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TIE-Newsletter

Dear friends and colleagues, dear brothers and sisters,

this is the first issue of a new TIE newsletter. We are planning this as a regular info on the work of TIE Global twice a year.

In the left column, we are presenting the TIE networks. In the right column, we are reporting on current activities of some of the networks.

Comments are welcome,

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ExChains Garment

The TIE network *ExChains* aims at building links between retail workers and textile/garment factory workers along the global supply chain in Europe and Asia. Mutual solidarity is vital for the worldwide struggle against exploitation and poverty in the industry. In *ExChains*, TIE has been working together with independent regional trade unions since 2002. These are currently: the FTZ&GSEU in Sri Lanka, NGWF in Bangladesh, GAFWU in Chennai/India, GATWU in Bangalore/India, and ver.di in Germany. We want to develop joint strategies for supporting workers' self-organisation and for building trade union practices along the supply chain. Additionally, the production countries' trade unions are working together regionally and developing new approaches towards organising. Specific campaigns do

ExChains Garment

Garment Workers in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh: Strengthened by New Strategies

For garment trade unions in the Global South it is hard to improve the working conditions in the industry. This is why, supported by Northern consumer oriented NGOs, they are trying to create consumer awareness for workers' miserable situation and to call for global brands' responsibility. They quite succeed at this – but this continuing success has not caused trade unions in the producing countries to gain any enduring strength, nor workers' situation to profit from any sustainable improvements.

In the *ExChains* network, garment unions and workers in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, joining with works council members of H&M and Zara, and ver.di union activists, are trying a different path to reach their goal. We jointly developed a new approach: The unions conduct workplace mappings at H&M, Zara, and other supplier factories. So workers can nail down the biggest problems together, and develop corresponding demands to the brand companies.

There are concrete problems, such as defective furniture or a lack of drinking water, that workers can negotiate directly on factory level. Each success, however small, strengthens workers' self-consciousness and enlarges their space for future struggles with local management. But more comprehensive demands, such as higher wages or shorter working hours, can only be pressed home if we

get some public attention, but must be transcended in order to create oppositional power in the factories. For German retail, we are also exploring union approaches against pre-carisation, the division of workers, and dumping wages.

ExChains Orange Juice

The TIE *ExChains* network is currently in the process of building a new orange juice network along the global supply chain, with workers from Germany and Brazil participating. Experiences of the garment network are playing an important role in this process. The orange juice network aims at organising concrete actions in the workplace, creating pressure on the retail companies, and strengthening trade union action in orange picking, processing, and sale. Brazilian trade unions of plantation workers and industrial workers are working together across organisational boundaries. Currently, the network unites activists from FERAESP and



succeed to make the brand companies move. Thus, the three countries' trade unions are joining to negotiate with the international corporations directly.

Brand companies' German works council members and workers support the workers' and unions' negotiations in the production countries. During the first half of 2016, they will set up their demands to the international brands and local factory owners, which will then be presented within the companies, f.i. in staff reunions. Spreading the production workers' demands in the company will strengthen their trade unions' negotiational power. The support will encourage workers themselves to keep fighting.

The garment workers are planning to record videos talking about their demands, the negotiations, and the importance of working together with German works council members within the *ExChains* network. The videos will be shown in staff reunions in Germany.



ExChains Orange Juice

Resistant Oranges

More than half the orange juice consumed worldwide is being produced in the Brazilian state of São Paulo, two thirds thereof exported to the EU. With 17 percent, Germany is the biggest single buyer. In Brazil, as in Germany, just a few large corporations are dividing up the business between them.

In July 2015, TIE and ver.di union, in cooperation with Christliche Initiative Romero, organised a journey of German retail works council members to Brazil where they met orange plantation workers and orange processing factory workers. Brazilian and German workers discussed their respective working conditions and possibilities for mutual support in their labour struggles.

Dealing with their own workplace problems, the German workers had come to understand that workers can only act up to global corporations by global union networking and joint action. During the trip, they had the opportunity

other farm workers' unions, from the orange juice industry union of Mogi Mirim, from the union federation CONTAC-CUT, as well as German members of food retail works councils and ver.di union.

VidaViva

The TIE network *VidaViva* uses health issues as a trigger to organise workers. Work caused health problems are globally on the rise. Companies want workers to believe that all it takes to endure work is a more balanced diet and regular exercise while at the same time work organisation keeps being trimmed for efficiency, and the pressure keeps rising. In the *VidaViva* network, workers are developing solidary strategies to counteract pressure and gain control over their workday. Our aim is not just to shape healthier workplaces, though, but to organise trade union resistance against ever increasing company impositions on our lives. Since 2003, we have developed various instruments for education, self-research, risk analysis, worker



to exchange experiences with Brazilian colleagues and to identify common problems.

