



ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS AT POINTS OF RUPTURE OF THE TECHNICAL COMPOSITION OF THE WORKFORCE

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ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS AT POINTS OF RUPTURE OF THE TECHNICAL COMPOSITION OF THE WORKFORCE

In the Research papers series, we publish current analyses of members of the CEDRA Research committee. The notebooks are intended for reflection on the practical work of RC CEDRA and the wider social struggles. With them, we want to stimulate theoretical discussions, share experiences from organisational practices in the field, and offer reflection on strategies and means of the class struggles, and thereby contribute to the political organisation of the working class.

ABSTRACT: *Is it possible to locate the potential for political work at the level of the base, i.e., among workers in the sphere of direct production? Our hypothesis is that this potential opens up at the level of discrepancies between the different technical compositions of the workforce required by capital. After presenting the historical context, in which the question of political work at the level of the base in Slovenia is raised, we discuss the concept of the technical composition of the workforce, and then develop the basic hypothesis of the volume. This is followed by two case studies that serve to illustrate our basic hypothesis.*

KEY WORDS: *technical composition of the workforce, political work at the level of the base*

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Objective and research issue

The series of defeats that the labour movement in much of the world has suffered over the past decades has led to a series of studies on the revival or renewal of workers' organisations, in particular trade unions (see, e.g., Frege and Kelly, 2004). Studies of the organisational approach have a special place in these discussions (see, e.g., Heery et al., 2000; Dörre et al., 2009), however, they often treat organisation as an end, without considering the broader social, that is, political dimensions of workers' organisations (see Simms and Holgate, 2010). Although this volume largely deals with aspects of labour struggles that may also be useful for organisation from a purely technical point of view, our intention is not to give mere recipes for better union organisation. The theses we present for reflection and discussion refer to the possibilities of organising workers' struggles as a condition for political work at the level of the "base"¹. In other words, we are interested in whether the elements on which a socialist policy could be based can be identified at the level of the base. Our working hypothesis is that this is possible by applying the concept of the *technical composition of the workforce*. In the following, we will first outline the above concept, and then illustrate its use with two case studies.

¹ When we talk about organisation at the level of the base, we mean the organisation of workers at the level of direct relations of production, where the process of capitalist exploitation takes place, i.e., in companies and other work organisations, as opposed to organisation at the level of representation of workers' interests in the sphere of parliamentary politics, and at the level of umbrella trade union organisations, which provide certain services to their membership, and represent them in various forms of "social dialogue", including collective bargaining.

Context and task

Our starting point is the thesis that the working class – which, under the specific circumstances of Slovenian transition with the early mobilisation of trade unions (Crowley and Stanojević, 2011), was able to achieve a socially relatively tolerable transition to capitalism - it successfully defended most formal institutions in the decades of transition, but its organisation at the level of the base is gradually declining (Stanojević et al., 2016), while its subordination to capital is increasing. More specifically, formal institutions (collective contracts, tripartite social dialogue), set in place by the unionised working class in the early struggles during the transition to consolidate its power, are, because of disorganisation at level of the base, maintained only as an instrument that enables a regulated and controlled relinquishing of political power to capital (Bembič, 2017).

The disintegration of workers' organisation at the level of the base is evidenced, among other things, by the decline in the number of strikes and other forms of the mobilisation of workers at levels exceeding the individual company, indicating that the organisation of the base is maintained only on individual islands of “strategic” activities, such as the energy and metal industry, surrounded by a sea of weakly organised masses. Even where the organisation at the level of the base still exists, the union is often completely subordinate, and serves as an extended arm of management. Where trade unions continue to defend the interests of workers, union trustees have, especially in recent years, increasingly been the target of attacks, usually ending in dismissals. Although these, as it often turns out in court proceedings, have no legal basis, they are still effective – when, after months or even years of proceedings,

the court orders that the union trustee must be re-employed, the workers' organisation in the company is long dead.

Almost complete subordination at the level of the base has devastating consequences for the struggles of workers' organisations on all "higher levels", e.g., in parliamentary politics, social dialogue, the school apparatus, the media, etc. We do not, of course, argue that the ideological-political struggles only reflect what is happening at the level of the base, or that the base is the only place of workers' struggles. The ideological-political struggles have a meaning, and state apparatuses are an important scene of class struggles that trigger return effects at the level of the base. We do argue, however, that the ideological-political struggles which are not accompanied by a direct struggle at the level of the base (that is, economic struggle at the level of direct production) are merely "empty phrases" with no material foundation (see Althusser, 2014: 123-135).² In short, ideological-political struggles can only be successful, if they are connected with economic struggle at the level of the base.

² Perhaps one of the biggest mistakes of the Slovene Marxist intelligentsia in recent years is that, in fear of the "economisation" of class struggles, it constantly emphasized the necessity for political struggles, but remained silent on issues of organisation at the level of the base. In addition to abstract references to Lenin's actions against the Otvovists, this orientation can be supported by the argument that ideological-political struggles are only an illusory expression of class struggles, but this "expression" is a necessary element of the class struggle itself, as it establishes (retrospectively, so to speak) the historical position of the working class, the expression of which it is supposed to be. But while this argument can certainly be accepted on a principled level, it seems that the Slovene Marxist intelligentsia did not count on another possibility - or at least forgot to mention it - namely that this ideological-political "expression" of class struggles may be left without the material foundation, which it is supposed to express. Today's reality of "social dialogue" and parliamentary politics is precisely this: the specific "expression" that the ideological struggle assumes in the case of a complete defeat of the working class in "economic" struggles, and the consequent disorganisation of workers at the level of the base.

The task we set for ourselves follows from the above analysis: how to strengthen the position of the working class in class struggles at the level of the base, i.e., economic struggles, which alone can provide the material basis, without which there can be no decisive struggles for power. This is the context of Cedra's efforts on a practical level. By addressing the question of those elements at the level of the base, on which the progressive political line could rely, this volume attempts to reflect on the struggles on a theoretical level.

Concept

We will explain the concept of the technical composition of the workforce by comparing it with the dialectical-materialist logic, which has now been surpassed³. In the standard dialectical-materialist treatment, historical development leading to socialism takes place in the tension between the development of productive forces⁴ and production relations⁵. Medieval feudalism is characterized by small businesses, where individual workers (farmers in the countryside and craftsmen in the cities) work with modest means of production (tools, materials, etc.), which are predominantly

³ Elements to illustrate the standard version of dialectical materialism are summarized from Engels' work *Anti-Dühring* (1965), *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 1976), and *The Holy Family* (Marx and Engels, 1979).

⁴ Productive forces can be defined as a whole of factors that enable the achievement of a certain level of labour productivity in society, e.g., technology, machines and tools, knowledge and skills of the workforce, etc.

⁵ Production relations are social relations that define a certain mode of production (slavery, feudalism, capitalism), and on which, among other things, the division of society into social classes is based.

privately owned. The majority of production takes place to meet the needs of either the producer or the feudal lord, and only a small portion of the product is sold in the market.

With the onset of capitalism, there is a complete reversal in social relations. The key change is the attitude of workers towards the means of production – these are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the private owner of those means, the capitalist. As a rule, the capitalist is no longer a worker; a hired workforce (wage workers) works for him, while the capitalist as the owner also appropriates the product of work. This is the basic contradiction of the capitalist mode of production: production is entirely a social act, as it is possible only with the participation of large masses of workers, while the results of this production are appropriated by private owners, individual capitalists. The reverse side of this contradiction is the general dependence of workers on wage labour - because workers no longer have their own means of production, no longer sell the goods they produce or the services they provide, they can only make a living by selling their labour, which is bought by the capitalist. Society thus splits into two opposing classes: the class of wage workers (the proletariat) and the class of capitalists.

Several other social contradictions arise from this fundamental contradiction. While capitalist production under the control of individual capital (company, factory) is strictly planned, capital relations are dominated by the anarchy of competition, where each capitalist tries to outcompete other capitalists, which can only be achieved by constantly reducing production costs by introducing machines. The introduction of machines rapidly increases the scope of production, but at the same time, it also expands the reserve army of unemployed workers. The proletariat also grows in numbers, as more and more capital is needed for machine production, which makes small entrepreneurs (craftsmen, merchants, small farmers, etc.) unable to withstand competitive battles

with large industry. In addition, machine production eliminates the need for specialised knowledge and skills - the worker is now nothing more than an appendage of the machine he is tending -, which makes the workforce a completely replaceable, formless, pliable mass, and reduces the worker to a bare number in the capitalist calculation, determined by the cost of reproducing its miserable existence.

On one side, we have a growing ability of society to produce goods, while on the other side, there is a growing poverty among workers who cannot afford the goods produced. Therefore, economic crises occur, where production capacities remain unused and workers unemployed. In the day-to-day competition, and especially in crises, capitals go under and are taken over by other capitals, or merge to overcome the destructive competition. Mergers of individuals create large monopolistic societies run by paid managers, while capitalists transform into socially completely redundant rentiers without a function in the production process.

But the dialectical-materialist interpretation does not stop at the negative sides of capitalism - in them, it recognises the birthing of a new society. In the capitalist dismantling of the old, feudal society and its destructive trends, it sees revolutionary processes that create the material conditions for the coming socialism. In the painful expropriation of small medieval producers by the few emerging capitalists, and the glaringly evident inequality of wealth, it sees the concentration of means of production, necessary for the historical leap towards a nearly unlimited increase in labour productivity (development of productive forces) and thus meeting the needs of the population. In the socialisation of production (mass participation of workers instead of individual work in scattered medieval workshops), it finds the potential for its planned regulation, which will replace the anarchy of capitalist competition. In the deskilled worker, it recognises a new, universal worker who will perform any kind of productive work, and will be able – because of growth of productivity,

working to meet the demand will take less and less time - to deal with common affairs, education, and all-round development of their talents. In other words, with the development of productive forces it released, capitalism simultaneously created both the conditions and the need for social change that would eliminate the capitalist social order itself, that is, capitalist relations of production.

Even more important are the changes in the social structure that take place under capitalism. *Class opposition becomes crystal clear*: on one side, property is accumulated, and acts as capital in relation to workers which enslaves and exploits them, while on the other side, the disintegration of feudal ties increasingly blurs the former social differences and special statuses of workers. At the same time, this amorphous mass of wage workers whose only means of ensuring their livelihood is their ability to work, which they sell to capital for their daily bread, is constantly growing in size, as all other social classes (petite bourgeoisie and farmers) lose their possessions in hopeless competition with the industry, and slide into the proletariat. With the transformation of capitalists into rentiers who only collect income from ownership of large monopoly companies, and are no longer engaged in the organisation of production, the contradiction between labour and capital sharpens and reaches a climax, as it becomes clear that the capitalist is a completely useless, parasitic figure whose historic task is completed. The constant changes and disintegration of all old certainties and traditional ties between people, including recurring crises revealing the irrationality of the capitalist social order, eventually force workers to open their eyes and realise their position and historic task - the abolition of capitalism. In short, along with the material conditions for social change, capital also creates the social subject that will implement these changes - the modern working class, or the proletariat. The described dialectical-materialist historical logic has thus far, of course, not materialised, and it is questionable if it ever will.

However, the problem is not simply that this logic is wrong; this way, this method of dealing with historical events is even more problematic. Namely, it presumes a “clean”, smooth, almost automatic transition from capitalism to socialism,⁶ which occurs with the aggravating of the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction between productive forces and production relations, which is expressed as the aggravating of the contradiction between labour and capital. Louis Althusser (2005: 87-128) therefore critically noted that this opposition between labour and capital never occurs in its pure form, but is always an inseparable part of the whole of social circumstances that do not derive from the elegant dialectical logic of the development of the fundamental contradiction between labour and capital, but can be of an entirely different kind (i.e., they are heterogeneous with respect to the underlying contradiction). We therefore say that the fundamental opposition between labour and capital is “overdetermined” (ibid.: 101) with a whole set of different circumstances that define an always exceptional, specific concrete situation in which social struggles take place, e.g., the law of a particular country, ideology, national culture, form of the state, and a whole range of other circumstances, from the international situation to geographical dimensions of each country.

The concept of the *technical composition of the workforce*, developed by the Italian operaists, which we are trying to present here, can be understood in contrast to the above dialectical-materialist treatment of the proletariat as a formless, homogeneous mass of wage workers.

⁶ A good example of such an understanding of history, where social turnabout takes place virtually as a logical development of the concept, can be found in one of Marx’s earlier (1979: 496) works, in which the author states that “[T]he proletariat executes the sentence that private property pronounces on itself by producing the proletariat, just as it executes the sentence that wage-labour pronounces on itself by producing wealth for others and poverty for itself.”

That is, it can be understood as one of the circumstances that overdetermine the fundamental contradiction between labour and capital. Namely, the concrete historical form that capital imprints on the workforce (Močnik, 2011: 188-189) to adapt it to the specific requirements of the accumulation process, manage it and “effectively” exploit it (see Mohandesi, 2013: 85). More specifically, we propose to understand the technical composition of the workforce as an aspect of overdetermination that defines the set of relationships in which an individual worker is involved, insofar as these relationships are shaped by capital (or the capitalist state). With this (re)formation, capital adapts the workforce to the current needs of the accumulation process, and at the same time, as we will see, it imposes a certain ideology on the working class.

