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TIE-Newsletter

Dear friends and colleagues, dear brothers and sisters,

this is the latest issue of our TIE newsletter. It provides regular info on the work of TIE Global.

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.

The pictures in this newsletter are from an ExChains network photo exhibition in Germany with workers along the supply chain of orange juice production and retail telling their stories.

Comments on the newsletter are welcome.

In solidarity,

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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 get some public attention, but

ExChains Garment

Network Meeting in India: Growing Challenges, Growing Network

The South Asian garment industry is undergoing a transformation: Our colleagues of the Asian garment trade unions are reporting mergers, structural changes, the introduction of new production methods and machines, and the emergence of new factories in rural areas.

There are various causes for these changes. Real estate prices are rising in the industrial centres, so companies can cut costs by moving production from the centres to the rural areas. With the same move, they can also cut wage costs, because jobs are scarce in the rural areas and workers have less opportunities to choose from. New methods and technologies of production are designed to increase productivity. All these changes are leading to intensified competition which finally kicks a considerable number of competitors out of the market, leaving a reduced number of larger garment companies still in existence.

In April, Asian trade unionists from the *ExChains* network jointly discussed in Nashik/India how to react to these changes. By means of the *ExChains* negotiation strategy, the trade unions had been collecting experiences with how trade union power can be built in the garment industry (see newsletter 2-2017). The colleagues were able to conduct negotiations on factory level which were supported by solidarity actions of works councils and trade unionists in Germany. The negotiations included the demand on the garment producers to embark on collective bargaining and thus in fact recognise the trade unions. At the same time, we managed to join the demands of the South Asian trade unions to the demands of trade unions and workers in German retail, supporting each other. During the H&M works council assemblies in 2017 and 2018, common demands were handed over to a reluctant H&M management. Among other demands, H&M was urged to recognise negotiation demands of the garment unions.

must be transcended in order to create oppositional power in the factories. For German retail, we are also exploring new union approaches against precarisation, the division of workers, and dumping wages.

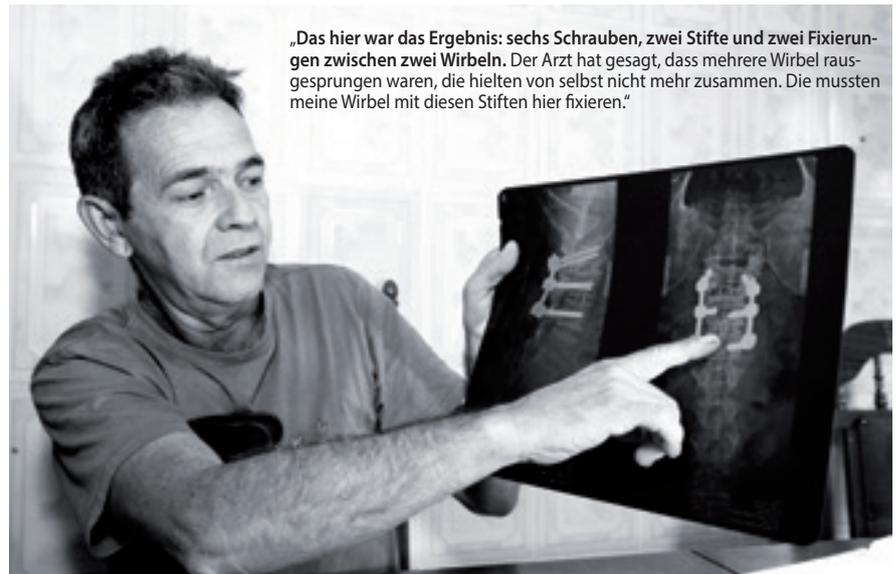
ExChains Orange Juice

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. For the first time, Brazilian trade unions of plantation workers and industrial workers are working together across organisational boundaries. Currently, the network unites activists from FERAESP and 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 orga-

In the Nashik meeting, the colleagues agreed on further proceedings: So far, German works councils and trade unionists are active in the *ExChains* network, together with four garment unions in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (see box in the left column). To be able to raise the pressure on factories and retailers, we will try and win additional garment and retail trade unions in Europe and South Asia to join the *ExChains* negotiation strategy, thus strengthening trade union cooperation along the supply chain.



