Black & Decker Firings: "Organizing Is Prohibited"

Black & Decker fired two of its employees on May 30, 2005, explaining that it was because the workers "wanted to organize themselves."

The supervisor who announced the dismissal, Ernesto Zavala, told Vidal del Angel that he was terminated for holding meetings of workers outside of the plant and for inciting other workers to do the same, adding that "this is prohibited" at Black & Decker. The supervisor also spoke to Juan Dávila in a separate meeting, stating that he too was fired "for organizing."

For the next two weeks, the two workers protested outside of Black & Decker Plant No. 2. They distributed flyers with the help of CFO volunteers and gathered many signatures of support from their coworkers.

During these protests Black & Decker sent out a security guard to snap pictures of the people distributing flyers and to monitor who was signing the petition. Meanwhile, intimidation tactics inside the plant were beginning to mount. The supervisors told the workers not to sign the petition, threatening that anyone who did sign would be fired while those who didn't would still have a job. They were also shown lists and told that the people on them would be dismissed. Management wanted to make everyone think that these lists showed the names of those who had signed the petition in support of the fired workers.

Black & Decker has a sweetheart contract signed by a "yellow" union. This union is controlled by the company, and the workers don't even know that it exists, because they've never seen the contract. No one in the factory advocates for their rights.

On June 6, Black & Decker fired two more employees for the same reasons given to Vidal del Angel and Juan Dávila. Some people who continue to work for the company have also reported that David Bowen, general manager of Black & Decker of Reynosa, mentioned that if the situation was not resolved in ninety days, the company would move to some other town or to China.

Workers at Black & Decker have long endured abusive treatment and harassment by management. In August 2004, the workers presented a petition with 76 signatures to the health authorities in Reynosa blowing the whistle on management’s decision to take down doors and partitions from the stalls in the men's bathroom as a form of punishment after a few workers put graffiti on the restroom walls. After a health inspector visited the plant, the partitions and doors were put back up. Nevertheless, after a few weeks of intimidation, the supervisors again threatened to remove the doors from the restrooms.

The firing of Vidal del Angel and Juan Dávila, and the threats about the restrooms, are both a violation of Mexican labor laws, as well as Black & Decker’s own Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct. This code specifically states; "employees have the right to join any legal organization for the purpose of collective bargaining ... [and] will not be penalized for exercising this right."

Vidal del Angel and Juan Dávila are demanding reinstatement, because it is obvious that their dismissals were unjustified. The other workers continue to fight for their right to have an independent union, one that is not a "company" union.

Read the history of the bathroom doors and partitions being removed at Black & Decker.

See photo showing how management removed the doors and partitions.

View the flyer that management posted threatening with the taking away of the doors.