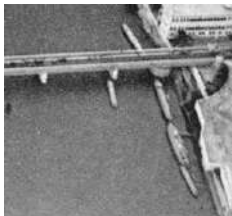
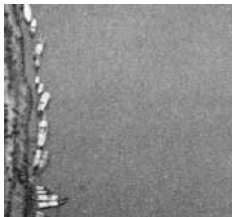


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# LOGISTICS & THE TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL STRIKE

page 05	<b>Logistics, Power, Strike</b> TSS Platform	<b>Introduction</b>
15	<b>Making &amp; Breaking Chains</b> Steven Cuzner	<b>Allt Åt Alla</b> Sweden
25	<b>Amazon: a Transnational Challenge in the Highly Automated Labour</b> Floriano Milesi & Sylvian Alias	<b>Precarious Disconnections &amp; Sud Solidaires France</b> Italy & France
29	<b>Intervention on the Question of Technology &amp; the End of Labour</b> Dietmar	<b>Interventionistische Linke</b> Germany
35	<b>Against G20 &amp; the Logistics of Capital</b> Toni	<b>Autonome Antifa Wien &amp; ...Umz Ganze! Bündnis</b> Austria
39	<b>Post Sector as a Logistical Mogul</b> Andraž Mali, Gregor Kašman & Peter Gradišnik	<b>CEDRA</b> Slovenia
47	<b>Counter Logistics &amp; the Transnational Social Strike</b> Alessio Lunghi	<b>Plan C</b> United Kingdom
53	<b>Around the Logistics Paradigm</b> Nicola Carella	<b>Berlin Migrant Strikers</b> Germany



# Logistics, Power, Strike: Elements for the Political Infrastructure

An introduction by the *TSS Platform*

**THIS READER COLLECTS** texts written by workers, activists and trade union members from several European countries, who took part in the discussions promoted by the Transnational Social Strike Platform around the issue of logistics. Since the beginning, as TSS platform we recognized that logistics poses an unavoidable political challenge to any movement aiming to overturn the present conditions of exploitation. Rather than just referring to infrastructures, transportation and delivery, logistics can be described as the underlying logic of today's capitalism and one of the leading forces behind the ongoing restructuring of production, political spaces — states, cities and metropolis — and social relations. Its specific relevance lies in the constant work of fragmenting and stretching the different knots of the chains of production and reproduction, in order to dispose them according to the exclusive needs of a transnational valorisation and to produce the conditions of a complete disposability of workers' time and life. Logistics thus includes a complex and multifarious set of technical tools, standards, protocols, organizing principles, institutional structures and legal conditions that materially and politically affect the way in which capital attempts to command social cooperation and to govern living labour. The articles collected in this reader and its introduction underline different aspects of logistics which, taken together, show its specific and nonetheless general political dimension.

# Logistics constantly builds an imaginary of efficiency and smoothness by *hiding the reality of precarious labour.*

Actions against logistics have risen to prominence in recent years. From ports to warehouses, from factories forming global supply chains to companies of the so called “gig economy”, from environmental issues to movements against infrastructural projects, all over the globe we observe a surge of struggles that have a direct relation with the impact of logistics. These struggles and the different forms of strikes they have been able to ignite shed light on a world of labour relations that for some time has been considered by social movements as outmoded and politically residual. They also demonstrate that the pervasiveness of logistics goes well beyond a specific sector, and beyond the realm of circulation. What is clear to us is the need to make our understanding of logistics more complex in order to question some easy presumptions and clear-cut distinctions, such as the one between circulation and production, precarious and regular workers, material and immaterial production, political and economic dimensions, the local and the global, labour and social struggles. These distinctions, used by logistics and its boosters to hide the reality of exploitation, are too often blindly accepted even by those who aim at organising against it.

The imaginary of efficiency, smoothness and technological necessity connected to the so called “logistics revolution” is only part of the story: to struggle in and against this world implies the task of unveiling the conditions laying behind this supposedly technical logistical transformation, bringing to light what logistics systematically makes invisible. As an overall transformation of the command over labour and life, logistics is the other face of precarity — a condition that has become general, but that logistics itself contributes to hide. As a matter of fact, a selective visibility is a core feature of logistics: while digital technologies are used to trace, track and command workers' performances, a typical characteristics of global supply chains is the capacity to exploit informal labour, which is not registered in companies' charts and

labour contracts, and to hide the responsibility of employers through subcontracting and outsourcing. What logistics makes visible is just the surface of the deeper political and social phenomenon of the forced and violent dependency on wage and income: special economic zones and warehouses, software and algorithm do not point to any “end of labour” — ironically upheld by both the employers and some critics of capitalism — but are rather a way of intensifying exploitation and continually reproducing workers' full disposability.

It's here that we can observe how the different dimensions of labour collide and conflate. The sense of a merciless digitalisation of life is the other side of the image of smoothness and ubiquity of deliveries. While interoperability and multimodality have been used to sell the logistical fantasies of a seamless and hyper-connected world of lean production, the celebration of 4.0 or “smart” production is the whip unleashed against all workers to force them to accept the worsening of their working conditions. What we face is then a complex differentiation of conditions in which digitalisation and technologies concur to put more pressure over workers in sectors as different as factories, warehouses, public services, farmlands, universities or delivery. Digitalisation means for all, and at a higher speed, the shift of power and command towards the competitive logic of global capital and the generalisation of precarity. As a consequence, the fragmentation and indefinite extension of the work-day, the harsher intensification of the work-time through the imposition of performance indicators and other measurement techniques increasingly camouflage command and affect all jobs and positions, including the ones once considered “safe”.

As the struggles across logistics show, however, the harshness of this command can be concretely weakened by turning fragmentation into connection, by making the struggle itself the condition of a political communication which is based on the shared urgency of taking back the control over time, and refusing the complete disposability that logistics' rationality claims and constantly tries to impose. In light of this we cannot think that our capacity of turning logistic against itself is only a technical question. If logistics is not a sector, if it is not just a matter of technology, if it is rather a pivot around which the global reorganisation of neoliberalism is

centred, then our own political infrastructure should be able to address and attack the entire set of conditions of this very reorganisation.

Any struggle in and against logistics must be *conceived and enacted on a transnational scale.*

The struggles related to logistics demonstrate that the only thing that has been actually shared across the globe is the enmeshing of every national or local condition inside a matrix of infrastructures, communications, production chains, algorithms, financial exchanges and mobility of labour and capital. By stating the need to set our political initiative on the transnational scale, we are not celebrating the global as such. We are rather registering the inadequacy of closed scales of understanding and organising to confront a capital which is global. For this reason, we see in the transnational dimension an unavoidable challenge and opportunity.

When local gains can translate in losses for others, the exercise of tracing back the whole supply chain becomes a necessary step. Yet, beyond this it's important to recognize that, while connecting, logistics fragments and creates divisions through the cooperation of a plethora of actors, including local, national and supranational institutions, in order to enhance its control over living labour. The question is not simply to understand how production and circulation are organised on a transnational scale, but how the logic of logistics structures the whole management and command of living labour, within and without the workplaces. This surely requires organising across borders, but also something more: it requires building political connections that are able to address and overturn the political conditions through which this very fragmentation is produced and reproduced.

From this perspective, the migrant condition helps highlight the pervasiveness of the logic of logistics. Migrants are not only highly employed in logistical hubs as precarised and in-



formal labour: they are also those whose mobility is being handled through a “logistical rationality” which aims at regulating, selecting, organising their movements towards and inside Europe. Seen from the viewpoint of migrants, logistics is a set of power relations implemented by firms, corporations, states and public and private agencies. To be established, the logistical command needs political means such as the nation-states and their control over the movements of living labour through the blackmail of precarious residence permits and a restricted access to welfare services. The violence of the border regime is another dimension of the fragmentation that is needed to bring about the availability to capital's needs and weaken the potential of insubordination. But while migrants allow to show the political dimension of logistics, they are also protagonists of a powerful movement which is every day challenging the logistical rationality by striking the borders. Migrants show that the project of confronting logistics and the need to organise transnationally is one and the same.

Different texts in this reader suggest that a better cooperation and coordination between labour actions enacted by unionised workers and support from other parts of society can produce not only a higher leverage for workers' demands, but also open the possibility for a wider politicisation of both terrains of struggle. What we suggest is the need to look at the same time at the fault lines and weak points of logistical organisation, in order to create and expand the glitches in the system, and at the political, social and institutional conditions that at once enable and are shaped by it. It is at this level that it becomes clear how the transnational extension of supply chains, infrastructure and e-platforms is not just an operational adjustment in the search for better conditions, but a force that shakes and rescales the political spaces where we act, transforming states and cities and reconfiguring metropolitan spaces.