„Das hier war das Ergebnis: sechs Schrauben, zwei Stifte und zwei Fixierungen zwischen zwei Wirbeln. Der Arzt hat gesagt, dass mehrere Wirbel rausgesprungen waren, die hielten von selbst nicht mehr zusammen. Die mussten meine Wirbel mit diesen Stiften hier fixieren.“

ExChains Orange Juice

Health Mappings Bearing up against Corporate Disruptive Action

Trade unionists in the Brazilian state of Sao Paulo have been conducting health mappings with over 180 workers in a number of plantations and factories of the Great Three Orange Juice Corporations. On top of the list of issues and problems named by the workers were

- **poisoning and health damages by pesticide usage** in the plantations: for instance, the prescribed period of waiting between pesticide application and field work or the minimum distance were not adhered to, thus exposing the unprotected workers to the pesticides
- **intransparency of wages:** picked oranges are being weighed without workers being present
- health damages by **high targets and heavy sacks**

The health mappings enabled workers themselves to conduct a thorough analysis of strains and problems caused by their work, and to formulate solutions and demands for negotiations with the employer companies.

The juice companies, on their part, massively tried to impede the implementation of the health mappings: once they'd learnt about the planned activities, they started to exert pressure on schools, communities, and churches, requ-

nise 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 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**.



„Meine Arbeit mache ich eigentlich gerne. Nur die **Bedingungen sind scheiße**. Man steht neuen Stunden, muss sich bücken, hebt schwer, **das geht ins Kreuz**. Wenn ich morgens alleine eingeteilt bin, muss ich schon mal zwei, manchmal sogar **drei Tonnen Ware** alleine wegpacken. **Rückenschmerzen** sind immer da, jeden Tag. Zweimal die Woche nehme ich auch **Ibuprofen**, wenn es zu stark ist.“

sting them to deny the trade unions the use of their localities. The unions then made do with conducting the mappings in workers' boarding houses.

VidaViva

Life Stories for Common Struggles

The latest meeting of the *VidaViva* network in Cartagena was something special. For the first time, 31 trade union multipliers from the central and the coastal regions of Colombia were able to assemble. They exchanged experiences about the different realities between the regions and discussed new ways to enable trade union organising and improve trade unions' access and outreach to workers. The participants of the meeting are planning to develop their own training tools from a Colombian workers' perspective. A first step had already

been made. On the periphery of Cartagena, workers' children between 7 and 14 years of age told in over 40 interviews how they perceive their parents' life, health, and work. In their touching accounts, lives shaped by precarity and exploitation become visible. Multiple factors causing strain and stress make up for the loss of irretrievable moments from workers' family lives.

Interviews were also conducted with workers from different industrial sectors. The interviewees are talking about work overload and about putting their health at risk in order to reach the ever increasing production targets. As in Brazil, *VidaViva* will produce *Vivências* in Colombia – the photo exhibition of workers sharing their life, health, and



„Man kann schon sagen, dass Cutrale immer ein Teil meines Lebens war, auch wenn ich nie direkt für die gearbeitet habe. **Als ich angefangen habe zu arbeiten, habe ich Orangen-Setzlinge** für deren Produktion **gezüchtet**.“

Rail sans Frontière

Workers and activists from Morocco, Senegal, 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 wage 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 questions. In discussion with other initia-



„Ich meinem Vorstellungsgespräch wurde ich gefragt, ob ich Teilzeit oder Vollzeit arbeiten will. ‚Vollzeit‘, habe ich gesagt, ‚37,5 Stunden wie Tarif. ‚Nein‘, hat er gesagt, ‚bei uns ist Vollzeit 42 Stunden. Dafür kriege ich 2.000 € Brutto, knappe 1.400 € netto. Da kannst nicht von leben und nicht von sterben. Die Älteren im Laden werden bei uns nach Tarif bezahlt. Das ist 600 € mehr bei 37,5 Stunden. Wieder andere arbeiten 46 oder sogar 50 Stunden und kriegen wie ich 2.000 € Brutto.“

work experiences. The first *Vivências* story from Colombia features women working in a tuna factory. Their story is relating instances of exploitation, mobbing, harassment, health problems, but also a lot of resistance. It is about women workers who decided to organise themselves to put a stop to exploitation by their employer, and organised a strike. Thus, they succeeded in pressing home better working conditions and, maybe even more importantly, in safeguarding their dignity. The exhibition will be presented in public from June, making the workers' situation broadly known.

