

# **Nestle India seeks permanent ban on workers' freedom of assembly**

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The management of Nestle India filed injunctions simultaneously in four courts in three states seeking a permanent ban on all union meetings, gatherings and rallies within 200 metres of its factories in Moga, Samalkha, Ponda Goa and Bicholim. These are the four Nestle factories in India that are unionized, with 1,350 members represented by the IUF-affiliated Federation of All India Nestle Employees.

Repeating similar struggles in Russia and Indonesia, the Federation of All India Nestle Employees is demanding the right to negotiate wages. Annual wage increases are unilaterally handed down by management every year and in recent years the amount has been far less than the rate of inflation, resulting in falling real wages. In particular dramatic food price inflation over the past two years has undercut workers' earnings in the world's largest food company. Even though Nestle India raised its own product prices by 15% last year, management ignored union demands to raise wages in line with inflation.

Even as Nestle India declared that sales rose 23.4% and net profit increased 29.1% over the past 12 months, management refused to negotiate with the Federation of All India Nestle Employees and unilaterally announced an annual wage increase of just 6%. In response the four unions affiliated to the Federation filed strike notices in preparation for a common day of action to again demand the right to negotiate wages.

Nestle India responded by filing suits for a "permanent injunction" that would ban any kind of union activity or worker gathering with 200 metres of each factory. Although the company's plea to the courts cites the planned strike day as the reason (and denounces the strike as "illegal" despite the fact that strike notices were filed in accordance with law), the reality is that Nestle India management wants to stop all "gate meetings" - regular meetings at the factory gates before and after shifts that are the most common and important venue for keeping members informed of union activities. That is precisely why the company is seeking a permanent ban.

When it comes into effect this permanent ban will effectively deny Nestle India workers their fundamental right of assembly and severely restrict the ability of unions to function.

Faced with this challenge the Federation of All India Nestle Employees will again call on Nestle India's national management to recognize wage bargaining rights. If the company again refuses and relies on the ban on assembly to suppress workers, then the Federation, with the full support of the IUF, will escalate the campaign to defend trade union rights.