Estrada, to find out how to form a union. From Estrada, the workers learned that they would have to obtain a registro, or legal status, for an independent union from local labor authorities, and that this task would be difficult, but not impossible. The attorney also told them to convene a meeting of workers. More than 200 CommScope workers came to the meeting, despite the organizers' expectation that only 30 would show up.

Accompanied by Estrada, 190 CommScope workers went to the Conciliation and Arbitration Board on 16 September 2015, Mexico's National Day, where they filed a request for a registro. Approximately one month later, on 12 October 2015, the workers held a small meeting at their workplace with the intention of demonstrating to the company that they had made the decision to unionize. Consequently, the factory supervisors, along with Human Resources, began to harass the workers, telling them that their organizing was a waste of time and would not be permitted.

On 19 October 2015, CommScope fired 172 of the maquiladora workers involved in the unionizing effort. "They say it's because we organized a work stoppage, but we never did that," said Verónica Rodríguez, one of the dismissed workers. In response to the firings, Estrada filed a legal complaint with Mexico's Labor Arbitration and Conciliation on behalf of the workers. He insisted that the dismissals were illegal, and a violation of human rights.

When interviewed about the labor conflict by Frontera NorteSur, a news site published at the Center for Latin American and Border Studies at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, CommScope's Vice President of Corporate Communications Rick Aspan claimed that the company had terminated fewer than ten workers. He also said that CommScope had dismissed the workers due to their violation of company rules, and not because they had joined a union. Similarly, in a statement released on 11 November 2015, CommScope rejected the assertion that it had dismissed employees because of their efforts to organize.

On 22 October 2015, the workers, in reaction to their dismissal, established a plantón, or protest encampment, outside the factory to demand an independent union and their reinstatement. In groups of 15 to 20 people, in six-hour shifts, they kept watch 24 hours a day as people stopped by to give them burritos, water, and other supplies. Although the police, called in by CommScope, often harassed the workers and told them that they had to move, the workers, knowing that their actions were legal and within their rights, stayed in place. The CommScope workers also met with workers from other factories to discuss how they could form a larger movement.

On 26 October 2015, a group of the fired CommScope workers joined an occupation of the Bridge of the Americas, a series of bridges that connects Ciudad Juárez with El Paso, Texas in the United States. At this demonstration, the workers held signs such as “Commscope, you want us to die of hunger” and “Commscope, I demand my reinstatement” and chanted “We are workers, not criminals!” and “We want a solution...union freedom!” Led by small-scale farmers and organized by rural, human rights, and environmental activists, the action was one in a series of monthly protests started 13 months earlier, when 43 rural teacher students were disappeared in the state of Guerrero.

At some point during the campaign, the state labor secretary visited the protesters in their encampment to ask that they lift the plantón because their demonstration was harming the company’s image. When the workers told the secretary that they would agree to his demand if he ensured that they receive a registro for their union, he refused.

After the secretary made a second visit in November and still refused to grant a registro, the workers organized a march to put pressure on authorities to meet their requests. On 12 November 2015, hundreds of maquiladora workers from CommScope and other companies, such as Foxconn, marched through the streets of Ciudad Juárez alongside supporters to demand an independent union and the rehiring of workers, the dismissal of legal accusations against Foxconn workers arising from earlier protests, the payment of money previously withheld from workers for a savings account, and better pay and working conditions. The CommScope workers waited outside the Labor Board office for four hours until the secretary finally emerged and promised them a registro.

Although the state rejected the union petition three times over the course of the struggle, the workers ultimately received a registro and became certified as a legal union on 16 December 2015. As part of an agreement with the president of the labor commission, the workers took down the plantón on 4 December 2015, marking the end of a 43-day camp-in. Despite winning union recognition, CommScope did not reinstate the fired workers.

Research Notes

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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