We can also approach the concept of the technical composition of the workforce from the other side, from the perspective of **political composition of the working class**, with which theoreticians characterise the historically conditioned form of unity, established by the working class when it breaks the forms imposed by capital, and establishes itself as an autonomous political movement (see Bologna, 1991: 23; Močnik, 2011: 190; Mohandesi, 2013: 86). The working class described above - as a deskilled, formless proletarianized mass, which, as a homogeneous mass in a dialectical-materialist interpretation, uniformly opposes capital - can therefore be understood as a zero (abstract) level of the political composition of the working class, while the technical composition of the workforce can be understood as a set of provisions and relations, with which capital and the state *segment and internally differentiate the working class* in various ways. A zero-level political composition exists only as an abstract point of reference that is never really realised: there is no form of working class unity given once and for all, only historically specific forms, with which the working class responds to the technical composition which the capital established at a given historical moment to break the former

political unity of the working class, and secure political control over it (Alquati, 1975: 225; see also Močnik, 2011: 190-191).

There are two closely related aspects to the technical composition, but they need to be separated analytically. The first, technical aspect, concerns the functional side of the technical composition of the workforce as an effect of violence (Močnik, 2011: 189) of capital against the worker. Capital buys labour, that is, the worker's ability to work, on the market. However, the process of capitalist production requires a specific workforce – for example, the work process in machine production requires completely different characteristics of the workforce than the work process that takes place in the office. These characteristics are first important in the labour market, as capital selects candidates most suitable for a given production process - at this level, formal education plays an important role, i.e., the form imprinted on the workforce by the school apparatus. In the production process, capital further shapes the workforce - we are talking about the experience and skills that workers acquire through work, i.e., by participating in the production process. In short, the workforce purchased by the capitalist on the market must assume the form of variable capital, which forms a part of a specific individual productive capital, that is, a firm in an industry, whose production process occupies a certain position in the international division of labour. Alquati (1975: 223) considers the technical composition of the workforce at two levels: a) at the level of functions that the international capital imposes on the national workforce in the context of international division of labour, and b) at the internal level, with the division of labour between regions, economic sectors, companies, departments, occupational and wage groups, as well as bureaucratic functions (ibid.: 123), which are also performed by wage labour. However, we could also talk about other aspects of adaptation of the workforce. Mario Tronti (2006: 51) believes that the capitalist “factory” subjugates the worker not only in the sphere

of production, but also in all other social spheres, thereby dismantling the collective worker⁷ into isolated individual workers, in order to shape them according to its requirements, and integrate them into productive capital. This brings us to the second, political aspect of the technical composition. While the described dialectical-materialist logic - and with it, most working class organisations in the twentieth century (Bologna, 1991: 17) - welcomed the capitalist technological “modernisation” as a condition of the transition to socialism, the technological rationality of capitalist production is not a force of “objective” progress for operatists, but a tool with which capital subordinates the working class. Machines, Panzieri insisted (1976: 36) - by “machine”, he understood the whole “bundle” of relationships, from physical devices to organisational techniques of the management of people - always represents the will of capital which, with its technological requirements, fragments the collective worker. Workers sell their individual labour, which - because they don’t have access to means of production, as they appear to them as a foreign, alien force, as capital - they cannot use to satisfy their own needs, or to produce goods. Cooperation between workers begins only in the process of production, which is already under the command of capital by then. Therefore, the productive force resulting from their participation appears⁸ to workers as the productive force of capital (Marx, 1961: 380), and the technical composition of the workforce, which the capital asserts, as an “objective”

⁷ Marx (1961: 571-572) uses the term collective (or combined) worker for a multitude of cooperating workers who carry out specific functions of the work process (i.e., different types of work). Use-value is the result of their joint efforts or cooperation - this is no longer the product of the individual worker, but a social product of the collective worker.

⁸ The fact that their own productive force “appears” to them in as a force of capital is, of course, not their illusion; this notion offers itself on the basis of objective circumstances; it is a necessary illusion.

requirement of the production process (Panzieri, 1976: 37; Tronti, 2006: 41-42). The work, says Alquati (1975: 98), is not organised by the boss, but by the assembly line.

When participating in the production process, workers could find that the capitalist is redundant, since, as part of the collective worker, they are the ones who produce all use-value. Capital, in accordance with the “objective” requirements of the production process, places these workers into work positions, departments, professions, and separate companies operating in separate industries, in different countries whose workforces compete; some are employed through standard contracts, others through agencies, student work, or even as sole proprietors; capital requires different levels of experience, skills and education of them, bases wage differences on these differences, and creates other inequalities in the social situation among workers. Into these intertwined systems of division of positions (that are often based on criteria that is often acknowledged by workers themselves, as well), systems of status, prestige, and other structures that cover the fundamental division into two positions, two classes - labour and capital, are then embedded (Alquati, 1975: 106). As Panzieri puts it (1976: 37), from the point of view of capital, an ideal division would be one in which an individual occupational group could be attributed to each individual, thus achieving the maximum degree of atomisation.⁹ Class unity, therefore, in contrast to dialectical-materialist logic, never manifests itself in the perspective of capitalist progress or development,¹⁰ but always as a rupture.

⁹ In this sense, one could say that the technical composition of the workforce makes the transition from the Marxist to the Weberian concept of class, one that recognises as many classes among workers as there are different market positions (see Weber, 1978: 928).

¹⁰ Here we can point out that “development” is one of the popular topics of the Slovenian parliamentary left and its extra-parliamentary supporters.

The technical composition of the workforce, insofar as it assigns (in accordance with the “objective” requirements of capitalist rationality) a special place under the sun to everyone, and evaluates (in the monetary sense) them accordingly, forms the material basis, on which various segments of the workforce organise their daily lives. On this basis, different patterns of consumption, “lifestyles” and identities, expectations and plans for the future are created, which the working-class households can often only realise with the help of bank loans.¹¹ It seems almost redundant to add that this diverse “material culture”, stemming from the technical composition of the workforce, further strengthens its own basis, that is, the technical composition. If the dialectical-materialist interpretation relies on general proletarianization of the working class, which unites the fate of the individual with the fate of the class, and requires a political solution, differences in the material position of individual labour groups open up opportunities to maintain and change the position of the individual with the help of different strategies (e.g., education, advancement in a company, etc.). At the same time, gains of a collective, class-based political strategy - at least for those in a comparatively better position - lose their attractiveness, as they are associated with higher risks (loss of position) and smaller potential gains. In short, although the technical composition of the workforce can be understood as violence of capital, which adapts the workforce in accordance with its needs, it always presupposes passive acceptance on the part of the workforce - albeit as “acceptance of the necessary”. The political effects of the technical composition are therefore demobilising from the point

¹¹ In interviews, workers often cite the indebtedness of working-class households as the reason for subordination and an obstacle to the mobilisation of working collectives.

Hypothesis

of view of the working class. Italian operaists associated changes in the technical composition of the workforce with the resistance of workers. When workers transcend the fragmentation and subordination enforced by capital (with a specific technical composition) and form a class, their struggle forces capital into a technological and organisational leap. This results in a new technical composition, with which capital attempts to regain political control of the working class.

However, it appears it is also possible to deduce in the opposite direction, and consider changes in the technical composition of the workforce as potential for the resistance of workers. To the extent that the technical composition - as a means of subordination - represents not only the violence of capital against the worker, but also the material basis that the workers accept, and insofar as they organise their lives on this basis and regulate their expectations according to it, it can be expected that sudden disturbances or changes in the technical composition, which capital requires and which nullify the previous technical composition, destabilise certain parts of the workforce. Namely, changes destroy their expectations and undermine their social position, thus calling into question their consent to capitalist discipline and exploitation as the material framework of their lives, one in which, after all, it is possible to live. In other words, insofar as the technical composition of the workforce shapes and overdetermines the individual's relationship to the fundamental class contradiction between labour and capital, that is, the individual's relationship to relations of production, it can be understood as ideology; disturbances between the established technical structure, which is the basis on which workers organise their lives, and the technical

structure required by capital can therefore, at least temporarily, shake, or even destroy the ideological framework, in which the individual accepts relations of capitalist exploitation and subordination. Accordingly, as an attempt to answer our above question about elements in the base that could provide a material basis for political work, we can put forward the following hypothesis:

Opportunities for political work at the level of the base open up mainly in instances of discrepancies between the technical composition of the workforce accepted by workers and the placement of individuals in the technical composition required by capital.

The hypothesis may seem a bit unusual, but it does not, in fact, bring major innovations; with the concept of discrepancy, we only want to draw attention to the political potential, which the changes in relative position of individual labour groups hold for political work at the level of the base. After all, hints to that can be found in other parts of Marxist theory. In the Communist Manifesto, for example, the writers point to the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie, which pitilessly tears at all existing relations and reduces them to the cold logic of capitalist calculation, while constantly distorting all social conditions before they can stabilise and assume the appearance of something that is self-evident. Because of these constant upheavals, according to Marx and Engels (1976: 592), “[...] man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.”

A good example is Hobsbawm’s (1984) treatment of the problem of labour aristocracy in England, that is, skilled manual workers who, until the second half of the twentieth century, enjoyed a much more favourable position than other workers in the British industry because of their skills. The English labour aristocracy jealously defended its specific position and the incomes based on it against the invasion of other groups of workers,

as these incomes formed the basis on which it built its lifestyle, which distinguished it from the ordinary proletariat (ibid.: 219-220, 234 -242 in passim). Therefore, Engels, and later Lenin, as well, saw labour aristocracy as the main bastion against socialism in England, and Hobsbawm also notes that the political views of this stratum of the working class were moderate or even reactionary (ibid.: 249). But these views changed as soon as the position of labour aristocracy was threatened by the growing competition of semi-skilled machine operators, whom the capital introduced in its efforts to enforce a new technical composition and reduce skilled workers to the position of ordinary manual workers. Since then, socialist thought rapidly gained in importance in this segment of the working class and over time, it became one of the most active proletarian groups in the British Communist Party (ibid.: 266-268).

In Alquati's (1975: 27-53) study *Relazione sulle forze "nuove"* from the early 1960s, we follow the political development of three groups of young workers, which occurs when they become aware of the gap between the technical composition they were introduced to in FIAT's specialised school or their formal education, and the actual position they occupy in the technical composition of the company's workforce. The study shows that it is in this gap between the two technical structures (ideologies) - the school on one side, and the factory on the other - that opportunities for political work open up. However, we must be aware that *changes in the relative position of individual workers or groups of workers open up opportunities for political work at most, they do not necessarily produce radical socialist views*. Bourdieu (1986: 111), who discussed the interrelations between the social position of individuals and their tastes (including political preferences), even considers political preferences of fractions or classes, whose relative position is deteriorating, to be markedly conservative, "since the most they can hope for in the future is the return of the old order, from which they expect the restoration of their social essence."

In continuation, we present two case studies, one from the manufacturing industry and the other from retail, to illustrate and support the underlying hypothesis about the relationship between ruptures and disruptions in the technical composition, and the potential for political work at the level of the base.

Case study 1: Proletarian organic intellectuals at the point of rupture of school ideology and the technical composition of the workforce?

Ideological state apparatuses and their relative autonomy

Classical Marxist theory saw the state primarily as a repressive *apparatus*, an instrument that provides the *ruling classes* (capitalists, large landowners) with supremacy, and thus enables the *exploitation of the working class* (Lenin, 2017). A more modern understanding of the state arises from its relative autonomy, which can be defined through its relationship to *the ruling class* (Poulantzas, 2008: 279-285). Simply put, the state is not a reflection of the economic interest of the ruling class; its function is to organise the political unity of the ruling bloc, of course under the dominance (hegemony) of the ruling class.

Let us explain with an example. The state can take measures that are not in direct economic interest of the ruling class (capitalists), e.g.: The Ministry of Labour can raise the minimum wage. However, these measures must not jeopardise the conditions for the material reproduction of society, which, in *the capitalist mode of production*, means

that the accumulation of capital must continue smoothly so that workers can find employment, so that the state can collect enough taxes to finance its activities, etc. In other words, *state apparatuses must establish and maintain conditions for capitalist exploitation* - from securing peace in factories and the inviolability of private property, through various incentives for domestic and foreign investment, to providing a technically suitably qualified and morally (ideologically) equipped workforce.

We must separate *state apparatus* from *state authority*: state authority is the objective of the political struggle, while the apparatus is the means that enables the achievement of objectives. Even when the authority changes, state apparatuses may remain more or less unchanged. Louis Althusser (2000; 2014) divided state apparatuses into two categories: the repressive apparatus that functions by force (army, police, prisons, courts), and ideological state apparatuses that function by *ideology* (school, family, church, as well as political party, union, and factory), that is, they regulate our conduct through “free will”. The repressive apparatus is organised under the unified control of political representatives of the ruling classes, while the ideological apparatuses are vastly different, and do not have a unified command; they are united only by the *ruling ideology*.

In the practices of state apparatuses, another, *secondary* ideology can be realised, which is often the ideology of resistance (ibid.). The conditions for its enforcement depend on the class struggle. State apparatuses are therefore not a simple reflection of the economic interests of the ruling class, but are, at least to some extent, autonomous; they are not merely an instrument in the struggle, but also a field of class struggle, i.e., the *class struggle* takes place in them.

The dynamics of social struggles and state apparatuses

In the time of emerging capitalism, the state functioned more or less as an instrument of the ruling classes. Marx describes how, in the early stages of capitalism, the ruling classes had to resort to *organised state violence* to shape the working class according to the needs of capitalist production, and accelerate the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Marx, 1961: 831 and 846).

