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Rough Terrains: Wages as Mobilizing Factor in German and Italian Amazon Distribution Centers*

In 2018, Amazon introduced a minimum hourly wage of 15 US dollars (around 13.70 euro) for all of its 250,000 permanent employees and additional 100,000 seasonal workers in the United States.¹ Yet since then, wages in Amazon's European locations have not been adjusted accordingly, and in fact continue to diverge dramatically. Workers and their trade unions have demanded higher wages and better working conditions in labor disputes at several European Amazon locations. Since 2013, industrial action has spread from Germany to France, Poland, Spain and Italy, and continues to gather momentum internationally. Nevertheless, Amazon's management refuses to negotiate contracts with most European trade unions,² while at the same time the global union federation UNI Global Union as well as national trade unions lack international strategies or goals to this end. Accordingly, industrial action remains widespread but by and large unsuccessful.

In this article, I critically discuss the demand for equal wages for all Amazon workers across Europe. The demand was initially proposed by the activist and grassroot union network Transnational Social Strike Platform (TSS), which has actively supported the Amazon strikes for

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¹ Amazon, Annual Report 2018, Seattle 2019, [<https://ir.aboutamazon.com/annual-reports/>].

² Two remarkable exceptions are agreements negotiated and signed in the Spanish location San Fernando de Henares with the non-union workplace committee in 2015, and in the Italian location Castel San Giovanni in 2018. See: Jörn Boewe / Johannes Schulten, *The long struggle of the Amazon Employees*, Brussels 2019. As these are the only cases in which agreements were signed, they are interpreted as exceptions confirming the rule.

years.³ The demand resonates with national trade union activities to some extent, as they seek to compel Amazon to enter into (or, where already mandated by law, improve) collective bargaining agreements and thereby raise wages above sectoral standards. Trade unions criticize Amazon's one-sided wage setting, counterposing political demands for profit sharing and improved living standards for Amazon workers. Beyond that, TSS's main argument consists of the notion that equal wages across all European distribution centers would render Amazon's strategic exploitation of national differences in wage levels and labor regulations futile. In this sense, a continent-wide wage hike for Amazon workers would constitute a major step forward both politically as well as socially.

When defining an agenda for a European strike campaign, the following minimum preconditions must be met: firstly, the agenda must take up Amazon workers' demands, at least approximately, on a Europe-wide level. Secondly, demands must be addressed to an accessible (juridical) contact person. Thirdly, the agenda must overcome national particularities concerning trade unions and their respective political orientation.

In the following, I situate Amazon's wage structure in the broader, general European context. Wage levels diverge strongly across Europe, making it difficult to define the right amount to demand as the baseline for equal wages. Next, I discuss insights into workers' strike motivations, using the example of three Amazon locations in Germany and Italy. These examples demonstrate that increased wages played no significant role in either the massive strike mobilizations nor in the smaller, recurring protests and stoppages. In a third step, I discuss various trade-union strategies before concluding with suggestions for future campaigns.

This article is based on data gathered from studies on changes in sales labor and worker subjectivities conducted over the course of my doctoral dissertation (from 2016 until today). My focus lies on "simple"

³ Transnational Social Strike Platform, *Strike the Giant! Transnational Organization against Amazon*, 2019, [www.transnational-strike.info/wp-content/uploads/Strike-the-Giant_TSS-Journal.pdf].

Amazon workers' perceptions of their working conditions and labor disputes in order to better examine their strike motivations. This article refers to statistical data from two surveys of 223 Amazon workers (73 strikers, 150 non-strikers) in Leipzig (2014) and Rhineberg (2016). The article's strategic deliberations are based on my analysis of interviews with six German and four Italian strikers as well as five trade union officials conducted between 2016 and 2019.

