



Fighting for rights in Hungary

profile

Country: Hungary

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Union: VDSZ Szakszervezet - Federation of Chemical Workers of Hungary

The Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers of Hungary, VDSZ, actively struggles on many fronts for its members. Mobilizing and organizing brought gains for VDSZ workers a century ago and continues to do so at multinationals, such as Hankook Tyre.



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VDSZ President Tamás Székely, Substitute Member of the IndustriALL Global Union Executive Committee, sees united action as the most important tool in the fight to protect VDSZ members:

“The VDSZ of today believes in uniting workers and unions to achieve more in the spirit of solidarity. This is true inside Hungary and also internationally.

“VDSZ has become well-known in Hungary over recent years for unified workers’ actions against bad labour laws, unfair tax rules and government attacks on our right to strike.”

VDSZ is working on building dominant representation on Works Councils at companies employing its members. Organizing to protect members through fast privatization, the union strives for effective wage negotiations in all collective agreements, as well as bargaining for job security, social security, and good occupational health practices.

Now 21,000 members strong, VDSZ is also prioritizing community organizing, increasing women and young members, and doing professional training for union staff.

In the fight against the anti-worker labour code of 2012, much public pressure has been generated through media work and social media information campaigning. This is also true of the 2014 campaigns against union busting at Hankook Tyre, and for workers’ rights at EVM Chemicals.

Since opening the Rácalmás factory near Dunaujváros in 2007, Korean-based Hankook resisted VDSZ organizing the plant’s 1,800 workers. Plant management was found guilty of numerous violations and fined by the Labour Inspectorate for obstructing VDSZ’s legitimate duties in representing the workers.

The union’s 109-year history has been strongly influenced by Hungary’s role in the World Wars and Cold War of the 20th Century. Founded by workers in a Budapest pub on 16 April 1905 and officially recognized by the Hungarian government on 22 April 1906, the union grew steadily in the period up to the second world war (WWII).

In the early period, strikes were conducted against the extremely poor working conditions in chemicals factories, and collective agreements were reached between VDSZ and the first employer associations in Hungary.

Early achievements of VDSZ included reducing the working week for the industry to 48 hours, negotiating improved wages, and instituting paid leave.

Following WWII the union worked together with the state authorities to build production in the industry. At this time VDSZ especially focussed on occupational health and safety and worker education.

In 1989, Soviet Union influence in Hungary eased and VDSZ changed its priorities. Since then the union has focussed on social dialogue and campaigning for stronger worker protection and representation.

When management illegally sacked the plant union president on 21 July 2014, VDSZ led large mobilizations outside the plant, together with over 60 Hungarian trade unions.

The Labour Code brought in by the current right wing government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán not only seriously undermines workers’ ability to fight for decent working conditions, it also empowers companies to reopen old conflicts and punish trade unionists for actions taken under the previous legislation. VDSZ President Székely faced penal procedure by Japanese multinational Bridgestone because of this.



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IndustriALL Global Union general secretary Jyrki Raina concludes:

“This active trade union affiliate of IndustriALL faces tough obstacles in Hungary. VDSV is now a well-established counterpart to the multinational companies operating in the upper-middle-income Hungarian economy. We will continue to support VDSZ in its fight for the rights of its members.”

Visit VDSZ channels:



www.vdsz.hu



VDSZ Szakszervezet - Federation of Chemical Workers of Hungary



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- 1 VDSZ members on the street in Budapest. VDSZ
- 2 VDSZ President Tamás Székely. VDSZ