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New encounters and painful losses

The past year gave us confidence and yet was marked by deep sadness. Confidence because, after the years of the pandemic, we can look back on a series of important meetings in different countries and regions. These included new initiatives on health in retail in Germany and on vineyards in South Africa. Workers at H&M succeeded in winning a collective agreement on digitalization. Existing projects were further developed and workers from the Global North and South came together to connect their work and discuss common strategies. This gives us strength and courage and creates the necessary collective connections for the coming struggles to change work and society for a good life.

We are sad because our friend and comrade Willi Hajek passed away on the 03rd of October 2022. Willi was an important source of ideas, companion, and driver of our work for many years. The tradition of thinking society, strategies and struggles for a different life through the subject was inscribed in his heart. The human being was at the centre of Willi's work. With this attitude, Willi shaped our work in many areas. We miss him!

With this newsletter, we always want to say thank you to all our loyal friends, donors, and supporters: without your support, the tie networks could not operate independently and self-organised as they do. We need your support so that we can

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continue to do this. Therefore, we call on you to donate to our work. Every amount helps us to develop our work and keep our international trade union work alive.

Transfer your donations directly to the account listed or click the donation button on our website www.tie-germany.org.

Feedback and comments on this newsletter are always welcome!

Enjoy reading and best wishes for solidarity,
tie Bildungswerk e.V.

Never spectators, always part of movement – never narrow, but embracing all of life

Our friend and comrade Willi Hajek died on the 3rd of October 2022. We miss his big heart, his ability to discover the possibilities of another world even in the most difficult conflicts, and his tirelessness in giving this world a human face.

Willi embodied the great goal of overthrowing “all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence” in a special way, always striving to ensure that it is not ‘quick victories’ or ‘clever strategies’ for radical change, but the human being that is at the centre of our activities. The tradition of thinking society, strategies and struggles for a different life through the subject was inscribed in his heart.

He has left a deep mark on the network, brought many people together and has given many impulses. He has been active in tie for over 30 years and has deeply shaped the network with his humanity and imagination: For example, in the cooperation with the oppositional trade unionists’ group (GoG) at Opel in Bochum, in many meetings between German and French trade unionists, in the cooperation with the comrades of the Union Syndicale Solidaires (SUD), SUD-Rail, Rail Sans Frontière, the International Trade Union Network for Solidarity and Struggle and many other initiatives in Germany, France, South Korea and West Africa.

This obituary is intended to remember Willi and to open



the possibility of keeping the existing networks and efforts alive and pushing them further. That is probably what he would have liked best as well. Therefore, this obituary ends with some questions to historical and current struggles that were always essential in the common discussions around historical struggles like the Paris Commune, the practice of workplace self-organisation at the watch manufacturer LIP, the resistance against militarisation in the Larzac region or current struggles like our workplace and international work, the Yellow Vests or the approaches of SUD among others:

- Where does the *not-yet* of a different society already appear in the here and now? Where do we see the beginnings of the new in past and current efforts for self-organisation that we can take further? What does ‘self-organisation’ mean in our everyday life and in our work?
- What is the significance of the numerous and everyday efforts for dignity in our work? How can we keep these efforts alive and move them forward?
- Where do we see current fractures, contradictions and landmines in capitalism that we can strengthen, make more alive and that we can expand, perpetuate? How can we draw strength from this for ourselves and our movements?
- How do we strengthen efforts around the whole of life, the connection of political work at the workplace to the work in the neighbourhood, to art, to love?

Together we want to discuss these questions in the coming weeks and months to remember Willi.



ExChains Orange Juice

Joint strategies with workers from South Africa

At the meeting of the Orange Juice Network in Brazil, not only a large part of the more than 40 participating trade unions from the Brazilian states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Pará came together this time. For the first time, three trade unionists from the agricultural workers' union CSAAWU from South Africa were also able to attend. This is an important step towards deepening international cooperation between workers and trade unionists in the agricultural sector. The meeting started with a simulated network tournament, similar to the World Cup. The participants were divided into teams and discussed the strategies of their unions in the ground: What do we want to achieve and what are our means to do so? What is holding us back? Who are other actors that support us in the struggle?

