

Uprising

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More leftists need blue-collar jobs!

It is striking that very few leftists work in practical or manual professions. We learned a lot from our work on farms. It is very important more leftists get to know the world of blue-collar jobs and workers. Many of the advantages to working on farms we mention are not universally valid and working on farms is not realistic for all people. But we think there is a strong case for doing blue-collar jobs for many more leftists. Why hang around university or NGOs and compete with each other for lousy precarious temporary jobs and overpriced share apartments in gentrifying cities? We think (subcultural/scenester) leftists are often tempted to start a career as a *critical intellectual* where a lot of people are competing against each other. Ultimately, the critical articles, PhD papers, blogs and books those people are writing do not change anything. We have done our part to it too. If we are serious about workers’ politics, we have to be blue collar workers ourselves. There is a shortage of skilled workers throughout most industries in Western Europe. We can work almost anywhere, and many practical jobs (and the knowledge that comes with it) are very strategic. Of course there is useful strategic job opportunities in all sorts of academically trained jobs too: Engineers, doctors, teachers and lawyers are just a few examples of skillsets, useful for working class movements. If taken on by comrades with sound politics, who know which side they are on. Still historical evidence so far suggests that those job groups have rarely taken the lead in fighting against oppression and for emancipation¹.

The saying that we should “be the change we want to see in the world”² is nonsense. Big capitalist corporations will not stop destroying the planet just because we change our lifestyles or set up small

1 Extensively those topics are discussed for example in this book: Staughton Lynd & Andrej Grubacic (2008). *WOBBLIES & Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History*. PM Press. Oakland.

“utopian” projects. They will stop doing this only by force, and we can get force by organising together in solidarity and dedication. And because capitalism relies on our labour, we have most power in the workplace. Strike, sabotage and take over workplaces to make them useful for people not capital. Of course that is a long way, and stupid saying alert, it starts with first steps as small as talking to colleagues and getting to know each other and establish small improvements in the workplace.

We need people who do jobs and have (or gain) knowledge and skills that is useful after capitalism. Not just people who work for NGOs and charityclubs that are trying to save the world. Stop living off the problem, by only talking about it. Get a blue-collar job! Or at least several internships or summer jobs.

With at least a little sense for observation this helps to understand and make sense of the world in direct confrontation with it, not from text or media. It definitely helps to take notes every day after work and to find at least one friend to team up with for such antics. This is how this book came into being :-).

Those corporations which are destroying the planet and peoples lives, are doing so, because that is how they make money. Shell, EXXON, Tesla, Amazon, facebook... just to name a few, are not going to stop doing so. Because some (paid) NGO-worker is “raising awareness” in the public sphere or liberal media. Nothing wrong with explaining why destruction and oppression are bad for moral reasons. Capitalism simply gives a shit on your awareness crusade. And whoever is the government for the moment gives a shit too. Accumulation of capital or put simply just making money goes on. For example if more people in Germany transition to eating vegetarian/vegan, the German meat industry (like Tönnies) simply increases exports to China. By the way Tönnies is doing an organic business branch too now, still does not change anything to us... So there is good reasons for certain diets over other diets that is for sure, however the change they cause might be smaller than many liberals and marketing people are trying to make us believe. For us it is a diet not an identity.

2 Supposedly said by Gandhi, which in popular belief is still the godfather of non-violent political action. Matter of fact this is bollocks! If you want to know it precisely, have a look in this little book: Andreas Malm. *How to Blow Up A Pipeline*. (2021). Verso books. Some comrades are actually university lecturers ;-).

farm's surplus go? Even though it might be a small scale super utopian ambitious project: The biggest share of their investments goes into rent → landlords or fuel, machinery, equipment, seeds... guess what? Most of it is controlled by big corporations, making money in the current capitalist conditions³. So instead of trying “tactics” that do not work since decades like *consumer choice* or *being the change you want to see in the world*... Let's rather pull together all our hope, dedication and dreams and get serious.

Towards a workers' takeover - Don't you know they are talking about a revolution

For us, even daring to think and talk revolution seems very abstract and far away. And even comrades sometimes admit they find it scary. Personally I find the status quo way more scary. However, we strongly believe that revolution is where we have to start! We do not know what a path to a revolutionary takeover looks like either, and this is not something two people and a bunch of their comrade-friends can figure out. But we firmly believe that the first step is to even dare to imagine a revolutionary workers' uprising practically. The Angry Workers have already done a great job here⁴. We want to share some first thoughts specifically about how uprisings will affect agricultural workers, and we are curious about other workers' ideas on this.

In case of an insurgency, farms will be faced with (international) supply chain issues. These problems will hit certified organic places roughly as much as conventional farms. The organic ones overall have smaller shares of external inputs. But they are far from self-sufficient. The vast majority of farms still operate conventionally. They are heavily reliant on external inputs such as fossil fuel-based fertilisers, fuel and pesticides or additionally bought fodder etc. Even though organic farms are not dependent on fossil fuel based pesticides, they are generally more reliant on fuel for vehicles than conventional farms. In a transitional phase, we will still depend on these inputs and will have to safeguard their supply. Then, we will have to put a lot of effort into transitioning the agricultural sector to at least organic standards. As this is less energy intense and environmentally less harmful.

3 For the nerdy ones: Old Freddie and Karl described this already very extensively in their work. A whole lot of the *Communist Manifesto* is simply about making this point. So no big news here. Really.

