Under pressure from workers and their international allies, the producer AZURA commits to respect trade union freedoms and to enter into a serious and sustainable dialogue with the FNSA/UMT

A severe conflict broke out in Choukou Ait Baha-Agadir Morocco in December 2021 between the AZURA group (see box) and the FNSA/UMT union (see box). This conflict is the result of the non-respect of trade union rights and a deterioration of working conditions.

In response to the abusive dismissal of a union delegate and the obstinate refusal of management to respond to the invitation of the labour inspectorate, combined with the inaction and even connivance of the local authorities, the workers, in solidarity with their delegate and in order to claim their rights, decided to organise an unlimited sit-in in front of AZURA's headquarters in Morocco.

During this protest movement, a tragedy occurred on 2 January 2022: While trying to cross the road to supply the sit-in with water, employee Sabah DINAR, was knocked down and run over by two cars, an accident that proved fatal. This tragedy triggered immense anger among the employees and aroused strong national and international solidarity. Unfortunately, it took the death of a martyr for those responsible to take action.

An international denunciation campaign supported by strong commercial pressure was put in place by ECVC and LA VÍA CAMPESINA

The perseverance of the employees, supported by an international campaign, triggered the attention of the General Management of AZURA. Two successive meetings were held between the management and union members in a mediation committee, where it was decided, on the one hand, to compensate the strikers and to guarantee their jobs and, on the other hand, to compensate, with consent, the union delegate who had been abusively dismissed. This agreement, deemed satisfactory by both parties, was to be consolidated in the framework of a negotiated trade union relationship between the FNSA and AZURA. A meeting was held on 27 January 2022 between the management of AZURA and a delegation of the executive of FNSA: at the end of this meeting, which took place in a calm atmosphere, both parties agreed to institutionalise social dialogue and to draw up a collective agreement. A great homage was paid to the young deceased Sabah DINAR with the commitment to take charge of the schooling of her four children by the Group's Foundation.

In order to guarantee the respect and implementation of the agreements reached, it will be necessary to ensure the vigilance and unity of workers, as well as the monitoring and pressure of an international network of peasants and rural workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AZURA GROUP</th>
<th>FNSA/UMT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- French-Moroccan family group created in 1988 and specialised in the production of fruit and vegetables</td>
<td>- National Federation of the Agricultural Sector, created in May 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- World leader in tomato production - nearly 1000 hectares</td>
<td>- Member of LA VIA CAMPESINA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 16,000 workers</td>
<td>- 20,000 members and supporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 50 production sites</td>
<td>- 18 national trade unions, including the national trade union of agricultural workers and the national union of farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trade union rate 5%</td>
<td>- 10 regional sections</td>
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<td>- 67 local sections</td>
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EUROSOL, Almeria: At Eurosol, defending the law has a high price

On 23 February, ECVC published a press release on its website denouncing the violent trade union repression that is currently taking place at Eurosol, a major vegetable and fruit producer based in Almeria, Andalusia. This repression, which is mainly targeting delegates and activists of the SAT Almeria trade union, is complemented by serious breaches of Spanish labour legislation.

EUROSOL commits repeated violations of workers' rights

While the public authorities and political figures have been called upon to exert pressure, the ECVC's "commercial pressure" working group has increased its exchanges with the client of the Spanish supplier Eurosol, particularly in Switzerland and Germany. A few months ago, "La plateforme Pour une Agriculture Durable", the trade union Uniterre and the organisation Solifonds called upon the Swiss supermarket chain Migros, a major customer of Eurosol, in a joint press release to inform it of the situation and in particular to take action accordingly.

Although a social audit was indeed commissioned and carried out by the retailer within the company, the results of the audit remain insufficient, even reflecting an absolute ignorance of the facts and context, and would tend to be limited to the arguments supported by the company.

Indeed, all documents proving the repeated violations of workers' rights and the manipulation of newly recruited workers were ignored. Moreover, after the audit, the company redoubled its efforts to harass workers with seniority, not paying overtime, handing out arbitrary sanctions and proceeding with new dismissals.

Migros challenged by four organisations

In a new letter to Migros sent at the beginning of March 2022, La Via Campesina supported by various organisations (Interbrigadas (Germany), Uniterre, Solifonds, Agrisodou (Switzerland)) ask Migros to distance itself from this social audit report, to examine the documents submitted and to fix the non-conformities in its own supply chain instead of trying to hide them.

La Via Campesina and the four organisations are preparing an action plan to inform the public and the authorities at European level about the labour rights violations of Eurosol, supplier of various European retail chains such as Migros, Lidl (Germany) and Albert Heijn (Holland).