After this overview, the participants exchanged views on the current situation in their respective regions and workplaces. The main problems of the workers and the main challenges for grassroots mobilisation and negotiations with the employers were identified: Work intensification, pressure from managers and an unfair system of weighing were the main problems. Difficulties to get in contact with workers without observation and the deregulation of labour law under the Bolsonaro government are other main challenges.

Afterwards, all reported on their experiences with health mapping so far and the conditions under which they implement the mapping. Some unions were able to negotiate a day off for mapping activities, but the majority had to find other ways forward. In some cases, it was done directly after work



in residential areas and in the industry it was combined with a barbecue afterwards. For the farms, where many migrant workers from other regions work, the shared accommodation is a place to come together. Finally, in South Africa, workers living on the farms were picked up by the union by bus or taxi and met at a place far away from the employer.

Discussion of negotiation strategies and other tools

Based on this, the question of how to proceed with the results of the mappings was discussed. One aspect of the discussion was whether, in the case of problems that are relevant on different farms, such as poor and dangerous ladders for harvesting, best practice solutions from one farm should be extended to other farms. Advantages and disadvantages were identified: On the one hand, this can lead to more negotiating power and can spread the acquired knowledge of the workers for the benefit of many; on the other hand, there is a risk that specific local requirements are not considered, such as a different soil condition. Such an upscaling is therefore desirable in itself and part of the added value of a network, but at the same time the how must be well discussed and reflected upon.

A joint app, VivaVoz, was also launched and will be tested in the coming weeks. It is a tool that was developed in response to the challenge that workers are spread over long distances and the union is not always easily accessible. With the app, workers can report problems and get support from the union, anonymously or with contact information, as they wish. In addition, the app also provides union members with up-to-date information quickly and easily, thus improving communication.





Building a South-South Co-operation in Agriculture

One focus of the meeting was the exchange between Brazilian and South African trade unionists. The joint discussions about work confirmed to the trade unionists from both countries what they already suspected: The working and production conditions in agriculture in Brazil and South Africa are similar, even if the historical and political context is different. In South Africa, the conditions in agriculture cannot be understood without the history of apartheid and its continuities in land ownership. In Brazil, the current question is whether some of the labour rights that were restricted under Bolsonaro can be regained and more energy can be put into mobilising the workers. The common problems in both countries are numerous: piecework instead of living wages, the organisation of precarious workers, for which prejudices and divisions must be overcome, the handling of pesticides that are harmful to health, and heavy and unergonomic carrying during harvesting. With the mappings and the strategies linked to them, there are already starting points for a common practice. The meeting ended with concrete planning for the trade unions on the ground, but also for the further South-South exchange, in which tie Mozambique will also be part. The international work with the German colleagues from the food retail sector is also to be deepened next year.

ExChains clothing

The TIE network *ExChains* aims to build links between workers in the retail, textile and garment industries from Europe and Asia working along the global supply chain. Mutual solidarity is vital to the global fight against exploitation and poverty in this industry. In *ExChains*, TIE has been

ExChains wine

Strengthening solidarity among farm workers and new links along the value chain

After two initial mappings in June and July 2022, the South African comrades were able to conduct further mappings in the second half. On the Louisville-Landau wine farm, 46 workers came together and talked about their work-related physical health problems and stress. As on all the farms already mapped, the spraying of highly toxic pesticides without sufficient protective measures was named as one of the most pressing problems. In addition, the dependence of the workers on the farm owners became



working with independent regional unions since 2002. Today, these are: the FTZ&GSEU in Sri Lanka, the NGWF in Bangladesh, the GAFWU in Chennai/India, the GATWU in Bangalore/India, the ver.di trade union in Germany and, more recently, the Spanish MIT and the Italian SI-Cobas. Joint strategies are being developed that promote workers' self-organisation and build trade union practice along the value chain. The trade unions in the producing countries are also working together regionally and developing new approaches to organising beyond one-off campaigns that attract attention but do not build countervailing power in the factories. In the local retail sector, we are also looking together for new trade union approaches

clear. Clean drinking water and the installation of street lighting are urgently demanded for the housing. Safe routes for the farm workers' children growing up on the farms are also high on the list of demands. After the experience of several mappings on different farms, the CSAAWU comrades note that solidarity among the workers on the farms has been strengthened and many workers ask after the mappings how they can join the union.

