

A). What remains?

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This final chapter can only be a rather rough sketch. We simply lack the time and resources to follow every thread we bring up here with thorough research. Still some ideas are ripe to be mentioned. It contains first some conclusions overarching the inquiry chapters and trying to draw lines between the dots and putting it somehow in the wider agricultural, economic, political context in Germany, as this is where we are at the moment.

However we are definitely not the very best (resourced) researchers. Writing after work or in winter breaks with dirt under our fingernails.

So digging out more numbers etc we leave to people with more capacities (comrade-academics and comrade-journalists and of course some liberal NGOs are doing a good job in collecting data, as you can notice in our references). Still we want to share a few remarks and thoughts on some topics, where our opinions might be different to other participants in such debates. And where our dissent stems from our daily experience of horticulture and working class life. We wish this whole book to be a helpful contribution in a conversation among comrades and colleagues who act in the spirit of solidarity.

5 chapters in one table

	chapter 1.) Eco Village	2.) Family Business	3.) Hinterland Organics	4.) Community Supported Agriculture	5.) Collective Cooperative
legal framework	phony contract of non-profit associations	owner operated plus family members	manager operated tax saving project of owner	e.g. registered cooperative owned by customers	e.g. registered cooperative owned by workers
business	in total 30ha of land: grass, grain, vegetables, orchard processing	30ha fruit orchard & processing	30ha mostly fruit & processing	30ha in total 8ha vegetables	50ha in total vegetables growing
leadership	tyranny of structurelessness Nope	fear based	confused	distrusting	trust based
boss	Nope	workaholic - narcissist as hide	- random / absent; only managers	not so competent as leaders	informal hierarchies
atmosphere	resigned bitter	good among colleagues	resigned conspiracy stories	great team whack bosses	friendly good team spirit
health & safety	bad	bad	whack	so so	good
our wage as temp / seasonal	-> share economy	bullshit "deal" below minimum wage	12€ / h legal Min-wage	2300€ / month gross 40h / week	13,80€ / h gross
website	outdated	very shiny	outdated	very shiny	outdated
social media	X	very shiny	X	very shiny	outdated
reputation - in sector - with customers - in local "community"	low high high	high high high	medium high rather high	medium very high so so	very high very high very high
potential for worker's struggles	zero	almost impossible	almost impossible	-> possible	-> against market prices & wholesalers

Workers are writers too!

“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”

-Zora Neale Hurston

Writing about our work experiences was helpful to us. The writing was partly healing, partly very challenging. As it took much longer than intended and the texts got much longer and better than ever imagined in advance. The writing helped us making sense of our experiences and sharpen our observation of work and politics. Some ideas only came to us while writing. The online publishing put us in touch with interesting people from around the world. We were invited to a few leftwing events, even internationally. Sorry comrades, we could not make it to every invitation, from Ireland and France to Germany, Poland and Bulgaria. Looking back at writing the texts and publishing them, made our experiences more meaningful, as fellow workers and comrades can access the material and analysis now too. Hopefully it helps in our struggles against oppression.

There is a radical tradition of workers trying to make sense of the world by doing inquiries, which we think is currently mostly lacking in the Left. Beside some cranky Wildcats¹, Angry Workers, labournet.tv and NotesfromBelow² comrades (<https://www.angryworkers.org/2021/10/03/the-renaissance-of-operaismo-wildcat/>). For a more historical take on the topic tracing militant workers inquiries back to the roots of the workers movements in the 19th century we found Clark McAllister’s book *Karl Marx’s Workers’ Inquiry* very informative³.

