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# Blocking the global factory

## Transnational worker organising in e-commerce and logistics – the case of Amazon

PhD Dissertation

submitted by

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990, the global economy has been transformed through neoliberalisation, marked by the retreat of the state from regulation, the provision of public services, and the gradual replacement of dependable, standardised employment by informal, contingent and precarious forms of work (Ness, 2022). These upheavals have undermined stable labour market conditions, and traditional forms of workers' interest representation through trade unions and collective bargaining, which were based on the standard employment relationship. However, labour scholars have argued that this standard was an historical exception, applicable only to advanced capitalist economies in the Global North and for a relatively short period of time, and that in the rest of the world, work arrangements predicated on insecurity, informality and precariousness have always been the norm (Breman & van der Linden, 2014).

Scholars of capitalism have noted its remarkable capacity to revolutionise the productive forces through constantly seeking out novel organizational forms, technologies, lifestyles, modalities of production and exploitation (Harvey, 1990). In the post-war period, the contradictions between production and distribution gave rise to the first, or 'offline' logistics revolution, which profoundly transformed global commerce and transportation through technologies such as barcoding, satellite communications and the intermodal shipping container. More recently, processes of digitalisation, platformisation have had transformative effects on labour and capital, enabling new business models and forms of valorisation based on the capture and analysis of massive amounts of data, as well as on productive processes, giving rise to new forms of labour and precarity. As Moritz Altenried observes, contemporary digital capitalism is not marked by the end of the factory but by its "transformation, multiplication and generalisation" (2017: 198). Digitalised factories have served as an incubator for technological and organisational innovations which have diffused more broadly into other sectors of the global economy. Today, platform-based business models are ubiquitous and digital technologies are implicated in practically every sector of the global economy, from manufacturing, agriculture, warehousing, logistics, transportation, education, and domestic services, while global supply chains increasingly rely on them to transport commodities, deliver services, supply and control labour (Ness, 2022). In this context, a second revolution in e-logistics and e-commerce has occurred, spearheaded by Amazon, which has transformed the global logistics industry through new supply chain management practices, automation, and algorithmic management practices that have permitted an unprecedented control and surveillance of labour and its collective organisations (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2021). The changes associated with digitalisation and the platform economy have also been a terrain of intense struggle, as workers, trade unions and civil society groups have variously adopted traditional and innovative mobilisation strategies in order to contest contemporary forms of exploitation (Badger, 2021; Cini & Goldmann, 2020; Heiland & Schaupp, 2021; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2019).

This dissertation examines the collective mobilisations of workers at Amazon, focusing specifically on the cases of Germany and Poland, and on the transnational labour networks which have emerged to respond to new forms of exploitation and control. It positions itself in a longer tradition of research which critically examines capital's transformative effects on social, political and economic structures, and in particular, on the recomposition of labour through processes of digitalisation and platformisation, and on the capacity of labour to defend its interests and reshape working conditions through collective mobilisation.

The analysis of collective mobilisations at Amazon is significant for a number of reasons beyond the particular case. First, Amazon's rapid expansion and business model based on tariff avoidance and its insistent refusal to recognise trade unions as legitimate social partners in co-determination have had a profound impact on employment relations and working conditions in the retail and logistics sectors, and more broadly on capital-labour relations in the countries it operates in. In Germany for instance, the company's refusal to sign the retail and mail order collective bargaining agreement, and the tacit endorsement of German employers' associations, exacerbates the trend away from codetermination in the retail sector. Boewe & Schulten characterised the campaign in Germany as "a collective conflict over

the power to determine working conditions for an entire sector… If the top dog in the e-commerce sector can get away with stubbornly refusing to conclude collective agreements, then why should up-and-comers like Zalando be prepared to enter into such agreements?" (2019: 24). Indeed, Amazon's tax and tariff avoidance practices have contributed to worsening conditions in the sector, by putting pressure on other market actors to do business with cheaper, non-tariff competitors.

More broadly, Amazon exemplifies the influences that digital platforms and information technologies have on the social fabric of late capitalist societies, in terms of transforming productive processes as well as cultural consumption patterns. While Amazon's authoritarian labour regime represents one among many contemporary variations, it has primarily used digital technologies to develop the most innovative methods of extracting the maximum value from labour, by introducing new rigidities into the labour process which have enabled the intensification of work, and undermined the autonomy of workers. The consumer demand for ever-faster delivery times aggressively encouraged by Amazon has intensified competition among retailers and third-party logistics providers, and fuelled the growth of massive last-mile logistics networks with devastating consequences not only on workplaces, but on local communities and the environment. As Alimahomed-Wilson et al. (2020) observe, Amazon's business and labour practices, its concentration of corporate power in terms of the scale and magnitude of its influence over the world economy represent many of the destructive forces of capitalism, and of an actor that is systemically embedded in and interacts with other social and political relations of domination across multiple scales, from the local to the global. In the era of nascent industrial capitalism, Marx (1996) already identified the concentration and centralisation of capital as a general tendency, which provided larger capitals numerous advantages over smaller competitors. As Prug & Bilić note,

> "monopoly is a structural position that allows capital to mitigate risks and control innovation in order to keep expanding and growing… It can sustain losses in some operating areas longer. It can absorb risks from market fluctuations and low demand to starve competition. It can reinvest parts of capital to develop and produce new commodities. It can supply markets with constantly differentiated and updated commodities. It can use accumulated capital to acquire and merge competing companies. It can influence political and regulatory processes" (2021: 31).

Digital technologies have provided capital new means for accumulation and unprecedented growth, with Google, Amazon, Facebook Apple and Microsoft investing over $70 billion into research and development in 2017 alone (Bughin et al., 2017: 6). These global technology giants have managed to achieve near-monopoly status, due to the network effects and scaling opportunities afforded by digital commodities, as well as by building socio-technical ecosystems (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016). In order to understand capital-labour relations under contemporary digital capitalism, it is important to examine the key corporate actors which set the pace for contemporary global political economy. As observed by Anna Tsing, multinational firms which dominate certain sectors of the economy "influence the organization of capital by shaping what counts as 'big' … [and] become models for capitalists, stimulating corporate trends, business literatures, state policies, and transnational regulatory environments" (Tsing, 2009: 154).

While Amazon was founded in 1994, the first instance of collective action can be dated to May 2013, when logistics workers at Fulfilment Centres in Bad Hersfeld and Leipzig, Germany, staged the first strike in the company's history. Indeed, a wide variety of local, national and transnational forms of collective organising have emerged, involving trade unions, social movement organisations, NGOs and state actors, dispersed along Amazon's global business operations, cutting across multiple industrial sectors, offering a rich case for comparing union power, strategy and discourse within and across countries. On one hand, these actors have dedicated a significant part of their resources to addressing traditional issues such as working conditions, remuneration, health and safety and union-busting. However, as the campaign has evolved, and followed different trajectories across national contexts, the claims of unions and their allies has gradually expanded to respond to new threats in the form of subcontracting, agency work, monopolisation, tax avoidance, privacy and digital rights, gentrification, climate protection and union-busting.

During the first phase of contention, the company responded to a strike in Germany, by redistributing shipments to be processed at plants in Poland, illustrating a key lesson for the parties involved in the dispute: the company's financial power, and the network redundancy built into its logistics infrastructure provide it with the capacity to insulate itself from, or at least mitigate the disruptions to commerce caused by localised industrial actions. Trade union leaders have since recognised the limitations of national-level unionism and the importance of responding to these challenges by beginning to organise on a cross-sectoral and transnational basis. Philip Jennings, the former general secretary of UNI Global, a global union federation which in 2014 established an Amazon Working Group, which was to become the UNI Amazon Alliance, to transnationally coordinate industrial actions against Amazon, explained that unions had no choice but to mobilise transnationally since its Amazon's supply chains were effectively borderless (Boewe & Schulten, 2017a: 7).

Much of the social commentary regarding the impacts of technological change on the future of work and society more broadly paints a rather bleak picture characterised by worsening working conditions, the deepening commodification and subsumption of desires and affects by powerful multinational corporations. This research eschews the tendency of "left melancholy" (Brown, 1999: 20) that is pervasive in critical political economy, namely "the regret or sense of loss associated with an observed absence of activity that is (pre-)considered to be capable of success", and a focus on the ways in which relations of domination are sustained and reproduced (Huke et al., 2015: 6). Instead, it argues for an emancipation-oriented approach which focuses "upon the ways in which processes of domination are contested, disrupted and as a result remain incomplete" (Huke et al., 2015: 1). I argue that despite the increased conditions of control and surveillance, where labour has been dispossessed of its traditional sources of power, workers and their allies nevertheless possess considerable resources and capabilities to mobilise effectively.

This dissertation sets out to address the following research questions.

*1) How have collective actors mobilised against Amazon in their local and national contexts? What factors can account for variations in collective action at the local and national level?*

*2) How have collective actors coordinated their actions transnationally? What factors can account for different trajectories of transnational cooperation?*

The first question involves the identification and description of forms of collective action at the local and national levels. I do so by analysing the collective actors involved in the industrial conflict with Amazon in each context in terms of their power resources and strategic capabilities. Following from this, I explain variations between countries and analyse the conditions under which actors rely on traditional repertoires of actions, or alternatively when they innovate and utilise novel resources, capabilities or pathways.

The second question, involves describing forms of collective action at the transnational level, i.e. explaining how trade unions and their allies have managed to facilitate cooperation and coordinated their actions across different institutional pathways. Subsequently, it involves identifying the factors that can account for different trajectories of transnationalisation. This involves exploring whether trade unions in different national contexts have perceived and formulated problems in the same manner, and how they have addressed vertical and horizontal differences in formulating common political positions and developing transnational collective identities.

Chapter two introduces the theoretical framework and key concepts which inform the empirical analysis. The first section, engaging with critical political economy and labour geography contextualises the mobilisations of Amazon logistics workers in the historical development of systems of production, distribution and consumption. I begin by discussing how capital has historically overcome obstacles to the realisation of profit. The so called 'logistics revolution' has been instrumental in this regard, ushering in the post-Fordist period of capitalist development marked by the decentralisation of production,

distribution and consumption processes across global-supply chains. In this period, the deregulation of capital and labour markets, the erosion of social protections, deindustrialisation, offshoring and outsourcing have had complex, multi-layered effects on the global economy. On one hand, these processes have fragmented employment relations, producing a highly precarious, cheap labour economy characterised by a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions. They also contributed to a crisis of representation among trade unions, reflected in the decentralisation of collective bargaining, and declines in the levels of union membership and industrial conflict (Baccaro & Howell, 2017). Scholars have since argued that the longevity and legitimacy of trade unions turns on their capacity to renew their organisations, and represent an increasingly heterogeneous working class, for instance via union revitalisation projects. On the other hand, another strand of literature argues that despite the erosion of union power, logistics workers have retained a significant degree of bargaining power due to their capacity to disrupt the circulation of commodities through collective action at critical 'choke points' in global supply chains, presenting novel possibilities for transnationally-linked forms of labour activism. While such sanguine accounts offer some welcome inspiration in contrast to narratives predicting the demise of labour in times of late neoliberalism, they present a puzzle relating to the mobilising capacity of logistics workers in general, and Amazon workers specifically. That is, if logistics workers do indeed possess as much bargaining power as is imputed to them, why are they among the most exploited and worst paid workforces in the world, and why is it that in some contexts they have managed to develop robust forms of collective organisation, and utilised their disruptive capacity, whereas in other cases they have not?

Consequently, in the second section of the chapter I develop a more fine-grained conceptualisation of worker power that can account for differences in mobilising capacity by engaging with industrial relations and social movement studies literatures. Specifically, I introduce the power-structure approach which serves as the theoretical framework for analysing the power resources and strategic capabilities of the trade unions investigated in the empirical analysis of mobilisations against Amazon in Germany (chapter five) and in Poland (chapter six). One of the premises of the framework is that despite diminished structural and associational power over recent decades, labour nonetheless possesses considerable power resources for collectively representing and advancing its interests. The approach highlights the agency of social actors and emphasizes that their mobilising capacity is conditional on their ability to make effective strategic choices in their social, economic and political contexts. First, I conceptualise workers' power by breaking it down into its constituent parts, structural and associational power, and discuss practical relevance of these categories for analysing workplace conflict. Drawing on recent contributions to power-structure analysis and union revitalisation debates, I identify less obvious and direct forms of power, including institutional power, coalitional power and ideational power. Next I discuss the main power resources, internal solidarity, network embeddedness, infrastructural resources, and narrative resources, as well as the main strategic capabilities, intermediation, framing, articulation and learning.

The final section of the chapter, drawing on labour internationalism scholarship, discusses the challenges associated with the construction of countervailing power to global capital in the form of transnational labour movements, and introduces key concepts informing the analysis of transnational mobilisations against Amazon (chapter seven). First, I discuss the factors that scholars have identified as the major obstacles to cross-border cooperation between workers and trade unions in different countries, namely divergent interests, institutional-cultural differences and organizational differences. Next, I discuss how actors have managed to overcome obstacles to transnational cooperation, highlighting the importance of cognitive mechanisms such as perceptions of reciprocity, trust-building and the international socialisation of activists, the formation of transnational union identities, as well as shared cultural understandings of union representation and co-determination. Finally, I conclude by discussing bottom-up and top-down forms of labour internationalism, as well as the dynamics of coalition building between labour and social movements, and the conditions where their capacities may become conflictual or complementary.

Next, the following two chapters concern themselves with methodology. Chapter three provides a literature review of the industrial relations landscapes of the two country cases selected, namely Germany and Poland. In prefacing the discussion of research design and methods employed for data collection and data analysis in the following chapter, this chapter overviews the systems of industrial relations in Germany and Poland, and the major actors in each context by contextualising them historically. In particular, attention is given to relevant labour law reforms, and sources of institutional power that are available to unions in each country, as well as efforts at union revitalisation that have been undertaken by trade unions in the two countries, and where applicable, the differences in approaches taken by different trade union organisations within each country.

Chapter four describes the research design, methodology, the methods of data collection and methods of data analysis. First, I explain the 'most-different systems design' (MDSD) and the rationale for comparing mobilisations in different industrial relations systems, namely Germany and Poland, and the units and level of analysis. By maximizing systemic variation, I control for constant factors, such as the organisation of the labour process and employer and state strategies, which are not relevant for the analysis. The emergence and form of mobilisations is interpreted as a product of the interaction between structural conditions, such as institutional openness, and the reflexive choices made by unions and activists in terms how they have deployed the power resources and strategic capabilities available to them. Next, I overview the industrial relations systems of Germany and Poland, focusing on the trade union organisations which have been involved in the industrial dispute with Amazon, and the challenges and patterns associated with trade union revitalisation in each context. Next, I discuss the methods for data collection, namely participant observation, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Finally, I discuss the methods which were used for analysing the collected data.

Chapter five bridges between the theory and methodology chapters, and the analysis of mobilisations against Amazon in subsequent chapters by contextualising the emergence of Amazon within broader transformations to global political economy associated with digitalisation and platformisation. In the first section, drawing on scholarly debates on platform work and the gig economy, I discuss the impacts of digital technology and automation on employment relations, working conditions, and on processes of production, consumption and distribution. Indeed, this literature echoes much older debates regarding the potentials of technology to displace menial, repetitive and hazardous forms of work, as well as techno-optimist speculations regarding the capabilities of technology to streamline work processes and make organisations more efficient. Next, I describe the generic features of digital platforms, and present Amazon as a case which illustrates novel forms of valorisation based on the capture and analysis of 'big data'. The second section traces Amazon's growth, from its origins in 1995 as a small electronic book seller, to its present form as one of the largest multinational companies with significant influence over the world economy. I describe Amazon's relations with markets and institutions, and its detrimental impacts on individuals, workplaces, communities, politics and the environment, which have contributed to the emergence of various forms of collective action. In particular, I draw attention to the corporation's relations with state agencies as a provider of surveillance technologies, and the consequent risks to privacy and civil liberties. In the third section, I describe the Amazon Logistics supply-chain, with attention to the different kinds of facilities in the network, drawing on maps which have been developed by trade unions and researchers. In the final section, I discuss the labour process at Amazon Logistics facilities with reference to two groups of workers: Amazon warehouse workers, and subcontracted delivery couriers. The discussion focuses on power, control and autonomy within the labour process, while describing the forms of employment relations, working conditions, algorithmic management systems, and their influence on mobilising capacity. Overall, Amazon appears as an actor which combines old and new forms of repression in order to inoculate itself from collective forms of mobilisation.

Chapter six describes the mobilisations which have taken place against Amazon in Germany involving the trade union Ver.di and other social movement organisations. In the first section, I provide

a cursory overview of the main contentious issues in the industrial dispute on the basis of which actors have organised their actions and claims. The second section provides a brief chronological overview of the dispute and traces the emergence of contestation in Germany to the first strikes in 2013. The third section presents the power-structure analysis of Ver.di and describes the power resources and strategic capabilities deployed by the union in the course of its dispute with Amazon. Next, I describe collective actions undertaken by the union in the dispute by means of four vignettes: the 'AVE' campaign for generally binding collective bargaining agreements, a campaign focusing on organising warehouse workers at Delivery Stations, a campaign focusing on organising last-mile delivery drivers, and campaigns for health and safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. The final section focuses on the social movement actors which have organised collective actions against Amazon in Germany, namely Berlin vs. Amazon and Amazon Workers Against Surveillance. The collective actions undertaken by these groups are illustrated through three campaigns: the campaign opposing the construction of the EDGE-Tower in Berlin, the campaign against surveillance and repression, and finally, the glocal MakeAmazonPay protest in Berlin in November 2022.

Chapter seven describes the mobilisations which have occurred against Amazon in Poland involving the trade unions NSZZ Solidarność and OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza. In the first section, I provide an overview of the central contentious issues in the dispute in Poland, which have served as the basis for the unions' collective actions and claims. The second section traces the emergence of contestation in Poland and foundational events for both trade union organisations, particularly the foundation of the first IP works commission in Poznań in 2014, and to the first wildcat industrial action that occurred there in June 2015, as well as the founding of the first Solidarność works commission in Wrocław that same year. This section also illustrates the tense relations between both union organisations during these first years of the dispute. The third section presents a power-structure analysis of NSZZ Solidarność and describes the power resources and strategic capabilities deployed by the union during its dispute with Amazon. Likewise, the fourth section presents the power-structure analysis of OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza, following the same structure. In the remainder of the chapter I describe the collective actions undertaken by the unions by means of five vignettes: efforts to organise agency workers at Amazon, the 'Safe Package' and 'Stop Feedbacks' campaigns jointly organised by both unions in 2018 and 2019 respectively, the collective dispute between both unions and the company in 2019, the glocal Make Amazon Pay actions in Poland in 2022, and finally, mobilisations against the repression of trade unions, specifically the campaign to reinstate Magda Malinowska.

Chapter eight discusses mobilisations against Amazon which have occurred on the transnational level. First, I describe the two main transnational labour networks which have emerged in the course of the dispute, namely the UNI Global Amazon Alliance, and the Amazon Workers International. It is argued that these networks represent top-down and bottom-up forms of labour internationalism respectively.

# CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework and key concepts utilised in the empirical analysis. The first section, contextualises the mobilisations of Amazon logistics workers in the historical development of systems of production, distribution and consumption, engaging with critical political economy and labour geography literatures. I discuss transformations associated with post-Fordism and the logistics revolution, particularly regarding the global recomposition of labour, the challenges that trade unions have faced in terms of representing the interests of an increasingly heterogeneous working class, and how they have responded via union revitalisation projects. The second section conceptualizes worker power and introduces the power-structure approach, which I use to analyse the power resources and strategic capabilities that trade unions have deployed in their mobilisations against Amazon in Germany (chapter five) and in Poland (chapter six). I argue that despite diminished structural and associational power, labour nevertheless possesses significant power resources for collectively representing and advancing its interests, and that the development of mobilising capacity turns on unions' ability to make effective strategic choices in their respective contexts. I conceptualise workers power in terms of structural and associational power, then proceed to discuss the main power resources and strategic capabilities that trade unions have at their disposal. The final section of the chapter, discusses the challenges associated with building countervailing power to global capital via transnational labour movements, and by engaging with labour internationalism literatures, introduces key concepts informing the analysis of transnational mobilisations against Amazon (chapter seven). First, I discuss the major obstacles to cross-border cooperation between workers and trade unions in different countries, namely divergent interests, institutional-cultural differences and organizational differences. I then discuss how these obstacles to cooperation have been overcome, highlighting the importance of cognitive mechanisms such as perceptions of reciprocity, trust-building, the international socialisation of activists, the formation of transnational union identities, as well as shared cultural understandings of union representation and co-determination. Finally, I conclude by discussing bottom-up and top-down forms of labour internationalism, as well as the dynamics of coalition building between labour and social movements, and the conditions where their capacities may become conflictual or complementary.

## Supply chains and the circuit of capital

The relative importance of the different processes or 'moments' in the circuit of capital—namely valorisation, realisation, consumption, and distribution—has changed in different periods of economic development (Harvey, 2018: 81). As Marx famously observed,

> "The more production comes to rest on exchange value, hence on exchange, the more important do the physical conditions of exchange – the means of communication and transport – become for the costs of circulation. Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport – the annihilation of space by time – becomes an extraordinary necessity for it" (Marx, 1973: 536).

Highlighting this interdependency, Marx noted that "while living labour creates value, the circulation of capital realises value" (1973: 543), defining capital as *value in motion*, meaning that capital that is not in motion is no longer capital. While surplus-value is created during the production of commodities, it can only be realised as profit after passing through distribution and consumption. The laws of market competition compel capitalists to decrease the turnover time of commodities, since during idle time surplus-value cannot be converted into profit and slowdown in the circulation of capital means a loss of value. As David Harvey elaborates, "any failure to maintain a certain velocity of circulation of capital through the various phases of production, realisation and distribution will produce difficulties and disruptions" (Harvey, 2018: 74). To this end, capital produces geographical landscapes of spatial relations, territorial organization, systems and places linked in a global division of labour, to facilitate accumulation appropriate to the period of development.

Capital faces certain barriers to profitability and realising value, such as market saturation, idle capacity, low returns on capital, supply-chain disruptions, labour conflict or indeed a number of issues related to the 'labour problem'. This consists of "first, the need to successfully incorporate labour into the production process; second, the need to exercise control over labour time in the production process and third … the imperative to exploit labour as part of the process of commodification to realize surplus value" (Cumbers et al., 2008: 370). Barriers to accumulation may be relieved by creating new markets, or territorially, by relocating capital and labour to new territories i.e. via spatial fix (Harvey, 2003; Jessop, 2004). Indeed, in the postwar period, commerce and transportation were profoundly transformed during the so-called logistics revolution, with the introduction of technologies such as barcoding, satellite communications and the intermodal shipping container. The utility of logistics for capital is its capacity to overcome barriers to profitability, by accelerating, streamlining, and securitizing circulation processes, and by providing by means of oversight "a set of protocols and techniques that enable firms to seek out the lowest wages anywhere in the world, and to evade the inconvenience of class struggle when it arises" (Bernes, 2013). This provides context for statements from global institutions such as the World Bank (2010) which emphasize that "a competitive network of global logistics is the backbone of international trade."

Whereas Marx described a labour process that produced surplus value through enclosing workers within highly despotic factory regimes, in the post-Fordist phase of capitalist development, the organisation and coordination of commodity production, circulation and valorisation today occur at the level of global supply chains. Economically powerful manufacturers under the Fordist model were able to produce and 'pushing' standardised commodities onto retailers for sale, a different logic applies for supply chains in the context of post-Fordist production which are supposed to be agile, flexible, lean, securitised and risk-averse. Processes of production, distribution and consumption have been reassembled as "a dispersed but coordinated system, where commodities are manufactured across vast distances, multiple national borders, and complex social and technological infrastructures… stretched across a highly uneven economic and political geography" (Cowen 2014a: 7). As Deborah Cowen observes:

> "contemporary capitalism is organized as a dispersed but coordinated system, where commodities are manufactured across vast distances, multiple national borders, and complex social and technological infrastructures… the global circulation of stuff is organized around the standard shipping container and the intermodal infrastructures that support its mobility across rail, road, and especially sea. Ninety percent of the world's commodities move through maritime space, much of it in the form of containers. Like giant Lego blocks, these boxes move in vast and growing quantities, eliminating much of the human labor of distribution. Thomas Reifer goes as far as to suggest that if Marx were with us today, he would begin his analysis with the container in place of the commodity" (2014b).

Supplier-led chains feature retailers at the top of the chain largely retaining control over product design, pricing, marketing and logistics, outsourcing other functions. Anna Tsing refers to this arrangement as supply chain capitalism, premised on "subcontracting, outsourcing, and allied arrangements in which the autonomy of component enterprises is legally established even as the enterprises are disciplined within the chain as a whole" (Tsing, 2009). The expansion and innovation in the logistics sector, particularly in supply chain management, have been crucial to this. Lean production are premised on detecting and eliminating activities not adding value and synchronizing production output to market demands with as little delay as possible. This means near zero-warehouse inventories, and the replenishment of stocks only as needed, according to a 'Just-in-Time' (JIT) logic. Flows across different sites in the networked supply chain give rise to 'tense', rationalized production process that are constantly under pressure, often accompanied by authoritarian managerial styles and conflictual forms of industrial relations (Womack & Jones, 1996).

With regards to the dynamics of power between capital and labour, a somewhat mixed picture appears. On the one hand, the deregulation of capital, deindustrialisation and relocations of production outside of the capitalist core economies have fundamentally have contributed to the "worldwide but

uneven development of a cheap labour economy" enabling a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions (Cillo & Pradella, 2016: 69). While organised labour faced successive defeats in the Global North, relocations contributed to the formation of new working classes and new struggles in the Global South (Silver, 2003). Tilly suggests that while the hypermobility of capital has certainly weakened labour movements, it has not been primarily via its direct impact on workers, but in the manner in which it has undermined state sovereignty, social protections, workers' rights, welfare provision and substantive democracy (Tilly, 1995).[1] Indeed the deregulation of labour markets and the erosion of social protections have intensified precarisation and further undermined labour's bargaining power. The fragmentation of standardised employment conditions and the expansion of temporary work has contributed to the crisis faced by unions in in representing workers in traditional ways, and pushing them to reform their structures and modes of organising workers (Bieler, 2012). In particular, precarious and vulnerable 'gig' workers have been difficult to mobilise, exposing the shortcomings of traditional forms of worker organising and interest representation (Zamponi, 2018).

On the other hand, another strand of literature maintains that, certain segments of the working class have retained a high degree of bargaining power given that they are employed at 'choke points' of global supply chains which are exposed to disruptions which can have cascading effects (Alimahomed-Wilson & Ness, 2018; Moody, 2018). Beverly Silver has argued that transportation and warehouse workers "possess a relatively high degree of workplace bargaining power… [which] is to be found less in the direct impact of their actions on their immediate (often public) employers and more on the upstream/downstream impact of the failure to deliver goods, services, and people to their destination" (Silver, 2003: 100). While the composition of workers' contention in the transportation sector has changed historically, with industrial conflict in air freight surpassing road and rail in the second half of the twentieth century, transportation have registered consistently high levels of industrial conflict globally throughout 1870-1996 (Silver, 2003: 100). On this account, logistics workers have retained "the residual power of interrupting the productive cycle – a power that offshoring, outsourcing, and downsizing has in many respects stripped from the majority of 'productive' workers themselves" (Toscano, 2011). As put by Deborah Cowen, "far from a mark of its strength, the securitization of logistics marks its vulnerability" (Cowen 2014a: 4).

Indeed, blockades of warehouses, highways and transport routes have become a core part of logistics workers' repertoire of action (Curcio, 2014). For instance, Italian logistics workers explained that blockades have been "the only proven useful tool to obtain bargaining power in the logistics sector" (Cillo & Pradella, 2017). Explaining the logic behind a daylong blockade of an IKEA warehouse in Piacenza, Aldo Milani, the national secretary of Si-Cobas commented that blockading "means that goods are not loaded onto trucks. These do not arrive on time for the ships, producing a delay in deliveries at destinations in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. A one-day blockade blows up the organization of the entire process… this means a big economic damage… in a warehouse where fresh food is stored, for example, a four-hour blockade means two to three hundred thousand euros lost" (cited in Cillo & Pradella, 2017).

However, the structural power of logistics workers must be qualified, since this does not explain why logistics workers are among the worst paid and exploited workforces in the world, or account for the (non-) emergence of mobilisation despite structural equivalency. Indeed, overly structuralist accounts of worker power neglect a range of important factors which can explain how logistics workers have managed to organise collectively and actualise their capacity for disruption, or to account for variations in their mobilisation trajectories and outcomes. Workplace bargaining power might then be better viewed

[1] Workers have historically has secured such victories through the state, by institutionalising forms of social protection and regulation. If it is true that state sovereignty is declining vis-à-vis supranational actors, then workers' agitation at the national level will not be as efficacious, compelling them to pursue claims in supranational arenas.

as a necessary but insufficient condition for mobilisation (Fox-Hodess, 2018). Next, I turn to scholarship of industrial relations and social movement studies in order to develop a more fine-grained conceptualisation of worker power that can account for these differences.

## Conceptualising worker power

Whereas industrial relations research allows for analysis of the interaction other actors and structures at the institutional level, there remains a conceptual gap "between workplace action and broader structures and practices where organised interests play a role" (Kirk, 2018: 647), that is, between the institutional and micro-mobilisation contexts. By "stressing the relative autonomy of capital-labour relations within the workplace from their relations as social actors, [labour process theory aims] to connect IR's traditional focus on the meso-level of collective actors and institutions downwards… uncovering 'further realms' of informal worker action" (Kirk, 2018: 645). Labour process approaches interpret capital-labour relations in the workplace as a 'structured antagonism', emphasizing that opposition in the workplace "overlaps and coexists with accommodation, compliance and consent", given capital's need to generate creativity and cooperation from labour (Taylor & Bain, 2003: 1488). These approaches emphasize the centrality of control within the labour process, by means of which capital ensures profitable production, and translates labour power into actual labour and surplus value. They also help to clarify how workplace production regimes and corporate ideology shape worker agency at the point of production may constrain or enable mobilising capacity at the micro-level (Braverman, 1974; Thompson, 1983). Labour process approaches have been applied to account for the emergence of worker collective action in the platform economy and logistics sector by identifying contradictions internal to digitalised labour processes that are capable of triggering antagonism and worker solidarity (Cini 2022; Cini & Goldmann, 2020; Cini et al. 2021; Gandini, 2018; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Veen et al., 2019). On the other hand, labour process approaches face certain limitations since they are not able to fully account for variations in organising modes, action repertoires and collective solidarities which require attention to factors outside the labour process, namely the political, social and institutional context.

While IR research has traditionally focused on the analysis of institutions, bargaining structures, the research following John Kelly's seminal *Rethinking Industrial Relations* (1998) has bridged this field with social movement research, and focused on the processes of worker mobilisation, the missing link between structural context and collective action (Gall & Holgate, 2018; Gahan & Pekarek, 2012; Heery, 2018; Kirk, 2018; Zajak et al., 2018). Social movement concepts have also been applied to analyse the transformative potential of trade unions (Hyman, 1989), union agency (Reese & Newcombe, 2003), union strategic choice (Frege & Kelly, 2003), mobilisation across multiple scales of action (Brookes, 2017), framing contests between union federations and local affiliate unions (Clemens, 1996), and employers' counter-framing activities (Haydu, 1999).[2] Scholarship on collective action framing emphasizes that social change and organizing success are tied to the cognitive capacity of actors to frame their actions in a way that achieve cultural resonance among their audiences (Lindekilde, 2014; Snow et al. 1986). Political process approaches also interpret social change as an outcome of the strategic choices of collective actors exploiting political opportunities available to them. As McAdam et al. (2001: 43) note, "no opportunity, however objectively open, will invite mobilization unless (a) it is visible to potential challengers and (b) perceived as opportunity".

[2] As Zajak et al. (2018) note, industrial relations and social movement scholarship tends to focus on similar concerns, while relying on different conceptual tools. Both emphasize the importance of organisational structure and member participation (bureaucratic and hierarchical vs. informal and decentralised), democratic principles (representative vs. direct democracy), the motives of collective action (material and employment related concerns vs. post-materialist concerns).

This said, the conceptual and methodological toolkit of social movements studies faces certain limitations in analysing labour movements given the "unmovementlike" character of trade unions which oscillate "between direct action and institutionalized power, between democracy and bureaucracy" (Fantasia & Stepan-Norris, 2004: 557, 571), and given that routine aspects of union activity are embedded in specific institutional contexts and involve particular sets of organisational practices. As Fantasia and Stepan-Norris observe, "unions also bargain and negotiate with employers, they help to regulate economic activity, and they serve a brokerage function as employment agents, stabilizing labor markets on behalf of their members. In these ways unions restrain social combat and collective action, and thus a significant part of the labour movement can be seen as not only institutionalized, but institutionalizing" (Fantasia & Stepan-Norris, 2004: 557).

Given these reasons and limitations, the theoretical framework utilised in the empirical analysis of the mobilisation of Amazon workers is informed by concepts developed in social movement studies, labour revitalisation studies, labour process analysis and mobilisation theory.

Over the past four decades, advanced capitalist economies have been fundamentally altered through a range of interconnected process including the globalisation of production, deindustrialisation and the liberalisation and deregulation of labour markets, characterised by the casualization of employment relations and fragmentation of contracts and working conditions. While these shifts have occurred in different ways and different speeds across national-institutional contexts, it has been argued that they have followed a common neoliberal trajectory as regards their industrial relations, characterised by the decentralisation of collective bargaining and declines in union density and industrial conflict (Baccaro & Howell, 2017). The dualisation of labour markets has produced privileged 'insiders', relatively insulated from risk and uncertainty, while precarious 'outsiders', such as temporary agency workers buffer insiders from market fluctuations by providing necessary 'flexibility' (Piore & Berger, 1980; Pulignano et al., 2015; Rueda, 2014). Unions are expected to privilege insiders, who are over-represented among the rank-and-file, over outsiders, and may consent to changes which increase flexibility for outsiders (Saint-Paul, 1996).[3] Empirical research demonstrates that despite uneven representation across different IR models in Europe, "'insiders' do not always act as such, and outsiders rarely express interests in opposition to insiders" (Meardi et al., 2019). In this context, unions' reduced protection for outsiders has been understood as 'second-best solution', when unions' no longer have the necessary power to protect both insiders and outsiders due to the erosion of IR institutions, labour markets and welfare institutions (Hassel, 2007; Palier & Thelen, 2010; Pulignano et al., 2015; Turner, 2009).

The result has been nothing short of a crisis for trade unions. In this context, scholars have argued that trade unions' ability to represent the increasingly heterogeneous working class and its 'new constituencies' outside traditional strongholds are a condition for their long-term survival (Marino et al., 2018). These transformations have compelled trade unions to undertake revitalization projects which have featured a wide range of strategies including: campaigns focusing on the acquisition of members in existing and emergent sectors, the reform of union structures and processes, coalition building with social movements and civil society actors, efforts at improving political representation, developing dialogue with employers, and efforts to build international solidarity. On one hand, 'bottom-up' approaches such as the 'organizing model' concern innovative means for recruiting members, and 'social movement unionism' refer building public involvement and developing coalitions with allies outside the workplace in broader struggles for social justice (Seidman, 1994). Both are rooted in deliberative democratic principles and premised on grassroots strategies that emphasize the empowerment, agency and

[3] The likelihood of becoming a labour market outsider depends on social-demographic standing and national welfare regimes, as well as company-specific factors, such as the reliance on temporary and agency labour, themselves responses to international market pressures and the volatility of demand in the respective sector (Meardi et al., 2019; Pulignano et al., 2015: 2).

independence of rank-and-file members. Meanwhile, 'top-down' forms of economic or business unionism seek to leverage union bargaining power on a macro scale, while presupposing that company-level structures should fall under their respective confederations with respect to planning, support and evaluation (Ostrowski, 2014).

These efforts at union renewal gave impetus to a stream of research on union revitalisation, which developed power-structure analysis, sometimes referred to as the power resources approach, as a heuristic for researchers and organisers (Frege & Kelly, 2003, 2004; Lévesque and Murray, 2010a; Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022; Schmalz & Dörre, 2018; Schmalz et al., 2018; Webster, 2015). It involves "an analysis of precisely who needs to be defeated, overcome, or persuaded to achieve success", as succinctly put by Jane McAlevey (2016). Power-structure analysis offers a practical means for determining the forms of power that workers and their allies have at their disposal, and for identifying the targets of collective action, namely the actors and institutions that influence the likelihood that collective action will succeed in achieving immediate goals, or broader societal changes. In this context organizing refers to the process of developing organizational structures or mass power organizations (Alinsky, 1989). According to resource mobilisation approaches in social movement studies, organizational infrastructures, and the capacity of leaders to harness material, social, and organizational resources is a precondition for collective action (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978, 1986).

In its classic formulation, power resources are "the properties of an actor that provide the ability to reward or punish another actor" (Korpi, 1978: 35). One of the premises of the approach is that despite its diminished bargaining power, labour is by no means an impotent victim of structural change, but that it may collectively defend its interests by mobilising the considerable power resources at its disposal. In contrast to deterministic accounts that focus on structural factors inhibiting mobilising capacity, the approach emphasizes the agency of actors and their capacity to make strategic choices (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). The approach allows an analysis of specific configurations of power resources at a particular point in time, and consequently to understand when and why power resources are not mobilised, or how workers deprived of certain resources may turn to other types. In fact, different types of resources do not have equal importance over time and space: some resources may be more salient in certain local or national contexts, while others might be complementary or alternatively, substitutes (Refslund & Arnholt, 2022). Workers in certain industries or workplaces that lack structural power can leverage their associational power to advance their interests (Silver, 2003: 94), while workers lacking both might be compelled to use coalitional or institutional power (Refslund & Arnholt, 2022: 1962).

This approach is particularly useful for addressing the micro and meso-mobilisation contexts, namely, how Amazon logistics workers have been able to mobilise by deploying their structural and associational power. Further, it lends itself to a comparative analysis that highlights variations in worker power and forms of strategic action that have been utilised within the constraints of different national political and institutional contexts.

Workers' power consists of two categories of power resources, *structural power*, which refers to the position of wage-earning workers in the capitalist mode of production, and *associational power* which concerns the power that workers derive from the formation of collective organisations such as trade unions, political parties and works councils (Wright, 2000: 962). Structural power is a primary power resource that is immediately available to workers even without any collective interest representation (Schmalz & Dörre, 2018), arising "out of the type of dependencies between the social parties at the place of work" (Jürgens, 1984: 61), and the capacity to cause disruptions that restrict the valorisation of capital through strikes. Structural power is tempered by employers' ability to replace workers through outsourcing jobs (Drahokoupil, 2015), using strike-breakers (Refslung & Arnholt, 2022) or through managerial whipsawing practices, that is, by playing plants off against one another by encouraging competition over productivity (Greer & Hauptmeier, 2016). In the transportation sector however, capital faces higher disincentives to geographical relocation than in even the most capital-intensive manufacturing industries, so spatial fixes have had a limited utility in solving the 'labour problem' given

the reliance on high levels of investment in immobile infrastructures like railways, sea and airports, canals, and highways, which "cannot be moved without the value embodied in them being lost" (Harvey, 1999: 380).[4] As illustrated by recent studies of transnational mobilisations of dockworkers, labour militancy was not demobilised through spatial fixes, but through a combination of technological and organizational fixes such as automation and privatisation, and state regulations variably offering new rights or alternatively restricting industrial action (Fox-Hodess, 2017, 2018).

Structural power may be further distinguished into two sub-types: workplace bargaining power and marketplace bargaining power (Wright, 2000: 963). *Workplace bargaining power* relates to the particular position or status of workers in the production process, the importance of the specific tasks performed for the continuation of production, and by extension, the capacity to disrupt the valorisation of capital. Workplace bargaining power therefore also signifies how dependent employers are on their workers (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). Workers who are employed in tightly integrated production processes, or in key export branches possess a high degree of workplace bargaining power given that localised work stoppages in key nodes can have cascading effects and cause disruptions on a much larger scale.[5] Workers can mobilise this power by refusing to work, for instance through strikes, sit-ins, blockades or through more covert forms such as sabotage or go-slows, which may incur major costs for employers and force them to consider worker demands. This form of power may be exercised at other points in the cycle of capital, not only in the production process. Transportation workers can slow the circulation of capital via transportation routes and channels of capital (Silver, 2003), while education and care-workers may strategically withhold their reproductive power and influence other economic sectors (Becker et al. 2017). The concepts of logistical and circulation power refer to the capacity to interrupt distribution outside of the workplace, for instance via road blockades or street demonstrations, which may also be exercised by non-wage-earning social actors in public arenas (Webster, 2015). Indeed, empirical studies have demonstrated that such tactics have become a staple of some logistics workers' repertoire of action (Cillo & Pradella, 2017). In the context of global supply chains, levels of organisation, union density, and thus structural and associational power are highly varied, however are likely to be low if workers are employed in labour-intensive and low-skilled positions (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015: 724)

*Marketplace bargaining power* refers to workers' substitutability, and is therefore related to the structure of the labour market, its segmentation into core workforces, precarious and informal forms of work, and the unemployed, and the uneven hierarchies between different groups of wage-earners. Structural power is therefore mediated by the supply and demand of labour, and of specific skills, as regards both the general labour market, and the specific company (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). Beverly Silver elaborates that this power "results directly from tight labor markets" and can take several forms such as "(1) the possession of scarce skills that are in demand by employers, (2) low levels of general unemployment, and (3) the ability of workers to pull out of the labor market entirely and survive on nonwage sources of income" (2003: 13). These conditions indicate that the strength of workers' bargaining position, the extent of viable alternatives for workers, and their capacity to choose between voice and exit will be influenced economic cycles (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). It is also related to levels of state welfare provision, as well as by organisational resources such as union strike funds. Indeed, the workplace bargaining power of wage-earners in many former union strongholds has been undermined

[4] As Harvey notes, these physical infrastructures come to function as a kind of 'second nature' or "geographically organised resource structure" that expedites production, exchange, distribution and consumption (Harvey, 1999: 9). Accelerating circulation time goes hand-in-hand with a rising organic composition of capital: "the nature of capital is such that the arms race to lessen circulation times by deploying (and securitizing) vast circulatory apparatuses necessarily involves the hypertrophy of constant capital, dwarfing variable capital (proletarians) and revealing potentially paralyzing quanta of fixity as the price for accelerated circulation" (Toscano, 2014).

[5] As Beverly Silver notes, "such bargaining power has been in evidence when entire assembly lines have been shut down by a stoppage in one segment of the line, and when entire corporations relying on the just-in-time delivery of parts have been brought to a standstill by railway workers' strikes" (2003: 13).

by deindustrialisation, offshoring and a focus on shareholder value, while high levels of general unemployment and workfare labour market policies have reduced marketplace bargaining power (Schmalz & Dörre, 2018).

*Associational power,* arises from collective forms of organisation, and in contrast to structural power, require collective actors who are capable of initiating an organising process and implementing action strategies. In the context of asymmetrical power relations under capitalism, collective organization is more important for labour, since capitalists can pursue most of their interests individually via market relationships (Streeck, 1989; Offe, 1985; Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980).[6] Works councils, informal workers' collectives, shop stewards, trade unions and workers' parties allow workers' interests to be coordinated and represented at the level of the workplace, the company, the industrial sector and the political system. The power of wage-earning workers is mediated by these organizing structures that endow them with the necessary resources and capabilities, know-how, legitimacy or access to networks in order to succeed in furthering their interests. Notably, informal collectives or works councils may not necessarily be aligned with formal organisations such as trade unions, particularly their higher-level structures or union federations. For that reason, the capacity to intermediate between different levels of organisation is decisive for the effective deployment of this resource (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022: 1963). In order to effectively mobilize their associational power, "the structures of the associations have to be optimised so that associational action can be reconciled with the underlying structural conditions and the interests of the members" (Schmalz & Dörre, 2018: 5).

Union density and collective bargaining centralisation are often used as general indicators for associational power, whereby low levels of union membership and decentralised collective bargaining are interpreted to mean declining associational power (Baccaro & Howell, 2018). However, such an approach is overly reductive and obscures the wide range of power resources available to unions. Union density levels have varying significance in different national contexts, and while union density is indeed on the decline across most OECD countries, "this cannot be equated per se with a proportional drop in unions' power resources" (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022: 1969). Decentralisation does not necessarily entail declining union power and high employer discretion. Instead, it is important to consider how decentralisation plays out at lower organisation levels, and how it interacts with other power resources (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). Scholars also highlight that efficient organisational structures are necessary to exert associational power, and deploy resources in an effective manner (Behrens et al., 2004). An efficient organisational structure implies an efficient division of labour within trade unions, established and functioning working processes and a sensible distribution of resources.

The traditional formulations of the power resource approach have been criticised for focusing on more direct and obvious forms of power, such as structural power, at the cost of neglecting indirect and less obvious, yet nevertheless important forms of power (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). In the context of declining union power due to globalization, scholars have stressed the necessity for unions to build and elaborate on alternative kinds of power resources namely, institutional, discursive/ideational and coalitional power resources (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013).

*Coalitional power* refers to unions' capacity to leverage the resources of other groups such as NGOs, or social movement organisations, and may focus on recruiting members, or building alliances between producers and consumers (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). For instance, scholars and organizers have attributed declining union power in the US to a split between labour and social movements, and a shift away from deep to shallow organising approaches (McAlevey,

[6] For workers, collective action is a prerequisite to defining labour interests and sanctioning employers, whereas for employers collective organisation brings largely secondary benefits. For this reason, decollectivisation has been more damaging for labour than for capital (Baccaro & Howell, 2017: 303).

2016). While they are certainly no panacea to the multi-faceted crisis of trade unions, coalitions with progressive civil society allies allow unions to compensate for the loss of structural, associational and institutional power, and can be a valuable resource for revitalisation (Touraine et al., 1984; Zajak 2017; Zajak et al., 2018).

Analytically, a narrow focus on unions and member-based organisations limits the scope of IR to conceptualise the dynamics of global supply chains and to identify mechanisms that can synergise the associational power of labour with other actors (Atzeni, 2021; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). IR and SMS research have studied the agency of activists and union actors from two distinct perspectives, however as Jane McAlevey points out "the people in unions, who are called workers, and many of the same people after they have punched the clock at the end of their shift and put on their SMO (or 'interest group') volunteer hats—people who are then called individuals. Workers, too, are individuals. A divided approach to workplaces and communities prevents people and movements from winning more significant victories and building power" (2016: 2). In fact, the overlaps between positions within trade unions, movement organisations and within Amazon, is one of the reasons why I decided to interview individuals which act as brokers mediating between different types of organisations.

*Institutional power* refers to the unions' participation in institutional structures such as works councils and national tripartite institutions (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013). The capacity of trade unions to mobilise effectively, are strongly influenced by the national institutional arrangements in which they are embedded, which shape actors' interactions, organisation and strategies. Institutional arrangements themselves reflect the past and present distribution of power, the product of struggles, concessions and agreements between capital and labour which are "solidified" in co-determination institutions (Poulantzas, 1978). The dual nature of institutional power grants unions significant rights, while simultaneously constraining their capacity to act (Schmalz & Dörre, 2018). These include the rules regarding the establishment of works councils, the depth and coverage of collective bargaining and wage-setting institutions, employment protection legislation, unemployment benefit systems, conciliation and arbitration systems and vocational training systems (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). Institutions can simultaneously constrain and facilitate attempts at trade union innovation, depending on the social context and actors' strategic choices, namely how they choose to exploit the opportunities available to them (Hassel, 2007; Turner, 2009). For instance, unions efforts to mitigate precariousness has been argued to "hinge on their access to institutional power across different spheres of action and how these institutions empower unions to be inclusive" (O'Brady, 2021: 3). Just as institutional openness conditions unions' capacity to renew their internal structures, it is equally important to consider how such initiatives might be institutionalised or 'solidified', lest they remain marginal episodes, and how unions might strategically use them to elevate themselves to a more socially powerful position. Mrozowicki et al. (2010: 237) remark that "grassroots activism can easily be squandered if it is not supplemented by the reinforcing of the institutional and political position of unions at the sectoral and national levels of industrial relations." A more detailed analysis of the institutional arrangements as pertains to our two cases, Germany and Poland, shall be elaborated in the following chapter.

For the purposes of a more fine-grained analysis, I adapt the framework developed by Lévesque and Murray (2010a) which assumes that the associational power of trade unions to be shaped by a range of other interacting factors, namely: i) *union capacity* (power resources and strategic capabilities), ii) *institutional arrangements*, iii) *political opportunity structures* and iv) *the capacity of other actors*. The development of an effective mobilisation or conflict strategy, therefore rests on combining structural power with organisational capacities that take advantage of existing institutional arrangements and the political opportunity structure.

*Union capacity* consists of power resources, defined earlier as "the properties of an actor that provide the ability to reward or punish another actor" (Korpi, 1978: 35), and strategic capabilities which are the "sets of aptitudes, competencies, abilities, social skills and know-how that can be developed, transmitted and learned" (Lévesque and Murray, 2010a: 341). The implication is that power resources

alone are not sufficient but require social actors that are skilled in developing, making effective use of them, and transforming them as needed in different situations. The mobilisation of power resources is key for success, and can refer to "attaining power resources not previously possessed *or* mobilising already acquired or available power resources", meaning analytical attention should be paid to the requiring, maintaining and application of power resources (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022). The main power resources are internal solidarity, network embeddedness (or external solidarity), infrastructural resources, and narrative resources. The strategic capabilities include intermediating between contending interests, articulating actions over time and space, framing and learning.

### *Power resources*

*Internal solidarity* refers to the unity of purpose between members and the existence of close-knit networks, shared experiences and ideological common-ground. Relates to "mechanisms developed in the workplace to ensure collective cohesion and deliberative vitality", namely participation in the activities of the union (Lévesque and Murray, 2010a: 336). Given the multiplicity of collective identities in any workplace or union, union leaders have the important task of eliciting a perception of shared relation or status among workers, and facilitating the formation of cohesive collective identities. Indeed, the weakening of unions has been attributed to the fragmentation of 'monolithic' collective identities characteristic of industrial unionism (Hyman, 2001). Internal solidarity is closely related to the capability to *intermediate between contending interests*, given the expansion of precarious work, the multiplication of social identities, and types of employment status.

Internal solidarity is indicated by two main factors: 1) *the internal mechanics of union representation*, for instance, the existence and quality of union shop stewards and channels of communication between union members, shop stewards, with local and federal levels of union leadership, or union policies and programmes designed to integrate new groups of workers or activists; and 2) *the extent of participation and quality of engagement*, namely, the active participation of union members in organizational tasks and activities such as strikes, meetings, internal discussions, flyering and outreach. Key here is the presence and quality of leaders which are accountable to different groups of workers and which can foster a "willingness to act" among members (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980). The relationship between member participation and organizational efficiency is not one of simple correlation however (Voss, 2010: 377ff.), since without active participation, and a culture of enforcing compliance on members and leaders via the institutional and constitutional rules of the union, even a highly efficient, and well-resourced union may become bureaucratic, oligarchic or even irrelevant to workers (Levi et al., 2009: 206). Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick suggest that unions can address the 'iron law of oligarchy' by developing a "virtuous circle (or 'magic triangle'): a transparent process of strategic leadership enables and encourages rank-and file participation in debates and decisions; more informed and engaged members display greater willingness to act, enhancing union effectiveness; this in turn provides the organisational capacities and leadership confidence that facilitate transparency and participation." (2020: 260). Accordingly, a "system expectations and accomplishments" between union members and union activists, and a union culture that emphasizes the voice and rights of rank-and-file members are important factors of internal solidarity (Beaud & Pialoux, 1999: 363). Research has also underscored the importance of exploring the implications for worker voice and participation in contexts where union representation and collective bargaining coverage are falling (Holland et al. 2019).

*Network embeddedness,* sometimes referred as coalitional power, relates to the density and strength of a trade union's ties to other unions, social groups and organisations, such as NGOs, SMOs, student groups and churches (Frege et al., 2004). It is closely related to the union's intermediation capabilities, namely to effectively utilise their allies' resources and activate them for mobilisation purposes, for instance by setting mutual commitments and pursuing common goals. Community coalitions can help to

address issues relevant to workers within and beyond their workplaces including access to public services, environmental protection, racism and gentrification. Integration in larger networks, for instance global union federations, can enable trade unions to promote their own agenda and influence the change process in national or transnational arenas (Lévesque and Murray, 2010a). Trade unions may have *horizontal links* with unions in the same sector, or with groups actively engaged in conflicts with the same employer. They may also develop *vertical links* with regional, industry, national and international structures. For cooperation to occur, in addition to the availability of networks, there is a need for bridge builders that are embedded in both trade union and non-trade union contexts (Mayer, 2009; Rose, 2000).

Network embeddedness is indicated by: 1) *network diversity* or heterogeneity, namely whether the network consists of predominantly unions and institutional structures, or whether it also includes NGOs, SMOs, or other community groups, and 2) *network density*, or the intensity, thickness and durability of contacts between trade unions and other actors, and the quality of interaction (e.g. exchange of information, expertise, experience and policy recommendations). Relational approaches to collective action emphasize the interdependence of organisational decision-making, suggesting that inter-organisational structure can be as important as the internal properties of organisations (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Hadden, 2015; Mische, 2010; Emirbayer, 1997). Organisations are embedded in networks, must cooperate or make compromises with other groups in order to advance their goals, and so the *structure of inter-organizational relations* influences strategic decisions. Network positionality can influence the choice of repertoire of action and can encourage strategic convergence among tightly connected groups, suggesting that organizations may "adopt contentious forms of action when their peers have already done so" (Hadden, 2015: 8).[7] For instance, research on climate change networks found that groups' proximity or exposure to their peers led to differential adoption of tactics, leading to a segmentation into blocs that drew on more contentious or more conventional forms of action (Hadden, 2015).

*Infrastructural resources* refer to the material and human resources that trade unions have at their disposal, and the organizational practices governing their efficient allocation. 1) *Material resources* include strike funds, paid (or unpaid) exemptions from work-time for shop stewards and works council members, as well as offices and spaces for meetings, state funds for training and research, and investment funds for members. 2) *Human resources* refer to staff with the necessary skills to carry out trade union work, including technical specialists, researchers and volunteers. The union revitalisation literature also emphasizes the importance of recruiting union staff which represent a greater range of biographies, social locations, ethnic and linguistic origins (Lévesque and Murray, 2010a). Equally, it is important to draw expertise from other 'bridging organizations' (Ganz et al., 2004: 191). Finally, the third dimension, refers to the 3) *organizational practices, procedures, policies and programmes* which are in place in order to utilise the resources, skills and capabilities of staff and activists in the pursuit of union objectives. For instance, this may include legal services for members, programmes for engaging members or underrepresented groups of workers, or workshops for educating and training works council members in the skills needed for organising workers at the shop-level. With regards to this last dimension, also relevant is the existence of a culture of innovation, or a reluctance to deviate from existing processes. Developing novel campaign initiatives for underrepresented groups of workers, can for instance, provide new avenues for union action.

*Narrative resources* refer to the repository of stories that frame actions and understandings by connecting "events, experiences and strands of ideology" (Lindekilde, 2014) in meaningful ways in order build a sense of efficacy and legitimacy among target audiences, and to shape motives for collective action.

[7] Hadden (2015) suggests three relevant relational mechanisms: 1) *information sharing*: networks structure organisations' relationships with one another, since advantageous network position can provide information about opportunities or choices that organisations might otherwise not be aware of, thus stimulating inter-organizational learning about tactics, and potentially leading to adoption of new forms of action, 2) *resource pooling*: coalitions allow organisations to utilise (material and symbolic) resources of others, 3) *social influence*: groups use their legitimacy to persuade one another of the desirability of certain tactics.

These interpretative and action frames express key elements of union identity (Frege & Kelly, 2003), and its "living organizational heritage" (Lévesque and Murray, 2010a: 339), the inherited cultural traditions and definitions oriented to class, market or society, which influence its perception of threats, opportunities, and strategic choices (Hyman 1994, 2001b). Narratives are central to the representation and discussion of interests, and in the construction of collective identities, by providing workers, as well as audiences in other arenas, meaningful frameworks for interpreting key issues. Indeed, frames can be mobilised to explain or respond to new situations, and can influence whether collective actions are successful. Snow et al. (1986) identify three generic *collective action frames*:

i) *Diagnostic frame:* the actor's identification or definition of the problem, and attribution of blame. These can include specific frames pertaining to working conditions, or can more broadly refer to issues relevant to unions such as membership loss.[8]
ii) *Prognostic frame*: the actor's proposed solutions and strategies to resolve the problem.
iii) *Motivational frame:* the actor's rationale for motivating others to action.

### *Strategic capabilities*

*Intermediation* refers to leaders' capability of developing collective interests by mediating between conflicting demands from both within and outside the union. As the central intermediary organisations for collectively representing labour interests at multiple levels (Müller-Jentsch, 2018) trade unions are faced with opposing organizational logics which highlight the "contradiction between ideals and organized interests" or between movement and organisation (Hyman, 2001: 60). Whereas the 'logic of membership' favours the pursuit of members' interests, the formulation of collective identities and the cultivation of a 'willingness to act' i.e. the 'ends' of trade unions, the 'logic of influence' favouring the interests, survival and consolidation of the organization itself, i.e. the prioritisation of short-term victories and securing the 'means' for mobilising capacity such as membership numbers (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980; Schmitter & Streeck, 1999; Streeck, 1989). The need to reconcile these opposing logics is an organizational dilemma and source of instability that all trade unions must reckon with, since neglecting the logic of membership risks undermining the mechanism for overcoming barriers to collective action. Along these lines, Kim Moody has argued that union leaderships' commitment to partnership and the lack of democratic organisation and mechanisms for accountability have produced an "open embrace of the enemy in the daily relationship of labour bureaucracy to corporate bureaucracy" (Moody, 1997: 57).

Since consensus-building within unions is a bi-directional process which is influenced by workers, intermediation entails the need for ongoing dialogue regarding strategic objectives, and the means to achieve them. This capability also interacts with network embeddedness, given that effective leaders need to able to access, create and activate the relevant social networks. Indeed, intermediation is crucial given that trade unions are simultaneously engaged with actors and issues that span from the shop-floor, sector and national levels. In the case of heterogeneous networks of trade unions, NGOs and social movement organisations, specialised intermediating capabilities may be necessary, since the interests, action repertoires or framing strategies of these organisations may not converge. Intermediation capabilities are salient in cases when opportunities for change are seemingly closed down, for instance the absence of

[8] Membership loss can mean different things for union representatives operating in different national systems (Frege & Kelly, 2003: 19-20). For instance, German union leaders are generally not as concerned with membership decline given institutional protections which insulate union power from fluctuations in union density. In the Italian context, unions are more concerned with mobilising potential (e.g. workplace elections and political demonstrations) than necessarily with dues-paying membership levels. However, membership levels are salient in the context of competition between rival union confederations. In Poland, collective bargaining normally occurs at the company level, so declines in union influence are more likely to be framed as a key organising issue than in Italy and Germany where they are less likely to be framed as a major priority.

co-determination, the displacement of critical employee voice by processes of managerial control (Holland et al. 2019), managerial non-responsiveness to worker demands (Harlos, 2001), or preferences for docile or 'silent' workers (Donaghey, et al 2011). In these cases, employee voice may be directed externally towards actors which are outside of the employment relationship but which might reasonably influence it, for instance by means of campaigns that seek to leverage consumer power and damage corporate brand image (Holland et al. 2019). In fact, contemporary research on the platform economy has focused on employee voice and representation largely in the workplace, while neglecting its expression in the broader political sphere (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Successful union revitalisation efforts in Poland have been attributed to the interaction between established cultural motivations, the reflexive choices of union activists, and institutional openness to change (Mrozowicki et al., 2010), suggesting that intermediation capacities play a critical role in interfacing between external and internal factors. Indeed, the authors emphasized the role of biographical experiences and subjective commitments of union activists in mediating between seemingly objective cultural and structural conditions.

*Framing* refers to a union's capacity to define an autonomous agenda by shaping societal discourses and formulating appropriate strategies. Framing strategies are crucial in shaping perceptions of the legitimacy of organisations and collective actions such as strikes and protests. Research has explored how frames have been deployed to mobilise support, demobilise adversaries and to legitimate repression (Lindekilde, 2014), and how unions have used frames to engage different audiences (Ferree et al. 2012). Framing is grounded in and interacts closely with power resources, notably narrative resources, the deliberative dimension of internal solidarity, and network embeddedness. Leaders may have narrative resources at their disposal, however they may fail to select the appropriate issues at a suitable time, or they may lack the capability to renew them or actively transform them into conceptual tools that workers can use to interpret current issues. Cooperation in transnational labour networks for instance often involves conflicts between the interests of different unions, which may be reconciled through broad and inclusive framing.

Closely related to collective action frames, *frame alignment strategies* refer to how framing elements are assembled to form argumentative positions in public debates and how different frames may be combined within discursive opportunity structures. Snow et al. (1986) identify four different types:

i) *Frame bridging:* involves linking two or more congruent but structurally disconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. This might involve providing an explanation of a problem by connecting it to another phenomenon, problem or set of events.
ii) *Frame amplification:* involves the strengthening and clarification of a frame by advocating for a particular interpretation of a phenomenon from among a set of others.
iii) *Frame extension:* involves extending the boundaries of a frame to encompass the perspectives, sentiments or interests of target groups. By doing this, actors can signal to prospective participants that a particular issue might also have an impact on them.
iv) *Frame transformation*: involves substituting a frame when an existing one fails to resonate with the desired audience's own interpretative frames.

The manner in which grievances are framed indicate the union's self-assessment of the political opportunity structure. As Hickey et al. note, "unions adapt their campaign strategies and methods of organizing to the particular circumstances in which they find themselves. Accordingly, the same union in two contexts may use different means to achieve the same ends" (2010: 75). Organizational factors such as union identities, organizational structure, leadership and ideology can help to account for why unions develop and deploy certain framing strategies, or why they might gravitate towards more conventional or

contentious forms of action (Frege & Kelly, 2003: 20-21; Hadden, 2015: 5-6).[9] Since frames are dynamic and subject to contestation, frame analysis can reveal how unions "redefine their collective purpose and identities" over time, and to determine why certain strategic choices might be effective or not (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013: 766, 769). Additionally, social movement research emphasizes the importance of exploring "the *processes* of framing and mobilization at different *levels* within a social system (i.e., the individual, social movement and social action field levels)", which has been rather neglected in industrial relations research (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013: 767).

*Articulating actions over time and space* refers to leaders' capacity to spatially, foster multi-level interaction between different levels at which they seek to exert an influence, namely the workplace, company, sectoral, regional, national and transnational levels, and temporally to do so in the short as well as long term (Wills, 2002). In the context of globalized economies, the "geography of unionism" has been reconfigured by substantial rescaling, in terms of the organization and integration of worksites across global production networks, and in terms of increasing heterogeneity, reflecting the need to construct solidarity between increasingly diverse categories of workers (Lévesque and Murray, 2010a: 343). Actors may transpose local issues to larger contexts, for instance national or global arenas (up-scaling), or interpret global issues and organise against them on a local level via 'glocal' actions (down-scaling) (McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 2005: 61-64).

Leaders must be capable of acting as norm brokers, and translate or frame international issues in a manner that is congruent with domestic discourses, or vice-versa, in order for claims to resonate with their target audiences (Ayoub, 2016: 35, 64). Norm brokers therefore connect domestic organisations to transnational networks and international institutions. As Fairbrother & Gekara note, "this layering of activity and engagement lays a foundation for the on-going re-articulation of union purpose" and is instrumental for promoting collective capacities for mobilisation between different unions, particularly since "mediations between local and national/international forms of organization define trade unionism over time" (2016: 601, 603). Articulation practices allow leaders to "draw on a much wider set of social resources to defend their members' interests" (Turnbull, 2006: 321), while interactions between unions operating at different scales can provide new opportunities and forms of brokerage due to institutional regulation at different scales of action (Lévesque and Murray, 2010b). I address the issues relating to articulation and intermediation in greater detail in the following subchapter which focuses on labour transnationalism and cross-border cooperation.

*Learning* refers to the union's capacity to reflect and learn from past experiences and to diffuse this knowledge throughout the organisation in order to anticipate change. This capacity is critical for adaptation and innovation, otherwise union leaders may rely on existing mobilising tactics and actions that may not be suitable for dealing with new problems or applicable to new contexts (Hyman, 2007). Learning is also central to the renewal of union organizational practices and routines. As Lévesque and Murray note,

> "learning is a reflexive and imaginative process that entails thinking about the past in order to draw out lessons that can be applied to the present and projected into the future… [it is] one of the most critical capabilities to script-breaking in organizational routines… if a local union does not have this learning capacity, it will remain a prisoner of its own history, caught in a path dependency of its repertories and

[9] National union leaders play a critical role in influencing framing, particularly in weakly institutionalised systems such as Poland where leaders have more powerful positions in the organisation. Leaders have a key role in mobilising membership support and resources for strategies, and in asserting new union identities during moments of crisis. Union identities and traditions have a strong influence on framing choices. Class-oriented unions, as in Italy, might interpret employer hostility to unions as a political rather than a labour market issue, whereas society-oriented unions, as in Germany, may interpret opportunities for consensus with social partners as more advantageous than engaging in conflict.

identities: it is likely to follow a trajectory that will not challenge its projects, values and traditions" (2010a: 344).

Another key dimension of learning concerns the diffusion of this knowledge via organizational channels and processes. Indeed, local leaders may be competent in analysing problems, and in developing, planning and implementing innovative strategies for addressing new challenges, however "without the means and readiness to spread such experiences in the interest of developing 'best practice' scenarios throughout the organization, local initiatives will degenerate to being an exercise in 're-inventing the wheel' anew." (Behrens et al. 2001a: 51). The related concept of *organizational flexibility* (Ganz, 2000: 1012) refers to the union's capacity to adapt organizational processes to reflect and support changes in policy needs, for example by organising new member groups, new generations of staff, new forms of encouraging member participation, new forms of salient knowledge (for example local biographical knowledge and skills).

This discussion indicates that organised labour can develop industrial strategies by deploying and developing various power resources the strategic capabilities at its disposal. An important caveat here is that labour does not develop its structural and associational power resources in isolation from other powerful actors, but is rather mediated by the *capacity of other actors*. Accordingly, another set of important factors to take into consideration includes the collective organisation of employers, the power resources at their disposal, and employers' dependence on workers (Refslund & Arnholdt, 2022). Indeed, in many cases, labour mobilizes its power resources following a process of trial-and-error, in opposition to the organised counter-power of dominant groups (Schmalz et al., 2018).