At the same time as the mappings, tie and CSAAWU investigated the opaque supply chain links to the German food retail sector. The German retail sector is the largest buyer of South African tank wine and has a decisive influence on the prices of imported wine. This gives the German trade a special role in shaping the working and living conditions of the local workers. Through research on the ground and an update of the research in the joint study with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, further supply chain links from wine plantations to the German retail trade could be identified. CSAAWU plans to carry out mappings on these farms, build up trade union bargaining power there and develop demands. In a subsequent step, these should be supported by the trade unionists in the German retail sector vis-à-vis the buyers of the farms.

In addition, the next date for an international working meeting in South Africa has been set. As part of a joint delegation by ver.di and tie, works council members from Edeka, Kaufland and Rewe will travel to South Africa in March 2023 to discuss further joint action with CSAAWU. The mapping results already available at both ends of the supply chain and the experiences from the orange juice network with comrades from Brazil form the basis for this.

Trade unionists from CSAAWU were able to experience directly how concrete successes were achieved in the orange juice network and how the Brazilian trade unions work on the ground at meetings in Brazil this year in December. CSAAWU and the orange juice network agreed to work together on the issues of pesticides, international shifts in orange production affecting workers in both countries, and tools for organising farm workers. In this way, tie is not only positioning itself as North-South solidarity along the food retail supply chains but is also following the example of our garment network of cross-border cooperation between trade unions in the producing countries.



in the face of precarisation, splitting of the workforce, low wages and digitalisation.

ExChains Orange Juice

Three companies in Brazil dominate 80% of the world market for orange juice from concentrate. The orange pickers are mostly migrant workers from poor parts of Brazil. The working and living conditions of these workers are often catastrophic. Time and again, working conditions are even found to be similar to those of slaves. Germany is the second largest demand market worldwide. In 2015, TIE therefore founded a trade union network along the orange juice value chain together with ver.di's trade department, works council members from Edeka, Rewe and Kaufland and trade unions from Brazil. The experiences of the garment network play an important role. The network aims to organise concrete actions at the workplace and strengthen trade

VidaViva

20 years of Life – Work – Health: Network meeting with many new and old faces

The centre of the hall was decorated with flowers and colourful scarves, a wall with a huge photo collage of memories of past work, and over 80 trade unionists were happy to come together again in a large group for the VidaViva meeting after almost three years of the pandemic. This marked the beginning of the 20th anniversary meeting of the health network in Florianópolis in the south of Brazil. A singer accompanied the group with guitar and short songs. In addition to many Brazilian trade unionists from different sectors and states, there were also trade unionists from Germany, South Africa, India, and Colombia. They come from the industrial sector, commerce, banking, the public sector, education, and other sectors. They are all united in working with the health mappings, raio and other tools of the VidaViva network, to mobilise more workers in trade union work around issues of life, work, and health, and thus living a trade union practice in which workers are subjects and shapers of their working and living conditions.

Reflecting on political challenges and experiences of workplace struggles

The exchange started with a look at the political situation in the different countries and how it affects trade union work. Brazil was marked by the presidential election in 2022. The extreme right-wing Jair Bolsonaro was not re-elected. Successes of right-wing parties, racist divisions in society and a precarious economic situation are reported by trade unionists from all countries, even if the manifestations are very different. In India, the extreme right Hindu nationalist government continues to consolidate its power. This also means a reduction of labour





union action in harvesting, processing, sales and along the value chain. In Brazil, for the first time, unions of plantation workers and industrial workers are working together across organisational boundaries.

ExChains wine

The TIE-ExChains network is in the process of building a second agricultural network along the wine supply chain. It builds on the experience of the struggles of Brazilian orange plantation workers, *verdi Handel* and colleagues in the German retail sector. The agricultural workers' union CSAWU, which is mainly organised in the Western Cape of South Africa, is part of the network and will strengthen the struggles of the colleagues on the ground and in the German retail sector. The new possibility of cooperation between South African and Brazilian farm workers,

rights and fear of repression when it comes to building trade union structures in companies. In Colombia, there is hope that the repressive political situation will improve with the country's first left-wing president, Gustavo Petro.