The growing organisation of the working class and the socialist takeover of power in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, and elsewhere after World War II, brought noticeable changes in state apparatuses. As early as the second half of the 19th century, the European working classes gradually organised themselves into a political force, and forced important concessions from the ruling classes, such as the beginning of the welfare state in Bismarck's Germany (Lash and Urry, 1988: 25-29). The real growth of the welfare state took place in the decades after World War II. Even before that, social partnership institutions began to develop, which, in exchange for agreeing to moderation in wage growth and ensuring smooth production during war and competitiveness in peaceful times, brought unions certain influence on state policy (Eichengreen, 2007).

The twentieth century, in particular its second half, was largely marked by changes in power relations between social classes on a global scale, which was reflected in the state apparatuses of nation states. With the success of the labour movements, the balance of power in state apparatuses – even in capitalist societies – also leaned toward workers; these changes brought tangible material benefits for the working class. In other words, the state was no longer just an instrument of the ruling classes, it really became the scene of class struggle.

The effects of changes in the school apparatus on the working class

To meet capital's needs for a skilled workforce, in the 19th century, states established centralised and bureaucratised education systems - as part of the infrastructure that served the needs of the ruling classes. In the second half of the 20th century, education also became a social right, which was supposed to serve the individual and society as a means of developing human potentials that could not be reduced to the demands of capital. (Raduntz, 2007: 60) The masses were admitted into the school system, but the system remained the mechanism that distributed people in social positions (Hirt, 2004), and legitimised social differences, i.e., exploitation and oppression, at the same time.

Education, especially higher education, is one of the key apparatuses that assures the conditions for the accumulation of capital, since it is supposed to supply both employable workforce and technological innovations that individual capitals can use in the production process. The period of neoliberal capitalism in which we live can be defined as a restoration of capitalist oppression and exploitation both in the developed capitalist countries, as well as in the former socialist countries and the countries of the Global South. The renewed domination of capital over the working class also transformed the state apparatuses. Analyses of this dominance in *higher education* highlight two aspects of the adaptation of higher education institutions to accumulation of capital:

1. A shrinking space for the production of theory, which alone can break with the ideological stance, from which the relations of exploitation are legitimised and reproduced; that is, with neoliberal ideology. Instead, institutions are engaged in developing tools to analyse the effectiveness

of methods of managing people and disciplining them; not only do they not bring emancipatory potential, they are actually the techniques of “nobility” (Močnik, 2009).

2. Subordination of the pedagogical process to accumulation of capital, and its reduction to the creation of a supply of flexible and suitably qualified workforce equipped with “competencies”. In this perspective, the student is the investor who is supposed to accumulate his “human capital”, thereby ensuring both the highest possible level of employability, and “high returns” when selling their labour (employment). The pedagogical process is thus reduced to “gaining competitive advantages in the labour market” (Krašovec, 2013: 77). The logic of students as future workers who invest in a better position in the labour market does not recognise any collective interest or solidarity of the working class.

While both of these aspects - both focusing on *the functioning of the university as a school apparatus* - are important, we would like to demonstrate in the following that they are both insufficient, if they do not take into account *capital’s impact on the school apparatus through the labour market*, or more precisely, if they neglect the aspect called the “matching problem” in the conventional approach. Restricting ourselves to the just-mentioned aspects of reducing relative autonomy can lead us to overestimate the ideological effectiveness of the school apparatus and, consequently, the social struggles that take place *in the apparatus itself*. On the other hand, this restriction to the school apparatus itself overlooks the discrepancies between the ideological effects of the school apparatus and the required (and established) technical composition of the working class, which, in our view, can be politically productive.

The problem: school ideology and the technical composition of the workforce

The production of theory is key for “progressive politics” of the working class. Namely, the class position of the working class does not exist without theory - this position does not arise spontaneously. However, establishing a proletarian position alone is not enough, as it cannot be asserted in social struggles if it is not implanted in the working masses, that is, without people – according to Gramsci, they could be called “*organic intellectuals*” – who would unite the working masses around this position, and organise them into the working class.

The research and educational policy of the state, which requires the university and other institutions to take into account the employability of graduates and market orientation, is not the only factor that determines the conditions of theoretical production and higher education. Particularly in regard to education, we must take into account that capital pursues its interests through *the labour market*, as well, using it as a transmission mechanism, through which individual capitals (companies) and the state with their demand *enforce their requirements for labour or the technical composition of the workforce*. Accordingly, we can put forward the first thesis:

Thesis 1: The technical composition of the workforce required by capital triggers return effects on the school apparatus, including the university.

This brings us to the core of the problem. According to the well-known Althusser’s (2000) thesis, the school is the (most important) ideological apparatus of the state in the capitalist mode of production. In school, we learn skills such as reading and writing, as well as *rules of conduct in society, obedience, and commanding*. As a rule, each level of schooling equips us with

a *different ideology*. Those who complete only primary school and will most likely land in the role of the exploited, learn, above all, obedience; others who are expected to be agents of exploitation (e.g., master craftspeople, managers) will need to be able to issue commands; agents of the repressive apparatuses (e.g., police officers) to achieve obedience without discussion; highly educated people are not only ready for professional functions, but also for justifying and issuing commands, etc. (idem.). On the other hand, we have a different ideology, i.e., *the technical composition of the workforce*, which capital already articulates via the labour market. Both ideologies deal with the same relations - the necessary knowledge and skills, as well as the moral and ideological traits of the workforce. But the question is, to what extent are the two ideologies consistent with each other.

An ideological discrepancy?

Althusser answered the question of consistency of the two ideologies (i.e., school ideology and the technical composition of the workforce) without even addressing it. Namely, he believed that the school equips each group that leaves it at a certain level with an ideology suitable for the role that this group will play in the production process. In other words, he believed that the technical composition of the workforce provided by school, and the technical composition required by capital more or less match. We, however, are putting forward the opposite *thesis*:

Thesis 2: School ideology and the technical composition of the workforce do not necessarily match.

Let us clarify. The mismatch we are aiming at concerns a point that Althusser understands as an unproblematic point of matching.

Namely, he believes that the match between the education system and the required technical composition of the workforce, “if we leave aside some mistakes and failures”, is good (Althusser, 2014: 145). Simply put, Althusser believes that people actually do the work that roughly corresponds to the level of their formal education. In contrast, we argue that a significant portion of the population leaving the education system is not ideologically well prepared for the role it plays in the class society - that there can be a considerable mismatch between the role that school prepares people for, and their actual role in the division of labour.

Human resources managers call this a “matching problem.” We usually talk about it when “persons with similar education are distributed across various occupations”, which indicates a “*visible separation between state-planned educational and vocational trends*” (Kramberger, 2007: 128-129, italics in the original). The discrepancy can concern the level (the individual’s education is higher or lower than the education required for the work position) or the field of education, or it may also be both (see Čelebič, 2014: 1). We will be interested in the issues of over-education for a given work position (the so-called over-education - of course, only from the point of view of the technical composition of the workforce, enforced by capital) and the matching between the field of education and the work position.

Higher levels of education are usually associated with better employment opportunities, but even before the crisis of 2008, research showed that highly educated young people who were unable to find a job quickly often opted for *less demanding* and *lower-paying* jobs, so they were “over-educated” (Trbanc, 2007: 53). This problem was exacerbated by the decline in labour demand in the post-2008 crisis, which occurred with a simultaneous increase in the number of graduates in the first years of the crisis (Tršelič Selan, Perko and Kajzer, 2014).

The discrepancy between the tertiary workforce the school system throws into the labour market every year and capital's demand for workers with higher education overlaps with the discrepancy between the structure of graduates by fields of their studies and demand in the labour market (ibid.: 24 and 32), i.e., the required technical composition of the workforce in terms of competencies. It seems that the "relative abundance" of competencies and knowledge occurs precisely in the field of social sciences and humanities, so in areas that (at least potentially) enable young people to analyse their social position in the context of social struggles. So, for example, in the crisis year 2012, the majority of unemployed first-time job seekers with tertiary (i.e., higher and post-secondary) education were educated in social sciences (social, business and administrative sciences) and humanities. Humanities graduates waited the longest for their first job, while in the crisis (between 2009 and 2012), this wait was significantly extended for social sciences graduates (Marjetič and Lesjak, 2013: 14-15; Figure 1). *On the basis of data up to 2012, it therefore seems difficult to reject the hypothesis of a discrepancy both with regard to the required level (which is not surprising during the crisis), as well as to the field of education (the second hypothesis).*

The problem of the relative excess of tertiary-educated people in relation to the technical composition of the workforce required by capital has a return effect on the school apparatus itself, as enrolment in tertiary education programmes is declining, which, at least in part, in addition to smaller-sized generations, can, at least partly, be attributed to worsening of employment opportunities for university graduates (Čelebič, 2014: 23). The fact that capital is relatively successful in enforcing the requirements for the technical composition of the workforce is also indicated by lower occupancy of enrolment places in humanities programmes in Slovenian universities in the first enrolment period (see Marjetič and Lesjak,

2013: 27 for the 2012/2013 school year); long-term (since 2000) reduction of the share of those enrolled in social science programmes; absolute decline of graduates in social sciences (period 2008-2013), etc. These trends are probably largely related to the deterioration of employment opportunities for graduates of these programmes (Čelebič, 2014: 25-34), and these depend on the technical composition of the workforce enforced by capital. *On the basis of this data, our first hypothesis about the effect of the required technical composition of the workforce on the school apparatus therefore does not seem particularly controversial.*

The discrepancy between school ideology and the technical composition of the workforce is also reflected in the workplace. According to data from the CEDEFOP survey (2016), in 2014, more than a fifth of workers with higher education in Slovenia (N = 516) were “over-educated” in relation to the requirements of their jobs, and about 7% of them had education that was at least two levels higher than required. With the age of 37, the “over-educated” were on average younger than other respondents with tertiary education, while those “over-educated” by two levels were even younger (average age of 35), which shows that the level of “over-education” is higher among younger workers. So, as far as the level of education is concerned, the discrepancy between the two ideologies does not exist only in the labour market, but in the workplace, as well, regardless of the field of education: the share of “over-educated” among those tertiary educated respondents, who were educated in social sciences or humanities, was almost the same as among students of technical and other faculties.

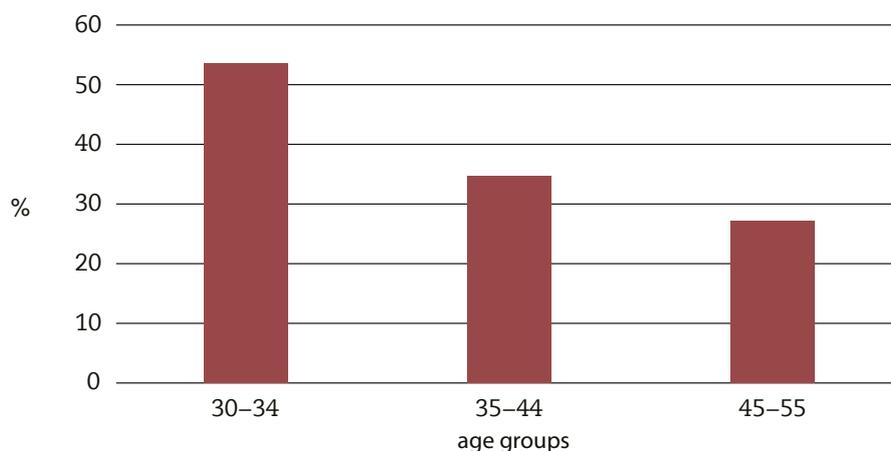
The hypothesis about the political effects of the discrepancy between two ideologies

The discrepancy between school ideology and the technical composition of capital raises political issues. In the introduction, we hypothesised that problems in the relationship between the technical composition accepted by workers (in this case, school ideology), and the placement of workers in the composition required by capital, open up potential for political work, as it undermines the self-evident framework of capitalist exploitation.

Thesis 3: The discrepancy between school ideology and the technical composition of the workforce opens up space for political struggle in work organisations, i.e., at the level of the base.

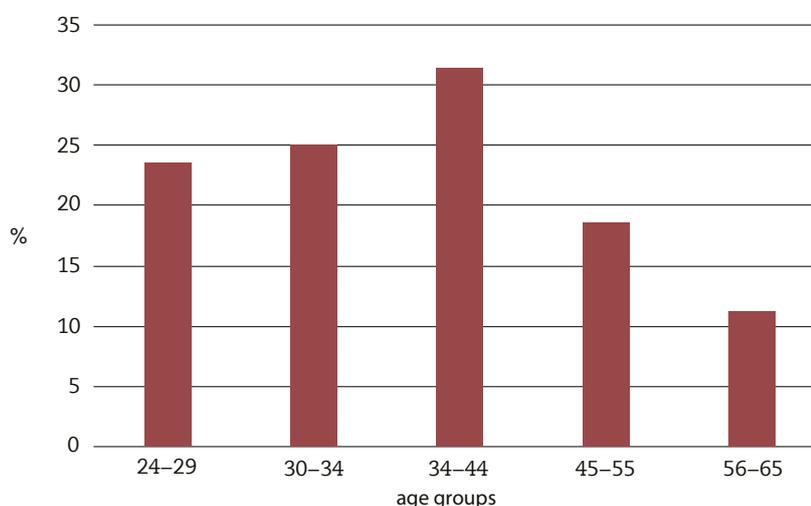
Some indicators show that “over-educated” workers in job posts with required lower levels of education than theirs, are, on average, less satisfied with their employment (Čelebič, 2014: 9). According to the CEDEFOP survey (2016), among all surveyed workers who are dissatisfied with their jobs, a large number of them is “over-educated”, and in the age group 30 to 34, more than half of the surveyed workers are “over-educated” (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of “over-educated” worker among tertiary educated
(Source: CEDEFOP, 2016)



Not all “over-educated” workers are dissatisfied with their employment, but an interesting pattern is evident. Dissatisfaction increases sharply with the age of the “over-educated” and reaches a peak in the age group 35 to 44, where almost a third of all “over-educated” are dissatisfied, and then decreases again (Figure 2). Dissatisfaction seems to increase when it becomes clear to workers (sometime after the age of 30) that the job with a lower required education is not temporary, but that they are permanently stuck in it.