Finally, the structure of state and political systems, namely the form of electoral system and the composition of government has an impact on workers' social protection and wage levels, and as such influences workers' marketplace bargaining power (Peters, 2017).

## Labour internationalism: Solidarity or competition?

As this chapter has argued so far, the internationalisation of markets and competition, and the shifting of production to the level of global supply chains, have profoundly transformed labour relations and presented trade unions with a series of new challenges. Historically, social protections in the form of worker's rights, welfare provision and substantive democracy have been secured by institution-building at the national level, however the globalization of capital has contributed to their erosion (Tilly, 1995). In this context, scholars have inquired whether an equivalent, countervailing power in the form transnational labour organizing can emerge and foster solidarity across borders (Ebbinghaus & Visser, 1996). The extant scholarship presents a mixture of pessimistic and more sanguine views on the topic. In some cases, trade unions in different countries have managed to jointly represent workers' interests on a transnational level; in other cases, they preferred to remain in relative isolation, or opted to defend local labour markets and the interests of their constituents, while others seemingly pulled in both directions (Hyman, 2005a: 139; Lévesque & Murray, 2010b; Waterman, 2004; Wills, 1998: 111). Initiatives in labour internationalism raise the question of how mutual interest and a commitment to collective action can be developed between organizations across borders whose relations are more often characterised by competition than by solidarity (Lévesque & Murray, 2010b; Lillie & Martinez Lucio, 2004).

The analysis of transnational labour networks at Amazon in Chapter 7 contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence demonstrating the challenges and opportunities for labour transnationalism, and how trade union identities are variously declined at the transnational level, namely, under which conditions they become institutionalised or more radical. In order to contextualise the relevance of the analysis within the relevant literature, this section first discusses the factors that scholars assume to prevent labour transnationalism, namely divergent interests, institutional-cultural differences, and organizational differences in intermediating between contending interests. Next it addresses the

mechanisms which have allowed actors successfully overcome these obstacles to transnational cooperation. Finally, it discusses different forms of labour internationalism and the challenges of coordinating collective action between labour and social movements.

### *Barriers to transnational cooperation*

Labour transnationalism has been defined broadly as "the spatial extension of trade unionism through the intensification of co-operation between trade unionists across countries using transnational tools and structures", encompassing transnational collective bargaining, information exchange, mobilisation and codes of conduct (Greer & Hauptmeier, 2008: 77). The scholarship on the topic has identified three types of barriers which obstruct the formulation of common political positions between trade unions and workforces across national borders, following explanations based on divergent interests, institutional-cultural factors, and organizational factors.

First, various institutionalist and rational-choice explanations emphasize that the divergent interests of national trade unions have prevented the formulation and representation of common interests at the transnational level (Keller, 1997; Streeck & Schmitter, 1991; Visser & Ebbinghaus, 1994).[10] In the context downward pressure on wages through market integration and the increased mobility of capital, the emergence of labour organization and regulation at the European level was predicted to be unlikely and lead to intensified competition between member states (Streeck, 1998). Disparities in labour costs between old and new EU member states have broadened the scope for MNCs to intensify cost-cutting pressures via relocation threats and 'coercive comparisons', pitting worksites in competition with one another, at times forcing concessions from Western unions, and prompting a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions (Bernaciak, 2010; Meardi, 2012b, 2014; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2003). Research on union relations within EWCs illustrates competitive behaviour between workers at different locations over new production and investment, leading to the emergence of underbidding instead of international solidarity (Hancké, 2000).

Second, the divergent institutional-cultural legacies, ideological profiles and path-dependencies of trade unions have been identified as an obstacle to cooperation since unions' identities, preferences, goals and repertoires of action are historically shaped by strategic interactions within their national-institutional environments (Frege & Kelly, 2003; Gajewska, 2009; Martin & Ross, 1999). Ebbinghaus and Visser define this obstacle as "nationally entrenched union diversity", arguing that "across Europe, labor interests are organized, mobilized and represented in patterns which reflect variations in persistent and deeply rooted national cleavages and institutions" and that "international solidarity between unions has become more difficult after a century of national integration of labor into distinct welfare states" (1996: 18, 27). Trade unions' influence in their national contexts has also been suggested to have an inverse relationship with their involvement in transnational activity (Logue, 1980). Unions with limited resources and institutional opportunities may seek to effect change from above in a 'boomerang effect' (Keck & Sikkink, 1999), whereas relatively stronger actors may rely on domestic channels and have fewer incentives to cooperate transnationally.

Orientations towards either social partnership, business unionism or radical opposition are themselves legacies of national labour movements and are resilient against change (Hyman, 2001). For instance, empirical studies attribute difficulties in implementing international framework agreements to historically patterned differences in unions' political outlook (Riisgaard, 2005). Others find that

[10] The territorial dimension is apparent in differences between union representatives from new and old EU member states, that advocate for either more regulationist or liberal policies. New member states tend to favour liberalisation of services, since their constituents can take advantage of lower-wage labour costs. Trade unions from new member states predicted to be reluctant to support harmonisation of labour standards, since this is what gives them a competitive advantage (Streeck, 1998: 146f).

cooperation between unions in Eastern and Western Europe has been impeded by different cultural understandings of union representation and co-determination between unionists (Klemm et al., 2011), and by the absence of cohesive transnational union identities (Meardi, 2000). Gajewska suggests that "one can derive the tactics and constraints of trade unions with regard to international cooperation from the type of industrial relations that define their position in the domestic arena and incentives for cooperation… [whereby] trade unions oriented towards cooperation with management might deal differently with international issues than trade unions with a more oppositional direction" (2009: 9-10). Interactions between labour and management at the company level also have a strong influence on the selection of union repertoires, so managerial preferences must also be taken into account. In certain cases, management has a preference towards local/national rather international negotiations and may selectively grant union representatives more resources and access to decision-making processes, influencing union reps' orientations as 'co-managers' or more autonomous 'political entrepreneurs' (Greer & Hauptmeier, 2008). Other studies point out that microcorporatist relations, characterised by union participation in managerial decision-making tend to isolate local unions and close the space for involvement in external networks (Lévesque & Murray, 2005, 2010b; Wells, 2001).

Finally, it is suggested that transnational cooperation can also be inhibited by vertical tensions on the level of interest representation internal to unions, an issue referred to in the preceding discussion of intermediation and articulation capabilities, specifically relating to membership heterogeneity, and the distance between leaders and the rank-and-file. As Gajewska notes, vertical disintegration is not only "a problem for international engagement. It is a general problem of the trade unions. Vertical relations between the trade union and the workforce can be a challenge because the latter hinders transnational solidarity" (Gajewska, 2009: 88). Unions must reconcile conflicting interests between members and non-members, and between workers and employee representation structures such as works councils at the plant/company levels (Hyman, 2004: 42; Gajewska, 2009: 88; Visser & Ebbinghaus, 1994). Issues of vertical integration exist at higher levels, indicated by the reluctance of national unions to delegate upwards to the European level (Pulignano, 2007), and between global/regional union federations and their national/sectoral affiliates (Seeliger & Wagner, 2016: 2).

While much of the scholarship discussed above has been duly sceptical about the emergence of labour transnationalism in the context of the globalization of capital and intensified competition, other accounts emphasize that the outlook is not so bleak, and that many of the same structural shifts have opened up new avenues for international labour solidarity. Transnational opportunity structures in the form of shared transnational employers and transnational governance frameworks may facilitate a convergence of interest among workers, and compel unions to use supranational arenas (Fox-Hodess, 2017: 2; Logue, 1980). The shift of labour regulation from the national to the global level, and institution building, in the form of European Works Councils, international codes of conduct and framework agreements provide new arenas and resources for cross-border exchange (Anner et al., 2006; Erne, 2008; Hammer, 2005; Hyman, 2005b; Martínez Lucio & Weston, 2004; Meardi & Marginson, 2014; Riisgaard, 2005). Further, organizationally integrated production, product standardisation and the similarity of business activities across sites in different countries have also been found to facilitate coordinated union strategic action (Marginson et al., 2004; Meardi et al., 2009: 38).

While structural and institutional factors strongly influence the likelihood for unions to cooperate transnationally, they are mediated by relations between unions, and cognitive mechanisms such as perceptions of reciprocity[11] (Gajewska, 2009; Fox-Hodess, 2017). Indeed, empirical studies point to the

[11] Indeed, where institutional regulations are not always binding, reciprocity is a general principle among trade unionists which functions as "an incentive for cooperation as well as a norm regulating and sanctioning trade union behaviour in the transnational sphere" (Gajewska, 2009: 6). For this reason, she stresses the importance of analysing the interest formulation process instead of beliefs and attitudes in a static sense, given that this provides insights into how unions decide

importance of considering the trust-building efforts and socialisation of union activists in international arenas, experiences at the plant-level, and the manner in which they interpret seemingly 'objective' threats and opportunities (Bernaciak, 2010; Gajewska, 2009; Erne, 2008; Hyman, 1999; Meardi, 2011, 2012b). For instance, the way that union leaders framed problems and interests in EWCs in the automotive sector was found to have a decisive effect on the development of shared norms, and consequently on the building of social ties and trust which were conducive to mobilisation in different countries (Greer & Hauptmeier, 2008). Other studies indicate that socialisation is a necessary but insufficient factor for transnational cooperation: frequent union interactions might be a pre-requisite for prolonged cooperation, however if actors can accomplish their goals through other means or institutional pathways then cooperation will not occur (Bernaciak, 2010; Meardi et al., 2009).[12] Further, even where EWCs have not managed to direct influence corporate decision-making, active efforts by unions to share information, resources and to mitigate rivalry and control in EWCs allowed common transnational understandings to emerge (Meardi, 2004, 2007a, 2012b).[13]

In sum, it appears that unions' capabilities to articulate and intermediate between contending interests and between different organizational levels, for instance through effective norm-brokerage and trust-building are crucial for overcoming the seemingly insurmountable cleavage of interests and national-identities. As put by Lévesque & Murray (2010b: 222), union involvement in cross-border alliances appears to be a product of the dynamic interplay between factors at the local, national and international levels: local union power resources (especially, but not only, discursive capacity and narrative framing), the orientation of national/industry unions, the resources provided by and the thickness of international regulation, and the capacity to articulate between these levels of action.

### *Building coalitional power: Overcoming barriers to cooperation*

Within the literature on labour internationalism, there is a lack of consensus regarding the ideal or appropriate form of multi-scalar unionism, which is itself a product of context-specific strategic considerations and ideological-political differences between actors. As with earlier debates regarding the opposing logics of collective action and the dilemmas associated with organisational bureaucratisation (Offe & Wiesenthal, 1980), there is a certain ambiguity between the means and ends of transnational cooperation.

Transposing debates around this problem to the international level, Richard Hyman charts a historical evolution in the dominant mode of international union leadership from 'agitator' to 'diplomat' as an effect of the development of intergovernmental regulation in the field of employment (Hyman, 2005a; Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020).[14] While labour internationalism in the early 20th century

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to cooperate or not, and how they make their choices mediated by their perceptions of the constraints in their respective economic, institutional and political contexts (Gajewska, 2009: 4, 25).

[12] In Bernaciak (2010) suggests that choices for national or transnational solutions were guided by cost-benefit considerations. In this case, trade unions cooperated when two conditions were both present. Namely, when no local negotiation channel, in the form of national or plant-level negotiations was available for the German unions, and when the Polish unions could benefit more from German assistance, in the form of informational and organisational resources, than from local negotiations. Research on transnational cooperation in the automotive sector, usually considered conducive to labour internationalization at the company level, found that local/national strategies in the form of local political exchange and specialised production strategies were found to be more attractive for unions than the relatively riskier and untested forms of transnational union mobilisation (Meardi et al., 2009).

[13] As Meardi notes: "Even if the EWCs do not achieve much directly, they often affect peripheral behaviours by increasing information and preventing competition: transnational union contacts are at least allowing unions not to harm each other through concession bargaining, even though they are still too weak to help each other" (2012b: 114).

[14] The vertical integration of national or sectoral unions within global union federations presents issues which differ qualitatively from those of integrating individuals within unions, namely that "powerful national affiliates are unlikely to allow significant positive discretion to a supranational decision-making authority" and that as a consequence, "bureaucratic

was characterised by tension between opposing bottom-up and top-down orientations, internationalism today is "largely the preserve of the professional labour diplomat… this lack of articulation between bureaucratic, institutionalised solidarity and a collective sense of mutuality is one reason why bodies such as the ICFTU and the ETUC pack so limited a punch" (Hyman, 2004: 42). He concludes that "if the institutions of international labour do not become less like bureaucracies and more like network organisations, welcoming the opportunities for increased transparency and internal democracy, they are likely to be consigned to increasing irrelevance" (Hyman, 2005a: 150). Other scholars emphasize that despite the benefits of efficiency that top-down models may offer for mobilizing against well-resourced multinational corporations, the democratic deficit in supranational union structures risks reproducing the inefficacy of national business unionism on a higher level (Moody, 1997; Waterman, 2001; Wills, 1998). Studies of labour leverage in global chains find that the incapacity to incorporate and accommodate local members' interests in transnational union networks impedes the development of cohesive collective identities (Niforou, 2013). As Cumbers et al. note: "particular union elites appear committed to older forms of social democracy and partnership with employers, which whilst no longer delivering for their workers at home – in the fact of corporate restructuring and the transferral of jobs abroad – are being constructed uncritically at the global level at the expense of developing independent labour networks between workers at the local scale" (Cumbers et al. 2008: 385).

This is not to imply that rank-and-file members are more averse to international cooperation than senior officials[15], since members often adopt more internationalist attitudes than their leaders (Gajewska, 2009: 2). Instead this may be interpreted as a product of elitist trade union cultures which exclude members from decision-making processes. Indeed, rank-and-file disappointment with the political direction taken by union leadership towards more moderate or nationalist positions can trigger alternative forms of internationalism (Gajewska, 2009: 5). Instead of a rigid, centralised and bureaucratic model of internationalism based on the rhetoric and verbal declarations of representatives, advocates of a 'new labour internationalism' have emphasized the benefits of a decentralised networked form, directly grounded in the experiences, daily needs, values and capacities of workers, with organic connections to progressive social movements and workers' communities, and based on multidirectional flows of support, information and ideas (Waterman, 2001). Indeed, the active involvement of local workers and unions in global campaigns has been shown to have a positive effect on enhancing bargaining power in local settings (Fichter & McCallum, 2015; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015; Sarkar & Kuruvilla, 2019). Workers' intimate knowledge of production processes allows them to identify potential allies during organizing campaigns, particularly in cases of labour standards violations (Niforou, 2015). Grassroots transnational networks of workers, shop-stewards and local union organisers have more potential to generate mutual solidarity since "power relations are likely to be more equal, connections and communications more open and respectful of local context and difference" (Cumbers et al., 2008: 383). Despite the supposed benefits, scholars highlight the scarcity of research on bottom-up approaches to labour internationalism, and insufficient attention to the micro-level and conceptualisation of the dynamics between the global and local scales of action (Niforou, 2015).

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international centralism becomes more linked to modest routine functions and a lowest common denominator in more substantial initiatives" (Hyman, 2005: 145). Given the language barriers present in international trade union work and the difficulty for workers to be adequately informed on situations in other countries, let alone to reach a common understanding, a degree of administrative bureaucratisation was a basic necessity in order for communication and coordination to occur. Nevertheless, "there is the familiar tension between 'movement' and 'organisation': effective impact depends ultimately on members' 'willingness to act', but hierarchical disciplines can cause such willingness to atrophy. Internationalism from above can thus marry efficiency to impotence" (2005: 145).

[15] However, such perspectives are certainly present in the literature, for instance Logue (1980), who refers to the "apparent paradox that working class political and economic organizations have been the outstanding champions of internationalism" whereas the workers they represent, for the most part, have been largely apathetic to international issues or even hostile to internationalism (cited in Hyman, 2005: 149).

Finally, scholars underline the necessity of clearly identifying not only the means but the goals of transnational cooperation – namely, what it is for. On this point, Levitas argues that a reinvented labour internationalism requires "a critical analysis of capitalism—aimed not (just) at saying isn't it awful, but at identifying potential points of intervention which might lead to transformation, and potential agents of that transformation" (2000: 209). Accordingly, it is argued that the organisational-processual dimensions of labour internationalism need to be combined with a utopian vision of a postcapitalist society which frames international union networking as part of a broader radical-democratic international project that transcends unions and labour problems (Levitas, 2000; Waterman, 2001).

Ultimately choices regarding transnational organisational form are not so dichotomous and empirical studies of global campaign governance illustrate that in practice, elements of top-down and bottom-up approaches are often combined (McCallum, 2013; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015; Sarkar & Kuruvilla, 2019). In recognition of this point, Evan stresses that "the effectiveness of labor's response does not rest on the invention of a single organizational form or campaign strategy" but on developing interconnections between unions in the Global North and South, and between traditional, hierarchically-organised national unions and global union federations (GUFs), and horizontally-networked labour NGOs and solidarity networks, in order to produce a "concatenated diversity" that synergizes the capacities of different kinds of actors and associations of actors (2010: 354, 360).[16] Likewise, Hyman suggests that "the future of effective internationalism requires a synthesis of these often contradictory elements" (2005a: 137). However, their integration often leads to governance struggles where initiatives by GUFs to actively involve and empower workers are limited, and global union strategies remain disconnected from the shop-floor (McCallum, 2013). GUFs' capacity to manage this tension depends on the extent of affiliate unions' involvement and integration into GUF structures and suggests that rather than implementing strategies from above, GUFs ought rather to play a facilitating and coordinating role, in order to better strike a balance between global priorities and local goals (Fichter & McCallum, 2015; Sarkar & Kuruvilla, 2019). The successes of such campaigns depends on relations between unions and allied actors, the industry, and the specific rights being violated, given that some issues (e.g. child labour or forced as opposed to violations of collective bargaining) are more sensitive to scrutiny and are more likely to provoke condemnation (Niforou, 2013, 2015).

While proponents of new labour internationalism have emphasized the benefits of involving diverse actors in global governance, they have not specified exactly how different actors may contribute and create new opportunities, and under which conditions their capacities may become conflictual or complementary (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). Studies of social movement-union coalitions in the context of the Rana Plaza disaster attribute the effectiveness of the campaign to "a mutual recognition among the actors of their complementary capacities and division of roles" in terms of building public outrage, and engaging in sustained, coordinated action and negotiation with other parties (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015: 737). Unions on the one hand leveraged their institutional 'insider' position, as legitimate representatives and negotiators, while social movements benefited from their freedom as 'outsiders' and played a mobilisation and advocacy role in order to build consumer pressure on global brands via naming-and-shaming practices that threatened to affect companies' sales and brand reputation. As the authors note, "in the absence of a direct relationship between producers and consumers—as in global value chains—social movement organisations create a 'chain of social connectedness' between downstream consumption acts and upstream production actors" (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015: 723).

[16] Global union federations are not a panacea for bypassing the problem of local labour organising. "Tree-like organizations work best in conflicts with similarly organized large-scale organizations, as tools for magnifying the power of workers that already have 'structural power' grounded in formal employment with large, stable employers." (Evans, 2010: 363). As Fox-Hodess points out however, even in situations where powerful coalitions can be formed in the context of GUFs, they can "at best serve as magnifiers of shop-floor power and not as substitutions for it" (2017: 18).

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY I - COUNTRY CASES

The previous chapter has outlined the theoretical framework that will be deployed in the analysis of empirical data in the following chapters, and has identified the major issues concerning the development and deployment of power resources and strategic capabilities by trade unions, as part of ongoing trade union revitalisation efforts. It also prefaced the analysis of transnational labour networks at Amazon, which are presented in the penultimate chapter, by presenting the major obstacles and opportunities for overcoming problems associated with constructing cross-border solidarities. This chapter prefaces the discussion of the research design and methods employed for data collection and data analysis in the following chapter, by providing a cursory overview of the industrial relations of the two country cases, namely Germany and Poland. Accordingly, this chapter describes these countries' respective industrial relations systems and the major actors in each context by contextualising them historically. Special attention is paid to relevant labour law reforms, and sources of institutional power that are available to unions in each country. Additionally, the chapter describes efforts at union revitalisation that have been undertaken by trade unions in the two countries, and where applicable, describes differences in approaches taken by different trade union organisations within each country.

### *Germany: Industrial relations*

The system of industrial relations that emerged in Germany following the Second World War II was premised on the principles of the social market economy, industrial trade unionism and the co-determination of key industries by the 'social partners' (Müller-Jentsch, 2018). By incorporating the monopolistic trade unions into policymaking and granting them a significant degree of regulatory power, the state could moderate industrial conflict, and rely on trade unions for their cooperation and a coordinated wage policy (Schmitter, 1974; Streeck, 1981). The sectoral unions meanwhile benefitted from protection against competition from fringe unions, and institutional security in the form of access to workplaces (Hassel, 2007). An element of this compromise meant that so long as union could maintain bargaining power by ensuring high density in key companies and cover financial costs, they could forego a strong focus on maintaining absolute membership numbers.

The central feature of German IR is the system of dual interest representation which functionally separates trade unions, granted exclusive rights to call strikes and negotiate collective agreements with employers and their associations at the sectoral level[17], and works councils, which have co-determination rights at workplace/firm level (Bergmann et al., 1975/1979). Collective agreements set non-discretionary guidelines concerning the regular evaluation and increase of wages in a sector, which, unlike voluntaristic works or firm-level agreements, cannot be unilaterally terminated by employers. Indeed, survey data illustrates that employees covered by collective agreements are more likely to earn supplementary payments, annual bonuses and to be better remunerated than employees which lack coverage.[18] Since the 1990's however a trend towards decentralisation emerged, with the introduction of opening clauses to agreements, allowing companies to diverge from collectively agreed wages and working conditions via agreements with works councils at site or company level (Pulignano et al., 2015). The retail and mail order collective agreement, which Ver.di has called for Amazon to sign, presently covers only 28% of employees in the sector.

[17] Collective bargaining tends to occur at the sectoral level, with some exceptions where unions negotiate directly with firms. Sectoral agreements are concluded regionally, so there is variation with bargaining following a cascading pattern once an agreement is adopted (ETUI, 2020).

[18] A survey conducted in 2020-1 showed that 77% of employees in companies with a collective agreement received a Christmas bonus compared with 41% of employees not covered by a collective agreement (Hans Böckler Stiftung, 2021).

The Works Constitution Act (Betriebsverfassungsgesetz) permits workplaces with at least 5 employees to establish works councils with significant competences and co-determination rights at the plant or company level. Namely, these are to monitor the application of collective rules, to be informed and consulted on working conditions, and to negotiate contentious issues. As section 87(1) of the Act notes, these include: the organisation of working time (including the beginning and end of shifts, break-times, the *recording* of working hours, reductions or increases in working hours, short-time work and overtime); permissions and planning concerning work leave; occupational health and safety measures (including accident prevention measures); on-call services; methods for payment (including changes from hourly to piece-work rates) and entitlements (wage subsidies, additional pay and bonuses, including the setting of targets and bonuses); the organisation of canteens and changing rooms; behavioural guidelines for dealing with colleagues and customers; procedures for hiring and dismissals, including instruments for monitoring the behaviour or productivity of employees (video camera systems, time-recording systems, time-clocks, productivity measures). These strong institutional rights mean that management cannot take decisions regarding these issues without considering the works council, and if no agreement can be reached between the employer and the works council, then decision-making on the issue is passed to an arbitration committee (sometimes referred to as 'conciliation committee, 'Einigungsstelle'), composed of representatives of the employer, the works council, and a neutral chair who can vote in case of a deadlock. The interest of the chair is to ensure a compromise between the parties that complies with law, which can take several meetings. Firms with over 2,000 employees are obliged to set up supervisory boards, consisting of an equal number of representatives from the employer and employee sides, granting certain competencies and informational rights. However, as Amazon illustrates, firms can stay under this threshold through a strategic use of subcontracting.

Works councils generally cannot deviate from collective agreements[19], but build on them by concluding firm or plant-level agreements with the employer that may cover all of its employees or just certain groups. Agency workers cannot stand for elections in the user-company's works councils are under-represented in works councils, earning voting rights only after three months of work (Pulignano et al., 2015).

Indeed, as elaborated in chapter 5, these factors have been a major obstacle for Ver.di's attempts to organise workers at Amazon, given the high proportion of agency workers. Further, while the German IR system allows for the establishment of Gesamtbetriebsräte, or company-level works councils which allow for the coordination and mediation of the various activities, interests and identities at work among various site-level works councils (Meardi, 2012b), this is not possible at Amazon, given that each site operates as a separate legal identity, permitting representation only either at the site or European levels, via European Works Councils.

While formally independent, historically works councillors were also usually union shop stewards (union workplace representatives, *Vertrauensleute*), ensuring a flow of information and resources between these institutions, while today this is not always the case. Indeed, also at Amazon, management-friendly works councils provide the semblance of worker inclusion and participation. While the legal barrier for forming works councils is very low, companies are not obliged to initiate the process which usually comes at the initiative of workers or a union, though in some cases, including at Amazon, management may initiate the process in order to gain additional control over it to provide a semblance of democratic participation.

[19] In certain cases, collective bargaining agreements include opening clauses which allow works councils to derogate from sectoral agreements. In some cases, the pressure of closures or relocations has led works councils to agree to terms even worse than in collective agreements. As a result, the binding nature of standards in sectoral agreements has diminished. This has been a key factor in that to the emergence, in Germany, of the largest low-pay sectors in the EU, with 22.6% of employees earning less than 2/3 of the median wage (Kalina & Weinkopf, 2017).

Works councils depend on unions to provide training for elected representatives, without which, they are unlikely to be very effective, or easily susceptible to co-optation. German unions have increasingly recognized the necessity of paid union representatives, which are crucial for connecting different fields of union activity (Behrens et al., 2001a). They balance the interests of union locals and works councillors, provide membership services such as legal counselling and are essential to maintaining close connections with political actors and social movements. However, the dense networks of local representation, due to the shop steward system and legally-mandated establishment of works councils, has positioned unions well to engage employers in new bargaining initiatives.

Following German reunification, the East German unions were dissolved and absorbed by West German unions, which moved in, transplanting labour institutions "on new terrain in contentious circumstances and with shallow roots" (Turner, 2009: 309). While the absorption of 4 million East German workers into the DGB during 1990-1 meant a rapid 50% rise in union membership, the following years witnessed steady decline, due to the rapid deindustrialisation of the former East states, and the inability of unions to consolidate and expand their influence there (Dribbusch, 2007; Müller-Jentsch, 2018; Turner, 2009). By the mid-90's, the German labour movement was in crisis, given the weakening of the institutional foundations of their power, namely comprehensive collective bargaining and workplace co-determination in a framework of social partnership (Hassel, 1999; Turner, 2009). The membership levels, political influence and bargaining power of trade unions declined, together with the coverage of works councils and collective bargaining agreements (Müller-Jentsch, 2018).

Collective bargaining coverage has steadily declined nationwide, but remains higher in West Germany. Employee coverage in services rapidly fell from nearly 100% in 2000, to 40% in 2015. The number of co-determined companies has also steadily fallen since the turn of the century: "In 2013, only 9% of all eligible workplaces actually had a works council in the west and 10% in the east, although these covered 43% of all employees in the west and 35% in the east. A majority of larger workplaces of over 500 employees have a works council. The number of works council members increases according to establishment size" (ETUI, 2020). Likewise, whereas larger workplaces tend to have adequate representation of union members on works councils, the opposite is true for smaller and mid-size workplaces. As Dribbusch & Birke explain: "Where employees are spread over a large number of sometimes very small workplaces, working under different types of employment contracts and following different working time arrangements, it is much harder to establish structures of trade union representation. To overstate the point: it is not a lack in demand for trade union representation, but rather a lack in availability of trade unions that is first and foremost to blame for the small membership numbers. Where there is no trade union, nobody can join one" (2019: 12). Further, the introduction of opening clauses in collective agreements permitted derogations from their terms, undermining the uniformity and binding nature of negotiated standards (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019: 15). Meanwhile employers' associations also began to lose members and appeared to lack a unified strategy (Schröder & Silvia, 2006).

The precarious financial situation of many DGB trade unions and shrinking membership levels prompted a wave of union mergers (Streeck & Visser, 1997). In 2001, the United Services Union (Ver.di) was founded as a merger of five previously independent unions ranging a spectrum of political positions and strategies, leading to an increase in size, organizational complexity and interest heterogeneity (Keller, 2005).[20] As a multi-industry services union, Ver.di encompasses a heterogeneous range of competing or conflicting member interests that must be mediated and accommodated. Its decentralised 'matrix' governance structure seeks to strike a balance between functional and territorial representation, the avoidance of strict hierarchical organisation and the delegation of power downwards and sideways to

[20] These included former DGB unions, namely the German Postal Union (DPG), the Commerce, Banking and Insurance Union (HBV), the Media Industry Union (IG Medien), the Public Services and Transport Union (ÖTV), and the unaffiliated German White-Collar Workers' Union (DAG).

autonomous industry departments (Annesley, 2006). Decision-making occurs at federal (Bundesebene), regional (Landesbezirk), and local levels (Bezirk), with the union integrated into 13 industry departments that have significant autonomy and regulatory competence over their own activities.

While inter-union competition intensified in the 2000's with the formation of 5 new subsector unions which terminated their bargaining partnerships with sectoral unions and began concluding their own CBAs, the effects were largely mitigated through the legislative and judicial institutions (Hassel, 2007; Müller-Jentsch, 2018).[21]

The power of unions was further undermined by the Schröder government's Hartz reforms (2003-2005) which deregulated the labour market, rolled back unemployment benefits, relaxed employment protections, and strengthened employer control over contracts and working conditions (Müller-Jentsch, 2018). While these measures succeeded in bringing unemployment down from its peak of 11.7% in 2005, they did so by deregulating agency work, and introducing a low-wage concept of work, expanding precarious work, on-demand services, and non-standard jobs[22] (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019).[23] As a result, waged income is heavily polarised, with Germany's low-wage sector presently among one of the highest in the EU.[24] An increasing number of people began to be caught in the periphery of unemployment and informal or precarious employment, while the majority of these newly created jobs were also insecure (Birke, 2011). Following the 2008 crisis, tripartite agreements safeguarded core workforces at the expense of outsiders, with the gap between wages, work conditions and contracts widening after the crisis (Birke 2011). Job losses affected first and foremost temporary agency workers and those employed on fixed-term contracts. However, new regulations in 2017 stipulated that after nine months of work, agency workers were entitled to receive wages on par with their directly-assumed colleagues, and that they may not be employed by the same company any longer than 18 successive months.

Since the mid-2000's, German industrial relations have undergone a series of qualitative and quantitative changes. First, they have become more prone to conflict, indicated by the increase of the number of industrial disputes. Germany presently ranks in the lower-middle among EU countries in figures of days not worked due to strikes and lockouts. Second, the occurrence of industrial action has shifted to the service sector[25], which has consistently accounted for 68% of days not worked between 2005-2018. In fact, the service sector has seen the slowest wage development between 2000-2017. Finally, labour market outsiders have been increasingly involved in industrial action, reversing a previous trend (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019: 26-29). In light of these trends, labour market dualisation has increased, with scholars suggesting the emergence of two spheres of regulation: "on the one hand a 'traditional' sphere characterised by stable collective bargaining and co-determination structures, on the other hand an 'emerging' sphere with unstable and conflictual bargaining arrangements and unilaterally determined and often precarious employment relations" (Müller-Jentsch, 2018: 648). The union-free zone of private

[21] In the interest of limiting bargaining competition, the state intervened in 2015 by legislating the *Tarifeinheitsgesetz*, or Unitary Bargaining Law, which specified that an agreement concluded by only one union may cover a company. While the law was challenged by the subsector unions in the Federal Constitutional Court, the complaint was rejected (Müller-Jentsch, 2018). Labour courts meanwhile protected the DGB unions from competitors, granting them the exclusive capacity to conclude bargaining agreements in their domains (Hassel, 2007).

[22] This segment comprises 21% of the total workforce where the number of women is 2.5 times that of men (Müller-Jentsch, 2018).

[23] In 2019, fixed-term contracts accounted for 8.3% of all employment contracts, and 44% of all new-hires. Agency work, while accounting for only 3% of all employees in 2017, is unevenly distributed, comprising of 10-20% of workers in sectors like manufacturing (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019: 4-5).

[24] Low-waged employees, defined as earning less than 2/3 of the average gross hourly wage comprised 22.5% of all workers in 2014 (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019).

[25] "Most of these conflicts are in the context of disagreements over in-house collective agreements. Frequently these are triggered by companies pulling out of sectoral agreements or refusing to be bound by collective agreements in the first place" (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019: 28).

services is a clear case of the latter, particularly among low-wage occupational categories such as building services, retail sales and food service (Turner, 2009: 310).

However, while the labour market underwent massive transformations, the distribution of trade members between sectoral unions remained rather stable.[26] As Hassel notes, membership decline is rooted in the service sector: "Structural changes on the labour market towards the service economy should have turned ver.di into the natural winner. However, ver.di has not assumed this role, despite the strong corporatist industrial relations institutions in place. The continuing lack of union support among service employees is the most important aspect of the German union membership crisis" (2007: 184).

Institutionalist interpretations suggest that dualisation is not necessarily the product of explicit choices by union leaders to privilege the representation of insiders' interests, since such choices are rather conditioned by their institutional contexts, and the weakening role of trade unions within them (Palier & Thelen, 2010; Pulignano et al., 2015). The "institutional security" provided by the German corporatist system allowed unions to secure interest representation at the workplace level, but in the long-run undermined their membership base by encouraging unions to protect their core constituencies while neglecting new groups in the labour market (Hassel, 2007). While the institutional environment has provided union leaders few incentives to reorient their organisations towards organising new groups in the service economy, they have opted for union mergers which broadened membership and secured the inflow of member dues at a comparatively lower cost (Hassel, 2007; Keller, 2005). German unions are increasing efforts on representing outsiders, institutional obstacles persist in the form of collective agreements have allowed a "protection gap" between permanent and agency workers to emerge, though this has been attributed to a weakened institutional environment for bargaining and representation rather than to explicit union choices (Pulignano et al., 2015). For instance, when faced with plant closures, works councils at some companies have won employment guarantees for regular workers by accepting work agency quotas and "increasing flexibility at the margins" (Pulignano et al., 2015: 10).

Despite this, certain unions, among them Ver.di and IG.Metall have been able to slow membership decline by adopting organising concepts from U.S. unions, premised on a grassroots focus on member mobilization and recruitment (Rehder, 2014; Turner, 2009). Whereas union membership in the healthcare, social and education sectors grew during the early 2000's, Ver.di's membership fell by 23.8% during 2001-2008, and by 7.1% during 2008-2017, with much of this attributable to retail and public administration (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019: 12).

IG.Metall's *Besser Statt Billiger* (Better Not Cheaper) campaign is instructive of how unions have managed to confront the exploitation of agency work following its deregulation. Metalworking companies replaced union members with cheaper agency workers, while works councils were pressured into accepting concessions on pay and working conditions. The campaign pushed for stronger national regulations and a stronger sectoral agreement on agency work, while encouraging works councils to regulate agency work at the local level. The success of the campaign's success has been attributed to collective action that combined pressure for legal reforms together with inclusive bargaining within existing collective agreements (Benassi & Dorigatti, 2018). Ver.di however, has not been able to negotiate collective agreements which specifically cover fixed-term or self-employed workers (Jolly, 2018).

[26] Employment in manufacturing, the backbone of German unionism, declined by 14% between 1980-2005, while union membership fell only 4%, whereas over the same period, employment in services increased by 17%, while membership in service unions grew by only 6% (Hassel, 2007: 183-184). Significantly, apart from Switzerland, Germany has the widest gender gap in union membership in the EU, with women making up just 33.7% of union members in 2019, and comprising 48% of total employment (Fulton & Sechi, 2019).

### *Poland: Industrial relations*

The Polish trade union landscape is dominated by three large national organisations, Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy 'Solidarność' (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarity'), Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Rodzaje Związków Zawodowych (OPZZ, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions) and the Forum Związków Zawodowych (FZZ, Trade Unions Forum). Solidarność, the largest of the union confederations, was founded in 1980 as a social movement centred around a trade union, but which in addition to advancing workers' rights, voice and control in the workplace also pursued broader socio-economic demands (Gardawski et al. 2012: 31; Meardi, 2007; Touraine et al., 1984). Solidarność and OPZZ played a central role in the democratisation process and were crucial for setting Polish IR on the path of competitive pluralism (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018; Gardawski, 2003). While radical labour mobilisation in Poland was relatively strong in the 1980's, trade unions have shifted towards moderate strategies and endorsed neoliberal reforms following 1989 (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017). Solidarność led the first coalition government following the transition in 1989, however in recent years it has shifted away from its rebellious traditions and gravitated towards a liberal-conservative ideology, indicated in its support for the re-election of the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) in 2015, in return for promised pro-labour reforms.

There are also other small confederations, national unions unaffiliated to any confederations, as well as around 7,000 local union organisations operating at the worksite level that are not connected to larger unions. While neither the union confederation nor independent unions publish regular membership figures, survey data shows union density to have fallen from 65% in 1981 (roughly half in Solidarność) to 11% in 2014,[27] however the general trend of membership loss had slowed in the mid-2000's (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018). The three major confederations account for 87-92% of Poland's 1.5 million trade union members (CBOS, 2019; GUS, 2019), while by comparison, membership in non-affiliated unions was estimated to be between 100,000 and 300,000 (Gardawski et al. 2012). Surveys indicate that 53% of workers are employed in workplaces without any union representation (CBOS, 2019).[28] The sectors where membership is highest are mining (20%), education, science and health (19%) and public administration (17%), while it is the lowest in commerce and services (2%) (CBOS, 2012). Large workplaces with over 250 employees are more likely to be unionised (26%), than those with fewer than 50 employees (7%), while public sector employees are three times more likely to be union members than employees in the private sector.

After transition, the development of IR was a state-dominated process in Poland whereby the newly constituted actors acquired little capacity to shape labour policies at the sectoral or national levels, and were deprived of efficient mechanisms to support the aggregation of collective interests (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018). Tripartite and sectoral social dialogue in Poland has been characterised as an 'illusory corporatism' whereby governments have avoided or bypassed tripartite negotiation[29] (Ost, 2011), while unions and employers' associations[30], rather than engaging each other in meaningful dialogue tend

[27] A study by the national Central Statistics Office reported union density of 17% for 2014 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2015).

[28] 18% of respondents were employed in workplaces with one union, 17% in workplaces with more than one, while 12% did not know whether a union was present at their workplace (CBOS, 2019).

[29] Governments have tended to use tripartite institutions instrumentally, when seeking additional sources of legitimacy, or when looking to diffuse responsibility for unpopular policies (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018).

[30] Crzarzasty & Mrozowicki also refer to the general weakness and problems internal to employers' association which have obstructed social dialogue: "Employer organisations seem to have been trapped in a vicious circle: they do not promote supra-enterprise collective bargaining out of fear their members will flee, whereas inability of employer organisations to aggregate and represent collective interests of their constituency deter potential members from joining in. In particular, foreign-owned companies appear to be oriented on opportunistic adaptation in the environment of weak institutions and tend to capitalise on low capacity of employees for collective action rather than act as agents of change transposing patterns of IR dominant in their countries of origin." (2018: 680).

to lobby public actors in pursuit of favourable policies and resources in return for political consent (Meardi, 2007: 254-6). Changes to collective bargaining law in 2009 mandated annual pay negotiations in the public sector, giving unions more autonomy from the state, however leading to an increase in wage-related disputes given the necessity of using strike threats to force employers to bargain (Meardi & Trappman, 2013). The establishment of the Social Dialogue Council (RDS) in 2015 saw a temporarily re-legitimation of social dialogue, however the preconditions for their efficacy are still missing, namely, the mobilisation capacity and veto power of trade unions, and the representative mandate of the employer organizations (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018).

Collective bargaining is very decentralised, with agreements tending to be negotiated with single employers and coverage predominantly at the worksite or firm level. Sectoral collective agreements are very rare due to an absent supportive legal framework, the fragmentation of both unions and employers' associations, and the reluctance of employers to bargain collectively (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017). Meanwhile, divergent trends between sectors have made national level coordination difficult (Meardi & Trappman, 2013). Sectoral bargaining has also been impeded by the unions' organizational structures, for instance with Solidarność organisation historically developed along territorial rather than occupational lines.[31] While around 30% of workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements, less than 3% are covered by multi-employer agreements (Fulton, 2021).[32] The content of agreements has also deteriorated, rarely exceeding the minimal requirements of labour legislation, and often having little effect on employment conditions (Meardi & Trappman, 2013).

While works councils do exist, they have not become institutionally embedded, and workplace representation primarily occurs through workplace union organisations. Decentralisation has been maintained via legislative incentives, such as low thresholds for establishing a company-level union relative to works councils[33] (Clauwaert et al. 2016). Legislation providing for the establishment of works councils was only introduced in 2006, in response to the EU directive on establishing a national framework for information and consultation (2002/14/EC), however their powers are limited to receiving information on economic issues and being consulted on work organisation and employment issues, meaning that company agreements tend not to spill-over (Fulton, 2021). While 3,034 works councils were established by the end of 2009, a large proportion were not renewed after their four-year term, falling to 720 in 2015, due to a range of organizational problems within works councils themselves, as well as due to insufficient support by the trade unions (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018; Skorupińska, 2017).[34]

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[31] While Solidarność is often referred to as a union confederation like OPZZ and FZZ, formally it is a 'unitary union' in which company-level union organisations do not have separate legal status and are considered a single legal entity (Gardawski et al., 2012: 34, f. 29).

[32] Certain sectors such as steel are exceptions, which was one of the first to have a sectoral collective agreement negotiated in 1998 (Gilejko, 2011).

[33] Workplace unions can be established with a minimum of 10 members, while the works councils required the relatively higher threshold of 50 employees, raised to 100 in 2008 (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018).

[34] "Originally the law envisaged two paths for establishment of a works council: in unionised workplaces, the representative trade unions appointed the delegates to the council, while in non-unionised workplaces councillors were elected. However, following the 2008 ruling by the constitutional court which found union appointment of works councils members procedure unconstitutional, all works councils are to be elected in a general ballot. Unions subsequently lost interest in promotion of works councils." (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2018: 679). Meanwhile, Skorupińska's (2017) survey conducted with 242 works councils found a range of additional reasons for the decline of works councils. In some cases, where unions were sufficiently strong, it was felt that works councils were unnecessary, whereas in other cases there were difficulties in finding willing candidates. In other cases, organisational problems or the limited powers provided to works councils led to them not being renewed. Another explanation lay in the passive or low-level activity of works councillors. Councils rarely made full use of the legal opportunities provided to them for instance by soliciting employers for information, informing the National Labour Inspectorate of labour violations, or even in holding regular council meetings. Many others were not interested in establishing cooperation via works-level agreements, or faced obstruction by employers.

Apart from two large waves of strikes, Poland has seen relatively low levels of industrial disputes. The first wave peaked in 1992 registering a total of 6,362 strikes with 730,000 strikes, the second peaked in 2008 involving largely public sector workers, registering 12,765 strikes with 209,000 strikers. By 2013, the level of strikes had fallen to 93, involving 29,263 strikers (Maciejewska et al., 2016). A significant barrier in this regard are restrictive laws that prohibit minority strikes and which require the majority of employees to support a strike via referendum. On the other hand, the number of demonstrations and street protests has increased from 1,500 in 2009-2010 to 2,500 in 2012, while the 2015 election of the right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS) spurned a further wave of anti-government collective actions, indicating a potential shift in the structure of social contention given the weakness of union-led mobilisations (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017).

*Neoliberal transformation and the decline of union power*

In accordance with the pattern of post-socialist 'dependent market economies' (Nölke & Vliegenthart, 2009), since the systemic transformation, Polish policymakers have consistently held to a belief that national competitive advantage and the inflow of foreign investment could be ensured by keeping labour costs low (Maciejewska et al. 2016). The transformation from a state-planned economy, to a market economy consisted of the 'shock therapy' of a first wave of reforms: these included the privatisation of (largely-state owned) heavy industry and the introduction of elements of conditionality into the social security system (Maciejewska et al. 2016). A rapid rise in unemployment and stagnating real wages led to the first strike wave in 1992,[35] prompting the establishment of tripartite institutions of national social dialogue[36] (Gardawski et al., 2012). The second wave of neoliberalisation in 1998-2001 aimed to tackle unemployment and adjust Poland's legal framework in line with the convergence criteria under the Maastricht Treaty in preparation for EU accession in 2004. This entailed a second wave of privatisations in the public services, further welfare retrenchment, the reduction of corporate taxes (from 40% in 1989 to 19% in 2004), freezes or temporary brakes or minimum wage increases, and finally, labour market deregulation which decreased workers' protection against collective dismissal.[37] Until 2008, the economy saw reasonable levels of GDP growth, export growth and inflow of FDI, as well as declining unemployment (2008 saw the lowest figure of 7.1% in three decades), however an important factor for the latter was mass emigration, with 1.5 million or 9% of the economically active population leaving Poland between 2002-2007 (Maciejewska et al., 2016: 249).[38]

After the global financial crisis in 2008 hit, Poland was the only country in the EU not to experience recession, with growth only slowing from 6.8% in 2007 to 1.6% in 2009, with the sectors more exposed to international competition[39] suffering from more job losses (GUS, 2015b; Maciejewska

[35] In certain government-controlled sectors where Polish unions have historically been strong, namely mining, steel and military, workers received much higher numbers of redundancy payments than their counterparts in the public sector, or sectors dominated by women. The strikes in 1992 were quelled through these initiatives, with more disadvantaged workers faced with choosing between exit and mobilisation. During this time, political consent was ensured via selective forms of employment protection such as early benefits, that were unevenly distributed and privileged these industries (Meardi, 2007).

[36] The Tripartite Commission on Social and Economic Affairs, the first national tripartite negotiating body was established only in 1994, designed to play an advisory role with the goal of maintaining social peace during economic restructuring. It includes representation for government, employers and unions, however which is only extended to the three main union confederations and four employers' associations (Gardawski et al. 2012). However, the implementation of crucial labour market reforms after 2008 without union consent prompted the trade unions to leave the Tripartite Commission in 2013 (Maciejewska et al. 2016).

[37] These included legislation on temporary work agencies, the introduction of a possibility of concluding an unlimited number of fixed-term contracts, the exemption of state owned enterprises from obligations to establish company social funds, the suspension of collective agreements for employers in a difficult situation (Maciejewska et al., 2016: 237).

[38] Indeed, Western European labour markets and opportunities were migration have been characterised as the Polish labour market's 'safety valve', reducing job competition for those who stayed (Meardi & Trappman, 2013). Indeed, instead of voice strategies in the form of collective bargaining and mobilisation, the labour market favoured exit strategies such as emigration, dismissal and high labour turnover (Meardi, 2012a).

[39] Namely automotive and steel, whereas services, agriculture and construction were relatively more sheltered.

et al. 2016; Meardi & Trappman, 2013). Despite strong economic performance, from 2009, operating under the assumption that a more flexible labour market would cushion companies from economic downturn, policymakers, with the support of employers' associations implemented a series of anti-crisis measures including wage subsidies for ailing businesses, the flexibilisation of work-time and further deregulation of the use of fixed-term contracts[40] (Clauwaert et al., 2016). In this context, the politicisation of precarious employment by introducing term of 'junk contracts' and proposals for unpopular pension reform brought about the cooperation of the previously rival confederations OPZZ and Solidarność. The non-interventionist macroeconomic policy course was not altered however, apart from Poland's decision to postpone the adoption of the euro, with the Eurozone crisis undermining assumptions of the beneficial effects of the single currency for Poland's stability and attractiveness for foreign investment (Meardi & Trappman, 2013). In 2015, further reforms aimed at reducing the excessive use of fixed-term and civil law contracts, abuses by temporary work agencies and a reform of parental leave (Clauwaert et al. 2016).

The gradual decline of the power of trade unions has been explained by a range of structural as well as cultural factors which have influenced attempts at revitalisation. The first set of factors relates to the structural properties of neoliberal regimes and the inability of trade unions to adapt to new labour markets. As markets were opened up to foreign competition and privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation policies created a flexible and segmented labour market with insecure and precarious jobs at high social cost, in the form of low pay, unprotected contracts, poor career prospects and instability in employment (Gardawski et al. 1999; Gardawski, 2001; Maciejewska et al. 2016; Mrozowicki et al. 2010; Ost, 2009). Industrial relations seemed split into two spheres: a rapidly growing 'new economy' of a high number of small, private, high-tech firms with highly individualised employment relations and 'union-free' or aggressively anti-union management styles, and an 'old economy' where unions managed to maintain some residual power but tended to negotiate contracts with little substance, in the large "obsolescent structures" of the private sector, low-tech firms with significant state ownership (Gardawski et al. 1999). As in Germany, albeit under very different dynamics, unions lent their support very unevenly in the transforming economy, focusing on protecting their traditional support base, a small core of privileged and skilled workers, at the cost of organising in adverse circumstances across a high number of workplaces. These dynamics however must be interpreted in the context of Poland's semi-peripheral position to Western markets.[41]

On the other hand, the decline of union power also has explanations relating to the cultural legacies of communist and post-communist unionism, and the limited traditions of unionism independent from employers and the state. The lack of organised resistance by workers in post-socialist countries was ascribed to an 'immobile mentality' and acquiescence to the promised benefits of European

[40] By 2014, 28.4% of workers were employed on a limited contract, compared to the EU28 average of 14%, with the largest growth of temporary employment in wholesale and retail. A Eurostat survey showed that in 2012, 70% of people aged 15-24 were employed on this kind of contract (Maciejewska et al., 2016: 245). Employers' preference for these contracts relates to lack of regulation over their permitted length, a two-week legal notice period for termination, and the ability to terminate without cause (Clauwaert et al., 2016: 7). Since 2011, the Council of the EU has repeatedly advised Poland to amend its employment protection legislation and to combat labour market segmentation by reducing the excessive use of civil law contracts which do not enjoy the full protections under labour law. It has also called for a better transition from fixed-term to permanent employment, to improvements to programs to ensure the employability of older workers, pension reform, the reduction of youth unemployment, and an increase in increase female labour market participation by improving the availability of affordable, quality childcare (Clauwaert et al., 2016).

[41] "The strong position of trade unions in postwar Western Europe was built on the economic and political relevance of skilled workers as mass consumers and mass producers in capital-intensive industries. By contrast, the decline of socialist heavy industries and the eastward relocation of low-wage, labour-intensive light industry undercut the mobilisation capacities of trade unions in the first phase of economic transformation. When skill-intensive investors finally arrived in CEE countries, they seemed to 'prefer individual case-by-case deals with their workers and public administrations to mediation of nationally or sectorally organised interests' (Bohle and Greskovits, 2006: 12)." (Mrozowicki et al. 2010: 224).

integration (Kramer, 1995). Indeed, research on workers' consciousness identified a moderate level of support for liberal reforms among workers, casting doubt on their militancy (Gardawski, 1997, 2009), however others demonstrated that workers' acceptance of neoliberal reforms was not accompanied by the watering down of class opposition in the workplaces (Meardi, 2007). As the social costs of the reforms became apparent in 2000-1, the union's rank-and-file condemned the role that their organisations played in the transformation while neglecting their materials needs. Rather than opposing economic reforms, union leaders embraced a pro-market rhetoric and continued to pursue an ineffective, ritualistic social partnership. Taken together, the reduction of unions' influence at the workplace level, their complicity in neoliberalisation and the moderation of their claims contributed to a societal distrust or indifference towards unions, and evidence of the unions' inability to represent and defend the collective interests of Polish labour in the postcommunist era (Bernaciak, 2017; Crowley & Ost, 2001; Ost, 2005, 2009; Spieser, 2007; Wenzel, 2009). In the course of organising workers at Amazon, Inicjatywa Pracownicza has related that a negative perception and memory of Polish trade unionism has been related to the reluctance of many workers to join trade unions [PL005]. This is particularly salient among young precarious workers which "in general, are reluctant to join unions and have little knowledge of the activities and possibilities they create… [they] do not perceive themselves as a social class, and they tend to see unions as unnecessary for a successful career or as hierarchical and bureaucratic structures that are too petrified to include young people working in very unstable conditions" (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017: 70). In the context of the massive informalisation of the labour market since 2000, the authors are emphatic: "The mainstream trade unions in Poland do not know how to organise such a labour force" (ibid.: 70).

While support for neoliberalisation among union leaders has become more muted, it has been argued that the mobilisation capacities of trade unions continue to be constrained by "the long-term effects of the socialisation to social dialogue and their institutional anchoring in the Polish political system" (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017: 69), and the lingering attachment to the ideas of "old-fashioned economic unionism" (Ost, 2005: 177). Indeed, the collapse of Solidarność's superstructure in 2001 allowed its 'unionist' side to emerge, highlighting the necessity of formulating alternative economic demands (Meardi, 2005; Mrozowicki et al. 2010).

*Trade union revitalisation in Poland: Top-down, bottom-up and hybrid forms*

Mrozowicki et al. suggest that the evolution of the Polish labour movement can be charted from a position of initial strength, to marginalisation, and into "slow but visible revitalisation" at the start of the millennium (2010: 225). Throughout the 1990's, trade union leaders seemed uninterested in reforming their organisations, organising the neglected segments or contesting prevailing negative discourses about unions, but were rather focused on securing political positions for themselves (Ostrowski, 2014). However in the early 2000's, challenging assumptions of the quiescence of CEE workers, a wave of labour protests spread through the region, taking the form of innovations in collective bargaining, strikes, grassroots organising campaigns and informal collective actions, prompting the thesis that 'exit' strategies, and their related labour problems had led to a resurgence of voice from below (Meardi, 2007c).[42] In Poland, there were strong demonstration against the deregulation of labour laws in 2002, and campaigns against foreign-owned hypermarkets (Meardi 2005).

As the previous section demonstrates however, much of the literature on Polish IR has stressed the weak agency of labour in a context of institutional closure, overemphasizing the impact of institutional factors on renewal tactics, while at the same time neglecting potential for institutional renewal (Mrozowicki et al. 2010). Experiments in revitalisation in Poland illustrate that even in unfavourable circumstances, trade unions can make innovative strategic choices towards organising workers (Kozek &

[42] Suggesting a cyclical occurrence Meardi (2007c: 520) proposes that "'exit' strategies turn into labour problems (informality, insecurity, inequality, populism and migration) which in turn call for 'voice' solutions."

Ostrowski, 2003; Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017; Ostrowski, 2014). At the same time, scholars have been divided on the benefits or indeed the appropriateness of different pathways to renewal in Poland (Ost, 2002, 2009; Mrozowicki et al. 2010). David Ost for instance, argues that models of social movement unionism have been detrimental to labour in post-socialist CEE countries, and that unions might rather strengthen their representation by focusing on the delivery of key services, and the neglected material needs of workers (Ost, 2002).[43] Indeed he predicts that if revitalisation were to occur in this context, it would take the form of an "aristocratic unionism" among high-skilled male craftsmen (Ost, 2009: 30). Following Ost, others concede that confederate union structures provide critical support for organising in the form of financial support, expertise and training facilities, and advocate for a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies (Ostrowski, 2014).

Despite a context hostile to labour organising, there have been efforts at union renewal and revitalisation, with varying degrees of success, among both among the major trade union confederations, as well as among radical independent unions which have pursued alternative strategies and modes of organising. Following growing grassroots discontent with their strategic direction, Solidarność and OPZZ undertook revitalisation campaigns for organising outsiders in the neglected private sector, however both have essentially opted for top-down strategies (Mrozowicki et al. 2010; Ostrowski, 2014). Mrozowicki and Maciejewska (2017) identify four approaches that the major trade unions have used to organise atypical employees. First, this has involved political lobbying to reform the Trade Union Act in order to broaden the narrow definition of employees which had thus far excluded self-employed and civil law workers.[44] Second, running social media campaigns aimed to raise public awareness of labour conditions, namely in the campaign against 'junk contracts'. Third, by establishing inter-company union committees[45] comprising regular as well as agency or outsourced workers. Fourth, by engaging in transnational initiatives such as lobbying at the EU level or by participating in European Works Councils. Indeed, renewal was encouraged via union education programmes, and expert and financial support from the EU institutions, and European and American unions[46] (Mrozowicki et al., 2010; Ost, 2009). Organizational factors have also influenced the kind of renewal strategies that were developed: the centralised structure of Solidarność has allowed it to more easily shift resources to organise workers more efficiently than the decentralised OPZZ and FZZ, whose development was rather driven by competing

[43] According to Ost, Solidarność's social movement origin became an obstacle rather than a resource, arguing that "it is only those unions that scale back their political and social movement commitments and embrace the centrality of economic unionism that are making a comeback today" (2002: 34). Grounded in the context of mandatory unionism under communism, he elaborates: "The point, however, is that the success of an organizing model depends on the nature of prior experiences. Aggressive organizing may work when employees feel they have been ignored by unions. But when employees have a history of feeling overly patronized by unions, it makes sense that organizing will seem secondary to servicing" (36).

[44] The reforms to the Trade Union Act, have largely benefited the major trade unions, while continuing to exclude the most precarious workers: "The project increases the criteria of union representativeness from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of eligible workers at the company level. The legal changes following the verdict of the Constitutional Tribunal in June 2015 will also open the way for union membership to self-employed and civil law workers. However, in line with NSZZ Solidarność and government proposals, union membership would be restricted to those who perform work for one employer for at least six months (regardless of the type of contract) which indeed can be seen as restrictive and excluding the most precarious (or flexible) employees from union membership." (2017: 69 f.3).

[45] For example, the Confederation of Labour was originally founded as a cross-sectoral unit within the OPZZ with the objective of organising 'challenging' segments of the workforce, such as precarious workers and the unemployed (Gardawski, 2001; Ostrowski, 2014). While it grew quickly, it was marginalised "due to internal opposition within the OPZZ, mostly from the leaders of the affiliated federations who were afraid of losing their organisational power and resources within the confederation" (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017: 71). Meanwhile, Solidarność established the Union Development Office, premised on the American approach of active recruitment, albeit with a centrally-driven member recruitment policy (Gardawski et al. 2012: 8; Krzywdzinski, 2010; Trappman, 2012). For Solidarność, union renewal consisted of "a) reinvigorating union commitment through training, promoting membership growth, and monitoring union development, b) organising new membership in non-unionised companies, and c) union restructuring in the form of creating 'local union organisations' at sub-regional divisions of the union." (Mrozowicki et al. 2010: 225).

[46] Resounding with our own findings, exchange and cooperation with Western unions was a key resource for Polish unionists based in multinational firms (Gajewska, 2009; Meardi, 2007b).

unions that represented narrow occupational groups (Czarzasty et al. 2014). However, such organising campaigns have tended to focus on the traditional strongholds of union power, namely skilled workers (Ost, 2009) and 'privileged' workplaces such as automotive companies (Meardi, 2007b). Whereas collective bargaining could have provided opportunities for unions to reinvigorate their bases, union leaders have treated negotiations as a means of maintaining communication with management (Gąciarz, 1999).

Whereas some predicted revitalisation in the form of an 'aristocratic' unionism (Ost, 2009), qualitative, biographical research with Polish company-level union activists found that the impetus for grassroots organising has not necessarily come from union leadership, but from structurally and culturally marginalised groups of people such as women, young workers, and those employed in lower-skilled segments of the economy, such as cashiers in hypermarkets, who have not been primarily concerned with low levels of pay, but with "reclaiming the stability of occupational careers and increasing the sense of agency in a broader societal context" (Mrozowicki et al. 2010: 236). The study identifies two, often overlapping pathways of union activism, namely 'transitional' and 'reinvented'[47], which form a continuum of top-down and bottom-up strategies. In this context "it was neither political activism, nor the rhetoric of broad social change, but a more efficient representation of economic interests in the workplace that attracted new membership to trade unions" (236). Further, the post-communist union 'ethos'[48] of solidarity against exploitation produced out of the workers' struggle with the old ruling class, theorised elsewhere as a constraint on mobilisation (Crowley & Ost, 2001) was reflexively reworked by union activists as a cultural resource to reposition the role of trade unions in terms of class conflict (Mrozowicki et al. 2010). Similarly, other qualitative research examining the formation of company-level trade unions in Polish private enterprises noted that while rank-and-file workers often did not exhibit "explicit 'union-friendly' behaviour" there was nevertheless an "internalized and individualized cultural capital related to the situation of justice and equality in the workplace", however that such resources required effective leaders which could mobilise and activate them for collective action (Ostrowski, 2014: 215).

Since the late 2000's, smaller, radical unions have seen rapid growth both in terms of their visibility and membership, facilitated by a permissive institutional context for establishing independent unions (Mrozowicki & Antoniewicz, 2014; Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017). Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers' Initiative, IP) was founded in 2001, initially as an informal collaboration between anarchist activists and workers employed in the Cegielski ship-engine factory in Poznań which had broken away from Solidarność 'Sierpień 80' (August 80), itself a breakaway union from Solidarność (Inicjatywa Pracownicza, n.d.). In 2004, it was formally registered as a national trade union organisation, a decision influenced by the legal protections available for workplace-based union activists, and subsequently saw two periods of growth: first in 2009-2010, via an influx of members that had become disillusioned with existing unions at their workplaces, and second, via efforts to unionise precarious workers in the cultural sector, and in greenfield sites such as Amazon (Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2017). Presently, IP has works committees in the manufacturing, health and social care, education, construction, theatre and cultural arts, retail, postal services, logistics and transportation sectors.

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[47] The 'transitional' pattern was observed among activists involved in unions before and after systemic change, characterized by "stable occupational experiences of union activists within long-term unionised organisational contexts… [and] likely to coexist with a consensual stance towards employers, occasional sectional mobilisation, and the endorsement of historical union identities." The 'reinvented' pattern was found among union activists involved from the 1990's onwards "grounded in discontinuous occupational careers and the experiences of union-hostile organizational contexts … [and] based on the pragmatic redefinition of union goals by newcomers to the union movement" (Mrozowicki et al., 2010: 229).

[48] Indeed, echoing previous research on the legacy of Solidarność (Meardi, 2007), the authors emphasize that the diminished relevance of class as an ideational category do not correlate with decline. "The universalistic rhetoric of dignity and rights, rooted in a local cultural context, served then as a useful cultural tool to justify more active economic claims and to re-link the bottom-up activism of workers with trade union strategies." (Mrozowicki et al., 2010: 236).

In its organisational documents, the union acknowledges its roots in the traditions of anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism and its stated goal of building a self-governing workers' movement that is "independent of employers, the government and political parties" (IP, n.d.). As part of this tradition, the union is firmly embedded in progressive social struggles on the local and national level, supporting the tenants' movement in blocking evictions, as well as movements' for gender equality, most recently by actively participating in the 2020-1 Women's Strike protests against the tightening of abortion laws in Poland. The principles governing its organisation, namely the empowerment of rank-and-file members and renunciation of "bureaucracy and the employment of 'full-time activists'" are contextualised in the perceived shortcomings of other trade unions.[49] IP rejects the pursuit of social dialogue as an end in itself, and instead emphasizes participation and collective solidarity as means for defending workers' rights [PL045]. The union embraces a broad notion of membership and claims to organize all employees regardless of gender, workplace, contract type, industry, or nationality (IP, n.d.). The union has a high number of women members, including many with children. In March 2018, the Social Congress of Women invited 100 women workers from Poznań and Warsaw to discuss everyday struggles of dealing with management, exhausting shifts and risks of job loss.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY II - RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous chapter provided a theoretical basis for exploring the challenges facing workers and trade unions in globalised, neoliberal capitalism, and to conceptualise what resources and capabilities they have at their disposal in a context where workers' power is on the decline. The literatures on trade union revitalisation and labour internationalism provide some optimism in an otherwise bleak scenario, indicating that while there are significant barriers to reconstituting workers power both at the national and transnational levels, workers and their organisations have, under certain conditions, managed to overcome these obstacles and have achieved significant accomplishments by cooperating cross-nationally. A review of the relevant literature points to the fact that relational mechanisms have been decisive to these efforts, namely that the international socialisation of workers and union activists, and trust-building are essential for establishing mutual understandings and constructing transnational identities. Finally, I discussed the problems associated with the organisational dimension of transnational union networks, particularly the benefits of coalitions of unions and civil society actors, and highlighted the importance of developing structures which synergise the capacities of diverse actors and organisations operating at different scales of action. In particular, scholars have noted the dearth of research on bottom-up forms of internationalism and insufficient attention to the dynamics between the local and global scales (Niforou, 2015).

The industrial conflict at Amazon provides a vantage point for addressing these shortcomings, given the opportunity to observe intersecting forms of mobilisation at the national and transnational levels, as well as forms of labour internationalism from above and from below. The choice of this particular dispute is also relevant given Amazon's status as a 'Trojan horse' (Meardi, 2002) that threatens to undermine established models of industrial relations, not necessarily by advocating for decentralised bargaining at site or firm level, but by radically insisting on individualised employment relations without union interference.

[49] "Our movement is also a reaction to the corrupting and extreme politicization of trade unions. We must reject the necessity of leaders - too often they have betrayed the cause they initially fought for. We are for grassroots, direct democracy as a form of organizing for the labor protest movement. The goal of Inicjatywa Pracownicza is not to lead the workers' struggle, but only to mobilize them to fight independently to improve their living conditions and free themselves from the oppression of any authority." (IP, n.d.)

This chapter describes and justifies the methods chosen for the study. I begin by restating the research questions and discussing the logic of underpinning the research design, as well as the units and levels of analysis. Next, I proceed by discussing the institutional and political context of the two cases, Germany and Poland, and identify the challenges and patterns associated with trade union revitalisation in each context. Next, I discuss the methods used to collect data, the obstacles and issues regarding access, and how they were resolved. Finally, I conclude by explaining the methods for data analysis.