Our aim, therefore, is not simply that of realising a counter-logistics as a technical reversal of the logistics of capital, but to understand our opposition within an overall set of social conditions that are constantly challenged by everyday social struggles and strikes. We need to develop a practical knowledge which draws both on the analysis of the ubiquitous functioning of the logistics infrastructure, and on the

manifold experiences of insubordination, pushing them beyond their limits. Our aim must be that of creating the conditions for a political communication that is actually able to counteract logistics as fragmentation and domination. While logistics presents itself with the face of concentrated knots such as ports, land ports or data centres, its reality is a dispersed and resilient form of power which valorises and reproduces unbalances and specific conditions of exploitation. While logistics celebrates a corporate world with selective borders, what we need is to produce a transnational political communication by raising demands that resonate with the continuous mobility of migrants across Europe and beyond.

The aim is to combine the capacity to materially hit in specific points and to *attack the social and political conditions of reproduction of capital.*

The role of blockades and other tactics which aim at interrupting flows and circulation constitute an up-to-date tool in labour disputes vis-à-vis the territorial dispersion of contemporary production. Nevertheless, they remain politically powerless if they are not included in a larger strategy. Instead of simply mirroring logistics' discourse, its technical equipment and its glittering façade, a politics that aims to contrast the pervasive fragmenting power of logistics must combine the capacity to materially hit in specific points and politically attack the social and political conditions of reproduction of capital.

Let's be clear: blockades can bring to our side significant gains. Wage increases, a shift in the balance of industrial relations, relieved tasks, local community building, display of strength, sense of empowerment are all positive outcomes of this tactic. But there is no providential capacity in blockades: they cannot substitute organisation, strategy and discourse. The simple intensification of blockades alone is unable to

foster political connections on the same scale of the attack and leaves untouched the coercion to work. Then, if logistics is the logic that regulates not only production, but intervenes also in the reproduction of capital as a social relation, any sort of counter-logistics should at once hit production in its most sensible points and pose itself the problem of how to block the metropolitan organization that logistics contributes to bring about. Against this background, a logistical strike must connect the attack on the sphere of circulation and production with the capacity to halt the political dimension of neoliberal societies. This objective includes the need to build political connections among the fragmented precarious labour. These connections shall not simply replicate the objective links existing between the knots of the same productive process or supply chain. They should rather aim at overcoming isolation by indicating common points of impact and terrains of struggle in which to deploy over time our collective power of insubordination. These political connections are our real leverage.

As the anti-G20 mobilisation showed, the blockade of the port of Hamburg produced something more than an economic, albeit temporary, damage: as a part of the project of the #Hamburgcitystrike, it productively pointed to the need to overcome the sheer reactive action against governments' agendas. Following our understanding of logistics, the call to block the logistics of capital suggests that we cannot address in a separate way the political and the economic domain. Against the dream that there can be a political power able to govern from above the logistical transformations, and the fantasy of a self-sustaining logistical power, it is clear that logistics produces political tensions and is constantly troubled by resistances and insubordinations. As migrants' relentless and undisciplined movement daily shows, the claim of logistics to command everything and everyone remains unfulfilled. While logistics may govern processes, it needs state power to impose its plans and restrain insubordination: the rise of nationalism and racism and the unequal but widespread return of the state are faces of the same coin.

In times of “disruptive technologies” — a new mantra in global circles of business — used to attack workers' organising and forging of social relations, we need to disrupt the politi-

cal supply chain that reproduces the “systemic nightmare” we are living in. The goal is double: on the one hand, we need to share a common grasp of the production process. On the other hand, the goal is that of developing a common discourse and common demands able to connect different subjective figures inside and outside the workplaces. This means that a counter-logistical politics should equally draw on the struggles inside the workplaces, on women's and migrants' strikes against patriarchy and institutional racism, and on the various forms of metropolitan opposition. To be effective, counter-logistics needs a political infrastructure which aims at overcoming the unproductive distinction between the practical moment of organisation and that of the production of a political discourse. Arising from within the strike movement, the political infrastructure we wish to contribute is the place where to develop a common strategic vision to push struggles towards common goals and unleash all their potential. A political infrastructure that is able to sustain and foster the process of the transnational social strike as a tool of political communication, a field of organisation, a chance of mass insubordination. To make possible the unexpected.



Migrants blocked in the border town and logistical passage of Idomeni, along the Balkan route/Greece–Central Europe corridor.



# Making & Breaking Chains

A text by *Steven Cuzner* from Allt åt Alla, Sweden

**WE MIGHT PICTURE** workers becoming more and more connected to each other across the globe. Capitalists have over the last decades increasingly ensured that production constantly moves around geographically in order to outplay labour costs, taxation structures and storage issues. Even the most trivial commodities require transportation routines across oceans, borders, labour sectors, working conditions and laws. This global interdependence would seem to unite workers far and wide. But thinking just a bit more carefully about it we might suspect that perhaps the opposite is true. As the assembly line has gradually been stretched and diced up, where one task following another is sometimes continents away, workers along that abstract assembly line are disconnected from their fellow colleagues. Not many are likely to keep track of the nationality or conditions of the workers dealing with the next or previous step. Most might not even know, or care, what step in the complete process they themselves are actually involved in!<sup>1</sup>

A container may lie stacked on a ship deck out at sea for a very long time before finally being hoisted up by a crane at some port destination. Neither the dockworkers nor the cargo ship deckhands need to know much or anything about its contents. Any which one of these containers may be ordered to remain stacked in the port indefinitely, and any which one could be staying only briefly before being hauled to the other

1. It is valuable to address here that alienation may not be the first thing every worker wants to overcome. Some would argue that being alienated from the whole tedious process of production can be a worker's only protection from wasting emotions on the affairs of the capitalist. The issue here is therefore not alienation as a harm on our daily lives, even if many feel a very legitimate unhappiness with that. The grievance here is rather in how disconnection from other workers in the chain of production creates obstacles for collective interference. To some extent, we are forced to understand what needs to be coordinated with other parallel interferences to avoid reaching a dead end.

end of the planet again, for packaging or who knows what. And then perhaps a month later, after some transformations, the same contents may be back in the same harbour once more. Before arriving in a shop or a post order warehouse, before eventually arriving in your home or before expiring and being destroyed, there are so many potential destinations and journeys in store for each commodity.

We could try to do the forensics and trace the logistics, get access to serial numbers and batch numbers, potentially follow raw materials from where they are scraped by hand from the insides of dark mines underground, to their eventual incarnation as the commodity you purchase. But we would still need to sniff out the material trail of any other component involved in making that same commodity, if we are to fully understand how to interfere with the specific production of anything. And even so, conditions of *just-in-time* manufacturing (wherein transportation companies adapt to the interests of manufacturers who want delivery of raw materials or components only just in time and thus lie floating outside of coasts or in a tetris of constant restacking in ports for unconfirmed periods of time) are always themselves rearranging the seemingly rigid logistics channels we might think we have understood.

So, in consideration of the daunting scope of this mess, the question might be: why do we at all need to know how these motions are conducted in the first place? Is there any advantage, from a worker's perspective, to interfere with the production of any specific commodity, in order to gain the upper hand over capital? Is it rather, perhaps sufficient to singularly deal with the conditions local to oneself, regardless of impact local to someone else? Should we, because the map is so confusing, simply interfere with the process from our very own standpoint and not waste time on understanding everything else? Can we be satisfied with spontaneous reactive resistance and ignore the bigger picture; rely on the idea that resistance itself triggers other local resistance, and that a general build-up incites a counter-power entirely regardless of the messy logics of contemporary capitalist planning? In some ways, maybe.



But if we pretend for a moment to ask the same questions from the standpoint of our adversary (being the patrons of the capitalist system) we are likely to answer differently. Would they not consider it far more threatening if workers from vastly different segments of the same production chain joined forces and planned interference that could not be compensated for elsewhere? Would it not be devastating for the exploiting forces if people shared a common grasp of production chains, and were prepared to coordinate interference across national boundaries, contract specificities, labour tasks, union affiliations etc? And what form of power leverage would we gain if coordination of interference all along the chain was also anchored with the general social majority? If we the populations subjected to the impervious economic verdicts of capitalism, maintained a common overview of its bloodstream, so to speak, and if this lent to collective planning and locally committing to transnational plans — it would appear that our ability to truly block this stream was within reach.

