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TIE-Newsletter

Dear friends and colleagues, dear brothers and sisters,

this is the second issue of our TIE newsletter. It provides 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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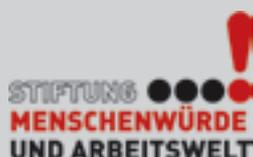
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ExChains Garment

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 must be transcended in order to create oppositional power

ExChains Garment

North-South Trade Union Cooperation

The inequality in power along the global supply chain makes it hard for garment factory workers in the Global South to press home sustainable improvements in their situation. By putting pressure on global buyer companies through cooperation with international consumer campaigns, local trade unions may be able to succeed in creating short-lived public attention for certain problems at supplier factories. But these strategies have hardly contributed to strengthening local trade unions on the ground.

In a joint effort against such shortcomings, the trade unions working together in the *ExChains* network have developed a new strategy, as a conscious effort to build union power at each level along the global garment supply chain. Demands and strategies are developed collectively through transnational solidarity between unions of garment workers in different countries in South Asia, and with retail workers unions in the Global North. The aim is to enforce better conditions for all workers along the supply chain.

In order to deepen union-to-union solidarity between unions of garment workers in the Global South and the union of retail workers in Germany, a number of trade union leaders of the German *ver.di* union retail section travelled to Bangalore and Dhaka in October to meet with members, activists, and leaders of the *Garment and Textile Workers Union* (GATWU) and the *National Garment Workers Federation* (NGWF). The German union leaders' major motive was to understand the living and working conditions of garment factory workers, with the aim to strengthen the negotiation power of workers and their trade unions at both ends of the global supply chain.

Meeting their respective counterparts, the *ver.di*, GATWU and NGWF trade unionists discussed workers' most pressing issues. Two days were spent with

in the factories. For German retail, we are also exploring 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. 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 Ger-



meeting workers and their families: in villages outside of Bangalore, in a workers' neighbourhood in Dhaka, in front of factory gates, and during factory visits organised with the support of Zara. Thus, the German unionists tried to get a comprehensive insight to the situation of workers in Dhaka and Bangalore.

They also met Gautam Mody, general secretary of the *New Trade Union Initiative* (NTUI), the progressive federation GATWU and GAFWU are affiliated to, in order to learn more about the situation of trade unions in India. In Bangladesh, NGWF organised a meeting with workers of H&M and Zara supplier factories who reported on the concrete problems in their workplaces. In Dhaka, the ver.di trade unionists also demonstrated their solidarity, participating in a protest march of their Bangladeshi union colleagues and garment workers for 1. the payment of living wages to workers by factory owners, and 2. the payment of fair prices to the supplier factories by the buyer companies.

Jointly, the German visitors and the local trade unionists confirmed their determination to work together on a steady basis. The major elements of this cooperation are a continuous flow of information on the conditions in the factories, and the development of a common negotiation strategy, aimed at strengthening the bargaining power of garment workers' unions and retail workers' unions at the same time. Therefore, concrete steps were agreed upon, such as the investigation of supplier factories, the further development of contacts along the supply chain, direct communication between workers, and concrete joint actions.



man 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 oriented benchmarking etc. in order to develop workplace strategies. In Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Columbia, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Turkey, and

Thus, the exchange was a great step towards building mutual understanding, solidarity and respect between the two ends of the global supply chain.

VidaViva

International VidaViva Conference in Brazil

On November 12 to 14, the 10th International VidaViva Conference took place in Florianópolis, with activists from seven Brazilian states, from Germany, India and Mozambique participating, and activists from Columbia, Canada und Turkey sending video messages.

The conference enabled an important exchange of experiences. Participants from each country presented how they implemented network activities in correspondence with their respective countries' reality, and what strategies they used to enable real changes in workers' lives. During the conference, the participants developed an exhibition which was then used to present approaches, strategies for an improved workers' involvement, achieved outcomes, but also difficulties and barriers.

The participants of the conference also discussed current developments in global capitalism and their consequences for how work and production are organised, key issue being different forms of precarisation in the respective countries and their consequences for the possibilities to organise workers.

Brazilian participants presented an experience with VidaViva implementation at the CELESC electricity company in Santa Catarina state. The national electricity company Sinergia incorporated the implementation of VidaViva tools such as workplace mapping, health workshops, and Raio videos, including workers' participation during their working hours, in a collective agreement. Plain rank-and-file workers, not just elected trade union representatives, were trained as trainers. Thus, 60 percent of all workers were already able to participate in mappings and other activities. Currently, the union is negotiating the results and workers' demands with the company.