## Units of Analysis and Case Selection

To restate, this dissertation is guided by two research questions, namely:

*1) How have collective actors mobilised against Amazon in their local and national contexts? What factors can account for variations in collective action at the local and national level?*

*2) How have collective actors coordinated their actions transnationally? What factors can account for different trajectories of transnational cooperation?*

Using a 'most-different systems design' (MDSD) I conduct a comparison of Poland and Germany, two countries with distinct industrial relations systems. MDSD is suitable for comparing cases that have a similar outcome, but which share few explanatory variables, based on the logic that factors which differ between cases cannot explain a common outcome (Anckar, 2008; Benassi et al., 2016; Gayle, 1988; Meckstroth, 1975).[50] By starting with the observed variation—in this case, forms of labour mobilisation—the design centres on "eliminating irrelevant system factors" that do not play a substantive role in explaining the outcomes (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 35). By maximizing systemic variation, plausible alternative explanations of similar outcomes are ruled out (Baccaro & Locke, 1998). This allows me to control for some explanatory factors, such as employer and state strategies, which are constant and not relevant for the analysis, while identifying the influence of a set of explanatory factors, namely: industrial relations systems, and the power resources and strategic capabilities deployed by trade union and social movement organisations (Lévesque & Murray, 2013).

As elaborated in the following chapter, this is due to the standardisation of the labour process at Amazon logistics facilities worldwide and the largely uniform manner in which management has responded to mobilisations across countries. While employment relations and working conditions on the shop-floor have an influence on mobilisation processes, since they constitute the pool of grievances and sources of injustice that leaders frame and activate into collective action (Kelly, 1998), the consistency of these factors across all possible cases means that on their own, they are insufficient for explaining the emergence of mobilisation, or for explaining why mobilisations have followed more or less institutional pathways, both at the national and transnational levels. Rather, I interpret the emergence and the form of mobilisation as a product of the interplay between structural conditions, namely institutional openness, and the reflexive choices of unions and activists (Mrozowicki, et al. 2010).

The chosen unit of analysis is therefore the mobilisation, with a focus on comparing the organisational structures, processes, strategic choices and collective actions of trade unions in the context of an industrial dispute with the same employer in different countries. However, other actors such as social movement organisations, NGOs and political parties are significant insofar as they constitute the field, allies and targets of union actions. On one hand, the literature on labour in the logistics sector

[50] In contrast, most-similar systems designs compare cases that differ only regarding a few explanatory factors, but have contrasting outcomes. This is based on the assumption that the factors common to relatively homogenous systems are irrelevant in explaining their differences, since the different outcomes are observed among systems sharing these factors (Benassi et al., 2016: 123; Meckstroth, 1975).

points to the workplace as the appropriate level of analysis, given that the labour process and labour's negotiating power differs based on its position in global production networks. Indeed, while there is a significant degree of variation between different types of facilities and the role they play in Amazon's logistics network, namely Fulfilment Centres, Sortation Centres and Delivery Stations, they vary little between countries. Instead, the cases exhibit significant differences on the national level, in terms of factors relating to institutions and actors, such as union traditions, identities and strike regulations. The country-level might plausibly be more appropriate as the level of analysis since it allows for assumptions about the influence that institutions have on unions' strategic choices to be tested (Hassel, 2007; Turner, 2009). A focus on the national level also highlights how the employer's globally-coordinated strategy manifests at the local-national level, in terms of its relations with labour markets, state actors, unions and industrial relations systems. At the same time, critics of 'methodological nationalism' in IR research point to increasing variations between industrial sectors, and caution against overstating homogeneity and strategic coherence—for instance, of rules of behaviour and political and cultural resources—at the country level which no longer have the same explanatory power today (Bechter at al., 2012; Meardi et al. 2009).[51] The relevance of the sector for explaining collective action seems particularly high in the institutional context of the European Union given that labour market governance and social dialogue tends to be organised at the sector level, at both the nation-state and European levels (Bechter et al., 2012; Marginson, 2005; Meardi, 2009, Meardi et al., 2009).

The selection of Poland and Germany as appropriate cases for studying labour transnationalism is justified by the fact that these countries represent key locations in the Amazon's logistics network interfacing between Eastern and Western Europe, and are where the first instances of cross-border cooperation emerged. Indeed, the first strikes in the company's history occurred at an FC in Bad Hersfeld, Germany in 2013, whereas the first transnational action occurred at an FC in Poznań, Poland in 2015 when Polish workers spontaneously organised a go-slow action after realising that their mandatory overtime was due to strikes occurring in neighbouring German facilities. In subsequent years, contention spread around the world, with the global Make Amazon Pay campaign registering actions in over 40 countries in 2022. The two cases demonstrate different forms of mobilisation at both the national and transnational level. This allows me to compare actors' collective action forms at the national and transnational levels, and therefore to test the impact of institutional factors on 1) national forms of mobilisation, and 2) transnational forms of mobilisation.

The German case features one trade union organization, Ver.di, which has largely pursued institutionalised forms of action at the national level, and various NGOs and social movements, which have cooperated with the union in a patchy manner. At the transnational level, a combination of mobilisation forms is apparent: Ver.di is formally affiliated to UNI Global, a GUF that pursues a characteristically top-down form of labour internationalism, while some Ver.di activists have pursued bottom-up internationalism via Amazon Workers International. The Polish case features two trade union organisations, NSZZ Solidarność (Solidarity) and OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers' Initiative) whose relations have historically been competitive, but in the context of the Amazon dispute have cooperated to a limited extend and jointly organised some campaigns. At the national level, Solidarność has pursued institutional forms of mobilisation, characterised by partnership with the employer, whereas IP has pursued alternative forms of mobilisation, premised on the activation of rank-and-file members, and the building of coalitions with progressive social movements. At the transnational level, Solidarność is affiliated to UNI Global, while IP is engaged with Amazon Workers International. Relations between

[51] As Bechter et al. note, this does not entail that sector differentiations are replacing national ones, however that to "to understand industrial relations both levels are important: we cannot derive the kind of industrial relations that affect a company, or a group of employees, simply by the country in which they are located; we must also know in what sector they operate" (2012: 15).

the two forms of internationalism are characterised by competition, however they have also featured limited cooperation, for instance in the context of the global Make Amazon Pay campaigns.

Although I do not make any broad claims of generalizability from the cases selected, they nevertheless illustrate the tensions and challenges facing trade unions in the context of multinational platform companies that disrupt historically established ways of managing employment relations and industrial disputes. Despite differences in labour markets, union structures and institutional settings, actors have responded to these challenges in different ways. Since Polish and German mobilisations at Amazon have taken distinct trajectories, I inquire whether this is a product of the institutional constraints of different IR systems (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Nölke & Vliegenthart, 2009).

Germany presents a case of a 'coordinated market economy' (CME) with strong IR institutions where trade unions rely on institutional power, and utilise classical forms of mobilisation along institutional pathways. In Germany, unions have been institutionally protected from market forces and were able to preserve their mechanisms of participation at the company, sector and national levels. However, German unions have been unable to adjust to structural change on the labour market and to reorient themselves to new categories of workers in the service economy. This institutional security has meant that falls in membership can produce a weaker sense of crisis among union leaders and reduce the incentive to organise non-unionised workplaces (Frege & Kelly, 2003: 16; Hassel, 2007).

Poland meanwhile presents a case of pluralist competition between unions in a post-socialist 'dependent market economy' (DME) where institutional power is limited, and unions are required to either develop or activate alternative power resources, or to form alternative trade unions. The kind of 'dependent capitalism' among CEE economies was premised on attracting foreign capital with weak labour organisations, underdeveloped collective bargaining institutions and forms of regulation, low labour costs as well as generous state subsidies and tax bonuses (Meardi et al. 2013: 41). CEE unions face similar problems to those in advanced capitalist economies, namely declining coverage of collective bargaining, diminished capacity for collective mobilisation, membership loss and the crisis of union identities. However, "the position of labour in DMEs is substantially weaker than in CMEs … given the heavy competition for foreign direct investments and the lingering threat of companies being relocated further east" (Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009: 684). As in other liberal market and post-socialist market economies, the decentralisation of bargaining and the deregulation of labour markets has translated to a stronger decline of unions in Poland than Germany (Mrozowicki et al. 2010).

Strong bargaining institutions may facilitate union efforts to encompass a broader range of workers interests, but their previous success can contribute to the erosion of trade unions by helping them maintain a powerful position in their traditional segment (Hassel, 2007). Baccaro et al. (2003: 128) argued that where their institutional position was weaker, unions have tended to adopt organising approaches, whereas where institutional position was stronger and the political opportunity structure more open, they have focused on developing social partnership. Indeed, revitalisation efforts have been "far more numerous and experimental" in LMEs and developing countries, and tended to emphasize union organising and social movement unionism (Phelan, 2006: 21). Organising members and targeting non-union workplaces tends to be a more prominent goal for unions in more decentralised systems such as Poland.

**Table 1.** Cases and dimensions of analysis

| | | Germany | Poland |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Industrial relations systems* | | Coordinated market economy (CME) | Dependent market economy (DME) |
| *Forms of mobilisation* | National-level | Institutional forms (collective bargaining, strikes) | Mix of institutional (partnership) and alternative forms (radical unionism) |
| | Transnational-level | Mix of top-down & bottom-up internationalism | Mix of top-down & bottom-up internationalism |

## Data collection methods

In order to describe the evolution of contention and forms of mobilisation at the national and transnational levels, I relied on three types of qualitative data: direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and documents. While singular sources of data can fail to capture the complexity of social phenomena that intersect at the micro and macro levels, complementary data sets can reveal aspects that might otherwise be missed, while further enhancing confidence in the data and the validity of the findings (Deren et al. 2003; Kelle, 2005; Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). This section explains how I collected data from these different sources.

### *Participant observation*

Ethnography has been defined as a qualitative research method where the researcher "immerses him- or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and the fieldworker, and asking questions" (Bryman, 2008: 402). From September 2018, I began my exploratory fieldwork in an effort to clarify my research questions, and to deepen my understanding of the labour dispute at Amazon and the challenges facing the parties to the conflict. At this time, I was living in Florence, Italy, and the absence of any Amazon facilities in the area posed some challenges for building a close rapport with the participants. I departed on a series of short trips to Piacenza, located in the Po Valley of Northern Italy, which has been a hot-bed of contention, given its crucial location as a hub for goods transportation that connects the entire country, and remarkable for the self-organisation of migrant workers with the support of independent radical unions such as SiCobas, AdlCobas and Unione Sindacale di Base (Cillo & Pradella, 2018; Cini & Goldmann, 2020; Cuppini et al., 2015; Curcio, 2014; Curcio & Roggero, 2018).

These first experiences allowed me to meet union activists and logistics workers, albeit who were not employed directly by Amazon but rather by its competitors, or by subcontracted 'cooperatives' in the periphery of Amazon's supply chain in Italy. At cafes and the union offices of SiCobas and Unione Sindacale di Base, I was able to observe informal interactions between workers, union secretaries and union legal counsel, to have some open conversations and to ask questions. Subsequent trips to Piacenza gave me the opportunity to conduct the first exploratory interviews, which guided the later fieldwork and helped me to develop the protocols for the more structured interviews that would follow. Eventually, I was able to establish contact with and hold interviews with the secretaries and worker delegates of trade unions which represented Amazon workers in Italy, namely the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL), the Unione Italiana del Lavoro

(UIL) and the Unione Generale del Lavoro (UGL). A visit to Wrocław and Katowice in Poland enabled me to meet workers and union representatives from the Polish trade unions active at Amazon, namely Inicjatywa Pracownicza and Solidarność. During this time, I also participated in a guided site tour of an FC in Wrocław directed by an HR member of staff. Ostensibly, tours of facilities for the general public were not only an exercise in brand management, but also served as opportunities to recruit new employees, as indicated at the end of the tour when the guide explained how visitors could go about starting the application process.

A decisive turning point occurred in November 2018 when I travelled to Stockholm to attend the activist-academic conference 'Against the Logistics of Exploitation' organised by the Transnational Social Strike Platform, allowing me to meet Amazon workers and trade union activists active in organising collective action against Amazon in Poland, France and Spain. During the workshops, participants shared information about their local struggles, and discussed ways that they might mutually support one another and coordinate their efforts. From this point, I was determined to try to attend as many international meetings as possible, and subsequently attended conferences of the UNI Global Amazon Alliance, and the Amazon Workers International. These international meetings serve first as occasions for workers, union representatives and allied organisations to exchange information about developments concerning Amazon in their respective countries.

Multiple observations at UNI Amazon Alliance meetings helped me to reconstruct a timeline of labour disputes, and key events such as strikes, protests, court rulings, the opening of new worksites, and worker organizing efforts at the national-level. I was also able to obtain some insights into coalition building efforts by observing interactions in a real-time setting, and, by attending multiple meetings, to observe developments in the composition and strategy of the network over time, as it expanded to include different claims and groups of workers. Further they provided me access to documents that were circulated internally among members of the network, including country reports produced by trade unions that summarised key issues, events and turning points as concerned Amazon in their respective countries. Most importantly, discussions related to developments in the labour disputes with Amazon in the logistics sector, however gradually the agenda expanded to include other themes and industrial sectors, reflecting the evolution of mobilisations in different countries. Based on their own experiences, participants would advise their counterparts on local and national strategy, and this exchange served as a basis for developing transnational campaigns. Further, these regular meetings provide participants with a transnational space to socialise and deepen social ties, not insignificantly, during coffee breaks, conference dinners and at bars where animated dialogues continued well into the night. Likewise, these occasions were also invaluable for me and allowed me to meet a wide range of union representatives which were agitating against Amazon in different parts of the world. I collected my observations in a journal and produced my own meeting minutes which constituted the main data sources for these conferences.

These conferences provided a privileged perspective into the relations between trade unions in a transnational arena, as I observed debates around transnational strategy unfold, for instance, regarding which kinds of actions should be taken, how they should be coordinated, which kinds of audiences and organizations should be engaged, or what might be the most effective ways of framing issues in order to generate maximum solidarity and support. They also offered an insight into the actors' own interpretations of their work, their own analyses of the causes and challenges related to the industrial conflict, and assisted in reconstructing the unions' collective action frames. On one hand, the semi-closed nature of these conferences meant that the data generated from these observations was insufficient for determining how unions framed their activities to workers, governments or the broader public. On the other hand, I considered them as a kind of proxy, since union representatives often recounted or reflected on how they framed strikes, protests or other actions in the media. To compensate for these limitations, this data was triangulated with data generated from one-on-one interviews conducted with participants, as well as by analysing documents published by trade unions.

The two networks had differing approaches to permitting participant observation at meetings, reflecting their political commitments. On one side, the UNI Global Amazon Alliance allowed researchers studying Amazon to participate in conferences, however from 2022 this policy was overturned. The relatively smaller Amazon Workers International presented higher barriers to access given the policy of keeping meetings closed to journalists and researchers, in the interests of maintaining a space for Amazon workers and allies. While my initial requests for access were denied, I was later able to participate as a member of Amazon Workers Against Surveillance, and shared my experiences of participating and co-organising actions in solidarity with Amazon workers in Berlin, and ongoing efforts to organise workers at Delivery Stations in the last-mile of the supply-chain.

Burawoy (1998) describes *reflexive* ethnographic method, based on engagement and participation as a means of generating knowledge about empirical phenomena, in contrast to positivistic approaches based on the detachment of the researcher from the object of study: "Reflexive science starts out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself" (Burawoy, 1998: 5). Indeed, as the fieldwork progressed and as I built closer relations with my research participants, I diverged from my initial role as a non-participant observer, and depending on the context, participated more actively as an organizer, or as a worker.

In November 2019, shortly after moving to Berlin, I attended an activist meeting organised by the local chapter of the Tech Workers Coalition[52] and the German Make Amazon Pay network[53], announcing the launch of the Berlin vs. Amazon (BvsA) campaign, an initiative formed to oppose the construction of the EDGE-Tower in the Kreuzberg-Friedrichschain district. Scheduled for completion in 2023, the main tenant of the Tower will be Amazon. From this point, I became actively involved in BvsA's organisational work, in meetings where the identity, goals and demands of the collective were deliberated, and in the subsequent planning and preparation of a range of collective actions including street demonstrations, protests, subvertising, online debates, conferences, labour organizing workshops and art exhibitions focusing on work conditions in Amazon logistics facilities, and direct outreach with residents of the district. After a year and a half, the BvsA campaign went into abeyance, however in 2021 the collective was revived by a new cohort of activists. In late 2021, I participated in launching Amazon Workers Against Surveillance (AWAS), a campaign designed to contest technologically-enabled forms of surveillance at Amazon. The project publicised testimonies from Amazon workers in Germany, Poland and the USA, regarding how surveillance had successfully been contested at their workplaces, for instance via works-level agreements, and developed a solution-oriented flyer which informed workers about the necessary steps to form works councils. Notably, members of both BvsA and AWAS participated in the planning and preparation of the glocal Make Amazon Pay actions on Black Friday in Berlin from 2020-2022.

Initially, direct observation of the labour process was not possible, given the closed nature of Amazon facilities. Indeed, in the early stages of the research I was not intent on it, since my focus was largely on forms of collective action at different scales. Meanwhile, my interviews and informal conversations with Amazon workers, as well as autobiographical testimonies of Amazon workers circulated online helped me to bridge this gap and become familiar with aspects of the labour process. On the other hand, I remained puzzled by the mobilising process at Amazon and divergent outcomes,

[52] The Berlin Tech Workers Coalition presents itself as a "grassroots organization that empowers tech workers to build collective power and get involved in campaigns that make a positive impact on our society" (Berlin Tech Workers Coalition, n.d.). It does so for instance, by providing training and support for employees that want to establish works council structures in their workplaces.

[53] Note that this German social movement predates and is distinct from the global Make Amazon Pay campaign that was launched in 2020 as a joint initiative of UNI Global and the Progressive International.

and namely how it was that grievances on the shop-floor succeed in, or alternatively, failed to be translated into collective forms of action, prompted me to approach my fieldwork from another angle.

In July 2021, I applied for a job as a 'warehouse associate' at an Amazon Delivery Station on the outskirts of Berlin via a recruitment agency. I was not the first to embark on this path, and ethnographic studies of work at Amazon logistics facilities have also been carried out to study organizing campaigns in Germany (Vgontzas 2020, 2022), the USA (Lotz, 2022), and France and Italy to study the production of consent within the labour process (Massimo, 2020a, 2020b).[54]

The barriers to securing the job were very minimal: upon arriving at the agency for the interview, the interviewing manager was rather unconcerned with my CV, and after ascertaining that I had legal permission to work in Germany, proceeded to ask which facility and shift I was interested in applying for. For the first two months, I worked on a part-time basis, then on a full-time basis for the remaining three months. During this time, I became personally acquainted with the labour process and relations between workers and management that I had previously known only via second-hand testimonies.

Covert workplace ethnography brings challenges in identity management, and tensions arising from the need to remain 'covert' towards management, while attempting to be 'overt' towards participants and co-workers (Badger & Woodcock, 2019; Efthymiou, 2009; Lugosi, 2006; Spicker, 2011; Virtová et al., 2017). From the beginning, I was resolute that my responsibility was towards my co-workers, and not towards company managers from whom I concealed my identity. As I got to know my co-workers more intimately and began to develop friendships, my status shifted from covert to overt, and I gradually revealed my identity to those I felt that I could trust.

During my employment at Amazon, my roles as researcher, worker and activist became increasingly blurred, and attempts to keep them neatly separated proved to be complicated. Indeed, it was difficult to contain my outrage when I heard of co-workers being sacked for failing to meet productivity quotas, when I witnessed bullying from managers on the shop-floor, when I found out that promises about alleged bonuses were broken, or when I saw social distancing guidelines during a global pandemic— allegedly implemented to protect the health of workers—instrumentalised for discipline and control. The total absence of union shop stewards or a works council did not appear as a coincidence. As Badger & Woodcock note, "throughout the ethnographic process, 'working' and 'researching' identities overlap and merge as the demands of the labour process and of the study interfere with each other in a manner that is co-constructive, rather than disruptive of the broader research aims and interests. A critical advantage of this long-term engagement with the field-site and participants is the position it grants researchers to witness the continual changes taking place at the [company], and the result on working lives" (2019: 137).

After reaching out to a local union secretary, while sympathetic to my concerns, to my dismay advised me that I would have to wait for my probation period to expire, and that I would have to find 5-10 other co-workers in a comparably secure employment position before a works council process could be initiated. Nevertheless, humour, cynicism, misbehaviour and 'unorganised conflict' on the micro-level demonstrated the capacity of workers to "bend the bars in these particular iron cages" (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995: 629). While I was wary of romanticising informal resistance, these episodes underlined the potentiality of mobilisation despite the absence of formal organising structures.

One of the methodological challenges associated with researching the quality of working conditions and as they relate to mobilising processes, is the idiosyncratic nature of the perception of

[54] Additionally, Sam Wallman depicted his experiences of working and organizing in a Fulfilment Center in Melbourne, Australia via comic illustrations. https://labornotes.org/2022/12/comic-tales-inside-australian-amazon-warehouse (1.12.2022).

'quality', shaped by individual motivations and experiences of work, and the racialized, gendered and embodied experiences of labour (Badger & Woodcock, 2019). In these settings, ethnography brings diverse experiences into conversation with one another, allowing "for a range of approaches to be incorporated into the research, and in so doing creates a space for pluralistic accounts to emerge organically" (Badger & Woodcock, 2019: 136). In fact, this approach was valuable insofar as it exposed me to perspectives from workers which were not involved in collective forms of organising against Amazon, at times contrasting with the accounts of workers which union gatekeepers had selectively put me in contact with.

Language skills posed obstacles as well as opportunities. Language barriers segregated me from some of my co-workers, creating problematic omissions and silences in the findings (Badger & Woodcock, 2019; Valero-Garcés, 1995). However, this also reflected a broader workplace dynamic where a significant part of the workforce spoke very limited German, or English. On the other hand, my Polish language skills were an asset not only to myself but to my Polish colleagues, many of whom did not speak German or English, and consequently meant that I became an intermediary between them, and managers during disputes over shift-planning or pay. At the same time, the handheld Zebra devices (an Android-powered smartphone with an inbuilt barcode scanner) could be operated via a number of languages, minimising the language barrier regarding the individual's ability to perform their tasks within the labour process.

In early 2022, following the appointment of a new union secretary tasked with organising Amazon workers in Berlin and Brandenburg, I began to participate in a canvassing and outreach campaign targeting Amazon distribution centres in Berlin where shop steward or works council structures had not yet been established, and where union membership was low or zero. Notably, this included my former workplace. This consisted of travelling to Amazon distribution centres during shift-changes, and approaching workers outside worksite premises as they were finishing or entering to start their shifts. By engaging workers in informal conversations and conducting short surveys on work satisfaction, the campaign had multiple aims: to listen to workers' experiences, assess their needs and identify prevalent issues at each worksite; to inform workers about their legal rights and the benefits of trade unions and works councils and to answer any queries; to collect contact details; where appropriate, to encourage workers to join the union, and most importantly, to identify organic leaders capable of initiating works council and mobilising processes.

### *Secondary document analysis*

In addition to participant observation and semi-structured interviews, I collected two types of documents: organizational documents produced by trade unions and social movement organisations, and news media documents (N=611). While document collection and analysis continued in parallel to different stages of the research, it was particularly useful at an early stage for gathering factual information about the types and frequency of mobilisation across the cases studied, and for preparing for further fieldwork and interviews. It general, they allowed me to identify what the actors were saying, what was said about them, and how they framed issues to workers and to the wider public.

The first category, *organizational documents*, consists of texts produced by national trade unions and social movement organisations as well as by transnational labour networks and global union federations involved in the conflict with Amazon. Organisational documents are particularly useful "as a resource that 'tell us what is going on' in the organisation" (Prior, 2010: 96), regarding decision making, organizational structure, ideology, repertoires of action and collective action frames. This category included general texts available online, such as mission statements which describe and frame the organizations' history, structure, processes and political values, as well as texts specific to the conflict with Amazon such as open letters, press releases, calls for action and social media content. Another important resource were union newsletters such as *News*, *Publik* and *Handel* published by Ver.di and *Glos*

*Załogi Amazona* (The Voice of the Amazon Crew) published by Inicjatywa Pracownicza, which provide a wealth of insights into how the unions frame and directs their messaging towards members, offer reflections on past actions, often including interviews with Amazon workers, shop stewards or other union officials. An additional source were *employer documents*, such as press releases, company blog posts and letters authored by the Amazon CEO delivered at annual shareholder meetings. While I did not systematically analyse the company's public relations strategies or managerial frames, employer documents nevertheless provided a useful source of background information to illustrate employer responses to the collective actions of labour.

The second category, *news media documents* concerns texts published by news media concerning the industrial conflict with Amazon. These texts range from elementary reports of basic facts, to investigative journalism with more comprehensive depth of analysis, and partisan opinion pieces authored by Amazon workers and members of the studied organisations. I also included my own transcriptions of relevant televised programs, podcasts, radio programs and press conferences which featured these actors. Additionally, this category included autographical testimonies of Amazon workers and whistleblowers, including work journals, which helped to describe the labour process and managerial styles.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Whereas participant observation and document analysis provided me with a mixed insider-outsider perspective into the labour process at Amazon logistics sites, as well as into the mobilising process at multiple scales, I also relied on semi-structured interviews since I wanted to understand how activists interpreted the dispute with Amazon, and how they used their own interpretations and understandings in order to mobilise others for action. Interviews provided a range of advantages in this regard since they are "reliable gateways" into researching organisations (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012: 240), and provide rich accounts that help to make sense of complex organizational realities which may otherwise be obscured to the researcher (Eby et al., 2009). In social movement research, in-depth interviews with key informants are useful to gain information about key aspects of organising on which few sources are available, and to make detailed descriptions of the social processes of political participation such as internal dynamics and mobilization strategies (della Porta, 2014). As such they bring subject agency into centre of the analysis (Blee, 2013), and help to highlight ideational factors "such as culture, norms, ethics, perceptions, learning, and cognition" (Rathbun 2008: 691). Together, interviews with key informants allowed me to obtain factual information as well as subjective interpretations of the dispute, including how stories, narratives and images were linked together in the process of constructing intelligible collective action frames.

Between September 2018 and December 2022, I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with key informants. First, I selected interviewees with different organizational affiliations, emphasizing the trade unions involved in the industrial dispute with Amazon in each case (NSZZ Solidarność, OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza and Ver.di), while also including social movement organisations that were active in the field (Berlin vs. Amazon, Amazon Workers Against Surveillance). Second, following the principle of purposeful sampling, I targeted respondents on the basis of role they occupied within their organisations, since I wanted to understand how mobilisation processes operate at different scales, both within and between organisations, at the national, regional or local levels. Accordingly, I included national trade union leaders, the heads of unions' commerce or logistics departments, local union secretaries and union shop-stewards. This was useful insofar as these individuals acted in various intermediary or brokerage positions in their organisations, bridging between different levels of union activity: national union representatives were knowledgeable about the transnational dimension, given that they interfaced vertically with GUFs, lower level union structures, and horizontally with their counterparts in other countries; local union secretaries mediated between shop-stewards, works councillors, rank-and-file

members and the higher levels of their organisations; some works councillors were simultaneously shop-stewards for their respective unions, and in some cases also wore a third 'hat', given their membership on the special negotiating body for the establishment of a European Works Council at Amazon. Third, I tried to achieve some geographical variation within the cases by selecting interviewees from different regions in each country. While my coverage was not exhaustive, this had the advantage of helping to identify variations in mobilising processes between equivalent and different types of worksites (e.g. between Fulfilment Centres in different locations, and between Fulfilment Centres and different worksites such as Delivery Stations).

The interviews were all conducted face-to-face in English, Italian, Polish or a mixture of German and English with regard to interviews in Germany. All participants were guaranteed personal anonymity and their permission was asked for audio recording, which was permitted by all but one respondent. While interviews varied depending on the type of respondent, broadly they focused on respondents' accounts, experiences and reflections of participating in collective action against Amazon. The interview protocol consisted of four parts. First, I asked how respondents about their biographical or activist histories, namely how they had come to be involved with their respective trade union or social movement organisations. Second, I asked about the mobilising processes that the respondent was knowledgeable about. This involved asking about past collective actions that they had participated in, were involved in planning and which kinds of other actors had been involved. Local leaders in particular provided insights into the dynamics of worker representation, given their involvement in meeting on works councils or works assemblies which are closed to outsiders. For respondents with experience in transnational activities, this involved asking what steps the unions had taken to establish bridging practices, such as European Works Councils, participation in transnational labour networks, sharing information or experiences with colleagues across borders. Finally, I asked open questions regarding how organizational structures, processes and practices have changed since their involvement with the organization.

## Data analysis methods

In the first stage, the gathered documents, interview transcripts and ethnographic observations including fieldwork journals, protocols from union conferences and activist meetings and were imported into qualitative analysis software, MAXQDA. All interviews were transcribed by myself, while a small number were transcribed by using the software Trint, which I then had to clean and correct. These documents were coded together thematically in order to extrapolate different sets of variables for each of the trade union organisations, social movement actors examined as well as for the employer.

Trade unions and social movements were analysed in terms of their organizational structure, demands, practices, resources and strategic capabilities, as well as specific collective actions and campaigns undertaken. I also analysed union strategy, leaders' perceptions of barriers and opportunities to collective action, and how internal and external criticism was addressed. I also coded for managerial practices and aspects related to the labour process, as well as grievances, in order to identify which aspects of work had been identified by workers and unions as major issues.

Finally, I focused on identifying the collective action frames, and frame alignment strategies which were utilised by the different organisations. I paid attention to how the industrial conflict developed in each context, and how the discourses of the company, unions, and social movement organisations evolved. I also paid attention to transformative events, "turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural activity [where] … very brief, spatially concentrated, and relatively chaotic sequences of action can have durable, spatially extended, and profoundly structural effects" (McAdam and Sewell, 2001: 102). Given my interpretative approach, the data was coded with an aim to understand the self-assessments and perceptions of the industrial dispute by the actors involved, and to identify the resources and capabilities they utilised in order to achieve their goals. Since fieldwork and data collection occurred simultaneously with analysis of data throughout much of the research process,

there was a continuous process of reflecting and refining theoretical categories, as new insights from the field prompted me to refine and merge codes.

# CHAPTER 5: POWER AND CONTROL IN THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

This chapter contextualizes the emergence of Amazon within the broader transformations to the global capitalist political economy associated with digitalisation and the platform economy. The first section discusses the impacts of technological change on working conditions, and processes of production, consumption and distribution, in the context of debates on platform work and the gig economy. Amazon is presented as a case which illustrates many of the destructive forces of capitalism, as well as novel forms of valorisation based on the capture and analysis of 'big data'. Next I overview the growth and market strategy of the company, drawing on existing case studies which illustrate its rise from a small online bookseller, to a global corporate power with significant influence over the world economy. I describe the company's relations with institutions and actors in different national contexts, as well as its impacts on individuals, workplaces, communities, politics and the climate which have given rise to various forms of collective action. The third section provides an overview of the supply-chain of Amazon Logistics illustrated by means of maps which have been developed by trade unions and researchers. Finally, I discuss the labour process at Amazon Logistics facilities with reference to two groups of workers: Amazon warehouse workers, and subcontracted delivery couriers. The focus is on employment relations, working conditions, the organisation of the labour process and the role of algorithmic management systems. In following chapters, the industrial conflicts and campaigns which have emerged in response to these issues will be discussed.

## Digital platforms, technological change

In recent years, processes of digitalisation and the rapid proliferation of digital platforms have once again illustrated capital's incessant pursuit of new markets, commodities, means of exploitation (Srnicek, 2017). The information technology sector has been a source of intense technological and organisational innovation, which have spilled over and transformed production practices, working conditions and cultural consumption patterns (Cini et al., 2022), as well as labour markets, producing 'new' jobs of varying quality while threatening to displace existing forms of labour. In this context, a familiar debate concerning the impact of technological change on labour has re-emerged (Crouch, 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2018).

More optimistic accounts suggest that job displacement processes reduce repetitive and hazardous types of work, and upgrade occupations, leading to the development of more hybrid skills among workers (Fernández-Macías, 2018).[55] It is argued that the productivity efficiency of information technologies, indicated by the 22% annual growth rate of e-commerce in Europe due to the automation of shopping, "increase demand for online retail goods and this in turn leads to an increased overall employment in retail" (Petropoulous, 2018: 121).

However, such sanguine interpretations of technological development and digitalisation seem less concerned with the quality of work, on worker health and safety, autonomy and economic security. More sceptical accounts of the digital revolution represented by 'Industry 4.0' highlight historical continuities, suggesting that "platform work is simply 21st-century causal work rebranded" which "closely resemble casual labour arrangements that were typical at the outset of industrialisation and are still a prominent feature of labour markets in developing countries" (Berg & De Stefano, 2018: 179-180). Analyses more sensitized to class conflict emphasize that algorithmic monitoring has enabled an increase in managerial

[55] Concerns about job displacement by automation are often overestimated, however since feasibility assessments often focus analytically on the displacement of occupations rather than tasks (Arntz et al., 2017), while employer choices regarding the application of labour-saving technology ultimately rest on economic calculations of whether machinic substitution is cost-effective (Petropoulous, 2018).

power over workers within the labour process, reduced worker autonomy and privacy, and given rise to a 'zero-trust' model of employment relations (Crouch, 2018).

Research into technological change in the US logistics industry suggests that automation is unlikely to reduce employment in warehouse work over the next decade, but is rather likely to lead to work intensification given growth in demand. Gutelius & Theodore find that "even though some technologies could alleviate the most arduous tasks of warehouse work (such as heavy lifting), this likely will be coupled with attempts to increase the workload and pace of work, with new methods of monitoring workers" and depending on how such technologies are implemented, this "may present new challenges for worker health and safety, employee morale, and turnover" (Gutelius & Theodore, 2019). Effects on employment are neither inevitable: when warehouse operators introduce technologies that automate processes, they have the option to retrain workers into new roles (Gutelius & Theodore, 2019: 10). At Amazon, automation has not substituted the need for routine, physical labour, but have increased productive efficiency by minimising the costs of supervision and creating conditions that allow the company to "disqualify [workers'] labor in order to replace them more easily with one another" (Alias & Milesi, 2017).

Before proceeding, some theoretical clarification is needed regarding digital platforms, which have been variously defined as new models of organisation, coordination, accumulation and valorisation of capital. Scholars have defined platforms as intermediary digital structures that bring together a range of different users, including customers, service providers, producers, suppliers and physical objects, and which use algorithmic technologies for gathering big data, generated by search engines, social media networks, video and music streaming services, computer software or retail consumers (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kareborn, 2019; Srnicek, 2017). Despite significant variations in organisational form, platforms tend to feature a high level of technological innovation in the labour process and workforce management methods (Briziarelli, 2018; Gandini, 2019; Joyce & Stuart, 2021; Woodcock & Graham, 2019). A central feature are algorithmic control systems which "optimise the worker-control process by analysing and using workers' performance ratings, metrics and data collected from clients and users to make decisions about the allocation of future tasks and worker retention" (Cini et al., 2022: 2). Under platform-based rating and reputation systems, workers are rated by clients following task completion, with ratings determining the likelihood of receiving more work. Algorithmic management thus implicates customers in the management circuit, meaning that the performance of work is dictated by the whims and desires of customers, rather than only managers (Wood et al., 2018). While platform-based rating and ranking systems may facilitate high levels of autonomy, task variety, complexity as well as flexibility with regards to the spatial and temporal dimensions of work, this autonomy can lead to overworking, social isolation due to irregular working hours, sleep deprivation and exhaustion (Wood et al., 2018).

Platforms are not always geared towards the production of physical commodities, but rely on the capture of personal information and their capacity to transform it into valuable 'big data' (Fumagalli et al., 2018). As noted by Hofheinz, the multi-faceted character of data has presented challenges regarding its definition:

> "Policymakers have struggled to find a suitable metaphor; data is the new economy's most important 'commodity', 'currency' and 'infrastructure', to use just three of the concepts to which it is most often (and somewhat misleadingly) compared. But data is really something else entirely. Data is data. Its use has its own logic, and its own requirements… In a nutshell, data is how global businesses communicate across the vast spaces they now occupy. And it is the crucial raw material from which those companies – as well as governments and individuals – will come to new insights, develop and deliver new services and derive

> vital conclusions… data is not worth much to the individuals who own or create it. Data becomes valuable when it is combined." (Hofheinz, 2018: 92-94).[56]

Accordingly, aggregated data represents one of the primary sources of capital for platforms: Google, Facebook and Twitter accounts are free to create, however users 'pay' with their information (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016). Beverungen et al. (2013) refer to this free extraction of value from the commons as the "communism of capital", while Fumagalli (2021) refers to 'network-value', "i.e. the transformation of the use of individuals' daily life data into an exchange value" as the extension of value-capture beyond the labour process (Fumagalli, 2021). Shoshana Zuboff suggests that the pervasive collection and commodification of personal data, driven by profit-motive is no longer a feature specific to individual companies in the information sector, but has become a generic feature of the political economy of 'surveillance capitalism':

> "In our time, surveillance capitalism repeats capitalism's "original sin" of primitive accumulation. It revives Karl Marx's old image of capitalism as a vampire that feeds on labor, but with an unexpected turn. Instead of claiming work (or land, or wealth) for the market dynamic as industrial capitalism once did, surveillance capitalism audaciously lays claim to private experience for translation into fungible commodities that are rapidly swept up into the exhilarating life of the market." (Zuboff, 2019: 1)

The collection of 'big data' facilitates network effects and rapid cumulative growth unconstrained by the problems of size, whereby a user-base, upon reaching critical mass can become self-perpetuating, as opposed to Fordist factories where expansion was determined by the limits of labour productivity, demand and output (Srnicek, 2017). Arguably, it is this capacity to use information as a cumulative property, namely to use knowledge to produce more knowledge, as with machine-learning, that makes platforms 'algorithmic' (Dyer-Witheford et al. 2019: 37). Data fulfils many functions for capital: "they educate and give competitive advantage to algorithms; they enable the coordination and outsourcing of workers; they allow for the optimisation and flexibility of productive processes; they make possible the transformation of low-margin goods into high-margin services; and data analysis is itself generative of data, in a virtuous cycle" (Srnicek, 2017: 41-42). The scalability of digital products produces tendencies towards monopoly, since on the supply-side, the costs of developing digital products such as software are high, however the costs of producing each unit, are extremely low (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016).

Platforms tend to follow a strategy of constant user engagement, presenting themselves attractively to consumers in order to extract more information, and tend to have strong tendencies towards monopoly and cross-subsidisation, diversifying into multiple sectors in order to balance economic losses and gains (Srnicek, 2017). The sale of digital commodities poses some barriers to sustainable profitability, so platforms seek to establish themselves as quasi-monopolies in emerging e-commerce markets where they can maintain control over price-setting, by building enclosed 'socio-technical ecosystems' that offer highly personalised and interlinked products and services which facilitate strong customer retention, and generate new consumer needs, desires and markets. These systems are 'closed' because they "systematically impede changing to another provider, since users would then generally face a loss of aggregated data, with unpleasant consequences" (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016: 462).

Platforms also challenge existing distinctions between supply and demand, and between production and consumption: platforms' added value comes from customer activity, and the ability to use data to construct profiles and provide insights into consumer preferences. Platform companies improve their market position via permanent feedback loops between users and digital production

[56] Hofheinz cites an OECD (2015) report which tried to calculate the market value of individual data: "The bottom line: the data people held about themselves was worth much less – companies were willing to pay much less for it – than the individuals themselves thought it was worth. Recent market-based transactions – such as the 2013 acquisition of Climate Corporation by Monsanto Corporation for $930 million – have demonstrated that the value of data rises considerably when it is aggregated" (Hofheinz, 2018: 100, f.9)

processes: by accumulating user data, and by using it to continuously optimize their production and service processes (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016). The capture, processing and analysis of massive amounts of data relating to customer shopping habbits and preferences is central to Amazon's ambition to effortlessly satisfy every conceivable consumer need through a click, and to streamline the logistical costs of storage, handling and transportation of goods (Dyer-Witheford et al. 2019: 37; Pfeiffer 2021: 245). This data allows Amazon to decide which products to manufacture and sell, which products to recommend to customers, in which order, and how to market additional products most efficiently, allowing operations to be streamlined not only at the moments of consumption, but also production and distribution (Alimahomed-Wilson et al., 2020; Wilson, 2020).

### *Transforming work: Digitalisation and labour markets*

The growing scholarship on the impact of digitalisation on work highlights the polarisation of jobs, evident on the one hand, in the rising demand for well-paid skilled jobs requiring non-routine cognitive skills, as well as for low-paid less-skilled jobs based on non-routine manual skills, while conversely, a declining demand for 'middling' jobs requiring routine manual and cognitive skills (Darvas & Wolff, 2016; Goos & Manning, 2007; Petropoulous, 2018). It has been suggested that evaluation and ranking systems built into platform work may exacerbate inequalities between workers, with evidence reflecting that higher-skilled workers push lower-skilled workers out of jobs (Schor, 2018). Work on digital labour platforms is highly diverse encompassing a wide range of web-based 'clickwork' and 'crowdwork' as well as location-based work-on-demand mediated by apps (Berg & De Stefano, 2018; De Groen & Maselli, 2016). Relatedly, Huws et. al find that crowd-work "cannot be regarded as a clearly defined and distinctive form of labour but forms part of a spectrum of rapidly changing and overlapping forms of just-in-time work, which draw to varying degrees on digital media for their management" (2018: 157-158).

A central issue in the context of platform work has related to the redefinition of the employment relationship, specifically to companies' attempts to rebrand casual workers as autonomous, self-employed contractors, which have been contested through the courts in various contexts.[57] Platform employment based on independent contracting has been criticised for free-riding on conventional forms of employment (Schor, 2018). Companies routinely tout the benefits of platform work, suggesting that they provide job flexibility and entrepreneurial autonomy, allowing people to 'be their own' bosses and liberate themselves from forms of discipline and control characteristic of traditional employment. Critics note however that this "is true only for those who use the platform for supplemental earnings, rather than to pay their basic expenses" (Schor, 2018: 166). National surveys carried out in the US indicate that less than 30% of workers rely on their platform as a primary means of subsistence and have alternative sources of income (Huws et al., 2018),[58] whereas 'dependent' workers which rely exclusively on platforms tend to earn poverty wages, "experience extreme precarity, have less job satisfaction and autonomy, and are unlikely to persist if viable alternatives appear for them" (Schor, 2018: 166). Experts have argued that legal definitions should rather reflect the subordinate, dependent relationship of workers to platforms (De Stefano, 2016; Huws et al., 2018; Jolly, 2018).

In terms of policy-oriented solutions for managing the impact of digitalisation on work, experts point to the necessity of establishing regulation concerning the liability, safety, security and privacy for

[57] Courts in the UK found Uber drivers to be 'workers' under labour law, and dismissed as "'faintly ridiculous' the notion that 'Uber in London is a mosaic of 30,000 small businesses linked by a common 'platform'" (Berg & De Stefano, 2018: 179).

[58] The ILO's (2015) survey of 'click workers' working on Amazon Mechnical Turk and CrowdFlower found that crowd-work represented the main source of income for 40% of workers, while 40% reported working regularly seven days per week (Berg, 2016).

the operation of machines and AI systems (O'Reilly et al., 2018: 7), and suggest that displacement concerns may be mitigated via education and training programmes that develop skills to work with new technologies (Petropoulous, 2018). Proponents of universal basic income schemes or stronger forms of welfare support and redistribution note that such measures can reduce workers' dependency on platforms (Schor, 2018). Others emphasize that institutional frameworks and channels of social dialogue are not well-adapted to the rapid pace of technological change, and highlight the need to extend collective bargaining agreements to include subcontractors, self-employed workers, agency workers and non-standard forms of employment, and to close legal loopholes around employee definition (Doellgast, 2018; Jolly, 2018). Relatedly, Colin Crouch points to the necessity of easy access to union representation and emphasizes that unions must adapt their structures and processes in order to better attract and represent the interests of non-employees: "like labour law, unions need to discard the distinction between employees and other kinds of worker" (Crouch, 2018: 196).

In Germany, concerns about the effects of digitalisation on work and employment have led to a public consultation process headed by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, involving social partners and policymakers, and culminating in the white paper 'Work 4.0' (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, 2016). The document recommended a labour and social policy system that fosters decentralised innovation on the basis of 'targeted labour market intelligence', or closer monitoring of changes in labour demand and supply, and broader stakeholder participation in policymaking (Rahner & Schönstein, 2018). The DGB's Good Jobs Index reported that 27% of employees noted that digitalisation has increased their workloads, with the retail sector being one of the most affected, at 35% [DE105].

## Amazon: Creative destruction

Amazon was founded in 1995 as an electronic book seller, however it quickly became an all-round online retailer, established its own online marketplace, a logistics service for third-party sellers, Fulfilment by Amazon and Mechanical Turk[59], a web-based digital labour platform for crowdsourcing simple tasks 'on-demand', as well as Amazon Home Services, a location-based platform allowing customers to hire cleaners, handymen, and landscapers. It has continued to branch out into different sectors, including cloud computing, artificial intelligence and machine learning (Amazon Web Services), robotics (Amazon Robotics, formerly Kiva Systems), video content creation and streaming (Amazon Studio and Prime Video), fully-automated retail shopping (Amazon Go), while banks and credits unions have reported bracing themselves for Amazon's invasion of their market [USA169]. By 2018, Amazon was the second trillion-dollar corporation after Apple.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, technology companies saw a massive boom, taking advantage of lockdowns and waves of closures and job losses, consolidating their power (Sadowski, 2022). While Covid-19-related lockdowns contributed to 250,000 store closures in the US alone, online trade and parcel delivery volumes in March and April 2020 reached peaks normally seen around Christmas [DE43]. However, since the start of the pandemic, experts have warned of the failure of Amazon's logistics infrastructure given "the triple threat of supply chain disruptions, rapidly increasing demand, and the risk of outbreaks within its warehouses" [USA76]. In mid-April, the company stopped accepting new customers for its grocery delivery service, offered through Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods supermarkets, while struggling to meet demand. Plans were announced to recruit nearly 200,000

[59] Sarah Kassem has compared the organisation of the labour process and structural power of location-based Amazon logistics workers and web-based Amazon Mechanical Turk workers, finding that "given the challenges in disrupting web-based gig labour, workers continue to express their agency through more alternative forms by instrumentalising digital spaces to foster solidarity and support each other for better working conditions" (2022: 1).

additional employees to meet increasing demands for home-delivery, at a time of year when the company normally sheds the temporary workers recruited for the November-December peak. Workers who had been laid-off in the hotel, restaurant and travel industries were invited to apply for temporary work for the duration of the crisis.

Following pressure from unions and workers around the world, Amazon gradually rolled out a series of temporary benefits for its workers as a form of pandemic relief, implemented a variety of protocols to minimise the risk of infection at its highly crowded logistics facilities, emphasizing that "health and safety are a top priority with all of our roles and sites". Like Uber, Instacart, DoorDash, Lyft and other platform companies, Amazon announced two weeks of paid sick leave for all employees diagnosed with the Coronavirus and were required to quarantine, as well as unlimited unpaid time-off and temporary 2€/hour increase in the hourly wage, a symbolic kind of 'hazard' pay that lasted until May 16th [USA118]. Additionally, a $25 million relief fund, financed by donations, was created for independent delivery contractors, seasonal employees and gig workers such as Amazon Flex delivery drivers (who can opt for part-time contracts, or work full-time as direct employees), with individual grants of $400 to $5,000 per person. The relief fund was criticised by workers and observers who noted that the richest man alive was soliciting donations to pay his workers [USA80].

By 2022, Amazon was the second largest private employer after Walmart and the fifth largest company in the world by market capitalization, preceded by Apple, Saudi Aramco, Microsoft and Alphabet. While the company employs 1.2-1.6 million workers directly, and hundreds of thousands of more workers are employed in the peripheral sphere of recruitment agencies and external independent contractors (Delfanti et al, 2021; Statista, 2022). As noted by Williams (2020: 37), "Amazon embodies corporate personhood more than nearly any corporation in world history. Even its name is prophetic. The Amazon is the world's largest river—it dominates the ecosystem of an entire continent. In Western parlance, "Amazons" are the larger-than-life figures that physically dominate other 'average' humans—in a clear reference to this, Amazon refers to its employees as 'Amazonians.' The association of the Amazon corporation with its historical namesakes are not accidental".

In addition to their application of digital technologies in production and distribution, platforms like Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google, Uber and Airbnb have had disrupted markets. Whereas firms in newly opening markets usually focus on optimising existing products, platforms bypass this step and "instead, their aim is to radically challenge the functional logic of established markets" (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016: 459-60). Because of this, platform companies have been compared to key corporate actors under monopoly capitalism of the 1960s and 70s (Baran & Sweezey, 1966; Braverman, 1998). As Mitchell and LaVecchia (2016: 13) observe: "Amazon presents a vastly more dangerous threat to competition than Walmart, because its ambition is not only to be the biggest player in the market. Its intention is to own the market itself by providing the underlying infrastructure — the online shopping platform, the shipping system, the cloud computing backbone — that competing firms depend on to transact business. In effect, Amazon is turning an open, public marketplace into a privately controlled one." Indeed, since entering e-commerce as a competitor, Amazon has transformed the business model for booksellers by offering a massive product selection and 'one-stop' shopping, undercutting competing book publishers which have now become its suppliers. By leveraging its dominant market position, it is able to demand "above-average discounts or other concessions from publishers and to pull no punches in this kind of price battle", becoming a sales platform that book publishers are dependent upon for their survival (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016: 464).

Amazon's platformisation has not only involved cornering existing markets and transforming them into a digital marketplace, but also by creating a digital production system. Such monopolising market strategies are typical of digital companies which "have learned from this kind of experience in the early days of the Internet. As digital capitalism approaches adulthood, large corporations are aiming to create socio technical ecosystems integrating hardware and software that meet as many user needs as possible and make it harder for users to switch to another provider" (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016: 462).

Despite the fact that they operate in different sectors, "their supply structure is increasingly convergent, they constantly observe and adapt to one another, leading to in part 'isomorphic' structures on the supply side" (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016: 464).

Amazon Publishing, provides authors with a self-publishing service that produces e-books in tandem with the Kindle e-reader, allowing authors to retain more revenues than via traditional publishers (Staab & Nachtwey, 2016; Williams, 2020). However, the platform maintains a significant degree of control over relations between vendors and customers on the marketplace. Third-party sellers are subject to a 15% commission on sales, in addition to fees for advertising and delivery, and are obliged to provide Amazon information on their transactions, which have allowed it to wage predatory pricing battles, to squeeze and acquire competing retailers such as Diaper.com and Zappos (Alimahomed-Wilson et al., 2020: 7; Dyer-Witheford et al. 2019: 37).

Experts emphasize that Amazon's monopoly power, and its exploitative labour and business practices have been facilitated by "neoliberal policies and politics, such as the weak enforcement of antitrust laws, corporate welfare, and weak labor laws in the United States and other countries" (Alimahomed-Wilson et al., 2020: 6). Indeed, just in 2018, the company spent over $14 million USD on political lobbying, and that 75 of 115 Amazon lobbyists had previously held government jobs (Williams, 2020: 38). Srnicek points to the role of monetary policy, suggesting that reduced returns on financial assets and low interest rates have encouraged risky investments in "unprofitable and unproven tech companies" (2017: 30). Coupled with corporate cash hoarding and tax havens, capital has found it "cheaper to take on new debt instead of repatriating these offshore funds and paying corporate tax on them", while at the same time draining government revenues and exacerbating austerity (2017: 32).

In July 2019, the European Commission investigated Amazon's use of its marketplace sellers' data, given the company's dual role as a marketplace as well as a retailer on the platform which it administers. The investigation was initiated due to allegations of possible bias in providing sellers privileged access to its 'Buy Box' and the Amazon Prime programme. The investigation found that Amazon had "distorted fair competition on its platform and prevented effective competition" by relying on "marketplace sellers' non-public business data to calibrate its retail decisions" [GLO029]. It also found that Amazon "abused its dominance on the French, German and Spanish markets for the provision of online marketplace services to third-party sellers" and that "Amazon's rules and criteria for the Buy Box and Prime unduly favour its own retail business, as well as marketplace sellers that use Amazon's logistics and delivery services". Amazon committed to address these claims, and the Commission made them legally binding over all current and future marketplaces in the European Economic Area: a potential breach of commitments allow the Commission to impose a fine of up to 10% of Amazon's total annual turnover, in addition to a periodic penalty payment of 5% per day of Amazon's daily turnover for every day of non-compliance.

### *Surveillance, supply-chain securitisation and the state-capital nexus*

Amazon's rapid growth has been financed by capital markets and by revenues generated largely by Amazon Web Services (AWS), its cloud computing division. Founded in 2006, AWS provides web-service infrastructure for hosting applications, databases, websites, backup, storage space and processing power to government agencies, businesses, banks and financial institutions. In 2021, while AWS accounted for only 13% of Amazon's revenue, it represented 74% of its operating profit, and controlled a third of the global cloud services market [USA167]. Amazon has been able to dominate the e-commerce market despite running at a loss. Indeed, experts suggests that its capacity to offset losses through business in other sectors, namely AWS, go a long way to explaining its capacity to 'sit out' lengthy labour disputes, or to corner new and existing markets (Boewe & Schulten, 2019: 17).

In particular, two of AWS' technologies have drawn public criticism, including 'Amazon Rekognition', an image and video analysis package with facial recognition capabilities, and 'Amazon Ring', a smart home surveillance system.[60] Over 1,800 US law enforcement agencies have contracts with AWS, host body-camera and surveillance camera footage on its cloud, and are able to request video content recorded by Amazon customers without a warrant [USA163]. The United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency met with AWS executives to explore the possibility of using the technology for "predictive analytics", and while the deal was never concluded, AWS nevertheless hosts ICE's digital immigration case files, including familial, residential and biometric data on over 230 million people (Williams, 2020: 41).

In 2019, supported by civil rights and privacy organisations, AWS workers began to publically protest their employer's state contracts, and launched a campaign to ban the sale of facial recognition software to law enforcement agencies under the banner "No Tech for ICE". Amazon software engineers, interrupting an AWS summit in 2019 by playing recordings of children being separated from their parents at a US Customs Border Protection facility [USA172], while hundreds of other Amazon employees submitted an anonymous letter to Jeff Bezos demanding for the company to "cut ties with the deportation machine", and asserting their refusal to "build the platform that powers ICE" and to "contribute to tools that violate human rights" [USA168]. The campaign claimed that "Amazon Ring partnerships with police departments threaten civil liberties, privacy and civil rights, and exist without oversight or accountability" [USA166]. It emphasized the discriminatory effects of the technology which have been ignored during the development process, namely the tendency to disproportionately identify people of colour, and the capacity to identify protestors during public protests [USA165]. In June 2020, following the Black Lives Matter protests, Amazon put a one-year moratorium on the police use of its facial recognition technology [USA164].

Amazon has managed to control disruptions to customer fulfilment by developing network redundancy and expanding its number of facilities globally: in the event of a strike, work stoppage, slowdown or any other industrial action, orders and shipments are temporarily rerouted to other sites, minimising the effectiveness of workplace bargaining power. The collection and analysis of big data has been essential for supply-chain securitisation, granting Amazon an immense amount of informational power to exercise against collective actors who might seek to disrupt fulfilment operations (Williams, 2020).[61] Leaked confidential memos have revealed that the company monitors social media pages used

[60] "For consumers, Amazon offers Ring, a "smart" surveillance system that consists of a video doorbell and other wi-fi enabled products that surveil the area around one's home. Ring is used in hundreds of thousands of American homes and is expanding its presence in Europe and other countries. Homeowners who install Ring are able to access the information it produces through a social media app called Neighbors, which aggregates the data collected by all Ring systems and allows users to view information about suspicious activity within a 1.5 km radius of their homes. Like the Citizen app (formerly Vigilante), Neighbors uses this data to visualize the appearance of crime… consumers can use Ring and other Amazon devices to share parts of their internet bandwidth with other device owners, as part of a network Amazon calls Sidewalk" (Delfanti et at., 2021: 13).

[61] As Deborah Cowen remarks, just as critical infrastructures have historically been priority targets for warring states, supply chains have become securitised and managed by public and private military and civilian forces, with "economic losses from supply chain disruptions increased 465% from 2009 to 2001, reaching a staggering $350 billion … Supply chain security managers repeatedly highlight labor and industrial disputes as the top sources of disruption. These are often assessed interchangeably with disruptions caused by acts of terrorism. For instance, PwC outlines how labor actions in supply chain chokepoints provide a useful proxy for the effects of terror. They use a 2002 lockout in West Coast US ports with its estimated costs of $1 billion per day as a proxy for the impacts of terror attacks in key logistics hubs… logistics workers are also subject to exceptional security measures aimed to pre-empt disruption in ports and transport corridors… Labor actions are of undoubted significance to the flows of global trade, but so are the protests of many other groups whose lands and livelihoods stand in the path of logistics space. In fact, one of the best maps of the resistance of diverse groups that disrupt logistics space are supply chain security reports and policies themselves, which in addition to "industrial disruption," alternately cite "pirates," "terrorists," "indigenous blockades" and the generic "political disruption" as key risks. Supply chain security documents offer valuable inventories of old and new enemies of empire." (Cowen, 2014a: 4-7).

by workers, and illustrate union-busting training videos[62] made for warehouse managers to identify first signs of worker organising on the shopfloor (Delfanti et al., 2021). Amazon Global Security Operations, tasked with protecting "the safety and security of employees, vendors, visitors, and assets" at Amazon posted job advertisements for intelligence analysts with prior experience in the military or law enforcement to collect information on "sensitive topics that are strictly confidential, including threats against the company by labor organizations … activist groups and hostile political leaders" [DE060]. Confidential emails indicated that the division gathers information about worker satisfaction with working conditions, labour related incidents (e.g. injuries, cases of theft) and organizing activities at facilities around the world, including a description of actions (e.g. a "strike" or the "distribution of leaflets"), the number of participants, the date, time, location and source of the report, and the number of workers attending union meetings [USA170].

One leak from 2020 describes the geoSPatial Operating Console (SPOC), which allows the company to produce heat maps of union organising. The system collects and visualises over 40 variables relating to internal and external risks including: local crime rates, opioid usage, critical weather events, "Whole Foods Market Activism/Unionization Efforts", "union grant money flow patterns", the "Presence of Local Union Chapters and Alt Labor Groups", the number of charges filed with the National Labour Relations Board, a "diversity index" indicating the racial and ethnic diversity at each store, the percentage of families within a store's zip code living below the poverty line, and team "sentiment" data which assess employee satisfaction based on internal employee surveys [USA158; USA171]. The former Amazon HR manager who shared the memo commented that "the tool could be used for things like factoring in the financial strength of the closest unions [and] success rate of local unions (how many campaigns have resulted in [collective bargaining agreements])" [USA158].

## Mapping the digital factory

While Amazon does not publically provide a database of its logistics facilities, trade unions, researchers, journalists and consulting companies have produced databases and maps of warehouses, offices in order to organise the information about the composition of the network, consisting of different work sites, processes and labours. MWPVL (n.d.), an independent supply chain and logistics consulting firm provides a database of Amazon's global fulfilment network, listing a short description, the date of opening, location, ID code, and square footage of worksites, counting a total of 2297 active and 346 planned facilities globally.[63] The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and Ver.di have produced a map illustrating the locations of Amazon logistics facilities in Germany, however details beyond the type of facility are not specified.[64]

The 'Mapping Amazon Italy' project provides a more detailed overview, including additional socio-economic variables such as: the estimated number of permanent employers plus drivers, the distance of the site to the nearest logistic hub, the average taxable income, and employment rate in the municipality.[65] In particular, the authors note the challenges of determining the number of employees on

[62] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRpwVwFxyk4&ab_channel=WholeWorker

[63] https://www.mwpvl.com/html/amazon_com.html

[64] https://th.rosalux.de/news/id/49483/karte-aller-amazon-standorte-ueberarbeitet

[65] "Let's take the Passo Corese distribution center, one of the largest in Italy. Passo Corese is located on the western edge of the municipality of Fara Sabina, on the border between the provinces of Rieti and that of Rome, less than 10 kilometers from the north Rome motorway exit. In terms of income, with its average taxable income of 17,177 euros per year, equal to 1,321 euros gross per month for 13 months (to be precise, the taxable income is the gross income minus the deductible charges), Fara Sabina is outside the range of municipalities in the Roman belt, characterized by a per capita taxable incomerelatively high between 18,000 and 21,000 euros (in the capital the average income is 24,830 euros). Furthermore, a few kilometers away, in the province of Rieti, there are at least a dozen municipalities where the average taxable amount is between 14,000 and 15,000 euros and, proceeding in the direction of Abruzzo, it drops below 13,000 and you also come

temporary contracts due to high turnover and fluctuations during seasonal peaks. In the USA, a 'Mapping Amazon' project was developed by Good Jobs First[66] which also maintains an Amazon 'Violation Tracker', a public database of offenses lodged against Amazon in the USA related to safety, competition, employment, environment and consumer protection.[67] It overlays Amazon distribution centres in the US over the median disposable household income and the estimated number of households with Prime subscriptions, indicating that locations of facilities are based on logistical and economic considerations.

The mapping exercises also find support for the thesis previously stated by researchers that Amazon tends to build its warehouses in peripheral, often economically underdeveloped, industrial areas with high levels of unemployment and underemployment where there are few alternative options (Boewe & Schulten, 2017a: 19; 2019: 11; Cattero & D'Onofrio, 2018). They show that warehouses tend to be clustered in the metropolitan periphery, nearby to highways and airport cargo terminals, and in close proximity to areas that have a higher concentration of Prime subscribers, which tend to also be large metropolitan areas with higher levels of disposable income. Whereas highly-skilled urban workers are unlikely to find wages or working conditions attractive, the same does not hold for those living in lower income areas where alternative forms of employment are not easily found.[68] Sourcing and transporting the necessary labour to complete the work is itself part of the logistics operation: Amazon organizes buses to fetch its labour force in some cases, in a 120km radius from its warehouses, meaning that workers need to complete a daily 2-hour round trip in addition to physically-demanding shifts (Amazon workers and supporters, 2018: 97).

In order to understand how the supply chain functions, it is necessary to examine Amazon's own classification of warehouses, according to the role they fulfil and the division of labour within warehouses.[69] In addition to the facilities described below are a number of offices that are not part of the logistics network, such as Head Offices, Data Centres, Customer Services, and Software Development Centres which may be dedicated to other branches such as Amazon Web Services or for machine-learning and voice recognition as with Alexa Data Services. In some national contexts, only a small range of these facilities may be found, whereas nearly all can be located in more developed markets such as the USA or Germany.

The workforce inside logistics facilities is divided into two main departments, inbound and outbound. *Inbound* consists of *dock*, responsible for unloading goods from trucks; *receive* which deals with unpacking boxes, registering and labelling individual projects and placing them on conveyer belt which are then split into several 'fingers'; and *stow*, which consists of taking packages from the 'fingers', scanning them and shelving them in the appropriate storage location. The relatively larger *outbound* department is divided into *pick,* which involves walking long distances around the warehouse to recover the items from different locations where they are stowed, guided by a digital scanner displaying the position where they are located, and collecting them onto trolleys; *pack* involving packing products in cardboard boxes and labelling them with barcodes; *AFE,* the 'Amazon Fulfilment Engine', a special department in packaging; *ICQA*, responsible for quality control; and *ship* responsible for loading goods onto trucks for further delivery. *Team Leaders* are responsible for allocating tasks, training, leading meetings, assigning tasks,

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across municipalities such as Accumoli and Amatrice, whose economies were devastated by the earthquakes of 2016 and 2017 (and where the income compared to our data, which dates back to 2017, probably fell further). Similarly, as regards the occupancy rate, exploring the surroundings we pass from almost 60% in Fara Sabina to municipalities in Lazio where it drops below 45%. The same goes for the municipalities of northern Abruzzo, between L'Aquila and Teramo." https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5c724cb9425741bbb14b6eeffe99a427

[66] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/adc5ff253a3643f88d39e7f3ef1a09ee

[67] https://violationtracker.goodjobsfirst.org/parent/amazoncom

[68] A trade union representative from the Polish trade union Solidarność confided that for many Polish FC workers, despite the physically demanding working conditions, Amazon was a preferable alternative to working for other small business where workers could not be sure that a paycheck would arrive at the end of the month.

[69] See also https://www.aboutamazon.com/workplace/facilities

communicating with internal and external suppliers, and tracking and reporting working hours. *Process Guides* assist leaders, perform administrative or other non-routine tasks and are not subject to targets but rather assist in monitoring other workers (Amazon workers and supporters, 2018: 97-99; Owczarek & Chełstowska, 2016).

*Fulfilment Centres*, classified into sortable and non-sortable, are the primary nodes in the network positioned on the peripheries of larger metropolitan regions, along major highway routes, in proximity to airports and ports and with good connections to public transport. *Sortable Fulfilment Centres* deal with small items, such as books, toasters, toys and other household products, and can employ over 1,500 workers. They are also supported by subcontracted workers employed by external companies including truck drivers, reception, security and cleaners. *Non-Sortable Fulfillment Centers* perform the same function however they are built for dealing with larger products such as yard furniture, outdoor equipment or rugs, employing over 1,000 workers. At second-generation Fulfilment Centres, some picking and stowing tasks are carried out by robots. Fulfilment Centres are identified based on the International Air Transport Association's 3-letter IATA code, indicating the nearest international airport followed by a number. For example, the Fulfilment Centre in Passo Corese on the outskirts of Rome Italy is coded FCO1, based on its proximity to the Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino airport.

*Receive Centres* are warehouses that stock large quantities of items with the highest demand, and then send them to FCs in the network.

*Sortation Centres* represent the 'middle-mile' in Amazon logistics network, responsible for sorting parcels according to their final destination. They are smaller than FCs and employ between 500-1,000 workers. From this point in the supply-chain, goods are already packaged into parcels barcoded with a customer address. Their identification code is the same as for FCs.

*Delivery Stations* are small warehouses responsible for 'last-mile delivery'. Delivery Stations receive shipments from Fulfilment and Sortation Centres, process them, and allocate them to drivers for delivery to customers' homes. Many of the tasks carried out in FCs, such as picking, packing, stowing and shipping are reproduced on a smaller scale here. Delivery Stations can employ anywhere between a few dozen to several hundred workers. Delivery is performed by drivers employed by external 'Delivery Service Partners', or by Amazon Flex couriers, independent gig-workers using their own vehicles. Whereas full-time DSP drivers might be expected to deliver between 200-300 packages a day, Flex drivers tend to be employed on-demand and can deliver 10-50 packages over shorter shifts of 2-4 hours. At the Delivery Station where I worked, Hoppegarten DBE3, around 15-20 DPSs would handle the delivery of 80-100,000 packages per day, distributed among 250-350 drivers, increasing to nearly 500 drivers during seasonal peaks. The code for Delivery Stations is "D", followed by an ID code for the region and a number. For example, the Delivery Stations at Tegel, Mariendorf and Hoppegarten in Berlin, Germany are coded DBE1, DBE2, and DBE3.

