

ITUC OnLine

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Global Union Alliance Files OECD Complaint against Deutsche Telekom for Union-Busting

Brussels, 12 July 2011 (ITUC OnLine): A complaint filed today with the OECD describes how Deutsche Telekom has engaged in anti-union activity in the United States and Montenegro that violates the organisation's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

The complaint, filed by the German union ver.di, US union the Communications Workers of America and global union federation UNI Global Union, details the union-busting activity in the United States, where the management of wholly-owned subsidiary T-Mobile USA "has engaged in a pattern of conduct designed to undermine and frustrate employees' efforts to choose union representation freely and to deny employees their rights to collective bargaining."

It also reveals that in Montenegro management of Crnogorski Telekom, which is majority owned by Deutsche Telekom, has engaged in conduct designed to undermine employees' ability to engage in collective action and to exercise their rights to collective bargaining.

"Deutsche Telekom has set a double standard for working conditions, where German workers have the right to union representation and collective bargaining but those in the US and Montenegro do not," said UNI General Secretary Philip Jennings. "This is a clear violation of the company's own corporate social responsibility guidelines as well as the OECD Guidelines."

The OECD Guidelines, to which both Germany and the United States are signatories, have set a single standard that all governments must promote with employers, including the right of workers at multinationals to form or join trade unions of their choice, have standards of employment and industrial relations that are not "less favourable" than those of the employer in the host country and enable authorized worker representatives to negotiate on collective bargaining or labour-management relations issues.

The unions are calling on the German government, which owns 30 percent of Deutsche Telekom, to ensure the company allows all workers to participate in union activities in a free and fair manner.

"Time and again, Deutsche Telekom has attracted negative attention by conducting an anti-union corporate policy against employees in their international subsidiaries," said Lothar Schröder, who is a member of the ver.di board as head of the union's telecommunications department. "The company must be held accountable."

In the most recent attack on union rights at T-Mobile USA, management has rolled out a set of tactics known in the US under the euphemism "union avoidance" after workers signed cards indicating they want to be represented by CWA.

"T-Mobile USA management is reading right from the classic union-busting playbook," said Larry Cohen, president of CWA. "They are using every tactic possible to delay the elections while at the same time trying to intimidate workers and make them fearful for their jobs if they vote in favour of a union."

In the complaint, the unions are also asking the German government to intervene and mediate a solution for these issues. The government can also issue a decision on whether or not the company has violated the guidelines.

A determination that the company has violated the Guidelines will be taken very seriously by the investment community as a violation of commonly accepted social responsibility standards.

Governments are obliged to ensure that multinationals based in their country respect the OECD Guidelines, said Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, which is supporting the global campaign.

“The German government needs to take this complaint very seriously and ensure that the company is abiding by international norms,” Burrow said. “It is not just the company’s reputation that is on the line but also the reputation of the German government.”

You can find the full complaint at: <http://weexpectbetter.org/oecd-complaint-oecd-beschwerde.html>

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