

EDITORIAL

Special Issue: Organizing transnational collective action within multi-level employment relations: When and how does transnational solidarity occur?

Ilana Nussbaum Bitran¹, Marcus Franke², Philipp Gies³, Heiner Heiland⁴, Franziska Laudenbach⁵ (guest editors of this special issue)

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Work and employment are constantly changing. Most recently, globalization and digitalization bear particular responsibility for this. Over the past decades, the internationalization of the economy has led to a cross-border organization of value chains. But as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) show, the world is by no means borderless. The result is rather a “multiplication of labor” that entails heterogenization, diversification and intensification for workers. Competition between companies and company units is increasing and, according to Wolfgang Streeck, national systems of industrial relations are losing their ability to “unify the regulation of labor relations in industries and companies for the sake of enforcing social equality and solidarity” (Streeck, 1998:63; own translation). As a result, collective action by workers is forced to operate transnationally (Seeliger 2019). At the same time, new challenges arise in the course of the digitalization of the economy, which undermines established labor relations

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- 1 Research Fellow at Institute Labour and Economy, University of Bremen, Wiener Straße 9, 28359 Bremen, Germany, nussbaum@uni-bremen.de
 - 2 Research Fellow, Centre for Labour Studies and Political Education (zap), University of Bremen, Celsiusstraße 2, 28359 Bremen, Germany, MFranke1@uni-bremen.de
 - 3 Research Fellow at Centre for Labour Studies and Political Education (zap), University of Bremen, Celsiusstraße 2, 28359 Bremen, Germany, philipp.gies@uni-bremen.de
 - 4 Research Fellow at Institut for Sociology, University of Göttingen, Platz der Göttinger Sieben 3, 37073 Göttingen, Germany, heiner.heiland@uni-goettingen.de
 - 5 Research Fellow at Centre for Labour Studies and Political Education (zap), University of Bremen, Celsiusstraße 2, 28359 Bremen, Germany, f.laudenbach@uni-bremen.de

and regulatory dispositives. Concentrated, this can be seen in the field of platform work. Precarious employment conditions tend to go hand in hand with increasing heteronomy and a deficit of employees' ability to shape labor policies (Heiland 2022).

As a result, the emergence and development of solidarity as an "independent determinant of human societies" (Alexander 1980:6) and as a starting point and resource of labor becomes precarious and workers' power resources are weakened. However, at the same time, the globalization of production together with the digitalization and the transnationalization of working relations open up new possibilities and spaces for collective action. In this special issue, we focus on the world of work and especially on the new forms of solidarity that are needed to counter the negative side of the current working world. The following pages present different perspectives and examples of transnational labor solidarity in the globalized world. Taking into consideration how working relations have been changing in the last decades, we ask how collective action has also changed and what it means for the concept of solidarity.

Usually understood within the national container society, solidarity has been called to play a new role beyond the borders of the national state. Both on the international as well as at the transnational level, new places and acts of labor solidarity have emerged to protect workers and to improve their working conditions as well as to fight back neoliberal transnational policies and practices. Solidarity may manifest itself in different forms and spaces. With the advent of globalization, it is also called to extend the scope it can reach. Workers' solidarity has had an international intention since its very beginning but only a few times it became real. Now, with the challenges imposed by this new era, there is not only the intention but also the need to trespass borders. One question still remains: Under what circumstances does transnational solidarity arise, and how is it organized? As we explore these intricate terrains, we are confronted with the pressing question of *when* and the equally important puzzle of *how* to do it.

Our contributors, hailing from diverse academic backgrounds and research perspectives, give insights into the multifaceted dimensions of transnational labor solidarity. Throughout the six papers, they dissect the mechanisms, and the outcomes of collective action that transcends borders.

Ilana Nussbaum Bitran and Irene Dingeldey extend the idea of solidarity developing a typology of acts of solidarity at the transnational level and applying it to the European Minimum Wage Directive. They show the different positions of the social partners and the Member States when discussing the new directive. They conclude that

the Directive can be seen as a form of inclusive solidarity towards social cohesion, but which is only promoted by certain actors.

Franziska Laudenbach and Philipp Gies investigate transnational solidarity in times of the pandemic crisis in the European sectoral social dialogue by highlighting the work during 2020/21 in the two sectors commerce and social services. They show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, social partners engaged in crisis management at various levels and, inter alia, increased their activities at the European sectoral level. They interpret the European sectoral social dialogue as a platform for networking and lobbying, where bridging and bonding elements enhance acts of transnational solidarity.

In his contribution *Transcending Borders? Horizons and Challenges of Global Tech Worker Solidarity*, Valentin Niebler analyzes three examples of transnational workers solidarity of tech workers. Hereby, he outlines existing hurdles and opportunities of transnational collective action within the field of global tech companies. The paper proves that transnational collective action by tech workers is possible although with a limited continuity. The three examples provide evidence that, within the challenging field of tech work, unionization and transnational coordination is feasible. By focusing on actors' collective and transnational activities that are typically not amongst those represented by trade unions, the paper takes up an under-explored dimension of transnational acts of solidarity.

Ladin Bayurgil, Claudia Marà and Valeria Pulignano investigate workers' solidarities in the platform economy. Through qualitative interviews of platform-mediated food delivery couriers in Italy and Belgium, they show how the structures of national labor markets lead to different dependencies on the platforms and thus to different solidarities of their workers. While inclusionary solidarities emerge in Italy, exclusionary solidarities prevail in Belgium, which also leads to different forms and manifestations of collective action.

Jonas Pentzien investigates in his article how alternative conceptions of exchange emerge and proliferate within platform capitalism. For this task he analyzes 18 interviews with founders of cooperatively-structured platforms and explores their strategies to gain legitimacy. Along the codes of identities, value proposition, resources and networks Pentzien systematically unfolds his findings and offers valuable insights on alternative organizations in the digital economy and their legitimation dynamics.

In *Islands of Trust* Hendrik Simon scrutinizes the question of developing transnational solidarity across national borders despite the situation that locations have to act in

competition with each other along the supply chains. Based on case studies, expert interviews and participant-observational research, he identifies “Zones of Uncertainty” within the industrial relations of fragmented workers. Therefore, the author places the element of trust at the center of his investigation to overcome the identified “Zones of Uncertainty”. He elaborates the importance of transnational networks as structures to build up trust among the actors, which foster the development of transnational solidarity.

Finally, in an interview with Gianpaolo Meloni, founding-member of the newly formed Amazon European Works Council, we look at the role of unions and how they helped protect workers' rights during the four-year funding process. We “hear” the need to adapt to technological advancements and international collaboration. Furthermore, the interviewee discusses the importance of ethical consumer choices, the coherence in actions by unions and politicians involving workers in protection efforts and exposing the true nature of some companies.

As you navigate through the immersive contributions in this issue, we invite you to consider the ever-evolving landscape of transnational labor solidarity and the imperative of extending its reach across borders. The pressing question of *how* remains, and it is our hope that this collection of insights and analyses will contribute to shaping the answers.

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