

## TIE Global Holds its 7th International Conference

Between June 24 and 27 TIE Global held its 7th international conference in Wiesbaden, Germany. Participants came from the various organisations and countries that are members of TIE Global. At the conference the different TIE Global projects in countries such as Bangladesh, Brazil, France, Germany, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey and USA were reviewed and discussed. During the meeting participants also discussed changes in global power relations in the political and economic sphere resulting from the current world crisis. The debate centred around the impact of the current crisis on workers' movements and on TIE Global work in different countries.

### ONE crisis, various faces

During the conference debate it became very clear that there is only one global crisis but with very different consequences in each country. The current crisis is not just financial as the media has portrayed, but is at its core one of capital over-accumulation. On the global level there is overproduction of goods and commodities in relation to consumer capacity. The auto industry is a good example. According to various specialists there is 20 - 30% over production world wide. Less than a decade ago there were more than 20 car companies world wide. Today there are only 15 and even that number will dramatically shrink. According to TIE Global Germany member Heiner Koehnen, "In the industrial sector capital is using the crisis to restructure at all levels. Working conditions are under attack as work rules and work relations are changed. The crisis will accelerate changes in power relations at the economic, political, and cultural level. It

will also create a push for more exploration of natural resources." Another focus of the debate was on the changing power relations between countries. China, India and Brazil are seen as playing a more important role in the global economy. Marsha Niemeijer of TIE Global USA also pointed out, "Power relations between the north and south will change. At the moment the majority of the governments in the north are developing programs (bailouts, cash incentives) to keep the economy functioning. In the end, workers will pay the bill. In Europe the crisis threatens the existence of the welfare state. This will have an impact on unions and other social movements. Every country will experience change although it will take different forms. It is important to see the crisis not only from the perspective of fear, but as one of challenge and opportunity. We have to build the fight back, actively organise and mobilize workers around the world."



# Actions of tie Global Bangladesh

In Bangladesh there are 4,500 garment factories employing about 2.5 million workers. The sector accounts for more than 76% of the export value of the country. In 2008, even while the unions were under government restrictions because of a state of emergency, a number of activities took place. Education programs to develop new leadership, especially among women were developed. Eight trainings were held with factory workers inside and outside the export processing zones about wage discrimination and working conditions. Beyond that, the National Garment Workers Federation, a leading union in this sector, together with TIE Global organised exchange programs and education sessions on working conditions, union and workers' rights, and how to build a union at the workplace. More than 900 workers participated. Bangladeshi participant Amirul Haque Amin, President of the National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh told other conference participants how TIE Global has supported the struggle in the

garment sector through the ExChains project. "In one factory there was a struggle over wages. The factory closed - workers were not allowed by law to strike. But through the ExChains project of TIE Global and the international support of the Clean Clothes Campaign the company was forced to compensate the workers. In another case, METRO (one of the world's biggest retailer) cancelled all orders because the death of a worker and bad working conditions of the supplier had been publicized. Both the supplier company and workers blamed the union for the cancelled orders and possible permanent job loss. Again, through an international campaign of TIE Global and Clean Clothes METRO was forced to reinstate the orders;

working conditions were improved and workers were paid lost wages." Amin concluded his report by saying, "This is the type of international solidarity that we need to multiply. Workers all along the supply chain - from production to retail - need to join hands with each other."



