



TIE-Netherlands is committed to developing and strengthening an independent and democratic labour movement by providing education, support and advice to union activists. TIE-Netherlands facilitates projects in a number of countries and regions in cooperation with its network partners and other local organisations (trade unions and grassroots organisations). In the Netherlands, TIE works closely with FNV Unions but also other labour and human rights organisations. TIE seeks the active participation of Dutch union members in its projects, and stimulates the exchange of ideas and experiences to improve the practice of trade unions, in the Netherlands and in other countries.

TIE considers structural poverty to be mainly a political problem, not just an economic one. TIE believes that poverty is caused by unequal power relations and that a strong labour movement, should be capable of addressing these disparities. The labour movement must organise workers at the

work place and diligently defend their interests in order to successfully tackle societal inequalities.

TIE believes that a democratic trade union should have a democratic decision-making structure, including a democratic election of its representatives. It should provide a transparent flow of information and effective mechanisms of control to all workers/members. A trade union must defend the interests of all workers equally, irrespective of his/her social status, job function, educational level, type of labour contract, gender, sexual preference, age, handicap, or union membership status.

In terms of methodology, TIE is known for its innovative 'bottom up' approach. Workers should have a strong organisation on the work floor in order to efficiently formulate and negotiate practical demands and to challenge undemocratic union structures. The TIE-network sets up projects with local partner organisations that involve:

- Training of workers and union representatives
- Exchange of ideas and experiences between workers, and with representatives from various countries (including the Netherlands)



- Collective development and implementation of innovative union strategies

To fulfil its task of strengthening a democratic labour movement on a global scale, TIE focuses on the following issues:

- Strengthening the position of youth, women and LGBT- workers at the workplace and within the unions.
- Strengthening the position of workers in free trade zones
- Corporate social responsibility from a worker's perspective
- Strengthening international solidarity between workers; for example, through social media

TIE and its partners are active in a large number of countries, including Morocco, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Honduras, Guatemala, Turkey, Belarus, Russia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Cambodia.

PROJECTS: EXAMPLES

Free Trade zones

Several TIE projects deal with the question of free trade zones. During the last few decades an increasing amount of industrial

production has moved from the West to other countries. Large multinationals, as well as smaller producers, go to where they find the lowest production costs and wages. Certain sectors, such as the textile industry, fish and seafood processing, and assembly work in the electronics and car-parts industries, employ mainly women and young people who work in precarious conditions. The desire of governments to create the most 'attractive' investment climate in these zones means that there is little, if any, control on labour conditions and workers and trade union rights are often violated. Accordingly, very few workers in these zones are organised. TIE, together with local partners and Dutch labour unions, supports the workers in free trade zones in various countries who are not, or who struggle to be, organised.

Gender in Belarus

The TIE project to support democratic unions in Belarus also concentrates on reinforcing the position of women – and female leadership – in the independent and democratic labour union BKDP. It does so by supporting seminars about (self-)realisation, rights, useful skills and strategic decision-making. In 2006 the first meeting took place between the BKDP, FNV Bondgenoten (the largest Dutch labour union) and TIE-Netherlands, in which a



group of women (from Belarus) also participated. As a result, the women started to realise that certain issues are more important to them than to their male counterparts, and that these issues will never be dealt with unless women themselves become more active in the union. They are now working hard to make this a reality.

Mutual learning and international cooperation between union activists

The organising work by active union members on the work floor is always a central issue in TIE's projects. Employees have the most practical and relevant knowledge about their daily work and their unions. Peer-to-peer exchanges are invaluable and inspirational. They encourage workers to invent collective strategies to challenge labour conditions. Knowledge exchanges between union members are particularly effective in multinationals and between workers of the same sector; combining the knowledge of union members in various countries is a very good way to learn more about the company or the sector and is extremely useful for efficient strategy planning. A good example is a project in which TIE facilitates cooperation and mutual learning between workers from the

supermarket sector in the Netherlands and Chile (Lidl and Walmart, both multinational companies).

Trade union activists working for Walmart distribution centres in Chile successfully used the method of 'production mapping' to increase their membership and to strengthen their position towards the management. After being introduced to this method during an international exchange in Chile a group of Dutch union activists (FNV Bondgenoten) at Lidl started to apply the method in 7 supermarkets in the Netherlands. Together with their colleagues they identified the main issue for workers (health problems because carrying high pallets and heavy boxes), the number of cases and the health consequences that workers experience. After mapping these issues they presented a report to the management during an action which has been extensively covered by the Dutch media. The Lidl management promised to take steps to improve health and safety regulations, something which will be carefully monitored and mapped by the workers.



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