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Press Information ▪ Press Information

Philips makes a mockery of employee participation

Philips does not take employee participation seriously. That is the conclusion reached by the European Metalworkers' Federation and FNV Bondgenoten at a Decent Work Conference today in Utrecht. Philips minimizes the influence of works councils and trade unions at all levels of participation in Europe. Representatives hardly ever have an opportunity to have a dialogue at a strategic level. Part of Philips European Works Council (EWC) is not elected by employees, but appointed by Philips management. Philips influences elections and has fired trade union representatives.

After meetings with representatives of trade unions and work councils throughout Philips in Europe, EMF concludes that they feel that the company does not take their input seriously. This conclusion is strengthened by a pilot study carried out by SOMO (Dutch centre for research of multinational corporations), which was presented at today's conference. Ron van Baden, FNV officer and EMF coordinator for Philips, says: "Philips sets the agenda, decides the scope of discussion and silences critical voices. The fact that European negotiations are handled by the Dutch country manager demonstrates how seriously European dialogue is taken. Employee representatives hardly ever get to a dialogue on a strategic level. At least five out of 23 members of the EWC are not elected but simply appointed by management".

EMF has several documented cases where Philips has tried to limit trade union influence. Trade union representatives in Hungary and Sweden have been fired and elections have been induced and influenced by management. It has interfered with the outcome of internal EWC elections. A lockout case in France has also been registered, in order to force employees to accept a severance offer; workers simply were locked out.

Henk van der Kolk, President of FNV Bondgenoten, insists that "Dutch multinationals have a responsibility to ensure employee participation at international level and should apply all national and international rules. Practices such as harassment and dismissal of trade union representatives should not take place in a decent company. Participation, for Philips employees, is just a joke".

Several attempts by FNV and EMF to improve the situation have come to a standstill. The unwillingness of management and fear on the part of employees seem to be the main causes. "You have to be very strong to do what's needed, knowing that others lost their job for this", says EMF General Secretary Peter Scherrer. "As long as Philips is unwilling to open up a dialogue, we will keep tracking and unveiling Philips social policies".

Philips CEO Kleisterlee will retire next year. FNV Bondgenoten and EMF suggest to the company that the ability to have a serious (European) dialogue be included in the profile of the new CEO.

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Press Release

FNV Bondgenoten is the largest trade union in The Netherlands' private sector and represents 480,000 members. EMF is a European federation of 75 trade unions in the metal and electronics sector across 35 European countries and represents a total membership of 5.5 million.

The EMF is the representative body defending the interests of workers in the European metal industry. The EMF has a mandate for the external representation and coordination of the metalworkers' unions and a mandate to engage in bargaining at European level.

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