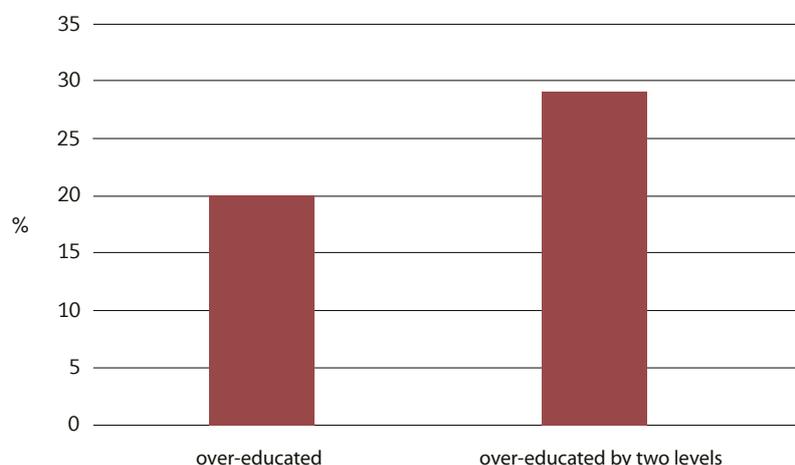
Figure 2: Proportion of dissatisfied workers among the “over-educated” by age groups (Source: CEDEFOP, 2016)



Dissatisfaction increases with the scale of “over-education”. If, among all tertiary-educated respondents, about 20 percent of the “over-educated” are dissatisfied with their jobs, this share increases with the widening of the gap between the required and the actual education (Figure 4) - e.g., for university graduates in jobs for which high school or less is required.

The dissatisfaction of the “over-educated” can be interpreted as a reflection of the frictions arising from the inadequacy of their ideological equipment in relation to the technical composition of the workforce. Simply put, while these “over-educated” people were trained in human management techniques in school, they themselves become objects of management in the workplace; while they’ve learned the ideology appropriate for the agents of exploitation, they themselves are now merely the object of reckless exploitation; although school accustoms them to issuing orders, they themselves are now merely executors of orders; and although some of them have been trained as professional ideologues, they often land in places where daily experiences force them to question the sense of order and morality acquired in school, and their own acceptance of relations of subordination.

Figure 3: Proportion of dissatisfied workers among tertiary “over-educated” and among tertiary “over-educated” by two levels (Source: CEDEFOP, 2016)



The sketched ideological discrepancy, i.e., the discrepancy between the technical composition provided by the school apparatus, and the technical composition required by individual capitals may cause dissatisfaction - but what can be done about this dissatisfaction? Our thesis is that it can be *organised and used for political work at the level of the base*, which we will try to illustrate with the example below.

Example A.B.

The study discusses the workers' takeover of a union that was subordinate to company management. Fieldwork was conducted with participant observation. The core of the empirical part of the study are two individual and three collective interviews¹². While the individual interview was *informative* and allowed the research team to familiarise themselves with the situation in the company, collective interviews were *formative* in nature - their purpose was to renew and maintain an engaged collective that had been established before the research began.

Elements of the technical composition of individual capital

The analysed companies (Samotrak, Hitritrak and Kamenek) are part of a multinational group established abroad. At the time of our research, it employed hundreds of people in Slovenia, and around 1,800 in total.

¹² All the names of the workers, management and companies in the study are fictitious. All interviews were transcribed and encrypted, thus concealing the identities of the workers.

The Slovenian part of the group produces semi-finished products, and is heavily dependent on end customers of their products, who are constantly pressing with demands for quality and competitive prices. The companies in question are not independent when it comes to either sales or purchases, as the parent company negotiates with customers and suppliers, and makes decisions. Maintaining profits is therefore only possible by controlling production costs - this means saving on labour costs. The company is otherwise an important part of the group, as it represents its technological centre; for example, it manufactures equipment used by some related companies around the world. According to publicly available data, the company's financial situation is very solid, indebtedness is low, and investments are financed with their own funds (i.e., retained earnings). Nevertheless, the wages are extremely low – workers in production only receive the minimum wage.

At the time of our research, the production, which accounts for about 80 percent of employees, was mostly staffed by women; women were also predominant in lower management. No special qualifications were required for work in the production - production was based on a Taylorist organisation and deskilled work. The share of workers with only primary education in the group was higher, and the share of workers with higher education lower than the average of the Slovenian manufacturing industry. Given that the workforce was relatively homogeneous in terms of required education and skills, the most important elements of the technical composition of the workforce were: the position of the factory as part of multinational capital in the local environment, employment status (permanent/fixed-term employees), age, and hierarchical divisions (workers on one side, and junior management on the other). We will discuss only the most important ones.

Regarding the first element of the technical composition, the manufacturing sector to which the analysed company belongs, is part of the export sector, which means that it is exposed to fierce international competition. The threat of relocation of production was present throughout the research and represented a kind of general framework of the technical composition: the capital in the company used this threat to achieve discipline and acceptance of high work quota. As the company was one of the largest employers in the municipality, employment opportunities of workers were severely limited.

Another important element of the technical composition of the workforce in the company was the division into standard and non-standard employees. The precarious (non-standard) workforce consisted of students, agency workers and fixed-term employees. The company did not hire agency workers at the time of our research. *Indefinite-term employees* (i.e., standard employees) were, at first glance, the core of the workforce, but these were deskilled workers whose knowledge and skills were broken down into simple tasks that were connected to operations according to technological plans. Standard employees felt the effects of segmentation via the return effects of direct pressure on precarious workers. According to the workers (see below), precarious workers tried to ensure job security by relinquishing their rights and working intensely, which was felt by standard employees due to the increase of work quota.

The segmentation of the workforce into standard and precarious workers thus produced certain ways of *disciplining* the entire workforce. At the same time, non-standard employees were more difficult to recruit for collective action, as they were more exposed to capital pressure.

An even more important element of the technical composition of the workforce was the *age division among standard employed workers*. Younger workers were not prepared to accept the situation in the company. They were ready for resistance, even if they were not unionised. Older workers were mostly passive and surrendered to their fate. Despite being unionised, they behaved the same way as precarious workers:

When they're outside, everyone is strong and powerful. They say, "That's not right, and that's not right. I will not make 700 pieces. I won't," I don't know what... Then they go inside, and no one says anything, no one objects. They work so hard us, young ones can barely keep up... (Second collective interview, 2015)

There seemed to be a *generational divide*, a rift between older and younger workers, but in another collective interview, the workers offered an analysis that showed that things were not that simple. The behaviour of older workers was based on the fact that despite their standard employment, they were in an extremely precarious position (see below). The management used the hardship of older and precarious workers to control the entire team and intensify the work.

The fourth element of the technical composition of the workforce was the assignment of workers to hierarchical functions of lower management. *The lower management*, i.e., the organisers of the work process and the forewomen, *organised the discipline* in the production. As a rule, they relied on a *small circle of workers* for this. Workers from these circles did not represent the majority, but they formed the basis on which the management relied on for realisation of the interest of capital in the production. These were either workers with whom the supervisors were on good terms, or workers who were more exposed to the pressures of capital. Forewomen put these “mistresses” in positions that fit them, where they know the work well, and are extremely fast. In this way, the management

separated the weakest members from the collective, and enabled their “personal satisfaction in mastering the task” or even “status in the collective”, at the same time. The positions in which forewomen put them were crucial in terms of the pace of work of the entire collective, as they determined the rhythm of the entire line:

[L]ine one, line two. The pace is dictated [...] by the one on composition. She's usually on good terms with the forewoman, or is “in pact” with her. The one on the left and the one on the right - these two are synchronous, and are pushing the pace. The machine on the control position is not catching up - not catching up. Pieces are piling up. [...] And those three screws in there keep getting pushed - of course, she caught the pace half a year ago. So, the pieces keep flying, flying, flying in. [...] These ones are in pact, right, so she doesn't have to worry about accidentally moving her to a position she's not so skilled in, where she wouldn't be able to keep up. And she's satisfied there. She feels she's the strongest there - no one can catch up with her. Not even the control machine ... (First collective interview, 2015; italics added)

Younger workers reported that their shift successfully began to limit the pace of work, but the ‘masters’¹³ quickly “mixed” them up. The work organiser moved one standard and two fixed-term employees from a shift that greatly exceeded the quota to a shift with lower excess. These two workers wanted their employment contracts extended, so they raised the pace of work in this shift, as well.

The masters’, among whom there was fierce competition, were mostly workers with lower education, and despite standard employment,

¹³ Translator's note: the term ‘master’ refers either to the title of formal education (master craftsperson) or a work position. In both cases, it denotes someone who, in the hierarchical structure of the work team, is above regular workers and is supervising them.

their position was extremely precarious. The precariousness of their position was probably also the reason why older workers, in exchange for a less strenuous and safer position, were willing to act as agents of capital in achieving submission of their co-workers. They were more vulnerable and easier to manage; from the point of view of capital, they were suitable for this position.

Trade union and the work collective

Interviews showed that the union did not perform the function of a workers' organisation in the company. There was no workers' council in the company. The core of the union consisted of long-time workers, while younger standard employees did not join. There was no room in the union for workers with fixed-term contracts. The union was an extended arm of the management. The union's management received the same low wages as workers in the production, however, the president and vice-president of the union were transferred to less burdensome work positions. The union meetings were convened and attended by the general manager. Members did not have much influence – in all the years, they did not even manage to set up the operating rules of the union. Some 'masters' were appointed to positions of shop floor stewards. During the last industry strike, when half of the workers stopped working, at least one of the stewards kept working.

Younger workers did not want to join such a union without assurances of its transformation into a workers' organisation. Tensions between the union and the collective of younger workers arose when the latter turned to the union because of problems in their relationship with the 'masters'. Since the union did not respond, the dissatisfaction escalated into a wave of mobilisation of production workers.

Mobilisation of the workers' collective

Because of unbearable conditions in the company, a team of those workers who were dissatisfied with relations in the work collective and demanded changes, began to unite. This collective consisted of ten younger workers who initially worked in the company through an agency. For the first time, they rebelled together against constant night shifts. Over time, younger workers also became indefinite-term employees, which somewhat strengthened their position. Although wages remained low, other issues were at the fore, especially the issue of relationships or disciplining, and work intensity.

The collective set up a Facebook group, which became the platform for communication within the collective, and which showed that the organisers of the resistance were not alone. A campaign was launched to collect signatures to improve employee representation in the company. About 50 signatures were collected. The collective also constantly tried to establish contact with the trade union, and either achieve a change in its operation, or establish a separate union.

The management and the 'masters' responded to the uprising with threats of dismissal and by increasing workloads, so that the "rebels" would make more mistakes, which would give the management a reason to confront them. The appeal for establishment of a representative body was quickly removed from the company's bulletin board, and the most exposed worker, A. B., had to go talk to the director of production. The counter-offensive by the agents of capital was relatively successful, as some workers withdrew their signatures and left the Facebook group. The persistence of the organised collective in demanding a change in the operation of the union did not bear fruit. The final straw came when

A. B. approached the trustee during working hours and demanded to talk to her, and the union trustee later complained to the company's management about his conduct. A. B. was therefore invited to a meeting with the director of production. After the meeting, the main initiator of the uprising was transferred to a job that burdened his health, and he soon had to take a longer sick leave.

With that, the collective began to disintegrate. The management achieved its goal, at least temporarily. Political debates on smoke breaks and at the machines also grew silent, workers began to withdraw their signatures from the petition for the establishment of the workers' representative body, and the ties between members of the work collective began to loosen.

At this point, our field research was launched, coinciding with the start of the second wave of mobilisation, which allowed the research team to monitor developments, and participate in discussions about the next steps. The research was carried out through *collective interviews*, in which the workers *analysed their situation and formed a collective position* based on that. These analyses allowed workers to identify potential allies in their older co-workers, even though they acted against the collective interest due to subordination stemming from their specific position (e.g., older, and non-standard co-workers). In other words, the analyses gave them an insight into the technical composition of the workforce, their own position in it, and the position of their co-workers, which also enabled the overcoming of the dividing lines that separated them.