These experiences show that VidaViva succeeds at mobilising workers to become active and take a stand for the improvement of their lives, health, and work.



Germany, around 100 unions from different sectors are active within **VidaViva**.

Rail sans Frontière

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 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



Columbian Activists Discuss Life, Health, and Work

November 23 to 25, an activists' meeting took place in Columbia where strategies and experiences for the implementation of VidaViva in the workplace were discussed and trainers trained. More than 20 trainers are active in Columbia. The challenges are huge. Over 70 percent of the workers, even in industrial workplaces, are working on precarious contracts, sub-contracts, or no contracts at all - which deeply impedes organising and trade union work. Currently, the unions are mainly implementing health mappings with permanent and precarious workers, for organising purposes.

Participation through VidaViva in Mozambique

The VidaViva instruments are particularly suited to trigger workers' reflection processes in the workplace. They allow workers to experience collective and participative processes, and the trade union activists to access workers in their workplaces on a regular basis.

In Mozambique, these chances are being successfully used. In 2016, a nationwide conference of VidaViva Mozambique was organised, and 3 regional train-



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.

Rank-and-File Unions in Europe

Within the »Réseau Européen des Syndicats Alternatifs et de Base«,

ings conducted. 50 multipliers were trained, 30 surveys conducted in different workplaces, and a handbook for plant-level negotiations written and distributed. In a number of plants, labour law regulations were used to build rank-and-file trade union structures around the issue of occupational health and safety.

Searching Movements

European (dis)connections

In October, TIE participated in the *Transnational Social Strike* (TSS) platform meeting in Paris, organised by numerous initiatives, such as the Italian group *precarious (dis)connections*, and supported by the French *SUD* trade union federation.

The meeting was particularly fruitful concerning new opportunities for cooperation, f.i. with the S.I.Cobas who had been leading the struggles in the Italian logistics sector, gaining them new strength and new members. Thus, we now have a number of starting points for an expansion of the ExChains network to Italy. We were also able to intensify existing contacts with Amazon workers.

On the other hand, discussions during the meeting showed that the effort to unify struggles against precarisation and fragmentation on a European level still has a long way to go. There are huge discrepancies between the different groups and initiatives regarding their respective policy understanding. The activists of *precarious (dis)connections*, for instance, were keen to discuss unified European demands. Such demands were hardly incorporated in the respective groups' practice, though, and thus could not be agreed upon.

A lot of communication work will be necessary to reach a common understanding. We must continue making the effort, though, because the aim is clear: Unite precarious workers' struggles, look for common grounds, develop organising strategies!

Rank and File Unions in Europe

The Struggle against the New Labour Law *Loi Travail* in France

An experience report by Willi Hajek

Since spring 2016, trade unions and students' organisations in France had been mobilising against the new labour law initiative brought forward by the government. The law is designed to push forward the precarisation of the French labour relations: Firing workers shall become easier, labour laws can be overruled by company agreements, trade unions shall be blocked from intervention.



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.

DaimlerCoordination/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.



After the new law had been announced in February 2016, hundreds of thousands took to the streets throughout the country in March for protest. The government was not willing to talk, the employers' federation denounced protesting labour and students' activists as terrorists. There were violent clashes with police troops. Mainstream media, all in the hands of major corporations, agitated against the movement.

The movement still did not cease to come forth with its creative forms of action and to keep inventing ever new strike and blockade actions. The call „*on bloque tout!*“ provided the movement with a voice and an aim: to paralyse the country together. In the ports of Normandy and the Mediterranean, the fuel stocks were blocked for one week. At Le Havre, insurgent inhabitants and dock and port workers joined to form a new rebellious people. Temporarily, police task forces were forced to withdraw.

It was great to see the CGT unions maintain militant unity with the *Solidaires* rank-and-file unions - in spite of all tensions resulting from discrepancies between their respective milieus. Neither did the movement of young people and students succumb to the media and government propaganda aimed at playing everyone off against each other.

The creative, courageous, and progressive movement was not able to prevent the law from being adopted by parliament in July, but the struggle continues. The movement, having lasted from March to July, has changed the social climate for the better: „We neither want the new *Loi Travail*, nor the world it creates! In the public squares and streets, wherever we gather, we will create ourselves a new world!“