## Sri Lanka

In 1977 Sri Lanka introduced a policy of free trade and created free trade zones to attract investment from all over the world. One of the selling points to investors has been a union-free environment. In Sri Lanka, 85% of garment workers are women. The majority come from the country side and live in dormitories around the factories. Working conditions are bad as is the pay - workers make only 43 Euros a month. Since 1980 TIE Global has been helping build independent unions in the free trade zones and beyond, especially in the garment sector. According to Anton Marcus, General Secretary of the Free Trade Zone and General Services Employees Union of Sri Lanka, "Our garment sector has suppliers for all brands. All our activities are linked to the international struggle, even

though the government is very critical of such activities because of the civil war that went on for so many years. And now there is the world economic crisis. On one hand the companies tried to change labour law, using the crisis as their excuse. We were able to convince other unions to fight the proposed attacks on labour rights. We developed a strong campaign against these proposals and in the end the employers were forced to withdraw them. On the other hand, the crisis has led to many plant closures and dismissals. We are using this opportunity to pressure for the creation of an unemployment system in our country. We have asked for immediate compensation in the short-term and an unemployment system longer-term. But we don't just fight for workers rights. The

government oppresses freedom of expression in our country. Most independent journalists have had to leave the country. Free communication is very difficult. So, we are developing a platform for freedom of expression to unite political parties, unions and NGOs. International solidarity is critical for this. If we don't succeed we risk losing many things we have won in the past. We fight and cooperate with civil organizations. Also we want to organize workers in the northern part of Sri Lanka. If we don't have a clear position in regard to racism there, we will not be able to do this. So we also want to win rights for minorities. We are just at the initial stages of this work and our hope is to increase international support for this vital work."

# Actions of tie Global

# Mexico and the US

In northern Mexico along the US border, workers suffer inhuman working conditions, low wages and discrimination. The region is preferred by international companies because of governmental financial incentives and the existence of unions that are complicit with the companies in every way. Workers call them "yellow unions". Garment factories were the first to come to this region and they employed mostly women. Initially they hired young women between 18 and 25. They made around \$100/month and worked 48 hours a week. Conditions are worse today - higher production targets and longer hours - 12 to 18 hours a day. Of course, this has led to an explosion of accidents and occupational diseases. With only "yellow unions" workers have organized through workers centres. TIE Global together with SEDEPAC (Service, Development and Peace) have, through the ExChains program held worker exchanges of workers from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mexico and Germany. TIE Global, SEDEPAC together with the Brazil VidaViva network has held workshops to help workers create actions in the workplace to defend their health and lives. Trainings have been organized in Fronteira, Saltillo and Mexico City bringing together workers from all over Mexico (Coahuila, Yucatan, Oaxaca, Puebla,

Quetaro, Aguascalientes, Torreón, Fco. Imadero, Chihuahua, Reynosa, Tijuana and Mexico D.F.). The work of SEDPAC and TIE Global has resulted in several victories for workers: stopping the dismissal of pregnant women, ending pregnancy tests for employment, recognition by the government and companies of occupation diseases, and winning some benefits for workers from closed plants. "It is fundamental that our workers struggle keeps being international. Companies set up in one country, squeeze out all they can in profits, move on, leaving injured and sick workers, and misery behind. Therefore, the work of TIE Global is fundamental to building workers resistance wherever in the world they are, since this is our goal everywhere," said participant Ana Caldeira of SEDPAC and TIE Global. For over twenty years TIE Global has worked with activists in North America. In the US, TIE Global has worked closely with rank and file workers linked to Labor Notes and Black Workers For Justice (BWFJ), an organization located in the US south. In many states of the US, especially in the south, public workers have no right to



collectively bargain or have union representation. TIE Global has joined with BWFJ to help organizing in this region and stimulate Black-Latino alliances among US-based workers. TIE Global has also worked with organizations in the immigrant communities and helped them to develop leaders.

# France, Senegal and Turkey

In France the union SUD (Solidarity, Unity and Democracy) was born from workers' resistance. When in 1995 the French government tried to change labour laws, the General Secretary of the CFDT union federation supported the attempts. Outraged, workers demanded a union congress be called to throw him out. When he denied this, the workers left the CFDT and formed a new confederation, SUD. SUD Rail and TIE Global developed a joint project in western Africa which has developed into TIE Global Africa. From a base in Senegal, the rail project is focused on supporting rail workers in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Congo and Morocco resist privatisation. "Privatisation has resulted in the isolation of entire populations because in some regions rail was the principle form of transportation. The network brings together trades people, civil movements groups, and rail unions. Finally, TIE Global has created a network of women workers from all four union confederations in Senegal. Senegalese society is extremely patriarchal and we need to change this," said Mamdou Ly, a member of SUD and TIE Global Africa.