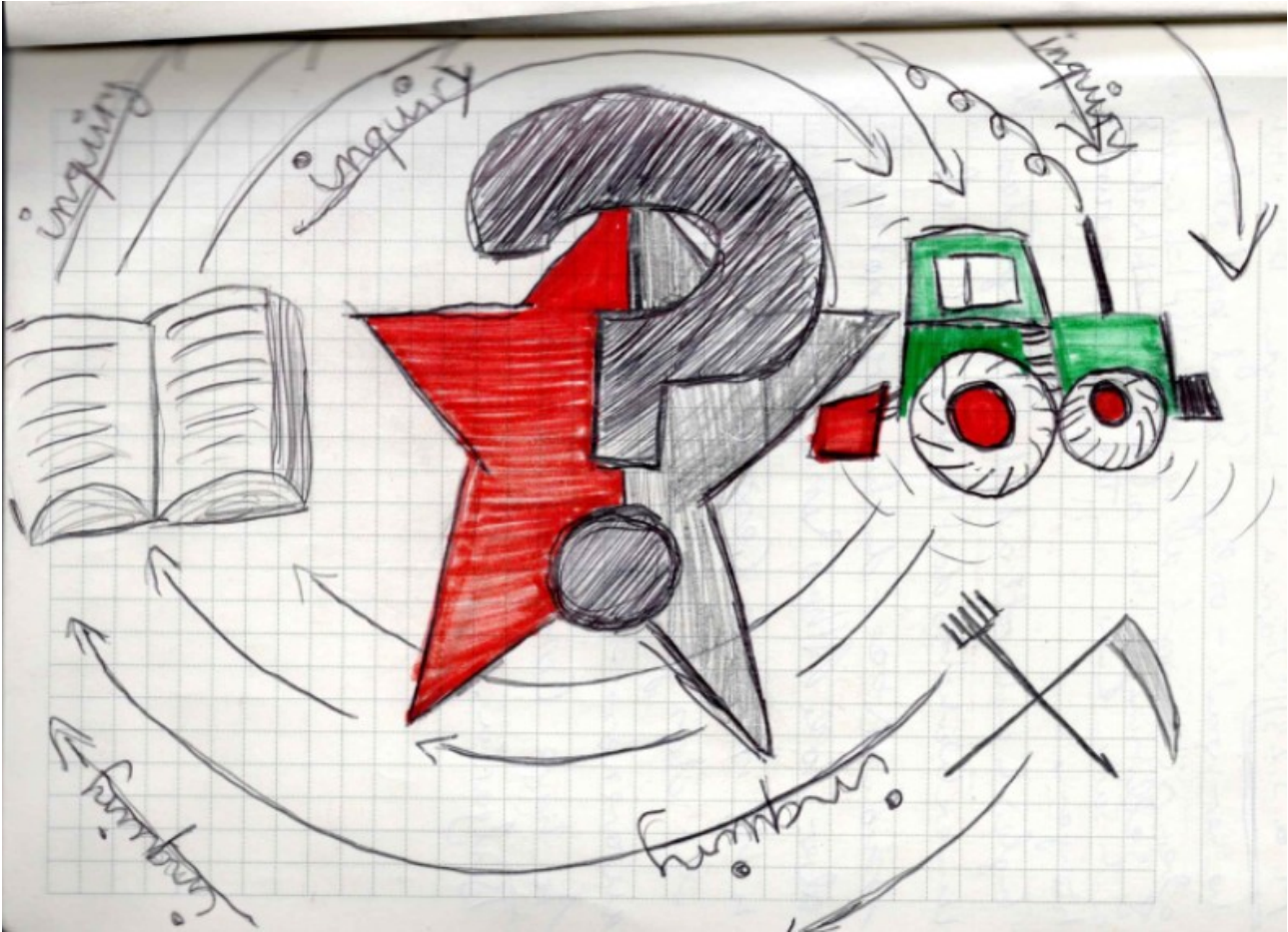
For us it is important that we don’t have to rely on the liberal, bourgeois media (although some of it is informative) but collect and share information and experiences from workers to workers first hand. We like being honest about the failures and shortcomings too. We do not need more shiny propaganda words about how this party or that union is going to help us, if we all join and pay our membership fees. And we like to make sense of our experiences ourselves with workers’ take over in mind. We want to make our voice heard. We want to speak for ourselves. We do not need the usual middle class liberal (academics, journalists, social workers, teachers, bureaucrats) to talk about us. We want to be in a direct conversation with comrades and colleagues, writing for each

1 <https://wildcat-www.de/> (accessed 9th of January 2025). Check out their collected texts on agriculture too: <https://wildcat-www.de/dossiers/bauern/bauern.html>

2 <https://notesfrombelow.org/> You are just great! Thanks for your work.

3 Clark McAllister (2022). *Karl Marx’s Workers’ Inquiry International History, Reception and Responses*. First published by Notes From Below.

other to put together the bigger picture. Writing is a way of doing so. We wanted to apply theory to our own experiences and let the practice again correct the theory and so on and forth with an non-dogmatic mind towards liberation.



Picture 1: Militant worker inquiry: practical work and theoretical reflection and research - How are they linked? (Source: own drawing).

Not all work sucks, though many workplaces do

Out of the five workplaces we were writing about, we only found one workplace where we even considered working long-term. But even in the workplaces with bad working conditions and a bad atmosphere, we enjoyed some of the tasks and we have had good times too. You can learn interesting things at work, about vegetables, about people, about machines. We also learned a lot about how to organise certain work flows, social processes, economic calculations and supply chains.

After all we can say there is no good reason to do unpaid ‘internships’ in agriculture to gain experience or to get involved in any informal ‘apprenticeship-deals’ that push you below the legal minimum wage be it as agreements with the boss directly or as wwoofing, volunteering etc. An official formal apprenticeship is a different story.