This type of action also demands a better realisation of precisely how dependant capitalism is on the whole spectrum of labour power: workers directly mining and refining materials, assembling and packaging commodities, transporting or handling materials or goods, servicing the retail of these, tending to all the care and reproductive needs surrounding commodity production/transportation/retail — and the always indispensable reliance on the non-employed, whose desperate position serves as the pending threat that keeps the employed loyal and willing to submit to the conditions of labour. An effective collective counter power needs to reside in forms of collaboration between all of these. For practical reasons of struggle, class consciousness — and with it, class antagonism against the gatekeepers of class society — cannot be exclusive to some rigid definition of “true proletarians”. If labour conflict artillery such as the strike is to properly interfere with exploitation, without becoming a tool used by managers of capital to isolate that which in reality is not isolated, strikes need to be made social and transnational. For this to happen, someone needs to be prepared to initiate and constantly open up channels of communication which traverse the imagined barriers between workers.

In the past year or so, during which a major conflict has gathered force in the Gothenburg harbour — the largest container port in northern Europe — some vital new types of connections have been put in motion, which appear to have had an impact on the nature of the conflict. Without wishing to exaggerate the scope of this connection, it is still of some value to point to a development which has potential to transcend the assumed outcome of such struggles. In related cases, perhaps principally in the Lisbon port conflict some years ago, where the “local” nature of an initial strike (against specific workplace austerity) transformed, to instead address and attack the political reality of austerity punishment upon all of Portugal and southern Europe. When pretty much every media channel first accused the striking dockworkers for “ruining the economy”, the strike returned a year later and rather emphasized this power leverage. We, the workers can ruin the economy you already are using against us: watch out. In the context of mass unemployment and huge cuts on public resources, the striking port workers were asking who, really, was causing this misery: politicians supporting capitalist interests, or workers in the country's commercial port who refused to handle the commodities that the economy depends on? The broader social reality of every dockworker's cousin, sister, nephew, aunt or acquaintance, was made just as vital — in fact the vital issue in the second installment of the strike — as the “isolated” workplace contract and ownership issues they first acted against.



Allt Åt Alla Stockholm's manifestation, a silent strike outside of “Näringslivets Hus” — The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise.

There is a heavy heritage of prejudice surrounding union struggles, which claims that “outside” involvement is unwanted. Our association (Allt åt Alla) has experienced the precise opposite in communication with the Gothenburg section of the Swedish dockworkers union, Hamnarbeträffbundet. Early on in their conflict, a team of representatives from the Gothenburg section (Hamn4an) set up a meeting with us. After describing for us the details of the conflict and the reason for declaring a strike, they asked us why we care so much about their struggle. Aside from the obvious, that any resistance for the advancement of the working class must be a priority to defend, we tentatively mentioned that we do recognize the undeniable power and centrality of dockworkers maintaining such a major logistical hub, for the interest to win over the capitalist system... Tentatively, because this may have been a sensitive issue. Along with the prejudice that trade union members reject coordination possibilities with social movements outside their workplace, is the tendency to assume that the former will hold a conservative position vis-à-vis the employer. The assumption goes something like this: because of their dependence upon salaries from the employer, employees will inherently limit struggles to local salary issues and thus avoid conflict that on a broader scale interferes with their employer's profits. People in anti-capitalist movements prepared to bet bucks on the veracity of this type of statement are indeed possibly referencing some actual experience, but much of it appears to rest on a seeming logic about employee loyalty with company profits. Though nothing certain can ever be said about contracted workers' “natural” willingness to participate in revolutionary action, it is a tragically defeatist malady of the organized left to assume that a revolutionary agenda could never be shared with people in “stable jobs”. The development seen in the Lisbon port is a perfect example of how wrong we are to assume such things. At any rate, dockworkers are, like anyone else, of course aware that the capitalist structure has no loyalty with them, that secure jobs can be compromised and made precarious, or simply transferred to another location at any moment, and for any reason that benefits the investors.

Hamn4an organises 85% of the workers in the Gothenburg port. But the owner, APM Terminals refuses to negotiate with them and insists instead on tying agreements to the minority

union (Transport) which belongs to the national trade union confederation (LO). To an outside observer, it may look like the owner is simply demanding that Hamn4an submits to the peace treaty which applies in the agreement with the other union. But the reason Hamn4an has consistently refused is much more obvious: compliance would deny them, and along with that other unions who place demands through collective refusal, the right to call their own strikes; the right to address problems they experience and the freedom to organize independently. After repeated attempts to seal a sovereign agreement, which have all been rejected by the owner, Hamn4an declared a number of incremental strike actions. To which the port owner responded with a lockout. Practically: a complete shut-down of the harbour afternoons and night time, with no access for workers or compensation for lost income. This lockout has also been far more brutal, in terms of capital losses for the port owner and the commercial enterprises affiliated,

than the strike proposed by the union in the first place. Which just goes to show what lengths this type of owner is willing to go, in order to smash radical unions. A classic example of union busting that echoes practices seen throughout the last century.



Slovenian protest rally, manifesting for the rights of the European dock workers.

Identifying their agenda in this way is not speculation. From the very beginning, the conflict was a response to the owner's intention to employ more temp workers in the harbour, which given the nature of the heavy equipment used in this type of workplace not only endangers worker safety, but also clearly shows that APM Terminals is systematically engaged in replacing combating workers with a precarious and thus servile workforce. Of course, there are several misconceptions

on part of the owner regarding this, in the assumption that precarious workers naturally shy away from labour strike. What is certain on the other hand is the immense obstacles facing any precarious workforce willing to commit to a conflict or even join unions. If nothing else, the reality for a precarious labourer is one of low connection potential with the rest of the workforce. Employers are generally well aware of this and exploit it to sever ties and enforce greater protec-

tion against labour conflicts, a fact which can hardly have escaped most residents of modern day labour market Europe, wherein governments have desecrated employment security laws and made precarious labour the defining condition in society. Back in the port of Gothenburg, we now witness how the Swedish state is chiming in with the port owner's union busting ambush on Hamn4an. Resorting to the same accusations heard in Lisbon some years ago, the Swedish Minister for Employment and Integration, Ylva Johansson, has vowed to "re-evaluate Swedish labour conflict rights". What began as union busting is developing into class busting.

Practical engagement in this conflict on part of Allt åt Alla (in collaboration with other groups) has so far been limited to very standard campaigning for Hamn4an. But something can be said about the collaboration interest on both sides, to reach a common understanding of what could be achieved and by what means. Hypothetically, if the lockout becomes a serious economic burden to the dockworkers, certain actions which can't be performed by the union members themselves can be done instead by outside collaborators like us – practices we have experience with from housing struggles in past years, wherein adjacent property is expropriated and turned into commons. These types of occupying practices are not simply about the spaces themselves. A space that is organized specifically to fortify the working class in conflict is certainly a material resource per se, but also serves to incite a type of energy. Commoning and more specifically expropriating in direct connection to struggles against repression, changes the political landscape of struggles and makes them more available and noticeable to the rest of the community, in a way which can't be matched by simple media coverage (which can sway in any direction, given the probable influence available to the wealthier opponent). Setting up sovereign cooking commons and conducting collaborative planning workshops in expropriated property has proven to be an effective way to enhance the relevant issues in conflicts, break the isolation imposed by the opponent, and demonstrate the social dimension of every form of resistance. Above all, establishing a resource specific to a cause does something that rarely comes on its own: it creates a context for further planning as an alliance, born out of the committed energy that comes with taking over.



It should be within our scope to imagine, or better yet plan steps to enable coordinated interference that can cripple capital and award us a position from which we can replace the system, as a collective practice. For this, we must logically rely on not only knowing about and guarding all the escape routes of our opponent, but also being prepared to quickly repurpose the products already in circulation, the buildings already erected, the transportation equipment already manufactured and maintained by workers across the world. In this understanding, and for this type of action, “subjects” are not more or less important based on their employment, citizenship status or whereabouts. As much as the capitalist mode of production uses every strata of exploited subjects to keep us chained down, breaking those chains also depends on us linking together and coordinating our counter-attack all along the chain.





