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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 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



VidaViva conference

### ExChains Garment

## Together we are stronger !

Trade union activists from South Asia got together with German garment retail workers in June. The exchange visit aimed at the implementation of the common *ExChains* strategy facing major global retail companies such as H&M, Inditex/Zara, Esprit, and Primark.

### Presenting Demands Together

During the H&M works council assembly, trade union leaders of GATWU/India and NGWF/Bangladesh, jointly with the German members of works councils and ver.di union, handed over a joint paper of demands to the management representatives who were also present. Instead of complaining about general problems, the colleagues from both ends of the supply chain had formulated very specific demands. H&M management received the paper reluctantly, but failed to make use of this opportunity for dialogue.

The colleagues from Asia showed concrete solidarity concerning the fight against H&M's harassment against its German workers: NGWF and GATWU denounced the termination requests against the German works council members Nico, Mali, and Lukasz as evident manoeuvres to get rid of employees who would not cease speaking up for their own and their fellow workers' rights. Trade union activists in Bangladesh and in India supported their colleagues in German retail by organising solidarity action and writing protest letters to the H&M production office in Dhaka.

### Building Pressure Together

The GATWU and NGWF leaders also attended the Primark works assembly in Hannover and discussed possibilities for cooperation with 400 workers. The German Primark CEO was also present at first, but generally rejected any idea of serious negotiations with trade unions in garment production. "But such negotiations are exactly what is needed if retail companies would take seriously their responsibility for working conditions at their suppliers", commented NGWF leader Amirul Haque Amin. The attending Primark boss would not lead this discussion, however: when he saw he wasn't able to stop this debate, he abruptly left the assembly.

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 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. Bra-



The search for commonalities, differences, and common strategies also played an important role in public actions and spontaneous store visits with Zara and Esprit workers. “We must treat each other with solidarity and develop common forms of action, if we want to improve our working conditions”, Amin pleaded. “We actually work for the same companies, be they Primark, H&M, Zara, or Esprit.” This is what the work of the *ExChains* network is about: What are the commonalities between the store workers and their fellow workers in the factories? What strategies can we develop on the basis of these commonalities? – During the Esprit works assembly in Stuttgart, these questions generated a discussion on how Esprit works councils can work together with the *ExChains* related trade unions in the future.

### **Trying New Strategies Together**

In a joint press conference in Berlin, activists of the three trade unions GATWU, NGWF, and ver.di, as well as TIE Global stressed again the responsibility of the Garment Multinational Corporations for the violations of basic labour and human rights in their stores AND at their suppliers. Amin provided a long list of supplier factories in Bangladesh, and their abuses: arbitrary firings, physical abuses, and intimidations being only the tip of the iceberg. The list included suppliers of H&M, Zara, Primark, Esprit, and Tchibo.

GATWU leader Prathibha Ramanath presented the *ExChains* network’s negotiation strategy: Works councils and trade unions in production and retail support each other with concrete actions in the workplaces and towards the fashion retail corporations. Demands and strategies are being developed by the workers themselves: “We will be able to push through some demands directly on the factory level. In regard to other demands, we shall have to force the buyer companies into negotiations”, Ramanath says. ver.di leader Stefanie Nutzenberger adds: “The direct link between us in retail and our colleagues in production enables us to exert direct pressure on the garment companies. Our cooperation along the supply chain equally strengthens the workers along the global supply chain.”

We will soon report of new experiences with mutual support because GATWU, for the first time, has founded factory committees in five garment factories in the frame of the *ExChains* negotiation strategy. The committees shall develop charters of demands with the workers, and bargain for collective agreements on the factory level. This is a new experience for Ramanath: “Up until now, our union acted like a fire fighter: If there was a problem, the union got involved and tried to extinguish the fire. With the foundation of factory committees, we are trying a new way. Thus, the union wants to establish itself as a permanent negotiating party with the respective factory management, in order to be able to negotiate demands which exceed minimal labour standards.” The German





zilian 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 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 analy-

workers active in the ExChains network, together with their trade union ver.di, will mobilise forces, create pressure, and develop creative actions, in order to make sure that this new strategy will increase workers' strength.