The material conditions for resistance and analyses, carried out by young workers (usually, three or four of the most active workers took part, and occasionally, they were joined by others) were, in line with our thesis, represented mainly by two elements of the *discrepancy*, which led to

major disruptions in the integration of these workers into the technical composition of individual capital, i.e., the company where they were employed. Firstly, almost all of them were “over-educated” - most of them attended or even completed higher education programmes prior to their employment - which indicated their ambitions, and the fact that ending up in the assembly line was particularly hard for them. This was probably the most important reason why younger workers were unwilling to accept their position in the company and decided to resist, even if they were not yet unionised. Secondly, most “over-educated” young workers were educated in social sciences, so they were able to operate with basic conceptual tools that allowed them to analyse the situation in which they found themselves. To sum up, the vertical discrepancy between the place in the technical composition for which the young workers were prepared by the school apparatus, and the place which they occupied in the technical composition of individual capital, incited them to revolt; the horizontal discrepancy between the field of study (mostly social sciences or humanities) and the needs of capital, which was likely the reason they ended up in the assembly line, enabled them to analyse the situation in the company, which enabled an effective resistance.

The most important insight that their analyses brought to the younger workers participating in the research broke down the dividing line between them and older unionised workers. Namely, they found that this dividing line is not the result of differences in age, moral attitude, or personal inclinations, but arises from differences in the structural positions in which capital places them:

Laura: I know of a couple of those who are in the union, but I don't trust them.

[...]

Question: So, they are mostly older?

Marinela: You literally see them being scared [...] ...

Laura: They are afraid of themselves!

Marinela: ... when the forewoman yells at them. She works even harder, and you see that she wouldn't dare stand up for herself or say anything at all, because she is literally afraid of herself. And when you talk to others, any one of them, it's: "Yeah, what can you do, that's the way it is." And I think they don't care.

Laura: It's important to have a job. That's the way it is with them. If you lose a job ... They are aware, right, because they are older, and God forbid they lose the job. [They wouldn't find another] anywhere. I mean for young people like us, maybe something could be found, but not for them...

Comment: If nothing else works, then you move, yeah.

Laura: Yeah, but they don't have that option.

[...]

Marinela: [They think]: "I only have a couple of years until retirement, I'll make it somehow."

Laura: Yeah, for most it's that, as well.

(Second collective interview, 2015, italics added)

Young workers found that the apparent generational divide is conditioned by different positions in the event of job loss. Older deskilled and uneducated workers in the "valley community", where the Samotrak group was the most important employer, had no other employment opportunities, so losing their jobs would be a disaster for them - if they

were too far from retirement, there was no solution for them. Younger workers were better educated, some even completed higher education. Working for minimum wage at a killer pace in the assembly line meant that disaster had already befallen them. These workers kept their hope for change, while at the same time, their education and experience of a different life outside the “valley” probably provided them with a background for resistance. This was an important finding, as it meant that older workers, despite behaviour that worsened the situation for all (maintaining a high quota), were their potential allies, as they were oppressed by the same force, but older workers found it harder to resist.

The workers also analysed the position of co-workers (fixed-term employees) who, just like the older workers, exceeded the quota, thus increasing it for the entire collective. They found that these non-standard workers, despite harming the collective with their actions, as they increase the intensity of work (increasing the quota), are not their opponents. Their actions are also the result of the precarious situation arising from the temporary nature of their employment:

[E]veryone hopes that maybe theirs will be extended [...]. And in fact, in this way, a kind of competition is already being created among workers - for nothing, I mean, for the same money. But through this policy of manipulation and intimidation of workers, you apparently achieve better results in production [...]. Especially if someone stimulates them by flattering them: “Work as much as you can. You are good, yours will be extended.” And then the quota is increased. [But then] the number of orders decreases, and those poor people who worked really hard for the whole month, are sent home, and that indefinitely-employed core is left with a higher quota.

(Individual interview with a worker in the manufacturing industry, 2015)

Just as younger workers found that threats did not affect all workers equally, that the influence was bigger on the older, less educated, and non-standard employees, they also learned about another element of the technical composition of the workforce - bureaucratic functions. They realised that the group of older workers who, in addition to young precarious workers, are most exposed to the pressures of capital and most willing to submit to it, is a source for recruitment of the 'masters'. The workers understood that when disciplining the 'masters', the management combined the threat of unemployment with *competition for positions in the company*, thereby ensuring their obedience in representing the interests of capital. The position of the 'master' is therefore always insecure; at any given time, she can either slip back into production or into unemployment:

Mostly [...] the cooks themselves are forewomen. [...] They don't actually have education for it. They are cooks. Some haven't even finished primary school.

...

Gabriela: For example, there's one I ... well, I get along with her, and, man, when you're talking - she sticks with us. But when the [time] comes, when she really should support us, she gets scared, too. So, in the end... Yes, it happened just yesterday. We had a falling-out again; she said, "I care about business, as well." I mean, there are too many of them. In a little while, there will be more forepersons than workers.

Manlio: There really are too many of them.

Gabriela: Yeah, right?

Laura: There really are a lot of them now.

Gabriela: And then there's conflict among them because they fear for their job, too.

Question: Are others trying to get them in trouble or something?

Gabriela: Well, not face to face like that, right...

Question: No, with the management or something like that?

Mafalda: Right. Well, they're competing with each other.

Gabriela: They compete with each other...

Mafalda: When it comes to work quota, right?

Laura: Because it's usually said, "Yeah, that one made this many pieces - why doesn't someone from my team make so many pieces?"

(First collective interview, 2015)

The workers realised that the best way to change their situation was to *join the existing union and take it over*. Establishment of alternative institutions, such as the workers' council or a parallel union, was the worse option, as the management would easily appoint its representatives to the workers' council, and the establishment of another union would bring conflict between the two unions, which would also benefit the management. Accordingly, the workers decided for organised action with the aim of taking over the union branch in the forthcoming regular elections of union trustees.

But how does one take over a union and transforms it into a workers' organisation, how does one change the union's political orientation? The workers decided to join the union and try to keep the co-workers who wanted to leave. They decided to act tactically and avoid conflicts that would quickly provoke reactions. In conversations, they encouraged other colleagues to think about what a union could be, and that it should be changed from within. The response to elections of union trustees exceeded all expectations. Signatures for the candidacy of younger workers were contributed by older workers, as well, and even by the

so-called “sweethearts” of the ‘masters’, who were supposed to be on the side of the management. As one of the younger workers who collected signatures said:

[E]ven women I never believed would sign, like Patrizia or Romina, and so on, signed. And Oriana..., even though she acts like this now, went and gave it to Romina, and said, “You don’t need to read it, just sign!” She asks, “So what is this?” “Yeah, it’s for the union. You just sign!” And that’s how it was.

(Third collective interview, 2016)

This showed that the findings of young workers who attributed the passivity of older comrades to their position, were correct. Younger workers who were engaged with the union won the union vote smoothly.

Discussion

The study brings some points to consider. Firstly, if our thesis about the return effects of requirements for a specific technical composition of the workforce, which primarily concern the fields of studies, is correct, ideological struggles for the survival of theory in the school apparatus are relatively ineffective. As high school graduates increasingly choose the field of their studies on the basis of employment opportunities offered by the diploma of a particular educational programme, success in the struggles for theory in higher education is very difficult, as it is - at least as far as the pedagogical process is concerned – largely decided elsewhere.

But at least as long as this process of nullifying the achievements of twentieth-century social struggles that enabled mass schooling continues, its effects are reflected in the increased discrepancy between

the ideological equipment provided by the school apparatus, and the technical composition required by capital. On this basis, we might perhaps hypothesize that processes that weaken the position of the working class in struggles in the school apparatus at least temporarily open up opportunities to intensify struggles at the level of the base, insofar as factories are full of ideologically inappropriately equipped and, consequently, dissatisfied educated people. If our basic hypothesis is not completely fallacious, these people represent the potential for political struggle at the level of the base.

Secondly, although the workers successfully took over the union, and the participation of the research group opened up possibilities for further cooperation, it must be acknowledged that the politicisation was only partially successful. Workers showed interest in political engagement (they sent a delegation to a big political event, organised by the socialist initiative), but cooperation died out, largely because of the limited engagement of the research group, whose capacities did not allow for continuous work with the renewed union in the company. Apart from joint research work, workshops and courses, the research group at the time could not offer much else to the union. But the union, which had just broken free from the grip of management, had to justify changes to workers, and show them direct economic gains that could consolidate their position, for example, in collective contract negotiations at company level. Therefore, rather than attending training events and meetings with other unions that Cedra cooperates with, the union's leadership chose to look for legal justifications for their demands of the management and seek professional assistance in negotiating a collective contract at company level. Of course, the union could not get this from the research group, but only from the existing union structures at the industry level, which were not willing to leave the union in the company to the influence

of an external organisation. The union's leadership increasingly turned to the existing structures of the branch union with requests for support and advice, and those were able to use their influence to "normalise" and depoliticise the union, so the connection with the RC weakened.

The questions arising at this point concern the core of Cedra's activities. Firstly, while the RC is increasingly developing its capacities to mobilise workers' collectives in crucial moments of struggle, where opportunities for political agitation often open up, it does not seem to have capacities for long-term work in "normal" conditions of everyday capitalist exploitation, like the existing trade union structures do. Which form would enable continuous operation with workers' collectives and their continuous politicisation? Even if Cedra had these capacities, another question remains: which activities could it carry out in this context - how to resist the pressure to act within the established forms and frameworks, i.e., the social dialogue?

Thirdly, the case in question may shed further light on the issue of the struggle in institutions (ideological apparatuses), such as the parliament. Namely, we often see parliamentary, trade union, etc. struggles as a tool that the socialist movement or parties use to fight among the masses. But in this case, the dynamics were clearly the opposite - the workers first organised into a union, past the union that was controlled by the management, and with this organised force, the "yellow" union crumbled to dust. The example does not speak of failure in the institutions of the bourgeois state, but it points to the importance an organised movement at the level of the base holds for the struggles within institutions.

Case study 2: Organic intellectuals in discount stores?

The study illustrates the initial hypothesis (i.e., the hypothesis about opportunities for political work at points where there are disruptions in the placement of workers in the technical composition required by capital) on the example of discount stores in Slovenia, i.e., in the retail sector. We will first outline the technical composition in the retail sector, then continue with the presentation of disturbances in the dynamics of the placement of workers in the technical composition of the workforce required by capital, and lastly, outline the political effects of these problems.

The national economic role of retail sector within new international division of labour

We cannot analyse the technical composition of the workforce in the retail sector without addressing the national economic role of the retail sector. This role can only be understood in the context of the problem of competition of the total social capital in the context of the international division of labour on the one hand, and the related issues of labour reproduction on the other.

The current pattern of the international division of labour arose in the last decades of the twentieth century. In the traditional international division of labour that prevailed after the Second World War, subordinate capitalist countries primarily played the role of suppliers of raw materials, and, at most, markets for the production of developed capitalist economies of the imperialist powers (USA, Europe). Harry Magdoff (2003: 84-90),

for example, noted in the 1960s that most direct investment originating in the United States and targeting Asia, Africa, and Latin America, went into activities that enabled the control of extraction and processing of raw materials, while in Europe, they mainly invested into industrial production, with the main motivation being market surveillance and lower production costs. The high post-war economic growth of industrial production in countries of the capitalist West was based largely on *domestic production for the domestic market* (Glyn et al., 1988: 9 and 50-51). During this period, the workforce in industrial production was largely deskilled, but complex machine production required lengthy (school) preparation, while high work intensity required a reduction of hours worked (Iñigo-Carrera, 2002). In addition, the political power of the workforce employed in the manufacture of machinery - which required certain skills - was relatively high, which strengthened the position of the workers with similar qualifications in other branches. Therefore, the reproduction of the deskilled workforce¹⁴ was also relatively universal, i.e., it did not differ significantly from the reproduction of the workforce that, due to the development of machine production, performed ever more complex work, e.g., engineering, technical, or scientific work. Complex work required even longer formal education, which later continued in the workplace (ibid.). Reproduction at that time was largely provided by strong workers' organisations (trade unions) which, with a policy of solidarity, managed to establish comparable conditions for different types of work (Schulten, 2002) in collective bargaining, and by the welfare state with its services and transfers. Simply put: the differences between the living standards of different groups of workers were relatively small.

¹⁴ The term “deskilled workforce” refers to the workforce, from which the machine has taken away the content of work, so that the workforce acts only as the appendage of the machine (Marx, 1961: 475-483).

With the automation of large-scale industry, the development of transport (containers) and communication technology in the 1970s, fundamental changes took place, as capital spread industrial production, which was previously largely in the domain of the developed capitalist West, all over the world. “Developing countries” thus become a place of industrial production, which triggers return effects on the working class in countries of the capitalist West – now, the masses of the surplus, primarily agricultural population, especially in Asia (and, with the collapse of socialist formations, in Eastern Europe, as well) compete in the world labour market (Fröbel et al., 1978). Mechanical production of machines allowed for the removal of skilled labour from the production of machinery (Iñigo-Carrera, 2002), and technological changes enabled the relocation of production at the same time. Capital can now break up the work process in the industrial production, and scatter it around the globe, thus ensuring the most profitable combination of relative costs and productive characteristics of the workforce, and thereby maximizing surplus value, i.e., profits (Starosta, 2016: 89; Iñigo-Carrera, 2002).

