

Migrant workers in Slovenia hunger strike for wages, 2010

Timing

March 1,
2010
to:
March 10,
2010

Location and Goals

Country:
Slovenia

Location City/State/Province:

Kocevje and Ljubljana

Location Description:

Kocevje is a municipality in southern Slovenia. Ljubljana is the capital of Slovenia.

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Immediate payment of all of the wages owed by Perkovic

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)›Hunger Strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 011. Records, radio, and television›pictures and videos of the hunger strike
- 013. Deputations

Segment Length:

1 2/3 days

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Migrant Workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Mevludin Mostarlic, Samir Muhamedbegovic, Nisad Huseinbasic, Samir Ljubijankic, Mustafa Begic, Jozef Lukac, Patrick Istvan, Sead Husic, Sulejman Klitic, Almir Portic, and Asmir Bosnjakovic

Partners:

None known

External allies:

Head of Labour Inspectorate Borut Brezovar, Invisible Workers of the World, NGO Socialni center Rog, ZSSS, Milos Pavlica, and Minister Ivan Svetlik

Involvement of social elites:

Minister Ivan Svetlik, Head of Labour Inspectorate Borut Brezovar

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Borut Brezovar
- IWW

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Minister Ivan Svetlik

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The joining order of the remaining external allies is unknown

Segment Length:

1 2/3 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Prenova and the owner Zoran Perkovic

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

7 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

While the workers did not achieve their goal of obtaining their wages with the hunger strike, they ended the strike because they had many options through which to obtain their wages.

Migrant workers in Slovenia have very few legal grounds on which to secure fair labor practices. According to the Employment and Work of Aliens Act (passed in 2000), workers who were not citizens had to work for the same employer for at least two years straight (sometimes longer) in order to apply for a personal work permit. At that point, a migrant worker could work for a different employer, but the work permit was only valid for three years, at which point the worker must apply again. Migrant workers were also excluded from Slovenian social welfare.

One company that took advantage of these legal loopholes was Prenova, a contracting company in the town of Kocevje. Zoran Perkovic, the owner, had not paid his workers a salary or social security in 15 months, with the exception of a few small cash installations and promises of more to come. While most of the 130 employees of the company left Slovenia without their wages, eleven stayed, determined to get paid. With no means to legally negotiate with their employer, nor for engaging with the state, eleven Bosnian and Serbian construction workers began a hunger strike on March 1, 2010, in order to draw attention to the desperate nature of their situation. The

eleven strikers were Mevludin Mostarlic, Samir Muhamedbegovic, Nisad Huseinbasic, Samir Ljubijankic, Mustafa Begic, Jozef Lukac, Patrick Istvan, Sead Husic, Sulejman Klitic, Almir Portic, and Asmir Bosnjakovic. Their demands were simple: immediate payment of all wages that Perkovic owed them. That same day, they turned to the Head of Labour Inspectorate Borut Brezovar to launch an investigation of the company.

They began their hunger strike in a hut on the outskirts of Kocevje. Pictures and video taken of the eleven men in their drafty hut in the winter helped to demonstrate the lengths to which they were willing to go to get their salaries. They exposed their bodies to dampness, cold, and hunger to emphasize just how much they had contributed to Slovenia with their labor and skill.

On March 9, the workers moved their hunger strike from the hut to the Labour Ministry in the capital of Ljubljana, saying that they would continue their hunger strike until they got paid because they saw “no other solution.” That same day, the workers met with Milos Pavlica, the state secretary at the Prime Minister’s office. He expressed sympathy with their “distress,” and said that while the state could not collect their salaries from Perkovic, it could assist them in other ways, such as issuing them work permits. However, the workers just wanted their salaries. The ministry advised them to sue their employer for the EUR 50,000-60,000 they were owed. On March 10, Labour, Family, and Social Affairs Minister Ivan Svetlik met with the strikers to discuss their legal options, in addition to offering them welfare benefits until they signed with a new employer. Public officials also promised to start looking into changing legislation around the rights of migrant workers. The workers ended their strike on the 10th.

Other groups also helped the strikers. Many other contractors offered to hire the men. The Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) offered to provide the workers with free legal aid, and the Red Cross offered them food until they signed with a new employer. Throughout the strike, the organization Invisible Workers of the World (IWW), an organization that investigates unfair labor practices, helped disseminate information about Slovenia’s unfair migrant labor policies, as well as the eleven workers’ campaign. It started an investigation in 2008 and produced a document that investigated the unfair work permit structure in Slovenia and urged a move toward new legislation on collective bargaining rights of migrant workers to give them a voice within Slovenia’s political structure. The IWW published the study on its website, which helped bring in more attention and support for the hunger strike. (For more information on IWW and their document, go to tovarna.org/node/1380).

It is, as of yet, unknown what steps the eleven hunger strikers have taken steps to obtain their wages.

Research Notes

Sources:

“Bosnian Workers Protest Against Slovene Employers Over Unpaid Wages.” STA News Agency. 19 July 2010. British Broadcasting Corporation.

“Minister Offers Help to Desperate Foreign Workers.” 10 March 2010. Republic of Slovenia: Government Communication Office. 20 February 2011.

<http://www.ukom.gov.si/en/media_room/newsletter_slovenia_news/news/article/391/1223/7a2db9c073/?tx_ttnews%5F

“Workers in Slovenia Hunger Strike for Unpaid Wages.” Libcom.org. 8 March 2010. blogger- oszasavje. 21 February 2011. <<http://libcom.org/news/slavery-europe-slovenia-08032010>>.

“Workers Move Their Hunger Strike to Ljubljana.” 9 March 2010. Slovenian Press Agency. 20 February 2011. <<http://www.sta.si/en/vest.php?s=f&id=1489225>>.

Additional Notes:

The information on this case is scattered. Not much from the workers’ perspectives. There was not much information on how the workers got media attention. Also, no information on the workers' course of action after they ended the hunger strike could be found. To see a video of the hunger strike, go to

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByDNisHuh_s.

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

Hannah Jones 25/02/2011

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