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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.

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.

### **ExChains garments**

## **Network meeting in India with New Colleagues from Italy**

The work in the ExChains network and the strengthening of the debate on better working and living conditions in the garment sector – this was the aim of the meetings of trade unionists and works council members from Germany, Italy, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in March at two networking conferences in Dhaka and New Delhi. Over the course of a week, colleagues from H&M, Zara, Esprit, Walbusch and Primark, as well as colleagues from suppliers, discussed their struggles along the garment value chain. They were joined for the first time by colleagues from the Italian trade union SI-Cobas who are part of the logistics departments of the fashion retail giants H&M and Zara.

The group visited a supplier factory and a workers' housing area in Dhaka. The poor working and living conditions of the colleagues were obvious. They have to work without adequate noise or fire protection in 28 degrees celsius heat in a factory hall with thousands of their co-workers. At the same time, the colleagues from the retail trade reported on their working conditions: low wages, high workload and unhealthy working conditions also shape their everyday lives. The conclusion of Safia Parvin from the ExChains network in Bangladesh: "We are workers for the same companies and have common problems that we can only change together."

"We have already made some improvements in negotiations with the management", members of the NGWF reported. Nevertheless, the massive work pressure continues to make many workers ill. Harassment by male supervisors is also still common. The many female workers are affected by the additional exploitation of their dependency. But they organize resistance. Despite layoffs and repression, unionists are engaged in disputes about improving working conditions in factories and enforcing and raising minimum wages. In India there was also a general strike earlier this year.



Additionally, the production countries' trade unions are working together regionally and developing new approaches towards organising. Specific campaigns do get some public attention, but 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 orga-



What international cooperation should look like in the future was discussed in New Delhi. The *ExChains* Working Conference was attended by trade unions GAFWU from Chennai, GATWU from Bangalore and FTZ & GSEU from Sri Lanka. In addition to the further development of joint negotiation strategies, the next steps agreed were the improvement of common information platforms and a more intensive focus on the digitalization along the value chain and the associated changes in labor and exploitation relationships.

## **Spanish Logistics Workers now Part of the Network**

In April, cooperation between the TIE network and the Spanish CGT union was agreed upon in Madrid after Spanish colleagues from the retail sector visited Germany in autumn of 2018. Zara works council members and trade union members from TIE in Germany met trade unionists from the CGT and Zara logistics workers from Zaragoza. The work of TIE, especially the *ExChains* network, the mappings and the discussions on the digitalization were presented and discussed. The colleagues from the company were quickly convinced. To get a better idea of the company, there was a visit to the world's largest Zara store in Madrid, as well as to the Zara Home central warehouse near Madrid. From there, all goods are shipped to all Zara Home stores around the world. The warehouse is already 95% automated. There are a total of 500 people working there, of whom 380 are permanent, the rest are temporary workers or other precarious workers. The warehouse is huge, but you hardly see any people. Only work processes in which the size of the product is not standard size, must be processed by hand. By the middle of next year, the RFID technology will be introduced throughout the warehouse. This means a more dense work experience for the workers, because then each product instead of just random samples must be checked and possibly repackaged. The entrance point into the in-depth cooperation will therefore be in the field of health and digitalization.



nising 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 *verdi* 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



## **Mappings in Italy as a Step into the ExChains Network**

In May, TIE activists from Germany visited their colleagues from SI-Cobas and SIAL-Cobas in Milan. SI-Cobas organizes workers in the fields of butchery, logistics and the automotive industry in various cities from Palermo to Milan. Strategies and actions are decided upon by grassroots delegates from all cities at regular meetings. SIAL-Cobas also organizes logistics, metalworking and chemicals in northern Italy. Both unions are currently trying to organize employees in the hotel industry. The German and Italian colleagues continued the exchange starting last autumn about their main areas of work and possibilities for cooperation within the framework of the ExChains network. After a presentation of Mappings and Raios by TIE, a first mapping with workers was carried out. In the future the cooperation should be extended to other trade unions.