This establishes a specific pattern of the international division of labour. Those parts of industrial production that require a highly skilled workforce can be separated from other parts of production, and maintained in developed capitalist countries, where infrastructure provides the conditions for technological development, and for the reproduction of expensive, highly skilled workforce that develops technological innovations, or specialises in bureaucratic (i.e., managerial) functions. In other countries (or regions of large countries, such as China, cf. Lüthje et al., 2013), the deskilled workforce with manual skills is mostly (though not entirely) concentrated. As their manual skills are losing their value, these workers must master other skills, e.g., machinery operation. Elsewhere, the type of workforce that prevails is the type that carries

out only the simplest tasks of industrial production and works under the most difficult conditions of capitalist exploitation. Certain countries still remain predominantly suppliers of raw materials, so the traditional division has not completely disappeared (see Iñigo-Carrera, 2014: 560-565; Starosta, 2016: 86-89). In the socialist countries of the time, which were based, among other things, on anti-imperialism, this pattern of accumulation of capital could not be enforced because of political reasons; that only became possible after the destruction of socialism and the turn to capitalism (Iñigo-Carrera, 2002: 10).

The transition from the traditional to the new international division of labour is connected to changes in the Western capitalist countries, which also affected Eastern Europe, i.e., our country (Slovenia). Major changes in labour reproduction occurred. If the reproduction of deskilled workforce in capitalist economies of the West - and even more so in the socialist formations of Eastern Europe - did not differ much from the standards of reproduction of highly skilled workforce, the possibility of transferring production to areas with cheaper labour (East Asia) greatly increased pressures on the deskilled workforce in Europe and the US (Iñigo-Carrera, 2002: 8). The expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed in the 1980s and 1990s enabled capital to break the political power of labour and enforce a *differentiated reproduction of the workforce* in the capitalist countries of the West (ibid.: 10). After the destruction of socialist projects, the differentiation of workforce reproduction is gaining ground in this area, as well. Two things should be emphasized here:

Firstly, despite the differentiation of reproduction in Europe and the US, much of industrial production, which requires a deskilled and easily replaceable workforce, has not withstood the pressure of global competition, and is now carried out in parts of the world where labour

costs are much lower. However, not all productions dominated by deskilled workforce could be relocated. A large part of the services, particularly those relating to the infrastructure service for capital and the reproduction of the workforce, remains in Europe. In Slovenia, these processes were reflected in the almost complete disappearance of the textile, apparel, and leather industries, which, at the end of the 1990s, had a total of around 40,000, while in 2017 only around 8,000 employees.¹⁵ The pressure on the labour market, which was created by capital pushing the workforce in these activities - mostly women – into unemployment, reinforces the tendency to differentiate reproduction. To the extent that most of this deskilled workforce is now employed in “traditional” services (retail, hospitality industry, etc.), this differentiation is now reflected as a split in the working conditions of the manufacturing industry on one hand, and these traditional services on the other.

Secondly, in the capitalist mode of production, widespread reproduction of productive capital is a fundamental source of household income and government revenues (Clarke, 2000: 80). In other words, both the population and the state depend on the willingness of capitalists to invest - if there is no or not enough investment, there is a crisis, high unemployment, and a rapid increase in government debt. Capital is, of course, willing to invest where the conditions for accumulation are favourable, that is, where relatively high profits can be expected, for which a well-trained workforce at the lowest possible cost is needed. Insofar as the accumulation of capital in the new international division of labour depends to a large extent on the ability of each country to offer a suitably

¹⁵ The data are summarized according to the SURS Yearbooks and data on the SI-STAT website. As the classification of activities changed between 1998 and 2017, the figures are only approximate.

skilled workforce at a competitive price, the sectors producing goods and services for reproduction of the workforce become of *strategic importance*. Or, as Marx (1961: 355-366) shows, given the length of the working day and the intensity of work, surplus value and thus profits - and these are the only reason capital produces anything at all - can be increased only by *reducing the value of the workforce*. And this, again, is possible only if productivity increases and prices fall in industries that produce goods for the reproduction of the workforce (ibid.: 359).

Differentiation of reproduction, i.e., lowering reproduction standards (restraining wage growth, shrinking the number of work-free days, etc.) in the sector that produces goods and services for workforce reproduction does not, of course, increase productivity in this sector, but it allows for a drop prices of goods and services in this sector, thereby lowering the price of all the workforce that uses these services. In principle, liberalisation of imports lowers the prices of goods intended for the reproduction of the workforce (e.g., food and drink, clothing, cleaning products, medicine, furniture, household appliances, etc.) towards levels that, at the required profit margin, correspond to production at the lowest value of the workforce (e.g., regardless of where they are produced, the price of clothing must be comparable to that of the Bangladeshi workforce). However, most services for the reproduction of the workforce (retail, hospitality industry, pre-school education, education, health care, etc.) cannot be provided from other locations - food in canteens for the Slovenian workforce, for example, cannot be provided from India. In short, given real wages in the industrial production sector, it is possible to reduce costs of the workforce, and thus increase competitiveness in this sector, by attacking the standards of the reproduction of the workforce employed in the workforce reproduction industries, including *retail*.

The precarious services sector therefore has the honour of ensuring the economy's competitiveness. Putting pressure on the value of the workforce in this sector (with the given real wages, i.e., the absolute quantities and quality of goods and services) allows for the increase of relative surplus value in the whole economy. To enable the precarious service sector to play this important infrastructural role - that is, to provide favourable conditions for capital accumulation throughout the economy through lower labour costs - the state is gradually removing safeguards and regulations that bond the reproduction of deskilled workforce to the standards, under which a workforce that provides more complex work is reproduced. These general measures include, for example, the flexibilization of the labour market or the introduction of non-standard forms of employment, which mostly affect labour groups which are, from the viewpoint of capital, easily replaceable due to the lack of specific skills; liberalisation of professions, like, for example, the removal of educational conditions in retail and the hospitality industry, or the tightening of conditions for obtaining financial social assistance. The decentralisation of collective bargaining from national to sectoral level, which occurred with the cancellation of the so-called General collective agreement for the trade sector a decade and a half ago, had a similar effect. In other words, with the withdrawal of regulation, the state leaves the initiative to individual companies (individual capital), such as, among other, retail discount store chains.

Elements of the technical composition of the workforce in discount store retail chains

When it comes to individual capital - e.g., individual retail chains - of course, little care is given to this mission, i.e., ensuring the competitiveness of the national economy by offering services for the reproduction of the workforce at low prices. They are only interested in profits, and these depend, firstly, on the difference between the price at which they sell goods on the market and the unit cost of goods, and, secondly, on the total volume of goods sold. As far as the latter is concerned, given the relatively good coverage of the network of shops, one of the key variables in the struggle for market share is *the price of goods*, which must be as low as possible. Therefore, for retail chains as individual capitals operating in labour-intensive non-specialised retail, the difference between the selling price of goods and the overall costs is crucial. They achieve this difference in two ways - by putting pressure on suppliers, and on their own workforce. In the following, we will focus only on the second of the two methods, as our research covered only work in retail discount store chains, not with their suppliers, but also because the problem of workforce management with the aim of squeezing the maximum amount of work out of it for a given amount of money reaches a whole new level in discount store chains.

How do discount store retail chains squeeze exceptional amounts of work out of their workers? The first element of the technical composition of the workforce concerns the state of the workforce that retail chains search for in the market. As is generally the case with the “precarious service sector”, retail discount chains in Slovenia also employ a workforce which they can expect to be “willing and cheap” (Artus, 2013: 414).

This does not, however, mean that wages are low, but that workers - perhaps with some additional monetary incentives - will be prepared to go beyond their limits. They mainly choose workers who neither have many other employment opportunities, nor alternative sources of livelihood. These are people who can only offer their bare workforce, nothing else. Or, as one of the interviewees describes her co-workers in the retail discount store chain Šopko:

these are also girls who have been in Šopko for a very long time and don't have much of an education, they are mainly saleswomen, or not even that, so they hold on to this job.

(Interview with retail discount store chain saleswoman 6, 2018)

However, the absence of alternatives is not necessarily linked to low education - quite a few of our interviewees had reached higher levels of formal education. But, similarly to the first study, in the case of discounts, we are quickly struck by the role that the labour market plays in enforcing the technical composition of the workforce. Here is how a young, university-educated discount store worker described her acceptance of a job at a discount store:

When you're looking for a job for so long, you get so humiliated you can no longer stand it. You just don't care anymore. That's just the way it is. [...] If I didn't have to work, I wouldn't do it, I would still be waiting. Before Šopko, I was unemployed for a very long time. I had goals, interest, and that didn't work out, but at that point, I still didn't come to Šopko. Then I was unemployed for three months, and I just said: "Wherever I can get work, whatever, I'll do it right away". And then I came here. Well, then you settle down a little. Because, unfortunately, finances are... When you have a child, you need an income.

(Interview with retail discount store chain saleswoman 3, 2018)

By ensuring a certain level of unemployment, the labour market provides a workforce that is sufficiently “willing” or “available” even before the start of employment. This workforce is then at the disposal of retail discount store chains to shape in accordance with their needs.

In line with our treatment of the national economic role of retail, the workforce in retail discount store chains is deskilled, so it is relatively quickly replaceable, which further strengthens the power of capital, and weakens the position of the workforce. According to the manager of one of the retail discount store chains, a new employee can acquire all the necessary knowledge and procedures in only two months and achieve the same level of productivity as experienced workers (Interview with the manager of the retail discount store chain 1, 2018). The company does not require any special skills for employment, either. When we ask saleswomen about the skills they need in their work, the answers are remarkably similar - the most important skill is actually not a skill at all, it's simply *speed*, that is, readiness and the ability to work extremely intensely:

Question: Do you need any special education or skills for this, for the job?

Answer: Speed.

[...]

Question: Does it mean that Šopko wants to have a certain type, certain profile of a worker?

Answer: Yes, speed! Speed, that's it.

[...]

Question: What do you think they are also paying attention to? In addition to speed?

Answer: Speed. That's it!

(Interview with a discount store retail chain saleswoman 1, 2017)

Question: What would you say is key to working in Šopko? What skills do you need to master?

Answer: To be able to move quickly. So that everything you do, you do faster ...

(Interview with a retail discount store chain saleswoman 4, 2018)

Question: Would you say that any special education or skills are required to do the job?

Answer: No, except that you have to be able to move quickly, you have to be fast.

(Interview with a retail discount store chain saleswoman 6, 2018)

As regards the issue of the absence of special skills or knowledge, two things should be kept in mind. First, the emphasis on speed as the most important “skill” suggests high work intensity - and the retail discount store chain business model is actually based on a high turnover at an extremely low level of employment. Aldi, which also operates in Slovenia under another name (Hofer), is known for its “lean employment” model, which allows it to reduce employee spending (wages, contributions, and labour taxes) to three percent of total sales, while in traditional supermarkets, this share is about nine percent (Rudolph & Niklas Meise, 2012: 144). The number of employees per individual branch is calculated on the base of the volume of turnover in the branch. However, because the number of employees per turnover is very low (i.e., the target productivity of an individual is extremely high), there are *always too few employees*, so the system is constantly operating at the edge of the capacities of workers.

The next element of the technical composition of the workforce, part-time employment, is also closely related to high workloads. Under normal circumstances, all saleswomen have part-time jobs, mostly between 24 and 33 hours a week. During job interviews, employees are often already told that the company only offers part-time work, as the pace of work is so strenuous, employees would not be able to endure more. Part-time employment is the central element of the business model based on “lean employment”, as the extremely high intensity of work required for a given number of employees to perform enormous amounts of work cannot be sustained for eight hours a day, for five days a week. After some time, the productivity of workers declines (see Bembič et al., 2016: 43), and it is more profitable for the company to replace them with other employees. Short-term employment, of course, means the transfer of risks to which workers are exposed into the future, as the workers are credited for pensionable service in proportion to their employment (e.g., a 30 hour work week accounts to only 9 months of the pension period per year).

Secondly, insofar as they are not required to have any special skills or knowledge to work at a particular work position, workers are not only quickly interchangeable, but this also allows them to move freely between different work positions. Since all workers work at all work positions in the store (baking bread, stocking shelves, inspecting and filling refrigerators, inspecting fruit and vegetables, cleaning the store, etc.), the work collective can be completely autonomous in the division of tasks:

Basically, managers or deputies go to fruits and vegetables. Me and the other saleswomen decide alone who will cover the refrigerator and who the bakery. I don't know, according to what we feel like.

[...]

Question: And everyone knows the work of all the positions?

Answer: Yes, everyone does everything ...

(Interview with retail discount store chain saleswoman 6, 2018)

The ability of workers to perform all tasks in the store is the basis for the autonomy of the workers' collective in terms of mutual distribution of a given volume of work. The company determines the number of workers in the branch according to the turnover but does not specify who will work in individual departments, so these workers as a team are responsible for making sure that all the work is done. The collective responsibility resulting from a high degree of functional flexibility (all workers can perform all work tasks) allows for further intensification of work on one hand, as there is no rest for any of the workers until all work in the branch is done, which – with under-employment, which is built into the business model of discount stores - never happens; on the other hand, it causes workers to internalise the requirement of capital for high labour intensity¹⁶:

¹⁶ One of the interviewed workers eloquently described the work process, in which a functionally completely flexible collective fills every second with intense work, with these words:

In the morning, it is determined, who will be cashier one and who cashier two. The third person is always cashier three. [...] Cashier one usually also takes care of the bakery, so that the bakery is prepared by eight, and he can go to the cash register. And this person also has to take care of those flowers, since we also get them. He is supposed to do this, as well, because they are next to the cash register. Cashier two helps cashier one. When there's a crowd at cash register one, they start opening up other registers. That's when they announce that the second cash register is opening, and cashier two jumps in. Cashier two is usually the one who takes care of refrigerators, which means that if that's not stocked by eight - which is hard to do, there is just too much merchandise... Well, then he continues to stock the refrigerators. And when that's done, then there's other merchandise, which is also delivered every day. [...]