*Prime Now Hubs* are small warehouses in the last-mile that oversee 'same-day' home delivery of purchases made using the Amazon Prime subscription. It is used largely by the company's subsidiaries Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods for same-day grocery delivery.

*Specialty* facilities are warehouses that stock items with seasonal characteristics (e.g. garden items), and which are particularly subject to peak times of year such as the Christmas holidays. Workers here are employed mostly on a part-time basis.

In addition to the privacy concerns associated with the harvesting of personal data on a massive scale, the model of one-click shopping encouraged by Amazon produces an array of externalised social and environmental costs. Around 70% of the costs of B2C e-commerce are attributed to transportation, of which around 50% is accounted for by the last-mile delivery, which is a particularly major source of carbon emissions produced in e-commerce distribution (Majowicz et al., 2022). The global carbon footprint of Amazon's logistics operations, warehousing and data centres are estimated at 44 million

metric tons of carbon. The rapid pace of shipping under the JIT system has been identified as a factor in the number of crashes and deaths on roads (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). Indeed, delivery drivers report exceeding speed limits and skipping breaks in order to meet tight deadlines [DE3].

The first Amazon facilities that were opened in Poland initially only delivered to customers in their neighbouring, more lucrative Western markets. Indeed, it was only in January 2021 that Amazon opened a Polish internet portal for customers in Poland [PL059]. Between 61-68% of Polish consumers receive their parcels via automated parcel machines, the highest rate in the EU, earning Poland the nickname 'Lockerland', whereas home or courier delivery ranks second. Across the EU and UK, the number of 'out-of-home' (OOH) pick-up points has seen rapid growth and is the preferred mode of delivery in certain countries, increasing by 35% in 2021. This figure consists of automated parcel lockers (increase of 80%) as well as 'pick-up/drop-off points' (PUDO), located in grocery stores, at small kiosks, gas stations or newsagents (increase of 30%) (Majowicz et al., 2022). The Polish locker market is dominated by InPost, which has 8,000 lockers countrywide, and to a smaller extent, the Polish Post which owns 200, but plans to launch 4,000 more lockers during 2020-2024 [PL066]. The PUDO market meanwhile is led by Polish Post which owns 13,000 locations, followed by foreign third-party logistics providers DHL (9,000), DPD (2,600), GLS (1,500) and UPS (1,200) [PL066]. The relatively slower growth of the B2C delivery market in Poland in 2022 has been attributed to the high level of inflation, the war in Ukraine and rising energy costs (Majowicz et al., 2022).

The German retail sector is characterised by a high degree of concentration, with the top 10 mail-order and internet retailers accounting for 37% of total sales in 2015 (up from 32.3% in 2012) [DE094]. In 2020, fuelled by lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, the German e-commerce market grew 40%, with Amazon accounting for 53% of sales nationwide (HDE, 2021).[70] In Germany, the prohibitive cost of rail transportation and the relatively lower costs of diesel and migrant drivers have meant that 80% of goods are transported by truck, contributing to traffic jams, air pollution, health risks and damage to roads [DE003]. Since 2017, Amazon focused on developing its own last-mile delivery capacities, in an effort to lower its dependency on large parcel delivery services such as DHL and Hermes, and opened 74 Delivery Stations in Germany as well as a number of Prime Hubs in proximity to large German cities. Since Amazon is delivering more packages itself, DHL expects to deliver 154 million fewer packages for Amazon in 2022 than in 2018, around 30% of its business [DE192]. Additionally, it launched the Amazon Flex program, however it has since been discontinued in Germany. In 2016, Amazon began wholesaling food to restaurants, kiosks and bulk purchasers in Germany [DE099; DE110].

## Labour and control at Amazon Logistics

This section addresses the organization of control among warehouse workers and delivery drivers within the labour process. It argues that a combination of punitive measures, incentive-based reward systems and surveillance supress worker agency in a highly individualised manner, while intensifying the pace of work and ensuring high levels of productivity. This is enabled by algorithmic managerial systems and the Taylorised organisation of work, which minimise the experience necessary to perform work and the costs of replacing and training workers.

As Delfanti et al. (2021: 23) note, "when a consumer clicks on an item on Amazon's website, they experience a fast, smooth, and convenient purchasing and delivery process that enables them to have almost instant access to an infinite array of consumer goods. What they don't see are the cascading effects set in motion by that click, which are governed by Amazon's corporate algorithms and fall squarely on

[70] https://einzelhandel.de/index.php?option=com_attachments&task=download&id=10572

the real engine of the company's one-click consumerism model: workers". Indeed, in order for customers to order and receive products, workers along the supply chain must carry out various types of labour necessary to receive, sort, package and ship commodities.

Existing research on the labour process in Amazon logistics facilities, observes the high level of regulation and low level of trust and the organisation of work according to principles of a digital Taylorism (Crowley et al., 2010) premised on the simplification, standardisation and splitting of work into discrete tasks, enabling an easy interchangeability of workers (Alias & Milesi, 2017; Barthel, 2019; Cuppini, 2018; Delfanti, 2021; Massimo, 2020; Staab & Nachtwey, 2016). Earlier generations of labour process theorists illustrated how processes of automation and deskilling dispossessed workers of their knowledge of the labour process, and objectified it in the very technology necessary to perform the work (Braverman, 1974; Thompson, 1983). In the platform economy, the function of exercising control over production and in the orienting, directing and monitoring of workers' task completion, earlier carried out by managers and the assembly line, is embodied by the very tools used by workers, connected to algorithmic management systems. Digital Taylorism not only refers to a revival of scientific management of the early twentieth century, but rather refers to how digital technology "allows for the mobilisation, renewal and recombination of crucial Taylorist principles in novel ways and contexts", permitting control, feedback and correction in real-time (Altenried, 2017: 200). As Delfanti et al. observe, "[Amazon] workers can't perform their jobs without these technologies, which renders them dependent on the very tools that monitor them" (2021: 4). The technologies pioneered by Amazon intensify the pace of work by enabling micromanagement on an unprecedented scale, introducing "new rigidities in the workplace" while constraining worker autonomy and opportunities for human interaction (Gutelius & Theodore, 2019: 4), relying on a combination of coercion, surveillance and consent in the workplace in order to achieve an "organized fragmentation of any potential antagonistic subjectivity" (Massimo, 2020: 130).

At the start of each shift, warehouse workers log into the system with their ID badges, while the handheld scanner assigns tasks, registers the barcodes on products and packages, and records information such as the number of packages scanner per hour, time spent at a workstation, and "Time off Task" such as bathroom breaks. The information is fed into the Associate Development and Performance Tracker 'ADAPT' system which tracks how efficiently workers perform their tasks and benchmarks them against dynamic performance targets, ensuring a flow of information regarding each individual's productivity to managers in real-time.[71] Low performance can lead to 'feedback talks' with management, formal warnings and eventual dismissal. Delfanti (2021) refers to this as 'machinic dispossession', the datafication and capture of workers' tacit knowledge that is learned on the job, for instance the capability to navigate labyrinthine worksites, or the familiarity with the position of the inventory. The scanner expropriates the political leverage this knowledge provides, while diminishing the costs and risks that come with a high level of worker turnover. These systems allow for each worker's individual output to be quantified, while at the same reducing their skills and interdependency (Massimo, 2020).

As one German FC worker and shop-steward related, together with omnipresent security cameras on the shop-floor, the feedback mechanisms integrated into this system put constant pressure on workers to increase their pace of work, engendering a panoptic self-surveillance:

> "Great pressure is exerted on the employees, superiors give the impression that they are constantly on your neck, the all-registering hand scanner and the many surveillance cameras reinforce this. And finally, there is also the fact that somehow a pressure develops to constantly check yourself" [DE5].

[71] Some workers have reported that they received automated messages notifying them of their termination through their scanner. One worker, whose log indicated inactivity for one minute was reprimanded by management for having "breached her contractual work performance obligation" (Boewe & Schulten, 2017a: 17).

Subcontracted delivery drivers, while not formally employed by Amazon but by third-party logistics providers referred to by Amazon as its 'Delivery Service Partners' (DSPs), are subject to similar performance-related forms of monitoring via apps such as Relay, Mentor and Flex. The Relay app allows contractors to place bids for short-term contracts for their drivers, while drivers themselves use the app to be assigned shifts, check-in at Amazon facilities and receive navigation routes. The DSP's dispatchers, as well as Amazon managers, are able to monitor each driver's 'tour' in real-time. Among some DSPs, drivers can call for a 'rescue' driver, if the volume of packages is too high, while drivers who had already completed their tours may be obliged to help with uncompleted tours [DE232]. DSPs are required to report the names of 'problem drivers', who make incorrect deliveries, fail to return undeliverable parcels to warehouses, or have incurred traffic fines. Problem drivers can be banned from working for Amazon globally, subjecting already precarious drivers to blackmail [DE232].

Drivers are also obliged to install a second Mentor app on their smartphones, ostensibly a "digital driver safety app" which monitors driving performance, registers infractions such as speeding, sudden braking, placing phone calls or sending messages, and generates a daily 'FICO safe-driving' score for an individual driver which may be compared with other drivers working for their own or other DSPs. Effectively, this enables competition between drivers and DSPs, which may have their contracts easily terminated. Drivers have related that their ratings were reduced when their phones rang, regardless of whether the call was answered, and noted that the metrics have led to unfair disciplinary actions from their managers including write-ups, loss of access to bonuses or being barred access from shifts [DE228]. Meanwhile, the Flex app is used by individual gig-workers in the context of the Flex program, who may bid for 2-6 hour shifts to deliver packages using their private vehicles. In 2021, Amazon piloted Driveri, a smart camera mounted to the rear-view mirror of delivery vans which monitors 'events' such as distracted driving, following other vehicles too closely or violating stop signs or street lights. Amazon drivers are obliged to sign consent forms to release their biometric data, while the data compiled from the camera is used to determine whether drivers are eligible for weekly bonuses, prizes or extra pay. Drivers have reported losing income from erroneous citations [USA174]. As one former delivery driver from Alabama related:

> "The Netradyne cameras that Amazon installed in our vans have been nothing but a nightmare… they watch every move we make. I have been 'dinged' for following too close when someone cuts me off. If I look into my mirrors to make sure I am safe to change lanes, it dings me for distraction because my face is turned to look into my mirror. I personally did not feel any more safe with a camera watching my every move." [USA174]

One of the major consequences is the physical and psychological effects on the workers that labour within such a system. Indeed, workers routinely report high levels of stress and anxiety associated with meeting the expected pace of work set by algorithmic management systems at Amazon, which leads workers to resort to unsafe working practices, avoiding taking bathroom breaks and urinating in bottles. It is also indicated by the high rates of workplace injuries at Amazon logistics facilities. For instance, in 2021, the rate of serious injuries[72] at Amazon facilities in New York was found to be 40% higher than at non-Amazon facilities in the state [USA173]. Older workers, women, and pregnant people are among some of the groups that are severely impacted by a system that penalizes workers for not meeting productivity targets (Delfanti et al., 2021; Gutelius & Theodore, 2019).

The employment structure has significant implications for the mobilising process and restricts the capacity of unions to organise workers for collective action. Under this system, workers are first employed via recruitment agencies ('green badge'), and depending on individual performance, may be eventually employed directly by Amazon ('blue badge'). Agency workers represent the 'industrial reserve

[72] Serious injuries were defined as injuries so severe that workers were unable to continue performing their job duties, and had to either be reassigned or take time off work.

army' and as such are subject to high turnover, whose proportion to the rest of the workforce grows substantially during peak seasons[73] such as during November and December, while in January, a majority of agency workers are laid off following the end of the peak. Since temporary and fixed-term workers can be fired immediately without any justification, this affords the company a significant degree of flexibility regarding its capacity to adjust the volume and professional characteristics of the workforce to trends in production (Cattero & D'Onofrio, 2018: 145-6). Agency workers frequently outperform more senior 'blue badge' workers, given the possibility of promotion and the threat of being laid off. Many unions discourage agency workers from participating in collective action, given the risks of being fired or not having contracts extended. The process of starting on temporary contract and moving to a permanent position varies with context since countries differ with regard to labour laws regarding the permanent assumption of workers. In Germany, workers may spend up to two years on fixed-term contracts before they are assumed permanently, however in certain cases they may be promoted within the course of two to three months. Additionally, the company relies on external subcontractors ('yellow badge') for other functions such as security, reception, cleaning, and crucially, for last-mile delivery, including parcel drivers and dispatchers.

Disciplinary market mechanisms and performance metrics are among some of the coercive tools that ensure a high level of productivity and compliance within the labour process. Another key element is the corporate culture and the ideological means by which Amazon constructs consent within the labour process, namely by inviting workers to "actively participate in the organization of work and in the social life of the factory" (Massimo, 2020: 135). For instance, the 'Connections' survey program allows managers to send workers questions via their scanners or workstations regarding different aspects of job satisfaction. The company describes it as a "real-time, companywide employee feedback mechanism designed to listen to and learn from employees at scale to improve the employee experience… individual responses are aggregated and shared with managers at the team level to maintain confidentiality. Connections analyzes response data and provides insights to managers and leaders to review and take actions as necessary."[74] Likewise, the 'Voice of the Associate Boards' offers "team members the opportunity to express themselves openly" and provide "employees a forum for expressing their concerns, offering suggestions, and asking questions on a daily basis". Such programs are framed as a means of worker empowerment and participation, however the presence of cameras in break-rooms by the suggestion board, and the fact that workers must be logged into their devices before participating in Connections indicate that anonymity is not guaranteed.

Gamified, incentive-based reward systems are another mechanism which has been used to demobilise collective action and to extract maximum productivity from workers by putting individual workers and departments into competition with one another. Individual workers are eligible to receive bonuses for good attendance, while certain departments or entire warehouses are eligible for collective monthly bonuses for meeting performance targets. However, workers have reported that bonuses are often unpaid: indeed, some Polish workers were surprised to discover that their absence at overtime disqualified them from receiving the attendance bonus. An investigation by the National Labour Inspectorate in Poland found that the company failed to transparently specify the rules stating eligibility for bonuses, particularly regarding 'incidents' which disqualify workers from receiving bonuses [PL048]. As a result, management extended the list of disqualifying criteria to include items such as absences caused by visits to the site's emergency first-aid or for blood donation, as well as lateness or early exit from shifts, even when these were previously authorised.

[73] As the Polish IP union has pointed out "Amazon also exaggerates these seasonal changes and uses them as an excuse for the employment of large numbers of temporary agency workers it can hire and fire" (Amazon Workers and Supporters, 2018: 97).

[74] https://sustainability.aboutamazon.com/society/employees/employee-engagement

In 2017, in response to high sickness rates at German sites, a collective 'health bonus' was introduced, whereby workers who had not called-in sick during a month, could be eligible for a 10% increase in their gross wage [DE110; DE114; DE143]. Since sickness-related absences were measured at the team level, sick workers were pressured to come into work despite illness. Another issue regarding the awarding of bonuses arises from the scheduling of night-shifts, which certain workers prefer to work given surcharges available for night-work. For instance, while the Polish Labour Code specifies that night-surcharges must be paid between 22:00-6:00, night shifts were often scheduled from 21:00-5:00 in order to avoid full payment. As one Polish worker observed, "None of the warehouse workers work until 6:00 in the morning, thanks to which one hour of the allowance stays in the company's pocket" [PL047]. At the same time, Polish workers have criticised the fact that the work regulations do not specify the means by which the collective productivity bonus is calculated, or how it might even be verified [PL052]. Bonuses have also been mobilised as incentives to discourage workers from participating in strikes. In Germany, the company has offered a special daily €10 attendance bonus to those who worked six days during the peak around Prime Day. However, the fact that this coincided with strikes led to Ver.di framing this as a "strike-breaking bonus" [DE170].

# CHAPTER 6: NEOCORPORATISM CHALLENGED: MOBILIZATIONS AGAINST AMAZON IN GERMANY

This chapter describes the mobilisations against Amazon in Germany. In the first section, I summarize the main contentious issues in the industrial dispute which Ver.di and social movement actors have targeted during the course of their actions. The second section provides a chronological overview of the dispute, and traces the emergence of contestation in Germany to the first strikes in 2013. The third section presents the power-structure analysis of Ver.di and describes the power resources and strategic capabilities deployed by the union in the course of its dispute with Amazon. Next, I describe collective actions undertaken by the union in the dispute by means of four vignettes: the 'AVE' campaign for generally binding collective bargaining agreements, a campaign focusing on organising warehouse workers at Delivery Stations, a campaign focusing on organising last-mile delivery drivers, and campaigns for health and safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. The final section focuses on social movement actors which have organised collective actions against Amazon in Germany, specifically Berlin vs. Amazon, and Amazon Workers Against Surveillance. The collective actions undertaken by these groups are illustrated through three campaigns: the campaign opposing the construction of the EDGE-Tower in Berlin, the campaign against surveillance and repression, and finally, the glocal MakeAmazonPay protest in Berlin in November 2022.

## Contentious issues at Amazon in Germany

This section identifies the focal points of contention on the basis of which trade unions and social movement organisations in Germany have organised their collective action. The main five issues are: the refusal of co-determination, precarious employment conditions, health and safety, repression and surveillance, and struggles over working time.

*1) Refusal of co-determination*

The ongoing industrial conflict against Amazon in Germany offers an insight into the challenges posed to the neocorporatist model of industrial relations. In Germany, Amazon's insistent refusal to recognise unions as legitimate counterparts in codetermination has transformed what would traditionally be a conflict of distribution to a "conflict of recognition" (Cattero & D'Onofrio, 2018: 150). Since the start of its campaign against Amazon in 2012, Ver.di has called for the company to sign the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in the retail and mail order sector, which has consistently been its overarching demand that subsumes all other issues and claims. A DGB (2022) publication notes that "there are not yet enough union members to be able to enforce an in-house collective agreement", indicated by the fact that when strikes occur, they tend to be minority strikes. Meanwhile, Amazon insists that it is a logistics company in Germany, however it has neither ratified the collective bargaining agreement in logistics, and instead, sets wages and benefits, at its own discretion, based on evaluations by a contractor, claiming that its remuneration is competitive in the logistics sector.[75] The union has insisted that it is unacceptable for employees "to be dependent only on the goodwill or the whims of their bosses" [DE10], and its calculations demonstrate that tariff evasion is ultimately a net loss for

[75] Likewise, in Italy, Amazon insists that it is a logistics company, whereas the Italian retail sector collective agreement would oblige it to pay, on average €2,500 more per employee [DE13]. To the contrary, in the USA, where entry wages in logistics are higher than retail and trade, Amazon defines itself as a trading company. Ver.di scandalizes the practice of 'shopping around' for preferable sectoral agreements and thereby benefitting from lower personnel costs. It maintains that since Amazon is a typical trading enterprise that buys or produces and distributes goods (by the union's estimates, in 2019 accounting for 50% of its business in Germany), it should be bound by regulations in the retail and mail order sector collective agreement[DE8].

workers.[76] While wage levels have certainly been a key issue for workers throughout the campaign, the union incorporates issues relating to remuneration within its master frame of tariff-evasion and a demand for a CBA in the retail and mail order sector. This is because under the system of dual interest representation in Germany, it would ensure not only regular, "legally binding wage increases instead of unilateral wage promises" [DE109], but also empower works councils, which have strong institutional rights to monitor employers' adherence to the terms of CBAs.

In recent years, while companies in Germany have increasingly obstructed the establishment of works councils (Behrens & Dribbusch, 2014), a trend followed by on-demand food delivery platforms such as Gorillas and Flink, instead Amazon moves in the direction of co-optation. While the company characterizes trade unions as foreign 'third parties' to employment relations and has deployed significant resources to demobilise unions and prevent their intervention in employment relations with workers in its facilities, it has on the other hand publically welcomed works councils, and made rhetorical gestures of support for their establishment at worksites. Tellingly, Ralf Kleber the former manager for Amazon in Germany stated that "we took a clear position early on and said that you don't need a collective agreement or a union to be a good employer", but praised the establishment of works councils at Amazon facilities and encouraged employees to set up works councils at other locations [DE218]. The late Christian Krähling, an Amazon worker, shop steward and works councillor who was central in initiating not only the strike movement in Bad Hersfeld, but also the Amazon Workers International observed that

> "Amazon is now imitating us and has a works council elected with every newly established location, which is then made up of appropriately docile people. And then Amazon says, we don't need trade unions, we'll sort that out with our works council." [DE117]

Indeed, the company limits the impact of works councils by promoting non-union electoral lists, which conform with managerial prerogatives and do not actively defend workers' rights. This tactical manoeuvre is evident in locations where a works council process is already underway, and where management seeks to gain control over the process rather than being seen as blocking an important institution of industrial democracy. In essence, this is an exercise in image control that provides a veneer of worker participation, a fig-leaf for Amazon's otherwise fervently anti-union politics (see also Cattero & D'Onofrio, 2018: 153-154).

*2) Precarious employment conditions*

As elaborated in the previous chapter, the labour composition at Amazon distribution centres consists of workers directly employed by Amazon ('blue-badge'), workers employed by recruitment agencies ('green-badge'), and workers employed by external contractors ('yellow-badge). As related by union officials, the employment structure, predicated on insecurity and high turnover, is one of the biggest barriers to mobilisation, supressing the number of workers going on strike, or even having contact with unions. Workers at logistics facilities begin their tenure with a green badge, and may be promoted to a blue badge following good performance and behaviour, however it is commonplace for workers to have to pass through multiple successive agency contracts. Workers start on a trial period, whereby their employer can terminate their contract immediately, without a notice period, and without having to provide any justification. Even following promotion, blue-badge workers are subject to the same probation for the first year of their direct employment with Amazon. Many agency workers, particularly those hired during peak seasons, do not have their contracts renewed, or simply quit after several months on the job. The majority of green-badge workers do not participate in strikes or become union members,

[76] While Amazon selectively offers some permanent employees shares and other benefits, these do not make up for lost earnings and benefits associated with a collective agreement. The union estimates that it would provide an additional €600 monthly for employees in the first year of work, and €260 from the third year. Likewise, the €400 Christmas bonus offered in 2021 would amount to €1500, and vacation pay would provide an additional €1300 annually [DE053].

and many are aware that coming out as a supporter jeopardizes the possibility of promotion. Given these risks, Ver.di even explicitly advises green-badge workers not to identify themselves as supporters during the probation period. A union project secretary explained the challenges of organising at Delivery Stations with non-existent interest representation structures:

> "You have 150 people working at the Delivery Station with a direct Amazon contract. 150 blue badges. Then you have … 100-150 agency workers and student workers. So that makes … 250 workers inside the warehouse. Then you have the drivers and the dispatchers and stuff. So if you sum them up, let's say 200 to 300 more workers. So you have a facility of 550 workers working 'kind of' for Amazon or directly for Amazon. Because the drivers also have Amazon cars, Amazon clothes, Amazon tracking devices, Amazon targets, everything's Amazon. But they're not Amazon. The agency workers are also not Amazon. They're working for agencies. The people who have blue badges, 150, like 70 or 80 of them have temporary contracts. These people won't unionise because they are afraid of not getting a contract extension. Some of them will, but that's really, really, really difficult. So basically, who are you working with? You are working with 60 to 70 workers out of fucking 500 workers. So Amazon created a structure where you could possibly only unionise, like 10% of the workforce. So it limits you. It limits you. The trick with the drivers and the sub-companies is really, really, really a game changer. But still it's possible. Why? It's possible because in Germany you have this strong legislation on works councils… technically you can easily found works councils." [INT23]

While the union has drawn attention to the problem of agency work, there has not been concerted effort by Ver.di to deploy its resources and organise meaningfully against the abuse of temporary contracts. While agency contracts were a more pressing issue for the union in the early stages of the campaign, this is less so the case now, since particularly at older FCs that have been in operation for five years or longer, Amazon gradually tends to directly assume an increasingly larger proportion of workforces to maintain a stable core workforce. The opposite is true at Delivery Stations which feature a higher proportion of agency workers, both inside the warehouse, and particularly among delivery drivers which exclusively for subcontracted third-party logistics firms. Notwithstanding these considerable obstacles to organising, the union has illustrated its capacity to begin to mobilise at Delivery Stations, illustrating a capacity to utilise the strong institutional protections offered by German law, in the form of legislation on the establishment of works councils.

*3) Health and safety*

Health and safety has been a major issue at Amazon in Germany since before the first strikes took place. In fact, works councillors from older sites such as Bad Hersfeld and Leipzig have related that wage increases are no longer the main objective for works councils but good, safe working conditions where workers can continue to work until they retire without endangering their health. Indeed, Amazon warehouse workers in Germany as elsewhere have continuously reported the significant physical and mental stress experienced by the fast-paced, repetitive nature of the work and constant monitoring of performance. High levels of work-related injuries and illness have been reported at German sites, with surveys indicating a sickness rate (illness-related absence) of 20-40% at Amazon sites in Germany, compared to the average 3.8% in the retail and logistics sectors, or the German national average of 4.34% (Boewe & Schulten, 2017a; Statista, 2020). The union has also criticised the inadequate ventilation and noise inside facilities, a source of stress, and criticised the sluggish implementation of minimal occupational health and safety standards required by German law [DE010; DE134]. Workers report the considerable stress of being constantly monitored via cameras, managers and work-devices that continuously collect data on individual performance. Over the duration of a shift, 'pickers' might cover 20km while lifting packages weighing up to 23kg, while 'packers' tend to stand still at their stations performing repetitive movements in packaging and labelling products. As the union has often pointed out, the physical strain of the job is exacerbated by workstations which have not been designed ergonomically, or with the input of works councils. Indeed, many sites still lack workplace risk assessments, occupational safety specialists, site doctors or paramedics [DE147].

*4) Repression and surveillance*

Since the first strikes, Amazon workers in Germany have denounced the stress experienced through constant performance monitoring. Ver.di and unions in other countries had primarily framed performance monitoring as a health and safety issue, and connected it to work intensification, given that individual performance data enables a ratcheting of productivity targets.[77] Surveillance is also closely related to Amazon's attempts to marginalise trade unions and obstruct their activities. More recently, social movement organisations such as Amazon Workers Against Surveillance have framed performance monitoring as a data protection concern, extending the frame of surveillance and control to bridge between different issues, and to incorporate the concerns of different groups of workers, including last-mile parcel delivery drivers, software engineers, data labellers, and customer service workers. Data protection is a particularly salient issue in Germany which unions, institutions and civil society groups have drawn increased attention to in recent years, in the context of debates around Work 4.0. Increasingly, Ver.di-affiliated works councils have been calling for new regulations on data protection [DE105; DE183].

*5) Struggles over working time*

While Sunday work is strongly regulated in Germany, firms have used the courts and legislature to gain concessions. Employers may be granted exceptions of up to five Sundays and public holidays a year if they can demonstrate disproportionate losses. In 2020, the Retail Trade Association (HDE) and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) pushed for deregulation, claiming it would allow for "a revitalization of the inner cities" and empower stationary 'brick-and-mortar' retailers vis-à-vis multinational online competitors [DE110]. The proposal was criticized by Ver.di and the Alliance for Free Sundays as exploitation of the Coronavirus pandemic to enforce the interests of national and global business groups, arguing that "any relaxation of the Sunday protection only heats up predatory competition in trade and worsens the lives of employees" [DE049].[78]

## The emergence of contestation against Amazon in Germany

Although Amazon has operated in Germany since 1999, it was only in 2011 that the first forms of contestation began to emerge. At the Leipzig FC, a combination of organised and spontaneous actions saw flyers distributed and stickers on the shop floor denouncing a wide range of grievances related to remuneration, benefits and poor working conditions. While there were local specificities to the grievances, generally they denounced the high pace of work in poorly ventilated warehouses, the excessive use of fixed-term contracts, disrespectful treatment by management, overtime at short notice, low levels of pay and lack of benefits. They also condemned insufficient breaks and the theft of break-time due to security controls and long walking distances between the shop floor and break areas. Further, employees were not paid surcharges that are customarily guaranteed under collective agreements including bonuses for work on Sundays and public holidays, while night-shift workers were only paid a night-bonus starting from midnight instead of 8pm.

At Leipzig, employees were irritated by having to train new workers for the site opening in Graben, former Western Germany where wages are comparably higher. As one worker commented:

[77] A worker at the Winsen FC reported that over four years, the expected picking rate increased from 200 to 350 parcels per hour [DE059].

[78] Stefanie Nutzenberger, head of the union's Amazon campaign noted: "Sunday openings without an occasion are a Trojan horse. They destroy jobs in medium-sized companies and sooner or later also force other industries to introduce Sunday work. The only winners are global players such as Amazon and Co. Many jobs and companies are left by the wayside because it is fuelling the competition for destruction in the retail sector." [DE049]

"That causes a lot of resentment in Leipzig. This is one of the reasons why the Ver.di level of organization is rising sharply there" [DE136]. At Bad Hersfeld, a letter campaign organised by the union sought to mobilise Amazon customers, encouraging them to send complaints to the manager of Bad Hersfeld FC, claiming that they cannot be satisfied with the shipping service "if the people who pack and send it suffer from poor working conditions" [DE136].

In 2012, noticing growing momentum, Ver.di began to deploy additional resources to support the mobilising process. It appointed two specially trained union secretaries and established bargaining commissions[79] in Bad Hersfeld, then conducted a survey among members to gauge the mood of the workforce for industrial action.[80] Consequently, it submitted a series of claims to management, foremost among these being the demand for Amazon to sign the collective bargaining agreement in the retail and mail order sector. To date, this singular demand has served as the union's master frame which effectively subsumes all other issues, which it claims result from the absence of a binding regulatory framework.

The public mood began to turn against the company in early 2013 following a TV report exposing the living conditions of migrant seasonal workers, and scandalising working conditions and the overuse of fixed-term contracts at Amazon [DE086; DE204].[81] This led to a petition calling for better working conditions, limitations on temporary work and a living wage [DE162]. Following mounting pressure, on 14th May, over 1,000 workers at Bad Hersfeld staged the first strike, marking the first industrial action against Amazon. In June 3,000 workers participated in a three-day strike coordinated at both the Bad Hersfeld and Leipzig sites, while August saw a further nine strike days at Bad Hersfeld. In September, hundreds of workers from both sites marched through Leipzig calling for a collective agreement, with support from students who distributed flyers, collected 500 signatures on a petition and expressions of solidarity [DE007].

This first wave of actions culminated in a series of outcomes. First, the unionisation rate at these sites increased dramatically.[82] Second, they attracted the backlash of a group of employees who signed a petition declaring their opposition to the strike campaign in December 2013 and produced t-shirts bearing the slogan 'Pro-Amazon' [DE213]. Around 1,000 employees from Bad Hersfeld and Leipzig signed the petition, denouncing the union's attempt to foment a negative public image of their employer. While the company publically welcomed the initiative and even permitted signatures to be collected during working hours, it denied any role in coordinating the action [DE164]:

> "It is disrespectful to claim that the more than 1,000 employees who are involved here do not have an opinion of their own. We respect that people exercise their right to strike - this is how a signature campaign should be respected by the union." [DE243]

While a visible pro-employer faction has since dissipated, it marked the first instance of a counter-organising strategy by the employer, and vocal opposition from a sizeable group of employees. As Boewe & Schulten observe, the company's backing of anti-union initiatives was not particularly surprising, but "much more worrisome was the presence of an atmosphere and social environment at Amazon in which such pro-employer groups struck a chord with employees. Pro-Amazon was Ver.di's first lesson in successful counter-organising" (Boewe & Schulten, 2019: 57). The company also reacted by renovating

[79] The Verhandlungskommission (bargaining commission) is a trade union structure responsible for initiating and handling a dispute with its managerial counterpart.

[80] Out of 500 respondents, 99.7% wanted a collective agreement, and 93.7% were in favour of industrial action [DE128].

[81] In particular, the ARD documentary focused on the conditions in the Seepark settlement in Hessen where many seasonal, migrant workers from outside of Germany were accommodated by the company. In particular, it drew attention to the intimidation and invasive monitoring that workers were subjected to by security services with links to the political far-right [DE204].

[82] While data for Leipzig and other sites was not available, of the approximately 3,000 workers at the two FCs in Bad Hersfeld, the number of union members had increased from 79 in 2011 to almost 1,000 in 2013 [DE213].

its public relations strategy, inviting journalists and politicians for site visits, expanding its media and communications divisions, and establishing a blog that reported on its charity work, technical innovations and which featured testimonies from employees that related their contentment with their jobs (Boewe & Schulten, 2019). As one of Ver.di's lead negotiators observed, "Amazon is becoming more skilful in cultivating its image… The company realised that adopting a purely defensive strategy would lead nowhere, so it strove to present itself to the public in a positive light" (Boewe & Schulten, 2019: 71).

Ultimately, the actions succeeded in obtaining some limited concessions from management including a 10% pay-rise, a €400-600 Christmas bonus, longer break times, and improvements to break rooms and air conditioning in the warehouse halls. However, the rejection of the principal demand for a collective agreement drew criticism from strike leaders, who perceived the concessions as intending to demobilise the movement, and evidence of the pressure that the strikes had mounted:

> "it is clear to everyone that [the Christmas bonus] is a result of our strikes… but many also know that it is an attempt to take the wind out of our sails" [DE14].

Not only was the Christmas bonus three or four times lower than the tariff-level, workers observed that informal concessions outside a regulatory collective bargaining framework provided no guarantees for the future:

> "It's not just about the money, we are now almost on hourly wages from the collective agreement in retail. But we want the collective agreement because otherwise it can be taken away from us at any time." [DE007]

Following these moderate accomplishments, the union sought to emulate the result and began to concentrate on increasing membership, and on building strike capacity by establishing union structures at other sites. Indeed, in June 2014 during a nationwide week of action, two further sites, FCs at Graben and Rheinberg staged their first strikes, marking the start of their regular participation in the strike movement [DE092].

In 2014 over 2,000 authors, artists and readers signed an open letter as part of the campaign "Authors for a fair book market", accusing Amazon of "manipulating its recommended reading lists and lying to customers about the availability of books as retaliation in a dispute over e-book prices" [DE195]. The initiative was supported by Ver.di, and other associations of authors from Germany, Switzerland and the USA. Information about the dispute was disseminated at the Leipzig and Frankfurt Book Fairs, where striking Amazon warehouse workers attended in solidarity.

Following the first wave of actions during 2013-2015, strikes and other actions against Amazon in Germany have followed a regular pattern, coinciding with 'peaks' when consumer discounts are offered and high volumes of packages must be processed and delivered. These are Prime Day (July), Black Friday/Cyber Monday (November) and the Christmas season (December). Ver.di has timed its strikes around these consumer holidays, seeking to maximize the amount of workers and sites participating in strikes, while heightening public attention to the industrial conflict and its chief demand for a collective bargaining agreement. While these actions managed to obtain some limited concessions from the company in the early years, with the campaign entering its tenth year and the company continuing to refute the central demand for a collective agreement, the efficacy of predictably-timed strikes has been questioned within the union and by observers suggesting that the campaign is stuck in a path dependency. One reason is that the economic impact of disruptions in the production process has been mitigated by network redundancy, namely the capacity to reroute orders to distribution centres unaffected by strikes, made possible by the gradual expansion of the company's logistics network.

Since 2017, the growth of Amazon logistics facilities in Germany has been so fast-paced that the union has struggled to keep up and establish structures of representation at new worksites. Since then, Amazon has invested significant resources into building its own Delivery Stations and Prime Hubs to

lower its dependency on its competitors that it outsourced last-mile delivery to, third-party logistics providers such as DHL (DeutschePost), Hermes and Kühne & Nagel.

## Ver.di: Organization, resources and strategic capabilities

This section analyses the union capacity of Ver.di in the context of its industrial dispute with Amazon in Germany. First, I address the types of *power resources* the union has as its disposal, namely: internal solidarity, network embeddedness, infrastructural resources and narrative resources. Next I discuss the union's *strategic capabilities*: intermediating between contending interests, framing, articulating actions over time and space, and learning.

**Table 2.** Ver.di union capacity: Power resources and strategic capabilities.

| Ver.di Union Capacity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Power resources | | Strategic capabilities | |
| *Internal solidarity* | Uneven degree of collective cohesion across sites; strong deliberative vitality | *Intermediation* | Union leaders demonstrate weak willingness and capacity to foster cooperation and exchange between union members and external allies |
| *Network embeddedness* | Moderate level of network diversity; high network density | *Framing* | Reliance on traditional narrative frames and limited attempts to shift frames in order to encompass claims and interests of new constituencies |
| *Infrastructural resources* | High levels of material and human resources; strongly developed organisational policies and processes to engage and support members | *Articulation* | Proactive articulation practices that link collective actions across multiple scales of action |
| *Narrative resources* | Traditional discourse focusing on regulating work via established institutional channels | *Learning* | Localised attempts at union revitalisation; Lack of strategic direction, path dependency and insufficient attempts at diffusing learning via organizational channels |

### Power Resources

*Internal solidarity*

The degree of collective cohesion developed by Ver.di among Amazon workers in Germany is polarised, and the dynamics of internal solidarity vary between the different types of sites in the logistics network, namely Fulfilment Centres (FC) and last-mile Delivery Stations (DS). One reason is that in Germany, FCs are relatively older and larger than DSs in terms of the scale of operations and number of employees. At nearly each of the 20 FCs in Germany, structures for interest representation at the workplace-level, namely shop stewards and works councils, have been established, along with channels of communication between members, shop stewards, local and federal union representatives. However strong mobilising capacity has been developed at just 9 of these, typically older 'first-generation' sites, which participate regularly in nationally-coordinated strikes. These include locations like Bad Hersfeld,

Leipzig, Werne, Graben, Rheinberg, Pforzheim and Koblenz, where union density among blue-badge workers is around 30-50%. At these sites, there is an established history of militancy, internal solidarity among workers, close-knit networks, regular meetings between active members, and a unity of purpose. Participation and shared experiences over the course of the campaign has been central in cultivating a sense of collective identity among workers. The extent and quality of member participation varies and changes over time. While a significant number of workers turn out for strikes, a smaller minority are actively involved in other aspects of union life such as meetings or outreach. As the strike campaign enters its tenth year in Germany, union membership at some sites has stagnated or declined. The reasons vary between site and are the product of local dynamics. At some FCs, the union lost its majority on works councils due to unpopular works councillors or negative perceptions of the union's campaign. Meanwhile, internal cohesion and deliberative vitality is either severely lacking or still in embryonic form at Delivery Stations. Shop steward structures are rare, and a works council has been established at one of the 74 DSs in Germany, in Wunstorf, Lower Saxony, while the second is in the process of being established at Mariendorf, Berlin.

The importance of developing strong internal cohesion and deliberative vitality within the union is underscored by the research conducted by Sabrina Apicella with Amazon FC workers in Germany investigating the motivating factors for going on strike (Apicella, 2021). Importantly, it was found that both strikers and non-strikers were relatively content with wages, and that this was not a significant factor in predicting participating in strikes. Instead, the salient factors predicting participation in strikes were: 1) job dissatisfaction with the organizational-technical as well as political dimension of the work, 2) employment security, namely the possession of a permanent contract, and 3) trust in trade unions. Therefore, non-participation was identified as a result of identifying with the company, having a fixed-term contract or a lack of trust in the union. Regional and demographic differences between sites in East and West Germany were found to play a relevant role given the homogenisation and transnationalisation of work processes.

*Network embeddedness*

Ver.di's strong network embeddedness provide a significant potential to leverage the resources of other actors for mobilisation purposes.[83] Vertically, the union is affiliated to the global union federation, UNI Global and participates as one of the most powerful actors in the UNI Amazon Alliance, enables it to promote its agenda at the international level, to share experiences, information and coordinate actions transnationally with partner unions. Networking on this axis is particularly dense, given the regularity of meetings, and thickness of contacts and information exchange between senior officials in the UNI-affiliated unions (see Chapter 8). Horizontally, since the union enjoys a monopoly over representation in the retail and logistics sectors, it does not face competition from other German trade unions. Ver.di is closely integrated within the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), and receives support from sister unions and organisations such as the DGB Bildungswerk, and Fair Mobility, via its counselling services for workers.

The diversity of Ver.di's network is moderately heterogeneous, given that it is linked not only to union structures, but also to NGO and community groups. At the local level, the Amazon strike movement has received support from social movement organisations such as the Strike Solidarity Alliance in Leipzig[84], Berlin vs. Amazon, and Amazon Workers Against Surveillance (AWAS). While

[83] Power resources alone are insufficient for mobilisation and require skilled actors who have the necessary competences to develop, deploy and transform them in specific situations as needed. The question of how effectively the union has succeeded in activating these resources and exploiting them fully to its advantage is related to its strategic capabilities and therefore discussed below under *Intermediation.*

[84] In 2013, activists affiliated with the group distributed leaflets, and collected signatures and statements declaring solidarity with striking Amazon workers. As one student present at the rally declared: "We are all Amazon. We all want wages

these groups operate independently from the union, many members have personal relationships with, or are themselves, Ver.di members, or (former) Amazon workers. Despite common ground, Ver.di differs from social movements actors in terms of culture, organisation structure, interests, values, socio-cultural membership base. These groups have supported Ver.di by deploying various resources at their disposal, and have also been instrumental in extending and bridging frames, and advancing claims relating to workplace surveillance and the role of multinational technology corporations in gentrification. For instance, Berlin vs. Amazon organised solidary protests to amplify the demands of Amazon logistics workers as they held strikes and other forms of protests inside warehouses during the pandemic.

In general, the union's networks are not as dense among social movements as among its traditional institutional partners. BVsA's campaign opposing the construction of the EDGE-Tower in Berlin was met with rather tepid response from the union, which did not offer its support, or incorporate the aims of the activists into its agenda, indicating divergences in the goals and commitments between labour and social movement actors. As scholars have observed, cooperation with social movements is less common than strategies of social partnership in countries with strong and more coordinated institutions such as Germany, and in these cases, cooperation is likely to be short-term and issue-based, rather than integrated into a long-term revitalisation strategy (Frege et al., 2004). The likelihood of such secondary topics to be institutionalised and for common initiatives to be developed, hinges not on the union's political stance, but on its size and how the specific issue affects the union (Behrens et al. 2001a: 46). In the context of the dispute with Amazon, Ver.di has largely not seized coalitional resources available for developing initiatives, attracting new groups of members, or addressing issues relevant to workers but not strictly related to work.

*Infrastructural resources*

German trade unions benefit from significant institutional power given the strong laws relating to the establishment and co-determination powers granted to works councils. These provide a high level of infrastructural support at the workplace level, granting elected works council members limited rights of participation in management. Union shop stewards and elected works council members are eligible for work-time release in order to perform their functions on site. The union has also sought to develop strike capacity at other locations by facilitating knowledge transfer and training through national conferences of Amazon works councils aligned with the union. These forums allow local leaders to meet, share information, expertise and to discuss practical means of advancing demands, building and activating membership at Amazon sites, as well as the risks and opportunities for future organising.

Nevertheless, a significant obstacle for organising across the supply-chain is corporate legal structure. Since each worksite is established as a separate, autonomous legal entity ('GmbH'), works councils may only be established on the site rather than company level. This also that deficiencies or variations in organising capacities between worksites cannot be offset, and that organising capacity must be established independently at each worksite. Likewise, while coalitional power may allow unions to leverage the resources of allied actors, they do not substitute for the absence of interest representation structures on the shop-floor, namely shop stewards and works councils, as is the case at most Delivery Stations.

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with which we can not only survive, but with which we can live" [DE007]. On Black Friday in 2017, the group mobilized its own network to visit the Amazon warehouse in Leipzig during a strike, and to provide solidary support to strikers during the action. The group has provided infrastructural support for the Amazon Workers International network, and participated in joint actions against temporary work and fixed-term contracts, namely rallies in front of the offices of the agency Adecco in Poznań and Leipzig. It also organized shuttle buses to bring activists from Leipzig to a demonstration in Berlin, on the occasion of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' visit to receive an award from the Axel Springer newspaper in 2018.

Ver.di possesses a range of material resources to support shop-level organising, including meeting spaces and funding for education and training workshops that engage new and prospective members, and build organising capacity among workers and labour organisers. As the second largest union in Germany, it is strongly embedded in internal and external networks, has strong connections with actors at local, regional and national levels, and can easily access resources within the DGB, the German Trade Union Confederation. During the dispute with Amazon, Ver.di has drawn expertise from external partner organisations such as European Alternatives and the Tech Workers Coalition who have facilitated workshops for migrant workers and workers in the technology sector like 'Know your rights, powers & history' in order to diffuse knowledge, build solidarity between activists in these related areas. Fair Integration operates advice centres for workers around the country, offering individual counselling services as well as informational materials for workers in multiple languages. In November 2021, Fair Integration organised action days for outreach with last-mile delivery drivers working for Amazon. For instance, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and the DGB Bildungswerk (the DGB's federal organisation for training and union knowledge transfer), have developed informational resources for Amazon workers, particularly last-mile delivery drivers in the form of a brochure. The union also supports workers by offering advice and legal support, for instance in cases of unfair treatment.

The union's capacity to organise workers at Amazon sites, relies on paid full-time staff such as project secretaries with experience in labour organising, or staff with other specialised skills such as scientific research. In order for the union to pursue its objective of building strike capacity, it has had to recruit staff who are capable of initialising and developing organising processes at worksites. Project secretaries are particularly crucial in this process since they are often the first point of contact between workers and the union. They also play a central role in identifying organic leaders in workplaces which may initiate the works council process and eventually support the formation of a self-sustaining mobilising structure. The personal networks of union secretaries are another valuable resource which they may activate in order to mobilise volunteers for action days including for demonstrations and outreach campaigns with workers.

*Narrative resources*

Ver.di has deployed a range of narrative resources in an attempt to legitimate its position and claims during the course of the dispute with Amazon. To do so, it has largely invoked the historical role of trade unions in Germany as important actors with powerful regulatory capabilities in employment relations, provided that they are embedded within the dual system of interest representation, consisting of collective bargaining agreements and works councils. This has meant that in the process of its campaign with Amazon, all manner of grievances and workplace issues were largely explained with reference to an absent collective bargaining agreement, and its stock of narrative resources has been largely confined to this issue. For example, the issue of pay rises became highly salient in 2022 given inflation rates of 10% registered in September. Union leaflets illustrated the differences in wages and entitlements, in the form of holiday pay, Christmas bonuses, overtime, night, Sunday and holiday bonuses, demonstrating that levels stipulated in regional collective agreements were significantly higher in every case [DE233], framing the wage review as a "failed wage adjustment" and evidence of the necessity of collective organisation and collectively-determined pay [DE234]. Ver.di works councillors emphasized the lack of transparency in the wage review process, and the unjust disparities between pay increases between worksites in Germany which ranged from 3 to 10.5%. Workers at the FC in Winsen HAM2, went on strike for the first time following an increase of just 3%:

> "3%, that is simply not enough. As a reaction to the poor wage adjustment we went for the first time on strike. We convinced over 200 colleagues to join our strike. If we really want to be successful, then we have to join forces across the network in Germany and internationally" [DE234]

Towards the upper-end of the spectrum, workers at Bad Hersfeld FRA1 and FRA3, sites characterised by a high level of mobilising capacity, earned a 7.4% wage increase, with a works council substitute observing:

> "We are getting 7.4% more. Our wage increase is above the average in the network comparison. We are getting more, because we are organized well within our union Ver.di and when it is necessary we go on strike. Nevertheless Amazon refuses us collective bargaining. Only with a collective bargaining agreement can we get Christmas and holiday pay" [DE234]

Meanwhile, the head of the works council at the Delivery Station in Wunstorf DNM1, the first DS to establish a works council in Germany, emphasized the arbitrariness of the unregulated wage adjustment:

> "The so called wage adjustment is simply disappointing. During the pandemic we achieved great things. At our Delivery Station the increase has been 6.4%. In other Delivery Stations the increase has been up to 10.5% - considering that we are doing the same work, these differences are arbitrary and unjust" [DE234].

The union's focus has been on reaching out to political actors and pursuing a high-profile media campaign to heighten public awareness of working conditions at Amazon sites, as well as highlighting the company's behaviour in logistics and e-commerce markets as a tariff and tax-evader. Accordingly, Ver.di has framed Amazon's practices in terms of gaining unfair competitive advantage, and evidence of the destructive effects of e-commerce on inner cities and brick-and-mortal retail. Companies such as Amazon, it is claimed, contribute to worsening conditions at other companies via tax and tariff avoidance practices, which put pressure on other market actors to do business with cheaper, non-tariff competitors such as Hermes, as opposed to DHL owned by DeutschePost, or by promoting work on Sundays [DE192]. Such framings emphasized the need to protect small and medium-sized enterprises and the need to maintain "attractive city centres" in order to counteract the growth in online commerce. As Stefanie Nutzenberger, the head of Ver.di's Amazon campaign observed:

> "Sunday openings without occasion are a Trojan horse. They destroy jobs in medium-sized businesses and sooner or later also force other industries to introduce Sunday work. The only winners are global players such as Amazon and Co. In the process, many jobs and companies fall by the wayside because it further fuels the destructive competition in the retail sector… And if everyone has to work on Sundays first, the retail sector won't have anything to gain from it either. Inner cities do not become attractive through the opening of stores on Sundays, but through the diversity of the range of different stores and varied offers for all sections of the population" [DE049]

Ver.di's diagnostic framing related to employee health became more central in 2017 with the slogans "Amazon makes us sick" and "the working conditions are tough and make many employees sick" [DE134]. Indeed, within the union there is impetus to ensure "good and healthy work", which would minimally ensure that workers do not fall ill as a result of their job, however once again, the union aims to address this issue through a collective health agreement, an idea which has promoted by leaders for some time but which is still without much concrete content.

During demonstrations, rank-and-file workers have mobilised other collective action frames. For instance, on April 24th 2018, several hundred Amazon workers and supporters from Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy, France and the USA held a demonstration in Berlin on the occasion of former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' visit to the capital in order to receive an award from the Axel Springer publishing house for "outstanding personalities who are extraordinarily innovative, create new markets and change markets, shape culture and face up to their social responsibility" [DE027]. The action was attended by union leaders, politicians and solidarity groups including Make Amazon Pay, which condemned the company's treatment of its workers, holding banners with slogans such as "Make Bezos pay" and "we are humans not robots or data" [DE029]. Ver.di leaders accused Amazon of seeking to Americanize industrial relations in Germany, asserting that "the expansion of a worldwide monopoly does not deserve to be called innovation", and that "innovation must also have a human face" [DE028]. The narratives mobilised by workers meanwhile legitimised their claims for better pay by emphasising that the wealth generated by figures such as Bezos were a direct product of their labour, with banners demanding: "Workers create wealth, deserve a fair share of the profits" [DE073]. Disciplinary feedbacks, an

instrument of managerial control, were creatively re-appropriated and addressed to Jeff Bezos, which protestors presented as a golden figure, calling for a fair share of the wealth which they had created. As one worker from Bad Hersfeld commented: "We've gilded Jeff Bezos through our work. We made him the richest man in the world" [DE012].

## Strategic capabilities

*Intermediating between contending interests*

One of the central issues related to collective mobilization is leaders' capacity to mediate between contending interests, demands or expectations within or outside the union in order to favour the emergence of collective interest (Kelly, 1998). It also relates to union leaders' capacity to engage actors outside the sphere of labour relations, and to demonstrate the congruence of interests (Lévesque & Murray, 2010a, 2013). In this regard, the Ver.di leadership has not demonstrated a strong willingness or capacity to intermediate between contending interests, and to promote collaboration between members inside workplaces with external allies. This has been exemplified in the limited coordination with activist groups organising against Amazon on the local level such as BvsA or AWAS, as well as to a lack of willingness to engage its members and to foster debates regarding the issues of tech-led gentrification or surveillance.

Additionally, the Amazon campaign has been a source of some tension within the union, given the split of competences between Branch 10, responsible for postal services, forwarding companies and logistics, and Branch 12 responsible for retail and wholesale trade. This is related to the structure of the union and its low level of integration, given that industry departments can make decisions independently in their policy fields. Further, the departments' political influence, their balance of power within the union and their share of resources is determined by their membership numbers (Keller, 2005: 223). These tensions came to a head in August 2022 when the union fired Orhan Akman, who had been a core negotiator during its dispute with Amazon, as well as with fashion chains and supermarkets and who had earlier announced his decision to run for promotion to the union's Federal Executive Committee [DE235]. It was alleged that Akman had publically criticised high-ranking union officials, including his superior, the head of the Trade department, of nepotism, namely of awarding lucrative contracts to their spouses, as well as the political orientation of the Trade department, and the union in general [DE236]. While the Committee did not publically comment on the matter, the press office related that the Federal Executive Committee stated that "there is no longer any relationship of trust with Orhan Akman and that a joint cooperation in the specialist area is no longer conceivable" [DE236]. Some Ver.di officials signed a letter protesting the dismissal, and criticised the lack of communication and the involvement of persons affected by the decision. In December, the Berlin Labour Court permitted Akman to be reinstated, upholding an action for protection against unfair dismissal [DE235].

*Framing*

To reiterate, framing refers to the capability of unions to develop collective action frames which define and legitimate repertoires of action, and which may produce a more or less inclusive agenda that can be part of a broader social project (Lévesque & Murray, 2013). As indicated above, Ver.di has demonstrated its capability of using framing strategically in order to make its goals align with the grievances voiced by workers. On the other hand, the union has demonstrated a limited capacity to extend its collective action frames and resources to address issues beyond the workplace, and to demonstrate its capacity to become not only an economic actor that shapes relations of production, but as an opinion leader that can effectively intervene in public debates and proactively establish an autonomous agenda. On the one hand, within international arenas such as the UNI Amazon Alliance, Ver.di leaders have emphasized the importance of trade unions developing a broader political focus, and discussing not only working conditions, but Amazon's broader impacts on social security, local infrastructures, its tax

avoidance practices, its receipt of public subsidies, and its impact on retailers and on the environment. Despite these rhetorical gestures, nationally, Ver.di's frame alignment practices have focused on amplification, consisting of reinforcing, clarifying and invigorating its core values and existing narrative resources, with a narrow focus on collective bargaining.

Instead, social movement activists have demonstrated greater flexibility in terms of utilising frame alignment practices in order to influence public interpretations of technology companies such as Amazon. BvsA activists utilised frame extension in order to broaden the union's frame of action from an exclusive focus on the workplace and collective bargaining, to incorporate the concerns of people living in the areas where Amazon facilities are located, and to broaden the scope of practice to consider the role of local politicians in enabling 'webtech urbanism'. They also relied on frame bridging practices in order to connect workers' interests in defending working conditions, to the interests of local communities and the protection of affordable housing by linking multiple congruent but disconnected frames by identifying a common target, namely Amazon. They managed to do so by challenging the PR branding of technology companies as clean, efficient and sustainable by pointing to their damaging effects on communities, working conditions and the environment.

Ver.di however has not managed to meaningfully renew its narrative resources, and union leaders have relied on traditional interpretive frames in order to give explanation for the conflict with Amazon. Indeed, for nearly ten years, Ver.di has justified the strike campaign at Amazon with reference to the CBA, arguing that it would ensure better pay and health protections, remaining wed to the idea that what is good for the union is also good for workers. As such, this has been a consistent if rather restrictive narrative. Whereas the union could have increased its legitimacy by deploying novel interpretative frames in order to address a wider range of salient, societal problems, and encompass the interests and claims of other constituencies beyond its membership, it has largely not seized this opportunity.

*Articulating actions over time and space*

Scholars have emphasized that German unions' ability to revitalise their organisational structures turns on their capacity to combine and articulate actions in separate strategy areas, namely by "[expanding] their field of strategic vision to the European level and at the same time focus their vision on workplace strategies" (Behrens et al., 2001a: 51). At the international level within the UNI Amazon Alliance, Ver.di leaders have shown a strong capacity to leverage the resources of its allies in order to proactively articulate its strategy across time and space. As one of the most important organisations in the Alliance, and with more experience in mobilising against Amazon than most other unions in the network, Ver.di has leveraged this position in order to promote and articulate its agenda in international arenas in a proactive manner.

For instance, within the UNI Alliance, Ver.di leaders have called for other unions to support its core demand for Amazon to sign a collective bargaining agreement in Germany, as well as in other countries, to increase the total number of striking worksites globally, and to invite new members to the coalition, in order to coordinate with its own strike campaign. Ver.di leaders have stressed the necessity of developing a proactive global strategy against Amazon within the Alliance, based on identifying markets which Amazon will target in the future, and to develop mobilising capacity at the most strategically important locations. They have emphasized the need for unions in the network to cooperate with local politicians and NGOs, but at the same time emphasized the unique role of trade unions, and cautioned against the risks of NGO'ization and having the agenda set by non-trade union actors. As such, the union has focused on multiplying its own external linkages, and deepening the connections between itself and other unions, and has been able to link action at multiple levels and to develop interaction between different levels of action.

*Learning*

Ver.di has demonstrated a moderate degree of learning and organizational flexibility in terms of its capacity to adapt its organizational processes and renovate its repertoire of action in order to respond to challenges in building mobilising capacity across worksites. At the beginning of the strike campaign, industrial actions were planned and coordinated by the union's federal administration, however from 2016, the union began to grant more autonomy to local shop stewards in independently deciding on a quota of strike days, which compared to senior officials were better positioned to gauge the mood of local workforces and management's reaction to industrial action [DE213]. Initially, the union sought to maximise the impact of strikes by timing them to coincide with peaks when high volumes of packages are processed. However, the efficacy of such predictably-timed strikes began to be questioned both within the union and by external observers who suggested that the campaign was stuck in a path dependency. Accordingly, the union made some attempts at renovating its repertoire, combining strikes lasting the duration of entire shifts, with 'in-and-out' strikes, short-term work stoppages lasting one to two hours in order to cause disruptions to shipping while making it harder for management to prepare and respond [DE072; 138]. As one local Ver.di secretary explained:

> "Our strategy in the labor dispute is therefore to keep putting pinpricks. We want to continually bring unrest to the company and pursue different goals on different strike days. On the one hand we ensure that the delivery promise cannot be kept, on other days we try to make a public appearance in order to get noticed in the press… But we can only set pinpricks because we are currently unable to stop production completely and carry out an enforcement strike. Fixed-term employees don't strike, other employees settle because they may hope for career opportunities. At the same time, the company is growing at an incredibly fast pace and is still making extensive use of the instrument of [fixed-term contracts]" [DE053]

Additionally, Ver.di has relied on mix of public relations strategies, and on building coalitional power via the UNI Amazon Alliance. The union has used media coverage in order to draw attention to working conditions at Amazon warehouses, the company's tariff evasion practices and its suppression of union activities, for instance by giving interviews to the press, participating in press conferences and by publishing media releases. In spite of these efforts, another local Ver.di secretary observed that the union's campaign was undermined by the lack of strategic direction and "power-structure analysis" that might more effectively direct strike power to critical areas of Amazon's operations:

> "When I started, there was no plan to win or, I would say, there's a lack of strategy in relation to Amazon inside Ver.di. I would say it's a big problem because there are some path dependencies… there is a big lack of strategy and strategic analysis, which is the precondition of organising. You need to know first, where it hurts, and you need to kind of quantify, you know, how much organising power you need in order to focus on the places where you can build up economic pressure. So this analysis is lacking. And when you have the analysis, you need to plan to win, you need to commit… But Ver.di has no fucking clue and no strategy for Amazon. And basically, I don't blame them… I think it's really hard to develop such [a] strategy." [INT23]

Consequently, insufficient resources and effort had been directed to organising drivers and workers at DSs, which in their perspective, possessed the most significant striking power in the network:

> "You have all of the drivers at Amazon … working for sub-companies. That makes it almost impossible to unionise drivers, which theoretically, would have the biggest striking power, because if the drivers don't drive, the packages don't get to the holy grail of Amazon, which are the clients. So basically you get rid of these people just by putting them into small sub-companies, who do not dare to unionise, or which would lose their contracts with Amazon if they would do so. So it really makes no sense for workers, to organise, especially drivers. There, for example, Ver.di has a political demand, in order to abolish this subcontracting in order to get them employed directly by Amazon. So then you [would] have at least the chance to organise drivers or get them represented by works councils. Now, you don't have it. And this makes it almost impossible to organise drivers. So you know, the workers' movement focuses on the big logistics centres, and there the strike power is least... So strike power, is the highest in the sectors of the Amazon network, which are the toughest ones to organise." [INT23]

An additional problem identified was the insufficient coordination and level of exchange between local union secretaries:

> "All the union secretaries who organise at Amazon have regular meetings. But basically my notion of these meetings is this way too less strategy or methods talk. It's more coordination of strike windows. So yeah, there I would say, the coordination between union secretaries is not so good. I don't know why, but basically … [at] the FCs where you have a strike movement … they have like, [their] own dynamic. So they're doing stuff on their own. They're striking. They get new members while striking, so they don't have really the need to coordinate stuff…. I would say the exchange between union secretaries on methods, on material, is way too less." [INT23]

Indeed, trade unions' capacity to break out of path dependencies turns on their ability to diffuse knowledge, methods and best practices via organizational channels (Ganz, 2000; Lévesque & Murray, 2013). As Behrens et al. observe regarding union revitalisation initiatives among German unions, "without the means and readiness to spread such experiences in the interest of developing 'best practice' scenarios throughout the organization, local initiatives will degenerate to being an exercise in 're-inventing the wheel' anew", with the risk that "both the impetus for innovation and the learning capacity of the organization will wither" (2001a: 51).

### *The campaign for generally binding collective agreements*

In 2017, Ver.di initiated a campaign calling for a general binding of collective agreements ('Allgemeinverbindliche Tarifverträge für alle', AVE). Ver.di's diagnostic framing, identifies tariff evasion as the cause of a range of problems including wage dumping, the obliteration of small businesses, the indirect subsidisation of business through welfare payments, and the risk of old-age poverty in retirement. Union slogans for the campaign included "Fight old-age poverty, stop destructive competition, secure livelihoods!"

> "Cut-throat competition in the retail trade, which has been caused or intensified by tariff evasion, among other things, also harms cities and municipalities… The low wages in the industry, which are also caused by collective bargaining evasion, also harm society as a whole. Because salaries are paid that are not sufficient to survive, the state has to step in with social benefits (top-up) - this is an indirect and unjustifiable subsidy to retail companies! Finally, when they retire, many employees are at risk of poverty in old age, which the state must also alleviate through transfer payments." [DE220]

In a second step, this framing assigns blame to employers' associations for exacerbating tariff evasion. Until the late 1990's the provisions of CBAs also applied to companies unaffiliated with employers' associations. From 2000 however, the German Trade Association (HDE) and the Federal Association of Wholesale, Foreign Trade, Services (BGA) began accepting 'non-tariff membership' from companies, leading to a dramatic fall in tariff coverage [DE118]. In 2020, the HDE admitted Amazon into the association, claiming that bringing the company into the fold was preferable to fighting it, and expected to strengthen the association, drawing criticism from Ver.di and stationary retailers who framed the situation diagnostically in terms of the distortion of competition in the sector [DE054; DE110]. Given the hesitance of companies to enter into negotiations over collective agreements, the union proposes a 'declaration of general applicability' [AVE], whereby the content of collective agreements would be legally binding in their respective sectors, irrespective of individual firms' endorsement, meaning that the hourly wage in the retail sector should not fall below €12.50 [DE112]. Ver.di frames large retailers as wielding excessive opening hours and sharp discounts as weapons against small and medium-size businesses, driving them to bankruptcy, leaving taxpayers and workers to foot the bill [DE176]. In terms of solution, it claims that the reform would benefit smaller retailers which are under pressure of wage dumping on the part of tariff-evaders, thus limiting unfair competition [DE220].

The AVE campaign represents an attempt to re-embed institutions in sectors such as retail where they are being eroded by actors such as Amazon. As noted by IR scholars, German unions tend to rely

on institutional resources, focusing on solutions via sectoral bargaining, works councils, labour law rather than on recruiting members (Behrens et al., 2001: 28). As such, union strategies based on institutional power are effective in economic sectors and regions where those institutions are embedded, however they are unlikely to succeed where they are not – namely private services or in former Eastern states (Annesley, 2006). The union's insistence on collective bargaining without the requisite bargaining power to force employers' or political actors to act can be understood as a 'fortifying myths', which are "an ideological element that allows activists to frame defeats so that they are understandable and so that belief in the efficacy of the movement can be sustained until new political opportunities emerge" (Voss, 1996: 253).

### *Organising at Delivery Stations*

Since 2017, Amazon has opened 74 Delivery Stations in Germany alone as part of its effort to decrease its dependency on third-party logistics companies in the last-mile parcel delivery sector. Ver.di has focused its resources on Fulfilment Centres, where organizing momentum has already been established, at the cost of neglecting the more numerous Delivery Stations which employ relatively fewer workers, as well as significant proportion of subcontracted drivers. Given that DSs are relatively new sites, local union secretaries have had to start 'from scratch' in identifying potential leaders among the workforce, training and supporting them to become shop stewards and in initiating the process of establishing works councils at their worksites. In the long-term, the goal is to integrate these sites in the (trans-)national strike movement, however only once sufficient mobilising capacity is developed. This section describes the initial steps of a project-based revitalisation strategy which sought to develop mobilising capacity among DSs in Berlin-Brandenburg.