The European Wage Structure

Wages interact with all levels of society—from individuals who rely on them for their daily needs, groups of employers and workers who negotiate them, to the state that defines working conditions through, for example, statutory minimum wages. The latter is of particular importance in the context of the European Union, where minimum wages and average pay levels vary dramatically despite the existence of a common market. Minimum hourly wages in the EU range from € 11.97 in Luxembourg to € 1.72 in Bulgaria,⁴ while some countries, such as Italy, have no statutory minimum wage at all. Pay levels evince a similar picture: Eurostat data shows that the average hourly wage for all 28 (now 27) EU member-states combined in 2017 was € 15.23, with € 27.61 in Denmark as the highest and € 2.34 in Bulgaria as the lowest.⁵

This dramatic inequality is also visible at a regional level, such as when comparing Northwestern, Southeastern and Southwestern Europe, where divergence between wages grew during the post-2008 crisis years. Moreover, even if the economies of Southeastern Europe are currently in the midst of a boom, wages nevertheless remain far below the European average (see graph based on Eurostat data).

In wage terms, Europe is divided into a Southern and a Northwestern region, but the graph shows that Southwestern and Southeastern Eu-

⁴ WSI, WSI Mindestlohn datenbank, Düsseldorf 2019, [www.boeckler.de/pdf/ta_mldb_2019.pdf].

⁵ Eurostat, Wages per hour for EU 28, EU 18 and the single states for 2017, Brussels 2017.

rope also differ profoundly.⁶ This divergence appears more ambivalent when political factors are taken into account, however, as commonalities across borders and regions and differences within nations emerge in equal measure. These conditions comprise complicated ground for defining an equalized wage level throughout Europe.

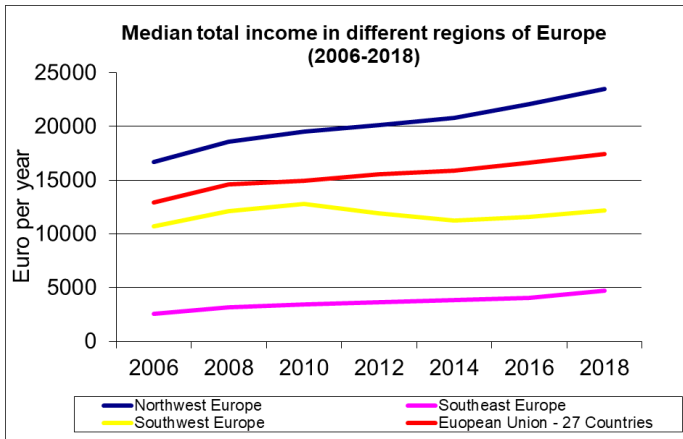


Figure 1: Median total income in different regions of Europe (2006–2018). Note: Northwestern Europe includes Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, Southwestern Europe includes Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and Southeastern Europe includes Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania. Own figure, data source: Eurostat 2020.⁷

⁶ Sabrina Apicella / Helmuth Hildebrand, Ein internationalistisch-linker Projektvorschlag für Europa, OXI, July 1, 2019, [https://oxiblog.de/ein-internationalistisch-linker-projektvorschlag-fuer-europa/https://oxiblog.de/ein-internationalistisch-linker-projektvorschlag-fuer-europa/].

⁷ Eurostat, Mean and median income by age and sex – EU-SILC and ECHP surveys, Brussels 2020, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di03&lang=en].

Wages in German and Italian Amazon Distribution Centers

Amazon entered the European market in 1998, only four years after its founding in Seattle. Since then, the company has become Europe's largest online retailer. Amazon adheres to specific logics when selecting locations for its distribution centers—known as “fulfillment centers” (FCs) in official company jargon, in reference to the “fulfillment” of costumers' requests. Potential sites must be connected to transport infrastructures such as harbors, train stations, airports or highways in order to drag and eject goods quickly. Avoiding disruptions (such as strikes) through a tight network of FCs able to reroute deliveries has also become a factor. Moreover, Amazon positions its FCs strategically in order to better serve customers with high purchasing power. The company takes advantage of local and regional differences in wages, tax law and the support of local decision makers, who in turn are often open to establishing favorable conditions for setting up operations there (such as reduced commercial taxes or expedited building permits). Cheap labor recruitment and support from local institutions (as varied as temporary employment or welfare agencies such as Germany's so-called “Jobcenters”) are crucial, as FCs are labor-intensive and characterized by high turnover. These considerations have allowed Amazon to open locations serving the German market from Poland, where workers earn little more than € 3.00 per hour (compared to around € 11.00 in Germany).⁸ In this sense, Amazon's European wages reproduce inequalities throughout Europe and undercut the European average wage level.