Well, you have it in your head that you have to get it done as soon as possible, because the oven in the bakery is ringing and you have to take the bread out. It seems to me that we all have this in our subconscious - fast, fast - because you know that there's another mountain of work waiting for you.

(Interview with retail discount store chain saleswoman 4, 2018)

The connection between the described elements of the technical composition of the workforce produces extremely strong ideological effects. First, in the almost complete absence of a workers' organisation at the level of the base, the organisation of the collective takes place entirely under the unilateral command of capital. More specifically, while the work collective in the branch is adaptable to the extreme in order to be able to instantly respond to any request of the work process, the power of capital is completely rigid and unchallengeable. In this constellation of power, the power of capital becomes completely unquestionable, and assumes the status of a "natural fact", which is perhaps best attested by the views of workers on the relationship between labour intensity and wages:

¹⁶ Question: So the one covering the bakery also jumps in at [the cash register]?

Answer: Yes, cashier one is the one who prepared the bakery. Afterwards, cashier one only works at the cash register, and puts away the carts. The cash register works non-stop, you don't have 5 minutes without a customer. There is always someone. When you get those 10, 15 seconds, just enough to put the carts away ... and someone is waiting for you again. And cashier two helps out cashier one.

Question: But the one working at the first cash register – that's the person who came from the bakery? And when bread needs to be baked again?

Answer: Well, then cashier two takes over.

Question: In the bakery?

Answer: Yes. Cashier two helps cashier one, with bread and everything else that needs to be done, everything that needs to be stocked...

Question: And this continue until the evening?

Answer: Yes.

(Interview with discount store chain saleswoman 6, 2018)

Question: Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone was employed full-time? Would this affect the work process?

Answer: Yes, less of us would be working. Fewer people, and people who are even more exhausted. No, I really don't know how a person could bear it here, if we were all full-time employees. Because there's actually so much physical work, and you need ... I mean, the body needs rest ... I don't think I could bear it. To have to work every day, Monday to Friday, for 8 hours. I wouldn't. I would not. [...]

Question: Yes, but what if there were more employees?

Answer: Well, that's the question of company policy then. More employees, lower salary. Then someone would probably complain again ...

(Interview with a discount store chain saleswoman 4, 2018)

Question: If you had a 40-hour workweek, would you be able to do all the work without overtime?

Answer: Yes, but then the pace would be easy, and the salary would surely go down. Then we would be paid minimum wage. You really get a workout in Šopko. It's not like you aren't able to talk to anyone, but you have to get used to it. It wasn't easy for anyone in the beginning.

(Interview with retail discount store chain saleswoman 3, 2018)

Two things are important here. First, it doesn't even occur to the interviewees that full-time employment with an unchanged number of employees and unchanged hourly rates could come about, that is, that they could force a concession from capital in the form of a reduction of work intensity. Second, the quotation from interviewee no. 4 clearly shows how the one-sided rule of capital, in the absence of a unionised workers' collective, obscures the conflict between labour and capital.

The only dispute the employee thinks of is the conflict between co-workers: “Then someone would probably complain again.” It is no wonder that in this environment, all conflicts appear to participants as individual, interpersonal conflicts:

I’ve had three regional supervisors. One had a stern approach, he shouted a lot; the other was more relaxed, like, “Yeah, you’ll manage, easy,” and the third one more by the book. It depends on the person, as well as the collective. The problem isn’t the work, it’s the people. [...] You have to know that work and *Šopko* are not important; people are what matters, and the soul.

(Interview with a retail discount store chain saleswoman 3, 2018)

With the absolute rule of capital, both the volume of work and the number of employees, which is rigidly determined by the ratio of turnover to employment (target productivity), are unquestionable, and the organisation of work is team-based. Therefore, each of the workers is aware that if one of her co-workers does not do her job, she will have to take on the additional workload herself. So each worker supervises all the others, observes if they work with the same high level of intensity as themselves, as she wants to protect herself against additional workload. But this way, the *workers control each other, and impose the high intensity of work* - the collective thus becomes *the tool of capital*. So, for example, when hiring new employees, the manager always consults co-workers before making their proposition regarding the extension or conclusion of a contract for an indefinite period to the regional manager. In other words, the workers themselves make sure that the contract is awarded only to those who are willing to accept the discipline imposed on them by capital:

There's someone we're dealing with now - we can't wait for the day her contract expires and is not extended. We all agree.

Question: Do you decide this in the branch yourselves?

Answer: The manager usually decides, but asks workers for opinions: "How do you like the new one? Is she okay or not?" Then she tells the regional manager whether to fire her or not. You have to have reasons, though. The manager can't just say, "Dismiss her!" without argumentation.

Question: And what do you usually consider when you give this advice, or when deciding, whoever it is that decides?

Answer: If the worker is hardworking.

[...]

Question: So, if someone works fast, achieves a high quota...

Answer: ... yes, they stay...

Question: ... they are yours, and if not...

Answer: Yes. I will not do other people's work. Sorry.

(Interview with a retail discount store chain saleswoman 1, 2018)

Another important element of the technical composition of the workforce in discount stores is the hierarchical positioning, which places workers into positions of, for example, managers, deputies or assistant managers, and ordinary salespeople. Managers play the most important role in disciplining co-workers. They are vital for the maintenance of discipline and high workloads. Management seems to choose managers in a very special way, as well: since most managers only have a high school education, they are aware that the salaries they receive here will not be matched elsewhere:

I won't get it, I will not get such a salary anywhere. I don't stand a chance. [...] In fact, these people are then willing to do anything, just for the sake of the salary. [...] They get you so... Many people say: I'm sorry I ever came to work for *Postrežek*, that I even got used to this salary. Many people say that. But now I'm used to this salary, what am I going to do now?

(Interview with the manager in a retail discount store chain 1, 2018)

The position of the store manager is defined by two circumstances. First, store managers must constantly prove themselves with achievements, that is, with high productivity (turnover per employee), and other elements of evaluation. Similar as with workers, the pressure managers are exposed to does not come only from the top, either. Even stronger, perhaps, is the pressure of discipline, imposed on each branch by the constant pursuit of higher productivity by managers of different branches - the company constantly promotes competition between different branches, and consequently between managers, through a scoring and comparison system. This is then passed on to salespeople in the form of pressure:

... constant controls, constant pressure, constant reviews, constant visits of bosses; they evaluate us every month - by branches, branches of the month ...

Question: And do they compare you to others?

Answer: Of course. And you find out every month how high you ranked. They score a lot of things in here, there are so many evaluations, and those who are eager, who act as if there is nothing besides *Postrežek* - and there are many of them... And because of that, productivity is, of course, a problem. Because everyone is competing to be better; it's constant - who will be better, who will be better, who will be better?

(Interview with the manager in a retail discount store chain 1, 2018)

The store manager or the collective do not have the authority to introduce “entrepreneurial” changes. As researchers (see, e.g., Grugulis et al., 2011; Felstead et al., 2011) also note for other modern retail chains, every minute detail in the branch, from ordering goods to their positioning on shelves, is planned in detail from the central office. What remains under the responsibility of managers is management of workloads, and motivation of employees to achieve maximum productivity, that is, *work intensity*. In other words, the managerial function is mostly reduced to pushing themselves - managers are namely also part of the direct production process - past their limits.

An additional element of discipline, especially for store managers, is the discrepancy between the instructions or rules, according to which the store is supposed to operate, and the ratio of the volume of work to number of employees. This number is so low - to maintain profits - that work tasks can only be carried out with constant infringements of rules, including those set by the company. Thus, for example, the company educates workers on the rules of safety and health at work, and orders them to work in a way that doesn't burden the spine, while imposing on them the amount of work that cannot be done without violating the rules of safety and health at work. These could be followed only if the number of employees was increased, otherwise not. At the same time, this means that the collective and managers must, under normal conditions, make a choice between violating the formal rules of the company, and doing all the work assigned to them. Store managers are therefore constantly at the mercy and disfavour of regional managers, as they are virtually constantly in violation - many of them have been reprimanded at least once.

Trade unions and other forms of workers' representation are not desirable in retail discount store chains (Artus, 2013: 419-420). In Germany, according to researchers, one of the chains was even prepared to close an otherwise profitable branch to suppress the workers' representation in it (Geppert et al., 2014: 11). The reason for this hostility towards workers' organisation is not difficult to guess. The method of exploitation in retail discount store chains requires a fully available, flexible and therefore politically subordinate workforce, and the union could connect workers, and thus jeopardize the unilateral rule of capital in stores. It would be difficult for the business model of a discount store to handle a workers' organisation that is not under the direct control of capital, therefore, it vigorously opposes it.

Breakdown of the technical composition?

The described work regime, and thus the technical composition of the workforce, on which this regime is based, is - at least as far as workers are concerned - unsustainable in the long run. The main contradiction in this regime, which undermines the technical composition of the workforce and thus the consent of the workers, is twofold. First, the required work intensity is unsustainable: salespeople can only be part of a team as long as they are willing to work at 100% (or better yet, 120%) capacity, which can physically only be sustained for a limited period of time. A survey conducted by RC CEDRA in 2019 among employees of one of the retail discount store chains in Slovenia in cooperation with a small group of workers¹⁷ showed that as many as 64 percent of interviewees suffer from health problems. Almost all the interviewees with health problems felt that their problems were related to working in the store.

As many as 45 percent of all workers report suffering from spinal injuries - injuries that are clearly related to lifting heavy loads. Injuries are, of course, only the mirror image of the aforementioned contradiction between the company's rules, including rules on health and safety at work, and the volume of work to be performed.

Occupational injuries and illnesses suffered by workers quite clearly indicate that working in discount stores shortens the period they are able to work in discount stores, before they become too weak. The other side of the contradiction is a shorter retirement period, which is linked to part-time employment of salespeople. Shorter retirement period (because of part-time employment) pushes the moment when workers will be able to retire, deeper and deeper into the undetermined future. In other words, while exceptional workloads shorten the period during which they are "usable" for the company, part-time employment prolongs the period for which workers will have to work. So, paradoxically, for employees of discount stores, the time of retirement is actually *getting further and further away* with each passing workday.

Both sides of the contradiction, in which the workers of discount stores find themselves, sooner or later overlap: the workers weaken, and the moment of retirement is still far away - realistically, retirement is perhaps even further away than it was at the start of their employment. Retail discount store chains then make the only sensible move - from the point of view of the specific business model: they want to get rid of workers who have lost their health due to working in the store.

¹⁷ The interviewees were obtained by the snowball method, i.e., through already established contacts with the company's employees, who then forwarded the link to the survey to their co-workers and acquaintances in the company via the social network Facebook, and these sent it forward to their contacts in the company, etc. The survey was completed by 49 workers.

However, medical examinations in many cases show that workers are still able to work, only with certain restrictions. This is often also determined by the disability commission of the Pension and Disability Insurance Institute of Slovenia, which usually issues the opinion that, in accordance with the law, the worker has the right to be transferred to another position. It is clear, however, that with the high intensity, there is no suitable job in discount stores. In other words, a suitable workplace, where workers could work under certain restrictions, of course, exists, but not in the face of the exceptional work efforts discount stores require of workers, and which were the cause of injuries in the first place.

In other words, when a worker's health worsens - and this is not uncommon due to the workload - they are still able to work under certain restrictions, but there is no more room for them in the technical composition of individual capital (i.e., the retail discount store chain in question). According to our hypothesis, the potential for political work opens up with difficulties in workers' placement in the technical composition required by capital. At this point, a certain breakdown of the ideological framework, supported by the technical composition of the workforce, occurs. Not only did the workers *accept the position* (in the technical composition of the workforce) *assigned to them by capital*, and "*invested*" in their relationship with the company on this basis, they also found that the company rejected them (i.e., that they could no longer occupy the given position in the technical composition of the workforce) precisely because they *adhered to the tacit agreement* and did their best.

The first retail workers that RC CEDRA contacted in 2018, who were the core of attempts to establish a workers' organisation in discount stores till the end of 2019, were mostly workers with the recognised right to be transferred to another workplace, or to other restrictions at work.

First, as with the young over-educated workers in the previous study, the discount workers' dissatisfaction with difficulties in fitting into the technical composition is potentially very high. For the over-educated workers who worked in the assembly line, the dissatisfaction emerged from the friction between the technical composition of the workforce accepted by workers (school ideology), and the composition imposed in the factory by capital (unskilled workforce in the assembly line). For workers in discount stores, the discrepancy is dynamic: the technical composition accepted by the workers produces medium-term effects that render the workers unsuitable from the point of view of the (same) technical structure required by capital. Or, in other words, the technical composition accepted by the workers either no longer applies to them, or it still applies, but there is no more room for them in it. The material foundation, on which the workers were able to accept capitalist exploitation and on which they based their plans, fell apart.