Outsourcing is one key issue the Colombian VidaViva network will deal with in the near future. Around 70% of the total Colombian workers are subcontracted. As such, they are even more precariously employed and even less organised than their directly employed colleagues.

The children's and workers' interviews will be used to create Raios – an education tool which opens spaces for collective reflexion by using provocative short videos and discussion guidelines. Their aim is to enable workers to jointly articulate their experiences and their knowledge, and develop common procedures and actions for change.

Rail sans Frontière

Resistance against French Railway Privatisation

Since March 22nd, the workers of the French national railway company *SNCF* are in strike against the rail reform of the Macron government. Media and government keep repeating their credo: "We must learn from Germany and from the German railway *Deutsche Bahn*." The state of affairs at the *Deutsche Bahn* are being sugarcoated in a ridiculous way, and myths and legends revived, such as: punctuality and reliability of the railway is always guaranteed in Germany, and reaching into the remotest corners.

tives, 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 caused by the current disruptions. Within a joint initiative – *Transnational Social Strike* – groups of precarious

This obscure talk makes it all the more important to confront the legends with the reality of the privatised German railway system, and spread the discrepancies throughout strike assemblies and railway stations. This is a major task of the Rail sans Frontière network during the strike: to expose to the light of day the real conditions at the privatised and the partly privatised railways of Great Britain, Belgium, Spain, Italy, and Germany – as well as the most instructive stories about railways that had already been privatised and are now in the process of re-nationalisation, as a consequence of workers’, users’, and finally administrations’ despair caused by the deficiencies and malfunctions of privatised railway systems (the most prominent example being *British Rail*).

The struggle for the public opinion is playing a huge role during the long weeks of strike, for the trade unions have launched a strike cycle reaching way into summer. The government wants to go ahead with its reform and obtain a final defeat of the rail workers. Still, the endurance of the striking rail workers encourages workers from other sectors, too, to mobilise against the ubiquitous process of pushing social relations in France towards precarisation.

Privatisation of the European public railways has not been a synchronous process. Nevertheless, it produced, and still produces, the same structural and operational difficulties and deficiencies everywhere: safety problems, defects in the materials, and the kill-off of more and more ‘unprofitable’ railway lines in rural areas. 9.000 (!) km of railway lines are projected for closure in France, and there are loads of historical “good examples” from the other European countries available to justify such actions.

For the local residents, with a success of the Macron plans, the following options would remain: use bus lines instead (if provided), use your private car – or stay at home.



„Meine Schichten wechseln innerhalb einer Woche. Zu welchen Zeiten ich arbeiten muss, erfahre ich erst eine Woche vorher. Und wenn jemand krank wird, wird alles noch mal umgeschmissen. Du kannst nichts planen, keine Verabredungen und nichts. Wenn ich einen Arzttermin habe, muss ich bitten und betteln, damit ich zu dieser Zeit nicht eingeteilt werde. Das ist alles Kacke.“

workers from numerous European countries are searching for a common union practice.

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

Rank-and-File Unions

A Broader Perspective, not Blinders

In January, over 300 activists from Europe, Latin America, the US, Canada, the Caribbean, and Africa got together in Madrid/Spain. The International Labour Network for Solidarity and Struggles (ILNSS) wants to open up new horizons for social transformation and emancipation by following exemplary struggles and efforts for a rank-and-file trade union practice.

For a start, the participating trade unions and initiatives presented their practices regarding the social conflicts currently most important to them. This was necessary in order to avoid a frequent pitfall for this kind of get-together, namely to simply presume common grounds (“we all live within the same capitalism, and we are all putting up resistance”). Instead, time and space was provided for an accurate description of the respective regional situations with their specific social relations, their important or even exemplary incidents, and their social upheavals affecting the local labour movement.



„Das Haus hat auch fast keine Möbel. Wir haben nur diese kleinen Tische. Es gibt nicht mal ein Sofa. Die sagen, wir sollen aufpassen, dass wir die Möbel nicht kaputt machen. Welche Möbel?“

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. The rank and file unions are also working together with unions and activists beyond European borders in the "International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles" (ILNSS), see www.laboursolidarity.org.