In the afternoon, the exchange about the own trade union work was deepened. Participants reported on mapping experiences and successes in different sectors and companies. The day ended with an interactive exhibition and discussion on strategies, successes, and obstacles of the own work. All countries and Brazilian states had a stand with photos, leaflets and other illustrations and materials of their own struggles and reported on their activities of the last two years. Here it was possible to have a deeper exchange about different strategies and to see which demands could be realised. In the energy sector in Florianópolis, for example, the union has succeeded with mappings in solving conflicts with managers, reducing work pressure, and strengthening union organisation in the company. Ergonomic problems were also solved. The comrades from South Africa presented their first mapping experiences and initial successes, which they had made on six farms this year.

Understanding and shaping digitalization as an international task

The second day was mainly dedicated to the issue of digitalization. To create a common understanding of this fundamental change, the form was considered in historical comparison with Fordism and Taylorism as well as Toyotism and lean production. While in the Fordist phase workers were given direct instructions and work was optimised through fragmented and monotonous processes, in Toyotism more flexibilisation was introduced and processes in individual departments were optimised through group work and the knowledge of the workers themselves. Current digitalization and the processing of large amounts of data aims to enable even more comprehensive control and flexible management in real time, optimising not only individual departments or processes, but entire company architectures and value chains. Those present agreed that there is a need for educational material to discuss the issue with workers. The success of H&M workers in Germany in winning a collective agreement on digitalization, which allows them to actively influence the transformation in the interests of workers, was discussed as an important example. Technology and digitalization were discussed at the



The United Steel Workers from Canada also work with the VidaViva tools and have made an exciting video about it.

as well as our colleagues from the VidaViva network in Mozambique, will enable both South-South cooperation and international work along the entire supply chain into the German food retail sector.

VidaViva

The TIE network *VidaViva* addresses health issues to organise workers. Network activists report that work-related health hazards are on the rise worldwide. Workers are told by companies that they should eat healthier and do sports to keep going. The organisation of work is becoming more and more efficient and the stresses are increasing. In *VidaViva*, workers develop solidarity-based strategies to reduce stress and gain control over their daily work. However, the network does not simply want to make workplaces healthier, but to organise trade union resistance against ever new impositions on life by companies. Since 2003, various tools for education, self-research, risk analysis, worker-oriented benchmarking, etc. have been developed in order to develop strategies in the workplace. In Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Colombia, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Turkey and Germany, a good 100 trade unions from different sectors are active in the network.

conference mainly from the perspective of the effects on work and health and regarding the necessity of designing technology according to workers' needs already in the development phase. Workers are the experts for this.

The third day was dedicated to looking back as well as looking forward and planning. The 20th anniversary of the VidaViva net-

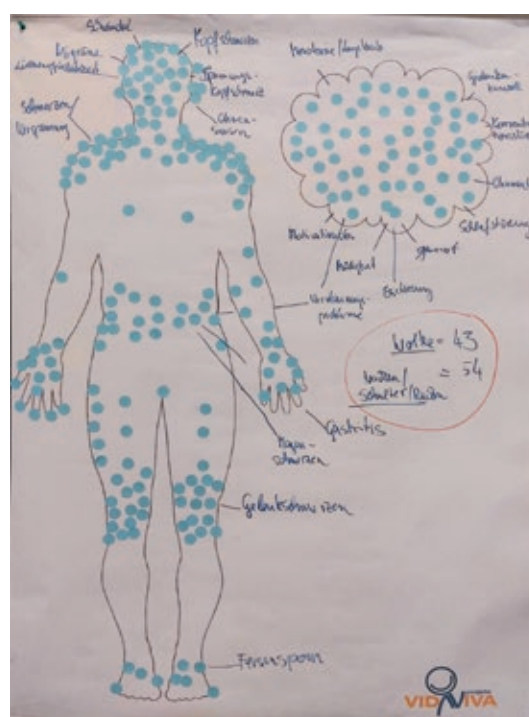
work was used to remember important moments and to reflect on the development. In addition, Margaret Keith and James Brophy, the 'parents' of the mapping tool were called in from Canada for an exchange. They were thrilled to see how widely the tool is now used, how many workers have started talking about it and how concrete improvements have been made. With this energy, participants finally went into planning concrete activities for the next year. "It was a fantastic time with great people. Thank you very much and I will miss you and Brazil! And I hope to see you again soon!" said one of the German trade unionists as he said goodbye.