In early 2022, in the context of a gradual loss of union members at older FCs in the area such as Brieselang, and the persistent absence of works councils and union members at recently opened DSs, the union appointed a project secretary responsible for organising Amazon workers in Berlin-Brandenburg. In the early phase of the mobilising process, the secretary made numerous visits to local DSs, in order to approach workers outside company premises during shift-changes, occasionally supported by other union members, politically-active Amazon workers and volunteers. This consisted of engaging workers in informal conversation, listening to their experiences, distributing flyers, collecting contact details and where possible, conducting short surveys on working conditions and work satisfaction. At this stage, encouraging workers to join the union was secondary to identifying issues, and demonstrating the presence and commitment of the union to supporting workers, and its possession of the necessary resources and capabilities to address workplace grievances. Given the high proportion of migrant workers at DSs in Berlin, in many cases first encounters involved explaining the role of unions, works councils and strikes in an elementary way. As the secretary related, the process of identity formation was closely connected with the development of trust and a sense of efficacy among workers regarding the capacity of collective mobilisation and workplace representation structures to influence working conditions:

> "You need the time and resources… you need to go there, and you need to speak several languages, at least English. And then you need to kind of relate to these people, get them together, get them into chat groups, and then start to talk about what would change if you have a works council. Works councils have an influence on basic topics, like shift time and break times and stuff like this, but also no immediate impact. So, but still you can offer something, you can kind of prove that it has a direct effect on your daily working routine if you join a union. Because people need to see this, people need to see, if I join the union, it's worth to pay for a direct change in my working relation. And if you stop working and you have a works election committee assembly, and you want people to run for positions for the election committee or for the actual works council, you're doing something with people, you know, you've proved that you have an effect on the company, and possibly a positive effect... The decisive moment was that I went [to the warehouse] like 20 or 30 times, I would say. And then I found people who are receptive to it, and then it's more like the identity creation, and that you tell them stuff that they didn't know about, "ah there's

> something new". You relate, you meet after the shift, drink a beer and talk to them about basic stuff. So you work with them on the individual level, you create like, a notion of that there is somebody there who cares… and then you find other people, you know, who know already what unions are. And you get them interested. And then for sure, you identify issues. And one point of discontent was the shift time change of the night-shift. And this is what you could relate, like the works council creation to perspective on how to have an influence on the shift time changes. Not that you will, with the works council, change the shift time again back from one day to the other, but you have a little say, and so this is something that you can tell." [INT23]

Workplace grievances were diagnostically framed in the context of absent works councils. Prognostic frames therefore advocated for structures of workplace representation as vehicles for change, which could institutionalise worker voice on the shop-floor. Contact details were collected in order to encourage workers to join a Signal messenger channel dedicated for sharing information and resources with Amazon workers in the Berlin-Brandenburg region. Success stories from Amazon actions around Germany were shared in order to spread awareness of practical collective solutions to workplace grievances, as well as information regarding the resources that the union possesses to support workers. Indeed, during these first encounters, the organisers framed power as access to information, and stressed the importance of being updated regarding the activities of other Amazon workers in the network. Such communication channels have been critical in forming collective identities, ensuring union visibility, and helping to overcome obstacles like the limited number of union staff, and the dispersion of workers among numerous sites and shifts.

A critical focus of the campaign was the identification of organic leaders which could trigger network effects in terms of the development of trust among workers:

> "But still it's more about trusting other persons, developing trust… This means that you are there, you can be reached, you reach out. You find people, for example, in certain positions that are, in organising terms, organic leaders who are trusted by other workers. The search for these people is more important because once you've got them, then you get trust automatically, because [workers] trust these persons and impress the decisions that these persons are taking… The search for these persons is really important at Delivery Stations, and also hard, because these people are usually in higher positions and they are also afraid of losing these positions. Because Amazon is really good at putting people in positions to compete amongst each other, especially in higher positions. So for them, it becomes, you know, "okay, I can join the union and fight for my associates, or I can just like focus on my career". So, yeah, so it's not so easy, but still, this is the task that you have to do, because you cannot like relate or create trust as a union official with everyone one by one. You need these people who have trust already with the other workers, these organic leaders." [INT23]

Indeed, organic leaders were seen as necessary for activating the attitudes and internalized values of workers and for reworking them into a common strategy. With regards to motivational framing, the campaign sought to instil a sense of agency among workers by highlighting the importance of direct worker participation. Contrasting a passive concept of representation unionism, the secretary emphasised active organising concepts developed by Jane McAlevey which focus on building union power from below. As they explained, this was premised on

> "… [putting workers] into a position that they can be protagonists of their own struggles, and that union secretaries only kind of help them on their way… you enable people to stand up for themselves, and you try to make them as independent as possible from the official paid union structure… you try to enable people to have a self-interest, like to organise and mobilise other people for you. So that they develop strength and also take decisions. So it's also about democracy and the union struggle… You try to get members to a position of decision making and taking responsibilities on their own. And not take the responsibilities off them and put them on your own shoulders, because this kind of cripples them, or hinders that they can develop politically and to be protagonists."

However, the appointment of just one union secretary to cover all Amazon worksites in Berlin-Brandenburg indicates a weak commitment of financial and human resources to a campaign that has

gained significant public attention in recent years. Indeed, one might draw parallels between former Ver.di campaigns which saw limited progress despite some initial successes, such as the campaigns against the supermarket chain Lidl, or the drugstore chain Schlecker, due to intensive counter-mobilisation by the target firms, and a weak commitment of union resources and staff (Turner, 2009). Relatedly, previous qualitative research on revitalisation strategies at Ver.di indicated that a number of trade union secretaries expressed that too few resources have been dedicated to the local level where the bulk of union work is undertaken (Annesley, 2006).

Hassel's observations regarding the obstacles that "institutional security" poses for union revitalisation projects in Germany resonates here: "Given the established patterns of membership recruitment via workplace representation in already unionized plants, they might not aim at attracting minority groups, which are more expensive to recruit" (Hassel, 2007: 180-181). Indeed, union leaders have admitted that not enough has been done to organise workers at Delivery Stations. While Ver.di may be reproached for its lack of coordination and a concerted effort to organise these worksites, as discussed earlier, there are a number of structural barriers to organising DSs. Given that there are nearly four times as many DSs than FCs in Germany, the union would need to commit significantly more resources and staff to organise these sites, with a potentially lower return, given that DSs employ smaller numbers of workers. While project-based revitalisation strategies such as the one described above are encouraging, it remains to be seen whether they indicate a broader shift in terms of the union's strategy and commitment of resources, or indeed whether the lessons from the campaign will diffuse more broadly within the union and facilitate a process of learning.

### *Organising last-mile delivery drivers*

While Ver.di has begun to organise workers employed inside Delivery Stations, the challenges for organising last-mile delivery drivers are even higher in a highly fragmented labour market, given that drivers are employed by a large number of small firms where works councils and collective bargaining coverage is rare. Around 79.6% of parcel delivery companies in Germany employ between 1 and 9 employees [DE231]. Indeed, Amazon's entry into the logistics sector and its high reliance on subcontracting has had a disruptive effect on the package delivery sector (Hassel & Sieker, 2022). DSPs are often registered outside of Germany and bid for contracts to transport large volumes of goods between Amazon facilities by truck, and to deliver individual packages to customers via delivery van.

During September and November 2021, the Fair Integration Advice Centre and DGB Bildungswerk in Thuringia organised a series of nationwide action days at Amazon, an outreach and information campaign targeting truck drivers and parcel delivery drivers. The action consisted of the counsellors waiting outside the gates of Amazon warehouses, points where drivers meet in the mornings before entering the site, talking to truck drivers and couriers about working conditions, disseminating flyers in several languages and informing them about their rights. Reportedly the action reached around 8,000 drivers [DE217; DE230].

In Hessen where the campaign was run, an estimated 80-90% drivers are migrants from non-EU countries, typically male, many from Eastern Europe, often without a legal work permit, uncertain residence status, and no recognised training and education qualifications. Drivers are often recruited with the incentive of a permanent employment contract that can be used to apply for settlement permit. Drivers earn a daily flat rate of €85, working shifts up to 12 hours, to six days a week, netting a monthly salary of around €2,000. Many drivers have faced unlawful dismissals, unpaid or underpaid wages, unpaid overtime, cases of extreme overtime without breaks, lack of vacation and cases of direct discrimination from bosses. Furthermore, the lack of handover protocols regarding vehicles at DSPs means that subcontractors often pass on costs relating to damages to the drivers, often deducted directly from salaries [DE232]. My own experience of working on the yard at a Delivery Station in Berlin allowed me to speak with drivers as they arrived to pick-up their packages at the start of each shift. Around 250-350

drivers employed by 15-20 different DSPs arrived each morning, whereas during the peak in November-December the number of drivers reached nearly 500. What was apparent was a range of different accounts that was patterned by differences among DSPs: while some drivers were satisfied with their employer as regarded timeliness of pay, shift-scheduling, hours worked and fair treatment by managers, others related that their companies tightly monitored delivery quotas, and that they had experienced harassment and discrimination by managers, and did not receive full payment of wages.

As the campaign organisers observed, DSPs take advantage of language barriers and workers' lack of knowledge of legal rights in Germany. They "don't know their rights, and when they know them, they don't dare to do anything", creating a "system of dependency a fear" [DE217]. Due to their precarious situation, many workers accept poor working conditions, and often do not file complaints with authorities, meaning that DSPs often do not face consequences for labour abuses. Amazon outsources communications for its drivers all around the world to a hotline in the USA, and DSP managers reported that conflicts are difficult to resolve since Amazon is only reachable via the Relay app [DE217].

Fair Integration consists of several projects in the 'Integration through Qualification' network funded by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the European Social Fund. Fair Integration offers workshops and legal counselling on social and labour law issues, either by e-mail, telephone, or in person at one of its 26 advice centres which exist in every federal state. The Advice Centres for Migration and Good Work (Beratungszentrum für Migration und Gute Arbeit, BEMA) support workers by examining contracts and other documents, calculating outstanding wage and vacation entitlements, determining facts, contacting employers, and eventually helping workers file lawsuits [DE229]. Since workers are employed by small subcontractors or recruitment agencies, the investigate work for consultants is slow, complex and requires research into the companies on a case-by-case basis. In particular, smaller companies have a low level of liquidity reserves increasing the risks of layoffs and bankruptcy. Redress via state institutions has been particularly difficult for migrants with limited German language skills:

> "Some advice seekers and advisors report that they have spent hours in hotlines, stood in front of closed doors or not received the right form for months. For migrants and refugees, this means frustration, fear and often indebtedness to friends and acquaintances. It is obvious that this situation makes them even more vulnerable to exploitative job offers. Some employers take advantage of this situation and make them fear that those seeking advice would be deported or lose their residency. A fatal interface is created with human trafficking, illegality, modern slavery and severe forms of exploitation. The work of Fair Integration clearly shows the dark side of the German labor market. It but also shows which ways there are for those seeking advice to get out of the situation. If they know their rights and know how to assert them and who can help them, they develop possibilities for action and a kind of new self-confidence." [DE229]

Certain resources have been critical for the network's advisory capabilities, namely multilingualism among team members, confidentiality, sensitivity to issues, and well-developed local networks with support structures for refugees, state institutions such as the Federal Employment Agency, and labour market actors such as trade unions which refer people to Fair Integration's counselling centres. This way, people seeking advice from the centres can also be connected to the trade unions. Fair Integration also employs a preventive strategy, disseminating information in the form of multilingual brochures, flyers, online events and outreach via social media, which it uses to inform workers about their legal rights, and to encourage them to speak out and claim their full legal entitlements.[85] Fair Integration relates that it has helped unfairly dismissed workers win compensation through the courts,

[85] During counselling sessions, some workers were surprised to learn that they waived some of their legal rights by voluntarily signing termination agreements.

which has had some preventative effects and led to some employers becoming more cautious [DE229]. Together with Ver.di, Fair Integration has established a new Occupational Safety and Health Control Act, however it notes that further institutional protections are necessary, in the form of legal rights to counselling, and the strengthening of existing rights against unfair dismissal.

While reports scandalising working conditions among Amazon's subcontractors continue to surface, the unions and their broader networks have focused on providing legal advice and support for individual cases, however a coordinated political response is still lacking. First, Ver.di has called for an end to subcontracting in the parcel delivery sector, meaning in the case of Amazon, that drivers should be employed directly by Amazon. Second it called for packages to be limited to 20kg when delivered by a single driver in order to minimise health risks. Finally, in order for legal loopholes to be closed, Ver.di together with the DGB and its partners have called for a law on subcontractor liability, which has existed in the courier, express and parcel sector since 2018, to be extended to the forwarding and logistics industry. Subcontractor liability applies across an entire industry and requires companies to pay for social contributions for their employees if their subcontractors fail to pay in full. This would oblige parcel companies to screen subcontractors regarding whether they pay all social security contributions before awarding a contract. One Ver.di secretary observed that such a reform is a precondition for organising subcontracted drivers, however that presently, political opportunities appeared closed given the Free Democratic Party's role in the government coalition. As one counsellor from Fair Integration who was involved in the Amazon outreach campaign commented:

> "Basically, however, we need different laws! Above all, we need subcontractor liability so that we can hold Amazon accountable. At the moment we are legally powerless against Amazon. In the current situation, my greatest successes are the moments when it is clear that someone no longer has to drive for Amazon because he or she has been hired by a 'normal' delivery service with more transparent working conditions and wages." [DE232]

### *"Amazon makes us sick!": organising for health and safety*

On 7th April 2016, World Health Day, Ver.di initiated a series of coordinated strikes at Amazon locations, citing numerous reports from workers of psychological and physical stress, high levels of illness-related absenteeism [DE098]. Indeed, strikes on this date have remained a stable part of Ver.di's repertoire of action and framing strategy which has connected worker health and safety, to the high pace of work at Amazon and the hostile managerial strategies. Indeed, employees with long absences related to illness have been dismissed or simply have not had their contracts extended, while other workers have reported feeling pressured into working sick. In 2016, the company instituted a health policy which was essentially a 10% health premium awardable to workers who had not used any sick days in a month. However, since the premium was calculated on an individual and collective basis, workers criticised that it effectively discouraged them from taking sick leave. The union claimed that "instead of doing more for [employees'] health, Amazon is introducing health premiums that put sick people under pressure and encourage distrust among employees" [DE100; DE134].

In the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, working processes at Amazon logistics facilities in Germany as elsewhere were reorganised in order to maintain social distancing guidelines and minimise the risk of infections. Areas and pathways in distribution centres, including reception, locker rooms and the shop-floor were newly arranged, however, hundreds of employees continued to arrive for shifts on overcrowded shuttle buses. Employees reported managers downplaying the severity of the Covid-19 and referring it as "just a normal cold" [DE041]. In March 2020, a works council member in Leipzig denounced management's lack of transparency regarding workplace infections and plans for implementing safety protocols:

> "As works councils, we are approached every day by colleagues who ask what happens if the first one is infected, whether there is a plan from Amazon. But we don't hear anything from Amazon! We feel left alone." [DE056]

While stationary retailers faced closures during the first lockdown in early 2020, Amazon warehouses in Germany remained open. To the frustration of the union, Amazon refused to conclude a company-level agreement on emergency health protections and short-time work benefits (*Kurzarbeitergeld*) in the context of outbreaks of infections at several sites in Germany.[86] In Germany, Amazon lobbied to be classified as systemically important, using the occasion to push to relax regulations around Sunday work. Amazon workers in Germany were offered a temporary 2€/hour increase in the hourly wage, which was rescinded on May 16th, break times were extended by five minutes, and the feedback system was temporarily suspended, momentarily relieving the pressure to perform [DE112].[87] Additionally, workers required to quarantine were offered two weeks of paid leave. Ver.di emulated the demands made by unions elsewhere and called for the temporary payrise to be extended indefinitely, however as related by a works councillor from Leipzig, the proposal was a source of tension:

> "The colleagues now get two euros more wages for every hour they work. That was a really difficult decision for us in the works council. We discussed for a long time whether we would approve the wage increase or not. If we had refused, the colleagues would have gone really nuts. Of course, they can really use the money. So we agreed, but that means that many colleagues will come to work right now, sick and certainly with Covid-19 symptoms, because they will get the money when they also work… We have been on strike for six years and we have been fighting for collectively agreed wages. Increasing wages now, in this situation, is cynical and inappropriate." [DE056]

Meanwhile, works councils stressed the necessity of personal protective equipment, respirators, emergency plans, the equalization of working hours, and above all, transparency from management regarding protocols for handling the risk of infections in the workplace. During certain periods of 2020, some worksites reported absence rates of over 30% [DE117]. In April, shop stewards at Amazon logistics sites initiated an online workers survey, and reported the inadequate sanitization of work equipment and areas where employees congregate, as well as the impracticality of maintaining social distancing [DE181]. The union demanded more transparency and called for the company to disclose its plan for handling the pandemic, which it refused, while insisting that a plan had been implemented.

The works council at the FC in Rheinberg obtained an injunction from the Wesel Labour Court, prohibiting Amazon from monitoring employees' observation of 2 metre distancing rules via video surveillance. Such works-level agreements however are the exception. Ver.di publically stated that health and safety protection during the pandemic cannot be an excuse to violate workers' rights [DE082].

In response to increasing infections at Amazon worksites, Ver.di organised a national health week at Amazon in June during Prime Day at 7 locations, denouncing the firm's subordination of employees' health to profit [DE048; DE083]. In Leipzig, around 2000 participants called for a CBA and for "good and healthy work", blocking the highway with their vehicles [DE111]. Similar 'drive-in-protests' occurred in NRW with Ver.di calling for a real Corona bonus for the workers which made 2020 such a lucrative

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[86] In December, the Ver.di reported 300 of 1800 workers at Graben to be infected. The local union secretary commented: "Immense pressure, constant intensification of performance, permanent performance reviews, poor management culture, insufficient recovery and breathing times as well as a lack of appreciation, coupled with inadequate infection protection precautions: These are all bad working conditions that are often the order of the day at Amazon" [DE085]. At Koblenz nearly 1,000 of 2,800 employees tested positive, with the responsible medical officer commenting that the company does not want to admit that its worksites are corona hotspots.

[87] One of Ver.di's campaign leaders Orhan Akman: "While Amazon chief Jeff Bezos earns billions, the company scrapped the two-euro-per-hour allowance that was granted to employees from March to the end of May" [DE048]. The company commented that it was planning to instate an hourly bonus in some locations, but only for attending employees [DE112].

year for Amazon [DE112]. They denounced Amazon passing the risks onto its workforce while being one of the largest beneficiaries of the pandemic. Attention was drawn to the company's refusal to communicate and provide clear information during a health crisis, allowing panic to spread, and to the fact that protective measures were only instated following pressure from workers and the union for binding health and safety regulations in workplaces [DE111]. In August, the Federal Ministry of Labour obliged employers to provide personal protective equipment, to check and adjust workplace risk assessments, and to give greater consideration to psychological stress [DE111].

The union noted that closures, layoffs, bankruptcies and rigorous austerity in the retail sector should not be attributed primarily to the Coronavirus pandemic, but were symptomatic of unfair competitive advantage, which has been permitted following years of political mismanagement and tariff evasion [DE111]. While the lockdown had driven consumption via online commerce, in the context of 64,000 stationary retailers nationwide threatened with closures, Ver.di proposed a generally binding collective agreement which would increase the short-time allowance to 90% of standard salaries.[88] This was rejected by the HDE, which instead suggested delaying annual wage increases and extending opening times, including Sundays. As one Ver.di leader commented, "the HDE shows itself to be a free rider of the crisis and wants to sell old wine in new bottles… Longer opening times neither bring more sales, nor do they secure jobs. They additionally fuel cut-throat competition." [DE181].

## Social movements against Amazon

### *Organising against tech-led gentrification*

In October 2019, the campaign against Amazon in Germany began to expand to other fields of social struggle, triggered by the announcement of the construction of the EDGE Tower at Berlin's Mediaspree, one of the city's largest investment projects. Scheduled for completion in 2023, the building will serve as Amazon's corporate headquarters in Germany, and an office for Amazon software developers currently dispersed among various sites in the city [DE16]. Berlin vs. Amazon emerged out of this juncture, as a coalition of several local initiatives[89], tech workers, artists, architects, social movement and labour activists, and residents of Friedrichschain-Kreuzberg opposed to the construction project. The collective has drawn attention to the displacement of local communities by real estate development, and the complicity of foreign companies like Amazon in processes of gentrification, climate change, surveillance and the degradation of work.

> "This tower will definitely cast a shadow over Friedrichshain in the evening and of course it will also have far-reaching effects. Because when 3400 employees suddenly move in, they want to live somewhere. They are mostly better paid tech workers, marketing employees… Above all, the initiative would like to strengthen the neighborhoods and the networks in the neighborhood" [DE193]

Whereas Ver.di's Amazon campaign had rather narrowly focused on traditional labour issues such as collective bargaining, working conditions and health and safety, local social movement activists were concerned with preventing the deterioration of an already tense local housing market and the cannibalisation of a unique neighbourhood culture for profit. As one BvsA activist explained in the context of the shortage of affordable housing in Berlin:

> "… more and more people are aware of Amazon's behavior and are afraid of being pushed out. In all cities where Amazon is setting up locations, you can see that rental and real estate prices are skyrocketing.

[88] Indeed locally, works councils at some Primark, H&M, Zara and Ikea sites in Germany managed to win a short-time allowances paying 100% of their wages [DE181].

[89] These include the Berlin Tech Workers Coalition, the RAW Kulturensemble, Bizim Kiez and Make Amazon Pay.

> It's no coincidence that Seattle, where Amazon's headquarters are located, has the third highest rate of homelessness in the US" [DE214].

In terms of diagnostic framing, BvsA activists attributed blame for the project on "the Berlin Senate [which] has rolled out the red carpet for investors in various political constellations over the past 20 years" [DE052]. Activists drew on the imagery of place and the narrative of "webtech urbanism", a form of urban planning enabled by local politicians which privileges technology corporations and property developers while excluding residents. Home to several large tech companies and myriad small start-ups, Berlin has been colloquially referred as the EU's Silicon Valley, and activists have drawn comparisons to Seattle and San Francisco in terms of the social consequences of "unchecked tech urbanism" such as "skyrocketing rents, rising homelessness, and a widening income gap" [DE216]:

> "Berlin is literally being changed from the outside - without the consent of the local population. The e-scooters lying around, the sound of trolleys and shops for yuppie needs of every kind are the forerunners of this conversion and the expulsion" [DE15].

BvsA's organisational structure and repertoire of action was informed by similar initiatives, including No Google Campus, which successfully blocked the establishment of a Google corporate campus in Berlin-Kreuzberg in 2018, and the No HQ2 campaign, which blocked Amazon's plan to establish a headquarters in New York in 2019 by mobilising a coalition of unions, anti-gentrification activists and local politicians. BvsA identified three pillars of community-level organising in the HQ2 campaign which were adapted to the local context. The first was community organising, consisting of mobilising local activist groups to engage in door-to-door knocking, canvassing and flyering, and organising public meetings and workshops [DE15; DE37]

> "Above all, the initiative wants to strengthen the neighbourhoods and the networks in the neighbourhood… [and] to start a new discourse about digital platforms and digital infrastructure, which is also emerging in Berlin. That's why we're not against tech, but we want to somehow prevent the capitalist effects of these companies and create solidarity" [DE194].

The second pillar, linking topics and multiplying fronts, referred to the practice of building connections between different social issues and activating the different local initiatives mobilising against them. This meant that emphasis was given to building connections with logistics workers, tech workers, tenants' groups as well as anti-racism and climate justice movements and to encourage them to participate in collective protest.

> "… we want to address and encourage all citizens, residents and neighbors. We want to defend neighborhood culture, get left-wing activists on board and win new partners in the fight … in addition, we not only want to motivate the tech workers, but above all the people from the Fulfilment Centers" [DE215]

Finally, after some discussion around tactics and goals, the final pillar, image damage and public relations, referred to the capacity to foster a negative mood against Amazon and allied politicians at the local level. The group organised street demonstrations in opposition to the construction of the EDGE Tower in December 2019 and February 2020. The demonstration 'Save your neighbourhood – Fight Amazon' drew the participation of local housing projects[90], left-wing activists, residents, and to a minor extent, Amazon workers. The call for the demonstration stated:

> "Who wants a company like Amazon, which monopolizes areas such as mail order without considering losses, monitors its customers and harasses its workers, destroys new goods and works together with deportation authorities here in the neighborhood? … What we are experiencing right now is the forced

[90] These included Liebig34, Potse, Drugstore, Köpi, Rigaer94, Lause, Syndikat und Muterei, Friedel54, RAW, K-Fetish, SabotGarden and Diesel A [DE215]

change of our city from above. Small businesses and social institutions are being pushed out, open spaces, self-governing houses and cultural institutions are threatened and disappear - a central component of a diverse and lively city." [DE216]

Later in 2020, BvSA organised an online debate on the merits of a boycott of Amazon, with the participation of Amazon workers, and activists, and produced a short video[91] about the construction project in Berlin. The group also participated in Disruption Network Lab, a conference for experts and activists to share their investigations on the interconnections between real estate speculation and global and local housing crises, and to reflect on collective action and counter-solutions in this area. Both within and beyond the context of their organising work against Amazon, the professional and technical skills of politicised tech workers have been invaluable in terms of educating activists about secure digital practices and informing them of the variety of digital communication tools to facilitate contentious practices. Indeed, BvsA activists also provided technical assistance to AWI in terms of introducing new, secure tools for streamlining its internal communications between member unions.

### *Organising against surveillance and repression*

A conflict over trade unions' right of access to Amazon's worksites has also played out through the German court system. During a strike at the Pforzheim FC, the union had set up tables and distributed flyers in the company carpark. Asserting its right to control access to private property, Amazon filed a complaint to the Rhineland-Palatinate Labour Court, which ruled that the employer could prohibit such actions in the future. In another jurisdiction, the Berlin-Brandenburg Labour Court ruled that Amazon had to accept a restriction of its property rights with regards to the union's freedom of activity, but that the union could only encourage workers to participate in actions from the carpark outside the worksite [DE069]. On appeal, the Federal Labour Court determined that in the absence of other mobilization options and depending on specific local conditions, a trade union must be permitted to inform employees arriving for work about an ongoing strike [DE076]. The judging senate declared: "In the specific case, the weighing of conflicting fundamental rights guarantees on the employer and the trade union side shows that the employer has to accept a short-term, situational impairment of their property." [DE076]

Works councils at Amazon logistics sites in Leipzig, Bad Hersfeld and Amazon data centres in Berlin have succeeded in limiting or suspending feedbacks and other disciplinary actions through works-level agreements, by refusing to provide individual performance data which are not stipulated in contracts. However, these cases are exceptional, and many other sites, particularly those with a high proportion of temporary or fixed-term contracts, the level of organisation has not reached a requisite level to make such demands.

Following complaints from Amazon workers, the Lower Saxon Data Protection Commissioner investigated whether the routine collection of employee data for purposes of performance evaluation are permissible under state and federal laws, and forbid Amazon Logistics in Winsen from collecting and processing performance data [DE059].[92] Indeed, even at worksites where no works councils have been established, recourse via such institutional channels is one avenue that is available for workers in challenging surveillance and monitoring (Stephan, 2021). Amazon sued against the decision, and the

[91] https://vimeo.com/483585925

[92] The report of the investigation concluded: "The punctual delivery of goods intended by Amazon Logistik GmbH with the continuous collection and use of employee data and their other interests do not justify this serious interference with the right to informational self-determination of employees. In this case, I therefore take the legal view that the employees' right to informational self-determination outweighs the interests of Amazon Logistik GmbH Winsen. In addition, the punctual delivery of goods could also be guaranteed with the dissemination of less employee data. For example, I think it is conceivable that only the location of the goods within the logistics center is tracked - without the use of personal data" (The State Commissioner for Data Protection Lower Saxony 2021: 164).

Administrative Court in Hanover overturned the decision, with the presiding judge emphasising the need for regulating legislation:

> "We would have wished that the legislature would have taken action or will do so." [DE241]

In a press release following the decision, the DGB emphasized the need for an employee data protection law, a conclusion which was also reached by an expert committee of scientists, shop stewards and MPs assembled by the DGB to discuss employee data protection and to formulate a draft of the legislation [DE242]. Additionally, in the context of a discussion about the Works Councils Modernization Act, the DGB had called for the strengthening of co-determination for works councils when using AI, with regards to data protection and the introduction of work. It also demanded that works councils must be able to consult subject-specific expertise at any time, and that unions and works councils must be given digital access to employees [DE242].

In 2020, 15 European trade unions affiliated with UNI Global accused Amazon of spying on union activists and called for the European Commission to investigate the company's repression of union activists (see Chapter 7). In March 2020, warehouse workers from Germany, UK, Italy, Poland and Slovakia, supported by UNI Global, filed a request to the EU General Data Protection Regulation to investigate the firm's treatment of workers' personal data [GLO027].[93] However, the question of whether the form of data collection utilised by Amazon violates European data protection regulations is unresolved and is being pursued by the unions and by the transnational labour networks.

Amazon Workers Against Surveillance (AWAS), was brief campaign founded in November 2021 by Amazon tech workers and activists associated with Berlin vs. Amazon and the Berlin Tech Workers Coalition. The initiative aimed to challenge surveillance at Amazon, by extending the frame of surveillance in order to encompass the perspectives and interests of a broader segment of workers, and to signal the direct impact of the issue to them. It emphasized that workers employed in different areas of Amazon's operations, including warehouse workers, drivers, software engineers and data labellers, are equally subject to constant monitoring and performance control which is prohibited by German law.[94] AWAS solicited personal testimonies from Amazon workers in Germany, Poland and the USA, regarding working conditions, and specifically, about their experiences with surveillance, how they have contested it at their workplaces, for instance via works-level agreements. In doing so, it signalled to prospective participants how the issue of surveillance impacts them directly. As the campaign's website elaborates:

> "Stop the stress. Whether it's Amazon Alexa, package delivery, customer service or fulfillment, Amazon uses apps, hand scanners, browser tools and cameras to surveil its workforce 24/7. Working almost anywhere at Amazon is stressful and hazardous to one's health. Constant tracking isn't normal. Anyone who works at Amazon knows this all too well: Tools measure your performance, and management puts you under pressure. Your co-workers get sick due to stress, fired because they're not 'fast enough', paid less if they don't reach targets or bullied by management." (AWAS, n.d.)[95]

Given the limited outreach and capacity of the group, it was necessary to find the most effective way of utilising the resources available and ultimately it was decided that the focus should be on public

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[93] Christy Hoffman, General Secretary of UNI Global Union commented: "The combination of Amazon's voracious appetite for data alongside its anti-union behavior is deeply troubling… This is a company that we know has spied on employees, and workers have the right to know if video and audio recordings; social network information; trade union membership status or any other data collected by Amazon is being used against them in violation of EU privacy laws." [GLO027].

[94] Indeed, logistics workers use barcode scanners that record performance data; subcontracted delivery drivers have their performance tracked via an Amazon app, as well as by an app administered by their logistics companies; data labellers employed at Alexa Data Services and employees at Customer Services have their performance tracked via browser tools on their computers.

[95] https://organizeawas.de/en/

campaigning, leveraging networks with workers, trade unions and experts. In early 2022, AWAS developed a solution-oriented flyer to inform workers about the impact on surveillance on working conditions, to inform workers of how performance tracking has been contested at Amazon sites through works council agreements, as well as the necessary steps to establish works councils and to start internal negotiations to contest performance tracking. Framed this way, the campaign sought to reach out to two audiences: Ver.di and its works councils, and second, Amazon workers, particularly those that had thus far not been involved in collective action. Importantly, it sought to contribute to the development of mobilising capacity at worksites such as Delivery Stations where works councils have largely not been established, and as such has been a weakness of Ver.di's campaign. The campaign relied on the strong institutional protections available in the German context. The fact that performance data is collected by IT systems provides possible recourse via works councils, since the Works Constitution Act, specifically §87(1), no. 6 guarantee works councils co-determination rights regarding "the introduction and use of technical devices designed to monitor the behaviour or performance of the employees". Further, the fact that performance data is collected on a continuous and individual basis puts the practice in violation of Germany's Federal Data Protection Act. Reportedly, some works councillors and shop stewards experienced some barriers in regulating surveillance at their worksites, given that in some cases, works councils had already negotiated agreements with management.

The works council at Alexa Data Services (ADS), a software development centre in Berlin, employing 40-80 data labellers and linguists working on the digital personal assistant Alexa, managed to abolish the core mechanism of productivity-oriented surveillance via a works-level agreement signed in January 2021, which required the involvement of an arbitration committee. Upon learning that the works council at ADS had succeeded in abolishing performance tracking via a works-level agreement, the works council at Amazon Virtual Customer Services, employing around 1500 remote workers, sought to emulate the result. ADS works councillors and AWAS organised a training workshop in order to facilitate this process.

### *Make Amazon Pay, Germany*

Since 2020, the transnational UNI Amazon Alliance, the Amazon Workers International and the Progressive International had organised the global campaign Make Amazon Pay on Black Friday. Trade union organisations, human rights groups, environmental groups and various other social movements across 23 countries participated in the campaign in 2022 [DE227]. The glocal campaign was premised on strengthening the demands of Amazon logistics workers around the world who had been coordinating strikes on Black Friday for a number of years, by combining them with highly visible solidarity actions which were then disseminated via print and social media. The campaign coordinators had prepared a media package and disseminated it to groups worldwide which expressed an interest in participating, while encouraging them to adapt the claims and demands to local contexts. Utilising a high-profile media campaign, activist groups around the world used high-powered projectors to beam images and slogans critical of Amazon's activities in public spaces, including Amazon worksites its corporate offices. They criticised Amazon's considerable carbon emissions and the company's role in accelerating global climate breakdown, its tax evasion practices, and its exploitation of the Coronavirus pandemic while endangering the health and safety of its workers. Simultaneously, trade unions sent delegations of workers to support strikes occurring in other countries. For instance, Amazon workers at the Koblenz FC in Germany, travelled to France to participate in strikes across the border, while similar exchanges also happened between worksites within Germany.

On the 25th November 2022, a rally was organised outside the EDGE-Tower in Berlin by labour activists who had in previous years been involved in organising workers at the food delivery platforms such as Lieferando, Gorillas and Getir, as well as by activists associated with BvsA, AWAS, and the Tech Workers Coalition. While similar actions were organised outside the EDGE-Tower on Black Friday in

2020 and 2021, those rallies had managed to gather between 30-50 participants, whereas the rally in 2022 drew the participation of nearly 200 people.

The rally was attended by a local Ver.di secretary who spoke about recent organising developments at Amazon worksites in the Berlin area. As they related later, while the involvement of local activists presented unique opportunities for developing the strength of the workers' movement, the sporadic engagement of social movement activists with workers posed some barriers in terms of development long-lasting relations of trust between the two groups:

> "It's nice to work with external activists, but the problem is sometimes they have also some expectations, and it's difficult to meet them. Because they have expectations, that unions have to change the world, that they're big, they have a lot of resources, and then they're kind of bounded... what you need in order to work with workers, is to have a constant exchange with [activists], in order to build trust, relationship and identity. And if some activists come, they usually come for one or two actions, then you cannot develop this. You cannot develop a relationship to workers. That's the problem… Because they're also two different worlds. So you need to get them together, because on the one hand you have white, privileged students, who don't need to worry about things, like how to feed their families. And on the other hand, you have workers without time, who if they dispose their time for something, you have to think about something that really, that they feel is necessary to do… But this is also something that I always loved about unions, to connect workers issues with social movement issues. And to connect these, and if you are able to connect it, you can develop something really powerful because if you have society's support, you can change some stuff, you know, and you can more easily pressure politics." [INT23]

They observed that while the action was successful in terms of bridging issues relating to working conditions at Amazon, trade union repression, climate justice, gentrification and monopolisation, the action nevertheless highlighted the problems concerning divergent expectations between workers, trade unions and social movement activists:

> "The basic problem with unions and social movements, I would say is the problem of expectations on different sides, because in the union you have a lot of high expectations, because your job is about raising expectations. You know, people will join the union, and expect something from the union. So you want to enable workers to create more expectations amongst other workers because they want the other workers to get other workers in the union, you know, and develop a consciousness. So basically … your whole organisation is built on membership fees, so you have to do something that kind of holds members, generates new members. And the process right now, the outlook is not good, because the unions are losing members. So you are under pressure as a union, to even, to not get erased. Because unions really are struggling with the modern world, with the modern labour world, and politics are not reacting in an according fashion. They cannot because they're constrained by national boundaries. So globalisation and all of these topics are really having a hard impact on unions. So then, if somebody from the outside, from the social movement side comes, approaches you, has an idea like that, then you have to see, "is it worth the time to invest?" Because at that same time you could fulfil the expectations of existing members or even get new ones. So you have to see where you can create synergy effects between them like with this action for example. You do social movement activity, where workers are coming, or where social movement activists are really helping to organise workers. But it's really hard to go to them, because sometimes social movements activists also have these expectations [clicking fingers] "this has to happen now, the union has to do this, because I'm doing stuff that is not paid, but you are being paid, so it's your job!" So you have to really manage expectations. Technically, union officials are always managers of expectations. You have sometimes to downgrade expectations, because sometimes they're too ambitious or not realistic, and sometimes you have to try to upgrade expectations because people are pessimistic about their possibilities to have an impact on their worksite, or society, so you have to encourage them, and give them a perspective, or try to develop a joint perspective on how to do stuff. But often it is a really big challenge to do so." [INT23]

Indeed, as during previous years, the actions were marked by the absence of Amazon workers themselves. This was largely due to facts specific to the local context, namely the fact that the level of organisation among Amazon logistics facilities in the Berlin-Brandenburg area had not been sufficiently

developed. This was itself related to the fact that Ver.di had not appointed a project secretary to develop strike capacity at these sites until early 2022. Since this time however, the organising dynamic was had renewed impetus, though as the secretary related,

> "Unfortunately I could not get workers involved because there was other stuff going on like the works council election." [INT23]

Indeed, supporters at the rally presented a banner expressing solidarity with the works council election, while in early 2023, further plans were being developed between Ver.di as well as by the organisers of the action to deepen cooperation between social movement activists and Amazon workers in the area.

## Discussion

The German case illustrates the difficulties that trade unions face in organising workers at anti-union multinational companies, even in a CME context where unions benefit from a high degree of institutional power. Ver.di realised very quickly that a social partnership strategy with Amazon was not a viable path, and that leverage would have to be developed in order to extract even minimal concessions. Despite counter-resistance from the employer side, and a host of structural problems, such as the use of fixed-term contracts, agency work and subcontracting, the union continues to build strike capacity across the network. Nevertheless, the dispute between Ver.di and Amazon has reached somewhat of a stalemate whereby the union has not managed to build strike capacity to an extent and force Amazon to give way to its core demand for a collective bargaining agreement (Dribbusch, 2019).

The union has managed to establish structures of interest representation and developed a high degree of internal solidarity and deliberative vitality at older FCs, however it has struggled to develop these resources evenly across the entire network and to take full advantage of the disruptive capacities this would afford. At sites where interest representation structures have been established, the union has leveraged its infrastructural resources to develop mobilising capacity at the shop-level, offering education and training workshops, and promoting networking between sites in order to facilitate the diffusion of knowledge and best practices. However, local dynamics differ from site to site, and legitimacy and trust in the union must be continuously cultivated. At some sites, mobilising momentum has stagnated, indicated by falling union membership and the results of works council elections, where union lists have lost their majority status. At newly opened sites, barriers present themselves in the form of a high proportion of fixed-term and agency contracts in the first years of a site's opening. Given Amazon's stance towards unions, many workers which do join the union are cautious in revealing their identities, which has consequences on the legitimacy and trust in the union on site, and on works council elections.

The rapid growth of Delivery Stations in Germany, has presented a significant challenge in developing and deploying power resources across the network. For workers to join a union, shop stewards or works councillors must be present, which is a problem given that insufficient infrastructural resources have been dedicated to establish mobilising capacity at Delivery Stations among warehouse workers and parcel couriers, two groups of workers which arguably possess among the highest capacity to cause economic damage by interrupting last-mile delivery. Despite significant barriers, efforts to organise couriers and workers at Delivery Stations has shown that these challenges are not insurmountable, but require a great deal of time and resources from local union leaders that is needed to develop trust with workers, facilitate the formation of collective identities and initiate a works council process. In Berlin, the fruitfulness of such project-based revitalisation strategies was indicated by the successes in commencing a works council process at Mariendorf.

Certain resources have proved crucial to these efforts, namely full-time union staff with the requisite labour organising experience, linguistic skills, charisma, guidance, personal networks, and the capacity to activate these networks for outreach campaigns. At the same time, such first steps are

notoriously slow before such a dynamic can unfold, given the efforts necessary to identify organic leaders and workers that can form a mobilising structure that might hopefully be self-sustaining. This is further complicated by the fact that local union secretaries as in Berlin are employed on fixed-term contracts, giving rise to concerns regarding the future of these worksites when the secretary's contract expires. Regarding these concerns, the secretary in Berlin related that they were optimistic that the organising dynamic would continue to unfold even after the expiry of their contract. While it is hard to predict the prospects for such sites in the future, one might be reassured by the emphasis placed by this secretary on active rather than passive organising concepts, and on encouraging the direct participation and confidence of rank-and-file union members. However ultimately, the continuity of such critical roles depends on decisions made by senior union officials. It remains to be seen whether project-based revitalisation strategies based on active organising concepts indicate a broader shift in the union's strategy and its marshalling of resources, and whether the lessons from efforts to organise workers at Delivery Stations will diffuse throughout the organisation and facilitate a process of learning and organisational change.

Over the course of the dispute, Ver.di managed to wrest some significant concessions from Amazon, in line with the demands made by workers, including: wage increases, improvements to working conditions, such as more ergonomic work-stations, improved hygiene and ventilation, the re-organisation of canteens and breakrooms, the calculation of break-times, as well as supplementary payments in the form of Christmas bonuses. Additionally, some sites such as the FCs at Bad Hersfeld and Amazon Data Services in Berlin managed to abolish disciplinary feedbacks via works-level agreements. Nevertheless, since such concessions are secured by means of works-level agreements, they do not have cascading effects. In its public communications, and at team meetings on site, Amazon frames such concessions as a product of its own initiative or generosity, downplaying the impact of union activities, while simultaneously promoting industrial democracy in the form of works councils. However as union activists repeatedly emphasize, these are in fact the result of workers persistently voicing their discontent, and increasing the pressure mounted by the strike movement. Existing research conducted with Ver.di has indicated that the high level of turnover at Amazon has created difficulties for shop stewards and works councils in terms of successfully framing the concessions that have been obtained as outcomes of past collective action (Boewe & Schulten, 2019: 70).[96]

While Ver.di has managed to amplify the grievances expressed by workers and incorporate them within its frames, these tend to be subsumed under the overarching master frame of an absent collective bargaining agreement. This problem was also confirmed by Apicella's (2021) analysis of the dispute, drawing attention to the divergence between the union's goal to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement, with the political and material improvements that this would entail, and the demands of workers which have rather focused on the organisation of the labour process, and the consequences for health and safety. Her analysis emphasises that at least on the surface, the grievances of workers are not the same as those of the union, at least on the surface (i.e. collective bargaining), and that accordingly, the union could do better by listening more intently to its rank-and-file.

In line with this interpretation, I argue that the union has not fully exploited or renewed its stock of narrative resources, but has insisted on a traditional discourse that aims to regulate work by leveraging institutional power resources which in recent decades have been eroded. Historically, German unions have been able to perform this regulatory function given close ties with works councils as part of the dual system of interest representation, tending to rely on institutional resources, focusing on solutions via sectoral bargaining, works councils and labour law rather than on recruiting members. The union's campaign for generally binding collective bargaining agreements represents an attempt to re-embed

[96] As one worker interviewed worker related: "Lots of new people come and don't know how things were before" (Boewe & Schulten, 2019: 70).

institutions in sectors where they are being eroded by firms like Amazon that threaten to exacerbate the trend away from tariff-coverage. Meanwhile, Amazon has strategically exploited the institutional context by promoting works councils independent from the union, which as a result, has meant that ties between works councils and the union at some sites is rather weak.

At the same time, Ver.di risks reproducing mistakes made in the past, by privileging labour market insiders over outsiders. Efforts to support and include fixed-term workers and subcontractors at Amazon have been lacklustre, as have been efforts to innovate in terms of narrative resources and frame to address these groups. This is particularly problematic, since surveys carried out with fixed-term FC workers in Germany showed that despite precarious employment status, these workers exhibited a strong level of trust in unions and could very well be involved in the strike campaign at Amazon and in labour struggles more broadly (Apicella, 2021). Ver.di's neglect of fixed-term workers thus appears as a major strategic error. This can be understood as a product of the institutional security provided by the German corporatist system which has historically allowed unions to secure interest representation at the workplace level, while undermining in the membership base in the long-term by protecting core constituencies over new groups in the labour market, that are more expensive to recruit (Hassel, 2007). Indeed, this appears to be the case regarding Delivery Stations workers and drivers, which would require a strategic shift and a greater commitment of resources in order to organise workers across the supply-chain, including at DSPs. While this chapter has described some initial steps in this direction, union activists nevertheless emphasized the need for a political solution in the form of a subcontractor liability law. However once again, this would require a tactical shift in order to convince and mobilise lawmakers.

Ver.di has demonstrated a weaker capacity to extend its collective action frames to address issues beyond the workplace, and to legitimate itself as an opinion leader that can proactively establish an autonomous agenda on issues like gentrification, climate justice, surveillance, tax evasion, data protection, competition and monopolisation. While Ver.di leaders have debated ways of addressing these issues within the context of the UNI Amazon Alliance, at the national level, frame alignment practices have narrowly focused largely on amplification, that is, on reinforcing and clarifying its core values and demands for collective bargaining, as opposed to extending and transforming frames to address broader publics and sets of issues. While Ver.di's networks are dense and diverse among traditional institutional partners, allowing the union to leverage the resources of organisations such as the DGB Bildungswerk, or the Advice Centres for Migration and Good Work to directly support workers, this is less the case regarding social movements operating outside the sphere of labour relations. Union leaders' capacity to intermediate between contending interests within and outside the union, as well as to promote collaboration between workplaces with non-traditional allies and to establish common initiatives and goals was not a priority, and as a result, weakly developed.

Meanwhile, social movement activists have demonstrated greater flexibility and have directed their frames to influence public interpretations of the impact of multinational technology corporations, linking different social issues and activating different local initiatives organising against them. Narratives of webtech urbanism took aim at local politicians who facilitate an exclusionary urban planning to the detriment of residents, while frame bridging practices sought to link congruent but disconnected frames by identifying a common target in the form of Amazon, and to emphasize commonalities in the interests and goals of workers, in terms of improving working conditions, and local communities, in terms of protecting affordable housing.

Indeed, social-movement union coalitions are less likely to occur in systems with strong coordinated institutions as in Germany, while when they do occur, they tend to be short-lived and issue based (Frege et al., 2004). Further, unions which are less institutionalised, more militant, internally democratic, active on multiple issue fronts and characterised by flexibility in terms of ideology and organisational goals tend to be more open to cooperate with social movements and form broad coalitions (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Van Dyke, 2003; Zajak, 2017). The fact that Ver.di has not pursued coalitions with SMO's to address the myriad issues implicating Amazon at the domestic level can be explained by

divergences in the organisations' milieus, goals, interests, culture and values. Such cleavages can be overcome by overlapping memberships which generate mutual commitments and cohesion among organisations within coalitions (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009). With the exception of a handful of social movement activists which were active in Ver.di and other unions such as IG.Metall, the necessary condition of overlapping memberships was missing. Scholars also suggest that the timing of coalition is less a product of dynamics internal to organisation, but of the capacity of leaders to identify and act upon "structuring cues" (Tarrow, 1998) or windows of opportunity for fruitful coalition-building, which can just easily be overlooked (della Porta, 2016). Whereas in some cases local union leaders strategically exploited occasions such as Black Friday to leverage the resources and strategic capabilities of social movements for the purposes of union revitalisation, this has been largely a missed opportunity in the higher echelons of the union.

While Ver.di has exhibited a moderate degree of learning and organizational flexibility, in terms of its capacity to adapt internal organisational processes and renovate repertoires. On one hand, there has been some devolution of power to the local level in terms of granting autonomy to local union leaders for planning strike windows, as well as some innovation in terms of utilising short-timed in-and-out strikes, as well as blockades and protests on the shopfloor at some locations like in Leipzig and Bad Hersfeld. Despite these changes, the predictability of strike timing, and Amazon's capacity to offset the impact of industrial actions through network redundancy significantly tempers their economic impact.

Nevertheless, some union secretaries have expressed disappointment with the general lack of strategic direction, the inefficient distribution of power resources across the logistics network, and the lack of power-structure analysis that might more effectively direct strike power at vulnerable areas of Amazon's operations where stoppages can be most disruptive, as at Delivery Stations. Nevertheless, as indicate above, attempts to organise at these locations have shown some promise over the course of the last year. The union's ability to break out of its path dependency is conditional on its ability to learn from past successes and failures and diffuse knowledge, method and best practices via organisational channels (Ganz, 2000; Lévesque & Murray, 2013). While structures for exchanging information between sites are in place, in the forms of conferences of shop stewards, works councillors and chat groups, some union secretaries have expressed disappointment with the quality of exchange, as concerns methods and materials. Also here, the union might benefit from developing and pooling its network resources and encouraging exchange between union activists across sites, as well as across other companies in the sector in order to avoid re-inventing the wheel, and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and best practices.

# CHAPTER 7: MOBILIZATIONS AGAINST AMAZON IN POLAND

This chapter focuses on the mobilisations against Amazon in Poland. First, it provides a brief summary of the main contentious issues in the dispute between Amazon and the trade unions NSZZ Solidarność and OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza, which the unions have organised their collective actions and claims around. The second section traces the emergence of contestation in Poland to founding events of both trade union organisations, namely the foundation of the first IP works commission in Poznań in 2014, and to the first wildcat industrial action that occurred there in June 2015, as well as the founding of the first Solidarność works commission in Wroclaw that same year. This section also illustrates the tense relations between both union organisations during these first years of the dispute. The third section presents a power-structure analysis of NSZZ Solidarność and describes the power resources and strategic capabilities deployed by the union during its dispute with Amazon. Next, the fourth section presents the power-structure analysis of OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza. The final section of the chapter describes the collective actions which the unions have organised against Amazon through five vignettes: efforts to organise agency workers at Amazon, the 'Safe Package' and 'Stop Feedbacks' campaigns jointly organised by both unions in 2018 and 2019 respectively, the collective dispute between both unions and the company in 2019, the glocal Make Amazon Pay actions in Poland in 2022, and finally, mobilisations against the repression of trade unions, specifically the campaign to reinstate Magda Malinowska.

## Contentious issues at Amazon in Poland

This section identifies the main contentious issues that trade unions have focused on during their collective dispute with Amazon in Poland. The main five issues are: precarious employment conditions, productivity and control over labour, remuneration and the wage-setting process, health and safety, and repression and surveillance.

*1) Precarious employment conditions*

A significant part of the workforce is employed through recruitment agencies on fixed-term contracts which pose a significant barrier to union organising. In 2021, around 18,000 workers were employed directly by Amazon in Poland, while up to 10,000 additional workers were employed through recruitment agencies [PL060]. During the Christmas peak, agency workers account for two-thirds of the workforce, while from January onwards, agency workers are either dismissed or simply do not have their contracts renewed. Agency workers are not eligible for the same benefits as 'blue-badge' Amazon employees and face a number of disadvantages: they do not receive the 'medical care package' or health insurance benefits, they have received lower overtime rates, and have had their holiday time and working hours calculated on a different basis. Polish labour laws stipulate that agency workers can be employed at one plant for 18 months, and in total, workers can only be employed on temporary contracts for two and a half years [PL060]. Generally, workers are employed through agencies for one year before earning promotion, however in the past, agency workers were employed on successive contracts for up to 4 years [PL051]. Union membership across all Amazon logistics sites in Poland amounted to 300 for Solidarność, and 900 for IP (end of 2021), albeit both unions report a very high turnover rate [PL068].

*2) Productivity and control over labour*

Another key issue at Amazon sites in Poland has concerned the intensive monitoring of worker productivity. As in other countries, the output and inactivity of Amazon warehouse workers is constantly recorded, and measured against expected productivity rates. A constant ratcheting effect is built into the algorithm since rates are set on the basis of the performance of the top 90% of workers from the

preceding month.[97] One worker related how the intensification of work was enabled by opaque algorithmic management systems:

> "… this whole system is neither objective nor fair to us workers. I think that at Amazon, the workers have no control over, or specific knowledge of how these algorithms work, how the standards are calculated. What is modern at Amazon are mainly methods for 'turning the screw' for greater efficiency. Here, maybe the foreman is not breathing down my neck, but I am controlled by a wireless scanner connected to the manager's computer via the Internet. In the end, the work is just as tiring as it was a hundred years ago" [PL051].

The physical and psychological stress associated with the monotony and constant surveillance at work leads to a very high turnover rate, which unions report is one of the highest obstacles to organising. Low performance or excessive "time off-task" can lead to disciplinary measures such as negative 'feedbacks', written warnings and dismissal.[98] Management encourages competition between shifts and warehouses, particularly on shopping holidays when workers are encouraged to beat records for the number of packages processed while breaks are cancelled and mandatory overtime is required. Relatedly, break-time has been another point of contention, with workers being reprimanded for taking excessive breaks, related to the long distances between work stations, canteens, toilets and smoking areas. The unions have called for the company to suspend the feedback system indefinitely, IP more insistently than Solidarność.

*3) Remuneration and the wage-setting process*

The unions have criticised their exclusion from wage setting processes, since an external company is commissioned by Amazon to evaluate pay levels and on that basis allow the firm to determine pay rises. In 2021, level 1 workers at Amazon logistics sites in Poland earned 20 zł gross per hour (just above the minimum wage of 18.30zł) [PL060]. Workers have objected to a range of problems relating to remuneration including unpaid wages, incorrect and confusing payslips, the late and incomplete payment of bonuses, the lack of clarity regarding the conditions for winning bonuses, as well as disparities in pay between warehouses in Poland. Indeed, the system of algorithmic control is reinforced by a range of punishments and gamified rewards, in the form of bonuses for attendance and productivity, which are instrumental in recruiting agency workers for peaks like in December 2016, when the company advertised a 2 zł hourly bonus, 1200 zł attendance bonus, and a 600zł bonus paid to employees which recruit seasonal workers [PL047]. Such entitlements may be lost by a range of 'incidents' including lateness, early exit from work, missed overtime, blood donations and first-aid visits [PL048]. Some of these issues, such as disparities in pay between warehouses and unclear payslips have been addressed.

*4) Health and safety*

Health and safety issues have become increasingly salient in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic concern health and safety at work, which the unions have denounced as "profits over health". Already in 2018, even before the outbreaks of Covid-19 in Amazon warehouses, IP denounced limitations on access to personal protective equipment such as gloves, earplugs and safety vests, demanding full and unlimited access, noting that it was "scandalous that the corporation of the richest

[97] Management for refused to share this information with workers and the unions for a long time. Upon inquiring how rates are calculated, workers were told by team leaders that these are "high level mathematics and that we must simply trust" [PL051].

[98] Inactivity in excess of three minutes is registered as time "off-task", however workers have also been reprimanded by supervisors for single minutes of unauthorised break-time. IP has criticised this system noting that 'time-off-task' ignores essential work-related functions that workers perform and punishes workers for circumstances outside of their control (e.g. insufficient or excessive workloads, or equipment malfunctions that cause an individual worker's rate to fall). In 2018, the union noted that it received 236 queries from Amazon in just one day, regarding whether it provides representation to employees which had received feedbacks or filed sick leave requests [PL050].

man in the world was saving on the cost of health and safety in the workplace" [PL050]. Despite advanced technologies applied in the labour process, ultimately Amazon logistics facilities function on the basis of arduous, physical labour, with workers reporting rates of exhaustion and sickness much higher than at comparable companies. The unions note that workplace incidents are often underreported by workers due to pressure from managers [PL051]. The shift system with monthly rotations between day and night shifts has been condemned for increasing risks to employee health, disturbing sleeping rhythms and the organization of private life.

*5) Repression and surveillance*

Both unions have called for inclusion in co-determined decision-making, regarding the organisation of health and safety, working time and scheduling, and most importantly in the system of worker evaluation, and the associated warnings ('time-off task') on the basis of which penalties are handed out. However, the testimonies of workers and union activists show a pattern of hostile anti-union relations, with management ignoring or actively suppressing the voices of workers and unions when work-related problems are signalled. Union members report that even minor requests are ignored by management, which routinely obstructs union activities through a range of methods, including refusing unions the possibility of using the worksite canteen to hold open-hour duties to speak with workers, and by prohibiting the use of cellphones on site. The company has retaliated against union activists and militant workers by reassigning them to different departments, through dismissals, or by simply not extending contracts. In 2017, Amazon contracted the firm Conperio to monitor whether workers were at home during sick leave [PL048].[99] IP has repeatedly denounced the company for manipulating the functioning of workplace institutions, and using them to impede union activity. For instance, management disqualified workers with a high number of feedbacks, and elected members of the Social Fund Commission or the Health and Safety Council from standing for election on the Workers' Forum [PL047; PL048].

Digitalisation meanwhile is a marginal topic for trade unions in Poland, which tend to focus on traditional issues such as wages levels, working conditions and labour code violations (Skóra, 2018). However, trade unions tend to be concerned with the fragmentation of work relationships, the de-standardisation of working conditions, increased flexibility and displacement of human labour by machinery: "In debates in Poland priority has been given to the technical aspects of change, with support for digitalisation, robotisation and innovation largely seen as improving the efficiency and competitiveness of Polish companies. Little attention is paid to how these changes will influence employment opportunities and the labour market." (Skóra, 2018: 467). As such, there is no 'Work 4.0' initiative compared to the comprehensive one discussed in Germany (Rahner & Schönstein, 2018).

## The emergence of contestation against Amazon in Poland

In 2014, the first union commission at Amazon was founded by IP in Poznań and began leafletting and organising petitions around work schedules and productivity. While the company permitted the founding of the union commission, it tried to limit its activity on company premises, ignoring or rejecting all of the demands made until early 2015 (Amazon workers and supporters, 2018: 100). In April, hundreds of workers signed a petition against constantly rising productivity targets. The night shift of June 24-25 2015 was a significant moment in catalysing organising efforts in Poland, but also in forging the first transnational connections between workers in Poland and Germany. The preceding two years were characterised by intense strikes at Amazon facilities in Germany, among

[99] Polish law permits employers to control whether workers are using L4 (sick) leave for unintended purposes such as paid work.

concerns that the company might relocate operations to Poland in order to make use of cheaper labour across the border [PL44]. As German Amazon workers at Bad Hersfeld went on strike, workers in Poznań were informed at a day's notice of mandatory overtime during their nightshift. Polish workers had already suspected the company's capacity to use them to cushion the impact of strikes in Germany. Upon realising that the purpose of the overtime was to process parcels re-routed from German FCs, the Poznań workers initiated a go-slow strike:

> "The slowdown took place mostly in the Pick department. The pickers picked one item from the shelves for each tote instead of the usual twelve or fifteen. Sending the boxes to the Pack department like that made a mess of the conveyor belts; thousands of these mostly empty Amazon totes were falling from the belt, which then brought the Pack and the Ship departments to a standstill." [PL44]

Following this first action, Amazon workers in Poland began to explore the possibilities for resistance and solidarity with German workers, while simultaneously addressing their particular grievances: they condemned the long working hours, the monotony and repetitiveness of the work, constant monitoring and surveillance, and the lack of a Christmas bonus during the previous year's 'peak' [PL045]. Some workers called for the option to voluntarily change departments in accordance with their physical capabilities and declared that they deserved "better treatment than to be threatened with reprimands and admonishments, feedbacks and dismissals" [PL046].

Following the first series of industrial actions, several workers who participated were fired or suspended, some signing voluntary termination agreements. Many of these cases were contested by IP in labour courts. This and other wildcat actions that followed have nevertheless illustrated that despite legal limitations to striking in Poland, workers managed to organise a slowdown, and put pressure on management by disrupting the shipping process. This was possible not least due to their collective determination to resist strike-breaking practices in solidarity with colleagues in Germany, but also by virtue of the workers' own intimate knowledge of the labour process. An IP leader reflected on the strike some years later:

> "It didn't take hundreds of people. It was really clever to recognize that the Pick department is a choke point. Some people say that the Dock or Ship departments are the choke points in the warehouse since, when you do a labor action in the Ship department, you block trucks from leaving. But this was in Pick. Pick is where they send people who join Amazon on short-term contracts from temp agencies because they can train a picker in a few hours. That's what was unique in this action, that these workers who don't have special training—they weren't, you know, forklift drivers—understood how to shut down a warehouse. So it was amazing, this popular wisdom. It showed us that we don't need a labor sociologist to tell us 'do it this way' and that we don't have to limit ourselves to the restrictive legal frames of labor and union law." [PL044]

After the first actions, in June 2015 IP initiated a bargaining process with the company, presenting a platform of demands. These consisted of a 20-25% increase in the base wage to 16zł, additional benefits, and reforms to the calculation of break-times, particularly given long walking distances between canteens and work stations. As the union reflected,

> "Our experience shows that dialogue with Amazon is a sham. Amazon will always say - as it has been saying to striking Germans for years - that the voice of the worker is being listened to, and that strikes will not change anything… Workers in Germany say the opposite: that things only started to improve when they went on strike. It will be the same with us: Amazon will never officially admit that we have won anything, but we know that only our strength and collective determination will force the company to make concessions." [PL046].

In August, forklift drivers in Dock and Ship at Wrocław WRO2 submitted a petition demanding TR2 (level 2 pay, slightly above pickers and packers, but below team leaders), noting the heightened expectations and hazards of the role. The petition was shared and signed by 50 Dock and Ship workers in Poznań, who additionally demanded an increase in the hourly wage and the introduction of a seniority bonus. As relatively secure blue-badges, Ship workers generally report less pressure over rates than other

departments, given strict requirements to adhere to health and safety procedures. They criticised the unfair distribution of bonuses noting that during the Christmas peak, forklift drivers in Wrocław were the only ones to receive a 11zł bonus. The petition was ignored and management commented that forklift drivers should be happy to be 'on task' in roles without any productivity targets [PL046]. In July of 2018, a similar revolt occurred at the Ship department in Poznań when 55 forklift drivers and yard-marshals, responsible for loading goods onto trucks, refused work and turned in their identification badges over the lack of a Prime Day bonus, new disciplinary measures for health and safety violations, and ongoing problems like understaffing, increased workloads. One Ship worker explained the action in the context of the routine practice of assigning blame to workers and threatening them with penalties:

> "In fact, the point of the whole story is that management knows very well that without breaking the rules, we would not work so fast. So it allows rules to be broken, it just wants to shift the responsibility onto the workers and to punish us for it… Amazon just wants to protect itself so that if something happens, they will have somebody to blame… We had to stamp our feet to make them notice us, because normally nobody listens to us. All that matters are the rates and numbers" [PL050].

Following the action, management admitted the importance of the department and the excessive severity of the proposed penalties, rescinded the proposed policy and appointed additional yard-marshals to each shift [PL050].

In the first months of 2016 IP began a recruitment drive, and organised the first strike referendum in the summer, to gauge whether workers would support a strike. Over 2,000 Amazon and agency workers participated, with 97% voting in favour of a strike, however this amounted to 30% of the workforce, short of the majority threshold necessary for a successful vote (Amazon workers and supporters, 2018: 101). The union noted that while the referendum did not pass, it was nevertheless successful in building organising momentum and in sending a warning signal to management [PL047].

### *Conflict or cooperation? Two different approaches to industrial action*

Solidarność and Inicjatywa Pracownicza are distinguished by different political ideologies and industrial relations strategies, with the former preferring social partnership and dialogue with the employer, whereas the later has favoured a more militant, confrontational approach. Despite these differences, relations between the unions gradually become less competitive, and the unions began to cooperate in the context of the dispute with Amazon, and organised joint actions such as the Safe Package campaign, and later participated together in a collective dispute against Amazon, collaborating in negotiating with management, giving interviews with media and organising a strike ballot.

During the first year of its activities at Amazon, the former chairman of Solidarność's Amazon commission related that while both trade unions had attempted to minimise rivalry, a legal strike would be very difficult to carry out, that Solidarność was opposed to leveraging strike threats in its negotiations with management, noting that illegal actions could result in employee dismissals:

> "We have similar demands but different processes, similar goals but different methods of achieving them" (Owczarek & Chełstowska, 2016: 74)

The Solidarność leader emphasized the union's preference for social dialogue, and differences in the approaches of the two unions in a public statement on collective actions undertaken by IP in 2015 at another electronics company:

> "We are closely following media reports on the activities of OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza at Amazon Fulfillment Poland in Sady near Poznań. We consider many of the demands to be right. However, the methods of action, the confrontational attitude arouse our doubts. The threat of a strike, at this stage of union work, is not the only reasonable solution. Our concern is heightened by the experience of the strike that the OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza organised at the Chung Hong plant. Unfortunately, the media coverage of the action took precedence over the welfare of the workers. The issue was widely publicised

and became a kind of propaganda. The causal effect was short-term and applause-oriented, with several workers losing their jobs. We cannot put our colleagues at risk of losing their jobs and of reprisals from the employer. The aim of NSZZ Solidarność at Amazon is to improve the working conditions and pay of employees. This is long, arduous work, and above all in accordance with the letter of the law. Management and the trade union should work together on a partnership basis trying to improve the functioning of the workplace and strengthen the bonds between employees and the company, in a spirit of mutual respect. That is why we are in favour of dialogue and hard bargaining, as this is what brings a tangible, long-term effect. Nevertheless, we consider many of the demands put forward by Inicjatywa Pracownicza to be both appropriate and important in our workplace. We are concerned however, by the methods of their implementation, the haste in making decisions, the deliberately confrontational behaviour towards the employer, and actions verging on illegality. Let us benefit from the knowledge and experience of our colleagues from the European trade union centres operating at Amazon. Our priorities are: building solidarity among workers, gaining public trust, creating union strength and unity, fighting for decent wages and safe and friendly working conditions. This is why we have planned our activities for the long term." [PL079]

IP replied to the statement a few days later, emphasizing the futility of pursuing social dialogue with an aggressively anti-union employer such as Amazon:

> "Inicjatywa Pracownicza and Solidarność are different. We define the relations between workers and business owners in a different way, and as a result we have different practices. First and foremost, we argue that workers need to build strength in opposition to employers, which reap profits by paying low wages, extending working hours to the limit and constantly raising [productivity] standards. We feel this on our skin at Amazon. Seeking 'social dialogue' by force in the face of the bosses' ruthlessness is naïve. The company makes huge earnings while we barely earn above the minimum wage. Amazon has shown more than once that it is not interested in improving working conditions, does not have any regard for unions in other countries, and avoids collective bargaining. In the UK it has become famous for breaking unions, hiring specialist firms to do so. In Germany, it carried out a 'wage review' for six years, which did nothing to increase wages. Change only came when workers dared to fight for their own. Wages started to rise after strike actions. If Solidarność wants to learn from the experience of its colleagues abroad, who have been on strike for dozens of days in various distribution centres over the past two years, we find it incomprehensible that it wants to follow a path that did not work there." (Owczarek & Chelstowska, 2016: 81-82)

Indeed, Solidarność's first attempts at engaging management in negotiations after founding a works commission in Wroclaw illustrated the sincerity of the openness to dialogue that the company publically maintained. Management rejected the option of meeting with union representatives either on company or union premises, though a meeting eventually took place at hotel in Wroclaw on 26th October 2015. The union signalled that it wanted to discuss discrepancies in remuneration, the principles of cooperation between itself and the employer on matters pertaining to working conditions, and the future conduct of trade union activities on work premises [PL080]. As the Solidarność representatives reflected after the meeting:

> "We got the impression that Amazon's representatives do not treat our organisation as partners. We have repeatedly stressed our readiness to enter into dialogue and work out joint solutions. In return, we were met with a dismissive attitude and hiding behind internal, secret procedures which the employees were unaware of. Despite the fact that, according to the Constitution and the law, the only institution entitled to represent the rights and interests of workers is the trade union, we were compared to a football team founded by Amazon. In our opinion, yesterday's meeting is proof that the Polish Amazon authorities are simulating dialogue, that there is no will to cooperate, that many of the solutions they are proposing are contrary to Polish law and bear the hallmarks of obstructing trade union activity. We are concerned about this state of affairs. We do not accept such treatment." [PL080]

Accordingly, a month later, Solidarność organised a demonstration outside an FC in Wroclaw, with around 30 people participating. In addition to the claims submitted earlier, demands included

improved working conditions, the reduction of productivity standards, equalizing salaries between Germany and Poland and better meals from the company canteen [PL081].