4 **Angry Workers book Class Power on Zero Hours (2020) p. 353 and** <https://www.angryworkers.org/2016/08/29/insurrection-and-production/> Or as pdf: <https://archive.org/details/angry-workers-insurrection-and-production>

This means that, as revolutionary farmworkers, we need to start establishing links to workers in companies that produce fertilisers, machines, beneficial insects, IT systems for GPS tractors, spare parts for tractors, irrigation systems, greenhouses, solar panels etc. We also need to start establishing links to agricultural workers and suppliers in other countries. We need to learn from historical examples about huge-scale transitions to a more a sustainable agricultural sector. We need to study *truly* sustainable agricultural practices all over the world and try them out on a big scale. This realm travels under many different names, but beware some of the actual doings under those labels by different agents are just greenwashing or bollocks: Sustainable, agroecology, agroforestry, permaculture, regenerative, organic... just to name a few. And of course we must be honest about successes, failures and mixed results in historical case studies

Just to drop a few buzzwords: Agriculture in the Soviet Union in the 20th century, transition in Cuba in the 1990ies, countless examples of ancient and/or indigenous practices all over the world and how they got destroyed or pushed underground by colonialism. However resistant people preserved a whole lot of skills and knowledge all around the world regarding specific local contexts.

After an urban workers' uprising, an important question will be: who is going to challenge the property relations in the rural areas and how will this happen? We guess a lot will depend on the particular social dynamics and social ties in the local town. For example, in one of the companies we worked for, the landlord-family who owns the land and farm will probably be the main problem. This family (one of them is an active member in the local Green party) runs their own conventional farm, next door to the organic company. And they will still want to get rent. In another workplace the boss was a conservative party member of the town's council with many contacts to other local shopkeepers.

What can we do right now?

In our experience, there is no blueprint of a workplace that presents the ultimate answer to all the ecological and social issues of the current capitalist-industrial food system. A practical policy change we can demand right now is improving the working conditions of agricultural workers: Having proper health and safety equipment, being paid on time and correctly (Yes it is that bad – no surprise revolution sounds impossible), less heavy lifting, sufficient sun screen and hats for free etc.

In Germany, this would entail enforcing the minimum wage for seasonal workers without exceptions and minimum legal requirements on working hours, sick leave, health and safety ...

Another interesting policy demand might be an implementation of certified-EU-organic-standards on all farms. This would imply big programmes of training and preparation for the farmers and farmworkers and there needs to be a market for it, beyond the price dumping supermarkets and discounters, otherwise smaller and middle-sized agriculturalists will simply go bankrupt.

It is in all workers' interests not to have to work with toxic substances (pesticide spraying etc), so it might be a very hands-on and practical stepping stone to reduce usage of toxic substances enormously in comparison to contemporary conventional practices. All landworkers in all conditions and countries will have a common point of reference in staying healthy and not getting exposed to pesticides. This might be a popular reform demand many workers and comrades can support for their own advantage. On top of that, consumers, liberal allies, environmentalists and green parties can probably agree on it too. Beside that sometimes the EU has funny policy ideas about capping pesticide use.

We have to talk about agriculture's reliance on fossil fuels (and energy input in general: fuels, heating, diesel, fertilisers, seeds...). This topic has become more prominent in the mass media since the war in Ukraine started in 2022.

Organic is not a luxury but only reasonable

In organic food, we are partially paying for costs that are *externalised* in conventional agriculture. *Externalised* – is just a capitalist or economist euphemism, for making someone else pay to raise the own profit margin. In the mid-to-long-term, a lot of us workers will be paying for those externalised costs with our health and money (for example in the form of taxes). Stressing this point could be a way of making organic food and organic production more appealing to a broader public. We have no idea how much government bureaucracy is busy with monitoring nitrate remnants from fertilisers in ground water. Even the official horticultural apprentice training book admits, that there is rarely any knowledge on the long term impacts of pesticides and herbicides on humans or the environment. Maybe because the results would be to inconvenient.

We are not going to leave healthy organic food to hippies, new age yogis and rich consumers⁵. Who is growing the food? Who is working the land? To whom does it belong? The landlords or the workers?

Finally, we want to recommend two more texts which have a lot to say on the close relations between society and nature rooted in decent workers' communist aspirations: We found both of them helpful in the writing process of this book, although we are not quoting them directly. They help seeing the bigger picture: *The Habitable Earth: biodiversity, society and rewilding* published in 2021 by Ian Rappel⁶. And less optimistic *The Tragedy of the Worker* by the Salvage Collective⁷.

“Don't you know, They are talking about revolution”

Tracy Chapman was right. And don't you get the irony when this song is played in the radio while doing grocery shopping in a random supermarket? It just provokes to start looting that shop. What else should we be doing. Giving in? Giving up? Keep trying.

But when the loot is eaten up, so after two to three days, we are going to need skilled workers growing food all over the country.

If you love this world or „nature“ or care about your children. Let us invite you to take yourself and your feelings even more serious and join us in doing something about it.

Looking forward to see you on the fields, at the union meetings, in the countless conversations and infinite attempts to get ourselves organised. You are most welcome. Sorry there is no shortcut and nobody else is going to do it. We need class based organisation and movements within the agricultural sector and in society at large. Without uncompromising class politics we are not getting anywhere, neither in the workplace nor after work.

Love and Solidarity to all fellow comrades, colleagues and friends, never walk alone

5 Episode 11 of this podcast makes has few things to say on this in the second half: <https://gemeinsam-gegen-die-tierindustrie.org/podcast/> (accessed 9th of January 2025).

6 <https://isj.org.uk/the-habitable-earth/> (accessed 9th of January 2025).

7 <https://www.versobooks.com/products/2738-the-tragedy-of-the-worker>. Published in 2021 by Verso books.