How do the German and Italian locations fit into this picture? Alongside the United Kingdom, Germany is the most important Euro-

⁸ In Germany, strike actions have taken place in nine out of 13 Fulfillment Centers. With regard to working conditions and protests in Polish Amazon locations see: Ralf Ruckus, *Confronting Amazon*, Jacobin, March 31, 2016, [<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/amazon-poland-poznan-strikes-workers/>]; Amazon workers and supporters, *Stop Treating Us Like Dogs!*, in: Jake Alimahomed-Wilson / Immanuel Ness, *Choke Points*, London 2018, pp. 96–109.

pean market for online retail.⁹ According to the German service sector union ver.di, Amazon currently operates 13 FCs in Germany with a core workforce of around 13,000 employees. Each FC is formally incorporated as an independent limited liability company, which allows Amazon to avoid establishing a national, company-wide supervisory board as prescribed by German law whenever the number of employees exceeds a certain threshold.¹⁰ Moreover, Amazon does not adhere to any regional collective bargaining agreements and instead defines wages at its various locations unilaterally. Hourly wages in German FCs therefore differ from region to region: € 10.78 in Leipzig, € 11.27 in Rhineberg (as of August 2019), and € 11.71 in Winsen (as of December 2019). If determined by collective bargaining, the starting wage for a retail worker in Leipzig would be € 12.23 per hour, while a worker at Schenker Logistics would earn € 10.33. Ralf Kleber, Amazon's "Country Manager" in Germany, recently stated in an interview that in 2020 Amazon wages begin at a minimum of € 11.10 per hour, and reach a monthly gross pay of around € 2,500 including awards and bonuses.¹¹

The Italian population, by contrast, disposes over much lower purchasing power, and online ordering is not as common as in Germany. Amazon nevertheless continues to invest in the Italian market and operates four FCs in Castel San Giovanni, Passo Corese, Vercelli and Torrazza with 6,900 employees on permanent contracts as of 2019, serving both the Italian as well as neighboring markets. Unlike in other countries, most notably Germany, in Italy Amazon is obligated by law to comply with a collective bargaining agreement. In order to circum-

⁹ A study by McKinsey showed that the German population has the highest annual rate of online orders per capita, namely 24, while in Italy only two orders are placed per person. See: McKinsey, Studie: Jeder Deutsche erhält im Schnitt 24 Pakete pro Jahr, 2019, [www.mckinsey.de/news/presse/2019-06-17-postal-network].

¹⁰ For further information on specific conditions in German and Italian industrial relations and legal structures see: Bruno Cattero / Matra D'Onofrio, Organizing and Collective Bargaining in the Digitized 'Tertiary Factories' of Amazon: A Comparison Between Germany and Italy, in: Edoardo Ales et al. (Eds.), Working in digital and smart organizations, Cham 2018, pp. 141–164.

¹¹ Michael Gassmann, Wir zwingen niemanden, mit uns zu arbeiten, Die Welt, January 16, 2020, [www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article204976598/Amazon-Deutschlandchef-Ralf-Kleber-Wir-zahlen-ordentliche-Gehaelter-Darauf-sind-wir-stolz.html].

vent the labor disputes that have plagued the logistics sector in the Po Valley for years, the company has oriented towards commerce sector collective-bargaining standards for its FC workers in Castel San Giovanni, a town located in the Valley near Piacenza. The resulting starting salary of a worker there ranges from € 9.03 to € 10.53 per hour depending on additional remuneration (compared to the logistics sector, where € 10.43 is the norm).¹² Mariangela Marseglia, Amazon Country Manager for Italy and Spain, noted in 2018 with regard to Italian wages: “On average, a person working in one of our warehouses earns 1,400 to 1,500 euro per month, and has a range of benefits from private medical insurance to discounts.”¹³ She announced a 25 percent (€ 350 to € 375) wage increase in 2019, albeit without giving concrete figures for new average wages.¹⁴ This evidences a significant gap vis-a-vis the monthly earnings of Amazon workers in Germany.