## NSZZ Solidarność: Organization, resources and strategic capabilities

This section analyses the union capacity of Solidarność in the context of its industrial dispute with Amazon in Poland. First, I address the types of *power resources* the union has as its disposal, namely: internal solidarity, network embeddedness, infrastructural resources and narrative resources. Next I discuss the union's *strategic capabilities*: intermediating between contending interests, framing, articulating actions over time and space, and learning.

**Table 3.** NSZZ Solidarność union capacity: Power resources and strategic capabilities.

| NSZZ Solidarność Union Capacity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Power resources | | Strategic capabilities | |
| *Internal solidarity* | Low level of collective cohesion;<br>Weak deliberative vitality | *Intermediation* | Moderate intermediation capabilities given underdeveloped structures of internal representation, mechanisms for deliberative vitality and infrastructural resources;<br>Mitigated rivalries and ensured basic level of understanding with competing union. |
| *Network embeddedness* | Low level of network diversity;<br>moderate network density | *Framing* | Reliance on traditional narrative frames and limited ability to adjust frames in order to encompass claims beyond sphere of labour, and to engage new constituencies |
| *Infrastructural resources* | Organisational policies and resources to engage and support members are weakly developed | *Articulation* | Some attempts to link collective actions across multiple scales of action; however limited by underdeveloped mechanisms for deliberative vitality and channels for communication with membership |
| *Narrative resources* | Traditional discourse focusing on regulating work via social partnership strategies; | *Learning* | Little evidence of union revitalisation; but indication of limited attempts to readjust strategic direction |

## Power Resources

*Internal solidarity*

The first Solidarność interim union commission at Amazon was founded in Wrocław on the 11th January 2015, two months after the opening of the FCs WRO1 and WRO2 which governs activities across all Amazon sites in Poland. In late 2015, Solidarność registered a membership of 120 across the two sites in Wrocław, while in early 2019 that figure had grown to 300. The interim commission selected delegates, while elections were being prepared. As the interim commission was electing delegates, the General Manager met the assembled workers to remind them that "this is an Amazon worksite" and proceeded to call the police to disperse the assembly, however this was prevented by a lawyer which the regional board of Solidarność had sent to intervene (Owczarek & Chełstowska, 2016: 72). As related by the former chairman, the interim commission had chosen delegates which were rather ineffective in fulfilling their function and in managing the expectations of the workers:

> "Those people who were elected, we were not really satisfied with the way they were functioning there, because they promised the employees things. That they would get some pay rise if they signed up, they guaranteed a 1 zł pay rise if they signed up to the organisation. And there were problems. These people didn't come to work, it didn't look good and people were unhappy about it." [INT13]

The single Solidarność commission has struggled to administer union activities across all distribution centres in Poland and has sought to establish union structures elsewhere. However, the union reported challenges in terms of finding workers at other sites who were willing and capable of acting as union representatives, made more difficult by the fact that a significant proportion of workforces at newly established sites were employed on fixed-term contracts.

> "There is one commission at the moment, and we are currently gathering people who would like to establish branch commissions [*Komisje Oddziałowe*] in each warehouse. It is difficult for us, and we need people inside… the problem is finding the right people. And the second problem is that there are people at some of these newly opened warehouses who do not have a permanent employment contract there… if these people were elected, there is a very high probability that their contracts would not be renewed… they will have their contracts extended in July this year, so we have to wait a little longer." [INT13]

In February 2022, a new Solidarność commission was established in Poznań, which entailed a change in the leadership. The commission has focused on improving working conditions by pushing for its inclusion as a social partner in the wage-setting process. By the end of the year, the union increased its membership across Amazon sites to over 500.

*Network embeddedness*

Solidarność exhibits a moderate level of network embeddedness which it has exploited in order to leverage the resources of other actors for mobilisation purposes. It is vertically affiliated with the global union federation, UNI Global and participates regularly in the UNI Amazon Alliance, where it benefits from exchange with other partner unions regarding information about actions coordinated in other countries, as well as regarding differences in working conditions, remuneration and benefits. Solidarność received some financial support from UNI Global for local organising projects. While Solidarność is not formally part of the AWI network, its collaboration with IP on the Stop Feedbacks campaign contributed to its participation in an AWI conference in Poznań during 15th-17th March, 2019, as well as in a demonstration outside the offices of the recruitment agency Adecco during the conference. However, this involvement was exceptional, and the union has since not participated in AWI meetings. Solidarność delegations have travelled to Amazon sites in Germany such as Bad Hersfeld and supported colleagues during strikes, and also a participated in the demonstration in Berlin in 2018 on the occasion of Jeff Bezos' visit to receive an award from the Axel Springer media group. Such gestures of solidarity have been reciprocated by Ver.di, which sent a delegation of workers to support a demonstration outside the FC in Wrocław in 2015, providing opportunities for deepening connections between worksites, and for

informal socialisation, for instance in the form of a friendly football tournament between workers from Poland and Germany. Horizontally, the Solidarność works commission at Amazon competes with Inicjatywa Pracownicza as regards membership. As this chapter describes however, successive interactions between the two unions have softened rivalries between the two unions, and have led to cooperation on certain initiatives.

The diversity of Solidarność's network is rather homogenous, given that it has not cooperated with NGOs, community groups or social movement organisations in the context of the dispute with Amazon. As such it has largely not exploited the coalitional resources that might be available to it by developing networks outside the sphere of industrial relations. The union's relations have been limited to partnerships with institutional actors such as the Health and Safety Commission, the National Labour Inspectorate, the Sanitation Inspectorate and the Office of Construction Supervision. In 2019, union leaders suggested that the pressure from these actors was useful for strengthening their bargaining position vis-à-vis management:

> "During the last year we informed every possible institution, and Amazon was constantly monitored, and probably for this reason they came to the table to speak with us, because it created enormous problems for them." [INT13]

On the other hand, while these institutional channels have helped to mount some pressure on management to negotiate with the unions, trivial monetary fines and the company's tactic of challenging controls via a sluggish judicial system have meant that these avenues have not always been effective in deterring labour law violations or retaliatory dismissals:

> "The worst thing is that sometimes there is such powerlessness. Because the inspectors make a decision, and Amazon goes to court with it. And they try to undermine everything. If they don't like something, they go to court. They challenge the decision of the Chief Labour Inspector, and they go to court. Eventually, they lose these cases but then they appeal again. And all this takes time." [INT13]

While regional public institutions went to great lengths to facilitate the establishment of Amazon facilities in Poland, going as far as to assist in recruiting workers, their relations with Solidarność in contrast have been frosty as related by the former chairman of the commission:

> "These institutions do not want to have much to do with us, because for them, as far as I can see, the most important thing is financial interest. And they have an interest in cooperating. When the company first started, unemployment was much higher in Poland, and we also had a completely different government. And if something was American, everything was accepted, because it is always great and wonderful. And there were some big concessions made for them to come here and settle." [INT13]

*Infrastructural Resources*

In accordance with trade union law, members of Solidarnośc are entitled to financial support in certain situations. The union pays a basic statutory allowance in the cases of childbirth, the adoption of a child, the death of a member of the union, and the death of a family member [PL082]. The union also offers registered members free legal advice in matters of labour law and social security, as well as legal assistance and intervention in conflicts with the employer. Additionally, Solidarnośc has utilised the institutional opportunities available in the Polish context to establish Social Labour Inspectors (SIPs), which support workers by monitoring working conditions independently of the employer. Solidarnośc relates that in 2022, it managed to influence the changing of rules relating to granting benefits from the company Social Benefits Fund (*Zakładowy Fundusz Świadczeń Socjalnych*).

Digital communication tools constitute a significant resource for trade union renewal, allowing trade organisations to interact with existing and potential members as well as other broader audiences beyond the labour movement (Carneiro & Costa, 2022). Flyers, brochures and newsletters, in print or electronic form provide workers with conceptual tools for interpreting workplace issues and can be critical for helping to mobilise sentiments for collective action. In contrast to IP which has utilised a wide

range of media in its organizing activities, Solidarnośc has largely not developed these resources or exploited their full potential in order promote engagement among existing members, or to strengthen its legitimacy among non-members and other audiences. For example, while the union maintains a Facebook page for Solidarnośc members at Amazon, communications tend to be one-directional and engagement rather low.

*Narrative Resources*

Since the start of the campaign, Solidarność has followed a strategy of social partnership premised on attempts to establish good relations with management. As the chairman of the Regional Board in Lower Silesia commented as the first interim commission at Amazon was established:

> "The trade union is to be a platform for dialogue with the employer. We count on good cooperation in employee matters" [PL078]

The former chair of the Solidarność commission related that while he had a good personal relationship with the General Manager of the Wrocław FCs, he perceived the decision-making capacity of managers even in such senior positions to be rather limited:

> "From my point of view, it seems that these people who are general managers or HR bosses have little say. That is, all decisions are made not even in Luxembourg but in the United States … even if he wanted to [cooperate with us], he had no top-down approval, and his hands were tied". [INT13]

During demonstrations, Solidarność members relied on diagnostic frames which emphasized the alienation of workers within Amazon's labour process similar to those which were employed by unions involved in disputes in other countries, such as "We are humans not robots" [PL081].

## Strategic Capabilities

*Intermediating between contending interests.*

Intermediating capabilities refer to the union's capacity to mediate among contending interests within and outside the union, as well as its capacity to foster collaborative action by developing an ongoing dialogue between union members regarding union objectives and means, as well by building consensus in terms of leadership style and accountability (Lévesque & Murray, 2013: 780). The former chair of the Solidarność commission related that many conflicts never reach the union and that workers tended to approach the union for assistance only once they already have a problem on their hands. This was explained by reference to the manner in which management routinely makes it difficult for workers to approach the union, or for the union to conduct its activities on worksites, for instance, by refusing the union permission to use the worksite canteens for union duties:

> "The problem is that we have a huge turnover in employees. These are people who commute from very far away, and we have difficulties in establishing contact with these workers. They arrive by bus after a two-hour drive, so don't even have ways of meeting them. Union sign-ups usually take place during break-times, when somebody knows somebody, then they approach us and so forth. However, this is exactly the difficulty in other warehouses, and that's why need commissions in every warehouse. Because people sign-up when they recognise somebody they trust, and then there's a possibility to talk and pass on the knowledge of the benefits of being part of a union. But I don't really know what the reason is. On the internet for example, there are all kinds of opinions about trade unions, that they're a bunch of fat guys with moustaches who do nothing but take people's money and share it among themselves. But people simply don't have much knowledge about this topic. Usually [workers] approach us when they already

have a problem, or, for example, when their contract has already been terminated by mutual agreement[100], and ask if something else can be done for them, or if they already have a knife at their throat and they need a lawyer or something like that." [INT13]

Indeed, in a context of hostile management strategies that preclude union activity on site, it is difficult to develop a dialogue among workers regarding the purpose and role of trade unions, particularly when no structures of representation have been established at worksites. However, such difficulties are not insurmountable, as demonstrated by IP's experience, which has mobilised its infrastructural resources such as the workers' newspapers in order to inform workers about their legal rights and entitlements, and to repeatedly advise workers against being pressured into signing mutual agreements for termination. Whereas Solidarność leaders could have promoted internal debates among workers by use of such mechanisms, weakly developed internal mechanisms for deliberation, and infrastructural resources mean that intermediation capabilities were also not very strongly developed.

Relations between Solidarność and IP have been historically characterised by competition, in terms of both member recruitment and the capacity of organisations to influence debates, set the agenda and assume the role of an opinion leader. While relations between unions were initially tense, they have managed to mitigate rivalries in the context of the dispute with Amazon, which might be attributed to the inability of Solidarność to establish dialogue with management, and the stagnant growth of its membership and structures of interest representation in workplaces.

*Framing*

In the earlier phases of the dispute with Amazon, Solidarność focused on criticising working conditions, management's obstruction of union activities and its dismissive attitude towards unions. Nevertheless, the union insisted on establish social dialogue with an employer which clearly rejected unions as a partner in employment relations. Indeed, during its first demonstration outside the worksites in Wrocław during 2015, union representatives relied primarily on frame amplification practices which have consisted of reinforcing and clarifying its core principles and request for meaningful negotiation with the employer, relating to the press that "we want dialogue, not posturing and PR" [PL081]. However, the fruitlessness of initial attempts to establish dialogue with management, and a pattern of successive interactions with IP as well as other unions in the UNI Amazon Alliance may have contributed to Solidarność's adoption of a more confrontational position. Indeed, this is evident in the joint organisation of the Safe Package and Stop Feedbacks campaigns together with IP.

Despite this, Solidarność has largely not been capable of expanding its stock of interpretive frames in order to emphasize Amazon's broader impact on workplaces and communities, for instance its avoidance of taxation and its destructive impact on the environment. In this sense, the union has largely not managed to transform its framing capabilities in order to produce a more inclusive agenda that is part of a broader social project, or to portray its activities as beneficial to different groups of potential supporters. Indeed, this is related to underdeveloped infrastructural resources and mechanisms of deliberative vitality within the union. By comparison, whereas IP has actively utilised these resources in terms of providing workers a broad range of conceptual tools in order to interpret key issues affecting them, Solidarność's framing capabilities in this respect have been largely underdeveloped.

*Articulating actions over time and space*

As an affiliate of UNI Global, Solidarność regularly participates in the international conferences of the UNI Amazon Alliance. Solidarność has utilised these interactions in order to exchange information with partner unions regarding collective actions and campaigns that it has undertaken in Poland, as well

[100] This refers to the practice whereby workers are pressured by management to sign an agreement consenting to the termination of the contract ("rozwiązanie umowy za porozumieniem stron").

as to compare differences in working conditions, levels of pay and additional benefits and bonuses offered. While this has been useful in terms of informing other unions in the network of the challenges faced by trade unions in Poland, for instance regarding the barriers to participating in the international movement in the form of restrictive strike laws, Solidarność appears to have been less proactive in terms of articulating the benefits of transnational cooperation among its members or among non-unionised workers, and to connect this to its activities on the local and national levels. This is also related to weakly developed mechanisms for deliberation within the union, as well as the under-utilisation of digital and print communication tools to disseminate knowledge among members.

*Learning*

While Solidarność has not employed confrontational, wildcat forms of actions such as those employed by IP, it nevertheless participated in international days of action coordinated by the UNI Amazon Alliance, and encouraged workers to use their sick-leave in order to donate blood. As indicated above, while the union initially followed a strategy of social partnership, it has demonstrated an attempt to recognise the limitations of employing such an approach vis-à-vis an employer which has little interest in negotiating with trade unions, and as such began to cooperate more closely with its former rival union. Further, while Solidarność leaders initially rejected the idea of a strike as unrealistic, more recently they have participated in a strike referendum, indicating a moderate degree of organizational learning.

## OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza: Organization, resources and strategic capabilities

This section analyses the union capacity of OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza in the context of its industrial dispute with Amazon in Poland. First, I address the types of *power resources* the union has as its disposal, namely: internal solidarity, network embeddedness, infrastructural resources and narrative resources. Next I discuss the union's *strategic capabilities*: intermediating between contending interests, framing, articulating actions over time and space, and learning.

**Table 4.** Inicjatywa Pracownicza union capacity: Power resources and strategic capabilities.

| OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza Union Capacity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Power resources | | Strategic capabilities | |
| *Internal solidarity* | Uneven degree of collective cohesion across sites;<br>strong deliberative vitality | *Intermediation* | Strong capacity to foster cooperation and exchange between union members and external allies; leaders are proactive in facilitating participation among rank-and-file;<br>Mitigated rivalries and ensured basic level of understanding with competing union. |
| *Network embeddedness* | High network diversity;<br>High network density | *Framing* | Continuous reframing of challenges;<br>Ability to shift frames and expand the stakes of the conflict beyond labour sphere & encompass claims/interests of new constituencies<br>Motivational frames give sense of agency and efficacy to collective organising |
| *Infrastructural resources* | High levels of material and human resources;<br>strongly developed organisational policies and processes to engage and support members | *Articulation* | Proactive articulation practices that link collective actions across multiple scales of action & leverage external linkages with network partners |
| *Narrative resources* | Wide stock of interpretive frames (do not only rely on traditional frames);<br>Militant discourse<br>Emphasize direct participation and voice via institutional and non-institutional channels | *Learning* | Purposive strategic leadership based on engaging rank-and-file through strongly developed deliberative processes;<br>Strong capability to diffuse learning and knowledge via organizational channels |

## Power Resources

*Internal solidarity*

The degree of collective cohesion developed by IP among Amazon workers in Poland is very high among certain sites such as Poznań, where the first workplace commission of IP was founded in December 2014. At the same time, the union has not managed to established works commissions among other sites, and as such, the degree of internal solidarity is rather uneven when all facilities across the country are considered. As of 2021, IP had shop stewards at FCs in Poznań, Wrocław (2 FCs) and Katowice (2 FCs), meaning that some form of union representation was established at 5 of 11 FCs in Poland where 30,000 workers are employed. The union reports 23 works council members across Amazon worksites in Poland, and in 2021 reported 900 members, a figure which includes workers employed directly by Amazon as well as by external recruitment agencies [PL068]. Particularly at Poznań, there are close-knit networks among workers, and an established history of militancy dating back to the first actions in 2015.

IP's approach to industrial relations differs significantly in many respects to the large trade union organisations which have dominated in Poland since 1989. As such the union rejects the pursuit of social dialogue for its own sake, and emphasizes direct democratic principles, the empowerment of rank-and-file members and collective solidarity as means for defending workers' rights [PL045].

> "Our movement is also a reaction to the corrupting and extreme politicization of trade unions. We must reject the necessity of leaders - too often they have betrayed the cause they initially fought for. We are for grassroots, direct democracy as a form of organizing for the labor protest movement. The goal of Inicjatywa Pracownicza is not to lead the workers' struggle, but only to mobilize workers to fight independently to improve their living conditions and free themselves from the oppression of any authority." (IP, n.d.)

IP draws on an active concept of union membership as direct participation, which establishes a "system of expectations and accomplishments" between union members and the organisation: concessions and improvements in work conditions are framed as products of collective mobilisation, evoking feelings of efficacy about direct participation, while motivating workers to be actively involved in the life of the union. The union fosters deliberative vitality within the organisation through transparent leadership practices that renounce "bureaucracy and the employment of 'full-time activists'", and actively focus on informing and fostering debates among rank-and-file members on current issues via its print and digital communications strategies. As opposed to the iron law of oligarchy, this more closely resembles the "virtuous circle" of transparent strategic leadership which involves rank-and-file participation in debates and decisions: more informed and engaged members display a willingness to act, enhancing the union's effectiveness, in turn providing the organisational capacities and leadership confidence that facilitate participation and transparency (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020: 260).

Nevertheless, union activists observe the difficulties of build collective cohesion at worksites with very high turnover, associated with a high number of resignations and dismissals or non-extension of contracts. Shop stewards relate that many workers inquire about the most beneficial way of quitting the job, but that many former Amazon workers are employed at other firms in the logistics sector, maintain their connections with the union and continue to be involved in organising against Amazon, or in other contexts. As one shop steward related, "wronged workers that are fired do not just disappear, but return to give management a hard time" [PL005]. Another shop steward related:

> "In my union, there are 1,000 members right now, but because of the high turnover, people come and go, so actually we have had three times more who have gone through this experience of doing things together. So we don't see this is as a defeat that these 4,000 who went through our ranks are gone. We say in touch – some are now truck drivers, work in delivery sectors or work in other factories. They call us for advice and, in this is the way we are networking with other people from other workplaces." [GLO046]

An IP leader reflected how a focus on building direct connections among workers and organising collectively helps to overcome the isolation that is a by-product of the labour process at Amazon. This process of solidarity building was also connected with the sense of dignity regarding one's work, and the confidence resulting from mutual support:

> "Actually organising with our colleagues helps us to survive the reality of our work. Because the company wants you to work on your individual productivity, to not talk to other workers, to just focus on work and work only. We don't want to be treated like this because we are human beings. We have the right to, for example, talk to our colleagues at work: we are not robots – this is of course the age old slogan of the labour movement at Amazon. We are not robots, but we are also not slaves. Workers don't like to be called this. There's a patronising approach in the mainstream media, when they present say that it's 'digital slavery', 'it's like algorithmic hell'. You know, all these descriptions that are quite 'sexy' for the media, but they don't appeal to workers because us workers have our dignity and we don't want to be called slaves. Because if you call yourself a slave, it actually cuts you from the perspective that you can organise and fight for improvements. So we would rather focus on making connections. Organising within the warehouse is all about making connections with others, to break this isolation and just to think together about what we can do about it. And actually that makes our ten hour shift survivable. Because if you don't want to be another algorithm or appendix to the algorithm, and if you're a human being, then you have to find your community, your group, that when then manager is coming to you for 'one-on-one' talks – they love these one-on-one talks – and we say, no, we are not one-on-one. We have our friend who is a picker working next to us, or we have a shop steward from the union who can come. You can just share your story that you're not alone." [GLO046]

The IP activist also articulated the significance of the dispute at Amazon, and its spill-over effects beyond the particular case:

> "Talking amongst colleagues, a lot of us have worked in smaller warehouses or factories, and the conditions were even worse. They say we have to stay here, not quit and look for alternatives. We have a saying in Polish: 'You can, from a little rain, end up under the drainpipe' [English equivalent: 'Out of the frying pan and into the fire']. The idea is that it's better to stay here in the hope that, because Amazon is so big and so influential, the important struggle for the improvement of the conditions of all workers can be achieved across the board. There are a few more companies that actually try to set up conditions in the whole sector. So if we are there and we want to learn how they discipline workers, what kind of kind of tools they use, how to implement these improvements… we should also understand what is happening in the whole sector. So it's not some kind of liberal approach of 'If you don't like it, find a better place'. Some of my colleagues worked in 15 workplaces like this. There are millions of us in Poland working in these kinds of conditions. I believe that a challenge for labour movements and for us as labour activists is not to look for individual solutions, individual careers, but to go back to these places, even find a job if you can for a short time. It's good to read about how capitalism is working, it's really good to know the theory, but it's really a life-changing experience if you go into factories, if you go to work in these warehouses and try for yourself to break this isolation, alienation. You can read about this in very important books, but you really have to experience this and take this challenge of changing the world, to fight capitalist exploitation for real." [GLO046]

*Network embeddedness*

IP's firm network embeddedness provides the union with a significant potential to leverage the resources of other actors to support its organisational activities at Amazon worksites in Poland. Vertically, the union is affiliated with the Amazon Workers International network. While the AWI is much smaller and less-strongly resourced network than the UNI Amazon Alliance, networking between unions on this axis is very dense, given the thickness of contacts between affiliated unions, and the regularity of meetings. The network has been invaluable for workers in terms of exchanging information regarding differences in work conditions, remuneration, benefits, relations between unions and management, as well as ways in which workers have managed to contest managerial control. AWI meetings have also been invaluable in terms of providing opportunities to deepen contact between unions in different countries, and to plan and carry out joint collective actions. For example, an AWI meeting in Poznań in

2019 was combined with a protest outside the offices of the recruitment agency Adecco. On April 24th 2018, a delegation from IP travelled to Berlin to attend a demonstration during Jeff Bezos's visit to receive the Axel Springer Prize for "visionary entrepreneurship in the internet economy". During the demonstration, IP activists described working conditions in Polish warehouses, and read out 'negative feedbacks for Bezos' written by Polish Amazon workers.[101]

On one hand, like Solidarność, IP has remarked on the utility of interactions with institutional actors in order to put pressure on management to adhere to health and safety standards, for instance controls by the Occupational Safety and Health Commissions (BHP) and the National Labour Inspectorate, which calculated workers' energy expenditure at logistics facilities [PL067]. However, IP's networks are highly heterogeneous given that the organisation is not only linked with union structures and state institutions, but has deep roots in progressive social movements and in the tradition of anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism, meaning that the union's socio-cultural membership base, organizational culture and values overlap more closely with local social movements, than Ver.di or Solidarność for instance. Union activists have also engaged with broader social issues outside workplaces, and have participated in the tenants' movement, as well as in the 2020-1 Women's Strike which mobilised against the restriction of abortion laws in Poland. The union also collaborated with the Polish artist Tytus Szabelski's multimedia exhibition *AMZN* which sought to shed light on the working conditions, specific corporate culture, and vision of the future articulated by the company.[102] Drawing on photographs and IP union leaflets, the exhibition presented a narrative of workers' struggle and mutual solidarity in the context of growing automation.

*Infrastructural Resources*

IP demonstrates a strong capability to utilise the range of human and material resources at its disposal in order to support workers at Amazon and to facilitate their engagement in union activities. This include a mix traditional and less conventional resources for engaging members. The union finances its activities through the collection of member fees, and by accepting donations, inheritances, grants and other statutory activities [PL083]. The union organizes training workshops for workplace organising, which are critical for building competence and disseminating knowledge about organising practices in the organisation. It also provides legal representation for employees in the cases of disciplinary actions or unlawful dismissals. For instance, the union had successful defended an employee in the Labour Court that was dismissed after participating in the first wildcat action in 2015. During the second strike referendum, IP opened a strike fund to "help cover the costs of organizing a strike service, i.e. printing posters, banners, leaflets, transport between warehouses throughout Poland, and for financial support for employees in the event of a strike" [PL052]. The union has organised elections for Social Work Inspectors (SIP), workers who are elected for four years, with the aim of ensuring that the company provides safe and healthy working conditions and protects employees' rights. Inspectors investigate working conditions, the causes of accidents at work, record irregularities which the employer is obliged to respond to, and to monitor the employer's use of preventive measures. In case of immediate danger, the SIP may request managers to address the issue or, in the case of failure to take action, issue a recommendation to stop the operation of technical equipment while alerting the union. The union impresses on workers that SIPs are one among many instruments that workers should make use of in order to protect their rights and ensure their safety at work, encouraging them to report any problems that arise on the shopfloor.

[101] Slogans during this protest included "Make Amazon Pay", "No awards for exploitation", "Without a fight don't count for a better life", and adaptations of Amazon's motto "Work hard, have fun, make history": "Strike, have fun, sign the collective agreement", and "strike, have fun, send capitalism to the dustbin of history" [PL050].

[102] See https://www.tytusszabelski.com/AMZN and http://amzn.vnlab.org/en/o-projekcie

IP has also participated in the Social Fund Commission in order to extend workers benefits to additional resources from the Company Social Benefits Fund which employees may apply to in order to receive childbirth benefits, subscriptions for sports and recreation, and acute financial support in difficult circumstances, such as long-term illness affecting workers or family member requiring sick leave, surgery or rehabilitation [PL068]. Workers may receive grants of up to 2280 zł annually (usually around 300-1000 zł) [PL047]. Decisions about the distribution of benefits from the Fund are made by a Commission composed of three employer representatives, and one from each of the two trade unions.[103] [PL068]. The union offers workers advice on how to apply for grants from the fund and offers support in writing applications.

An essential resource which has facilitated this diffusion of knowledge is its biannual Amazon workers' newspaper, 'The Crew's Voice' (*Głos Załogi*) which publishes news relating to Amazon across the country, and closes the geographic and informational distance between worksites. The newspaper was created to amplify the voices of workers, to inform different categories of workers of their rights and entitlements, to provide legal and professional advice, to educate workers about workplace institutions, and ultimately, to direct collective action in order to address work-related problems. The newspaper provides the names and photographs of union representatives across different worksites, assisting in directing workers to the union. For instance, the 'Legal ABCs' section provides practical advice for: pregnant employees and expecting parents; handling disciplinary actions such as feedbacks; problems with security personnel; recourse to sick pay not being fully paid-out; miscalculated payslips; guidance regarding documenting and signing post-accident protocols. Employees are invited to contact the union for assistance with filing legal appeals against reprimands by management [PL046]. Additionally, IP has demonstrated a strong capacity to utilise digital communication tools in order to engage members, potential members, as well as broader audiences outside the sphere of labour relations. Content in the form of texts, images and video is regularly published via the union's website as well as its social media channels. These range from descriptive information regarding the union's activities, statements of solidarity for other actions and causes, content celebrating achievements or commemorating important dates, as well as calls of action intending to mobilise audiences.

*Narrative Resources*

IP was founded in the early 2000's by workers at the Cegielski factory in Poznań which were disillusioned with the dominant tradition of trade unionism in Poland. As an IP leader reflected in 2020, the re-recomposition of labour following the neoliberal transition, and Poland's particular position at the interface of Eastern and Western Europe contributed to the union's identification of the logistics sector as a crucial site determining the future of the labour movement:

> "Inicjatywa Pracownicza was started in the early 2000s by workers at the Cegielski factory. What happened in that factory in 1956 was a massive moment in the history of organizing against the Communist state, and it was also connected to the Hungarian Uprising later that year. Those workers faced harsh retaliation and eighty protesters were killed. What we've done doesn't compare, but we are inspired by that history… The new regime that came into power in the 1990s was basically shock therapy for working-class people,

[103] In November 2016, a dispute broke out over the mishandling of resources from the Fund. The Commission had decided to use funds leftover for the year to increase the level of Christmas bonuses, which IP criticised since this excluded on the one hand agency workers and disadvantaged employees with bailiff's orders for outstanding debts, which would be liable to be seized. IP union criticised the Commission's use of the funds emphasizing that "the Social Fund must not just be another promotional publicity stunt for Amazon, but should provide real support for those who need it most!" [PL047]. It also criticised Solidarność's position and lack of decisive action: "The attitude of the second union of the NSZZ Solidarność is disappointing, which, despite its declaration, neither requested an increase in the allowance, nor supported people with bailiff's orders, nor vacation grants" [PL047]. IP recommended that agency workers should be extended access to the Fund's resources, and that certain benefits such as Christmas bonuses should be paid by the employer, allowing for additional vacation grants (wczasy pod gruszą), and the reinstatement of school starter allowances and vouchers in kind (bony rzeczowe) for employees under bailiffs' orders.

> and all the unions supported it, including Solidarność leaders who used that period to get into politics. In the 2000s, young workers at the Cegielski factory had had enough and decided that they wanted a new form of labor organizing. Inicjatywa Pracownicza came out of that. We are inspired by that tradition and the rejection of the big unions that supported company "restructuring," which always meant dismissals. So we are connected to that factory emotionally, but there's another connection as well. The factory had 20,000 workers in 1956. Now it has something like 800. The old working class that made up the heavy industry sector—that factory makes engines—was destroyed in Poland in the 1990s and 2000s. Our union had a lot of discussions about what the new field of working-class formation would be. As Poland has become a big warehouse for Western Europe, we've come to think that logistics will be the crucial sector for the future of the labor movement." [PL044]

During the collective dispute in 2019, IP emphasized Amazon's lack of regard for worker voice and together with Solidarność made 3 core demands for higher pay, to stop feedbacks and for stable employment contracts.

While management finally conceded to the union's long-standing demand for equal pay between warehouses in Poland, the union has emphasized that there is still a major wage gap between Amazon sites and that Polish workers still earn comparatively little. The union frames the company's massive profitability as a product of workers' exhausting physical labour, who it is claimed, deserve a share of the value they produce. The union's diagnostic framing accused Amazon of exploiting and deepening transnational wage differences, declaring that "we don't want to be a cheap labour force" and that "it's time to fight to dismantle such big pay inequalities between Amazon workers in Poland and in Western Europe". IP remarks that Polish Amazon workers often beat records in terms of the quantity of packages processed, performing the same work as Amazon workers in neighbouring countries, but under higher pressure, and that despite this, local wages have less purchasing power. It observed that the wages Amazon offered in Poland were 36% of those in Germany, which barely covered minimal social needs, given that consumers in Poland paid 54% on average prices [PL052]. The union newspaper reported surveys illustrating that household expenses in Poland had increased by 61% between 2015-2018 and that over 10% Polish workers were at risk of poverty, reckoning that Polish workers should be entitled to 25.38zł hourly, 54% of the €11 earned in Germany at the time. The union also illustrated that remuneration levels at Amazon in Poland lagged behind comparable logistics companies in local labour markets in Poznań and Wrocław, even after taking overtime and bonuses into account. [PL048]. Motivational frames called workers to reverse this situation through collective action, arguing that past payrises were a direct outcome of collective mobilisations such as the Safe Package and Stop Feedbacks campaigns, capture in slogans like "without struggle do not count on a better life".

Diagnostic frames have articulated the problem of low levels of pay together with Amazon's system for evaluating workers, consisting of gamified incentives and disciplinary feedbacks. The union highlighted the ratcheting mechanisms built into the system, claiming that performance standards "should not continue to rise as a product of the fact that we continue to work faster in a 'rat race'" in a vicious cycle where "the [productivity] requirements are constantly increasing, but we do not see corresponding increases in our pay". As the union claimed, the workers' reward for 'making rate' are higher performance targets in the following month, while individual that miss 100%, even by a few points can earn negative feedbacks. Slogans like "Amazon should pay more. Rates are too high. Amazon treats us like robots" and "High standards / Low pay – Reverse this!" implore workers to improve pay and reduce pressure to perform through participation in collective action, for instance through actions like 'safety hours' where workers were encouraged to go slow: "Remember! At Amazon, our safety and our health are most important, not our productivity!". The newspaper also announced contests for the worst selfie from the work bus commute, calling workers to post photos on Instagram with the tag #deliveringsweat. Indeed, IP has emphasized that workers spend 30-65 hours monthly commuting, in addition to working 10 hour shifts with rotating days and nights, in continuous standing and seating positions, calling for such sacrifices to be reflected in pay [PL050].

IP activists have described recruitment agencies as one of the most pathological capitalist institutions" which have contributed to the instability of employment at Amazon, and has demanded that the company cease using agencies and short-term fixed contracts [PL057; PL067]. While the company claims it uses agency workers mainly during seasonal peaks, in fact, temporary workers make up a significant part of the workforce all year-round and the union observed that thousands of workers are employed in 'permanent trial conditions'. IP has criticised this as an "anti-social hiring policy", noting that precarious contracts exert pressure on the entire workforce and that fixed-term contracts are "an injury to us all: our new colleagues are supposed to be afraid, to live in uncertainty over whether their contracts will be renewed if they dare insist on their rights" [PL048]. Elsewhere the union observed that "junk contracts fragment workers' unity and our ability to organise ourselves" and that "it is clear to everyone that Amazon extends the period of employment in precarious conditions to make it difficult for workers to fight courageously for their rights" [PL052]. It noted that "We compete with each other instead of supporting each other, we work more, faster and under more pressure, which makes us more and more overtired" [PL067]. Accordingly, the union stresses the importance of building solidarity between different categories of workers by using an inclusive framing: "It's very important for us that Amazon and agency workers organise together, and on the basis of equal rights, take part in union meetings, actions and protests" [PL045].

While the union maintains a strong focus on economic, labour-related issues, its stock of narrative resources has not been limited to the history of trade unions and labour issues, but has framed intensive e-commerce in terms of its damaging environmental impact. For instance, during the 2022 Make Amazon Pay campaign, IP diagnostic frames identified Amazon as one of the chief culprits of the climate crisis, noting that while the company encourages workers and customers to buy in sustainable ways, "the feigned care and concern for the environment declared in the company's PR campaigns is fake and artificial" [PL067]. Environmental waste were framed as by-products of the company's efforts to save on time and labour, while placing the responsibility for littering the planet squarely onto workers and consumers:

> "The faster we work, the more garbage we produce. Our planet and living environment don't need the constant capitalist rat race: increasing production, consumption and increasing pace of work. We don't need it either, Amazon is artificially creating a need to work and deliver shipments as fast as possible. But is this need real? Couldn't Amazon customers wait three instead of two days for a package of video games? Instead, we all need a clean environment, an end to the production of hazardous trash and its replacement with biodegradable materials." [PL067]

In the context of the Make Amazon Pay campaign, IP also criticised Amazon's model of production and distribution, emphasizing that the company's profits originate in the exploitation of human and environmental resources:

> "Meanwhile, through its anti-social and anti-labor management model, Amazon has become a huge greenhouse gas emitter. Despite pro-ecological propaganda, Amazon's carbon footprint in 2019 grew to 51 million tons. Thus, Jeff Bezos' company has already surpassed all the largest coal-fired power plants in the European Union, with Amazon's carbon footprint equal to the top five of ten largest emitters in the EU combined. Moreover, while the largest coal-fueled power plant in the EU, Bełchatów, reduced its carbon footprint by 15 percent (i.e. by 5.6 million tons of CO2, from 38.3 to 32.7 million tons), Amazon increased its by 15% (almost 7 million tons, from 44.4 to the above-mentioned 51 million tons). The annual difference in the growth of Amazon's carbon footprint is close to the entire declared emissions of the largest coal producer in the European Union and the largest coal-mine operator in this region, the Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa group. Amazon, which is constantly expanding in Poland, has not yet disclosed the full scale of its carbon emissions in our country. However, one must be mindful of the fundamentally different social functions that power plants, coal mines and the Amazon corporation perform in Poland. These power plants and mines provide energy to homes, schools, hospitals, offices and all other social infrastructure – including private companies like Amazon. With the large (although decreasing) carbon footprint of these entities, almost 40 million people in Poland benefit daily from the fruits of the miners' and power plant workers' labor. For short change, a typical Amazon employee in

Poland – in many cases, a former miner – packs products sold and consumed in Germany and other Western countries; ensuring, in fact, that they work for the German retail market, are compensated for their labor at 1/4 of a German wage, and do so in a warehouse built several hundred kilometers from the eastern border of that country.

Amazon management bases its profits on the chronic overwork of employees. The exploitation of human resources goes hand in hand with the exploitation of the earth's resources. As a result of the activities of our union, it has been established that the heads of Polish warehouses at Amazon force employees to significantly exceed reasonable working hours and conditions. The excessively high pace of work also translates to excessive energy consumption and a higher carbon footprint. In the December 2020 peak period, Polish Amazon employees had their daily working time extended to 11.5 hours, which also means greater energy consumption in warehouses. What's more, low wages encourage the corporation to lengthen the supply chain: packing occurs in the poor East, while the consumption of those packages transpires in the rich West. The profits accumulated by Amazon millionaire-shareholders, led by the company's CEO and one of the richest people in the world, Jeff Bezos, allow these millionaires to live in clover at a time of great social crises. Amazon's local workers, paid slightly above the minimum wage in Poland and well below the Western minimum wage, are particularly vulnerable to crises – both ecological and epidemiological." [PL071]

## Strategic Capabilities

*Intermediating between contending interests*

IP has demonstrated a strong capacity to foster cooperation and exchange within the union, through robust mechanisms of collective cohesion and deliberative vitality, as well as between union members and external allies through intermediation practices. For instance, the union has relied on the workers' inquiry method, and has developed questionnaires in order to include workers in decision-making, and to assess workers' experiences and preferences, ensuring a higher level of inclusion. In April and May 2017, the union conducted a survey asking which were the most important issues that the union should pursue: the 478 responses (84% at Poznań and 91% blue-badge workers) indicated that increases in the basic wage, and wage allowances were the most important issues.[104] A similar survey conducted during the peak in December 2020, this time organised by both IP and Solidarność, found that of the 1788 workers who participated, 70% were in favour of higher wages, 40% were in favour of the unions maintaining pressure, and committed to participating in slow-downs and other forms of protest to demand better remuneration [PL067]. On one hand relations between unions in Poland are characterised by pluralism and competition, regarding union members and the capacity of organisations to assume the role of an opinion leader, set the agenda and influence debates. While relations between the two union organisations at Amazon were rather frosty during 2014-2015, they have since collaborated on a range of issues and realised that a basic level of mutual understanding has strengthened their position vis-à-vis management.

*Framing*

The strong level of deliberate vitality encouraged and feedback mechanisms with rank-and-file members regarding the goals and means of collective action means that IP has demonstrated a significant degree of flexibility in terms of its capacity to continuously modify its narrative, to shift frames, and to expand the stakes of the conflict beyond the sphere of labour and to encompass the claims and interests of different constituencies. The union's collective mobilisations have involved the strategic use of

[104] 1) Higher base wages (30-67%), 2) a 13th month's salary (44%), 3) the introduction of an internship allowance [dodatek stażowy] after 1 year, which increases after 2 years, as in Germany (41%), 4) increased financing of the Social Fund and access to its resources (32%), 5) 3-monthly work schedules (23%), 6) sales for workers (22%) [PL048].

institutional and non-institutional tactics in order to build bargaining power vis-à-vis management, supported by framing practices that emphasized the agency to workers and sought to instil a sense of the efficacy of collective mobilization among the membership and its positive effects on working conditions:

> "In Italy, workers used strikes to force the corporation to make night shifts available only to those who wanted them and to pay a 25% bonus. We too must force Amazon to adapt production to our needs." [PL051]

IP has mobilised the historical successes of the trade union movement as a resource in order to illustrate the practical benefits of unionism, and to strengthen its own membership base. For instance, one of the columns in its newspaper, "30 achievements for which we should thank trade unions", ostensibly directed at persuading non-union workers, functions as an exercise in collective identity formation, linked to a motivational framing that directly encourages workers to participate in the defence of their own working rights:

> "All these rights were won by ordinary working people like us, organized and working together. We cannot allow future generations of workers to be deprived of the right and motivation to fight against injustice, for equal, more just societies." [PL067]

IP's political values of worker empowerment are also reflected in its framing practices which steer clear of narratives that present workers as victims. When asked by an interviewer what they thought about the media coverage of working conditions at Amazon warehouses, including reports of workers urinating in bottles and that Amazon had hired the union-busting Pinkerton agency to spy on its employees, an IP activist replied:

> "We don't think much of labeling workers as victims of espionage or bad management practices. Of course, such occurrences are the reality we experience in our warehouses. But in the role of victim, we have no power to change that. Reports of workers peeing in bottles might make a good story for major media, but they don't get our colleagues to strike or join the union. They are much more likely to do so through the everyday experience of their own exploitation, for example when management threatens to calculate a longer break as absenteeism. Of course, this makes the workers angry, but they have to see that they are not victims. The workers should not be portrayed as slaves, because those who are enslaved cannot defend themselves so easily. In this respect, this type of reporting does not help us much. We are exploited, but that doesn't mean we are unable to express ourselves. This is us. We can write pamphlets and newspapers, and make plans for how Amazon should change. If you want to support the workers, you shouldn't just rely on what the media reports about us. According to them, we are just poor victims at the mercy of the algorithms of digital capitalism. But that is simply not true." [GLO049]

*Articulating actions over time and space*

The union's framing and communication strategies demonstrate proactive articulation practices that link collective actions across multiple scales of action and which leverage the resources of external organisations. IP has illustrated the importance and necessity of transnational solidarity by reporting on international AWI meetings in its newspaper, connecting such initiatives to its own activities in Poland:

> "We still earn much less in Poland, but through our meetings we have come to understand that the fact that workers are organizing in other countries has a positive impact on our working conditions." [PL068]

IP emphasizes that it was thanks to concerted pressure in the form of direct action that disparities in pay between warehouses in Poland were eliminated, that discrepancies in pay between German and Polish worksites have been reduced, and that numerous important concessions were won, such as benefits for parents with young children [PL067]. The union has also participated in numerous conferences, debates, and made statements to the media, for instance during demonstrations or court hearings in order to attempt to proactively define the agenda and establish itself as an opinion leader that is capable of taking control of public narratives regarding Amazon, working conditions and the rights of trade unions and workers.

*Learning*

Despite limited institutional openness in Poland given the limited right to strike, IP has actively agitated to improve working conditions and to increase its bargaining power vis-à-vis management through a mix of institutional and more contentious tactics including spontaneous wildcat strikes, go-slow actions, demonstrations outside Amazon facilities and recruitment agencies [PL060]. The union has used the power resources and strategic capabilities at its disposal purposively and pedagogically, in terms of reflecting on its experiences with Amazon's management, and in terms of analysing the possibilities for organising, and adjusting its narratives accordingly. Robust processes of deliberative vitality and collective cohesion as well as purposive strategic leadership have been critical for this, as well as mechanisms in place to ensure the diffusion of competences and knowledge through organizational channels. Framing strategies are also proactively purposed towards the reproduction of the membership base: concessions from management were framed as achievements of former collective actions, serving as motivation to build strength, encouraging workers to join the union and participate.

### *Organising against agency contracts*

The dual employment structure at Amazon has been criticized by unions virtually everywhere, which have identified it as a significant obstacle in recruiting members and building mobilising capacity. IP motivated Polish workers to support the demand by noting that following a highly publicized campaign, Amazon workers in Germany had managed to limited the amount of agency contracts, and succeeded in pressuring the company into assuming many workers directly. In 2020, the staffing agencies Adecco and Randstad recruited around 10,000 workers for Amazon in Poland. Since the first industrial actions in 2015, 'green-badge' workers in Poland have related that they worry about the extension of contracts, and experience high levels of economic insecurity.

> "During the last months of work, I felt an uncertainty about the future - people appeared and disappeared, it was not known who will stay and why… even though we put in a lot of effort, in any moment they can dismiss you." [PL045]

> "[Agencies] keep people under constant strain, and in a state of uncertainty about whether they will prolong the next contract, which is for a month or two. And what next? Again, more stress and uncertainty!" [PL045]

> "I'm employed through the agency, all the time they keep flipping me from job to job. Us agency workers are like cannon fodder. You never know what you're going to be doing. They also don't want to send us for training, we're a waste of time and money. Although we have employment contracts, we cannot take vacations on demand, so in an emergency, they gave us 'unjustified days' [*dni nieusprawiedliwione*] - and then of course, dismissals… Agencies need to earn a lot of money through us, so they drag out contracts, despite promises that the next one will be for Amazon. It's like waving a carrot on a stick in front of your nose. As long as we continue to work fast." [PL045].

IP activists have described recruitment agencies as "one of the most pathological capitalist institutions" which have contributed to the permanent instability of employment, and have called for Amazon to discontinue using recruitment agencies and short fixed-term contracts [PL057].[105] While

[105] As one IP activist noted, Amazon claims that it relies on agencies to bolster its workforce before peaks such as Christmas, while using them year round to employ workers on contracts as short as one week. Conditions for blue-badge workers employed directly by Amazon have also become increasingly unstable. In addition to a legally permitted 3-month trial period, after which point workers are supposed to be assumed on a permanent basis, the company had introduced an additional one-yearly contract as a buffer between the trial period and permanent employment. As the representative noted, workers starting their careers at Amazon via agencies must endure two years of insecurity characterised by successive short-term contracts [PL057].

Amazon insists that agency recruitment is seasonal, IP observes that thousands of workers are nevertheless employed around the year in 'permanent trial conditions', dividing the workforce into two groups: one living in constant fear over their future at the company, and a second more privileged group that fears losing that secure position:

> "It is clear to everyone that Amazon extends the period of employment in precarious conditions to make it difficult for workers to fight courageously for their rights" [PL052].

IP has strongly maintained that fixed-term contracts are "an injury to us all: our new colleagues are supposed to be afraid, to live in uncertainty over whether their contracts will be renewed if they dare insist on their rights" [PL048], and stressed the importance of building solidarity between different categories of working by using an inclusive framing:

> "It's very important for us that Amazon and agency workers organise together, and on the basis of equal rights, take part in union meetings, actions and protests" [PL045].

> "Beyond the lack of mass solidarity, there is also an issue with union legitimacy: some people from the 90s who saw unions betray them, so they don't trust unions. A large proportion work for temp agencies, so joining a union is less useful. And permanent workers doubt they'll get support from temp workers if, for example, they do a slowdown. So we try to bring together temp and permanent workers. We try to convince them we're on the same team. Our first strike vote had hundreds of temps showing up to sign attendance lists with their names and addresses — they weren't scared." [PL085]

Consequently, IP called for negotiations with Amazon to establish a limit on the quantity of agency workers, and entered into a separate collective dispute with the recruitment agencies, Adecco, Randstad and Manpower, reiterating the demands made to Amazon: higher wages, regulation of working time and breaks, longer contracts and simplified payslips [PL046]. It collected 500 signatures on a petition calling for a moratorium on agency contracts and for employees to be assumed directly by Amazon, on a permanent basis. However, negotiations came to a stand-still. The company refused to discontinue using agency labour, claiming that the employment practices of agencies were not Amazon's responsibility, and that conversion to direct employment would continue to be based on "performance, quality of work, attendance and overall evaluation" [PL045].

In December 2015 and January 2016, IP organised protests outside the offices of recruitment agencies in Gliwice, Katowice, Kraków, Ostrowie Wielkopolskie, Poznań, Szczecin, Toruń, and Warszawa against the precarious situation of agency workers. During this peak, around two-thirds of the workforce was employed through agencies, while in the first two months of 2016, hundreds of these employees were dismissed, some for taking a few days' sick leave. During 2016, as required by law, Amazon informed IP about 800 employees it was planning to take action against, usually regarding the termination of contracts. IP represented over 100 workers in these cases [PL047]. While the company denounced the protests, IP noted that "they momentarily bought us": the wage was increased to 15zł, a 1zł seniority bonus (*dodatek stażowy*) was introduced for workers employed for more than one year, as well as additional benefits in the form of company vouchers, extra overtime pay and a Christmas bonus conditional on good attendance [PL046, PL047]. The practice of using fixed-term contracts shorter than 2-weeks was suspended, and the company announced its plan to limit agency employment and assume 85% of employees directly. Amazon denied that the concessions were related to industrial action.

Following these first actions, the company proposed that the unions sign a cooperation agreement, requesting that unions provide a list of their members, while assuring workers that union affiliation would not bring any negative consequences [PL046]. IP emphatically declined, denouncing the obstruction, monitoring and repression of union activity that management had practiced: "Enough repression of union members! We have the right to organise!". IP reported that management did not allow union representatives to carry out their activities during the hours allowed to them, creating difficulties in maintaining regular contact with employees, and alleged that the company had spied on

employees' internal correspondence with unions and used this information in courts against them [PL046].

### *Challenging productivity through safety: The 'Safe Package' and 'Stop Feedbacks' campaigns*

In 2017 the National Labour Inspectorate (PIP) had found that Amazon had not established a remunerations policy together with unions as required by law, the late payment of wages, and no clear policy regarding remunerations, bonuses and benefits [PL048]. The following year, PIP monitored the energy expenditure of workers at Amazon sites in Poland, finding that in some departments, workers exceeded the legally permissible standard three-fold that "one person is doing work that, according to the law, they should do over three days, in order to not damage their health" [PL068]. As an IP shop steward related:

> "The results of the research by the Labor Inspection were terrifying. Some women expended two to three times more energy than the legal limit. In simple words, they slowly kill themselves at work." [PL085]

IP cast doubts on the adequate adaption of warehouse work to the psychophysical capabilities of the workers, and called for the company to either conduct such a study, or to let the union do it itself, with the assistance of PIP. Meanwhile it emphasised the importance of defending rights and entitlements to workers:

> "If Amazon doesn't want to guarantee safe work for us, we have to take care of ourselves… Our union has won rest chairs in every department. You have the right to use them while you work, take advantage of it. Don't let yourselves be told otherwise. According to Amazon's documents, you have the right to spend at least 60 minutes (break period) at work in a sitting position, so don't end your breaks early. Don't let yourself be told that you can't sit down, have a warm drink, or just relax at work. We are humans, not robots." [PL068]

In August 2018, a health and safety (BHP) expert was ordered by the court to conduct an investigation into working conditions at Amazon logistics centres. They drew attention to the unsuitable organisation of work, unusually high level of employee turnover, and found that the company had failed to ensure compliance with minimal health and safety standards or to adapt the work to employees' psycho-physical abilities, age and health conditions, ordered for some women workers to be transferred to other departments due to risks of exhaustion [PL051]. It noted that the monotony and the predetermined tempo of work are causes of musculoskeletal ailments, slowed circulation, respiratory problems, the onset of sleepiness, reduced motor activity, alertness and mental fatigue. [PL051].

On the occasion of a peak during Amazon Prime Day 10-16 July 2018, Amazon workers in Poland, Germany and France organised the Safe Package (*Bezpieczna Paczka*) campaign. In Poland, the campaign managed to temporarily suspend disciplinary feedbacks, across all FCs in Poland from October 2018 to February 2019, during which time, no employees received written warnings or dismissals for failing to meet productivity rates [PL051]. Utilising a combination of direct shopfloor action such as 'safety hours', public protests, court action, and expert opinions from state actors, the campaign articulated how health and safety was routinely subordinated to profitability through the intensification of work, particularly during peak seasons when managers pressure workers to beat records of orders shipped:

> "Amazon manipulates regulations according to its needs. In order to fulfill orders and earn more money, health and safety regulations or the company's own "Amazon standards" are ignored. They become important when they can be used against workers, to harass or even fire them when the corporation wishes" [PL048].

> "Sales records, which bring the company enormous profits, for the employees mean additional working days, increased work intensity, and fatigue caused by lack of time for sleep and private life. The exhaustion of the crew only benefits management, line workers are not compensated for Prime Day and Black Friday to make up for the increased pace and compulsion to attend." [PL051]

> "The worker is there to meet the company's needs, and then to bear the full cost in terms of health and fatigue. We have become accustomed to subordinating ourselves to the 'business needs' of companies, including the constant ratcheting of rates, discipline, ubiquitous control and unfounded dismissals." [PL051]

Emphasizing the contradictions between the company's mantras of customer obsession, workplace safety and the performance evaluation system, IP announced 'safety hours', calling for workers to follow health and safety regulations to the letter and to work cautiously and slowly:

> "We have enough of beating records at the cost of our health!" [PL048].

> "One of the most common causes of accidents at work are pressure from superiors to work quickly and routine! Working like mad, we forget about instructions, regulations, caution, the excessive physical strain, the need to replenish fluids or to rest from routine. We forget about our health… don't exaggerate with the tempo, work safely!" [PL050].

> "Amazon tells employees to be customer obsessed. So, particularly during the Pinata period, let's make every effort to ensure that products arrive in perfect condition… In this way we will ensure the highest standards to guarantee customer satisfaction." [PL050].

General recommendations were given to all workers such as: "Don't forget to drink water regularly; Don't hesitate to go to the toilet; use the entire break time (15 or 30 minutes) for rest; check the MINIMUM goals for the department you work in; check the goods from six sides, its condition, number of packed items, etc.; read each barcode and check the compliance of the product with the description on the screen", as well as suggestions specific to departments like Pack, Rebin and AFE: "do not work in an unsuitable position; if you lack cartons, paper, goods or there are ready-made packages lying next to you, light the alert lamp and wait; don't pile tote bins on crowded workstations; don't take totes from other lines; when you re-bin your whole cart and have a 'wall' ready, turn on the lamp and wait; AFE, download large from the backs one at a time so they don't fall out of your hands" [PL050].

IP's prognostic framing articulated an active concept of direct participation, emphasising the importance of worker voice and co-determination as solutions to health and safety problems on the shop-floor:

> "Meanwhile, it is business that should be subject to the needs of workers and adapt to their psychological and physical state. We must abolish working conditions where workers are subordinated to business in order to reclaim our lives for ourselves and our loved ones… We fight the rush, pressure and routine … remember: who works fast, dies fast… The most important thing for us is for workers to start expressing their health needs out loud… That is why, as a union, we expand the awareness of health and safety at work and monitor working conditions. We demand a change in the system of evaluation of workers, influence on the determination of standards, as well as on decisions concerning organisation and health and safety, working time, scheduling, etc." [PL051]

IP attributed the success of the campaign to management's flawed implementation of the feedback system in Annex 3 of the work regulations in 2014 without the unions' prior consultation[106], and to the strong impact of the first spontaneous actions in June 2015 in POZ1's Pick department.

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[106] According to the Labour Code, all forms of monitoring for inactivity should be written in the work regulations, however the ADAPT system, on the basis of which penalties like feedbacks are handed out on, was never agreed with by the unions.

After the feedbacks were eventually reinstated in February 2019, IP and Solidarność jointly launched the Stop Feedbacks (*Stop Feedbackom*) campaign which aimed to establish regulations on the system, short of abolishing it completely. The campaign utilised to images of rats to draw attention to the 'rat race' at Amazon logistics facilities. The unions participated in seven meetings with the company intended to establish a new system for evaluating workers. The unions demanded involvement in the procedure of setting and verifying rates, and for provisions to prevent the continual increase of productivity rates without commensurate improvements for workers. They called for clear criteria for feedbacks, as well as rules for exemptions and appeals to be established in the work regulations (e.g. individual psychophysical conditions, or obstacles to work outside of employees' control, such as downtime and equipment failures). Slogans like "enough of the rat race at Amazon" criticised the continuing ratcheting of performance rates on the basis of the preceding months collective output. Indeed, every 4 weeks, the lowest 10% are discarded, while new targets are set on the basis of the top 90% [PL067]. IP activists made a case for slowing down the pace of work, arguing that

> "it makes no sense to beat records… we shouldn't work too hard, because then rates rise faster… the faster we work today, the higher the minimum will be in the future… standards should not rise solely as a result of increased personal effort, meaning that they cannot continue to rise simply because we work faster." [PL052]

The campaign also focused on informing workers about how rates are calculated, the differences between minimum and target rates, and advised workers for how to handle disciplinary actions (e.g. insist that activities are registered accurately and that a copy of documents is received). Since workers can get feedbacks only for failing to meet minimum rates, workers were encouraged not to exceed the minimum rate, and to scandalise any over-productive behaviour that contribute to rising rates:

"By working above rate, you contribute to increasing the pace of work and productivity standards." [PL067]

### *Collective dispute*

Following the Safe Package and Stop Feedbacks campaigns (2018 and 2019 respectively, discussed below), the feedback system was temporarily suspended. Given that both unions had cooperated on the Stop Feedbacks campaign in 2019, management refused to negotiate with both unions, and insisted on negotiating only with Solidarność. The former chairman of the Solidarność commission at Amazon related the company's attempts to obstruct cooperation between the two unions:

> "We met with management this week, but they wanted to meet with our organization only, they did not want [IP] to attend the meeting. They're trying to drive a wedge between us … and they try to convince us that they want to introduce a new process as soon as possible, but that they want to negotiate only with us… We had some specific proposals, but the employer did not want to agree to anything… they eventually proposed a new version of this assessment, how these feedbacks were handed out. But it was unacceptable for us, because it would be even worse for the workers than before." [INT13]

The Solidarność leader speculated that management had attempted to play the unions off against one another in order to block the proposed changes:

> "There is also the possibility that the employer presents something to two organisations, and the organisations disagree, and one says, for example, that it accepts the proposal, and the other one doesn't, and then the employer introduces whatever it wants, because the organisations can't come to an agreement, as according to Polish law. So I think [management] went in the direction of thinking that they could reach an agreement with us, present something, that we would say that we want it, that the other organisation would say that they don't want it, and that they could introduce it because we agreed. And for them it would be the most convenient thing to do … they wouldn't say it was the union that won it, they would just say that the unions didn't agree, so we will just introduce what we want." [INT13]

Instead, the trade unions announced their intention to participate in negotiations together, with management refusing unilaterally terminating negotiations. On May 9th 2019, the trade unions held a press conference outside of the U.S. embassy in Warsaw, formally announcing their entry into a collective dispute and putting forward a joint set of demands: 1) a 25 zł net wage, 2) the abolition of feedbacks, and 3) stable working conditions and permanent contracts.

The unions claimed that the wages offered by Amazon were far too low and did not cover basic social needs, and drew attention to the fact that wages in Wrocław were 1zl lower than in Poznań, and drew attention to the high levels of pressure and tiredness from long working and commuting hours [PL057].[107] The unions connected traditional labour themes with national concerns, drawing attention to transnational differences in wages and labour regulations, and the capacity of a multinational company to exploit a cheap labour force with inadequate protections to service Western European markets. During 22-30th May, they met with management three times in Wrocław, however after reaching no agreement, a discrepancy protocol was signed on 5th June. From 18th June to 2nd July two following meetings took place in Poznań with an external mediator. Management continually rejected all demands to permanently suspend the feedback systems, to include unions in the setting of pay, to discontinuing the use of recruitment agencies and temporary contracts, or to make any changes the system of worker evaluation. IP related that "the employer unilaterally broke off negotiations despite our willingness to engage in further discussions" but indicated a willingness to discuss outside of the dispute [PL052].

Under mounting pressure, the company increased the base wage by 1.50 zł per hour and equalized pay across all warehouses in Poland. The latter had been a long standing demand of IP which used the victory to call for wages in Poland to be raised to Western European standards.[108] IP found the wage increase insufficient and criticised the company's continued exclusion of unions from codetermination and rejection of dialogue. Low wages were articulated together with the constantly rising expectations and the company's increasing profitability, with IP claiming that workers should be entitled to share:

> "Why the dispute? In our view, Amazon does not take into account the voice of workers when we talk about important issues such as the pace of work. This was clearly evident during the negotiations. The [productivity] demands are constantly rising, but we do not see corresponding increases in our pay. Amazon can afford to payrises of more than 1.50 zł. New warehouses and sorting warehouses and sorting plants are being built. The company sells more and more globally and is increasingly profitable. Employees should participate in this. We can no longer allow rich global companies to prey on us. Amazon employs several thousand people in Poland, and as such a large employer, it sets salaries on the basis of its own discretion, i.e. the so-called Salary Review, the details of which it does not present. According to Amazon, salary levels are not an element of collective labour law. As a result, it thinks that it can omit unions from wage negotiations. That is why Amazon announced increases this year without consulting the social partners. We do not agree with such a policy. The employer should establish the principles of paying the base wage, as well as any allowances in the remuneration regulations." [PL052].

On July 15th, 2019 the second strike referendum was initiated, coinciding with Prime Day when workers at Amazon sites in the USA, Germany, France and Spain were striking. While restrictive labour

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[107] As the unions noted, Polish Amazon workers earn 36% of the wage of their German colleagues while paying 54% on average prices, in addition to working 10 hour shifts, compared to the 7.5 hours at German sites with no night-shifts. Indeed, the Polish National Remuneration Survey revealed that Amazon workers are placed in the 25% lowest paid group of workers in the country, earning 60% of the average national wage. IP referred to the sharply rising cost of living and prices in Poland, with monthly home expenses increasing by 61% between 2015-2018, with 10.4% of Polish workers at risk of poverty (by comparison, figures for the Czech Republic showed 3.8%, Slovakia, 6.6%). The union argued that Polish workers "… carry out the same orders as our colleagues in Germany, France and Spain, serving mainly German customers. However, we work under more pressure and at a faster pace. Polish warehouses (in fact, Polish employees) regularly break records for shipped products… the only thing that saves us is working overtime, but how long can we live like this?" [PL052].

[108] "It's time to fight to dismantle such big pay inequalities between Amazon workers in Poland and in Western Europe!" [PL052]

laws prevented the Polish unions from participating legally, they expressed their solidarity with the actions and travelled between different worksites organising voting stations and informing workers about the collective dispute in Poland, and actions transnationally [PL052]. Over 3,000 Amazon workers from Germany sent a solidary letter supporting the initiative in Poland.[109] Unlike the first strike referendum, this one was undertaken by both unions together, who jointly reiterated that high productivity expectations continued to be out of step with pay, that "rates are too high" and that "Amazon should pay more" [PL052]. By September 20th, just over 30% of Polish Amazon workers had voted with 90% of votes in favour, however, the initiative once again failed to meet the minimum frequency of 50% of the 16,000 logistics workers employed in the (then 7) FCs in Poland.[110] While agency workers were not eligible to participate in the referendum, they were able to sign a separate petition supporting the demands.

Whereas the hostile relations between the two unions improved when the company attempted to exploit differences and insisted on negotiating only with Solidarność, by 2022 the dynamic changed once again and relations cooled following internal changes in Solidarność, when many members left and joined IP, including the former chairman of the Solidarność Amazon commission.

### *Make Amazon Pay, Poland*

Since the start of the pandemic, relations between management and unions in Poland became more contentious, given the increasingly hazardous nature of the work. As the government implemented lockdown restrictions, Amazon warehouses remained open. Following pressure from unions in Poland, the company introduced a range of organisational measures to avoid over-crowding in facilities, however as workers related, the practicality of maintaining social distancing on the shop-floor, in locker rooms and on overcrowded buses during peak-time was largely impossible. In its newspaper in the spring of 2021, IP framed the profits made by Amazon during the pandemic in class-terms, contextualised against rising inflation and wealth inequality:

> "2020, thanks to the pandemic, saw Amazon and Jeff Bezos make a massive profit. If Bezos paid all his employees the equivalent of what he earned in the pandemic, he could have bought everyone a home worth 400,000zł, while still remaining the richest man. The pandemic significantly boosted sales, which resulted in more work for us. Meanwhile, in 2020 there was no increase in the base salary. A small group of the most senior workers increased their salaries by 1zł gross. Given the very high turnover, this only covered a small percentage of us. Such a low amount is not a pay rise, but a valorisation (adjustment) of salaries with respect to inflation, which was around 3.8% last year. We make the rich millions, and what do we get out of it? This year, the salary of around 3,000zł before tax, we will buy us 100zł less. When our salaries are frozen, our family budgets shrink in real terms. When our bosses pay us the same low wage for a long time, which has an ever-decreasing purchasing value, they themselves gain a lot and we lose. By saving at the expense of rank-and-file workers, Amazon can 'invest' more and become even richer, while we become poorer. Throughout the pandemic period, Amazon's managers, the media and policymakers have talked a lot about how important our work is. We were called heroes. We provided access to goods for people who worked from home. By putting the health of us and our loved ones at risk, we gave this opportunity to entire professional groups, increasing the overall level of safety. Amazonians, why do we still value ourselves so little and earn so little?" [PL067]

On Black Friday, in November 2020, IP participated in the Make Amazon Pay campaign, which called for the company to pay its workers fairly, pay its taxes, and pay for its exploitation of natural resources. In Poland, the mood among the workforce worsened after it was revealed that the 2,000zł

[109] https://www.labournet.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/amazonsoli160719.pdf

[110] Neither the software developers employed in Amazon's IT division nor the 9,000 agency logistics workers count towards this quota.