We got to know fellow workers from Germany, Poland, Portugal, Croatia, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Netherlands, Ghana, Romania, Georgia and Iran. We had great times hanging out with colleagues after work for dinner, barbecues, watching films, dancing or swimming in lakes, sharing hopes, worries and dreams, big and small ones. Overall the working class is as female and “diverse” as never before. And we do not have to travel the world as sabbatical-backpackers to broaden our horizons and to meet workers from everywhere and their stories, getting a job, does the trick too, on a budget. Overall the experienced work conditions branded a clarity in class consciousness in our minds. We usually miss this firm class consciousness when talking to non-working-class leftists or *critical intellectuals*.

You can live quite well on minimum wage

At least as long as healthy and childless, life is good. We even took longer times off to travel around for hiking or visiting friends. We earned minimum wage or just above it, but because we didn’t pay much rent and got cheap(er) or free food from our workplaces, we managed to save some money and still live good lives. The access to food was very different in our workplaces. Matter of fact the German tax law forbids companies to give anything for free to their employees. Supposedly any freebie has to be treated as additional wage and therefore taxed. Different bosses took this more or less serious and so sometimes we got a lot of produce, which was not fit for sale anymore, still delicious and organic. This way we cut down our own spendings on food a lot. Other workplaces were very strict – but not always looking so closely ;-). Especially in shit places, workers are ingenious about topping up their wages.

Another factor was the daily commute and housing costs. Living on site or in bicycle distance allowed to save more money with the same workload. Of course, living together (as couple or share housing) and being able to share costs, and not having children made this easier for us than it might be for other people. Also, we are healthy and are not putting money into a pension fund or something. But generally we can conclude that if you are interested in getting a job on a farm you do not have to worry too much about not having enough money for the season.

Doing physical work has advantages and disadvantages

During some physical work (the routine, monotonous tasks) your brain is free to think all sorts of things, to dream, to plot, and to plan. And meanwhile observe the boss closely and mentally map out their weak spots. This is in stark contrast to more high-paid white collar jobs we have had, for example working for an NGO, where I felt so absorbed by the job I could hardly think about anything else. However, whenever we had problems with colleagues, felt stressed or not appreciated as workers, the job was certainly able to occupy our brains too. Also, we are constantly doing new tasks and learning new things, which definitely requires a lot of brain power. At the moment, our work mostly makes us feel fit and healthy. When looking at some of our older colleagues, who suffer from all sorts of injuries and whose bodies seem worn out, we are reminded that this might not last forever and that it is important to take proper care of our bodies. Still we wonder if decades of agricultural work are worse than spending decades in an office chair on your physical health and mental health? And we skipped a whole lot of bullshit around pursuing careers in miserable offices and other pretentious bullshit as networking or office politics.

No more time, energy and patience for after-work activism

Because of the full-time, physical work, we had little time and energy or rather patience to do other political work. It is not only a matter of time, but as well of the way in which meetings are done in most leftwing activist groups: There is endless fierce discussions about countless details and very little practical output. I am just tired so let's get things done, cause it matters! We have to bring back politics and organising to our workplaces (on field). Guess what: While harvesting and weeding – plenty of opportunities pop up all day long, to talk and debate our lives, politics, wages and plotting to make our fantasies of a better life without oppression come true.

So for after-work meetings to be appealing and relevant to workers, they have to be short and focussed with practical outputs. As well there must be organised child care and a proper meal along with a warm welcoming atmosphere.

It's about workers' control

Our conviction that the means of production have to be owned and controlled by the working class were confirmed through our work experiences. Our experiences show that 'alternative projects' that are not based on workers' control, like the eco village and the CSA-project, make a lot of noise (in their area, social media and liberal media). Though we still think they are worth supporting to different extents, they fail to live up to (all) their promises. The decisions about the workplace have

to be taken by the workers themselves, they cannot be outsourced to managers or consumers. Put simply a decision turns out differently when those who have to put up with it and do the work have a big say in it. So this is the workers. And this is very fundamental to practical democracy that those affected have a relevant say in the decision making process.

Finding weak points to pressure the bosses

Already after just a few months of working in a workplace, it is possible to find weak spots. To know those is important so the company's bosses can be pressured to improve working conditions, in case of open conflict. At the CSA project, for example, they did a lot of slick social media marketing, which we thought could also be used against them. As they are very concerned about their good reputation in public. In farms with direct marketing, the farms' reputation is a weak spot, as they need that image of the good guy the hard working family business and so on in direct contact with their customers. This romanticised image might be challenged if word goes around about poor working conditions and lousy pay...