# Amazon: a Transnational Challenge in the Highly Automated Labour

A text by *Sylvain Alias* from Sud Solidaires, France  
& *Floriano Milesi* from Precarious Disconnections, Italy

**RIDING THE EFFECTS** of the retail revolution, Amazon is one of the principal actors of the so called “platform capitalism”. With a rapid growth and a lot of money invested in innovation and research, and the not irrelevant fact that the founder and CEO is the richest man in the world, Amazon is totally changing the organization of the retail sector. Besides, Amazon is also famous for the highly anti-union politics inside its workplaces. Organizing workers' struggle within a company such as Amazon is a challenge that poses several problems: How to organize across borders? How can the workers' transnational strike be effective in this era of radical technological transformation?

As a matter of fact, Amazon is just a part of the complex multidimensional global production chains. The just in time production “philosophy” is by now widespread and acts along global chains of production and through logistics infrastructures, that are able to reorganize the flows of goods according to the needs of the moment. More automation is used to reduce the “management” costs and increase production efficiency. However, often this automation is more publicized than actually implemented, and it has the purpose not so much to get rid of workers, but rather to disqualify their labor in order to replace them more easily with one another.



Digital circuits at work, Chile.

Against this global backdrop, it was Amazon itself that proposed an inspiring working model: that of the “Mechanical Turk”. There is a dreary irony lying behind this name: it refers to an automation with the shape of a man invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> that was apparently able to move and act autonomously, while concealing within its gears a man able to drive it. This very reference is telling: the model of which Amazon is a driving force is basically based on smoke and mirrors able to deceive and astonish the world with the most advanced prodigies of technique, the idea of a full automated capitalism. To those who may be bewitched by this dream, seeing in it the possibility of emancipation from labor through automation (as a sort of approxi-

mation to communism) we have to deliver bad news: there are still men and women hidden behind. More precisely: workers. Joking aside, it is always useful to keep the importance of human labor in mind: we have to face the course of strong technological innovation as something that deeply transforms some aspects of the relationship between capital and labour.

From the point of view of an Amazon worker, this great innovation translates in a more capillary control, greater workloads and the need to continuously increase his or her expertise in order not to be replaced. This replacement occurs not so much or not only by a machine, but rather by other workers, whose labor is likewise fragmented in different and simpler tasks, so that it is easier to substitute the poorly skilled and poorly paid workers, organized by algorithm. Of course, a less skilled job is not a lighter job, because it gains in quantity what it loses in terms of quality. Moreover, technologies are highly utilized to control and to discipline workers. A clear example of that is the monitoring of workers' movements inside the Amazon warehouses: on the one hand, it is necessary to orient workers in a machine–logic organized place, on the other it works to control the worker's performances.

*Think Globally — Act Locally*, political movements in the first 2000s used to say. They got a crucial aspect of the challeng-

es to come. Unfortunately, a similar philosophy has been inspirational to many corporations, which transformed it in a pragmatic: *Make business globally and pay worker locally*. They got the advantage of acting locally as part of a global strategy of exploitation, while the movements' cry remains unfulfilled.

Amazon workers are not passive in front of this situation and know that they need to organize across the borders. In the past two years, meetings have been organized among Amazon workers from different European countries within the framework of the Transnational Social Strike meetings. The first meeting involved workers from Germany (Bad Hersfeld, Berlin) and Poland (Poznan), it followed a meeting in Orléans (France) in October 2016, French workers from the warehouses of Saran did take part as well. As highlighted during the discussions among these workers, Amazon is using differences of wage, benefits and fiscal pressure across borders in Europe not only to make money, but also to blackmail workers, by switching flows in different hubs or transferring fulfillment centers in case they go on strike. The warehouse in Poznan was opened with the clear purpose of neutralizing the effects of the wave of strike hitting the German warehouses in the last years. At the last Amazon workers' meeting held in Poznan (Poland), after making the observation that the company acts according to differences in wages and labor legislation, the consensus was built around the decision to fight hard working conditions within Amazon. It was decided to build a campaign called "Amazon makes us sick": the health problems faced by Amazon workers are extremely important. In Germany, Poland and France, the dismissals for reasons of health are not uncommon. From now on, the stake is also to enlarge the transnational meetings to workers from other countries. Amazon is a transnational company and the social strength to build must be able to cross the borders. The challenge will also be to try to unify the workers from different departments. In fact, Amazon exists today beyond warehouses: grocery delivery services already opened today in certain cities and stores and, for example, bookstores are also beginning to appear. Is thus clear why the issue of labour inside Amazon and of the organization of Amazon workers has been part of the TSS since the beginning. And will continue to be so.



# Intervention on the Question of Technology & the End of Labour

A text by *Dietmar* from *Interventionistische Linke*, Germany

**IN THE LAST** period we have witnessed again a broad discussion on the question of technological innovation and its effects in the world of labour. Digitalisation and automation are the two main terms under which ongoing and future changes are discussed. It's a little bit difficult to give clear definitions, but let's say that the first can be broadly described as the formalisation of information and its transformation into numerical units, so it can point at the use of algorithms and is also combined with a facilitation of communication processes, the second one often means a replacement of human labour by self operating machines or a combination of machines. In Germany both aspects are discussed under the catchword of "Industrie 4.0" (industry 4.0), a term which suggests transformations in the dimension of the industrial revolution of the 19th century. In fact, the concept stands for an (until now projected) integration and optimization of the whole production process, from development to recycling, through the use of modern communication technologies (the internet of things in the factory). But it's more than a simple research-programme, it's a very effective agenda-building, run by industrial and public institutions on the level of Fed-

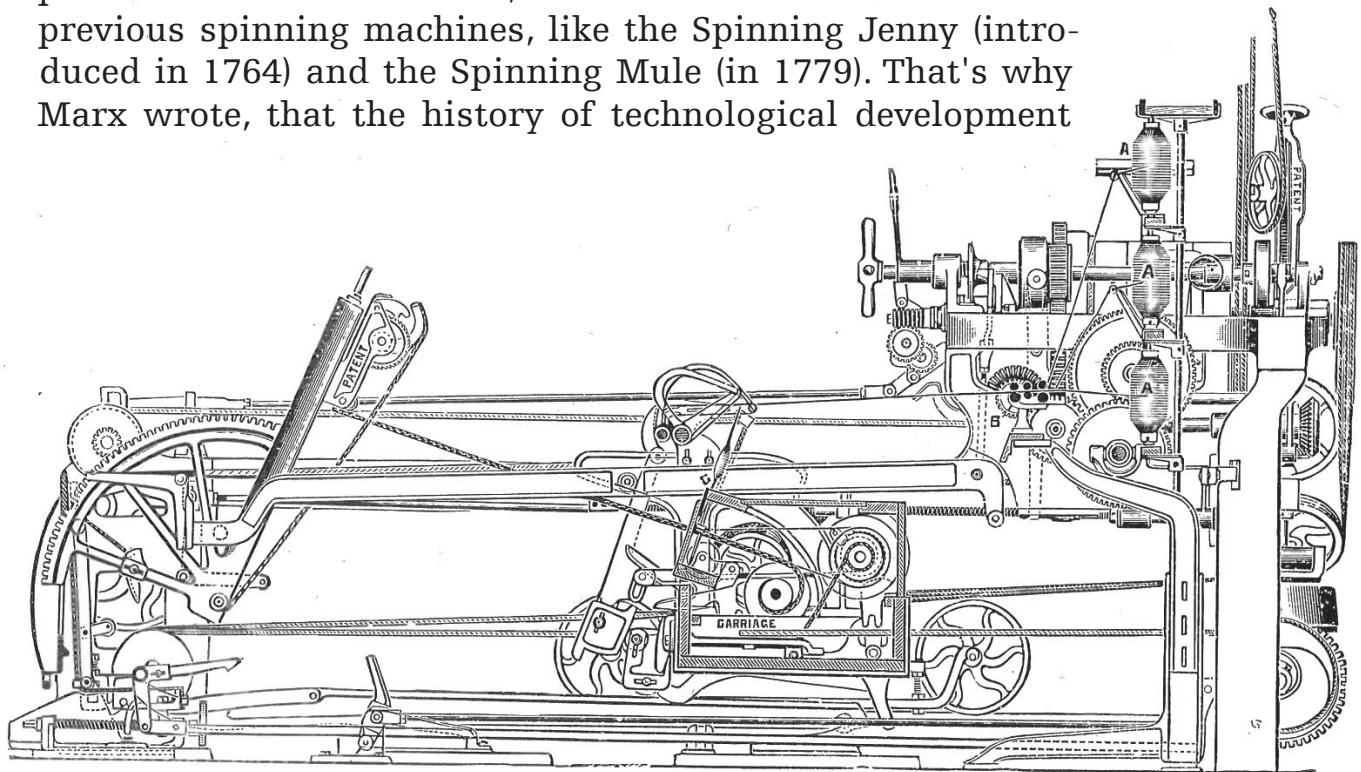
eral Ministries, Economic Chambers and even Trade Unions, which generates a broad public discourse. The Federal government recently declared it also to be one of the main topics of the G20 summit in Hamburg last July.

