

WORLD CONGRESS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Thematic Assembly minutes

Essential/Prekarious Labor, Strike Wave, Great Resignation, Energy Inflation: The New Capital-Labor Force Field and Ecological Unionism

14 October 2023, h.16-18 - University of Milan, aula 211

Opening: Alessio (Don't Pay)

I attempted to frame a narrative over the last decades of dominance of neoliberalism that managed to neutralize in many localities the power of labor and its ability to strike. The demise of labor strikes since the 1970s followed a pattern of attacks to dismantle them and one of absorption. As strikes and labor disputes surge around the world, we appear to be at the beginning of a period in which the balance of power in workplaces and labor markets swings in favor of workers, having long been skewed against them.

Covid-19 has been a catalyst for this. Capital internationalized dramatically from the end of the 1970s to the late 2000s, with global trade and flows of capital growing hugely quicker than the economy as a whole. The number of labor disputes globally dropped over the same period and industrial disputes became more localized, with little correlation between the number of strikes in any two countries, and very limited international coordination of any kind.

Then came the pandemic. Its initial impact was as an immensely disturbing force to the formal structures of globalization – the movement of goods and, more fundamentally, people were hit by lockdowns, supply chain disruptions, travel restrictions and so on.

Covid reintroduced consciousness into the system, with world governments being forced to act and suspend large sections of the economy and the mobility of goods and people. It also highlighted what essential labor looks like, who does the work is gender and migrant based, in health care, logistics and care work and became a new vanguard

in labour struggles in the face of the cost of living crisis and inflation.

Work that has been happening for some years has taken an urgency and relevance now, as we have seen with examples in Germany between climate activists and transport unions, the experience of GKN and its collaboration with Fridays for future, these debates and connections are due to not only the weaknesses of the labor movement in fighting for pay and conditions for their members but the general awareness that there will be no wages, pensions, or holidays on an unlivable planet and that change is coming, the issue is what change and who benefits - we've heard before that these changes are being used by the bosses to accelerate reforms and restructuring, of outsourcing, of regressive taxation, making workers pay for the green transition whilst maintain return of investment for shareholders and private equity firms.

Panel: Lisa Dluzewska (Workers' Initiative), Inicjatywa Pracownicza - Poland), Erick Zelaya (Movimiento Indigena El Salvador - UNT)

Lisa from Workers Initiatives spoke about the development of their union and how previous antagonism with relating to unions have changed with different sectors becoming more organized. Erick from UNT spoke about the composition of his trade union mainly (health, construction, indigenous people) and the violent repression they are facing with the current regime. There have been severe effects post-pandemic on health workers, which is a pattern repeated elsewhere. The situation in El Salvador with state repression has increased in recent years as capital invests in large mega projects including the notorious prison and the wave of mass incarceration (70,000 people arrested as part of a "gang" crackdown, without trial, also includes union members).

We spoke about the effects of covid and lockdowns and the new post-pandemic realities which have sharpened pre-existing contradictions and produced new ones. The strike waves that emerged in the US, UK and some parts of Europe were also noted not to have emerged elsewhere which illustrates the unevenness of how the crisis and responses have occurred.

Delegation interventions/observations:

- In UK is an interesting example
 - the climate movt, climate camp at a coal power station in 2008 with a lot of arguments with coal unions, now 15 years later the coal union says coal is

part of our pass and we need climate jobs.

- Oil and Gas workers wants to transition as shown by a survey of workers.
- In Austria,
 - Work with unions and establish connections with union
 - What strategies to engage unions, on what basis, on which part if the union to work with - leadership or rank/file base
 - Not instrumentalism workers in struggle but really attempt to develop a consciousness of why eco action is class struggle
- El Salvador
 - Breaking down division between classic workers and agri workers peasants
 - Situation of food arriving in the cities and people are trying to understand (?)
 - Proletarianization of the workers, domestic workers, artisanal workers — fights over land and rights
 - Keep in mind all of us those of who believe in the climate struggle that unions are vital to the struggle. All of us who are working somewhere are in the union. One of the primary task of any union is to raise an ecological consciousness and to discuss with workers to sensitize them. We need to meet with unions and join our struggles
- In Germany, IL
 - Labour organising confronted with two criticism
 - Gradualism of the labor union, we don't have time
 - **Labour aristocracy**
 - There has to be a change a way of life - how do we connect with “privileged workers” who don;t want to give up the luxuries of what they have.
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 - Labour unions answer different questions
 - Movt are what are we doing?
 - What we produce and how we adapt
 - **TSS / Italy**

- How do we relate to these struggles?
- How do we do that
- Which terrain to we choose to fight on the struggle
 - How do we show the material connections
 - **Green Transition is a crucial field of struggle**
 - Because capital is open up a new regime of accumulation
 - UAV workers in not to the pay the cost of the green transition
 - How do we transform this into a transnational alliances as these transitions?

Alex

- Defend the right to leisure, the return the office and the environment benefits of 4 day work week, reducing emissions, right to smart work / Reduction of hours

Proposals/Outcomes

There was no concrete outcomes as such but a lot of consensus beyond exchanges of experience that we already recognise things have changed interms of climate and labour movements becoming closer, we need to find new demands and alliances without tokenistic or instrumentalism workers, to not see the division between these two struggles. **What we need to do:** Build within the union, climate groups that attempt to connect work conditions to the climate crisis and push for bosses to pay for the crisis that they have built their wealth from. That means fighting the Capitalist Green Transition that is used to accelerate reforms and outsourcing, to not allow the right and fossil capitalist interests articulate the anxiety and tensions with the Green transition - that we all agree is already happening and underway. Its no more the case of arguing for a transition as the transition is happening, its on whose terms and who pays for it - workers or bosses - we need to fight for bosses to pay for it, and align with workers where such alliances can amplify these struggles and present a different narrative.