In Turkey tie works with unions and union activists from the metal, textile and commercial sector. The goal of our work is to strengthen workers organising efforts and support international cooperation by which we can build pressure on companies to guarantee workers rights. tie Turkey cooperates with German unions on international issues of organising and is also part of the ExChains project, trying to organise textile factories in Turkey.



# Actions of tie Global

## Germany



iTie Global Germany has brought the VidaViva project to a number of European countries. The first effort was through Freudenberg, a multinational car supplier with factories throughout the world. Work Council members of factories in France, UK, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Austria and Germany have taken part. Like others in VidaViva participants they have implemented workplace participatory action research and health mapping. Using these results they have developed worker-centred benchmarks on local working conditions to bargain/intervene more effectively around workers' health. This same process is also being used inside the Works Councils and factory commissions of Daimler Germany and Brazil.

- ✍ Since the early 1980s TIE Global has Conducted and published research on social movements, restructuring processes, and union and workers' struggles;
  - ✍ Trained rank and file and Works Council members;
  - ✍ Developed new organizing strategies
  - ✍ Supported and been part of the development of national, European and international networks of multinational corporations in auto, retail and chemical;
  - ✍ Supported networks in the public sector in France, Germany and western Africa.:
- tie Global Germany is actively part of the ExChains project, building solidarity between workers throughout the subcontracting chain in the garment sector, and between supplier and retail workers. Additionally ExChains links activists in Germany, Turkey and Asia on international organising campaigns and the right to organize. Finally, TIE Global Germany is developing exchange programs with activists in China.

## Brazil



**B**razil, Germany, Mexico and Mozambique simultaneously developed the VidaViva network. The project's objective is to strengthen effective workplace intervention. Activities focus on strengthening shop floor organization. VidaViva activities are carried out by unions (Mexico currently being the exception) through local trainers. So far, VidaViva has trained about 300 people from 130 unions and 8 different states using educational tools that have been developed and refined over the years. The project has developed a new strategic framework around the triangle of health, work and life. For years TIE Global

has sponsored worker exchanges among workers in the same sector or company (for example, Daimler) with the goal of creating networks geared to strengthening union action against multinational corporations. Recently, VidaViva in cooperation with the National Federation of Chemical Workers (CNQ) has brought the project to the existing network of workers at the various Akzo Nobel plants. The metalworkers federation (CNM-CUT) has adopted the whole VidaViva strategic framework and program for training and action at the local workplace level.

## South Africa Mozambique Nigeria

**I**n Nigeria TIE Global has assisted the Nigeria Labour Congress in building a national trade union activist education program. The program consists of national schools to develop new organising strategies and link the country to other unions such as Ghana, Sierra Leone and South Africa. Since 2008 VidaViva has been active in Nigeria. Today, TIE Global supports train-the-trainer seminars to multiply its impact at local work places. Since the early 90s TIE Global supports union activities all over southern Africa by enabling exchanges and trainings of activists within the region or within a specific company. Since 2007 activities of VidaViva have been implemented in South Africa in collaboration with local education, research and trade union organisations. tie Global work in Mozambique has come through VidaViva Brazil. There both union federations (OTM, CONSILMO) and the two independent unions (SNJ and SNP) have adopted VidaViva, forming VidaViva Mozambique. Since 2005 about 70 local activists have been trained and they are implementing participative action research at local workplaces. The project is active in the Maputo region and the four provinces (Tete, Manica, Sofala and Zambezia) of the Centre region. "To develop integrated work between African countries is fundamental to the construction of a network of action and solidarity," said Bobbie Marie of TIE Global Africa..

