

IndustriALL Global Union's Non-manual Workshop "Office in your Pocket III"

19 – 20 November 2015, Barcelona, Spain

IndustriALL Non-manual Section Contemplates Office in Your Pocket III in Barcelona

On 19 and 20 November the IndustriALL Non-manual Section met and considered issues connected to Office in Your Pocket for the third time. The meeting started by congratulating Martin Linder on his election as President of the 620,000-strong Swedish union Unionen.

One of the meeting's highlights was digitalization. Digitalization is likely to affect as many as half of jobs. This development makes it more important to emphasize life-long learning because digitalization will make us change jobs more frequently. There will be enormous pressure on working conditions because it will become a 24/7 society.

Some branches are enthusiastic about Industry 4.0. On the other hand there is already 5.0 or 6.0 in some cases. The changes are faster and faster. Jobs are more and more isolated with less and less social contacts. It is becoming the on-demand economy. A new labor market is emerging.

The IT revolution is happening more quickly than we thought. Now there is decentralized computing – The Cloud. 47 percent of US jobs are in danger of being done by robots. White-collar jobs can be done by algorithms or computers. Revision and reporting firms are automating in a big way. In the meantime it is not even a question of outsourcing, it is a machine that will do the job.

Women in the middle of their lives with little education will have to be retrained. More and more people are working free-lance, on platforms, crowd working. In this context unions are necessary so that more people can get a share. Most new jobs are skilled, white-collar jobs. Middle skill jobs are disappearing. Services are expanding. Tech companies are becoming platforms in the "überization" of the economy. That means that we have crowd-sourcing and on-demand platforms. There is an app based platform to facilitate transactions. The best case is that flexible jobs are created that our members really want.

The challenge is the uneven income and wage distribution and decreased job security. At the same time this is accompanied by increased specialization and skill displacement. Unions need to regulate this growing part of the economy through collective bargaining.

In France it is said that 3 million jobs will be lost and one million created. There will be more unemployment. Solutions need to be found which amount to more than just decreasing working time. The education system as well as the social security system need to be reformed. And platform work needs to become decent work. But we need to find new approaches. Nevertheless a lot of technology makes it easier for people to be smarter, doing things that were impossible to do before.

Unions need to be better at reaching out during the start-up phase. Platforms have created wage dumping. The EU will pass directives on how to regulate the crowd-sourcing market.

Anne-Catherine Cudennec, co-chair of the non-manual sector, presented how digitalization will have impacts on management and labor relations. It will be hard to avoid destruction of jobs and domination by the Big 4 – Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon.

Some sectors have already been impacted, whilst others will be touched later such as services to people. Work organization will be the most affected. From now on it will be more and more a question of teleworking, collaborative work, new types of office. Jobs will be changed or adapted, and new training will be indispensable. There will be an increased requirement for reporting.

Due to the intensification of work new health problems will arise. Management will have to oversee new kinds of work contracts such as teleworking, nomad workers, independent workers. People sometimes appreciate this type of working because it enables them to save time and avoid traffic jams. Managers too will have to adjust because they will have more external collaborators and sub-contractors. Different kinds of risks will have to be covered for these workers. New tax arrangements will be developed for companies.

Many people appreciate the new ways of working and consider them to offer autonomy and transparency, and many like the speed and immediacy. Nevertheless certain tools and rights need to be expanded, such as the right to disconnect. The right not to reply to messages at certain times has to be enshrined. Agreements have to provide for arrangements for working across time zones.

The French CGT wants to guarantee that hours are measured. The problem is the increased competition and the presence of more people bidding for the same job – the feeling is that more time worked will lead to more money. Even engineers are on this type of contract now. The challenge for unions is to organize this part of the labor market that works differently. If unions do not manage this, then they will shrink even more. Unions have to keep up with these strategic areas.

Work has lost the physical link with the employees, unions have lost the links to the people. One possibility is to create a hotline so that people can phone unions with their concerns. In Stavanger, Norway, IE has a digital office – the office takes care of the people who are all over. In France there was a virtual strike for two hours on Facebook. We need to create what's app links among employees.

Gwenne Farrell, from the Canadian union with the new name Move Up, reported on an on-going 160 day lockout of the roadside assistants. The call center workers were locked out. The workers want fair pay. The union invited the media to the picket line, it launched radio ads and a rally. It used Twitter and Facebook to share photos and testimonials. The campaign has been successful, and the negotiations are almost over.

In mobile working boundaries blur because of people working at clients or in cafes. It is practical for people to work where they want to. However it necessitates a new confidence relationship. Control is less possible through the traditional way of clocking in. The confidence shifts when people work outside the traditional places. People question whether the work has really been done. Even colleagues wonder whether others have more freedom than they do.