Christmas bonus would be paid only to temporary agency workers hired for the Christmas peak. A series of local collective actions took place with IP members participating, including blockades of warehouse gates and protests on the shop floor which saw the participation of over 100 forklift operators in Wrocław (WRO1) who stopped work, rang their horns, distributed flyers and wore the slogan "2,000 złoty for everyone" on their vests. IP claimed that the company "does not ensure that its workers in Poland have financial security in times of crisis accompanied by galloping inflation" and demanded a 15% monthly bonus, regardless of collective attendance or productivity, denounced Amazon's continuing use of short-term contracts during the pandemic lasting a fortnight or a month, called for management to stop penalizing workers for social distancing violations, for technical changes to the organisation over the warehouse in order to avoid overcrowding, as well as reiterating the standing demand for the suspension of feedbacks and the ADAPT system [PL067; PL068]. The Make Amazon Pay actions received letters of support from local miners' unions in Lower Silesia with IP observing that "former miners of decommissioned coal mines in the Lower Silesia region are among the rank and file members of our commission at Amazon – and count among our most active" [PL071]. Greenpeace Poland also participated in the blockades, protesting the environmental impact of e-commerce [PL070].

Following the campaign, the company submitted its proposal for the Christmas bonus to the unions for consultation, offering full-time employees 600zł (€130). The unions considered that not only did Amazon not raise wages for most employees in Poland during a year of high profitability, but that they were "once again treated like cheap labour", considering that Amazon workers in Germany, Spain, Italy France, the UK and the USA were offered the equivalent of €300. Neither of the unions took a position on the company's proposal, but were given a month to respond, jointly conducted a survey among members with three options: 1) that the unions should accept the company's proposal of 600zł, 2) that the unions should negotiate with the company for more, or 3) that the unions should negotiate for more, that should be supported with collective pressure, including the individual's commitment to participate in protests (e.g. by slowing down the pace of work or wearing the vest "2,000zł for everyone"). From the 1,788 responses, 70% wanted a higher bonus and 40% indicated that they wanted the unions to continue negotiations, and to maintain pressure on the company through slow-downs and other forms of protest. The unions therefore called for an 'Employee Action Day', demanding a 2,000zł Christmas bonus for every worker, and that the 4zł payrise, offered as a temporary hazard bonus during the pandemic, should be made permanent: "pay close attention to safety at work, and together with other employees, let Amazon know that we deserve more!" [PL068]. On 15th December, as part of the Make Amazon Pay campaign, the gate to WRO2 was blockaded for three hours by 110 people which prevented trucks from entering or leaving, during a peak when shifts were extended to 11 hours. Reportedly 80 trucks were prevented from entering or leaving the warehouse, while IP members distributed leaflets [PL060]. IP declared its full support for the blockade which demonstrated "how easy it is to disrupt the logistics of a giant corporation" [PL067]. The action framed the financial successes of the company as enabled by workers, the environment and public institutions which it has exploited as a free-rider, demanding that Amazon should fairly pay its workers, pay for its impact on the environment, and pay its taxes.

> "Amazon's success would have been impossible without the public institutions that citizens have built together over generations. However, instead of paying back the societies that helped it grow, the corporation deprives them of tax revenues and breaks world records in avoiding paying them." [PL067]

IP's motivational frames called for workers to participate in the action by referring to past successes:

> "Last year's international mobilization, in which we also participated, resulted in Amazon paying us an allowance of this amount for several months. After a revolt by the forklift operators at WRO1 and spontaneous strikes in the US, Italy and Germany, Amazon paid additional bonuses. Will we be able to achieve that this year? It also depends on you and your activity. Do you want to earn more? Do you want good working conditions? Do you want to be respected and have your opinion respected? Tired of changing jobs whenever a problem arises? Stop complaining and organize with us!" [PL067]

IP objected to management handing out penalties to workers for being 'off-task' during work-time and constant pressure for high work pace. Meanwhile it offered practical advice to workers for handling disciplinary situations, reminding workers to request a documentation of the exact alleged offences, and to appeal in writing to HR with the union's. The union related that many 'off-task violations' including "scanner/computer/system malfunctions, missing merchandise, carts, remote locations, damaged codes, cleaning, restroom, drinking water, spontaneous use of rest areas, talking to a supervisor, auditor, HR - these are all related to carrying out the job or implementing health and safety rules" [PL067].

### *Organising against repression*

In November 2019, assisted by a law firm specializing in data violations, IP and Solidarność submitted a complaint to the Office of Personal Data Protection regarding Amazon's practice of employee profiling, intensive surveillance and assessment of employee productivity. While unions had previously drawn attention to the company's indifference to establishing dialogue or in including unions as social partners in determining employment and working conditions, IP activists signalled a change in relations with management in 2021. Union representatives reported receiving an increased number of disciplinary notices, (e.g. for not wearing high-visibility vest). Whereas SIPs were previously able to enter other warehouses than their own to fulfil their inspection duties, management has obstructed this possibility:

> "For a while, it was easier to carry out union activities. We were doing health and safety audits, on-call at the plant without any problems. But now there has been a step backward again. We are prohibited from doing many things. In doing so, Amazon cites the provision that union activity or social labor inspection activity is a voluntary, social activity. We can't engage in it during working hours, only during so-called 'union hours,' but Amazon hasn't recently given us permission to use them on site, when we want. They interfere with 'business necessity'. We regularly receive official letters where union members are reproached for every small thing. Apparently, they are collecting 'hooks' on us." [PL068]

However, union leaders perceived that repression indicated the efficacy of collective action and apprehension on the side of management:

> "That's why Amazon is so openly anti-union because they know that in the union, we are not one against them, that we are holding this collective force. And of course they do respond. They do oppress us. We had two of our shop steward stewards from our union fired last year. They put us in different departments, they make our lives harder and harder. We got a lot of disciplinary letters as well, so they let us know they are watching us. But that also means that they are afraid of what we are doing and that we are kind of doing our job well." [GLO046]

Relations deteriorated further from the 6th September 2021, when Darek Dziamski, a 49-year old who had worked at the Poznań FC for seven years, died on site during his shift. Dziamski had suffered from heart disease, and reported chest pains and difficulties breathing to a team leader, who directed him to walk to the emergency first-aid point. By the time help arrived, he was unable to be resuscitated. Dziamski's widow, herself also an Amazon employee and a union activist remarked that he was often overworked and that his health had suffered as a result of the job. An Amazon PR manager commented that "our teams on the scene followed proper procedures - reacted immediately and cooperated fully with medical services to best help our colleague" [PL069].[111] Magda Malinowska, a prominent IP activist, was fired while fulfilling her duty as the local SIP, in monitoring how the situation was handled by the company. The union observed that once again, "Instead of improving working conditions, Amazon represses those who publicize them and fight to improve them", and initiated a solidarity campaign

[111] https://vod.tvp.pl/informacje-i-publicystyka,205/alarm-odcinki,274300/odcinek-1068,S01E1068,305590

denouncing the illegal dismissal, and calling for Amazon to reinstate Malinowska [PL068]. In an interview following her dismissal, Malinowska denounced the company's lack of transparency and highlighted the need for trade unions which actively monitor and draw public attention to unsafe working conditions:

> "Workplaces should be treated as a place of public character, subject to social control. It is not uncommon for tens of thousands of people to work in them. Their lives and health should be the most important, more important than the profits of a few privateers, than alleged patents, business secrets, etc. If they don't want to show some technological solutions, let them cover them up. Working conditions, on the other hand, should be a public issue. Why can't we inform the public what it's like on the inside? How does work devastate our bodies, the cost of which is paid by entire societies? Why are workplaces guarded like fortresses? What are the owners afraid of?" [PL068]

IP reported that in previous years a number of workers at Polish Amazon facilities had died during their shifts, but that most of these cases were not classified by the employer as occupational accidents, and that chronic exhaustion therefore should be considered a direct cause of work-related accidents [PL068]. Malinowska related Darek Dziamski's death to the results of the energy expenditure survey carried out by the National Labour Inspectorate, which revealed that some women expended two to three times more energy than legally allowed during a shift:

> "In simple words, they slowly kill themselves at work. With Darek's death, our union accused Amazon of being liable since they failed to measure the energy expenditure. Even when Darek complained about doing the work of three people, he got no support. And Amazon knows the reports prepared by the Labor Inspection. They should automatically measure all jobs in the warehouse in the proper way and change working conditions accordingly. They did none of that." [PL085]

In its newspaper, the union drew attention to destructive effects of the company's labour process and its politics:

> "Let Amazon pay for the deaths of our colleagues in the workplace! Let it pay for union busting and unlawful layoffs! Let it pay for the exploitation of workers and the destruction of our health and the planet!" [PL068]

During the campaign, Solidarność expressed its solidarity with Malinowska's dismissal and committed to take action:

> "The November 9, 2021 event showed that uncomfortable people who speak out about labor problems will not be accepted. We perceive the disciplinary dismissal of our colleague Magda Malinowska as an attack on union freedoms. An attack on one of us must be taken as an attack on all of us. Such behaviour by the employer is reprehensible and requires concerted action on our part. Such action will certainly be taken."

On 26th November 2021, Black Friday, in the context of the global MakeAmazonPay campaign, IP organised a protest in the centre of Warsaw, in front of a shopping centre, blocking cars, drawing attention to violation of union and workers' rights, encapsulated in the slogan "Stop pathological commerce! Reinstate Magda Malinowska! Make Amazon Pay!" [PL074]. The action leveraged coalition power in order to demand change from political actors, and was supported by AgroUnia, a farmers' movement which has recently founded a political party.[112] It advocates for national food security, the defence of domestic Polish markets, family farms, and has previously mobilized against supermarket chains and demanded changes in the government's agricultural policies. At the demonstration, the leader of AgroUnia denounced the "exploitation of advantage by trade giants and the exploitation of ordinary people by supermarkets and corporations" and supported IP in denouncing repression:

[112] https://agrounia.pl/

> "Black Friday is a day when you should think about the exploitation of workers and farmers around the world. Working overtime, being forced to work overtime, repressing trade union activities - this is happening in Poland. Trade giants do it, and politicians agree to it." [PL074]

On 26th April 2022, members of IP, Solidarność and other smaller independent unions participated in a Parliamentary Committee for Social Policy and Family, discussing a draft law aiming to reverse the situation whereby illegally dismissed employees must fight for reinstatements via the courts [PL077]. The draft proses that the employer would instead have to demonstrate to the court that the employee had violated rules prevailing in the workplace. IP insisted on adding provisions to ensure the protection of SIPs, to ensure that the dismissed person can continue to come to work and carry out union activities, and suggested that the fines for violation should be paid to trade union organizations, rather than to the Ministry of Justice. As a member of IP's National Commission stated at the Committee:

> "The protection of trade union activists and social labour inspectors in Poland is a fiction… According to current legislation, employers who want to get rid of trade unionists can do so easily and at no cost. By dismissing an employee in violation of the regulations, they gain three to four years on the spot, because that is how long the case will last in the Labour Court. During this time the crew is intimidated. The boss has just shown them that, regardless of the regulations in force, he can sack trade unionists with impunity. The employer will not incur any significant costs. The only thing he will have to pay for is back pay for the time they were out of work." [PL077]

Notably, Janusz Śniadek, the former chairman of Solidarność was present at the Committee and claimed that the problems faced by trade union activists did not result from weak regulation, but from incorrect execution, and that legal changes would anyway not be possible since they would not be agreed to by employers [PL077]. On 27th June 2022, IP together with the trade unions August 80, OPZZ Labour Confederation, the Independent Trade Union of mBank Employees, and NSZZ Solidarność, sought to utilise political channels for redress and jointly organised a protest at the Polish Ministry of Justice, demanding a reaction to the increasingly frequent, unlawful dismissals of protected union activists, often via disciplinary proceedings, while performing functions associated with Social Labor Inspectors [PL075]. The unions jointly filed a Common Position of Trade Unions on illegal dismissals to the Minister of Justice, noting that while such cases constitute violations of the Trade Unions Act, weak statutory protections and the insufficient sanctions against employers, mean that the law is regularly broken:

> "Employers opt for illegal dismissals because they know that they are very effective in hindering union activities on the workplace. Court cases for reinstatement drag on for years, consuming the time and financial resources of company committees. Dismissed trade unionists - leaders in disputes with the employer, persons articulating workers' demands, reporting irregularities, blocking changes in remuneration and work organisation that are disadvantageous to the workforce - have difficult or impossible access to the workplace and cannot engage in ongoing activities. Other union members are intimidated. The repression that falls on union activists also deters other workers and discourages them from joining unions. Employers break the law because they feel impunity. The only sanction they may face for unlawfully dismissing a trade union activist is to have to pay wages for the period of unemployment, which for many employers is an unnoticeable expense. With such a low sanction, there is nothing stopping them from crippling the activities of company trade unions." [PL076]

### *Strike Referendum*

In July 2022, in the context of rapid inflation, the union entered into another collective dispute with the company, with the single demand of a wage increase of 6zł. The following month, negotiations with a state-appointed mediator ended quickly after one meeting. During the mediation, Amazon informed IP that Przemyslaw Wolnowski, one of its negotiators, would be dismissed, despite being a protected member of the union presidium and a SIP. As an IP activist later explained:

> "The company was accusing him of allegedly breaching his duty to respect the rules of social coexistence and disobeying the manager's instructions. This was related to a situation where Przemek distributed union leaflets during a half-hour unpaid break. The manager started to take the leaflets from the tables and did not want to give them back. An exchange of words between them followed and Przemek demanded that she stopped restricting union activities." [PL084]

The union challenged the dismissal, while the company increased the base wage of 22zł by 1.50zł. The concession angered workers who organised a Facebook group to donate blood, which entitled them to two days off. Those who actively participated were reassigned to other departments or were threatened with a transfer [PL084].

On 5th October IP initiated a strike referendum for the third time, which is still underway up until the time of writing in March 2023. Once again, union delegations travelled across Amazon sites in Poland to encourage the 20,000 directly-assumed workers to participate (agency workers are excluded). Infographics on social media promoted the campaign and announced dates for voting at different warehouses: "for a decent pay rise, vote in the strike referendum!" [PL022]. Union activists related the challenges in executing a successful strike vote:

> "When organising the referendum, i.e. arriving at a particular warehouse with a ballot box, we literally tried to 'catch' two shifts of workers. We would arrive before lunchtime and finish at night with the last meal for the later shift. In this way we were able to reach a lot of employees, but still not everyone. There are lots of different shifts at Amazon – there are part-time employees, people who only come in at weekends. And we work, too. On top of that, we don't have the communication capabilities that Amazon has. The company obviously does not communicate the referendum through its channels. We can only rely on ourselves – to communicate with people who belong to the union. We have emails, we have social networks, and it must not be forgotten that some Amazon employees, those of elderly age, do not use the internet at all. For these people, the option to vote online is also unattainable, although we have collected a certain number this way, including from people who were afraid to vote the traditional way. I have the impression that roughly half of the staff only finds out about the referendum when we arrive on site. That's why we have to be at each warehouse several times to get the message across." [PL084]

Certainly, employer resistance to the process has meant that activists had to make repeated visits to each site, stretching the commitment of time and resources necessary for the referendum to be carried out across the entire network.

On 20th January 2023, the management of the FC in Łódź refused to allow IP activists to stand in front of the warehouse with a ballot box, while security personnel were posted at each entrance, checking identification and not allowing cars or journalists to enter. Union activists summoned the police and media, as well as a politician from the Razem party. On its media channels, IP denounced Amazon's obstruction of the election: "Amazon forbids strike referendum in POZ1 and WRO5!" [PL021]. The company claimed that voting had last too long and seemed "pointless", whereas union activists emphasized that disrupting a labour dispute is a criminal offence and that Polish labour law sets no deadlines on workers' votes on industrial action [PL084].

Nearly 3,000 workers at Amazon warehouses and offices filed a petition on March 21st demanding pay increases across four of Amazon's branches in Poland. The petition, written in Polish, English and Ukrainian was addressed to Marián Sepeši, Amazon's chief operating officer for Central and Eastern Europe, sitting on the management board of the companies Amazon Development Center Poland, Amazon Corporate Services Poland, Amazon Fulfillment Poland and Amazon MLS Poland. The text stated:

> "Annual inflation in Poland rose to 8.6% in December 2021, according to preliminary figures released on Jan 7th 2022 by Statistics Poland (GUS), a state agency. That marked the sixth consecutive monthly rise, with inflation rates at their highest in more than two decades. Inflation in Poland has also consistently been among the highest in both the European Union over the last two years. Moreover, it should exceed 10% in 2022. Amazon net worth in December 2021 was $1705 billion ($1.7 trillion), while the company's

net income was equal to $26,263 Billion: Amazon is amongst the most prominent companies in the e-commerce sector. While the company has risen significantly during the pandemic, the growth of the company does not reflect positively on its employees. Neither Amazon has decided to adjust employees' salaries to the circumstances in Poland nor have other benefits been rewarded. As employees of Amazon in Poland we would highly appreciate our employer Amazon Poland to take the current economic situation in Poland into consideration and support its workers by 15% rise in salary as inflation cover as well as award for the company's growth." [PL023]

Notably, nearly 200 signatures came from the Amazon Technology Development office workers in Gdansk and Warsaw, reflecting the organizing dynamic at tech sites in Poland, and their integration into the movement.

## Discussion

The analysis of the Polish case illustrates the obstacles faced by trade unions in a DME context where they do not benefit from a high degree of institutional power, as well as opportunities for revitalisation and the building of worker power. Accordingly, the significant achievements of the Polish unions illustrate that even in unfavourable circumstances and given diminished bargaining power, trade unions need not be victims of structural change, but can make strategic decisions to revitalise their organisations and to collectively defend their interests by creatively utilising the power resources at their disposal. Over the course of the dispute with Amazon in Poland, the trade unions have managed to secure a number of significant concessions through collection in the form of pay increases and improvements in the organisation of work processes which positive impacts on the health and safety of workers. While the third strike referendum is still ongoing at the time of writing, and despite the fact that the first two attempts failed to meet the frequency necessary to ratify the outcome, they were nevertheless significant in soliciting the involvement of workers and in sending a warning signal to management.

The comparison of the two trade union organisations mobilising at Amazon in Poland with different outcomes can be attributed to the variations in terms of how the organisations have deployed their power resources and strategic capabilities. Indeed, in the exchanges between the two unions in 2015, related earlier in this chapter, union leaders emphasized the ideological differences between the organisations, which have led each to pursue different strategies for mobilising workers. Whereas Solidarność initially pursued social partnership, before realising the lack of goodwill from management, IP has from the outset pursued a conflict-oriented strategy on the basis of building rank-and-file power, observing the fruitlessness of pursuing partnership with an employer that is clearly insincere in its public proclamations regarding openness to dialogue. Indeed, IP's first negotiations with management led to the unequivocal conclusion that "dialogue with Amazon is a sham", and that "only our strength and collective determination will force the company to make concessions" [PL046]. Consequently, these political and ideological differences have had a significant impact in terms of how each union has deployed and developed the resources at their disposal.

Both unions have observed the difficulties of building collective cohesion at worksites with very high levels of employee turnover, and of founding branch commissions at new sites. Indeed, developing deliberative vitality among workers, and trust in the union is difficult under such conditions, especially at sites where no structures of interest representation are present. However, the analysis illustrates that such challenges are not insurmountable, and that unions can leverage their infrastructural resources, for instance, union newspapers and digital communication tools, to at least partially offset such weaknesses, and to inform workers about their rights and entitlements, in turn fostering deliberative vitality. Whereas Solidarność has relied on a passive concept of union membership, IP advocates an active concept of membership that calls for direct participation in the daily life of the union, and which encourages workers to directly make use of the instruments of industrial democracy in order to build counter-power on the shopfloor. Under this conception, leaders do not direct the workers' struggle but harness the resources

and capabilities of the union in a way that enables workers to fight independently. Nevertheless, leadership is critical for transforming grievances into a sense of injustice and consequently, into collective mobilisation (Kelly, 1998), and crucially important but often overlooked are forms of left-wing political leadership that is also actively seeks out justice outside the workplace and mobilizes these sentiments in order to mobilise members (Connolly & Darlington, 2012). The emphasis on building solidarity among the workforce has been crucial for overcoming the isolation that characterizes work and Amazon and reworking this into a sense of dignity and confidence vis-à-vis management. Despite high levels of turnover, IP notes that workers who are dismissed or quit, do not simply disappear but tend to remain in the union, helping to build networks across companies and sectors. Instead of an iron law of oligarchy, such concepts of membership and leadership can be conducive to a "virtuous circle" of transparent strategic leadership (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020: 260). Well-informed and engaged rank-and-file members are more likely to demonstrate a willingness to act, enhancing the union's effectiveness, and in turn providing the organisational capacities and leadership confidence that themselves facilitate participation and transparency.

In terms of infrastructural resources, both unions have exploited the institutional opportunities in the form of Social Labour Inspectors, and provide their members with financial support, for instance via the Social Benefits Funds, as well as legal advice for social security and labour law matters as well as legal assistance in conflicts with the employer. IP also managed to effectively leverage the expertise of the National Labour Inspectorate in order to strengthen its claims regarding the poor organisation of the labour process, and to legitimate demands to decrease the intensity of work. However, divergences are apparent regarding the extent to which the unions have exploited digital communication tools for trade union renewal, as a means of interacting with existing and prospective members, as well as broader audiences. IP has deployed a mix of traditional and less conventional resources for engaging members and non-members in the form of flyers, brochures, the workers' newspaper, as well as social media channels. Such resources have been crucial for providing workers with the conceptual tools necessary to interpret workplace conflicts, as well as for mobilising sentiments for collective action. Given the geographic and informational distances between worksites, the workers' newspaper in particular is an invaluable resource which amplifies worker voice, provides legal and professional advice, including information about labour rights and entitlements, and directs collective action by disseminating union collective action frames. Given that many of these resources are available in digital form, they can be effective even when structures of interest representation are not present, trade unions might benefit from developing such resources when the possibilities for developing other resources such as collective cohesion are limited. Additionally, IP's training workshops for workplace organising are another resource which has been essential for developing organising competences among union members. In these regards, IP has more fully exploited the possibilities available to unions by developing infrastructural resources in order to promote engagement among members, as well as to strengthen legitimacy among non-unionised workers and other audiences.

Regarding network embeddedness, both unions have been able to leverage the expertise and monitoring controls of state institutions in order to strengthen their legitimacy and bargaining positions. At the same time, the paltry fines imposed by these agencies have been rather ineffective in deterring retaliatory dismissals or violations of labour law. Solidarność generally limited itself to interactions with such institutional actors, and as such featured a low level of network diversity, failing to fully exploit the coalitional power that might be available by partnering with NGOs, SMOs or community groups outside the sphere of industrial relations. Meanwhile, IP's deep roots in progressive social movements and the traditions of anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism has meant that the union's membership base, its culture and values overlapped to a greater extent with non-labour actors. Indeed, IP members have participated in other important struggles such as the Women's Strike against the restriction of abortion rights in Poland, and have participated in organisation a union convoy of labour aid for Ukraine. The engagement with broader issues outside of workplaces have helped to publically legitimate IP as an

opinion leader, and demonstrated its capacity to produce an inclusive agenda that is part of broader social projects.

Clear differences are also apparent among the organisations in terms of their use of narrative resources and framing capabilities deployed. Solidarność has largely not expanded its stock of interpretative frames to problematize Amazon's impact on workplaces, communities and the environment, while its framing capabilities were limited to frame amplification practices, consisting of reinforcing and clarifying core principles and demands for meaningful negotiations with Amazon. IP meanwhile, has developed its stock of narrative resources in order to incorporate the claims of actors outside the sphere of labour, for instance by framing intensive e-commerce in terms of the exploitation of human and natural resources, or by mobilising in defence of public services to more broadly challenge neoliberal reforms. The efficacy of such frames was evident by the fact that they attracted the support of local miners' unions, as well as Greenpeace Poland which participated in blockades of Amazon warehouses in Poland during Black Friday 2020. Such experiences confirm the point that broader and more inclusive frames can be deployed in order to mobilise the support of diverse target groups (Ferree et al., 2012; Lindekilde, 2014). As in other countries, Amazon has retaliated against militant worker and union activists by means of dismissals, reassignment and the non-extension of contracts. By framing repression as indicative of the efficacy of collective action and apprehension on the employer side, IP has sought to rework this obstacle into an opportunity, by pushing for legislative reforms at the national level, and by harnessing its network resources to mobilise additional allies, as with AgroUnia.

Framing strategies can also be effectively deployed in order to develop collective cohesion and to ensure the reproduction of the membership base. IP's motivational frames link past achievements as direct outcomes of previous actions such as the Safe Package and Stop Feedback campaigns, in order to illustrate the benefits of unionism and instil a sense of efficacy regarding participation in collective struggle. Such framing strategies encourage workers be actively involved in the life of the union, and thus further the development of cohesive collective identities and mobilising capacity. Conversely, IP activists have steered clear of narratives that label workers as victims. Through the use of such motivational frames and an active concept of membership, IP has managed to establish a "system of expectations and accomplishments" between union members and the organisation (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020: 260). Finally, in contrast to both Solidarność and Ver.di which have not succeeded in meaningfully problematizing the issue or developing convincing frames, IP has persistently agitated against the use of recruitment agencies and short-term fixed contracts, which its diagnostic frames identified as causes of employment instability. Inclusive framings illustrated the deleterious impacts of precarious contracts for both temporary as well as permanent workers, reworking this into a motivating factor, stressing the importance of building solidarity among different categories of workers.

While Solidarność managed to mitigate rivalries in order to ensure a basic level of understanding with its competing union, generally its intermediating capabilities were only moderately developed. Leaders' observations that workers' grievances often never reached the union, or that workers approached the union too late can be interpreted as an outcome of weakly developed infrastructural resources and mechanisms for deliberation. Meanwhile, IP displayed more strongly developed and proactive intermediation capabilities. It relied on workers' inquiry, in order to survey workers' experiences and preferences, and include workers in decision-making, which provided synergistic effects, in terms of strengthening deliberative vitality and ensuring a higher level of inclusion. These strongly developed feedback mechanisms afforded IP a greater degree of flexibility in terms of its capacity to readily modify frames and narratives as needed, in order to reach other constituencies and expand the stakes of the conflict in order to encompass the claims and interests of different constituencies.

As concerns the unions' capabilities to articulate actions across time and space, both unions have utilised their involvement in their respective transnational union networks in order to exchange information regarding differences in working conditions, levels of pay, bonuses and additional benefits paid. Additionally, these networks have been useful for disseminating information among allies in terms

of the challenges faces by unions in Poland, such as barriers to participating in the international strike movement due to restrictive strike laws. However, Solidarność has demonstrated a weaker capability in terms of articulating the benefits of transnational cooperation, and to connect this convincingly to its activities domestically. Once again, this can be traced back to weakly developed infrastructural resources and mechanisms for deliberation which have bottle-necked other strategic capabilities. In contrast, IP has more proactively utilised its infrastructural resources in order to illustrate the benefits of international solidarity, by actively reporting on AWI meetings in its newspaper, by highlighting the positive impacts of struggles abroad on working conditions in Poland, and by connecting initiatives at the transnational level to its own activities at the local and national levels.

In terms of learning capabilities, Solidarność has demonstrated a moderate capacity to learn from past experiences and to diffuse learning throughout the organisation in order to adapt to change. On one hand, after realizing the limitations of a social partnership strategy, it began to adopt a slightly more confrontational approach and began to cooperate more closely with IP on the Safe Package and Stop Feedbacks campaigns, as well as on the second strike referendum. Additionally, despite limitations to the right to strike, it participated in international days of action coordinated by the UNI Alliance by encouraging workers to use sick-leave to donate blood. On the other hand, IP has displayed a greater readiness to innovate its repertoire of action given the restrictive institutional environment, deploying a mix of institutional and more contentious tactics such as spontaneous wildcat strikes, go-slow actions, as well as protests on the shopfloor, outside Amazon facilities and recruitment agencies. The slowdown that occurred in Poznań in June 2015 was a significant turning point for the dispute in Poland, marked by a recognition of Amazon's transnational strikebreaking capabilities. This and other wildcat actions that followed demonstrated the bargaining power that logistics workers possess to disrupt the shipping process, notwithstanding legal limitations to striking. In short, IP has demonstrated a stronger capacity to use and develop its power resources purposively and pedagogically, in terms of how it has reflected on and framed past encounters with management, analysing the possibilities and pitfalls for organising, and adjusting its narratives and tactics accordingly. Once again, a high level of collective cohesion as well as strongly developed mechanisms for deliberative vitality and for ensuring the diffusion of competences and knowledge through organisational channels have been crucial for this.

This chapter has illustrated how the structural features in the form of the competitive incentives provided by the pluralist IR system in Poland, as well as the context of privatisation and liberalisation of certain industries provide opportunities for smaller radical unions like IP to present an alternative to the reformist tendencies of larger unions. Despite significant challenges in the form of the restrictive institutional environment, employer repression, and high level turnover due to the use of fixed-term and agency contracts, IP continues to build worker power across the network with the goal of legitimating a strike and represents a paradigmatic case of union renewal enabled by a pursuit of radical political unionism. On the other hand, IP has not managed to attain a level of unionisation among the workforce necessary to achieve company-level representative criteria in Poland. Nevertheless, the case illustrates that despite being a minority trend, political radicalisation is one of the strategic pathways that trade unions may pursue to reconstruct social identities, redefine solidarity, revive internal democracy and strengthen their legitimacy (Denis, 2012). Radical political unions frame their activities in terms of class struggle, and define their identities in opposition to hegemonic trade unions which are characterised by external dependence, a low levels of confrontation and internal democracy (Upchurch et al., 2009; Upchurch & Mathers, 2011). Since radical political unions tend to tackle political questions beyond industrial disputes, they broaden the agenda of trade unions by forging alliances with left-wing actors. The confrontational tactics utilised, in the form of strike threats or actual strikes, and wildcat actions bring heightened media attention and increase the national visibility of radical unionism. Likewise, IP's successive strike referenda, while they have so far not succeeded in meeting the requisite frequency, have increased bargaining leverage, managed to build organising momentum, and are evidence of the resilience and combativitity of the workforce, an important factor which is often neglected in assessments of the achievements of trade unions (Darlington, 2010).

Nevertheless, as IP's experiences demonstrate, radical political unions face a series of challenges and limitations, for instance in the form of employer counter-mobilisation, for instance through court injunctions, repression and strike-breaking to undermine their impact. There is also an expectation that the political orientation and discourses utilised by radical unions will fail to have a broad resonance and appeal to a wide range of workers (Denis, 2012). However, by taking care to avoid overly ideological or political language, and through effective framing strategies, IP has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case, and that instead, radical unions can succeed in mobilising broader sections of the workforce, for instance precarious agency workers, than their relatively more traditional counterparts. Further, it is expected that radical political unions are at a disadvantage in comparison to relatively better resourced confederal unions, which have structures dispersed through national territories necessary to sustain trade union activities, and that accordingly, radical political unions will tend to operate primarily on the sub-national level (Pilati & Perra, 2020). Such deterministic accounts however occlude the agency and strategic choices available to union activists in terms of selecting which power resources to deploy and develop, and the discretion in terms of how they interpret or frame the political context and their activities. Union strategy is not determined by the political or institutional environment, but is a product of a combination of both internal and external variables (Connolly & Darlington, 2012; Frege & Kelly, 2004; Mrozowicki et al., 2010).

# CHAPTER 8: TRANSNATIONAL LABOUR ALLIANCES AGAINST AMAZON

The 9th April 2013 witnessed the first strikes against Amazon, not in the USA, where it was founded nearly twenty years earlier, but at one of Amazon's two massive 'fulfilment centres' (FCs) in Bad Hersfeld near Frankfurt, Germany where workers protested against low wages, bad working conditions and demanded a collective agreement based on the rules normally applicable to German retail and mail order corporations. In the fall of 2013, Amazon announced plans to open three FCs in Poland and two in the Czech Republic over the following two years, prompting Ver.di to meet with the Polish NSZZ Solidarność and the Czech OSPO unions, who agreed to work closely together in the future "so that locations not be played off against each other" [DE9]. A year and a half later in 2014, Amazon opened its first three FCs in Poland, followed by another in Prague in 2015, largely to serve the German market, Amazon's second-largest market after the USA [DE9]. The first international connections and solidarities between Amazon workers were catalysed by German and Polish workers' mutual recognition of the firm's capacity to rely on its transnational reserve army of labour in order to break strikes, and to the first instances of cross-border cooperation. Indeed, since the first industrial actions, the company demonstrated a pattern of systematically shifting orders away from striking facilities in Germany, to neighbouring sites in France, Poland and the Czech Republic. Since this time, Amazon workers have coordinated their activities transnationally in two different transnational labour networks, namely the UNI Global Amazon Alliance, and the Amazon Workers International.

This chapter argues that these networks represent top-down and bottom-up forms of internationalism respectively. These networks have facilitated communication and coordination, helping unionists, workers and other actors in different national contexts to bridge the spatial gap. Such transnational coordination across different production sites is crucial for organising logistics workers who have a high potential to exploit vulnerable links in circuits of production and distribution.

The first section of the chapter focuses on the UNI Global Amazon Alliance, as a case of top-down labour internationalism. First, it describes the emergence of the network, its organizational structure, its membership, strategy and activities. It then describes the key contentious issues which the UNI Alliance has mobilised against on a transnational level. Next it addresses two characteristic forms of collective action organised by the UNI Alliance, namely capital strategies at Amazon shareholder meetings, and legislative reforms at the European level. The following section focuses on Amazon Workers International, which is described as a case of bottom-up labour internationalism. Likewise, it begins by describing the emergence of this network, and relevant differences with the UNI Amazon Alliances as regards its organizational structure, membership, strategy, repertoires of action and collective action frames. Next it describes the Global 'Sick Out' which was organised by the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice in April 2020. Consequently, it describes the Make Amazon Pay campaign, which has been jointly organised by both networks. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the recently established European Works Council at Amazon, focusing in particular on the opportunities and limitations afforded by this institution.

## Internationalism from above: UNI Amazon Alliance

### *Organizational structure*

In July 2014, UNI Global established a European Amazon Working Group, now called the UNI Amazon Alliance, which meets twice a year. UNI Global represents over 20 million workers in service sectors across 150 countries, with its largest federations in retail, wholesale commerce, banking and telecommunications (Helfen & Fichter, 2013). The membership of the UNI Amazon Alliance consists largely of senior officials of national union organisations (e.g. union Amazon campaign leaders, heads of union departments, staff of unions' international or communications departments) staff of global union

federations (GUFs) such as UNI Global, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Transport Federation (ITF) and the European Transport Federation (ETF), NGOs, research and advocacy organisations, academic researchers, and partner organisations such as the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation. Conferences jointly organised by UNI Global and ITUC have also involved national and European members of parliament, as well as officials from the European Commission. The Alliance includes trade unions from 23 countries, which tend to be the large national union federations in their respective contexts, including: Ver.di (Germany), NSZZ Solidarność (Poland), the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL, Italy), the Italian Confederation of Trade Unions (CISL, Italy), the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT, France), the General Confederation of Labour (CGT, France), the Workers' Commissions (CCOO, Spain), Odborovy Svaz Pracovniku Obchodu (Czech Republic), the GMB (UK), The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW, USA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU, USA) the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (USA), the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU, USA), the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW-STTP, Canada), the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA, Australia), Unionen (Sweden), The Engineers of Sweden (SI, Sweden), The Swedish Commercial Employees' Union (Handels, Sweden), and the Union of Private Sector Employees, Printing, Journalism, and Paper (GPA-DJP, Austria).

Some national union delegations include worker representatives in the union, however they comprise the minority. Consequently, the Alliance's agenda is shaped by senior union officials rather than rank-and-file members or workers. While the network is dominated by European and North American trade unions, it has gradually expanded to include unions from beyond these continents. The Alliance also invites policymakers, state regulators[113], journalists, academics, whistle-blowers as well as informal worker organisations to participate in its conferences, such as Amazon Employees for Climate Justice and the Awood Centre. Conferences of the Alliance are attended by around 100-150 participants, and directed by a steering committee.

The Alliance functions as a transnational hub for actors to exchange information and receive updates on the activities of their counterparts in different parts of the world, as well as for organising transnationally coordinated strikes and global campaigns such as Make Amazon Pay. Around half of the time of the conferences are dedicated to country reports, whereby members convey the latest developments in the company's business activities in their respective contexts, and how collective actors have responded. Consequently, the conferences function as a forum where affiliates reflect on transnational developments, plan collective actions, and hone their communication strategies with respect to different target audiences. For instance, in planning coordinated actions, union representatives have discussed the need to develop uniform 'branding', and as such have adopted frames that were perceived to be successful in national contexts, such as the UK-based GMB's slogan "we are humans not robots" [GLO033].

Affiliate unions utilise the network to disseminate the outputs of research that they have commissioned in their own contexts. For instance, the GMB with the support of the Trades Union Congress and UNI Global, collaborated on the report *Challenging Amazon* (2020), which investigated "the global abuses of workers' rights and safety; the multiple ways Amazon games the system through tax minimisation and public subsidies; how it leverages its position in the market to dominate and stifle competition; its use of intrusive data gathering and surveillance technology; and the environmental impact of its business model", as well as demonstrating how unions and public institutions in the UK and internationally have sought to challenge these practices [GLO069].[114] Further, the GMB commissioned

[113] For instance, a UNI Global and ITUC joint conference invited a representative from the French Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Posts (ARCEP).

[114] https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/challenging-amazon-report

research into Amazon's public procurement in the UK, in order to assess "how much the UK public sector is spending with Amazon and which authorities are turning to the company to run public services" by awarding contracts to Amazon Web Services [GLO070].[115] Likewise, the report *Amazon's Next Frontier: Your City's Purchasing,* produced by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a research and advocacy organisation focusing on the concentration or corporate power, investigates Amazon's public sector procurement in the US [GLO074].[116]

Affiliates have related during Alliance meetings that such reports have been very useful to organising work in their own contexts: the president of the US-based RWDSU noted that the union relied heavily on the GMB's reports and its activities in the media [GLO035]. Another joint report by the New Economics Foundation commissioned by ITUC has highlighted the influence that digital corporations on WTO negotiations regarding e-commerce and digital chapters within free trade agreements, noting that "governments are promoting new rules that would further reduce their own authority to regulate in the interests of people, to the extent that they are behaving more as captives of corporations, including giant tech monopolies, than as guardians of the public interest" [GLO071]. GMB leaders have suggested in international conferences, that Amazon's contracts with public service present an opportunity to leverage pressure from government and public institutions in order to address concerns around workplace safety and the marginalisation of unions [GLO037].

Unions with more experience in organising industrial actions against Amazon, such as Ver.di, have a central role in steering the network's agenda. Ver.di has insisted that the Alliance should orient its activities towards developing strike capacity across all Amazon sites globally, to establishing collective bargaining agreements in their respective contexts, and to develop a high level of visibility in the media. Apart from regulating pay and working conditions, Ver.di claims that demanding collective bargaining also entails agitating for cultural change among the company's management, pushing for Amazon to "drop the blockade" that the company has kept towards unions [GLO035]. The Teamsters, who noted that in the USA, there is no co-determination, no works councils or collective bargaining agreement, therefore "it's really a matter of changing how Bezos and Amazon think and act" [GLO035]. Indeed, the unions affiliated with the Alliance have focused on engaging politicians sympathetic to their goals, such as the GMB and Ver.di [GLO035].

Christy Hoffman, the general secretary of UNI Global has emphasized the Alliance's need to use "all of our levers of power", and for unions to coordinate across different countries in order to engage customers, investors, regulators and politicians. Hoffman noted that "we are not only here to talk about workers' rights" [GLO034], and as such, the agenda of the UNI Alliance has sought to connect a range of issues, summarised in the following section. The special symposium on Amazon jointly organised by UNI Global and ITUC in Brussels on 2nd December 2019 was a milestone in terms of moving the agenda of the Alliance beyond a focus on workers' rights, in order to address the issues of monopoly power and market competition, the climate crisis, privacy and digital rights and tax avoidance.[117] Indeed, by gradually

[115] https://www.gmb.org.uk/sites/default/files/Tussell%20-%20Amazon%20in%20the%20public%20sector%20June%202022%20Report.pdf

[116] While Amazon notes that contracts have been won through a process "subject to full and open competition", the analysis, based on a review of contract documents finds that "the request for proposals was written in a way that favoured Amazon and precluded competing offers" [GLO074]. The report notes that "Amazon is leveraging its growing relationship with local governments to induce more businesses to join its Marketplace, thus fortifying its position as the dominant platform for online commerce". See https://ilsr.org/amazon-and-local-government-purchasing/

[117] Symposium attendees were greeted by a video message from former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn who noted a close collaboration with the GMB. Workers employed in Amazon's logistics or last-mile services in the UK and globally, he claimed, should not have to endure the firm's unfair working practices. Corbyn also connected the company's tax avoidance to the situation of the British welfare state, asking "if they paid their taxes, how many more doctors, nurses and teachers would we have?". Referring to the upcoming UK parliamentary elections, Corbyn pledged that a Labour government

extending its concerns beyond the sphere of labour, the network has managed to broaden its sentiment pool and to incorporate individuals and organisations concerned with issues such as taxation, market competition, climate justice and data privacy. Hoffman explained the Alliance's strategic approach in terms of building a united front across a range of issues, raising awareness of these issues, and putting pressure on politicians and regulators to take action:

> "Amazon is really the iconic corporation of our time that captures all the issues we really care about, whether it is very anti-union to the core, precarious work, tax dodging, introduction of technology which breaks the body and spirit of workers with algorithmic management, monopolistic. All of these issues have to be taken on as a package. This is the package you get with Amazon, and this is what we're looking at from a global perspective. So we think globally, we need to raise awareness about these issues, to share and develop joint strategy. Not only among unions, but also among NGOs that are active in these different spaces, digital rights for example, but also politicians and so on… Amazon's business model is the same everywhere. It's not as if they have one model of getting work done in California and another one in Poland. It's really the same model, and they also need to know they're going to face worker resistance everywhere. Wherever they go in the world, unions should be ready, and they are ready to take them on, they understand the challenges that they're presented, that their economy is presented when Amazon is there. So we've got to do this as a global movement, and that's the way we are going to do it." [GLO060]

Nigel Flanagan, the former chairman of the UNI Amazon Alliance emphasised the significance of the conflict with Amazon, as a "fight that will define the future of the trade union movement", and framed the challenge for unions in terms of demonstrating their concrete utility to workers, in a context where unions are being increasingly marginalised by corporations such as Amazon that insist on individualised employment relations with workers. At UNI Alliance conferences, Sharan Burrow, the general secretary of ITUC framed the climate crisis, the worldwide decline of collective bargaining, and Amazon's monopolistic tendencies, as resulting from the failure of nation states' and global institutions such as the WTO and WB to enforce competition policy and regulate corporations. Burrow presented regulatory reform, as the solution, stressing the necessity of rebuilding multilateralism based on aggregate workers' power, supported by coalitions of trade unions, NGOs and community allies. She commended proposals made by US Senators to break up Amazon, and suggested adopting this as an umbrella or master frame which encapsulates other issues [GLO034].

UNI Global provides unions in the Amazon Alliance with a range of infrastructural resources. For instance, UNI has organised training workshops and seminars for trade unions in different locations around Europe, with EU funding and with logistical support from the ETF as well as Syndex, a consulting firm that specializes in advising and supporting trade unions, employee representatives and health and safety committees. Syndex has also been involved in developing improved tools for strategy as well as a worker health and safety questionnaire which affiliates of the Alliance distributed among workers in their countries. UNI Global and ITUC facilitate organising at the national level through organising academies, such as the Central and Eastern European Organising Center (COZZ) launched in 2016 to support union growth in the region, with organisers in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. COZZ also provides organising support to the ETF, particularly in docking, rail and aviation sectors. UNI reports that over 3,500 workers and organisers were trained at the Centre which employs 30 staff [GLO042]. COZZ has launched 'Unions Help Refugees' (UHR) a project facilitating trade union support to help refugees search for good jobs. UHR observed that despite high levels of education, low Polish language skills drove many refugees into low-skilled service jobs where language requirements are minimal, often without regular payment. UNI notes that "The objectives are to show a friendly union face, and to help workers avoid

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under his leadership "will force you to recognise and deal with trade unions" and "force you to pay your fair share of taxes" [GLO034].

human trafficking, the exploitation of refugee wages, or black-market conditions." The general secretary Christy Hoffman commented:

> "In the past five years, COZZ has succeeded expectations and been a dynamic force in the region to build union power, lift workers and now extends its support to job-seeking refugees from the Ukraine." [GLO042]

Given that much of the activities of the UNI Alliance centre around the exchange of knowledge and expertise between member organisations working in different languages, UNI also supports members with translation services and by disseminating communications throughout the network. In particular, there is an emphasis on leveraging the expertise of unions with more experience in organising workers at Amazon facilities and running a nationwide strike campaign, and relaying this expertise to newcomers in the network, and providing training for delegates. A representative of the Italian FILCAMS-CGIL referred to this as a kind of "anticipatory socialisation" [GLO033].

The Alliance meeting in 2019 coincided with the campaign against the proposed Amazon HQ2 in New York, which had promised 25,000 jobs in return for US$3bn in local government subsidies. Following calls by the community to reject the subsidies and for the right to unionise, the project was eventually established in Crystal City, Virginia, just outside Washington D.C. Stuart Applebaum, the president of UNI Global Commerce and the RWDSU, centrally involved in the campaign against HQ2, attributed its success to coalition building efforts between the labour movement and progressive social movements such as Make the Road New York. He argued for the UNI Alliance to develop similar coalition efforts, and to extend its narrative frames beyond the workplace, but to the wider range of issues that workers face in their daily lives, related to housing, education and migration [GLO034].

## *Contentious issues*

*1) Repression of trade unions and lack of co-determination*

One of the recurring themes in the Alliance concerns Amazon's obstruction of trade union activities, and its insistent refusal to recognize unions as legitimate social partners in co-determining working conditions, or to include them in wage-setting processes. As such, one of the key aims of the Alliance is to mount sufficient pressure on the company in order for it to sign collective bargaining agreements in every national context that it operates in. Given Ver.di's prominent position in the network, the demand for collective bargaining subsumes other claims concerning the setting of pay and bonuses. Representatives from Ver.di framed their campaign for a collective bargaining agreement in Germany to other affiliates as "fighting for cultural change at the company", meaning Amazon's refusal to acknowledge unions as social partners and to engage in dialogue [GLO035]. Unions in different countries have variably won some recognition and have forced management to the table, however the prevailing consensus among the Alliance is that developing union membership and strike capacity at Amazon sites is a prerequisite for negotiations.[118] In September 2020, 15 European trade unions, with the support of UNI Europa, submitted a letter to the European Commission, calling it to launch an investigation into Amazon's business and workplace practices, particularly its surveillance of union

[118] The Italian CGIL expressed their frustration in negotiating with a company that refuses to communicate with regional representatives, a standing feature of the Italian industrial relations system which is structured according to sector and region. In Italy, Amazon operates under 11 distinct legal entities and across three collective bargaining agreements, which within the Italian confederal structure, entails coordinating different sectoral unions within the CGIL, CISL and UIL responsible for commerce, transportation and logistics. While the Italian unions were the first to win collective bargaining agreement with Amazon in May 2018 (valid for one year, which was renegotiated in June 2019), the agreement covers only the FC at Castel San Giovanni, and applies only to workers classified under the commerce sector. Apart from a modest increase in wages, the unions won the right for workers to voluntarily opt into working night shifts.

activities which they alleged constituted a "breach of European labour, data and privacy laws" [DE137]. This came among revelations that Amazon had posted job listings for intelligence analysts to track "labor organizing threats against the company" and "funding and activities connected to corporate campaigns (internal and external) against Amazon" [GLO072]. Subsequently 37 members of the European Parliament submitted a letter to former CEO Bezos demanding information regarding the surveillance of union activists and politicians [GLO073].

*2) Health and safety*

Another theme which has been consistently reiterated in the Alliance's meetings is the issue of hazardous working conditions, with damaging physical and mental health effects on workers. Union representatives frame health and safety issues as a product of a rationalised labour process which intensively monitors and controls worker performance. The intense pace of work tended to be framed as an occupational health and safety concern, for instance, in the context of the Safe Package and We Are Not Robots campaigns. As Christy Hoffman related, health and safety concerns extend beyond facilities owned and managed by Amazon, to the businesses implicated in its supply-chains:

> "The underside of Amazon's explosive growth, however, is felt by the very people who generate its wealth: its workers. From the lack of masks and other protective equipment during the pandemic to injury rates twice as high as the industry standard to warehouses catching fire, Amazon workers are constantly put at risk — with fatal consequences all too often. In the supply chain, conditions are often much worse. Amazon has been found to sell clothing from dozens of blacklisted Bangladeshi factories that have been deemed too dangerous following the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse. The company is still refusing to sign the legally binding Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a central demand of workers, trade unions, and activists." [GLO060]

*3) Monopolisation and market competition*

Union leaders in the Alliance have framed Amazon's anti-competitive market behaviour in terms of e-commerce's destruction of "brick and mortar" retail and small businesses, gatekeeping, and stifling competition, arguing that fair competition is undermined by Amazon administration of the marketplace while simultaneously acting as a vendor [GLO033]. This echoes the concerns of stationary retailers, which have repeatedly pointed to their inability to compete with a market actor which undercuts competition by price dumping and by operating at a loss. Oliver Roethig, the general secretary of UNI Europa argued that the Alliance's goal is to "establish a level playing field for all" to create a fair market for all participants, and pointed to the need to close legal loopholes that allow corporations to avoid rules around competition, tax and privacy [GLO034]. Hoffman observed that,

> "… the danger emanating from Amazon is finally being recognized. Antitrust authorities and progressive political forces are finally taking the increasing market dominance and unfair competition against on-platform sellers and retail competitors seriously. For Amazon to set the rules for their platform while also selling themselves gives them an unfair advantage over all other sellers, as well as more leverage over our wallet and data." [GLO063]

*4) Taxation and public subsidies*

Unions within the Alliance have also problematized Amazon's relations with local and national governments where it operates, particularly in the context of its tax evasion practices and pursuit of public sector contracts. For instance, the GMB's investigation into Amazon's public subsidisation and tax evasion noted:

> "Receiving subsidies and tax deductions is commonplace in the United States, where they have also been known to threaten and pull out of warehouses and investment when demands for higher taxes are made. The most high-profile example is Amazon's withdrawal of plans to build a second headquarters in the Queens District of New York. The company was set to receive nearly $3 billion (£2.4 billion) in subsidies in exchange for bringing 25,000 jobs to the area. Campaigners, including unions, objected to the subsidy and raised other concerns – and Amazon pulled the plug." [GLO069]

UNI leaders have also connected this issue to the underfunding of public sector institutions due to falling tax revenues. As Christy Hoffman observed:

> "Amazon also undermines our governments' capacities to fight the cost-of-living crisis. Amazon avoided $5.2 billion in US corporate federal income taxes in 2021. In Europe, Amazon paid no income tax on €55 billion sales, instead receiving €1 billion in tax credits." [GLO060]

In October 2021, 136 countries agreed on a reform of the international tax system, which re-allocates some taxation rights over multinational corporations from their home countries, to the markets where their goods and services are sold and where they earn profits, regardless of whether they have a physical presence there or not [GLO075]. The reform, scheduled to be effective in 2023, posits that MNCs with global sales above €20 billion and profitability above 10% will be covered by the new rules, with 25% of the profit above the 10% threshold reallocated to market jurisdictions.

*5) Privacy and digital rights*

The UNI Alliance has increasingly turned its attention to issues relating to data privacy and digital rights. UNI Global leaders have framed these issues as causes of income inequality and have called for social partnership and collective bargaining as solutions. As Christy Hoffman related in an interview:

> "We see digitalization driving the wealth of people like Amazon founder Jeff Bezos to enormous levels, whereas there was no wage growth in western Europe in 2017 in real terms... We can bargain about the implementation of new technology, about the unrealistic scheduling accelerated by digital technology, about excessive surveillance and many more issues. If workers don't have a voice they will resist this technology. We are not afraid of new technology but it must be implemented in an atmosphere of security and fairness. Bargaining is central in the mix." [GLO061]

*6) Climate justice*

Finally, the Alliance has increasingly drawn attention to the environmental effects of intensive e-Commerce, and made calls for Amazon to decarbonise its supply-chain. Whereas affiliate unions have been slow to problematize this issue, the Alliance has invited the US-based worker organisation Amazon Employees for Climate Justice which has dedicated significant efforts to pressuring the company on this topic, and which succeeded in forcing Amazon to adopt a climate pledge, based largely on AECJ's own platform. As noted by Christy Hoffman, the issue extends beyond the carbon emissions stemming from e-commerce, but are also related to Amazon's sponsorship of political candidates with a record of climate change denial:

> "Amazon continues to fuel climate breakdown. Despite its pledge to fully decarbonize its operations by 2040, the corporation's CO2 emissions rose by 18 percent in 2021. And the number is only so low because — unlike competitors like Target — Amazon is drastically undercounting its carbon footprint: it solely counts its own branded products in its reporting, which make up only 1 percent of its overall sales. Amazon Web Services continues not just to supply fossil fuel companies, but has entered into "strategic collaboration" with some of them. And another chapter was added to Amazon's history of sponsoring climate denial when, shortly before the US midterm elections, it was revealed that Amazon gave money to at least twenty-five climate-denying candidates." [GLO060]

## *Capital strategies*

Given that some Amazon workers receive shares in their employment packages, UNI Global has pursued a strategy that has attempted to use worker shareholding as a resource to leverage support from Amazon investors. At the shareholders meeting on 22nd May 2019, 12 resolutions were filed by Amazon workers regarding: due diligence regarding the development of products such as facial recognition technology for law enforcement agencies, discrimination and diversity in pay and promotions, human rights impact assessment, environmental racism, hate speech in products, corporate lobbying, and finally,

regarding an independent chair and CEO suggesting that Jeff Bezos should not sit on the board [GLO066]. The head of Ver.di also supported targeting pension funds which own Amazon shares, claiming "we want investors to stand with us", and stressing the need to communicate with "responsible investors" about democracy and environmental impacts. Additionally, UNI Global staff have participated in conferences on responsible investment, and argued for investors to promote labour rights at their companies from human rights and financial standpoints; since they create regulatory, operational and reputational risks for companies such as Amazon [GLO066]. UNI's Senior Investor Engagement Advisor related:

> "Through their stewardship, investors can create an enabling environment where workers are able to safeguard their own human rights, in turn mitigating a whole host of human rights and material risks … to do this well, investor and company engagement with workers and their trade unions is essential." [GLO066]

Further, UNI Global has participated with the Committee on Workers' Capital (CWC), an international labour network focusing on facilitating dialogue and action on the responsible investment of workers' capital, in a global campaign aiming to address labour rights by engaging investors. The CWC released a guide for investors titled 'Shared Prosperity: The Investor Case for Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining' which highlighted the human rights responsibilities of investors, and made a financial case for the respect of labour rights [GLO067].

### *Regulating digital markets and services*

Officials from the European Commission's Directorate-General Connect[119] which were invited to conferences jointly organised by UNI Global and ITUC, characterised the stakes of the ongoing mobilisations against Amazon as a de-facto struggle over the regulatory power of platform companies and the extent to which platforms are capable of defining "the rules of the game" on their own [GLO034]. They emphasized the function of platforms in structuring information on the internet for supply and demand, and the financial power yielded from collecting massive amounts of data. Indeed, the European Commission has focused on improving consumer protection in marketplaces, regulating unsafe products, regulating platforms and misinformation.

In December 2020, in the context of the increasing salience of online disinformation, hate speech and the spread of counterfeit goods, the European Commission tabled proposals for a Digital Markets Act (DMA) and a Digital Services Act (DSA) to update the EU legal framework governing digital services, which had been largely unchanged since the adoption of the e-Commerce Directive in 2000. In particular, the legislative reforms addressed the issue of 'very large online platforms' which function as gatekeepers. While the DSA regulates services such as access to platforms, advertising and content moderation, aiming for a coordinated supervision of platforms in the EU in order to protect citizens from risks on social networks, the DMA regulates the market environment, and as such enforces stronger requirements for 'gatekeeper platforms' [GLO077].[120] The DSA is a "framework of layered responsibilities targeted at different types of services (i.e, intermediary services, hosting services, online platform services, and very large online platforms services) and proposes a set of harmonised EU-wide asymmetric obligations to ensure transparency, accountability and regulatory oversight over EU online space" [GLO076].[121] The

[119] Connect is the DG for Communications Networks, Content and Technology and the EC department "responsible to develop a digital single market to generate smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe" (European Commission, n.d.).

[120] https://globaleurope.eu/europes-future/digital-services-act-and-digital-markets-act-towards-european-digital-sovereignty/

[121] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-europe-fit-for-the-digital-age/file-digital-services-act

general secretary of UNI Global underscored the importance of this legislation, noting that the DMA "will make Amazon's use of third-party data from small and medium enterprises to compete with rival products on its marketplace illegal" [GLO060]. The DSA aims to ensure the security of users, imposes transparency obligations on platforms (i.e. platforms such as Amazon must explain how their algorithms work and requires them not to use data from their commercial users in order to obtain unfair advantages over competitors), and institutionalizes enforcement (i.e. firms may face violations of up to 6% of annual sales) [DE061]. UNI Global leaders have framed these reforms as evidence of the efficacy of broad coalitions to keep multinational platform companies accountable, as argued by Christy Hoffman:

> "These attempts to put Amazon and other tech companies in their place in Europe, the US and India illustrate that workers, progressive politicians and civil society can all work together in a concerted effort to hold companies accountable." [GLO063]

## Internationalism from below: Amazon Workers International

In 2015, shortly after the establishment of an IP union commission at Amazon in Poznań, the Polish union contacted Amazon workers in Germany, members of Ver.di, and came to a meeting in Bad Hersfeld. Despite organizational differences between the two unions, and the fact that Ver.di is formally allied with Solidarność in the UNI Amazon Alliance, these connections were established primarily between rank-and-file activists of the unions, and not between the trade union organizations as such. Since 2015, this network, initially called Amazing Workers, has met twice a year to "deepen transnational relations, exchange information and coordinate joint actions by Amazon workers in Europe and beyond" [GLO050]. Participants share information about working conditions, remuneration and bonuses, and conflicts with management. The meetings are generally attended by 30-50 participants, mostly from Poland, Germany, France, and the USA, however occasionally it has also included workers from Spain, Italy, the UK, Slovakia, Turkey and Canada. As such, the key actors in AWI are affiliated with the trade unions Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Poland), Ver.di (Germany), Solidaires (France) and Amazonians United (USA). AWI activists also interact in the context of other networks such as the Transnational Social Strike, which has organised conferences to facilitate coalition building between workers and activists in different countries and operating in different spheres of social struggle. For instance, the TSS meeting 'Against the Logistics of Exploitation', held in Stockholm in November 2018, sought to bridge connections between logistics workers, migrants and the global women's strike.[122] As AWI related in a declaration following one of its conferences:

> "We see ourselves not as a new union, but as workers from different unions with different orientations and traditions. Rather, we see ourselves as a complement to national trade union organizations. Since trade union leaders today are not in a position to take this necessary step towards the transnationalization of working struggles, we have to challenge them as members from the grassroots" [GLO045].

A leader from the Polish trade union IP related that AWI was formed in the context of fears of relocations, and shared perceptions held by workers in Germany and Poland regarding Amazon's exploitation of transnational differences between workforces:

> "The Poznań warehouse was Amazon's first warehouse in Poland, and it opened in 2014. I've been working in that warehouse since then. When it opened, we thought that it was going to be part of a larger shift, where Amazon was going to move warehouses from Germany to Poland. There were a lot of strikes in Germany at that time, and we've also seen that shift before with other factories and warehouses because we are much cheaper labor than Germans. We earn about four dollars per hour, so three to four times less than they do. At the same time, German workers were also afraid that the warehouses were going to

[122] https://www.transnational-strike.info/event/against-the-logistics-of-exploitation-tss-stockholm-meeting/

close and that they would lose work. We connected with some of them through social movement organizing and met in person for the first time in 2015. We quickly realized that Amazon was building power by exploiting the differences between countries. Over time, it's become clear that the company is not closing German warehouses; they just want to use us as a cheaper, more flexible workforce to limit the bargaining power of workers in Germany. We decided back then that we needed to stay in touch with each other. The Polish-German connection was very important to the beginning of Amazon Workers International. We've met every year since then, twice a year, and we've also expanded to become a larger network that includes French and Spanish warehouse workers. Workers from a few US warehouses have also joined. The Amazon Workers International name and logo are new, but it's not a new organization. We met in Madrid in March this year and decided to go more public." [PL044]

Indeed, as recounted in the preceding chapter, the first wildcat strike at Poznań in 2015 was a critical event which helped to build momentum for organising against Amazon both in Poland, as well as at the international level. Key to this were perceptions among Polish workers that they were being used as strike-breakers while colleagues at neighbouring German sites were striking. Further, of the 30 workers that were part of the first IP commission at Amazon in 2014, some had previously worked and were trained at Amazon warehouses in France and Germany. As an IP leader related:

"When they came back, they quickly realized the working conditions are worse in Poland, and because they saw unions in action in France and Germany, they understood that this is our weapon as workers. So they decided that we should start organizing together in Poland." [GLO046]

AWI frames the necessity for transnational coordination in the context of the limited capacity of national trade unionism to build sufficient bargaining power against a multinational employer with a strong capacity to insulate itself from the disruptive effects of industrial action by rerouting shipments across the network. In an open letter following a meeting in 2019, AWI stated:

"The labor dispute at Amazon reveals weaknesses in the prevailing policies of the European and North American trade union movements: although the nation-state borders for transnational corporations are becoming less important due to the abolition of nation-state regulations and free trade agreements, the workers are organizing themselves only nationally. Amazon stores and ships most of the goods for the German market from neighboring countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This is made possible by the European customs union. Across the border, wages are lower, working conditions worse and the right to strike more restricted. If German workers go on strike, their colleagues from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia will be turned into strikebreakers. The nationally organized trade union cannot do anything about it. Our vision is different: we want to strike together for common demands. Despite all of our differences, we are united by the fact that we are facing a common employer. We do not unite out of idealism, but because we think that only when united do we have a chance to effectively assert our interests against Amazon." [GLO045]

As related by a works councillor from Bad Hersfeld, Germany, participation in international networking is seen as a crucial antidote to the competition which the employer encourages between worksites, also in different countries:

"Amazon is a global player. In principle, it makes no difference where you work - in Bad Hersfeld, the USA, Poland or India. The work is the same everywhere. But Amazon puts the different locations in competition with each other. Networking is important in order not to be played off against one another… We make joint demands, for example on wages or health protection. Above all, you take away a great deal of solidarity and a sense of community. The site managers tried to turn us into opponents. But then we became colleagues and today we are friends." [GLO047].