The disintegration of the material foundation that enabled workers to accept subordination put these workers at the centre of attempts of the workers' organisation. Since this foundation was ruined, they rejected corporate ideology; because they are no longer in the workplace (due to restrictions), the company no longer has control over their lives, so they are relatively independent. At the same time, they are familiar with the situation and the atmosphere that prevail in the work process. Because of their experiences, other workers trust them, so they are well-suited for encouraging others to join the workers' organisation. But organising with the help of workers who are "temporarily" absent from work (because of restrictions) soon hit its limits. Namely, these workers were not present in stores every day to continuously address their co-workers. In addition, the trade union was not organised, which means that the workers were members individually, and mostly anonymously, because they feared

their membership would result in retaliation by the management. So, where the union existed, it was merely an individual, private matter of workers, a kind of an insurance policy for individual legal aid in case of problems with the management.

A new opportunity presented itself at the end of 2018, as a store manager and a group of her co-workers set up a union in one of the discount stores, where all members were organised and disclosed to the management. She formed the union after being transferred to a remote branch - together with a collective that did not want to change the manager and hoped to thus be able to influence the management to change its decision about the transfer. However, this did not happen. Instead, management slowly began to stifle the union and its president by issuing letters of reprimand. For about a year, the union remained limited to two branches (the previous and a new branch, where the president worked as a manager). When it became clear that termination was only a matter of time, cooperation with RC CEDRA began to strengthen.

RC CEDRA had conducted enough interviews in this and other discount stores by then, which allowed for a relatively quick analysis of relations in the company; an analysis that did not focus on the issue of violation of individual rights, but dealt with the issue of capitalist exploitation, disciplining workers and managers, and the effects of the work regime in discount stores on the health of workers, or the conditions of their material reproduction. In January 2020, the first activities (meetings with the union staff and the establishment of communication channels) began. With the help of RC CEDRA, the union surveyed workers on working conditions, with an emphasis on health in the workplace, and attitudes towards the union. The purpose of the survey was twofold: first, it implicitly showed workers that the union attacks the manner of exploitation in the

discount store by problematising its effects; second, the survey sought to provide the union with more reliable information on the effects of the specific type of exploitation on the health of workers. The management's response to the survey was very quick, and it directly showed how much the management was aware of the dangers of organised workers: a circular was issued the same day, warning workers that participation in the survey is "at their own risk" and announcing an investigation. The results did not differ significantly from the survey conducted by RC CEDRA in another retail discount store chain in 2019, but they are relatively unreliable because of the response of the management and the possibility of its interference. Counting only the responses received before the intervention of management (N = 52), almost half (42%) of the workers reported they were facing health problems. Of these, as many as 34% of all respondents reported back problems, well above the comparable population (28% for women between the ages of 25 and 45). Almost all of them associated these health problems with working in a store (lifting heavy loads). The share of those who thought that the management was hostile to the union and wanted to get rid of it, was 43%, which was almost five times higher than the share of those who thought that the management accepted the union. Based on analyses of interviews with employees and surveys in discount stores, the preparation of a media strategy began. In it, the union condensed the criticism of the specific way of exploitation, ways of disciplining workers and suppressing trade union organisation at discount stores and drew attention to the consequences for the health of workers.

The breakthrough in the field brought a new, systematic way of working with workers. Within the RC, organisers were selected who are in regular contact with workers from the branches, which enables monitoring of the development in the field, and the expansion of the trade union.

Communication channels have been established, through which union members are in daily contact with RC CEDRA. A workers' committee has been set up, consisting of the union's most active members, and representing its operational core, which normally meets every fortnight. The new method of work gave a strong impetus to organisation in the field. Quickly, the union began to expand to branches where members of the workers' committee were present, and the network was also strengthened with members from unorganised branches.

Management responded quickly. Shortly after the establishment, the expected dismissal of the union president took place. Because this move of the management was expected and the media strategy prepared in advance, the union was relatively successful in launching its interpretation of the conflict to the public. It was all the more convincing because, despite strong pressure, quite a few workers bravely defended the president and appeared in the media. Through managers, the management had been exerting soft pressure on new union members for quite some time, as well. They were often invited for interviews, where they were questioned about reasons for joining, there were attempts to convince them of the union's inefficiency, or even hints that it would be better if they withdrew their membership. And yet - despite all the pressures, threats and even dismissal of the president, by which the management sent a clear warning to the workers - the union organisation persevered. Moreover, the organisation is expanding even after the termination of the president, as new members join the union. In this regard, the question arises: why did the collective not disintegrate despite the pressure of management?

Part of the answer is certainly the new method of work and the establishment of communication channels, which allow for regular contacts with the most active members and, through that, with other

members in the field. But new methods of work are not equally effective in all cases. *Our hypothesis is that the new method works best with those workers who face problems with placement in the technical composition of the workforce or are threatened with losing their place in it.* Noting that this is a qualitative research on a very limited sample, we can conclude that our field data support the thesis relatively well.

Firstly, as we have mentioned, the president herself formed the union precisely because of the weakening of her position in the company, i.e., when the management transferred her to a remote branch, even though her children are still very young. So at least the president's case fits our hypothesis quite well - as her position in the technical composition of the workforce became increasingly harder to bear, she established a union. Moreover, when this move failed to yield effects and her position in the company deteriorated even further, as the management started sending her reprimands, she strengthened her cooperation with RC CEDRA. A similar case is that of another of the lower management workers, who is also aware of the precariousness of her position, as she joined the union shortly after receiving a reprimand.

Secondly, as in the first case study, despite the relatively low educational structure, there are indications of much higher ambitions among some of the most active workers. These are workers who have been or are still enrolled in tertiary education programmes and for them, working in a discount store probably brings disillusionment.

Thirdly, many of the most active members are older than most of their co-workers, or at least have seniority - most of them have been with the company for about a decade. At this point, the situation in discount stores may seem to deviate from the one in the first study, where older

workers were generally more willing to submit because of their structural position, mainly due to the absence of employment alternatives. However, the deviation is only ostensible. The position of older workers in the first case differs significantly from the position of workers in discount stores. While the former were willing to submit because they hoped they will be able to reach retirement age in the factory, that is, retain their place in the technical composition for as long as necessary, for the latter, due to “excessive wear” of the workforce when extending the period they will have to sell this workforce, the unsustainability of their situation is constantly in front of their eyes. All the most active workers (members of the workers’ committee) have been - almost without exception - in the company for many years, and are well aware that like their health, their place in the technical composition of the workforce is also unsustainable in the long run. Thus, the difference in the approach of older workers in both cases is actually the strongest support for our hypothesis, as it shows that these differences are not directly generational but are structured by another mechanism – according to our hypothesis, that is the technical composition of the workforce.

Discussion

The study brings an insight into the national economic role of the precarious service sector, which provides for the reproduction of the workforce in general, and of retail, in particular. It shows the specific ways of exploiting and disciplining workers in retail discount store chains, and their effects on the position of workers. There, it finds the contradictions that arise with placement of workers in the technical composition of the workforce. We located these contradictions in the widening gap between

the required pace of work and its effects on the health of the workforce (bringing closer the “expiration date” of an individual worker), and the extension of the period until retirement (the period during which a worker must make a living by selling her ability to work to capital). On this basis, we assessed the hypothesis of this volume; if the hypothesis holds true, space for political work should open up in places where there are difficulties with placement of workers in the technical composition of the workforce.

We found that the collected material supports the hypothesis relatively well, especially when it comes to older workers who have been with the company for a longer period, and who are also the most politically active. For these workers, the aforementioned contradiction between the accelerated “wear and tear” of the workforce and the conditions of its sale to capital becomes bigger and bigger. An ever more uncertain future in the company lowers the relative “costs” of workers’ organisation. As the moment approaches when the workers become weak and unable to work and the company wants to dispose of them at any cost, threats of harassment and dismissal lose their effectiveness. At the same time, the workers’ organisation becomes more and more attractive, insofar as it appears to be the best or even the only way out of an impossible situation.

Already in the first study, the workers’ analyses revealed that the differences in behaviours of older and younger workers are not conditioned simply by generational differences in the interests of older and younger workers. Namely, if that was the case, the behaviour of older workers in both studies would be similar - but it is not. While older workers in the first study were most reluctant to mobilise workers and joined only when the wave of mobilisation swept over virtually all of the workforce in production, older and long-serving workers are the heart of mobilisation

in discount stores. This difference in the behaviour of women of similar ages shows that the “generational divide” is provided and structured by a mechanism, known to us only by the specific effects it produces. Our claim is that this mechanism is the technical composition of the workforce, which we presented in the introductory part of the notebook.

Finally, it is necessary to point out the dilemmas that arise when it comes to organising in discount stores where there is no union yet. At this point, we cannot rule out the possibility that a union (in the sense of an organised collective), which is the only institution that allows political work with workers in the company, becomes a realistic and attractive enough option only after it has been established. In other words, it is possible - but by no means certain - that this completely “empty” move is indispensable, as otherwise, most workers would probably only be left with lawsuits and the silent bearing of burdens. But the decision to form a union, made by one or more workers, is “irrational” in face of given parameters, as, with the barely concealed hostility of retail discount store chains towards the workers’ organisation, this decision carries great risk, while the expected benefits are negligible. In this light, the question arises about the tactics of organising in other discount stores, where the union is not yet organised - is the union dependent on an irrational move of a few individuals?, jumping into the unknown

The solution that offers itself, so to speak, might be in the gradual building of a union with anonymous membership, which would actually be revealed only when it became sufficiently numerous and strong. Because, to what extent does it make sense to establish a formal workers’ organisation, i.e., a trade union, if it is not strong enough to defend its leadership and membership against retaliatory measures of the management. But the question can also be reversed: does the point at which a union is large

and strong enough even exist, if workers are enrolled in the branch union anonymously, so members mostly don't even know about each other, and the organisation itself exists solely as an insurance policy? The choice between two poor solutions reflects the successes of the class struggle led by capital in retail discount store chains, and, in a way, condenses all the difficulty of workers' organisation and political work at the level of the base in this part of the service sector: either the organisation is silent and completely subordinate to management, or it is subject to frontal attacks of capital. Whatever kind it is, it can only be such that it does not threaten the dictatorship of capital. But the aim, of course, is precisely creating an organisation that will be able to overthrow this dictatorship. If our hypothesis is usable, the area of its application is precisely the identification of organic intellectuals who will be able to realise this goal.

Conclusion

In the notebook, we pursued two closely related goals. Firstly, at the theoretical level, we tried to show the applicability of the concept of technical composition of the workforce in identifying potential elements for political work at the level of the base. We proceeded from the thesis that the technical composition of the workforce — that is, the way in which capital, in the process of accumulation, shapes the workforce, and engages it in a series of relations — produces political effects that politically paralyse the working class. However, in placing workers into the technical structure, constant inconsistencies, frictions, unsuccessful transitions, and failed attempts to occupy a suitable place in the technical composition of the workforce required by capital occur. In the next step, we presented two case studies, with which we wanted to show that it is precisely the failed placement in the technical composition of the workforce that leads to the (temporary) collapse of the ideological framework, which otherwise allows the working class to agree to capitalist exploitation. This, in turn, opens up potential for political work at the level of the base. Namely, insofar as the technical composition of the workforce assigns a place in society to individuals and enables them to arrange a “tolerable” life and plan for the future on this basis, difficulties with their placement in the technical composition cause them to lose their footing, and call into question the certainties that had previously seemed irrefutable.

The first study examines the case of young women workers whose educational choices point to ambitions that radically deviate from the place in the assembly line that they actually occupy. Their engagement in taking over the union through mass mobilisation of colleagues and

its transformation into a workers' organisation shows that the potential for political work certainly exists. The same is true for the group of workers observed in the second case study - their placement in the technical composition of the workforce failed because of its dynamic unsustainability, which encouraged the workers to work towards building a workers' organisation and opened the way for cooperation and political work for RC Cedra.

The difference in the position and mobilisation potential of older women in both studies is a good indicator of the importance of the technical composition for political mobilisation. We have seen that women who have been with the company for a longer period of time, and are also slightly older on average, take a different view on direct struggles in each case, although the generational divide seems to be important in both cases. This suggests that the position of a group of workers is not unambiguously determined by "objectively given" traits or characteristics, but that there is a mechanism that places workers with the same characteristics either among the more passive or among the politically active. This mechanism cannot be directly observed. Our thesis is that these differences in effects on groups with similar characteristics stem from differences in the placement of these groups in the technical composition of the workforce.

Perhaps we could even conclude that in each situation, we can identify a certain group that, due to its position in the technical composition or difficulties with its placement, is more susceptible to mobilisation, i.e., to political work. In other words, we cannot simply claim that a group (highly educated, elderly, deskilled, etc.) is inherently more or less ready to fight than others, but certain groups are, due to their specific position in a given technical composition of the workforce, more susceptible to mobilisation. To identify these groups, however, we need analyses

that are based on research interviews, and enable an understanding of internal relationships in companies and other organisations, in the wider economy, and so on. In short, an understanding of the technical composition of the workforce is a requirement for political work and agitation among workers.

Before we really finish, let us look back for a moment at the problem we encountered in the concluding part of the first study. Since the case of A.B. was observed, RC Cedra has made considerable progress, both in terms of workers' mobilisation and education. The example of its work in discount stores shows that with field work, the organisation was relatively successful in asserting the class political position in working with the collective, and in their responses, these positions were largely adopted by the branch union and other unions, as well as the media. But an organisation cannot make progress if it doesn't know the constraints it encounters. The outcome of the first study showed limitations that have not yet been resolved, but will have to be, if the political work that Cedra can do as a political organisation should go beyond the level of a pilot project.

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