Amazon not only sets up shops in different countries with different wage levels and legal regulations (e. g. with view to the applicability of collective bargaining), but also orients towards regional wage levels within each country, as the differences in German wages show. Moreover, Amazon’s starting pay actively underbids sectoral wages for industries and service work, which lie at an average of € 17.78 per hour in Germany and € 15.42 in Italy.¹⁵

Strike Activities

Workers in both German and Italian FCs organize in trade unions to negotiate their working conditions, including wages. In Germany, ver.di has repeatedly called for negotiations to sign a collective agreement in

¹² Amazon applied the collective contract for logistics to the other three Italian locations.

¹³ Beniamino Pagliaro, Amazon bets on Italy: 800 million investments and 1,700 new jobs by end 2018, *La Stampa*, July 9, 2018, [www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2018/07/09/news/amazon-bets-on-italy-800-million-investments-and-1-700-new-jobs-by-end-2018-1.34030553].

¹⁴ Teleborsa, Amazon, nel 2019 creati in Italia oltre 1400 posti di lavoro, *Il Messaggero*, December 18, 2019, [www.ilmessaggero.it/economia/news/amazon_nel_2019_creati_in_italia_oltre_1400_posti_di_lavoro-4934803.htm].

¹⁵ According to Eurostat, Mean and median income (see note 6).

line with established retail sector standards, but Amazon management refuses to even meet with the union and workplace representatives. Strike actions began in April 2013 and have totaled over 300 strike days at eight locations across the country.¹⁶ The strikes have so far failed to achieve their goal. Amazon management claims to “orient” towards collective bargaining standards for logistics, a sector with lower wages in Germany, and points out that wages lie above the legal hourly minimum wage (€ 9.19 in 2019 and € 9.35 in 2020). Lasting remarkably long, the strikes are carried forward by active rank-and-file members and supportive local trade-union officials. A tightly knit nationwide network for exchange and strategy development is already well-established.

A different picture emerges in Italy, where in 2018 Amazon management signed its first-ever—and thus far only—agreement with trade unions anywhere in the world. This agreement supplements the collective contract imposed on Amazon by Italian law.¹⁷ The agreement improved scheduling, introduced voluntary night shifts, distributed weekend shifts equally, and also guaranteed higher remuneration during night shifts for roughly 2,000 workers at the Castel San Giovanni FC. This result was achieved primarily due to the organizing efforts of three trade unions—CGIL, CISL and UIL¹⁸—and a strike of around 500 workers in November 2017 (as part of a wave of strikes and protests at Amazon in Germany, Poland and Spain on Black Friday). In contrast to *ver.di*, the three Italian trade unions appear to focus primarily on public outreach, political lobbying and consultation work in the plant, and

¹⁶ See Boewe / Schulten, *Long Struggle* (see note 2). It is also worth mentioning that strikers in Germany are paid wage compensation by their trade union, while Italian strikers receive no compensation for pay lost due to strike activities.

¹⁷ This supplementary agreement expired but was renewed in 2019.

¹⁸ The three biggest unions in post-war Italy are the CGIL (General Italian Confederation of Labor), CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions) and UIL (Italian Union of Labor). They differ in terms of identity, ideology and purpose: CGIL has always been linked to left-wing parties (most importantly the Communist Party), CISL is traditionally Christian-democratic, and UIL tends to be connected to the social-democratic Left. For further information see: Salvo Leonardi, *Trade unions and collective bargaining in Italy during the crisis*, in: Steffen Lehndorff / Heiner Dribbusch / Thorsten Schulten, *Rough waters*, Brussels 2018, pp. 87–115.

less on rank-and-file activities or organizing in the FC itself.¹⁹ They also cooperate with the far-right *Unione Generale del Lavoro* (UGL), which is politically close to the Lega party and the neo-fascist *CasaPound* movement. The UGL even signed the contract together with the other unions. Despite the existence of a local contract, no nationwide network of rank-and-file or trade-union officials has emerged, nor has any strike activity occurred at other Italian FCs since.