They elaborated elsewhere:

"I see it as our greatest success that we have established an international network at all and that the exchange takes place. Amazon is trying to put its locations in competition with each other and to promote competitive thinking within the group. The fact that we can undermine this with our exchange and counter the competition from above with our solidarity from below is already a great success. I can still remember when the warehouses opened in Poland. Our superiors almost portrayed our Polish colleagues as our

enemies. But through the direct exchange with them we realized that they are our colleagues, and face very similar problems. As a result, the corporate strategy of playing off employees from different countries against each other no longer works." [GLO053]

As related by an IP activist:

"Amazon Workers International was born out of the idea of connecting employees internationally. We cannot allow the company to divide us into Germans, Poles and French and make us compete with each other, and we resist it. But the company, of course, tries to fuel such divisions; it benefits from dividing workers into temporary and permanent workers, Poles and Germans, rural workers and urban workers. During our last campaign, we also published our leaflet in Russian. Because while Polish migrants work for Amazon in Western Europe, more and more people from Ukraine and other Eastern European countries are working here." [GLO049]

In February 2021, the activists affiliated with AWI organised an online commemoration event in memory of their colleague Christian Krähling, who had passed away earlier that year. An IP leader reflected on the central role that Krähling had played in founding AWI and in bridging the Amazon workers' movement in Poland and Germany:

"Christian was the most important link between the organized workforce in Poland and Germany, he visited us in Poland many times. He always stressed that we must see the common interest as workers in different countries and not focus on the differences that divide us. We were infinitely inspired by his strong commitment to organizing and building workers power in the workplace and mobilizing colleagues for confrontational action against management… following this approach, we are determined to build an international Amazon labour movement that will defeat Amazon… Christian will always be remembered as an important founder of this movement. He always said: "In Bad Hersfeld, we never dreamed of getting to the point where we are now, when we started organizing in 2011 with a group of 15, 20 people." Today we have one huge network with organized Amazon employees, unions, supporters, journalists and also artists from all over the world who work with great commitment on the cause." [PL060]

### *Organizational structure*

Regarding organizational affiliation and ideology, AWI states that "behind the meeting is no formal organization, neither a particular union nor union tendency… We invite all Amazon workers, as individuals or unionized, to participate – including temp workers, outsourced workers, drivers, tech and white collar workers in and for Amazon warehouses – who want to fight exploitative relations we face at work every day" [GLO054]. Indeed, in stark contrast to the UNI Amazon Alliance, AWI's membership consists primarily of shopfloor logistics workers which themselves hold other positions, such as works councillor, union shop steward, or social labour inspector. Indeed, the unions that participate in AWI share a common perspective of labour organising that emphasizes direct worker participation, and as such, AWI's agenda is not shaped exclusively by senior union officials, but by workers themselves. As a works council member from Bad Hersfeld explained:

"While organizing methods are rarely discussed in concrete terms at the meetings, most participants are representatives of grassroots methods. Self-organization is the approach, grassroots democracy. We share the ideal of a union in which workers have broad democratic rights of co-determination, including over union strategy. Unfortunately, this is handled very differently from district to district at Ver.di in Germany." [GLO053]

As such, Ver.di members who participate in AWI relate that domestically, they do not frame the network as a competitor to the union, but as a complementary layer to trade union structures. Likewise, another IP activist distinguished the function of AWI in the context of other traditions of labour organising:

"In Europe, you have many different union traditions, from business unions to more grassroots unions. And there are a lot of different union networks and organizations working on Amazon labor issues. In

> Amazon Workers International, we are convinced that the way we build power is in the workplace, in our local warehouses, and with warehouse workers in other countries. Our only criteria for joining is that you have to be a worker who's organizing with others in your warehouse. That one rule reflects how we think labor movements should grow. We do not think that consumer boycotts or politicians making a spectacle of our situation will help us. That is not how we build power. We are also different from many big unions in that we don't have professional organizers with full-time union jobs; we all work in the warehouse. We meet directly with other workers and don't have union bosses above us who tell us what to do. Despite language differences—because sometimes we speak seven languages in our meetings, it's really crazy—it has been easy to find a common language with Amazon workers from different countries. If you've ever worked a full shift scanning items or packing boxes, you just understand how it is, how they exploit you. There is a desire to talk to each other and hear how others are fighting against things like quotas and disciplinary actions. We are invited to demonstrations and debates with groups and networks that come from other traditions. And we do attend and cooperate. But in Amazon Workers International, we have a shared recognition of where our power comes from." [PL044]

For instance, the independent grassroots union based in the USA, Amazonians United (AU) has been active in the network since 2019. As an Amazon worker and activist of the AU related:

> "Our goal is company unions that can act independently of the social partnership-oriented associations - and the approach has been quite successful so far. We have already had a series of actions, work stoppages and rallies. Our union was founded and is run by workers. With us, all decisions about activities and actions are taken by the workers themselves and not by a union apparatus." [GLO052]

While social movement partners which support AWI in its political activities, such as the Streik-Soli Bündnis Leipzig, are a stable part of the network, they are numerically the minority. Further, whereas more institutionalised trade union organisations and federations tend to have more formalised and elaborate structures and working processes, this is not the case for AWI which rather focuses on direct exchange between shopfloor workers:

> "The network relies on the organic connection between the warehouse workers from different countries—we don't have union officials talking in the name of workers—and the fact that we share many of the same problems. Our warehouses look exactly the same inside, and Amazon uses the same disciplinary tools against all of us. We update each other about the struggles in our warehouses and think about how they're connected. We share an understanding that because Amazon is a global company, we need to have a global movement." [PL044]

As elaborated by an IP leader, a membership concept based on shopfloor worker facilitates flexibility on the part of labour organisers given their intimate knowledge of the labour process:

> "Amazon Workers International is not a formal organization and we intend to keep it that way. We started our work as a network in which we share, support and show solidarity. Amazon is very flexible – just-in-time – and can therefore easily bridge bottlenecks. In order to know when a good moment has come for an action, you have to be directly involved in the operational work processes. It is difficult for outsiders to assess when workforces will organize, because resistance often arises spontaneously." [GLO049]

The efficacy of this form of organising was explained with reference to the spontaneous actions which occurred during Black Friday 2020:

> "In November last year, for example, in one of the large warehouses in southern Poland where some of our members work, word got around during an early shift that temp workers, whose conditions are particularly precarious, were getting an extra bonus before the high season, while permanent employees weren't getting it. This information circulated within a few hours and people started sharing it. And they said: Why should only the temporary workers get the bonus? We should all get bonuses. It's not that they're getting paid less; we should all be treated equally. The forklift drivers organized themselves, dozens of them refused to work the morning shift for a few minutes and chanted slogans in the loading department. During the night shift, work was suspended for an hour. Amazon then got really restless. The manager came in the middle of the night, which usually never happens. The management spoke to our shop stewards because they knew that the high season was approaching and that 1,000 organized forklift

drivers could shut down the warehouse – a large warehouse for large items. All this happened in a very short space of time and showed us that you really have to be in the factories; one needs to know when opportunities arise where organizing workers can be economically damaging to the company. Because these are the moments when Amazon will comply with our demands. This will not happen through major campaigns or politicians speaking up in the European Parliament and complaining about Amazon's business practices. We experienced this only recently and it has not improved our situation." [GLO049]

The trade unions active in AWI have developed coalitional power through international networking as a means to help overcome barriers faced in their particular contexts. Confronted with a global employer, an IP leader emphasized the weaknesses of making demands confined to the national level, while underlying that international corporate decision-making presents opportunities for organisers:

"We believe that it is not enough to be guided by national labor law, as traditional trade unions do. A collective agreement in Germany is of no use to us in Poland. Amazon is a global company, so you have to think globally. But Amazon itself creates the infrastructure for workers to network, share problems and make common demands… It works the same everywhere. Changes that are introduced in the USA are also implemented in Germany or Poland. When we negotiate with our local supervisors, they have to call the Seattle headquarters to have decisions approved. This centralization is a great opportunity, because when the workers in a country fight for something, everyone benefits. The best example of this is the decision that Amazon will pay full wages to employees who are on sick leave due to Corona. In many countries, for example in Poland, the law only provides for 80 percent. This was a demand from Chicago workers. If they change the policy, they change it worldwide." [GLO048]

As an IP representative observed, while restrictive strike laws in Poland make it difficult for Amazon workers in Poland to participate in transnationally coordinated strikes, IP has nevertheless exercised deployed a variety of resources and capabilities to support the demands of colleagues in Germany, while strengthening its own position domestically:

"To give you an example, we have very different labor laws in Poland than they do in other parts of Europe. It's much easier to strike in France and Spain and Germany. So part of what we do together is look for ways of struggling beyond those legal differences. In Polish warehouses it is nearly impossible to organize a legal strike, but we are connected with other workers who can. That gives us power; we don't have to sit down and cry. We can support strikes in Germany with petitions, rallies, stickers, leaflets, press conferences, actions that share their slogans—and then the German workers strike for the common cause. That's how we fight together against something like rate increases." [PL44]

Similarly, to the UNI Alliance, the conferences of the AWI tend to focus on the exchange of information and expertise, with a view to utilise that information in order to develop and hone local organising strategies. For instance, the issue of wage discrepancies in Europe, and the recognition that wage differentials are an impediment to international action has been a recurring theme at both UNI and AWI meetings. Indeed in 2021, AWI published a leaflet calling for a European minimum wage. As an IP leader commented:

"The payment aspect is very important to us. The Polish workers earn so little that they have to work overtime. According to statistics, we are one of the nations in Europe with the longest working hours. That's why we demand higher wages, and our colleagues in Germany support us in this. You know that the Polish workers are forced to work overtime because of their economic situation when there are strikes in the warehouses in Germany. And they also know that this makes their strikes less effective." [GLO049]

In 2020, the network appointed a steering committee of eight members who were tasked with submitting a proposal for the establishment of a more formalised coalition, for managing public relations and planning forthcoming conferences. The international conference in Geneva in 2023 marked the first occasion that workers from the USA and Canada were able to participate in AWI meetings in person, which have largely been attended by Amazon workers from worksites in Europe [GLO052]. On the occasion of the meeting, a rally was held in front of the British consulate in Geneva in solidarity with the first strike at an Amazon site in the UK announced by the GMB union.

In April 2022, the International Trade Union Network of Solidarity and Struggle, organised a union convoy of labour aid for Ukraine, in order to deliver necessary products and materials for needed by Ukrainian workers. The initiative emerged given that several organisations in the Network had been actively involved in defending the Ukrainian population since the start of the war. The action was jointly organised by IP (Poland), Union Syndicale Solidaires (France), CSP Conlutas (Brazil), Adl Cobas (Italy) Sotsyalnyi Rukn (Ukraine), Gegužės 1-osios profesinė sąjunga G1PS (Lithuania), and was accompanied by a delegation of trade unions affiliated with the Network. IP, together with Solidaires and CSP-Conlutas financed the logistics and solicited donations from supporters. As IP related, "the main purpose of the convoy is to show international support for the class resistance against the Russian invasion" [GLO051]. The action declared its solidarity with pro-democracy movements in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, called worldwide nuclear disarmament and for the acceptance of all refugees from Ukraine and other regions impacted by conflicts caused by imperialist countries. Additionally, the unions called for a free and sovereign Ukraine and the respect of workers' rights, as well as for the abolition of foreign debts, and "for Ukraine to break free from the clutches of the IMF", asserting that "It is not the workers who are to pay for this imperialist war!" [GLO051].

## ***Contentious Issues***

*1) Co-determination regarding wages and working conditions*

While the workers and activists affiliated with AWI explicitly reject the pursuit of social dialogue for its own sake, they have called for greater participation in decision-making regarding the organization of work:

> "We demand … …that workers participate in the organization of labour. We are the most affected by this and have the experience to organize it in the best way possible. We must have a real say over every change in the labour process." [GLO043]

As such, AWI has also consistently advocated for healthy and safe working conditions at Amazon facilities. In pursuit of this goal, AWI has adopted the Safe Package campaign developed by the Polish unions Solidarność and IP. AWI facilitated the diffusion of this action by translating leaflets developed by the Polish unions, including tips for working slowly and safely into German and French, which were distributed to workers on Black Friday 2020 [GLO046]. As Christian Krähling related:

> "For the past few years, during the peak of Christmas at Amazon and on Prime Day in July, we have coordinated an international work slowdown called Safe Package through strict adherence to health and safety regulations." [GLO078]

*2) Repression of trade unions*

AWI has publically condemned Amazon's repression of labour activists, notably in the US when a number of Amazon employees were dismissed after speaking out about unsafe working conditions at logistics facilities in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, the AWI amplified IP's demands for the reinstatement of Magda Malinowska, following her dismissal after publicizing the death of an employee at a facility in Poznań.

*3) Managerial discipline and control*

One of the long standing demands of unions affiliated with AWI has concerned the abolition of the disciplinary feedback system. More broadly, the network has claimed that "that new technology should not be introduced at our cost. It shouldn't enable or enhance surveillance, increase the workload, or put workers out of a job" [GLO043]. Indeed, the activists involved in AWI had managed to win certain concessions at their local worksites, for instance by managing to abolish the system of feedbacks in Leipzig and Bad Hersfeld via works-level agreements, or by pressuring management to temporarily

suspend the system in Poland, such cases are the exception to the rule. As such, AWI continues to agitate against this central pillar of discipline and control in Amazon's logistics facilities.

*4) Precarious employment relations and agency work*

One of the central demands made by AWI, that distinguishes it from the UNI Amazon Alliance, has been the call to abolish employment via recruitment agencies. Indeed, AWI has consistently agitated against is Amazon's employment structure, based on a core of permanent workers, and a pool of highly precarious, easily interchangeable temporary agency workers. As such, during AWI meetings in Leipzig and Poznań, participants staged protests outside of the offices of the temporary employment agency Adecco and denounced the "systematic denial of workers' stability and well-being" with the slogan "Abolish agency work and temporary contracts – overcome divisions!" [PL060]. As indicated above, while AWI activists have managed to restrain the feedback system at some facilities, temporary workers nevertheless remain vulnerable to such disciplinary actions due to the precarity of their contracts. Accordingly, AWI has been very vocal about the precarious situation of temporary workers and has actively agitated against the use of agency labour.

## *Amazon Global Sick Out 2020*

On 24th April 2020, Amazon Employees for Climate Justice together with the non-profit advocacy group United for Respect organised a global 'Sick Out', which encouraged Amazon workers to take paid-time off on the day.[123] The action was supported by a day-long livestream which featured contributions from Amazon logistics and tech workers, trade union leaders, climate and indigenous activists, healthcare workers and caregivers, as well as prominent public intellectuals. The event was facilitated by Emily Cunningham and Maren Costa, former Amazon Web Services employees who were fired for speaking out about worker safety in Amazon warehouses in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the AECJ encouraged workers to participate in an online survey.[124] Discussions focused on the experiences of Amazon logistics and tech workers during the pandemic, Amazon's role in the climate crisis, as well as the company's censorship of whistle-blowers. The action was joined by Amazon logistics workers in California, including the San Bernardino Airport Communities Coalition based in the 'Inland Empire' of California, an industrial corridor whose communities have been ravaged by the environmental impacts of intensive logistics. Activists described their communities as 'sacrificial zones' for companies like Amazon which perpetuated legacies of environmental racism. IP workers from Poland participated in the action, highlighting networking efforts between logistics and tech workers at the company:

> "We hope that with exchange we will build our power, because… we know now that we are essential workers and we have structural power, to change the world. Also if we have support from you, tech workers, who are on our side" [GLO041]

Another IP activist related her working experience at Amazon during the pandemic:

> "For the first time, in my working life … it has become obvious who keeps this society running, and it's us. It's us, the logistics workers, it's us the retail workers, the healthcare workers. Were it not for us, this society would just fall apart. And now, we deserve much more than we are getting. We deserve better conditions, we deserve higher pay, we deserve to be safe all the time. And these are the things that we have been fighting for… ever since we started working and organizing, and these are the things that we deserve. This pandemic has just shown the fundamentals of how our world is structured, and who …

[123] https://amazonemployees4climatejustice.medium.com/amazon-sick-out-3d61b5a7ebfa

[124] https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeAE1r_W9miwP29nFfldZ5iiGoO9umK-lVp_5d1FSJBy5H8GQ/viewform

keeps it running. And so, this is what's so crucial here. And I hope that our struggles will receive wider support." [GLO041]

During an interview some months later, another IP activist and Amazon worker reflected on the global SickOut and reflected on the tensions and challenges associated with building power among logistics and tech workers:

> "We do appreciate our discussions over the last few months with tech workers from Seattle. I think what they did was brave, and we need their support. We don't have the symbolic position they have, so it's powerful when they can give us access to the space they get. But the challenge for our work together will be whether tech workers are able to see themselves as workers who are dependent on their wages. If they are able to organize on those grounds, then we'll have a foundation to build on together. What we would rather avoid is a situation where they only see us as pitiful, helpless people. If the only thing they do is talk about how scandalous our conditions are, that's not useful. We need to recognize our power, and increase it together so we can make real change. The balance of power is so unequal now. We're past the point of calling on Amazon management to make a little change here and there. Another challenge is that as warehouse workers we build our movement on our own anger; we know exactly why we're angry with Amazon. But if you are a tech worker and you design all these tools to discipline us, your experience is very different. You have to be aware of what you're doing. The tools they're creating are not neutral. They're designed to spy on us every second of our ten-hour shift, constantly increase our productivity, and literally work us to death. Last week, a worker in our warehouse died on the shop floor. The tech workers don't see that." [PL044]

### *Make Amazon Pay*

The Make Amazon Pay coalition was jointly organised by UNI Global, the Progressive International and Amazon Workers International.[125] The campaign made 23 demands across five themes: improve the workplace, provide job security for all, respect workers' universal rights, operate sustainably, and pay back society [GLO068]. On Black Friday 2020, collective actions under the banner of Make Amazon Pay (MAP) were undertaken by workers and their allies in 15 countries, comprising over 50 organisations. The action also received public support from over 400 lawmakers from 34 countries that signed a letter to former Amazon CEO Bezos, which accused the company of having had "dodged and dismissed … debts to workers, societies, and the planet" and which declared their readiness to "act in our respective legislatures to support the movement that is growing around the world to Make Amazon Pay" [GLO064]. The campaign was also supported by ITUC, whose General Secretary Sharan Burrow called for breaking up Amazon into separate corporate entities:

> "It is at times like this that working people everywhere need their governments and regulators to take action. We know that Amazon cannot change, if it could it would have done so by now. We are asking governments to do their job and step in to stop Amazon acting with corporate impunity… There are simple solutions to all of our demands, but it is clear that Amazon cannot reform itself. It's become too big to change its ways, it must be broken up… If anything, as Amazon gets bigger, the abuses get worse as we discover its secret program of surveillance and systematic anti-union and anti-worker practices. There is only one way to fix this: break up Amazon." [GLO068]

By 2022, the MAP campaign had grown to 80 trade unions, civil society organisations, environmental organisations and tax watchdogs. On Black Friday 2022, strikes and protests took place in over 30 countries: Ver.di and CGT organised strikes across 18 warehouses in Germany and France, while environmental activists protested outside Amazon's HQ in Dublin, against the new data centres planned in the city. Workers staged walkouts across the US, and protests took place in over 10 cities,

[125] https://makeamazonpay.com/

including at Jeff Bezos' mansion in Manhattan. In South Africa, the Liesbeek Action Campaign organised a protest against the construction of Amazon's new HQ in Africa, built on sacred indigenous land. In India, workers, street vendors and supporters organised demonstrations in over 20 cities as well as outside the legislature in New Delhi, while in Bangladesh, garment workers in Amazon's supply chain demonstrated for union recognition, better pay, working conditions, and called for Amazon to sign the Bangladesh Accord. The President of the Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation which participated in the campaign related:

> "In Bangladesh, we are on the frontline of climate breakdown, so we know climate justice and social justice cannot be separated. We have to Make Amazon Pay all its workers a decent wage in dignified workplaces and for its environmental damage…. Garment workers, like those I represent, toil to swell Amazon's coffers often without any recognition that we are even Amazon workers. Amazon is the third largest direct employer in the world, but when you take us in the supply chain into account, it is even larger. At work we can face sexual harassment from management and victimization when we try to organize in a trade union against that violence and for better pay and conditions." [GLO065].

Christy Hoffman, the general secretary of UNI Global identified the company's union-busting culture, its surveillance of employees, labour and environmental activists as one of the reasons for the action:

> "The pandemic has made Amazon the most powerful company in the world. It's high time to put a stop to the company's unfair practices… When non-essential businesses had to close during the crisis, Amazon was able to almost double its market value to over $1.5 trillion; profit rose 200 percent year-over-year in the third quarter. In the United States alone, Amazon is expected to rake in a whopping 42 cents for every dollar spent during the holiday season… The biggest beneficiary of the corona crisis would rather fire employees and silence critics than solve problems and negotiate with social partners... We must not allow a digital giant to control commerce, information infrastructure and data. We must ensure that Amazon, like every other taxpayer, pays its fair share of the cost of much-needed reconstruction. And we must not let Amazon get away with refusing to negotiate with unions, exacting inhumane labor practices from its workers and driving small businesses to the brink of bankruptcy." [GLO063]

As for AWI activists participating in Make Amazon Pay, an IP leader explained how the exchange of information between workers was critical to developing mobilising capacity among the different countries involved:

> "Amazon cannot process returns, so they are sent to Poland from other countries. The Polish workers don't agree with this, because in principle they only sort garbage. They say to each other: Scrap from all over Europe is unloaded here. We exchange such information, formulate common demands and try to organize actions together and support each other in strikes. Due to the different national legal situations, we use different strategies in labor disputes, but despite this we are working together for the same cause: In some countries, people have organized blockades, and last year we received support from the 'Make Amazon Pay' campaign, which also blocked our warehouse. In other countries where workers can strike, they do too. This is how we try to put pressure on Amazon. The cooperation was very effective, especially during the pandemic, because we had common demands. Amazon couldn't ignore us. When we asked for a hazard pay for working in very unsafe conditions, they couldn't say no. They could not ignore our demands for safety precautions either. During this time we have seen how powerful we are when we join forces. That's why we're now trying to build on it - unbureaucratically, at company level and by discussing our situation as employees. We have to organize ourselves better, otherwise Amazon will always be much, much stronger than us." [GLO049]

Another IP leader observed that the growth of the diverse movement against Amazon indicated….

> "Amazon has been operating since the nineties – in Europe, its first warehouse was created in 1998. It really took really time for us, the labour movement, to start doing things. But there are so many exciting new initiatives that have been happening in the last years. Look at the situation in the US, but not only. You know, there's grassroots movements in every country. In Europe, wherever Amazon is, you can find

people trying different strategies. There are some bigger unions, smaller unions, or more social movement people who try to build coalitions between labour movements and environmental movements and all this. So there are many points where you can become a member of this movement. Of course we, as workers, say that the most powerful position is to be on the inside, talking to other workers and to build this movement from the inside. But I would say, for those who are starting in the labour movement, I think it's really an exciting challenge. Because you can easily connect. Right now, through these [social] networks, we are connected. You can find our unions and different unions on social media. You can read about it. The media is willing to ask us for interviews because Amazon is a big player. So there is a space in which we can talk about our struggles, and I think this movement can make a difference. It's growing, and campaigns like Make Amazon Pay show that we have a leg to stand on." [GLO046]

While AWI activists have expressed some scepticism regarding the potential of mobilising lawmakers in order to pressure Amazon, opting instead to develop organising capacity among workers at the local level and connect this internationally, nevertheless they supported the campaign, noting the benefits of a broad global coalition:

> "But as long as this form of networking and campaigning is going along with what we do in the warehouses, that also helps us because that brings attention, that give us space to talk about our problems as workers. So I see that the Make Amazon Pay campaign is just this space, not just one campaign. A space where people coming from different traditions, from different unions, can use one slogan that we all agree on, that Amazon should pay, for higher wages, for climate destruction, for taxes and so on." [GLO046]

Elsewhere, they remarked on the workplace bargaining power possessed by logistics workers given their capacity to shut down commodity flows, emphasizing that the confidence of workers to carry out such action is reassured by the visibility of collective mobilisations in other countries:

> "The notion that we are slaves to digital capitalism gives us no power. We are not victims, we work at a central hub of global capitalism, which is crucial for the functioning of the commodity cycle. If we want, everything stops. Here in Poland we blocked a camp for three hours in December. Eighty trucks couldn't get in or out. Hearing that there is a global movement, that people are criticizing Amazon elsewhere, gives us the strength to pull through such actions." [GLO048]

Likewise, a works councillor from Bad Hersfeld, Germany, concurred that campaigns like Make Amazon Pay strengthen organising on the local level symbolically, by demonstrating the global scope of the Amazon workers' movement and by providing opportunities to build the network. They observed that while AWI welcomes such initiatives, they are seen as complementary, not as a substitute for organising at the local level:

> "AWI is involved in the 'MakeAmazonPay' campaign and thus part of the international networking. We are happy about the actions on Black Friday, which are coordinated by the colleagues from MakeAmazonPay and find the numerous forms of protest great. It illustrates what is often not so clear in the small local struggles: that we are a worldwide movement. We also met new colleagues from other countries during Black Friday. We have already invited some of them to the AWI networking meeting in January 2023 at the [Rosa Luxemburg Foundation] office in Geneva. However, such campaigns cannot replace workplace organizing. The fight against Amazon doesn't only happen on Black Friday, but all year round." [GLO053]

## European Works Council at Amazon

The trade unions active at Amazon have pursued the establishment of a European Works Council in order to strengthen their bargaining power vis-à-vis management. In 2018, Polish, French and Italian unions submitted requests to Amazon to form a European Works Council, and a Special Negotiating Body (SNB) was formed consisting of 16 worker representatives, supported by the consultants Syndex, and 7 company representatives. After four years of lengthy negotiations, and among doubts whether an agreement would even be reached, an EWC was formed on 1st July 2022 [GLO056]. Union

representatives on the special negotiating body related that the negotiation process had been interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and obstructed by company representatives who sought to limit the informational rights afforded to the EWC, and made a sudden decision to shift its head office from Luxembourg to Ireland [GLO035; GLO055]. Anecdotally, a German Ver.di delegate on the SNB related that the company had sent essential documents to worker delegates a few hours before a meeting, which were meant to be sent 14 days in advance. He explained that it is unreasonable for Amazon line workers to read and understand complex legal documents written in English with such short notice [GLO035]. By the end of 2021 however, representatives on the SNB related that the company seemingly reversed its position and resumed negotiations [GLO058].

The EWC agreement provides for two EWC meetings per year with simultaneous translation, paid 24h per year for members of the European committee, paid 72h per year for Select Committee members, entitlements to 15 days of support per year from an expert, and 5 days of training per member over their four-year term in office [GLO058]. The EWC comprises 35 representatives from across the continent, including the UK, despite Brexit. Representation consists of management and employees in the transport and logistics in the online retail sector, meaning that divisions in cloud computing, artificial intelligence or digital streaming have no delegates and are not consulted [GLO059]. The EWC also has a Select Committee composed of seven members which meets twice a year with central management by video conference. The EWC can provide unions in EU countries with strategically relevant information: for instance, if Amazon were to announce layoffs or expansions in hiring, the EWC could learn in advance whether the company has plans to expand at other worksites. The agreement also provides representatives with some insights into the company structure, into changes in entrepreneurship, in its economic situation, the organisation of the company and relocations of production, however only under narrowly defined circumstances.

Despite the success of finally establishing the EWC, UNI Global emphasized the limitations of the body in a press release: "European Works Councils are responsible for information and consultation and have little opportunity to make their wishes heard, let alone respect them. It is therefore in no way a substitute for genuine collective bargaining, a fundamental right still denied to most Amazon workers in Europe" [GLO055]. Despite these limitations, the director of UNI Global Commerce underscored the monitoring capabilities afforded by the EWC at Amazon:

> "We will closely monitor Amazon's compliance with the agreements. At the same time, we call on Amazon management to engage in appropriate collective bargaining with the unions. As well as the right to information and consultation, workers have a fundamental right to organize and bargain collectively, and Amazon should respect that." [GLO055]

A press release by ETUC also highlighted the weaknesses in the agreement: "there is a high threshold set for employee representation (1,000 in a country); high threshold set for organising an extraordinary meeting of the Select Committee: a proposal must concern 5% of the workforce (i.e. 12,000 employees in the EU) and at least 7% of the workforce in at least two countries over a period of no more than 90 days; the same percentages apply to the issue of transnationality" [GLO058]. Of the 1.6 million workers that Amazon employs globally, 200,000 are in Europe, while countries with fewer than 1,000 workers are not represented on the EWC.

Indeed, while EWCs do not grant participants significant rights in determining working conditions and employment practices, they may nonetheless yield positive indirect effects for unions in the form of information and legitimacy (Meardi, 2004, 2007). Further, EWCs can positively reinforce cultural and political changes within trade unions resulting from representatives' exposure to cross-border collaboration (Meardi, 2004). Active efforts by unions to share information and avoid rivalries are key in establishing shared cross-border understanding among unions and workers (Meardi, 2007). Whether an EWC is established or not, and its subsequent practices depend on the character of the participants and

on local conditions (Lecher et al. 2001). Competitive dynamics between different worksites can manifest in these settings, and unions from different countries may have different interests in participating.

## Discussion

In engaging with the extant literature on labour internationalism, chapter 2 outlined a series of obstacles that are predicted to preclude trade unions in formulating and representing common interests at the transnational level. First, it was predicted that divergent interests among actors in different national contexts would lead to competition rather than cooperation, inaugurating a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions. This barrier has manifested in terms of Amazon's individualistic corporate culture which encourages competition both within and between worksites, and in attempts to play national workforces off against one another. As the analysis has demonstrated however, these divisions were overcome thanks for socialisation and collective identity formation efforts: as Polish and German activists related, they first came into contact with one another in the context of common social movement initiatives, and over the course of repeated exchanges and instances of direct mutual solidarity, this barrier was successfully overcome. The literature indicated that the likelihood for cooperation is mediated by relations between unions and on cognitive mechanisms such as activists' interpretations of constraints and 'objective threats' in their respective contexts, here in the form of employer counter-strategies. Indeed, logistics workers perceived Amazon's strike-breaking capacity as a necessary barrier to overcome in order to maximise their potential bargaining power at these choke points.

Second, it was predicted that the divergent institutional-cultural legacies and ideological profiles of trade unions would inhibit cooperation, since the manner in which worker interests are organised, mobilised and represented reflect deeply rooted national cleavages and institutions (Ebbinghaus & Visser, 1996; Klemm et al., 2011). While such tensions, in the form of different understandings of co-determination and union representation are apparent in the international Amazon strike movement, I argue that this particular barrier did not prevent transnational cooperation, but rather resulted in splitting the movement into two factions, one which reflects histories of traditional trade unionism, and another which is marked more strongly by the legacies of revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism.

It was also posited that stronger unions which enjoy a greater degree of influence domestically have fewer incentives to cooperate transnationally (Logue, 1980), while weakly-resourced unions with more limited institutional opportunities would be expected to attempt to effect change from above in a boomerang effect (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). Socialisation and trust-building are necessary but insufficient for prolonged transnational cooperation, however if actors can accomplish their goals through other means or institutional channels, then cooperation is unlikely to occur (Bernaciak, 2010; Meardi et al., 2009). The analysis of German and Polish unions at Amazon appear to partially confirm these propositions: whereas Ver.di and Solidarność might be considered illustrative of a strong union with significant domestic influence, the erosion of its bargaining power in recent decades, coupled with employer counter-strategies compelled these unions to seek transnational avenues as means of solving its power resource problems domestically. The relatively less well-resourced IP likewise developed its transnational networks for similar reasons, however it would be incorrect to characterise this as an attempt to bypass the local and national levels by employing transnational strategies, given the emphasis that IP places on developing power resources domestically and the priority it gives to develop local mobilising capacity.

Finally, it was expected that vertical tensions internal to trade unions as regards interest representation between leaders and the rank-and-file would preclude cooperation (Gajewska, 2009; Hyman, 2004; Visser & Ebbinghaus, 1994). While such tensions were certainly, arguably they were more salient among the UNI Alliance than among AWI. This can be explained with reference to these networks respective internal cohesion resources and their concepts of membership. Arguably, this barrier did not preclude cooperation within the UNI Alliance, however it was less relevant for the emergence of

cooperation, given this network is characterised largely by senior union officials, and as such, much of the rank-and-file is excluded from decision making. AWI on the other adopts a membership concept based on direct connections between rank-and-file activists, with the explicit aim of including and support all categories of workers across sectors and across Amazon's supply chain. The choice made by AWI and its affiliate unions to adopt a horizontal organising structure and minimise unnecessary bureaucracy and representation implicitly resolves many of the issues related to intermediating between contending interests across different scales of union action.

Transnational governance frameworks and a shift of regulation also provide novel opportunities for interaction and a convergence of interest, which has also helped to overcome these barriers. The EWC at Amazon stands to provide unions with additional infrastructural resources largely in the form of strategic information, although this process has been obstructed through employer attempts to limit the information rights available to the EWC. However, UNI Global officials and members of the special negotiating body for the EWC have expressed doubt regarding its benefits, concluding that while it offers additional resources and another arena for communications, it is no substitute for collective bargaining and building mobilising capacity at the local level. Further, weaknesses in the agreement, namely the high threshold for employee representation exclude countries with smaller workforces or where Amazon logistics sites are not present. Nevertheless, even if the already-limited capacities afforded EWCs are further constrained, they nevertheless yield positive effects in terms of information, legitimacy, socialisation and preventing cross-border competition (Meardi, 2004, 2007, 2012b).

The UNI Alliance and AWI both perform similar functions in terms of serving as forums for affiliates to share information, reflect on recent developments, plan collective actions, hone communication strategies, develop branding and cohesive identities. The unions which participate thus leverage their network resources in order to develop other resources such as infrastructural resources, collective cohesion and narrative resources: affiliates of both networks report the utility of country reports and research for addressing problems domestically, in terms of recruiting members, framing their activities in their own press strategies nationally. As such, transnational labour networks are invaluable for trade unions in terms of pooling and mutually developing their power resources. However, the two networks are marked by significant differences in many respects.

The UNI Amazon Alliance was presented as a case of top-down labour internationalism, given that its organisational structure is characterised by an elaborate hierarchy that spans multiple levels of union activity, and given that its meetings are attended largely by senior union officials, or professional labour diplomats (Hyman, 2005a). Whereas this model purportedly offers benefits for mobilising against well-resourced multinational corporations such as Amazon, it does so at the cost of reproducing the democratic deficit on a higher level, whereby its decision-making and agenda setting largely excludes its affiliate members' rank-and-file (Moody, 1997; Watermam, 2001; Wills, 1998). On the other hand, the UNI Alliance exhibits a strong level of network embeddedness. It is characterised by a high level of network diversity, given its focus on engaging and developing joint strategies not only with trade unions, but also NGOs, national and supranational regulators, politicians and investors. Whereas in its early years the Alliance narrowly focused on workplace related issues, in the form of codetermination, collective bargaining, repression and health and safety, by engaging its diverse network partners, it has managed to broaden its agenda to encompass issues such as tax avoidance, the procurement of public sector contracts, monopoly power and market competition, the climate crisis, privacy and digital rights. In doing so, it expanded its sentiment pool to incorporate the claims and of a wide range of actors. Leaders have framed these issues as the results of a failure of regulation on the part of nation states and global institutions and accordingly have sought to develop solutions by developing coalitional power resources, and by leveraging pressure on lawmakers and institutions in order to carry out regulatory reforms. Further, the Alliance provides its affiliate members with a range of useful infrastructural resources in the form of training workshops, expert advice, and by developing workers' surveys, which affiliates might utilise to strengthen deliberative vitality within their unions. Since a significant part of the Alliance's

activities revolve around the exchange of knowledge and expertise which require language barriers to be overcome, UNI Global provides translation services and disseminates resources throughout the network. In doing so, it facilitates the transfer of resources developed by certain unions to others.

AWI meanwhile was presented as a case of bottom-up labour internationalism given its flat, decentralised, network structure, and a membership concept which prioritizes the involvement of rank-and-file members. The active involvement of local workers and unions in global campaigns was predicted to yield positive effects for enhancing local bargaining power, not least given workers' intimate knowledge of production processes which allow for bargaining power to be directed more efficiently and at an appropriate moment in time (Fichter & McCallum, 2015; Niforou, 2015; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015; Sarkar & Kuruvilla, 2019). Indeed, as related by IP activists, the organising model adopted by AWI facilitates a greater degree of agility and flexibility, since resistance on the shopfloor often arises spontaneously, and requires organisers to react swiftly in terms of identifying and acting on windows of opportunity, as was the case during the spontaneous protests which occurred in Poland on Black Friday 2020. Intriguingly, AWI is characterised by an agenda that is focused on workplace issues, namely co-determination of wages and working conditions, health and safety, repression of trade unions, resisting algorithmic control and managerial discipline, precarious employment relations and agency work. This however might be explained with reference to the fact network diversity is more homogenous, apart from a minority of social movement partners, given the explicit choice of building direct worker power and a scepticism towards relying on politicians to improve working conditions. A narrower or focused agenda at the international level need not necessarily be interpreted as a drawback, given that affiliate unions and individual members participate in other networks domestically and internationally. AWI participants framed transnational coordination in the context of the limited capacity of national trade unions to respond to Amazon's strike-breaking measures, or indeed to build sufficient bargaining power, without resorting to transnational strategies. Consequently, building coalitional power across borders was identified as a solution of overcoming these barriers at the domestic level. Despite a limited capacity to carry out a strike, Polish workers emphasized that even in such circumstances, trade unions have strategic options at their disposal: when strikes were coordinated transnationally, as during the Make Amazon Pay campaign, IP supported colleagues abroad and amplified their claims via petitions, blockades, shopfloor protests, rallies, stickers, leaflets and press conferences. At the same time, actions which were perceived to be effective domestically, such as the Safe Package campaign were transposed to other national contexts, with AWI facilitating this process of diffusion by translating leaflets.

Finally, some scholars have argued that neither one of these models is a panacea for the organisational problems faced by trade unions at the local, national or transnational levels, but that an effective labour internationalism might instead be based on a synthesis of these contradictory elements, namely hierarchically organised national unions, global union federations operating in concert with horizontally-networked unions, NGOs and solidarity networks (Evans, 2010; Hyman, 2005a). The rather loose global coalition of the Make Amazon Pay campaign provides some evidence for these claims. Whereas the unions affiliated with UNI sought to mobilise lawmakers and regulators, pursuing solutions through political channels, AWI opted to develop organising capacity among workers locally, while articulating these actions at a global level. Accordingly, based on mutual recognition of complementary capacities and an (implicit) division of roles (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015), organisations representing different traditions of trade unionism, together with their respective allies were therefore able to pursue different, yet essentially compatible goals and tactics, under the same slogan, in order to mount pressure against Amazon. The global scope of the campaign and the attention that it attracted thus had a positive effect on organising at the local level in breaking isolation and powerlessness, by demonstrating the presence of an international movement to workers.

# CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

The empirical analysis of the mobilisations against Amazon on the local, national and transnational levels indicate, in line with the postulates of power-structure analysis, that despite the erosion of structural and associational power of labour over recent decades, trade unions nevertheless are not hapless victims of structural change, but may nevertheless strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis employers by creatively utilising and developing their power resources and strategic capabilities. Even in environments where the institutional power of unions is limited, various possibilities exist for trade union revitalisation and the development of worker power. That said however, as the discussion has indicated, no single resource can explain variations in outcomes, since this is rather a product of the interplay of different resources and strategic capabilities across different scales of action (Golden & Erne, 2022: 466).

Political-ideological differences between the trade unions analysed can help to account for variations in terms of which power resources were available and developed, as well as the particular choices regarding strategic capabilities for developing associational power. While Solidarność at the outset of the dispute pursued a strategy of social partnership, it reconsidered its approach following failed negotiations with management. IP on the other has pursued a conflict-oriented strategy on the basis of building rank-and-file power, observing its fruitlessness, particularly in the context of a hostile employer which recognizes trade unions as external third parties to the employment relationship. Ver.di meanwhile has chosen a path that falls somewhere in the middle: after recognising the limitations of pursuing social partnership, it opted to steadily build strike capacity across the network, while continuing to demand a collective bargaining agreement.

All three unions analysed have faced the challenge of building internal solidarity at worksites with very high levels of employee turnover and in the context of significant repression by the employer. At sites where interest representation structures have been established, unions can use this foothold to strengthen collective cohesion and deliberative vitality within the union by leveraging their infrastructural resources, for instance by offering training workshops to rank-and-file members, or using traditional and digital communication tools in a purpose and pedagogic manner in order develop mobilising capacity at the local level. However, in order for workers to join the union, shop stewards or works councils must first be present. Dynamics differ from site to site and legitimacy and trust must be continuously cultivated. While transnational networking can offset some of these weaknesses by providing unions to other resources, they are by no means a substitute for the elementary work of organising workers at each site. IP, and to a lesser extent, Ver.di, exhibit the efficacy of active organising concepts which encourage the direct participation in the daily life of the union, and which enhance the confidence of rank-and-file members, and in turn strengthen deliberative vitality and collective cohesion. This was shown to be particularly crucial for overcoming the highly individualistic and isolating working conditions at a contemporary platform company and for reworking it into worker self-confidence. These methods have been shown to be effective in terms of revitalising internal solidarity, and in helping to build self-sustaining mobilising structures, for instance via the identification of organic leaders which can assist with the development of trust and legitimacy among workers. Such membership concepts help to overcome the familiar dilemma of movement and organisation and contribute to the development of a "virtuous circle" of transparent strategic leadership (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020: 260). Well-informed and engaged rank-and-file members are more likely to demonstrate a willingness to act, enhancing the union's effectiveness, and in turn providing the organisational capacities and leadership confidence that themselves facilitate participation and transparency. Solidarność meanwhile, has relied on a rather passive, or service-oriented concept of union membership, which has meant that these resources have been rather weakly developed. Whether such concepts are adopted depends on the collective identity of the union, the political proclivities of national union leaders, and on the capability of local leaders to transform grievances into a sense of injustice and ultimately collective mobilisation (Connolly & Darlington, 2012; Kelly, 1998). At Ver.di, such forms of organising appeared rather as the

exception to the rule, and whether they are indicative of a broader shift in union strategy and a more tactful re-deployment of its power resources remains to be seen.

As regards infrastructural resources, human resources in the form of union secretaries with the requisite labour organising experience, linguistic skills, charisma, personal networks and the capacity to mobilise volunteers for outreach have proved essential for developing internal solidarity, particularly at sites with no structures of interest representation, as indicated by Ver.di's efforts to organise workers at Delivery Stations. At Ver.di, channels for disseminating information among union secretaries were present, in the form of conferences of works councillors and social media channels, however the quality of exchange of materials and methods could be further improved upon. Given difficulties to organise across the network, and particularly across the myriad small worksites comprising the last-mile, the Ver.di could benefit from pooling its resources more effectively and encouraging exchange between activists across sites, in order to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, methods and best practices, in order to avoid having to re-invent the wheel. IP's utilisation of digital communication tools for trade union renewal demonstrates how weakly resourced actors in unfavourable institutional contexts can nevertheless creatively engage members and non-members via workers' newspapers and social media channels. These resources have proved highly useful for bridging the geographical and informational distances between worksites, for amplifying worker voice, for providing workers with essential legal and professional advice, as well as for more effectively directing collective action by propagating union collective action frames. Whether such resources are exploited depends on the initiative of local and national union leaders, and on the capacity of the trade union to facilitate a process of learning and organisational change.

In terms of network embeddedness, all three unions have exploited the typical institutional opportunities available to them in their respective contexts, given consistently dense ties with traditional institutional partners in each case. For instance, the unions were able to leverage the expertise of state labour inspectors, and provide their members with essential services such as advice on matters of social security and labour law as well as legal assistance in conflicts with management. In particular, the former have proved useful in legitimating unions' claims regarding the hazardous organisation of the labour process, and to give weight to demands to decrease the intensity of work, and to reform work processes with a view to protect the health and safety of workers. Ver.di and Solidarność were characterised by a low-moderate level of network diversity, with links to SMOs being weakly developed and not identified as a priority. As such, these unions failed to fully exploit the coalitional power that might be available by developing common initiatives with NGOs, SMOs or community groups outside the sphere of industrial relations. The extant literature indicates that social movement-union coalitions are less likely to occur in systems with strongly coordinated institutions (Frege et al., 2004), whereas unions that are less institutionalised, more militant, internally democratic, active on multiple issue fronts and characterised by flexibility in terms of their ideology and organisational goals tend to more open to cooperation with SMOs (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Van Dyke, 2003; Zajak, 2017). In the case of Ver.di, coalitions at the local-national level were weakly developed due to divergences in organisations' milieus, goals, interests, culture and values. Meanwhile the opposite was true for IP, whose deep roots in progressive social movements and the traditions of anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism made facilitated cooperation non-labour actors, as evidenced in the participation in the Women's Strike against the restriction of abortion rights in Poland, as well as in anti-imperialist initiatives such as the union convoy of labour for Ukraine. Engagement with broader issues outside of workplaces have helped to publically legitimate IP as an opinion leader and demonstrate its capacity to produce an inclusive agenda that incorporates the claims of other actors and which integrates it into broader counter-hegemonic political platforms. Given limited institutional power, Solidarność might have been expected to develop its coalitional power, however its inability to do so might be explained by reference to its status as the largest and most influential trade union in Poland, as well as deficits in terms of the capacity of leaders to identify and act upon windows of opportunity for coalition building.

A number of variations are apparent among the unions as regards their use of narrative resources and the framing capabilities deployed. On one hand, the unions have managed to obtain significant concessions from Amazon through collective mobilisation, however management's attempts to marginalise the unions, or to take credit for popular reforms, in the context of high employee turnover requires unions to convincingly frame these achievements as outcomes of collective action. IP's motivational frames have consistently linked achievements as outcomes of previous actions, such as the Safe Package and Stop Feedback campaigns, in order to validate the efficacy and necessity of participation in collective struggle. This was connected to its strongly developed internal solidarity resources, in particular, high levels of collective cohesion and deliberative vitality: encouraging workers to be actively involved in the life of the union while simultaneously demonstrating its benefits creates virtuous cycle that assists in the further development of cohesive union identities and mobilising capacity by establishing a "system of expectations and accomplishments" between the organisation and the rank-and-file (Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2020: 260). Further, IP has managed to expand its stock of narrative resources in order to incorporate the claims of actors outside the sphere of industrial relations, for instance, by agitating against the destructive effects of e-commerce on human and natural resources. Inclusive frames contributed to the development of coalition power, as evidenced by the participation of NGOs such as Greenpeace during Black Friday in 2020. Meanwhile, Solidarność and Ver.di proved less capable of developing their stock of narrative resources. This might be explained with reference to less strongly developed levels of deliberative vitality which, at Ver.di manifested in problematic divergences between the demands of union leadership and rank-and-file (Apicella, 2021). Ver.di, as well as Solidarność have remained rather narrowly wed to traditional discourses with a narrow focus on workplace related issues, and sought to regulate by leveraging institutional power resources which over recent decades been eroded, while frame alignment practices were limited to clarifying core demands. In Germany, this was explained with reference to the institutional security that trade unions have historically enjoyed, which contributed to insufficient efforts given to incorporate the claims and interests of labour market outsiders such as agency workers and subcontracted parcel couriers. This was a missed opportunity for Ver.di, given that previous research has identified high levels of trust in the union among agency workers, and the potential to integrate these workers into the strike movement (Apicella, 2021). Meanwhile, frame extension, frame transformation or frame bridging capabilities between different social groups were not fully exploited. At the local level, SMOs in Germany such as Berlin vs. Amazon demonstrated a greater flexibility to influence public interpretation of the deleterious impacts of multinational tech companies on affordable housing. By employing their frame bridging capabilities, social movement activists sought to link congruent but disconnected frames and to emphasize commonalities in the interests and goals of workers and local communities. Nevertheless, the potential of these coalitions was not fully developed, given organisational differences between Ver.di and social movement activists. Finally, in contrast to both Solidarność and Ver.di which have not effectively framed or mobilised against precarious work at Amazon, IP has persistently agitated against the use of recruitment agencies and short-term fixed contracts, which its diagnostic frames identified as causes of employment instability. Inclusive framings illustrated the deleterious impacts of precarious contracts for both temporary as well as permanent workers, reworking this into a motivating factor, stressing the importance of building solidarity among different categories of workers. While Ver.di has indicated its preference for a political solution to the question of couriers in the form of a subcontractor liability law, it remains to be seen whether it will be able to mobilise lawmakers for this purpose.

As indicated above, Ver.di's intermediating capabilities were rather undeveloped as a product of related weaknesses in deliberative vitality and efforts to engage the rank-and-file in agenda setting and decision making, as well as in limited willingness to cooperate with social movement activists. Weaknesses in intermediation however did not preclude Ver.di from transnationalising its claims and demands, however it contributed to the emergence of a form of labour internationalism that largely excludes rank-and-file members. The intermediating capabilities of Solidarność were moderately developed, given its readiness to mitigate rivalries with IP in order to ensure a basic level of understanding and cooperation.

IP meanwhile displayed more strongly developed and proactive intermediation capabilities, relying on workers' inquiry methods in order to include workers in decision-making. These feedback mechanisms have helped to produce synergistic effects in terms of strengthening deliberative vitality in the union and producing a higher level of inclusion. Given that AWI, like IP adopts a membership concept premised on direct connections between shopfloor workers, and the explicit choice to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy and representation, and to organise on a horizontal basis helped to resolve many of the issues relating to intermediating between contending interests across different scales of union action.

In terms of the unions capabilities to articulate actions across time and space, all three unions have managed to make use of their respective transnational union networks in order to exchange information regarding differences in working conditions, levels of pay, bonuses and additional benefits. Whereas Solidarność was less effective in terms of articulating the benefits of labour internationalism to its members, and to convincingly link it to its activities domestically, IP leveraged its infrastructural resources, such as the workers' newspaper in order to demonstrate the positive impacts of transnational cooperation and struggles abroad on working conditions in Poland. Ver.di has demonstrated a strong capacity to leverage the resources of its allies in order to proactively articulate its strategy across different arenas, and as one of the key actors in the UNI Alliance, it has used this position in order to promote and articulate its demand for a collective bargaining agreement in international arenas in a proactive manner. It has focused on multiplying its own external linkages, and deepening the connections with sister unions, and has been able to link action at multiple levels and to develop interaction between different levels of action.

Regarding organizational learning and flexibility, Solidarność exhibited a moderate capacity to learn from past experiences and to diffuse learning throughout the organisation in order to adapt to change, evident in its recognition of the limitations of social partnership, and its limited cooperation with IP on the Safe Package and Stop Feedback campaigns as well as on the second strike referendum in Poland. IP meanwhile demonstrated a stronger capacity to renovate its repertoire of action and has relied on a mix of institutional and more contentious tactics such as wildcat strikes, go-slow actions, protests on the shop-floor, as well as outside Amazon facilities and recruitment agencies. Despite limitations to the right to strike, IP has demonstrated the significant bargaining power possessed by logistics workers to disrupt shipment at critical choke-points. Further, IP reveals a stronger capacity to deploy and develop its power resources in a creative, purposive and pedagogic manner, in terms of how it has reflected on and framed past actions and encounters with management, by analysing the opportunities and pitfalls for organising, and by adjusting its narratives and tactics accordingly. Once again, a high level of collective cohesion and deliberative vitality proved critical for diffusing competences and knowledge through organisational channels. Ver.di meanwhile demonstrated a moderate degree of learning, evident in the changes made to its internal organisational policies and process, for instance the devolution of power to the local level, and by renovating its repertoire of action in the form of in-and-out strikes. Nevertheless, the predictability of strike timing and inefficient distribution of power resources across the network, as well as a lack of strategic direction among union leadership appear as bottlenecks to an effective exercise of bargaining power in Germany. The capacity to break out of these path dependencies depends on the union's capacity to learn from past successes and failures and to diffuse this knowledge via organisational channels. Whereas campaigns to organise workers at Delivery Stations have been promising in this regard, it remains to be seen whether these are isolated experiments in organising, or whether this signals a watershed in terms of a readjustment of Ver.di's priorities and strategy.

**Table 5.** Comparison of union capacity: Ver.di, NSZZ Solidarność and OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza.

| Comparison of Union Capacity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Ver.di | NSZZ Solidarność | OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza |
| *Internal solidarity* | Uneven degree of collective cohesion across sites; strong deliberative vitality | Low level of collective cohesion; Weak deliberative vitality | Uneven degree of collective cohesion across sites; strong deliberative vitality |
| *Network embeddedness* | Moderate level of network diversity; high network density | Low level of network diversity; moderate network density | High network diversity; High network density |
| *Infrastructural resources* | High levels of material and human resources; strongly developed organisational policies and processes to engage and support members | Organisational policies and resources to engage and support members are weakly developed | High levels of material and human resources; strongly developed organisational policies and processes to engage and support members |
| *Narrative resources* | Traditional discourse focusing on regulating work via established institutional channels | Traditional discourse focusing on regulating work via social partnership strategies | Wide stock of interpretive frames (do not only rely on traditional frames); Militant discourse Emphasize direct participation and voice via institutional and non-institutional channels |
| *Intermediation* | Union leaders demonstrate weak willingness and capacity to foster cooperation and exchange between union members and external allies | Moderate intermediation capabilities given underdeveloped structures of internal representation, mechanisms for deliberative vitality and infrastructural resources; Mitigated rivalries and ensured basic level of understanding with competing union. | Strong capacity to foster cooperation and exchange between union members and external allies; leaders are proactive in facilitating participation among rank-and-file; Mitigated rivalries and ensured basic level of understanding with competing union. |
| *Framing* | Reliance on traditional narrative frames and limited attempts to shift frames in order to encompass claims and interests of new constituencies | Reliance on traditional narrative frames and limited ability to adjust frames in order to encompass claims beyond sphere of labour, and to engage new constituencies | Continuous reframing of challenges; ability to shift frames and expand the stakes of the conflict beyond labour sphere & encompass claims/interests of new constituencies Motivational frames give sense of agency and efficacy to collective organising |
| *Articulation* | Proactive articulation practices that link collective actions across multiple scales of action | Some attempts to link collective actions across multiple scales of action; however limited by underdeveloped mechanisms for deliberative vitality and channels for communication with membership | Proactive articulation practices that link collective actions across multiple scales of action & leverage external linkages with network partners |
| *Learning* | Localised attempts at union revitalisation; Lack of strategic direction, path dependency and insufficient attempts at diffusing learning via organizational channels | Little evidence of union revitalisation; but indication of limited attempts to readjust strategic direction | Purposive strategic leadership based on engaging rank-and-file through strongly developed deliberative processes; Strong capability to diffuse learning and knowledge via organizational channels |

Chapter one introduced the two main research questions which this dissertation sought to answer, namely, how collective actors have mobilised against Amazon in their local and national contexts and what factors can account for variations in collective action at the local and national level. The second research question aimed at describing how collective actors coordinated their actions transnationally, and identifying the factors that can account for different trajectories of transnational cooperation.

Chapter two contextualised the mobilisations of Amazon logistics workers historically within important social, economic and political transformations, and developed a theoretical framework for analysing workers' structural and associational power. This allowed me to analyse differences between unions in terms of their resources and strategic capabilities, and to more specifically identify how union organizations have innovated and utilised their resources and capabilities in creative ways in order to address contemporary challenges. Variations in resources and capabilities among the unions examined was related to different principles, histories and patterns of interaction with workers, employers, state and non-state actors, and the different opportunities available to them. The utility of my comparison of these different mobilisations through power-structure analysis illustrates that despite its diminished structural and associational power, labour nevertheless has many strategic options available to collectively represent and advance its interests, even in conditions of institutional closure. The analysis demonstrates that trade unions can build mobilising capacity even in unfavourable circumstances, dependent on their ability to use the resources at their disposal, develop new resources, and reflexively adjust their framing capabilities to respond to new threats.

Chapter three foregrounded the power-structure analysis of Ver.di, IP and Solidarność at Amazon, in terms of emergence and challenges faced by these organisations in their respective cultural, political and institutional contexts. Next, chapter four explained the research design, the reasons for employing the selected methods for data collection, analysis, that units of analysis, and the reasons for comparing mobilisations in two different industrial relations systems.

Chapter five connected the methodological and theoretical framework with the empirical subject matter of collective mobilisations against Amazon. This chapter presented the opportunities and obstacles facing workers and trade unions by describing the supply-chain and labour process at Amazon Logistics, with particular emphasis on the work performed by warehouse workers and delivery drivers. Much of the discussion focused on power and control within the labour process, describing a situation where workers' autonomy is highly restricted, reflecting also the character of the grievances and claims articulated by workers, trade unions and social movements. I also described the general features of digital platforms, the role of data in processes of valorisation, and concerns relating to its ownership, collection and analysis. As this chapter elaborated, Amazon's monopoly power and capacity to corner markets were enabled by cross-subsidisation into other sectors of the economy, particularly cloud services. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic had given a massive boost to e-commerce, with Amazon's product sales growing by 50% over 2019-2021 to reach $242 billion. However, at the same time, service sales represented largely by AWS grew by 90% over the same period, reaching $228 billion, overtaking product sales for the first time in the company's history.[126] Following a year-and-half long boom since the start of the pandemic, Amazon's stock levels fell over 2022 returning to 2018 levels.

Against one sided accounts that celebrate liberating potential of algorithmic technologies, the analysis presents a case which illustrates the class-antagonisms produced out of capital's use of technology to extract the maximum value from labour. The highly efficient, logistical infrastructure which Amazon has built to dominate global e-commerce, premised on moving goods at rapid speeds, has produced a strain not only on workers, but on established ways of managing industrial relations, communities, and

[126] Service sales include AWS, advertising, customer subscriptions such as Amazon Prime, and third-party seller services. See https://seekingalpha.com/article/4570027-amazon-stock-2023-forecast-significant-trend-overlooked

the climate. The labour regime at Amazon Logistics facilities is characterised by a mix of old and new means for monitoring, controlling and directing labour, and consequently, the contentious issues which collective actors have agitated against in each context have reflected more or less traditional concerns, including: precarious contracts, working conditions, remuneration, health and safety, as well as monitoring and surveillance, both in the sense of 'classical' union-busting, and the technologically sophisticated surveillance of labour and its collective organisations. These issues were contextualised within ongoing shifts to global capitalism through the increasing penetration of digital technologies into production, consumption and distribution, and their impacts on labour processes, and the impact of the platform and gig economy on labour markets.

Chapter six described the mobilisations in Germany, tracing the beginnings of the strike movement to the first strikes at Bad Hersfeld and Leipzig in 2013, and the subsequent development of trade union structures across the country over the following decade. It demonstrates the difficulties faced by unions in a CME context where unions enjoy a significant degree of institutional power. Despite being able to extract significant concessions, the dispute between Ver.di and Amazon has reached a stalemate in terms of the company acceding to the chief demand for a collective bargaining agreement. The power-structure analysis of Ver.di indicated that while the union had succeeded in establish structures for interest representation, ensuring a high degree of collective cohesion at nearly all 20 FCs, the same did not apply across the fulfilment network, given Amazon's massive investments into the last-mile sector since 2017. The union has adopted largely traditional tactics and frames, relying on the institutional power afforded by the dual system of interest representation in Germany relating to collective bargaining and works councils. In this respect, threatened by an employer which outright rejects unions as an external third-party to employment relations and which rejects collective bargaining point blank, Ver.di appears to lack strategic direction beyond its moderate attempts to build strike capacity and pressuring political actors to regulate the company by making collective bargaining binding. The union benefits from its strong embeddedness within a network of actors which have assisted in providing legal support to workers, as illustrated by Fair Mobility's campaign to organise delivery drivers. The campaign to organise workers at DSs provides some strong indication of efforts at union renewal, in terms of building grassroots power among rank-and-file members and developing collective cohesion among unionised sites. However, it remains to be seen whether these localised efforts are any indication of a trend to diffuse more broadly throughout the organisation, or if indeed the union decides to direct its resources and capabilities to focus on Amazon's last-mile sector. I described three campaigns which included social movement actors, namely the campaign to stop the construction of the EDGE-Tower in Berlin, an information campaign against surveillance organised by Amazon Workers Against Surveillance, and the Black Friday 2022 demonstration in Berlin.

Chapter seven described the mobilisations in Poland, undertaken by NSZZ Solidarność and OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza, beginning by tracing the foundation of the first commission under the respective union structures and to the first industrial actions in 2015 which were decisive for catalysing transnational solidarities between Amazon workers in Germany and Poland. While Solidarność and OZZ-IP and marked by significant differences in their history, ideology and preferred approaches to industrial relations, the unions have managed to ensure a minimum degree of cooperation and have sought to combine their resources by jointly organising campaigns at Amazon and by negotiating with management together.

The power-structure analysis of NSZZ Solidarność reveals a low level of collective cohesion, given underdeveloped structures of internal representation, and underdeveloped mechanisms for deliberative vitality. While the union has maintained a traditional focus on regulating work via social partnership strategies and a discourse supporting this ambition, its initial encounters with a paternalistic management seemed to deflate any prospect of partnership, and it has since adopted a moderately more conflictual stance and developed its coalitional power by organizing various forms of collective action together with IP, such as the Safe Package and Stop Feedbacks campaigns. The power-structure analysis

of OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza demonstrated a strong degree of collective cohesion and mechanisms for deliberative vitality given a strong emphasis on informing, educating and including rank-and-file members, and processes to foster the inclusion of members and their participation in the life of the union. Framing strategies focused on motivating workers to participate by articulating their agency together with the efficacy of collective mobilisation. The union demonstrated its capacity to draw on a wide stock of interpretive frames, and its ability to continuously renew and shift frames strategically in order to reflect new issues, and to encompass the claims of new constituencies. It has maintained a strong focus on mobilising against the precariousness of labour through the use of recruitment agencies, an issue that Solidarność has been rather indifferent to, and has been actively involved in pressuring political actors to regulate the repression of trade union activists in Poland. In the context of the dispute with Amazon, Solidarność has not managed to present itself as an authority and has increasingly appeared as a junior partner to the relatively smaller, radical union which has surpassed Solidarność both in terms of union membership and its capacity to proactively articulate demands and present itself as a legitimate opinion leader. Indeed, apart from these joint actions however, there was little impetus for union revitalisation within Solidarność which has not managed to reflect on its weaknesses and adjust its own practices accordingly.

Finally, this chapter illustrated that certain structural features of pluralist IR systems in the form of competitive incentives, as well as the privatisation and liberalisation of certain industries provide opportunities union renewal in a politically radical direction, defined against the deficiencies of mainstream, confederal trade unions. The case of IP is instructive in that it demonstrates that despite a restrictive institutional environment, employer hostility, and obstacles in the form of precarious contracts and high turnover, trade unions can pursue political radicalisation in order to strengthen their legitimacy, redefine solidarity, reconstruct their social identities on a more inclusive basis and revive much-needed internal democracy (Denis 2012). Despite the fact that IP has not yet succeeded in meeting the company-level representative criteria in Poland, or in meeting the requisite frequency for a successful strike ballot, the benefits of this model of unionism are nevertheless apparent in the manner in which IP has managed to gradually but consistently build mobilising capacity, and demonstrate the resilience and combativity of the workforce, an important antidote to employer hostility. The fact that IP has most creatively exploited the power resources at its disposal to impressive effect is promising in terms of the benefits of this model. Radical political unions tend to address a broader range of political questions beyond industrial disputes, which in doing so broaden the agenda of trade unions by developing coalitional power and broadening the scope of claims. Nevertheless, radical political unions must reckon with the familiar dialectic between movement and organisation (Hyman, 2001b; Connolly, 2012), and strike a balance between sustaining a conflict-oriented union, revitalisation grassroots participation avoiding centralisation and bureaucratisation on the one hand, and on the other, the need to accommodate their claims within the existing order by ensuring their organisational longevity, institutionalising their structures and engaging with industrial relations processes and institutions for representation at the workplace level (Connolly & Darlington, 2012). However, the case of IP indicates that the emphasis on internal democracy and direct participation in the life of the union may lead to positive feedback loop between bargaining effectiveness, in terms of the ability to deliver improvements in pay, working conditions and managerial responsiveness to employee demands, as well as organizational effectiveness, defined as the capacity to democratically represent members and include them in decision-making and agenda setting (Connolly & Darlington, 2012).

The penultimate chapter addressed transnational mobilisations at Amazon, addressing the second research question, concerned with describing how collective actors have coordinated their actions transnationally, and in identifying the factors that can account for different trajectories of internationalism across different institutional pathways. Accordingly, this chapter described the two main transnational labour networks which have emerged in the course of the dispute, namely the UNI Global Amazon Alliance, and the Amazon Workers International as forms of top-down and bottom-up labour internationalism and outlined differences among the two networks in terms of their discourse and

practices. This chapter contributed to the literature on labour internationalism by illustrating the challenges associated with constructing countervailing power to global capital across multiple economic sectors. It demonstrated that trade unions across many countries have managed to cooperate within these networks, overcoming obstacles to cooperation in the form of diverging interests, institutional-cultural or organizational differences, with different emphases and degrees of participation. The analysis has demonstrated that socialisation, trust-building, mutual solidarity, collective identity formation efforts and employer hostility were essential to helping overcome these barriers. Central to this were logistics workers' interpretations that Amazon's strike-breaking capacity would necessarily need to be overcome in order to maximise their bargaining power at critical choke points of the supply chain. Whereas the divergent institutional-cultural legacies and ideological profiles of trade unions did not preclude transnational cooperation as predicted, they did however result in splitting the movement into two factions which reflect distinct legacies of labour struggle. While institutional opportunities at the European level allowed for the establishment of a European Works Council at Amazon, union activists have expressed scepticism regarding its utility, particularly given weaknesses in the agreement. Nevertheless, even if the capabilities of EWC's ought not to be overstated, they nevertheless yield positive effects in terms of minimising conflict among participants, as well as strategically relevant information, legitimacy and opportunity for socialisation (Meardi, 2004, 2007, 2012b).

Whereas the UNI Alliance and AWI accomplish similar functions in terms of serving as international forums whereby affiliate members can share information, plan collective actions, pool and mutually develop their power resources, develop communication strategies and build collective identities, they are nevertheless marked by important differences. Whereas the UNI Alliance is characterised by a high level of network density and diversity, in doing so it forfeits power resources related to internal solidarity, given an organizational model and membership concept that largely excludes affiliate unions' rank-and-file members. On the other hand, this has allowed the network to engage and develop strategies with NGOs, regulators, politicians and investors on a range of complex issues that require a great deal of specialised expertise, including tax avoidance, public sector procurement, monopoly power and market competition, climate protection, privacy and digital rights. This broad scope has allowed the network to incorporate the claims of a wide range of actors. In contrast, AWI identity as a network 'by and for workers' ensure the active involvement of shopfloor workers and unions in global campaigns with positive effects on bargaining power at the local power, given workers intimate knowledge of production processes that allow for power resources to be deployed in a more flexible, agile and appropriate manner. On the other hand, AWI's networks are characterised by a lower degree of diversity, given a narrower agenda which focuses on workplace issues that directly impact shopfloor workers. Finally, despite the benefits and drawbacks of both models of labour internationalism, it was argued that an effective exercise of local, national and transnational power resources might stem from a synthesis of both models, in a form of "concatenated diversity" (Evans, 2010). The Make Amazon Pay campaign was presented as evidence of this claim. Based on mutual recognition of complementary capacities and an implicit division of roles (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015), organisations representing different traditions of trade unionism, together with social movement and NGO allies were able to pursue different, yet compatible goals and tactics, under the same slogan, in order to mount pressure against Amazon.

# APPENDICES

**Table 6**. List of interviewees

| Nr. | Pseudonym | Organisation | Function | Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Asim | Si-Cobas | Union Secretary | Piacenza, IT |
| 2 | Andrea | Si-Cobas | Union Secretary | Piacenza, IT |
| 3 | Francesco | Studio Diritti e Lavoro | Lawyer | Piacenza, IT |
| 4 | Giacomo | Si-Cobas | Shop Steward/Worker | Piacenza, IT |
| 5 | Matteo | FILCAMS-CGIL | Union Secretary | Piacenza, IT |
| 6 | Stefano | FILCAMS-CGIL | Union Secretary | Rome, IT |
| 7 | Mateusz | NSZZ Solidarność Commerce | Union Secretary | Wrocław, PL |
| 8 | Szymon | OZZ-Inicjatywa Pracownicza | Shop Steward/Worker | Wrocław, PL |
| 9 | Kamil | NSZZ Solidarność Commerce | Union Secretary | Tarnowskie Góry, PL |
| 10 | Kuba | NSZZ Solidarność Commerce | Union Secretary | Tarnowskie Góry, PL |
| 11 | Mario | CGIL | Shop Steward/Worker | Piacenza, IT |
| 12 | Enrico | UGL Terziario | Union Secretary | Piacenza, IT |
| 13 | Giorgio | UGL Terziario | Shop Steward/Worker | Piacenza, IT |
| 14 | Antonio | UGL Terziario | Shop Steward/Worker | Piacenza, IT |
| 15 | Alessio | CGIL | Shop Steward/Worker | Piacenza, IT |
| 16 | Emanuele | UILTUCS-UIL | Union Secretary | Piacenza, IT |
| 17 | Xavier | Ver.di | Worker | Berlin, DE |
| 18 | Emily | Ver.di | Worker | Berlin, DE |
| 19 | Dennis | Ver.di | Union Secretary | Berlin, DE |
| 20 | Andre | Ver.di | Shop Steward/Worker | Berlin, DE |
| 21 | Gabi | Ver.di | Union Secretary | Berlin, DE |
| 22 | Kathrin | Ver.di | Shop Steward/Worker | Berlin, DE |
| 23 | Martin | Ver.di | Union Secretary | Berlin, DE |

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