SUREXPORT: The hell of berries

The case of the Spanish berry giant Surexport, is an example of the unprecedented violence that is part of the practices and politics of the global agribusiness

In this multinational company, where the majority of seasonal workers are migrants, 12-hour or even 16-hour workdays, 6 days a week or even 7 days a week, are the rule. Employees complain that they do not even have time to buy food for the week. The company is waging a veritable war on efficiency among its employees, who are subjected to daily reprimands and controls: beware of those who do not pick up quickly enough or who dare to talk to their neighbour... they will be subject to sanctions. In this berry hell, located in the town of Terra Cha (Galicia), the seasonal workers are only allowed a 15-minute break and have poor sanitary facilities. In the evenings, the seasonal workers have to share a room (4 per room) and at dinner time, up to 40 people are crammed into one of the kitchens of one of the many hotels rented by the group. Last July, following a denunciation campaign via social networks by a former employee, the Labrego Galego union, with the support of other unions and organisations, publicly condemned the company's inhumane
practices, asking the public authorities to open an investigation.

On 20 August, a young employee of the group died after a day's work

On 20 August, a 27-year-old man died after a day's work in the group's greenhouses in Galicia. The victim was suffering from a chronic illness, but the unions blamed the working conditions, especially the unbearable heat that the workers had to endure during their working hours in the greenhouses.

The results of the investigation into the working conditions have not yet been made public, the fruit harvesting season has started and according to the Labrego Galego union, the employees will need support.

Surexport is a fully export-oriented company, with the majority of its production going to European buying groups.

To be continued...

Section: Food for thoughts

The exploitation of migrant workers: The survival condition of capitalism

The Covid pandemic19 and the resulting unprecedented economic and social crises have brought to the fore two elements that are representative of our contemporary societies, namely a strong dependence on global value chains, whose vulnerability became apparent during the health crisis, as well as a strong dependence on economic sectors defined as "essential", such as the agro-industrial sector (agriculture, packaging), symbol of precarious employment, low wages and exploitation of a vulnerable foreign workforce, the result of a constant search to reduce production costs.

In the era of globalisation, the capitalist system is based on national and supranational policies, in other words, on a governance of migration, which itself functions according to the needs of the system.

It is interesting to see how, in this pandemic crisis, the term "essential" has arisen in a rather exceptional way, while associating it with productive activities. Indeed, the need to define which services should be considered legitimate and which not, has become, against all odds, a compelling necessity. A model of social Darwinism was thus reinforced and consolidated in order to institutionalise what was to be considered essential in the name of maintaining the capitalist system, and at the same time on which economic actors its functioning was based.

The fact of being an essential worker was thus translated, in most cases, by being a frontline worker, "forced" to work to support his family, bound to a precarious and low-level work contract, or even working in what is called informal economy, synonymous with a lack of social protection. Thus, the perception of the term "Essential" in the collective imagination has been defined as an activity that is not very valued, a symbol of low wages, deplorable working and living conditions, but essential to the functioning of a system based on the search for profit.
In this pandemic context, the agro-industry, identified as a sector indispensable to the continuity of economic activities in our societies, was characterised by the fragility of its supply chains, which are themselves dependent on millions of migrant workers, a significant proportion of whom are in an irregular situation. If the pandemic has brought to light the facets and characteristics of the migratory reality, it is interesting to observe how in some countries, while governments opted for the closure of their borders including the deportation of undocumented workers, at the same time and in order to ensure the continuity of these chains, farmers’ associations, including trade unions, demanded more flexibility in the mobility of seasonal workers, or even an emergency functional regularization in the name of maintenance and rescue of the crops.

Faced with the destitution and great precariousness of these workers, many of whom are isolated and live in inhuman conditions (such as the strawberry pickers in Huelva or the employees in Almeria living in huge shanty towns), it is worth highlighting the strong mobilisation of civil society organisations with institutions and public authorities, so that the latter opt for an extraordinary regularisation of the administrative conditions of workers in an irregular situation and asylum seekers.

This is why the ECVC Agricultural Workers and Migrants working group is very interested in this type of experience, since the demands related to migrant workers are an integral part of food sovereignty, the main focus of the ECVC roadmap.

**The challenges of the Social Conditionality clause**

The exploitation of the workforce, mainly made up of migrants, as well as environmental damage, are both characteristic and necessary elements in the development of the agro-industrial model that is being imposed in Europe. A model that not only harms the production of small farmers, but also subjects the workers to very precarious working and living conditions, even to semi-slavery.