The images used in this discourse often represent robots kicking out humans from their workplace and the visions proclaim deserted factories, automated delivery services, and the upcoming end of labour. However, prospects are very unclear, for nearly every scenario there can be found an empirical study. A brief look into the history of industrialisation shows on the other side, that this discourse is not new (and many less apocalyptic voices in the debate have also pointed at that). Since its beginning capitalist industrialisation has meant a permanent revolving of the technological production process, which is accompanied by a periodic hype of the “new” and “revolutionary” aspects of technological change, together with visions of the end of labour. A good example is the “Selfactor”, a spinning machine introduced in the middle of the 19th century, whose name was programmatic, because it was seen as a nearly self operating system, which eliminates the need for human labour (it was also the model for the automatic machine–systems described by the deeply impressed Karl Marx in the chapter *Machinery and Modern Industry* in *Capital*, Volume I). But until today labour was not eliminated, not even in the textile industry. This should make a little bit sceptical in front of such declarations.

One error the advocates of the end of labour make is that they presuppose a technological determination, after which everything that is technologically possible will also be used in the production process. But for capital technology is not an end in itself, it is only adapted if it is expected to generate more profit. This is determined by a lot of different parameters: expectations in the development of markets, the availability of cheap credits for expensive long–term investments, the competition with profitability in other sectors, and the advantages compared to the use of human work force. In Germany for example, despite the debate on “Industrie 4.0”, at the same time there are complaints about lacking investments in the production process (the so called “Investitionsstau”, that is investment backlog). Reasons for that are underused capacities of the productive facilities and the cheap labour force.

Until now it does not count for German capital to invest in deserted factories. But there are also other aspects. Surveys made by Trade Unions with Work Councils have shown that many companies don't use digitalisation for facilitating communication through internet (the internet of things in the factory), because they have security concerns. They hold back sharing information through the web, because they fear their data could fall into the hands of their competitors, and every hacking scandal makes it more unlikely that they will change this attitude. That's one reason why the topic data security was set on the agenda of the G20 summit by the Federal Government. So here capitalist competition itself is an obstacle for the use of technological innovation. On the other side the same surveys show that digitalisation in German companies means above all the collection of information on the performance of workers and an increasing control over the work force (for example through the tracking and recording of movements and workflow). It's also used to push workers to compete with each other through the screening of real-time productivity-charts.

Already the "Selfactor" did not really act by itself alone. It still needed workers for the maintenance and supply, but it downgraded them to a mere appendix and broke the powerful position of skilled workers, which were still needed to run previous spinning machines, like the Spinning Jenny (introduced in 1764) and the Spinning Mule (in 1779). That's why Marx wrote, that the history of technological development



Selfaktor.



Foodora riders on strike in Berlin.

under capital can be described as the history of warfare against labour (a trace which he unfortunately didn't follow up in *Capital*, Volume I, instead he analyzed the increase of productivity as an effect of competition and the search for extra-surplus-value). Technological innovation in the production process is used to decompose and fragment the existing workforce, to increase control, intensify work, and break the resistance of workers, more than to eliminate labour entirely. Even in today's highly automated car-factories you still find workers supplying and maintaining the machine-systems or carrying out operations, which are too capillary for robots. But many of them are contract workers or self-employed. The main effect of the use of technological innovation until now is precarisation of working conditions, even for workers with a fixed contract. This is also true where digitalisation has rather generated work than eliminated it, like in the whole area of the so-called gig-economy (the name refers to making a job like making a gig, very well known examples are online delivery services like Foodora and Deliveroo, or crowdworking-platforms like Clickworker). So digitalisation and automation under capitalist conditions

mean rather more shitty work, then the end of it. Also the whole discourse of "Industrie 4.0" is mainly used to prepare the public for more "reforms" and "adaptations" of the labour laws to the needs of capital. In her Weissbuch Arbeiten 4.0 the Federal ministry of labour, Andrea Nahles, takes up the claims of the BDA (Bundesvereinigung der deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände – Confederation of German Employers Associations) for a flexibilisation of the legal working day, and announced its transformation into a legal working week (surely the best way to increase the number of burn-outs). An old claim which has no intrinsic connection to technological needs but much more with the drive of capital for nonstop valorization of itself, and therefore the exploitation of living labour during the whole 24 hours of a day (again many examples could be made from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today, and



from every sector regardless of its organic composition – see for example the conditions on plantations in Southern Europe). So the whole discourse has also the function of a threat, forcing workers to expect a worsening of their working conditions (and therefore make it more unlikely that they will be replaced by robots). Something which should warn against the various declarations of the upcoming deserted factories and automated delivery services.

So in front of a discourse which often describes technological change as a kind of a natural force irresistibly eliminating labour from the production process, I think it is worth to insist, that living labour is still crucial for the production and reproduction of capital and it's world. Technological innovation has surely increased its productivity enormously, but it has not eliminated it. Even the most automatic machine-system needs planning, monitoring and maintenance by humans. For not being misinterpreted: I don't want to say that there are no ongoing transformations of production through the use of new technologies. But I want to make the point, that we should not fall into the trap of apocalyptic visions of the upcoming uselessness of human labour, and anticipate its ultimate defeat. We should rather survey and describe more precisely what real effects this has on the work place, how technological innovation is introduced in the production process, how machines interact with humans, and how they change working conditions on behalf of the exploitation of living labour, but also what possible forms of resistance can come out of it, that means, how the labour conditions as a whole could be used by workers to resist, to unite and to act on behalf of their own interests.



# On G20 & the Logistics of Capital

A text by *Toni* from Autonome Antifa Wien/...Ums Ganze! Bündnis, Austria

**FACING OUR EXPERIENCES** within the present age of globalization, crisis of administration as well as the system itself and especially of counterprotests during the last decades led us to a precise conclusion. When, as a highlight of the ending German G20 presidency, it was decided that the summit was going to take place in Hamburg in July, it wouldn't be enough to repeat the scenarios of Seattle or Heiligendamm. Hamburg and its harbor are an important hub for the German export economy and the global goods traffic — therefore, it's the perfect scenery to disrupt state and capital. We are calling to use the international mobilization against the G20 summit to inflict as much disruption as possible upon a world where goods can move freely overseas, while at the same time thousands of migrants are dying in precisely the same oceans.

As numerous systemic crises of global capitalism continue, technological progress under the pressure of capitalist relations of production and structures of ownership is not getting rid of poverty, but of human beings. In fact, politics is managing these processes of crises, disciplining the dispensables, while at the same time presenting itself as an answer to all problems. However due to structural and systemic reasons this politics can never be the solution. Thus, its practice leads to frustration and a shift to the right and nationalists fantasize about protectionism, of which even leftists are not exempted from. Furthermore, a growing reactionary oppo-

sition to globalization leads to ever more aggravating impacts of the crises and blocks progressive solutions for those problems to be formulated. Consequently, the right-wingers can only prove their political ability to act in a negative way — by depriving of their fundamental rights and of societal abundance and wealth even more people than the highly engineered capitalism, due to its inherent economic dynamics, is already doing. This results in two imperatives: repressive mechanisms such as the destruction of the social state and other neoliberal developments inwards — and a border regime with isolation, here in Europe namely by a border regime and Frontex outwards.

For *just-in-time* capitalism logistics entails very important requirements — especially container shipping. Goods, which have been produced under poor working- and environmental conditions to make them as cheap as possible, reach the markets through logistics. But for a successful exploitation, the movement of goods is not enough. In fact, humans must be potentially as mobile too. Nevertheless, they are only able to move freely, if they are helpful to the system. In fact, some people can still come to Europe and may even get the right to stay even though they are not sneakers or TV-screens. But if people haven't had the privilege of being born here, the only chance to stay is by satisfying the present demand of the local job market. Logistics is one of the main carotid arteries of capital, and has always been fragile for sabotage and other disruptive factors. Moreover, logistic chains are vulnerable. Selective interventions in the procedure of capitalist accumulation are much easier to achieve. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century you "only" need to paralyze a refinery (France), a part of a container port (Gothenburg, Sweden), or steal/destroy enough material of railtracks (Berliner Autonome) to interrupt the capitalist engines for a while. So, we are not alone, nor without a role model in our plan. All those activists have shown us where and how easily we can hurt capitalism in its logistic cargo cult!