Crowd working does not have adequate job evaluation. In addition the risks are shifted, with the people taking their own risks. Interns and trainees have been left out of the discussion. They are people who are predestined to precarious work and are a potential for organizing. The people who are capable of learning will have the advantage. But how can people learn?

In Brazil salaries are handled differently for white and blue-collar workers. Higher earners get no compensation for inflation. In the meantime the union managed to get the inflation index for everyone. Human resources did not want the union to get a foothold among the white-collar workers. In offices and administration there are a lot of women. Maternity leave went up to 180 days. Some of the office workers became supervisors. They then helped the union. The ABC union won over 180 members last year. Communication is tougher with white-collar workers. They communicate differently. They like graphs and tables. The production area is decreasing. People were also let off in the office area because of the crisis. Now they work 32 hours with a 10 percent loss in pay. The government subsidizes the rest in order to limit the redundancies. Some people work at home with a headset. These remote workers have global meetings at unusual hours.

Daniel Gullstrand from UNIONEN presented boundaryless work and union strategies. In the meantime people can no longer influence their schedule. They no longer leave their jobs behind mentally. Moreover the manager does not lead the workplace the way s/he used to. S/he has to trust the employees more. Workplaces are less hierarchical. Nevertheless this has weakened unions' position and collective bargaining power. Employees today have more to say about their own work but less to say about the overall organization.

What is behind boundaryless working?

- Digitalization, new mobile information and communication technology
- Changes in work organization (lean)
- Globalization, competition in global markets

For white-collar workers lean organization is the opposite than for manual workers. White-collar workers are individualized and less in groups. Their work load has increased.

Nevertheless professional employees do see positive consequences from this type of working such as the following:

- Increased influence over when to work
- More interesting and stimulating work
- Better work-life balance due to telework
- Better bargaining position in relation to the employer
- Flexitime means trust-based labor time
- Influence over working time has good health benefits

Still the negative consequences need to be considered:

- Constant availability for work-related communication lowers the quality of necessary rest periods
- Working at high speed/high work load leads to overtime and self-reduced breaks
- To work efficiently, professionals must often acquire the social and organizational resources needed by themselves

Constant restructuring means that roles are less and less clear. In addition people cannot get help from colleagues because they don't know what the others are doing.

This new reality requires new trade union strategies. In this context traditional collective agreements are not effective. The policies on work organization need to be formalized so that they can be part of negotiations. Otherwise it is difficult to organize informal practices. That way the union can have a say in how the policies are formulated. Psychosocial occupational health hazards need to be emphasized more. It must be made clear that the point is not to have more money for being constantly available. However there is a dilemma because people work for free during the week-end, but all work should be paid. Companies do not want to pay when they hurt people. People on burn-out are then paid by the State. Companies use people and then shirk the responsibility for burn-out. According to German studies there seems to be less burn-out but more depression. In Sweden sick leave is on the rise due to pressure. Scientists are convinced it is work-related.

In Brazil the workers are given their targets in January. They get a mid-term evaluation in July. And in December if the target has not been met, the worker has to improve in three months or else be fired. The union is trying to get a less stringent evaluation system from the company. In Canada there exist work-load committees.

Monika Kemperle summarized the conclusions from the Brazil workshop in 2014. There it was said that the issue of organizing non-manual workers will continue to have priority. Digitalization will become more and more important. It would be good to collect good examples of digital campaigning. How can we gain more influence through digital campaigning? The group needs to give thought to changing its name, especially to give a more positive image. Up to now the name has given rise to confusion. We can organize an exchange on the themes that keep recurring such as stress, working-time issues, work-life balance, evaluation, pay systems.

IndustriALL works primarily on five goals, which are:

- Building union power
- Defending workers' rights
- Confronting global capital
- Fighting precarious work
- Promoting sustainable industrial policy

For the non-manuals the strategy that will be pursued to meet the five goals will be especially as follows:

Organizing more white-collar workers

Doing research on new industrial structures

Collecting information on working time, mobility, digitalization, crowdwork

Contacting potential affiliates

Working with the sectors, especially pharmaceuticals, aerospace and automotive

Making the most of skilled workers' expertise

Including the issues in GFA negotiations such as accessibility, health and safety, stress, work-life balance, work organization and working time

Focusing on precarious work for the highly skilled

Ensuring quality jobs for the highly skilled

Trade unions must realize that one key success factor for building strong unions is the non-manuals. We need to address campaigning in a digital world in the future. These issues must be reflected in IndustriALL more widely. One step may be to change the name at Congress. One proposal was IndustriALL White-collar section. Proposals must be sent in on time for consideration by Congress in 2016.

For your kind information, the next meeting should be outside of Europe and have an external speaker.

In solidarity,



Monika Kemperle, Assistant General Secretary