The Italian and German locations have differing and yet roughly similar wage levels (compared to the much lower wages at Polish FCs). The work processes are also more or less the same. Moreover, strikes have taken place in both Germany and Italy—but under different regulatory conditions (minimum wage, legally mandated collective bargaining) and against the backdrop of different trade-union strategies. Nevertheless, only a minority of workers joined the strikes throughout the campaign²⁰—in most locations, a majority of Amazon workers are not unionized and do not participate in strike activities.

What do we know about Amazon workers' motivations to strike? Do they, as the trade unions' mobilizations imply, primarily point to the political side of labor at Amazon—low wages, little worker co-determination, and the refusal to accept a trade-union presence at the workplace? To what extent does the technical and organizational side of labor affect workers' decision to strike, as hinted at in the slogan “We are not robots!” that can be heard at Amazon strikes around the world, highlighting the standardized and Taylorized labor regime?

Mobilizing Factors for Strikes in Germany

Since the first strikes in German FCs in 2013, actions have spread to Poland, France, Spain, Italy, and recently also to the US. With regard to the technical-organizational side, labor at the FCs is transnationally ho-

¹⁹ The grassroots and conflict-oriented trade union *Si Cobas* had members there as well, but currently has no rank-and-file base.

²⁰ The internationalization of trade union activities is described in Boewe / Schulten, *Long Struggle* (see note 2).

mogeneous. Workers execute tasks like picking goods from shelves or packing them. These routines are clocked by hand scanners equipped with software indicating the order, direction, and speed of movements, leaving no time for rest during shifts. Thus, despite being physical, work in an FC can be characterized as a form of digital Taylorism that does indeed generate resistances.²¹

According to the survey conducted in the Leipzig and Rhineberg FCs, dissatisfaction with work processes is a central motivating factor pushing workers to strike. Workers are not only frustrated by the stress caused by the work regime, but are also granted insufficient breaks, have their work constantly monitored, and worry about falling ill. Workplace hierarchies, the lack of co-determination, and limited possibilities to interact with co-workers also contribute to their dissatisfaction.²² One worker from Rhineberg summarized her perception of the working culture as follows: “Get in line and do your job, it would be best if you didn’t say anything.”

The second motivating factor behind workers’ decisions to strike in the two German FCs was their shared heavy reliance on the trade union. My interviews show that, on the one hand, a trusting relationship is associated with trade union officials’ presence in the workplace and with *ver.di*’s support in the confrontation with Amazon. On the other hand—and more importantly—this relationship hinges on worker self-organization creating an everyday trade-union presence as well as sustainable and self-confident structures to serve as a counterweight to management. By doing so, workers in Germany find a way out of their work-related dissatisfaction as well as a form of protection against their superiors.

²¹ In Germany this has been discussed as the real subsumption of sales labor by Amazon, especially in Sabrina Apicella, *Amazon in Leipzig*, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Berlin 2016, [www.rosalux.de/publikation/id/8801/amazon-in-leipzig/]; Georg Barthel / Jan Rottenbach, *Reelle Subsumtion und Insubordination im Zeitalter der digitalen Maschinerie*, *PROKLA*, 47 (2017), 2, pp. 249–269.

²² For further reading on the results of the survey see: Sabrina Apicella / Helmut Hildebrandt, *Divided we stand*, in: *WOLG*, 13 (2019), 1, pp. 172–189; Apicella, *Amazon Leipzig* (see note 21).

Certainly, the precarity of workers plays also a role. One important factor in workers' decisions in Leipzig and Rhineberg was whether they were employed under permanent contracts, which tended to favor self-organization and strike activities, or whether they had temporary or seasonal contracts, which tended to hold workers back from striking.