### **LET US FOLLOW THEM!**

However, we are not looking for pure paralyzation. Obviously, it's only meant to be a symbolic act, but — as for our understanding — an act, which starts on one of the most cen-

tral locations to criticism we own in times of postmodern particularism, that is based on our division into tiny little parts that are unable to meet any goal on their own. What we need is solidarity within anti-capitalistic fights. And this solidarity is only achievable through joint criticism on the economic sphere. To focus on logistics allows us to overcome a personalized criticism of capitalist governments. The harbor of Hamburg is a specific manifestation of the structure of capital, where both political and economic levels meet, and are closely linked to one another. In the northern parts of Hamburg, politicians and their policies are the main subjects of protest. After all, we've chosen the harbor, as the location where globalized capitalism is being materialized. No matter what the hot topics of the day will be during the summit, our protest is not only directed against political monsters, but the systemic nightmare. Together we can and will harm the European export champion Germany in the harbor.

We chose to focus our critique of capitalism and the G20 on something else than the usual anti-summit protest routine. We don't want to only jolt the fence of the powerful any longer, we want to appear where capitalist economy can be attacked where it really hurts. We want to shut down the logistics of capital and stand up for open borders for everybody. We want to interrupt the current logistics of capital, the transport chains and its hubs. After all, ...Ums Ganze!, GROW and Beyond Europe call for associations of civil disobedience with the aim of blocking the harbor of Hamburg. Our actions don't address the police or the employees working in the harbor. We want to shut down the logistics of capital.

The possibility presented to us in Hamburg is to use the G20 as a platform. Together with our friends from Europe and beyond we may showcase that we can overcome symbolical politics by focusing on the logistics as one target. We aim to find a way out in hurting capitalism in a vital point and refusing the drift into nationalist and religious barbarism. Without revealing too much: this way-out will not start with a plea to the state, but with trans-border interruptions of the logistics of capital itself. Because this is the only language it will be understood.

For something better than the present.



# The Post Sector as a Logistical Mogul. Workers' Revolt & Union Organizing in the Post of Slovenia

A text by *Andraž Mali, Gregor Kašman & Peter Gradišnik*  
from CEDRA, Slovenia, translated by *Arne Zupančič*

**THE POST OF** Slovenia (PoštaSlovenije, PS) was recently the focus of domestic media mainly because of the Post Workers Union (Sindikat poštnih delavcev, SPD) activities that tried to warn the public about worsening working conditions in the company, though every year the Post of Slovenia brings huge profits to its owners — the State of Slovenia. The prediction for the 2017 fiscal year says the net profit of PS will be € 9,9 million, but with the rise of profits and revenues the workers' rights are shrinking, the number of employees is falling, and those who stay are subjected to intensified working norms and constant overtime work, which became the normal working conditions in the service sector as well as in other branches of the economy.

The fact of the falling number of employees of PS confirms the findings above — in the last decade the number dropped from 6723 at the end of 2006 to 5510 at the beginning of this year. In the same period, the Post of Slovenia has widely extended its activities in the field of parcel delivery and increased its share in the supply chains logistics, as well as in the e-services for individuals, companies and the public sector. The trends of the classical letter-post items reduction are clearly showing the structural changes in operations, but PS (as well as many other companies in the logistic branch) did not react to these changes by creating new, more secure and better workplaces, much needed for appropriate handling of all the new tasks, but, quite the opposite, by firing the workers and reforming their Post Offices into contractual units.

The Post of Slovenia started to generate its business model on an authoritarian regime of work, similar to the one incarnated by the technological and service mogul Amazon. The above mentioned processes are well symbolized by the trend of outsourcing. The number of classical Post offices in Slovenia has until now fallen way below 400, and the number of contractual units is rising on their account, now already representing 26% of all postal units. Though these kinds of post models are evidently lowering the accessibility of the post network to its users, the Post of Slovenia management relies on the examples of Germany and Netherlands, where the state-owned Post keeps only 0,3% of postal units while all the rest are subcontracted. Postal services should be public and accessible to everyone, but by introducing this kind of practices, PS is lowering the quality and accessibility of public services.

The decisions mentioned above (together with some others) have led to a significant intensification of work and deterioration of working conditions for all the employees. The most recent case can be seen in the Postal-Logistic center (PLC) Ljubljana, where the Postal Workers Union (SPD) organized a demonstration in mid-June, to warn about totally unsuitable working conditions prevailing there, and getting worse in other PLCs and Post Offices around Slovenia as well. One of the crucial problems for the workers is the growing number of extra-hours, since overtime became something completely normal due to the lack of employees and the expanded scale of work.



## TWO DIFFERING STRATEGIC DECISIONS OF THE TWO POST OF SLOVENIA UNIONS

These kinds of conditions brought workers to great despair, resulted, on the one hand, in numbers of resigned workers and, on the other, in workers' revolt. Two active unions in the Post of Slovenia reacted to the situation with different strategic decisions, triggering different reactions of workers. Negotiations on acute questions started within the company, during which workers' side was represented by the SPD Union and the Union of Traffic and Connections' Workers (SDPZ), speaking for most of the organized workers in the company. More than 3000 workers of Post of Slovenia confirmed the negotiation positions that included new employments, re-framing the norms, revocation of overtime erasure and the rise of basic wages.

The negotiations got complicated right before the end, when SPD submitted the agreement for approval to its members, who did rejected it, and the SPD Union subsequently withdrew from signing the agreement. After that act the Management of PS "found out" that the SPD did not meet the representation criteria any longer, and was therefore excluded from the ongoing negotiations, which continued with SDPZ Union only. The latter made an agreement with the management in June, but PS met only one of the workers' demands – to employ 111 new post workers, which represents a bit more than 2% rise in overall employment, but does not even meet the 2014 number of employments.

The SDPZ Union decided for a defensive strategy of adjustment to authoritarian regime of work, while SPD chose the active syndicalist strategy and used it to build the organizational power of the Union. Although they have yet to implement their key demands, they've managed to grow in numbers, they've lifted the level of activity among the members, and created the conditions for a collective action.

Accession to the (exclusive) negotiations by SDZP Union brought the workers some small concessions, but at the same time it passivated their membership, as the leadership didn't ask the members for approval of the agreement, and instead of solidarity they were promoting competition between the Unions and workers. Busy apologizing and explaining the

agreement, the leadership of SDPZ Union had also stated that “post workers should be satisfied with what had been achieved” and “the employees cannot expect to work 5 hours a day only”. With huge majority of employees working unpaid overtime and their hard extra-hours labor materializing as the very profit of the company, this kind of talk of Union leaders turns out to be extremely problematic. The Unions are as strong as their ability for organizing a collective industrial action — the strike, and to execute it they need informed membership, active throughout the negotiation process. Instead of this, the SDPZ Union deprived their members of the right to express their opinion on the agreement with the excuse that “because of technical and organizational difficulties this is impossible to do among 6000 employees”. The only thing coming out of this is undermining the power of Union organizing.

The SPD Union, on the contrary, has doubled its membership in just a few months during which the activists of the Union were organizing meetings and demonstrations, and showed they are prepared to tighten up the relationship with the management board, and that's how the SPD won back the representation criteria again.

## **ONGOING TRANSNATIONAL STRUGGLES IN LOGISTICS — WHAT IS THE BUSINESS MODEL OF THE FUTURE?**

Even in conditions severely unfavorable to Union organizing, it is still possible to fight successfully for workers' rights. This is also the case of workers' organizing in logistics centers of Amazon in Germany and Poland. Amazon has brought a specific, radically authoritative and neoliberal business model into Europe, a model that is based on different kinds of contracts resulting in very bad conditions for any kind of unity; it is based on disciplining and controlling any unity or its efficiency; on non-recognition of Unions and collective negotiations with workers etc. Though German work regulations is quite strict, Amazon still successfully evades it.