Meetings with their colleagues from the orange juice industry union and the farm workers federation (FERAESP) close to the huge plantations turned out to be specifically fruitful. The Brazilian unionists offered the German visitors a chance to talk to workers on orange plantations and in juice factories, so they could win direct insights into the working conditions in orange production and experience intense exchanges on eye level. The problems resembled each other: workers suffering from work intensification and precarisation in retail; and from a lack of health and safety provisions, wages far below a living wage, and relentless work pressure in production. Thus, all workers co-experienced that their problems in both ends of the supply chain are more similar than expected.

During a two-day seminar, all participants confirmed their determination to build international solidarity and develop an international network along the orange juice supply chain: from picking, to processing, to sale.

The orange juice network conceives itself as an equal North-South cooperation organising concrete actions in the workplace. We want to enable a continuous exchange to organise joint action, create pressure on retail companies, and support local union action. A permanent global exchange on local developments shall strengthen Brazilian unions' cooperation.

Moreover, the orange juice network is an information network, making its objectives publicly heard and collecting information on social, ecological, and health consequences of working conditions. It shall also provide a space to address grievances across workplace limits.

The network demands:

- decent working conditions along the supply chain
- no precarious contracts
- living wages, transparent wages
- access rights for trade unions to workers, esp. in the plantations
- implementation of health and safety standards in the workplace



oriented benchmarking etc. in order to develop workplace strategies. In Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Columbia, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Turkey, and Germany, around 100 unions from different sectors are active within **VidaViva**.

Rail sans Frontière

Activists from Morocco, Senagal, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, France, and Spain are joining forces in the network Rail without Frontiers. Existing contacts are also reaching out to North and South America, among others. Founded in Casablanca in 2010, the network supports and coordinates struggles against railway privatisations and for public services accessible to everyone. The activists exchange experiences from their mutual countries and support each other in labour struggles against repressions frequently occurring in the course of privatisations. The network wants transport companies to remain or to be reconverted to public property, in order to safeguard transport workers' rights and to guarantee accessible transport and mobility to everyone.

Searching Movements

Trade unions and workplace initiatives are facing huge challenges in practically each sector and country. Precarisation, global production networks, and new forms of work organisation have drastically changed the field of labour. Therefore, workers are coming up with new needs and demands, while trade unions are hardly able to supply them with possible answers or strategies. Our network, too, is confronted with new

- shorter and transparent working hours
- trade union strategies against market concentration

The Brazilian juice industry and German retail must guarantee labour rights and enforce compliance with labour standards in their suppliers' plants and plantations!

VidaViva

Nothing But Organising Can End Exploitation

In January, an education seminar was conducted in Istanbul, reuniting over 40 organised workers from Edirne, Çerkezköy, and Istanbul, organised by Textil union with TIE/VidaViva. The workers developed strategies on how to organise unorganised plants and how to strengthen existing trade union organising in their own workplaces.

After fundamental information on the existing labour law, health mapping was demonstrated as an instrument that can help workers indentify their problems and make a stand for workers' solutions and demands facing management. The process focuses on the rank-and-file: workers do not only rely on their trade union leaders, but initiate a joint strategy to handle problems in the workplace.

The discussions made clear that, in a capitalist society, it is not possible to solve all problems workers have. Complementing trade union organising, a social organising must finally aim at overthrowing capitalism and organising society without exploitation. But finally it is up to all workers to decide for themselves what they want and how far they want or do not want to go.

Another joint seminar took place in Istanbul in April. Participants were over



questions. In discussion with other initiatives, rank-and-file groups, and union activists, we are searching for escape routes from the crisis of the labour movement, and for ways of confronting the challenges for our work caused by the current disruptions. Within a joint initiative – *Transnational Social Strike* – groups of precarious workers from numerous European countries are searching for a common union practice.

Worlds of Labour China-Germany

TIE international conference in 2003: For the first time, visitors from China are reporting on developments of capitalism and the labour movement in their country. Since then, several organisations in Germany and China, including TIE, jointly founded the »Forum Worlds of Labour – China and Germany« (www.forumarbeitswelten.de) which has organised numerous exchanges between workers from China and Germany.

30 young, organised workers from Adana, Bursa, Söke-Aydın, Edirne, Çekeköy, and Istanbul.