Major concrete issues in the discussion were:

Sexist Discrimination in the world of wage labour and in social life as a whole. In the face of the omnipresence of multiple forms of discrimination and violence against women, the participants discussed how the labour and social movements can succeed to counteract machism with a solidarity based, respectful, and egalitarian sociality for everyone.

Repression. Global capital and government agencies around the world are acting with increasing harshness in the workplaces and on the streets. This radicalisation manifests in interferences with workers' right to strike and in massive prosecution of protesting workers, trade unions and labour activists. In reaction to this aggravation of social relations, alliances with lawyers' organisations, critical media portals, civil society groups (such as attac,

the Human Rights League etc.) are emerging in some places along exemplary conflicts and solidarity actions. The possibilities and chances of there alliances were discussed by the participants.

Colonialism. Delegates from the French overseas territories reported on the situation on Mayotte, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, and on the general strikes for equality, against institutional racism and against the exploitation of African land resources by multinational corporations. Participants from Central African countries reported on the severity of trade union struggles, f.e. in the gold mines.

Autogestion – Self organisation: Participants made reports of experiences with factory takeovers by workers trying to implement self-determined production, such as the tea factory of Fralib in Marseille/France. Other reports included the experiences of initiatives who built protest camps and villages in Notre Dame des Landes/France where people now live and defend forests and agricultural lands against the construction of a regional airport which is as useless socially and economically as it is destructive to the environment. With such takeovers and squattings, new practices and relations have developed towards a cooperative and solidarity based sociality that might be able to build an actual counter power to keep at bay the power of state-run bodies and governments. The success of the community protest at Notre Dame des Landes – an officially stated abandonment of the airport mega-project! – offers an example that encourages common resistance.

Migration: Participants reported from various initiatives and solidarity based activities for the support of refugees arriving in Europe. In Naples/Italy, for instance, a self organised health centre was developed, reminding us of initiatives such as the former Bethany people's clinic in Berlin/Germany and several similar initiatives in Greece.

Adding to the issue based plenary discussion, the transnational sector networks of the education, industrial, health, callcenter, retail and service sectors, as well as Rail sans Frontière, met separately to develop plans for future joint activities.

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, and 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. Strategies of multinational corporations are designed and implemented on a global scale. Thus, the Coordination has been working from the mid-1990s to develop a genuine workers' internationalism, enabling factory-level union activists from Europe, India, and South America to build common work across borders.



„Mein Name ist Josenildo. Ich bin verheiratet und habe eine Tochter. Ich bin aus Paraiba gekommen, um Orangen zu pflücken, auf der Suche nach einem besseren Leben für mich und meine Familie. Ich arbeite für Agrotec, einen Zulieferer von Citrusuco.“

Focus on Digitalisation

Invitation for Discussion

During the TIE/VidaViva conference in November 2017 we had decided to develop a new international TIE Global program on the subject of digitalisation in the world of labour and the connected process of social transformation (see Newsletter 2-2017).

In Germany, we have begun to collect experiences from the workplaces on issues such as: control; work delimitations concerning time, place, and skills; the rise of (new) precarious working conditions and labour relations; the change of collective experiences; possible forms of resistance; altered conditions for trade union organising. In cooperation with the retail section of ver.di trade union, we want to enable works councils and trade union activists to develop their own perspective and language as well as instruments for a workplace related rank-and-file work on the issue.

We are organising a similar process in other countries, too, such as Brazil, Colombia, and some South Asian and South European countries – with the aim to enable the creation of international programs for a better understanding and for possible forms of resistance against the developments associated with digitalisation.

In the course of this year, TIE organises several seminars in Germany with works council members from industrial production. In ver.di trade union, meetings on the subject are held in relation with the retail working group “Young Fashion” and in the frame of a larger conference.



„Wir schicken unseren Familien etwas Geld und den Rest geben wir für Medikamente aus. Ich nehme Medikamente wegen meines Asthmas. Das habe ich mir auf den Plantagen durch das Gift und die nassen Orangen geholt. Sie zwingen uns auch im Regen zu arbeiten.“