



News from European Workers in Unilever

November 2007 : for immediate release

Unilever's European Workers' Condemn Company Strategy Protest in Rotterdam, 4 December

After the announcement of 20,000 jobs being cut at Unilever worldwide, trouble is brewing within the group as workers await a wave of wholesale dismissals. European trade union federations, EFFAT and EMCEF are working with the Unilever European works council to hold a Unilever European worker representative's meeting and demonstration in Rotterdam on 4th December. Over 500 worker representatives are expected to attend from all over the EU. The event will be accompanied by national protests throughout Europe.

On 2nd August Unilever announced a plan to sell off 'slow-growth' businesses and slash a massive 20,000 jobs to an audience of analysts and financial journalists during a meeting to announce quarterly figures. Workers representatives in the company with information and consultation rights, including Unilever's European Works Council (UEWC), had not been consulted and still have not been informed about which jobs are under threat. 12 000 jobs are expected to go in Europe.

Günter Baltés, chairman of the UEWC, commented: "This latest announcement affects almost one in every three jobs in Western Europe. We are sick and tired of being told year after year that we have to restructure to grow. If this were right, we would now be in a fantastic position. No one is safe any more. The company is no longer meeting its social responsibilities with this policy."

Unilever is shrinking year by year. Many traditional brands have been sold and thousands of jobs have been cut in the last 10 years alone. For years the employees have been bearing the brunt of excessive profit expectations. A combination of self-delusion and self-destruction on the part of senior management has led to the high levels of overcapacity in the factories.

Workers' representatives have been demanding sustained growth to secure jobs. In their opinion this could be achieved if the money raised from the disposal of so many businesses in recent years had been invested in the remaining company, rather than being distributed among shareholders, to shore up the share price or to finance social plans.

Workers believe that Unilever has so far learned nothing from its past mistakes. They are concerned that Unilever has been openly traded as a possible takeover candidate by investment funds. For the European workforce it is clear that management is incapable of achieving the desired growth for Unilever using its current strategy.

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Harald Wiedenhofer, General Secretary of EFFAT said: “we were getting depressingly familiar with the reality that while management talks about growth they are really just engaged raiding the company’s assets. In fact, management have been downsizing for years in order to boost the share price through buybacks and dividends.”

To this, Reinhard Reibsch, Secretary General of EMCEF, added the following: "A modern, socially responsible company should attach importance to and respect the social aspects of the workforce as well as the growth and profit of the company itself. The employees were confronted at short notice with direct restructuring measures, the real extent and strategic background of which is still unknown. This is a striking example of "bad practice" by Unilever.”

Unilever’s European workers are making the following demands:

- A clear perspective of the companies plans for Europe;
- An end to dismissals and plant closures;
- Transparent concepts for sustained growth, where the safeguarding of jobs is given at least the same priority as the achievement of financial targets;
- Respect for the company’s most valuable assets: its employees;
- Unilever’s senior management to work constructively with the employees’ representatives, in search of acceptable alternatives.

Notes:

- Unilever, produces food and beverages such as Blue Band, Becel/Flora, Heartbrand, Hellmann's, Knorr, Lipton and Slim-Fast as well as household products like Omo, Surf, Comfort and Cif, and personal care products including Axe, Dove, Lux, Pond's, Rexona and Sunsilk. (www.Unilever.com)
- EFFAT is the European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture and Tourism sectors. It represents 133 national trade unions from 35 European countries with more than 2,6 million members. (www.Effat.org)
- EMCEF is the European Federation of Mine, Chemical and Energy trade unions. It organises 2.5 million workers in 35 countries and 130 national trade unions. (www.Emcef.org)
- A press conference will be held at 12:00 before the event on 4 December.

Further information:

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