The rise of awareness and organizing did not stay hidden for a long time to the management, that took the advantage of the precarious position of most of the employees and the constant threat of losing a job. The implicit threat contributed

to a petition, signed by ca. 1000 employees, saying they are distancing themselves from Union organizing, complaining about “bad publicity” Ver.di, German trade union focused on organizing in service sector, is spreading about Amazon and accusing the Union of molesting the workers in their free time. To avoid the strikes as a result of union activities, Amazon started to move its logistics centers to Poland and Czech Republic, though they primarily still serve the German-speaking markets.



SPD protests outside of the Pošta Slovenije HQ.

Despite all obstacles Ver.di still managed to organize a strike in 2013, the first one to hit Amazon in general, and the number of days with interruptions of work was raising every year since, up to 150 in 2016. Connections and organizing of Amazon workers has soon involved Eastern Europe as well, activating path of communication and organizing across different countries. The strikes didn't bring just a lot of media coverage, but have — way more important — mobilized and activated the workers.

## **POST OF SLOVENIA: CENTRE OF NEW TYPES OF UNION ORGANIZING**

The restrictive social circumstances are calling for more radical union activity. If we want to achieve that, we need to overcome the strategies and methods used by vast majority of unions today. We need to return back to organizing at working place. Capitalists and managements will try to find all the possible ways to disable or at least limit the unions' activities to — for unimpeded profit making — acceptable level. They will use the methods to disrupt the unity and to individualize and pacify the workers.

To limit ourselves to social dialogue and to believe that defensive approach, political trade and legal bargaining around the green table can solve the workers' hardships, is proved to lead to gradual but persistent decrease of rights.

Container terminals, port of Hamburg.



The strongest and the best tool workers can use against ever-growing intensification of work for smaller and smaller wages under unbearable conditions is reciprocal solidarity that needs to extend above one's company, branch, and sector and understand the interlinked dynamics brought in by logistical reorganisation of production. It has become clear that general precarisation is making a simply defensive strategy ineffective: what do we need is not just an organized and interconnected working class that stands in solidarity with the fight of its integral part to defend its gained rights, but the capacity to fight for more.

That's why one of our first steps should be the formation of workers' demands. Considering the intensification of work that materializes in unpaid overtime or limited toilet breaks, one of the first demands should be the respect of 8-hour schedule and new employments to cover the needs, and the next step being the demand to shorten the working hours (while preserving same wages). This kind of demand of course exceeds the level of particular company or branch, and could therefore work as a tool for building workers' solidarity and interconnection. The big challenge is how to articulate this kind of demands across the transnational scale in ways that are able to attack the dominion of wage and to reclaim a different welfare.

Unions as well faces multiple threats and possible ways after this year's successes. All the development so far is based on different, more radical approach to workers' organizing and if they will manage to preserve and develop this model, they will build up workers' power and will step up easier and stronger to new austerity measures of the management. We may conclude with the words of one of the Post of Slovenia syndicalists when the SPD Union regained the representation criteria. Now we need to connect and stay active. This was just a bureaucratic victory, and the paper has no value if we don't keep fighting! To build communicational and organizational infrastructure and to establish long-term activity, starting from the recognition that the Post sector, far from being the last remnant of public enterprises has become one of the main actor for logistics across the whole Europe, is the most important for the near future.



# Counter Logistics & the Transnational Social Strike

A text by *Alessio Lunghi* from Plan C, United Kingdom

**COMMODITIES ARE IN** perpetual motion, produced for exchange, *just in time*, routed through managed wage disparities, across borders and legislative and regulatory spaces, circumventing struggle, pre-empting blockages, monitored and measured. Contemporary capitalism's reliance on the dispersed factory has put in motion a global system, connecting huge production facilities with the retailers in expansive networks of container ports, roads, rail and airports. Our reality of such a system is experienced as a logic that permeates and reshapes our societies in its image. Much has been spoken about the "logistics revolution", but how can we envisage, within this new norm that is tangible everywhere we see and touch, a terrain of struggle that gives us insight to block, curtail, exploit and reshape for the purpose of fighting back, liberating and affirming our rights?

As millions of suffering people embarked on an exodus from the Syrian conflict and the wider region, from all corners of the African continent, escaping war, exploitation and in search of a better life — the question of logistics and its reality posed itself within a social realm. If logistics is both the name of the industry that enables the continuous flow of commodities, it is also its hegemony in our contemporary capitalist world that presents itself as the mechanism which subordinates labour to the domination of capital. A movement that cuts across, that utilises and becomes insubordinate to the needs of commodity production, that rebels against exploitation, wage inequalities and racial hierarchies and is therefore a movement counter to this assumed stable reality of logistics.

In his essay *Logistics, Counter-Logistics, and the Communist Prospect* ([https://desarquivo.org/sites/default/files/short\\_circuit\\_a\\_counterlogistics\\_reader.pdf](https://desarquivo.org/sites/default/files/short_circuit_a_counterlogistics_reader.pdf)), Jasper Barnes notes that:

...we might imagine, then, a logistics against logistics, a counter-logistics which employs the conceptual and technical equipment of the industry in order to identify and exploit bottlenecks, to give our blockaders a sense of where they stand within the flows of capital. This counter-logistics might be a proletarian art of war to match capital's own *ars belli*. Imagine if our blockaders knew exactly which commodities the containers at particular berths, or on particular ships, contained; imagine if they could learn about the origin and destination of these commodities and calculate the possible effects — functionally and in dollars — of delays or interruptions in particular flows. Possession of such a counter-logistical system, which might be as crude as a written inventory, would allow antagonists to focus their attention where it would be most effective.

To understand what the “counter” in “counter-logistics” implies we start with a definition of what the social dimension of logistics means in reality. Let's take a common example: *Deliveroo*.

## **PUSH THE BUTTON**

When we click the order button we set in motion a whole set of actions, activity and social relations. Data is transmitted over the internet to a virtual server based in one of many data centers, with military grade security, receives our request and gets placed in a digital queue, processed and stored in a da-



tabase, an automated response acknowledges our order with a human like affect. Within milliseconds a rider is geo-located and receives a notification via their smart phone with an order and restaurant location, already processed with other inputs (weather, traffic, availability). The algorithm has chosen. Meanwhile a restaurant receives the order and kitchen staff, timed and pre-estimated, cook your dish. 15 minutes later a rider turns up. Food is picked up, and the quickest route from A-to-B is chosen using triangulation and GPS. All the while you monitor the progress and location of the rider until finally they reach their destination in an average time of 32 minutes.

This process, beyond the technology that has enabled it, is predicated on the presumption of labour power to be subordinated to it, and not just the labour of the cook or the rider. The food was grown and farmed many thousands of miles away, transported by road then airfreighted, tracked and monitored in the same data centres, then to distribution points and into warehouses, picking and packed by often migrant labour, to the retailers. All through this process many types of labour were put to work, disciplined by the expropriation of commons into markets, denying any alternative or escape from the dependency of wage and income. It is the wage and income that offers the key to access our own social reproductive needs and we are slaves to it for this very purpose.

This chain of exploitation that is the real human costs of logistics becomes invisible to those outside of it, its smooth running and continuous delivery is testament to the invisibility of the process. Only when the flow is disrupted, halted and staggered do we see and acknowledge the real agency with which it continues to function. Understanding where and how these chains are organised, what created them, what maintains them is crucial for those of us that refuse to accept this control over our labour and lives.

## **A TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF COUNTER-LOGISTICS**

Our counter-logistics has to be transnational, the competitive pole to this opposition, nationalism, only offers us class compromises, racism and the continuation of things by other means.

Migrant workers block a logistic hub in northern Italy during a strike.



What would it take to transport a tonne of aid from London to Rojava? Or to safely transport 10,000 migrants from Libya to the shores of Italy? What would it take for all those that agree — on tactics and strategy to all meet up in the same place, the same time and take action together? What would it mean to our self-understanding to watch on our screens as container ship after container ship rack up huge costs unable to dock? What if the algorithms cannot react fast enough to changing social conditions? What resources and social relationships are required to create these counter-logistical moments? Accepting this reality, how do we struggle against it if we are to regain our control? What would a transnational counter-logistics movement look like? What is produced where? What are the processes that connect points together? What are the real social antagonisms around the wage, welfare and residency? What can we learn through the strike against the border by millions of migrants?

The effects of the changes in legislation and the logistics of exploitation has to be countered with the counter-logistics of the circulation of struggles, of information and experiences, with the know-how of where and when to block to aid the struggles many thousands of miles. The aim is to put crisis into capital, forcing it to a position of political compromise and then irrelevance, pushing back and in turn creating the space and time to reconstitute ourselves as an offensive movement that does not only produce itself as an opposing force but a force that produces and reproduces society outside the social domination of capital. For us, the project of confronting logistics and the need to organise transnationally is one and the same.