### VidaViva

## Viva la Vida! 15 Years of VidaViva

This year, trade union activists from Brazil, Germany, India, Mozambique, and Colombia discussed new forms of labour and their consequences for the labour movement. Pictures of 15 years of common fight, laughter, and debate are put up along the walls. Pictures of works assemblies in German retail are next to pictures of workers striking in Sri Lanka, protesting in Colombia, discussing in Brazil and Mozambique. In the meantime, some activists have turned grey while young activists have newly joined. And still workers' self-organisation is the central issue.

In November, workers and activists from five countries got together in São Luis/Brazil to consult on the work of the TIE/VidaViva network, discuss strategies and experiences together, and celebrate the 15th anniversary of the network. While it once started as a *health project*, *VidaViva* activists are now developing strategies to create healthier working conditions, enable workers to gain control of their work, and strengthen trade union organisation. "We once set out because workers suffered from an increase of their workload and hardly had a chance to address it",



sis, 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*

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.



explains VidaViva activist Mario Jorge Maia, an electrician and unionist from Santa Catarina. "Health is often being treated as a technical issue: limit values and expert knowledge was what counted – and not the knowledge and action of workers themselves." Soon it became clear that increasing health impacts were closely linked with new methods of management and control, and that workplace solutions had to be found to enable workers to change their working conditions and gain control over them. "This approach dealt with health as a company policy issue around organising, resistance, and genuine workers' demands." From the inception of the VidaViva network, the regular international conferences were used to exchange experiences with organising instruments, discuss work problems, and develop new forms of practice together.

This year's central issue were the challenges the network needs to address: "No matter where we come from – we all have been facing profound changes of work and life lately", states Mara Lira of TIE Brazil in the opening of the conference, "and they do not concern single-issue deteriorations of working conditions or minor cuts here and there, but a basic reconstruction of work organisation on the factory floor level and in our societies – with massive consequences for us as workers." This has brought new notions of the good life as well as changed problem-situations for the individual workers.

The current discussions in the VidaViva network are revolving around how to find solutions for these challenges. "The same transformation that is being discussed as digitalisation in Germany, is also behind the introduction of new forms of control in Indian garment factories, and is happening as precarisation of labour and life in Brazil – and it deeply changes the conditions for our work", Dithi Bhattacharya of TIE Asia sums up workers' experiences from the different continents. Enilda Mendoza of the teachers' union in Ilhéus/Brazil shares her assessment, and she is certain: "VidaViva gives us a space to discuss the changes, understand them, and develop strategies." New demands, needs, and ideas of different workers must be rooted in this work to fight for a good life.





### 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 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 move-

“Only by managing to create such spaces, trade union activists will be able to react to the current changes”, adds Polyana Melo of the public sector trade union in Maranhão.

Besides all the discussions and plannings, the get-together was also used to celebrate the VidaViva anniversary with music, feast and drink, and all the colleagues. Since 2002, VidaViva has been fighting for a good life, and there is no such thing as a revolution without dance. Viva la vida!

### VidaViva

## Work on the Ground in Mozambique

In Mozambique, the instruments of VivaViva are being used to encourage workers to reflect their workplace situation together. These collective processes enable workers to identify problems in their workplaces and develop ideas for their solution. This year, such processes were started with workplace mappings in eleven companies of various sectors (oil, water, sugarcane, energy, metal, timber, and security services).

In five more companies, the implementation of demands derived from last year’s workplace mappings moved forward. In these companies, the workers’ unionisation rate increased, and workers actively pushed for their demands – with the result that safety and general conditions of numerous workplaces in the respective companies were improved.