### **ExChains Orange Juice**

## **First Improvements as a Result of Mappings**

The mapping strategy developed by the International Orange Juice Network is having an effect. Following the pilot mappings on the “São José” plantation, the Louis Dreyfus Company and the agricultural workers union of Piratininga have already developed solutions to 47 of the 58 problems identified by the workers. The union and the company are under negotiation. “We negotiate effective changes for the benefit of the workers in a participatory process. There is a change in the trade union culture. Instead of just identifying problems, we are actively developing solutions ourselves”, said Jesus Donizete, president of the agricultural workers union. In concrete terms, the process from October 2018 to March 2019 led to improvements in the following areas:

- **New buses:** The company's buses, which transport the workers to and from work, often break down on the way back. Employees attribute this to the fact that the same buses are also used for transport on the uneven terrain of the



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**.

### ***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.

plantations. In addition, the equipment of the buses was criticized as inconvenient for trips of more than one hour. A separate bus was hired for transport within the plantation and more comfortable buses were purchased for the commute.

- **Free sun protection:** The strong heat and sunlight on the plantations complicate the work and lead to excessive exhaustion. Until now, workers have had to procure and pay for sun protection themselves. Currently, the company is identifying the most suitable sunscreen. This should be made available to the workers free of charge.
- **Protected tractor cabins and new seats:** Due to open tractor cabins, accidents on the plantations due to branches protruding into the tractor cabins occurred regularly. As an immediate measure, the company has now installed wire protections on all cabins. In the second step, all tractors will be equipped with glazed, air-conditioned cabins, which also provide protection against pesticides. The company also made sure to replace all damaged tractor seats to increase employee performance by reducing the risk of accidents.
- **Safe ladders:** The workers suggested that the ladders should be fitted with a thorn for better traction at the bottom and hooks at the top for attachment to the tree. This measure has now been implemented.
- **New tools:** Employees in maintenance and service lost a lot of time with long walks to get necessary tools from the central warehouse. Now, they all have a toolbox with the necessary equipment, which is always in the vicinity.
- **Pesticide cleaning:** The maintenance and service personnel had regular contact with the pesticides accumulated in the tractor. Now the tractors are thoroughly cleaned before maintenance.
- **Training on the use of pesticides:** Training on the handling and disposal of pesticides will be extended to all permanent employees.
- **Optimization of the pesticide spraying system:** the division between plantation zones where aircraft are deploying pesticides and zones where crops are harvested is being revised. This is to prevent the sprayed pesticides from drifting into the areas where workers are picking.
- **Effective protective clothing against pesticides:** The company handles the cleaning of uniforms of pesticides. Many boots used by workers over their intended time of use are not waterproof. The company will acquire new ones.
- **Pneumatic Impact Wrench:** The company has decided to purchase pneumatic impact wrenches to prevent health damage due to repetitive strain. Until now, the work had been done by hand.
- **Drinking water backpack and motorcycles against exhaustion:** Workers in pest control receive a thermal backpack for carrying sufficient amounts of cool water. The workers also have to travel long distances on the plantation. The





## 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 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 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

company accepted the suggestion to let the workers use motorcycles.

The company also announced that it will be directly employing harvest workers from northeastern Brazil this year, and they will receive an employment contract in advance.

### Cultural change and expansion of the negotiations

Negotiations between companies and unions usually take place only once a year and rarely address issues such as health and safety at work. This is changing now. The parties also recently discussed the possibility of follow-up mapping on the São José plantation to see if the measures implemented have led to the expected improvements or if further action is needed. In addition, the Fazenda São José mappings will also be carried out with the harvest workers and on four further plantations with at least 60% of the workers from each farm in the Botocatu region.

## *Rail sans Frontière*

## Convergence, not Dissociation: Unions and Yellow Vests in France

In our last newsletter, we reported that in France, workers and users are now fighting against the thinning out of public services (train, post office, health care, etc.) under the Macron government. Especially rural areas are greatly affected by these politics.

The unions had initially had difficulties to come to an assessment of the yellow vest protests and decided to keep clear of them. At length, though, they found they cannot dismiss the new movement as just being riots against rising gasoline prices for dubious political reasons. Rather, the yellow vests call for three things: first, an approach against the increasing injustice of taxation, second, an end to the erosion of infrastructure and basic services of the public sphere in rural areas and third, more democracy in the form of referendums, lower parliamentary diets and the ability to recall the “people’s representatives”.

