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Organising Potentials in Logistics in Times of Crises. the Case of Poland

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Abstract Text:

The logistics has been labelled as “choke points” (Alimahomed-Wilson & Ness 2018) in the global capitalist supply chains due to the structural power of workers who can disturb the smooth circulation of capital and goods on which capitalism relies. The Covid-19 pandemic has further increased workers’ structural power given the growing reliance of customers on on-line orders. Simultaneously, workers’ power resources are systemically undermined by the platformisation of the industry which causes the temporal and spatial disappearance of workplace boundaries..

Drawing from the literature on power resources and union organising in the logistics, this paper addresses the question of the conditions which allow workers’ structural power to be translated into associational power. The notion of “organising potentials” is introduced to understand the role of informal and weak forms of workers’ mutual care and solidarity and the circulation of repertoires of resistance in the development of collective discontent, protests and, in some cases, their collective interests’ organisations.

Based on narrative and focus group interviews with workers, as well as expert interviews with trade unionists, managers and employers, the body of the paper explores the organising potentials and workers’ protests during the pandemic in the case of four sections of the logistics within the private sector in Poland: logistic centres, parcel-delivery, online food-delivery and truck transport. It is argued that the analysis of the organising potentials requires considering both their structural power and a range of other factors: the diverse forms of employment precarisation across the sector, external and internal solidarities and the international diffusion of the repertoires of discontent. In conclusions, the differences between better organised logistics centres and disorganised other parts of the industry (in which informal, bottom-up and weak forms of protests emerged) are discussed in the context of a broader debate on the platformisation of economy.

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