



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Rwandan textile workers strike against unfair labor practices, 2011

February 14,
2011

to: February 19,
2011

Country: Rwanda

Location City/State/Province: Kigali

Location Description: UTEXRWA textile factory

Goals:

To change unfair labor practices such as: low wages, poor working conditions, lack of a platform to express grievances with the management, and the dismissal of colleagues due to the expression of complaints.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 105. Establishment strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 105. Establishment strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 105. Establishment strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 105. Establishment strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 105. Establishment strike

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- textile workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Congress of Labour Fraternity in Rwanda (COTRAF), Francois Ntakiyimana (General Secretary of COTRAF)

Involvement of social elites:

Anna Mugabo, the Director General of Labour and Employment at the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (Mifotra)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Congress of Labour Fraternity in Rwanda (COTRAF)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Ministry of Public Service and Labour (Mifotra)

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

UTEXRWA management, Trivets Deepak (manager of UTEXRWA)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Strikers succeeded in getting their co-workers re-instated but none of their other goals. The striking group of workers survived the entire strike but did not succeed in gaining many more members or allies.

On February 14, 2011, Rwandan textile workers began a 6-day strike to protest unfair labor practices instituted by new management. More than 500 workers at UTEXRWA, a local textile firm, went on strike in response to a multitude of negative changes instituted by a new factory manager, Trivets Deepak, 3 months prior to the beginning of the strike.

UTEXRWA workers protested due to a number of unwelcome changes and management's refusal to address the problems caused by these changes. The workers stated that there was no way to express their grievances. Workers also protested the dismissal of 33 co-workers that had complained to the management. Low wages, denial of annual leave, non-payment of overtime, and poor working conditions prompted the initial complaints. Workers stated that working conditions were hazardous to their health. Textile workers also expressed discontent with the fact that UTEXRWA no longer provided them with milk, which had helped to counter the possibility of contracting diseases from the chemicals used in the factory's production of textiles.

On February 15, strikers assembled in protest outside of the UTEXRWA factory to express their dissatisfaction in public speeches to Gasabo District Executive Secretary Ibrahim Ndagijimana and the manager Trivets Deepak. Gasabo District officials came to the factory to play the role of mediators. General Secretary of the Congress of Labour Fraternity in Rwanda (COTRAF), Francois Ntakiyimana, advocated for the workers stating that UTEXRWA violated the workers labor rights when it denied them the freedom to express their grievances. Ntakiyimana said, "Article 120 of the Labour Code grants workers, anywhere in the country, the right to air out their views concerning their work, which is visibly lacking here."

Anna Mugabo, Director General of Labour and Employment in the Ministry of Public Service and Labour, intervened as a mediator in the strike on February 16. Mugabo stated that ministry wanted to find out if the dismissal of the employees was in accordance with labor law and Article 120. She promised compensation to the dismissed workers if the ministry found evidence of unfair termination.

On February 19, Anna Mugabo requested that UTEXRWA reinstate the dismissed employees during a meeting with Trivets Deepak. The 33 dismissed employees attended the meeting. Mugabo said, "According to the labour law, article 33, the dismissal ranking should be done in accordance with the performance, professional qualification, time spent in the company and social responsibilities. And this is after you have notified the employees one month before. For UTEXRWA, that was not the case." Mugabo also ruled that if UTEXRWA did not reinstate the employees then it must give them their terminal benefits.

The strike seems to have ended after February 19 with minimal success. While the Ministry of Public Service and Labour ruled that the 33 workers must be reinstated, strikers made little progress on any of their other demands for change.

Research Notes

Sources:

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