Just last week, we chose the right place to protest against patents on barley and beer: right outside of the building of the European Patent Office, which happened to be on the way to the Oktoberfest, the European get-together of beer lovers.

We showed up with banners in four languages, a big balloon, flags and flyers to demonstrate on the day the patent office would rule on Carlsberg’s and Heineken’s desires to own a regular type of barley - from seed through the brewing process, to the beer itself.

Our action showed the strength of our movement: We have collected more than 182,000 signatures from all over Europe to present to the patent office. Together with our partner, no-patents-on-seeds, we gathered activists to demonstrate against multinationals laying claim to what doesn’t belong to them. Our protest was only possible because thousands of us signed the petition, shared it with friends and donated funds in the moment our community needed them.
It’s a moment of empowerment when ordinary people on their way to a funfair stop to listen to your arguments, and then join you in protest. People who go to Oktoberfest obviously care a lot about beer, and they took the time to learn about this ridiculous patent threat to many of their favourite brews.

Well, did we win? In a small way, we did: The patent originally covered all plants with reduced undesirable flavours. Now the patent is restricted to plants with a specific mutation that can influence the content of these flavours. The European Patent Office significantly decreased the number of types of barley included in the patent.

But unfortunately, the general take-away remains the same: Big corporations can claim ordinary plants as their inventions. They can maximise profits by claiming to own something belonging to nature and to all of us.

But we’re not finished yet. There’s another hearing at the European Patent Office coming, and we’ll be watching the results closely.

Encouraged after a good action, and still hopeful that together all of us can win this struggle, Mika (Bordeaux), Jörg (Lübeck), Virginia (Madrid), and the whole team at WeMove.EU

PS: If you know anyone who loves beer, please share the petition with them.

WeMove.EU is a citizens’ movement, campaigning for a better Europe; for a European Union committed to social and economic justice, environmental sustainability and citizen-led democracy. We are people from all walks of life, who call Europe our home whether we were born in Europe or elsewhere. To unsubscribe from WeMove.EU, please click here.

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