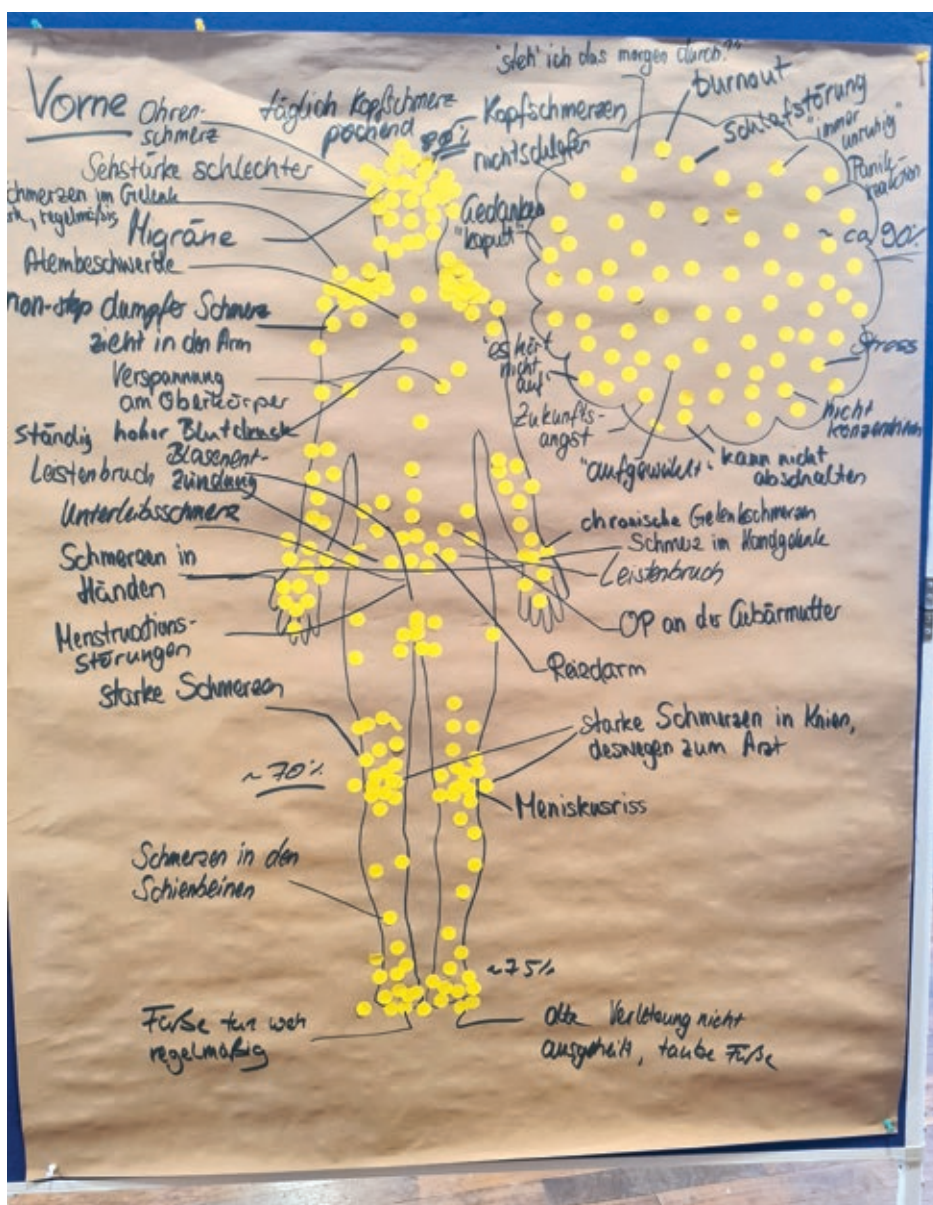
Search movements

Caring for Health instead of caring for profits at Primark

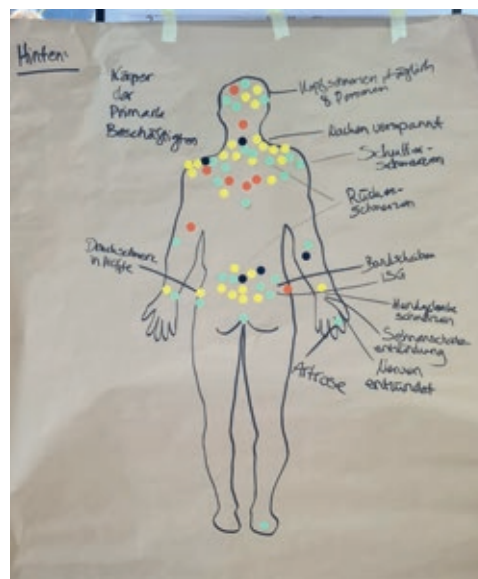
Constant joint pain, throbbing headaches, tension, concentration problems and problems falling asleep: these are only a few examples of health problems described by Primark workers at a workers' meeting. They see the causes in the working conditions in the company. The instrument of health mapping, which Primark workers and their works councils in Frankfurt, Dortmund, Essen, Leipzig, Berlin, Hamburg, and Bielefeld got to know, helped them to recognise this. In addition, the workers and works councils are not left alone with the problems, but they coordinate together, discuss strategies, and thus strengthen their work lo-

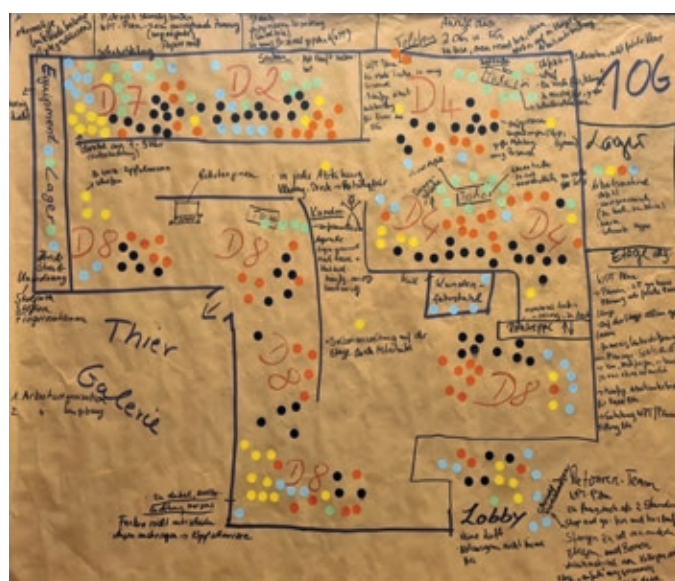
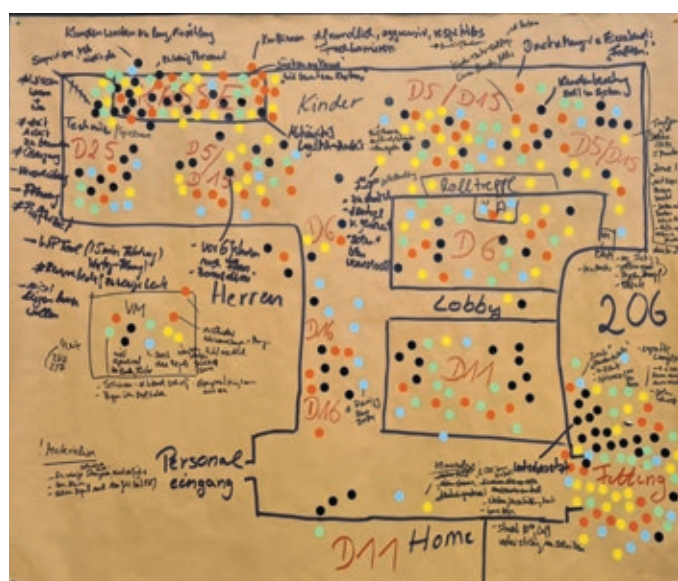


The Railways without Borders network is made up mainly of workers and trade union activists from Morocco, Senegal, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, France and Spain. However, contacts now also exist in other regions, e.g. North and South America. The network, founded in Casablanca in 2010, supports and coordinates struggles against railway privatisation and for public services for all. The activists exchange information about the situations in their countries and help each other in labour struggles against repression, which often goes hand in hand with privatisation. Their aim is to ensure that transport companies remain in public ownership or are returned to public ownership, so that workers' rights are protected and it is ensured that all people have access to transport and mobility in the long term.