Faced with this situation, ECVC has been asking for many years for the establishment of binding control mechanisms within the Community agricultural policy (CAP), in order to prevent agricultural companies that violate labor laws and social rights from continuing to receive aid.

During the last CAP negotiations, ECVC, in cooperation with EFFAT and other organisations, advocated for the inclusion of the "Social Conditionality" clause. The implementation of this clause will be voluntary from 2023 onwards and will become compulsory in 2025 for the Member States, through their national strategic plans.

For ECVC, it is now essential to guarantee its full deployment and to verify the effective impact of this protection mechanism on the rights of rural workers, particularly in terms of employment, social guarantees including housing, in all the countries of the European Union.

In order to carry out this project, ECVC has developed a proposal for the content and mechanisms of application and control of social conditionality based on a peasant approach and in accordance with the 2018 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other Rural Workers (UNDROP).

The ECVC proposal based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination recognizes the full range of rights of all workers in rural areas, proposes a series of positive regulations for small farmers, including a control mechanism for large companies involving sanctions before the competent courts for any operations that violate the rights of peasants, including obligations and recommendations for States as well as mechanisms for receiving complaints from unions and workers.

The ECVC document recognises all the rights of all workers in rural areas without discrimination, proposes a series of positive regulations for small farmers, as well as prior control mechanisms for large companies and sanctions for any exploitation that violates farmers' rights. Sanction mechanisms could be triggered both by the initiation of administrative or judicial proceedings.
Section: Action Plan

For 2022, La Via Campesina will consolidate its action on migration and rural labour issues

LVC Migration and Rural Labour Collective: Its main lines of action for 2022

The collective has agreed to actively participate in the organisation of the Nyeleni Summit (World Forum for Food Sovereignty), which will take place in spring 2023. The issues of migration and rural wage labour will be introduced in the heart of this international debate.

In the field of migration, it was decided to deepen the implementation and dissemination of its proposal for a Global Solidarity Pact with migrants and refugees, in opposition to the UN Global Compact and the EU proposals for a Migration Pact, which focus on intensifying security measures, data control and repression at the borders without recognizing and guaranteeing the fundamental rights of migrants. To this end, a training session on migrants' rights within UNDROP will be offered to the Peasants' Rights Collective. In particular, an event will be organised with allied organisations on December 18, 2022.

Through its struggle for the right to free movement, regularization of undocumented migrants and a decent life for migrants, especially in order to fight against land and resource grabbing forcing many peasants in the South to flee their countries, the collective will promote interregional coordination within LVC by supporting various events such as the PPT network, the Caravan to Brussels in Europe, forums on migration and other actions in Asia and other continents.

LVC's successful trade pressure campaign on the Azura workers' dispute in Morocco, including the issue of the proposed palm oil law coordinated between Indonesian and Swiss organisations, which ultimately failed.

The collective paid particular attention to the issue of the palm oil law proposal coordinated between Indonesian and Swiss organisations, which finally failed in Switzerland.

Action plans on salaried employment, training, alliance with trade unions and coordination of commercial pressure actions between regions will also be encouraged.
**Visit to Andalusia and Portugal during the red fruit campaign**

A delegation of the Migration and Rural Labour WG of ECVC will visit the heart of the red fruit producing regions in Huelva (Andalusia) and Odemira (Portugal) during the month of April. Members of the FNSA (Morocco) union will visit the different regions of the province of Huelva, where during the strawberry season more than 15,000 seasonal workers of Moroccan origin are recruited. The SOC-SAT Almeria union and the FNSA have been working together for several years on training and union action.

The delegation, composed of members of farmers' organisations, trade unions and agricultural workers from Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Galicia, Morocco and Andalusia, will gather information on the agricultural production and marketing model in Huelva and Odemira.

Meetings and exchanges will be organised between workers, agricultural organisations, trade unions, environmental NGOs and institutions, in order to better understand the impact of the agro-industrial system on the environment, local production and the conditions in which the workforce performs their tasks.

One of the objectives of this meeting is to strengthen the alliances and mechanisms necessary to defend a model of agro-ecological peasant production, respectful of the environment, labour rights and trade union freedoms.

**The trade unions La Confédération Paysanne and SOLIDAIRES are organising a large solidarity march to help exiles and refugees**

On 2 April, the Confédération Paysanne and Solidaires will support the many exiled men, women and children who, at the risk of their lives, cross the border between France and Italy every day at the Montgenèvre pass.

This symbolic marauding operation will highlight what migrants experience at French borders. The aim is to denounce European agricultural policies that put the world's farmers in competition with each other and drive vulnerable populations into exile.