Currently the yellow vests are working on organizing at a grassroots level. The desire to establish social centres was the focus of the first nationwide gathering in Commer-

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 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](http://www.laboursolidarity.org).

cy earlier this year. The movement criticized the increasing social inequality and at the same time advocated an ecological transformation. At the end of June, 700 delegates gathered for the third national meeting in Montceau-les-Mines.

The focal points of the Rail sans Frontière network in France were closely linked with the yellow vest issues in the last six months. Many of the network’s activists took part in initiatives against the closure of rail lines in their immediate environment and conducted joint events on mobility issues involving climate change initiatives. The focus was on joint actions for free public transport. Aubagne, an industrial zone near Marseille, served as an example of the fact that free public transport can offer a realistic alternative to private car traffic. For the unions, the time of dissociation from the Gilets Jaunes is over. Now, convergence – the new collaboration between trade union activists and yellow vests – is on the agenda.



## Calamitous Privatization in Mali

The current situation of rail workers in Mali is an extreme example of what the privatization of public services can do to employees and users. In 2003, the railways of Mali and Senegal had been privatized, including, above all, a central lifeline of both countries: the Dakar-Bamako railway line. The railway unions had warned against privatization and protested against it. The new owners fired many workers and tried to silence the rest.

For twelve years, changing multinational corporations were allowed to exploit the railways and snatch away the profits. The consequences: Mass layoffs of train workers, massive closures of stations along the route (where people have no other means of transport) and a dramatic decline in infrastructure. Thus, in 2015, of the original 22 locomotives only three (!) were left.

Even the governments of Senegal and Mali, who had pushed privatization against all odds, eventually had enough. In 2015, the railway companies were re-nationalized and the governments promised to put everything right: the traffic on the lifeline Dakar-Bamako would be ensured, the jobs would be secure and the wages would be continuously paid by the state.

On the Senegalese side, this worked reasonably well, but not in crisis-ridden Mali. Finally, a group of railway workers went on hunger strike on December 18, 2018. By then, arrears of nine (!) monthly wages had accumulated. The hunger strikers camped on the railway tracks of Bamako Station and were supported by their families. There was international solidarity in the form of protests and material support from the



## 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.

Rail sans Frontière network, Senegalese and French trade unions and associations.

After 143 days, the hunger strike was ended on May 11, 2019, after a new minister of transport promised to pay all outstanding wages swiftly. The hunger strike cost the lives of ten workers and family members.

In September, colleagues from Mali will report to the congress of the French SUD Rail on their fight against privatization and public transport.

## Digitalization

### “Just like in the Factory”: Digitalization in Garment Retail

RFID, omni-channel and workforce management: digitalization disrupts retail trade and is so much more than just the replacement of stationary retail by online shopping. In February, TIE therefore discussed the issue with 30 works council members of Zara, H&M, Esprit and Karstadt at a seminar. The aim of which was to find answers to new questions arising from digitalization and develop common strategies. Despite the question of how to deal with store closures, it should be noted: retail does not disappear due to digitalization, but it is nevertheless changing massively. Already existing problems, such as unhealthy working conditions, stress and precarious work, are exacerbated. Workers are being deployed in an evermore flexible and unsteady manner – namely only when customers are in the shop. A separate life and weekly planning is thus hardly possible. The work becomes more monotonous because advising customers is rationalized – after all, customers only receive recommendations based on their past purchases. Sold items must be restocked from storage to the store immediately – sales assistants are turned into store-keeping drones. This is made possible by technologies such as RFID chips in clothing, which make it processable at a glance which product is on display and which is not. Algorithms are used to calculate staff requirements based on activities, revenues, and customer traffic.

With the seminar we started a process to better understand the new changes and develop resistance strategies as well as formulate our own demands in order to be able to affect changes to the new industrial relations and technological processes ourselves. The reaction to digitalization is too often a pure technology assessment. From this perspective, technology is something that we experience as passive beings. This perspective is also a view that the managements communicate. But thereby we forget: Technologies encode social interests. They change the work process and how workers view themselves within the work place. That is why works councils in the retail sector want to understand the transformation themselves in order to be able to fight with and on behalf of the workers. In addition, digitalization must address fundamental issues: how do we design work, life and society according to our needs, and what technologies can support this?