Already when looking at the body mappings, it becomes clear that the results are the same everywhere: Workers regularly complain about back pain, headaches, pain in the legs, arms, and shoulder area as well as stress, 'not being able to switch off' and constant restlessness. In numbers, the overall picture is drastic: 70% of workers report leg pain, 90% report psychological stress, 80% report headaches, 100% report back pain. The workers do not leave all this at the door: in the 'Our World' step, the workers describe what these health





Grassroots trade unions in Europe and worldwide

In the "Réseau Européen des Syndicats Alternatifs et de Base", grassroots trade 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 seek to jointly resist the impositions of capital operating across borders. The network fights for the preservation of public goods and services for all, for workers' rights, for a just distribution of social wealth, for social transformation instead of the rule of global corporations and financial markets. The participating trade unions and organisations are committed to the principles of independence, self-organisation and grassroots orien-

problems mean to them personally. The stress is 'taken out on the partner', there is hardly any energy or desire left for hobbies and leisure time, children, relationships, and friends are neglected because 'you are weary'. This is also an image that workers in all stores are familiar with.

In the workplace analysis, the workers systematically work out the causes: Using the floor plan of the workplace, the workers examine their workflow and identify these causes. Examples are the simultaneous work tasks at the changing room, the constant interruptions on the floor, which is why work has to be done again and again from the beginning, or trolleys that are difficult to move. These exacerbate the constant time pressure and physical strain. The fundamental change in work through digitalisation and the establishment of standardised and timed work processes, which were introduced at Primark under the label In-store Experience, further exacerbate the problems.

Primark cares – about money!

Workers describe the joint discussions as an 'eye opener': for the first time they are asked for their opinion on the health problems and their causes at Primark and can contribute ideas for solutions. This form of trade union work cannot be taken for granted and strengthens self-confidence and the will to work together for change. A company that cares about its workers should welcome these ideas. Unfortunately, Primark's response has been negative. In several negotiations with works councils, company representatives have questioned whether the results of the mappings – i.e. the joint discussions and investigations of the workers – are meaningful. Instead, they want a questionnaire. Real improvements are not wanted, profits are more important to the company than effective health protection.

At the same time, there are rumours that Primark in Germany is going to cut costs. Workers in the stores are already experiencing that the number of workers is shrinking, and the workload is increasing. It shows that numbers are more important than the health of the workers. The works councils are therefore taking care of the health issue themselves and are strengthening themselves through the exchange between the participating shops. They all continue to work in negotiations and with mappings in workers meetings on healthy working conditions through the solutions of the workers on site.

tation and consciously question capitalist relations. Beyond the borders of Europe, grassroots trade unions also work together in the “International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles” (ILNSS), see also www.laboursolidarity.org.

Search movements

Trade unions and workplace initiatives are facing major challenges almost everywhere. Precarisation, global production networks and new forms of work organisation have profoundly changed the field of wage labour. Workers are formulating new needs and demands, also for the trade unions, which are finding it difficult to find answers. Networks like ours are also confronted with new questions. Together with other initiatives, grassroots groups and trade union activists, we are looking for strategies to get out of the crisis and for answers to the challenges that the current upheavals pose for labour. In a joint initiative – *Transnational Social Strike* – groups of precarious workers from many countries in Europe are looking for a common trade union practice. In the Frankfurt area, activists in the Prekärlab network are trying to establish a common practice in

The app determines the work – digitalization in food retailing

Work in food retail is changing in leaps and bounds due to company-driven digitalization. More and more programmes and apps are being used to control work and the value chain. This goes so far that an app dictates how much space on a shelf is to be filled with a certain product. In this way, the company wants to match the range of goods exactly to the sale. In the branches where few or no workers are organised, the systems give the workers more and more guidelines, leave them less room for decision making and increase the work pressure.

