

Minutes of Workshop II – From the workplace into society and vice versa

The main questions regarded how to organize the public support to the workers on strike, and what type of bargaining power is entailed in the extension of solidarity. When and how does solidarity help? When does it contribute to the confusion of the workers and the misinterpretation of their actual strength and striking capability? How is it possible to bring workers' struggles outside of the single workplaces and inside society? How is it possible to bridge the struggle against exploitation and the one against expropriation in every field of life? At the end of the workshop, we came out with even more open questions, which we need to address and discuss in the next meetings and also in the next months with a good communication amongst us.

Several workers (from Amazon, from the logistic sectors, from the social care services...) took part to the workshop, as well as various local and European trade unions, such as: ADL Cobas and FIOM (Italy), SAC (Sweden), Workers' Initiative (Poland), Sud Solidaire (France), Ver.di (Germany). There was a strong transnational participation of organizations dealing with the issues of precarity, social centers, solidarity networks, from the UK, Ireland, Sweden, France, Greece, Poland, Italy, Portugal, Germany.

We had three Inputs in the beginning:

1. A friend from ADL reported about the selforganized strikes in northern Italy in the logistics and transport-section in 2013. 90% of the strikers have been migrants, and the struggle had to be connected with other social questions: the struggle for residence permission/documents or for housing and against the high rents. Social questions in the society and in the territory cannot be separated from the working place. The unions offices should be open spaces, to listen and not to teach. A new common ground of struggle has to be developed, based on democracy against the power of the bosses.
2. A friend from SUD-rail explained about their experiences to get organized also on atransnational level and the problems to find a common ground. She also mentioned the difficulties to bridge the rail workers demands with the interests of the customers..
3. And a friend from a social workers network in Frankfurt reported about their efforts to bridge the different situations of precarization between the providers and the users of social services. Its a general question, which way reproduction is (not) valued in society and that the working conditions influence the quality of social services...

From Portugal it was reported, that unions are still necessary for every strike but that bigger alliances could be build for a supermarket-strike and that social medias became important.

From Poland the positive example of a strike of kindergarden-workers was described. A group of women struggled against privatisation and cuttings, and they won and could block the privatisation, although they could not strike but by organizing local meetings and campaigns. Their strong base inside the workplace was a precondition for the successful campaign in society... And negative experiences might happen, if strong support from outside is not basing on strength inside.

From Sweden it was reported about a struggle in the transport sector (against outsourcing) where a solidarity movement worked a lot with social medias. And in the health sector a small group of three determined workers could raise a big solidarity campaign against the

introduction of a time-pay-control-system to take care for elderly persons. Social medias again played an important role, the campaign worked with the older people and their relatives, thus between workers and their clients/customers.

From Amazon workers in Bad Hersfeld it was reported also about activities to get involved customers in solidarity campaigns. And they are part of a solidarity strike network, trying to build bridges not only to other amazon warehouses but also to other sectors and to develop more the political level. In Leipzig students get organized in solidarity with amazon strikes as a lot of students are hired as temporary staff in the christmas period.

The relationship from inside and outside the workplace, between customers and workers, between production and reproduction was a topic in more contributions: in the protests against water privatisation in Italy, when workers conditions became another question, or in a situation in Greece, where the majority of the population is outside production.

On one hand a separation from inside and outside seems to be not fitting and not useful anymore and new forms of mutualism are in discussion. On the other hand it was questioned, if everything should be called as a strike and this touches again our perception of strikes and the difference to something like actiondays.

More general questions came up: we have many examples of successful strikes and struggles, but the labour movement appears nevertheless weaker than 20 years ago. We have to find another common ground in a wider frame to evaluate various methods and tools. We have more informations than ever, but how to coordinate?

We identified some transnational chains of production and exploitation: Amazon and other logistics companies, social services, transports, railways. Subcontracting was recognized as a common European practice aiming at lowering labour standards and wages; precarization was understood as a common point between workers and recipients of social services, where to strike means the empowerment of both sides; in the social sector, to strike also means to bring the struggle for better working conditions outside the workplaces and to re-politicize the social needs in a context of austerity and precarity.

We discussed the potentialities, limits and contradictions of the experience of Blockupy meets Amazon; of the strikes in the logistics sector in Italy, where the large majority was made by migrant workers; of the electronics workers in Poland, and the problem of unity among workers that solidarity from outside cannot solve.

Solidarity is the name of a problem and does not answer fully to the question of the internal organization of the workers; solidarity cannot replace the concrete problem of the connection between workers. Therefore we must rethink the relationship between the inside and the outside of the workplaces, and the link between production and reproduction. Solidarity among different workplaces and the coming together of the diverse labour disputes are important as well. Solidarity is also about creating something that is political communication; it does not only involve practical or technical support, but also the production of the political conditions for allowing the unity of the workers, through new ways of coordination and organization. In order to do that, we need a common ground and common tools; we also need to rethink the trade union as a structure, since it is showing itself unfit to deal with the new complexities of labour. We need to connect the struggles and share informations.

The conditions of strike (necessity of a trade union to call it, legal limitations etc.) are very different from country to country, nevertheless there is a shared European frame which we need to take into account and can help suggesting common forms of action and political communication. One of the main problem concerns, therefore, how to re-politicize the struggles and at the same time how to continue to hit the employers and hurt the capital.