Surprisingly, wage levels and economic security did not play a role for the German strikers, despite wages being below-average for retail workers in Germany and even if collective bargaining contracts—which are central to the trade union's mobilization—regulated wage levels. In fact, I observed a degree of contentment with the wages among strikers and non-strikers, who often compared their incomes to the lower pay found at other companies in the region.

Exploring Motivating Factors in Castel San Giovanni

Explorative interviews with strikers in Piacenza showed that they have similar attitudes towards work and strike intentions as their German colleagues. A key factor pushing workers to strike is work dissatisfaction: they named the physically and mentally demanding routines, arbitrary task and shift assignments, and unannounced overtime that conflicted with everyday life planning and leisure. They also complained that they worked “like dogs,” that their performance was measured, and that everything was about “numbers” while their efforts went unappreciated.

With regard to the second factor, trust in trade unions, the protective function of a trade union membership was evident. Nevertheless, there are also key differences in strike motivation at the two locations. While German strikers fight for trade-union recognition in the company, this has already been achieved in Castel San Giovanni due to Italy's favorable national law consolidating trade-union presence and co-determination on the one hand, and the successful negotiation of an additional agreement after the mobilizations on the other. The Italian strikers problematized their trade union activities as an extra burden, claiming that it

was time-consuming and sometimes led to disadvantages in daily work routines (like assignment to unpopular tasks), not to mention disputes between workers concerning the collective agreement itself, which some perceived as insufficient. As in Germany, their pathway out of job dissatisfaction was not to commit to trade-union activities, and instead demand personal development opportunities for advancement within the company—with which Amazon failed to comply.

Wages were more openly problematized as a mobilizing factor in the interviews in Castel San Giovanni than in Rhineberg before the first strike in 2017. By that time workers expressed a feeling of injustice, arguing that their commitment to work was not adequately compensated. After wages increased due to the supplementary agreement, however, perceptions changed: now, Amazon wages were seen as decent, reliable and on-time. Workers appreciated that Amazon's wage levels did not differ based on gender, age or origin. Wages and employment were also perceived as the lesser of two evils compared to other regional employers. In the Italian logistics sector, for instance, workers were not paid on-time or at all, faced unannounced overtime, worked in non-air-conditioned distribution centers, and work processes were less well-organized. Amazon can thus take advantage of the harsh situation on the Italian labor market, permitting its own working conditions and wages to be perceived as less bad. That is an important factor in strengthening ties to employment, especially for employees with permanent contracts, which points to the last important mobilization factor for strikes: namely, temporary contracts appeared to hold workers back.

Conclusion

The proposal of equal wages for Amazon employees across Europe invites us to consider the role of wages in the labor struggles at Amazon and situate them in the context of European wage structures. We can see that the general European wage structure favors capital and economies

in some regions of the Northwest, but disadvantages European employees and poor populations, especially in Southeastern and Southwestern Europe. In this context, Amazon not only pays their employees' wages significantly below the European average, but also actively underprices labor as workers in industry and services earn an average of € 17.78 per hour in Germany and € 15.42 in Italy.²³ The German case demonstrates that one way through which Amazon seeks to lower wages is by refusing to sign collective agreements. If it does, as in Italy, it always chooses agreements that favor poorer working conditions and grant minimal concessions. Despite different national strategies, it is clear that the management orients its wages towards the low end of the scale. Both strategies affect the entire commerce and logistics sectors, where Amazon sets standards. Overall, these factors cast doubt on Amazon's self-depiction as a comparatively good employer that does not profit from its low-wage policy.

Departing from this macro-level analysis, it makes sense to confront the company with the demand for wealth redistribution. That would economically allow workers to participate in the profits and take on Amazon's unilateral definition of wage levels as one element of its political work structure. Yet one condition for developing international strategies defined at the beginning of this article was that the agenda must take up the exigencies of Amazon workers at least roughly on a Europe-wide level. Demands for equal wages and strikes do not tackle all sources of discontent with the technical-organizational as well as the political side of labor. As my research shows, poor salaries and exploitation are not the most pressing motivating factors for mobilizations. The German and Italian strikers do not even demand higher wages as a top priority. This finding is remarkable, given that within the international trade-union network, the main demands clearly point to signing collective bargaining contracts, which primarily allows for negotiated material improvements. This divergence—on one side the trade union's prime instrument and on the other side the strikers' wish to change the

²³ See Eurostat data above for the year 2017.

technical and organizational side of labor because it causes stress and illness—needs to be taken seriously.