To pick out one example: the workers of a sugarcane harvesting company in Maputo

Province identified a large number of grave health problems and risks, but were already able to make the company cut the production targets which had been extremely high formerly.



### Rank-and-File Unions in Europe

## Together against Precarisation

In June, the congress of Solidaires, the federation of SUD trade unions, took place at St. Briec/France, attended by 400 delegates from different social areas and sectors, including activists from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Brazil, Germany, Belgium, and Spain. A central issue was the evaluation of the long struggle

ment 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](http://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«, 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



in spring 2016 against the new French labour law which promotes further precarisation of labour relations and living conditions. Various experiences from different wage labour worlds provided the basis for intense debates. New forms and cooperation and action between union federations – specifically CGT, FO, and Solidaires – have developed across all of France, as well as between unions and social initiatives, such as attac, antiracist groups, housing initiatives, and student groups.



In spite of all blockade and strike actions, the government has not backed off, but pushed through its labour law “reform” at any sacrifice. Additionally, the police forces demonstrated a new quality of determination to use violence and measures of repression against protesters.

The future holds new challenges in the face of the Macron government's plans to sharpen the labour law even further, in order to gear up the French economy to German “standards” such as the Agenda 2010. Together, the conference participants formulated the aim of building a social front that involves all those who do not simply want to protest against further aggravations of the law, but are also determined to work together to create ideas and practices enabling the creation of a world that is different from the world of precarity envisioned by the governments and bosses.

### Focus on Digitalisation

## Self-Optimisation and the Digital Rationalisation of All Life Spheres

In the course of last year, TIE has begun to organise a series of seminars addressing the issue of **Digitalisation and Labour**, with works council members from the industrial sector. The idea was born from the feeling that current public debates do not address the issue in a satisfactory way: They mostly narrow down the discussion to the possible elimination of jobs, the necessity for qualification, and the influence of collective agreements and co-determination. But there is much more to the current change process: hidden beneath “inexorable technological development”, a profound social transformation is being pushed forward.

In its wake are tugged along the transformation of enterprises; new forms of control in the workplace; delimitation of work concerning time, place, and qualification; the construction of a new type of worker; the increase of (new) precarious working conditions and labour relations; a change in collective experiences and possible forms of resistance; and completely changed conditions for trade union organisation.

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.



While the complete control of Taylorism never actually became a workplace reality, single steps in the work process can now be screened in every detail, by promoting various incentive mechanisms for workers' self-optimisation, giving workers permanent feedback concerning their performance and coupling alleged "self-organisation" directly to control targets.

Considerable time ago, this form of control has already made its way into people's lives beyond the world of labour, by using self-monitoring technologies such as fitness apps or individual time management. Through self-tracking, the world of individual performance is being extended to all measurable manifestations of life, and various forms of self-optimisation are being promoted.

This moment, for one thing, resembles the introduction of Lean Production in the 1980s.

Then, as now, the new forms of production and labour organisation had been the basis of profound changes, eventually resulting in a dramatic weakening up to even the obliteration of trade unions and their bargaining power. In the 1980s and 90s, TIE Global, joining up with Labor Notes / USA, had therefore organised programs aimed at a better understanding and possible forms of resistance against this process.

For another thing, in the process of digitalisation, the boundaries of the world of labour are being transgressed as if non-existent, and a digitalisation of social relations promoted which will profoundly change our living environment, our housing, and our towns and cities. Facing up to this challenge, trade union policies must think beyond the workplace. It has become clear that if we deal only with the *consequences* of technologies we will be left behind, because scientific and technical development is a social process, and as such is shaped by concrete interests. It is therefore key to get involved during the *making* of technologies already, in order not to be left afterwards with spaces for action that are already narrowed.

The participants of the this year's TIE/VidaViva conference in Brazil therefore agreed to make processes of digitalisation the core issue of a new international TIE Global program. Critical academics shall be involved in order to better understand the process and develop a genuine perspective and language from a workers' perspective, as well as new forms of resistance.