The seminar was designed to enable the colleagues to find out for themselves which health problems they are having in the workplace and where these problems come from, in order to develop joint solutions. It is clear that, to tackle problems in the factory effectively, trade union activists need the workers to side with them. If union activists want to press home demands beyond the legal provisions, a deeply rooted workplace organising is needed. Problems concerning health and safety issues, strains, stress, and performance pressure can only be solved if workers can dispose of well organised oppositional power in the factory.

Most participants, besides doing organising work in their own workplaces, are trying to organise non-union factories in their areas of work. Their voluntary organising work shall be supported by enabling them to identify legal spaces for acting and to use health mapping as an organising tool. From their own experiences, the activists know that organising of non-union factories must happen secretly. For in most cases, once management gets to know who is involved in trade union organising activities, activists get fired before they even had the chance to getting started.

With our workshops, we want to enable practical learning processes, based on workers' own experiences. Thus, the participants are being divided up into working groups where examples from their respective fields of practice show them which forms of organising they can use for addressing existing problems and organising factories.

Searching Movements

The Notion of Something New

For 1st March 2016, the platform *Transnational Social Strike* called for a day of action in over twenty cities in eight European countries. Various events, demonstrations, actions, and meetings aimed at showing that we can, with forces united against borders and precarisation, overcome hierarchies and divisions. The day of action was a success – not really for large participant numbers, but first of all because we launched a process to connect struggles of precarious workers, to look for commonalities, and to develop organising strategies.

The streets of Munich were occupied by Bulgarian migrant workers demanding the right to housing and equal rights for everyone. In Berlin, a strike stroll of Blockupy activists, union activists, EU migrants, and students blocked the streets. In Poznan, German and Polish Amazon workers decried their respective working conditions and clarified the need for coordinated cross-border actions.

For us, the meeting of precarious people in Frankfurt was particularly important. In the evening, H&M and Amazon workers, migrant workers, unemployed workers, care workers, and refugees convened to speak of their experiences of precarious life and work and develop common perspectives. This was more than just delivering reports: the reunion succeeded in creating links



Rank-and-File Unions in Europe

Within the »Réseau Européen des Syndicats Alternatifs et de Base«, rank-and-file unions and organisations from Spain, Greece, Switzerland, France, Germany, Poland, and Belgium have been working together continuously since 2003. The trade union activists of the network are working to counter the impositions of transnational capital with joint resistance. The network is fighting for the preservation of accessible public goods and services, for workers' rights, for a just distribution of social wealth, for social transformation replacing the domination of global corporations and financial markets. The participating unions and organisations feel devoted to the principles of independence, self-organisation, and rank-and-file orientation. Moreover, opposing the trade union mainstream, they are conscientiously calling into question the global capitalist system as a whole.

Daimler Coordination / Auto

The DaimlerCoordination is a working forum serving the regular information exchange between leftist, democratic plant groups and workers in Daimler factories in Germany. The Coordination conceives itself as undogmatic, anti-capitalist, rank-and-file oriented. We aim at understanding the international relations that our own workplaces are part of, and at countering a narrow-minded competition logic with national and international solidarity. Corporational strategies are designed and implemented on a global scale. Thus, the Coordination has been working from the mid-1990ies to develop a genuine workers' internationalism, enabling factory-level union activists from Europe, India, and South America to work together across borders.



between the different realities and posing common questions. For everyone, if to different degrees, precariousness does not just imply the exclusion from housing, health, or mobility, but also degrading experiences at work and a steady decrease of working conditions.

The 1st of March, for us, was part of a process to interlink precarious realities and to build organising strategies and solidarity between precarious workers, in order to develop solidary answers to the current crisis developments.

Labour Worlds China-Germany

Solidarity between China and Germany

A visit of Chinese activists to Germany in January 2016 marked the start of a new two-year programme of Forum Worlds of Labour. The programme's objective is to build workers' solidarity in German companies' factories in China and Germany. Currently, thousands of German companies are running plants in China. Workers employed by the same company in China and in Germany, can learn from each other and mutually support each other, if they get the chance to exchange experiences. The new programme is being coordinated by a working group consisting of activists in Hongkong, Wuhan, Suzhou, and Shenzhen, as well as several German cities. It shall provide interested colleagues in China and Germany with the chance to exchange experiences on the respective working situations, discuss possibilities for their improvement, and develop approaches towards practical resistance against attacks by the common employer. Moreover, the exchange on workers' living situation in both countries shall trigger the necessary debate on a society without wage-dependency.