# Around the **Logistics Paradigm**

A text by *Nicola Carella* from Berlin Migrant Strikers, Germany

**IT IS NOW** beyond doubt that after the long crisis begun in 2007, the neoliberal model has entered a phase of profound restructuring. We are witnessing not online economic reorganization (labor market, international agreements, financial policies), but also a new (loud, but fragile) narration that is said to be almost a government-led counter-globalization, as shown by Trump's victory and the case of Brexit in the UK.

At this stage, logistics is taking on a crucial importance, increasingly emerging as the pivot around which this global reorganization of neoliberalism is centered. From the point of view of the development of the productive forces, logistics is the currently most dynamic sector in the economy. The management of goods and services flows is becoming more and more central to produce value, also thanks to the close connection existing with the latest technology developments. The most striking example of this trend is Amazon, whose warehouses are increasingly exploiting the possibilities offered by the algorithmization of the work processes.

However, logistics is not just the core of the neoliberal production reorganization. Logistics is, in fact, delineating as the new paradigm on which all social relationships are reorganized. For this reason it seems worth trying, assuming oneself the risk of a possible “stretch”, to use it as a materialistic reading key to understand the direction of the current political and social transformations. The field in which this process is most evident is that of work relationships. In fact, there is a sort of “logisticization” of the work relationships, through a wide restructuring based on the algorithmic processes. The development and use of increasingly complex artificial intelligence is deeply changing the relationship between constant capital and living labour. On the one hand, machines increasingly able to learn and adapt are replacing tasks that until a few years ago were the exclusive prerogative of workers, such as the selection and sorting of consumer goods and the meeting of demand and supply of goods and services. On the other hand, there is a transformation of the role of living labour, that must increasingly adapt to the digitization process. What is happening is a kind of exchange of roles between constant capital and variable capital on which the logistics paradigm basically is based. While machines tend to replace and expropriate the living work of their cognitive and creative abilities, workers tend to become machines and be evaluated as such. In this direction go, for example, the intensification of working processes, the lengthening of working time and the return of the cotty, the measurement of productivity based on the variable *number of pieces produced per unit of time*, the unit of typical machine measure.

It is clear that this exchange of roles is based on a narration through which logistics justifies its expansion. In fact, machines, however intelligent, remain machines, means of production without any need for reproduction, as they do not eat and do not sleep, do not strike and do not have children. Besides, the use and exploitation of living labor remains as a dynamic source of profit, pushing for an historical retreat of capital that is increasingly using archaic methods such as extraction of absolute surplus value through lengthening of the working day or cancelling fixed working hours and intensifying the pace of production.

Logistics does not only act on the work relations, but also on the class composition. As a matter of fact, the centrality of the migrant figure emerges within the logistic sector. The management of goods and services flows goes hand in hand with the management of flows of people and humans, arising from wars, poverty and famines, and embedded within such dynamics. The exploitation of the migrant labor force, which is inherently precarious and embodies the *just-in-time* exploitation, becomes the mainstay of this logisticization of social relations and production relationships.



A migrant jumps on containers in the in the border town and logistical passage of Idomeni (Greece), along the Balkan route/Greece-Central Europe corridor.

By reading this transformations we must, in our opinion, make a double effort. First of all, the effort should be directed to read the precarisation processes (also linked to nationalistic movements) that subtract bargaining power to migrants in the logistics industry. An effort that also means giving new and more strength to the struggles for universal unconditional income, minimal inter-categories wage (we think of the US alliance today between the 15 dollar hourly movement and Black Live Matters) and the right of citizenship unbundled from work by discussing and using common claims that can help to connect struggles transnationally, such as a European residence permit, a European minimum wage and a European welfare. A second effort is to promote grass-root unionism within logistics (from Gig Economy to Amazon), a contamination between existing unions and forms of precarious self-organization. In this respect, our newborn experience of Critical Workers, wants to be a suggestion, to be further developed, for organizing and supporting labor conflicts outside the trade unions, but not in contradiction with them. Obviously the limit of such experiments is often the lack of willingness on the side of the unions themselves to act in collaboration with self-organized groups.

Supporting the organization of conflicts, sharing information, imagination and transnational solidarity structures is, in our view, an exciting task for the TSS as a platform, within and against the logistics machine. We use the website and the mailing list to tell these experiences, a sort of newsletter that talks about logistics and immigration by sharing organizational forms and even cross-polling (for example, Plan C's analysis on riders has been very useful to us in building reports with the mobilized riders in Berlin). We should create an editorial board composed by all the nodes that can update the site and select the materials.

And yet, widening the look beyond the work relationship and the migrant composition of living labor, we can even see a tendency towards the logisticization of decision-making and governance processes. In this, the empty German authoritarian technicism that imposed austerity on Greece ignoring the referendum was a point of no return. By now, supranational bodies are correlated to each other according to a rigid scheme, from the top of a black box to the lower levels and more peripheral and local powers. The undisputed government flow is, as the flow of capital into logistics, similar to a physical law, a mathematical axiom, armored by the rhetoric of legality, efficiency, decorum, productivity, and optimization of public spending. That is why we look with interest to the block of the Hamburg port, as an expression of conflict during the G20 days. Do not contest the decision-making process protected by the red zone — Black Box, but block the logistics, capital flow and wealth that is managed by the authoritative Black Box and symbolically the flow of governance. It is in the flow block along with the development of political subjectivity within the flows that exists for us the present, difficult, but possible and even necessary, of the social strike and the TSS platform.





Porters and other migrants fill the streets of Bologna (Italy) the day after the first national strike in the logistics warehouses. 23/03/2013

## WHAT IS THE TSS PLATFORM?

The Transnational Social Strike (TSS) Platform aims at involving different kinds of workers — women and men, those employed in factories, those who experience the normality of precarity, locals and migrants — in a political process against subordination and exploitation. It is open to workers, groups and unions across Europe and beyond that share a common goal.

### What do we mean by transnational social strike and why to start a process towards this goal?

We experience every day that things in the workplaces and in society have changed. Organization of labor struggles is weakened by the divisions between those who work in the same hub, factory, school, call center etc. Solidarity is challenged by the differences of contracts, time of employment, political conditions such as residence permits or welfare rights. Labour disputing is more and more difficult and it is often not enough to stop the increasing precarization. National divisions imposed on labor obstruct the capacity to fight back against the transnational dimension of production and exploitation. As a result, a little conquest by one can sometimes be a loss for many others: be they workers in other countries with lower wages and income or temp workers in the same factory, young interns or migrants and refugees forced to work for free to get their visa.

The TSS process is born from the assumption that there is no technical way out to this situation: only a political movement can overturn the state of affairs according to which we are just numbers and shares in the balance sheets of the European technocrats and capitalists. The strike is for us the name of a power that aims at damaging the pillars on which this unequal and unjust society is grounded. Building the conditions to exercise this power is what we need in order to overthrow the current state of subordination to employers and politicians.

Therefore, today the strike needs to be transnational and social.

Transnational because capital works and thinks transnationally, creating divisions among countries, wages and working conditions to weaken us and make profits. Only by facing and overturning these divisions we can aspire at increasing our power and make ourselves heard. In this, we refuse to be labeled either as anti-EU or pro-EU: we deem insufficient to organize at the national level, as the transnational dimension is our battlefield and Europe is for us a common space of organization where to find allies and enemies.

Social because the power of the strike cannot be restricted to some categories of workers, trade unions or groups of supporters. The strike is a weapon that everyone has to be able to hold and use throughout society: even those who are constantly changing jobs, the migrants who risk their residence permit, the students and the unemployed. The strike can become for them a chance to be in the frontline, to organize and to overthrow the political conditions of exploitation. There must be no exclusion from the strike movement: this is the basis of our understanding of solidarity and social strike.

The TSS Platform is a political infrastructure to confront these challenges. It is a reservoir of experiences and tactics to politicize labor struggles, to connect social and labour struggles, and make their claims heard well beyond each group's and union's capacity. It is a space of organization, communication and encounter where different figures of labour can think together about how to develop a common discourse, how to support common European claims capable of being instruments of emancipation and how to build the conditions of possibility of the transnational social strike.

[www.transnational-strike.info](http://www.transnational-strike.info)