Relative satisfaction with wages might be caused by the fact that German workers can rely on a minimum wage at any job that is rather close to wages at Amazon. On the other side, Amazon has difficulties hiring enough workers. Germany also offers unemployment benefits to persons who have not been previously employed. Even if this welfare system is highly repressive and exclusionary towards migrants, it has weakened the existential threat of unemployment. Overall, German Amazon workers are well-aware of their ability to leave the job, even if they prefer being employed.

At the same time, Italy only introduced a welfare structure for poor households and unemployed persons called “citizen’s income,” similar to German unemployment benefits, in 2019. Workers had no experience with it when I interviewed them, nor did they mention it as an influencing factor. Moreover, there is no regulated minimum wage in Italy, and the country’s high unemployment levels make workers comparatively replaceable. Leaving the job is thus not a plausible alternative to working at Amazon, which possibly lowers willingness to participate in strikes, especially among temporary workers. Based on these considerations, my hypothesis is that the demand for higher wages resonates better with workers in the Southern parts of Europe than with Northwestern European Amazon workers. This is mainly due to different wage levels and welfare services, which give wages a different weight for individual engagement in strikes at different countries. A European campaign will thus face challenges connecting to the demands and problems of striking workers equally, should it choose wages as the dominant campaign issue.

How can we formulate a political demand for wealth redistribution that promises benefits for Amazon’s core workforce as well as for seasonal workers who only stay on over the Christmas season? Who would be an accessible (juridical) contact person and what kind of agenda could overcome the national particularities of trade unions and their

political orientation? Our demand should, in my view, address the European Union instead of Amazon, as it has the greatest possible legal competencies over its 27 member-states and plays a key role in regulating the European labor market. For comprehensive, top-down wealth distribution we ought to discuss Europe-wide and largely identical welfare benefits free of repression and discriminatory exclusion. This would lead to a radical redistribution of wealth both regionally as well as in terms of the poor populations who would benefit most. We should also include a European vision of self-organized working sectors as public commons—in, for example, health care or education—which would include a vision of workers determining the technical and organizational side of their employment as well as democratic self-administration and living wages as the political side thereof. Our plan should also include serious steps towards a transnational climate plan, premised on decentralized, renewable energy and mobility as a commons, i. e., free and out of the hands of (energy) companies. This could open a debate around an utopian vision for Europe, linking up with demands for the self-determined and democratic organization of work and social security, including the natural foundations of human life. Faced with the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, strikes at Amazon warehouses in Italy and the US are currently gathering momentum once again, opening a window of opportunity for reviving the debate on international strategy.²⁴

A shared subjective experience among Amazon workers and strikers irrespective of their national location is the factory-like work process and the squeezing of the workforce. Working to the beat of machines and algorithms is a common reality at Amazon FCs in Europe and around the world. This experience is likely more suitable for an immediate European mobilization of Amazon workers. Appealing to these shared repressive working conditions potentially opens the debate to

²⁴ For further information see for example Hilary Russ, Instacart, Amazon workers strike as labor unrest grows during coronavirus crisis, Reuters, March 30, 2020, [www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-instacart/instacart-amazon-workers-strike-as-labor-unrest-grows-during-coronavirus-crisis-idUSKBN21H3AV].

workers' self-organized and self-determined control over processes and dignified working conditions. Common strike activities and developing an international strategy with Amazon workers as protagonists to tackle the company's organizational as well as political standards are paths that should be continued. They could also invite ideas for improving working conditions along the supply chain, including in transportation and production, as well as for sustainable organization of every-day consumption.

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