At the beginning of November 2022, Kaufland works council members met in Kassel for an in-depth discussion on digitalization in food retailing. The focus was on the concrete systems at Kaufland and the questions of what effects can be expected on employees and with what criteria the systems would have to be designed according to the workers so that they do not lead to an increase in the already high work pressure. It was agreed to use the health mapping as an instrument to discuss the health-related stresses of the technologies, to develop own demands on the design of the working conditions and to jointly mobilise the workers in the company. To deepen the work, biannual meetings of the active works council members are planned to develop common strategies and to disseminate them in the group of companies.

It was also quickly clear that this cooperation would go beyond the Kaufland company boundaries. The experiences and struggles of workers in other companies and sectors are too similar, in which workers are fighting for a say in the shaping of digitalization. The struggles of workers in South African wine-growing and Brazilian orange juice production will also be part of the future work. One worker described the importance of the cooperation as follows: “Every time I pull a bottle of wine across the conveyor belt, I can’t help but think about the situation of the workers in South Africa.”

Digitalization

Digitalization in the hands of the workers

Together, ver.di’s retail and commerce section and the workers at H&M succeeded in concluding a collective agreement on digitalization. They were supported by tie within the framework of the project “ver.di verbindet” (ver.di connects). Joint discussions at more than 50 workers’ assemblies and with H&M and Zara workers from Spain and Italy enabled a



the areas of organising the unemployed, social services, retail and other precarious sectors.

Daimler Coordination / Car

The Daimler Coordination is a working forum for the regular exchange of information between left-wing, democratic factory groups and people from Daimler plants in the FRG. It sees itself as undogmatic, anti-capitalist, oriented towards the grassroots and supported by the interest in wanting to understand international connections beyond one's own horizon and to promote solidarity in the FRG and beyond, contrary to narrow-minded 'location thinking'. Since the company's strategies are global, the coordination has also been striving since the mid-1990s for real internationalism on the part of the workers, with the aim of international cooperation between company trade union activists in Europe, India and South America.

deeper understanding of what digitalization means in retail: Their experiences with digitalization were discussed with H&M and Zara workers and demands for the design of technology were formulated. These formed one of the bases for the demands formulated by the Federal Collective Bargaining Commission.

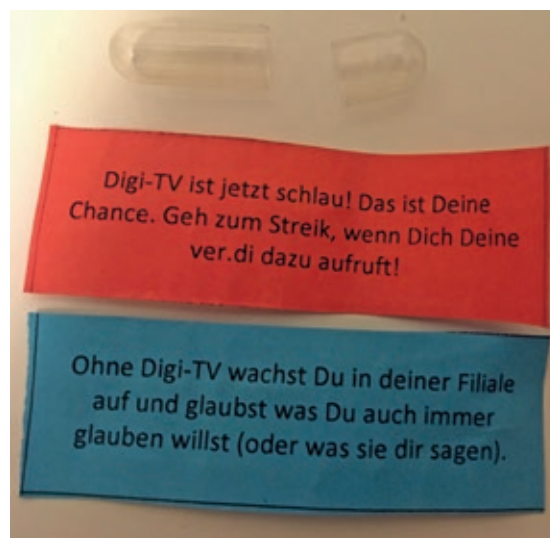
Technology as a social process

What is special about the first collective agreement on digitalization in the retail sector is that technology development and implementation are negotiated by workers and their union. Instead of taking technology for granted and cushioning its impacts, workers are already influencing it at the time of development. It is agreed in the collective contract that H&M will involve workers and ver.di in the development of technologies. To this end, various forms of participation have been agreed and tests run in stores, which are evaluated by the workers and their union to negotiate requirements for the design of the technologies. The criteria they apply are, for example, the extent to which the planned technologies lead to an intensification of work or how they must be designed so that they promote humanely working conditions.

Entering supply chain negotiations?

The collective agreement is a success for the workers at H&M and ver.di. It is special because it puts new contents of trade union work on the agenda and opens new trade union spaces. At the same time, it raises the question of cross-border expansion: H&M

is not only introducing technologies in Germany, but these are instruments for transforming the entire supply chain from production to logistics to sales. Retail companies want to use digitalization to reorganise their entire value chain and increase their control over it. The first step towards negotiating technologies in the retail sector has been taken. Now the question arises whether these negotiations can be internationalised together with our trade union comrades from South Asia: Joint demands from the North and South are needed to shape the 'digital transformation' of the supply chain in the interests of workers.



More on the collective agreement here (in German)

