



IWA-AIT

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International Workers' Association ★ Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores ★ Internacia Laborista Asocio

January 1, 2016

IWA- A brief look back at 2015

Part One

International Solidarity Campaigns

2015 started off with calls for an international solidarity campaign against Orange, Citibank and Amazon, Manpower and Adecco.

The campaign against **Citibank** was called by the **ZSP** from Poland in response to their practices of discrimination and harrasment. Several workers are suing the company for differences in pay, for taking away work after paternity leave and sexual harrasment. (As of 2016 these cases are still ongoing. Citibank claims it is working to improve the situation with mobbing and harrasment.) Solidarity actions took place in Poland, in several cities in Spain and in Argentina, with protests sent to Citibank from all over the world. A couple of months later, a comrade from ZSP was taken in and interrogated during a protest and Citibank threatened to sue for defacing their logo. New actions are being planned in the upcoming year.



(Spain, Argentina. Below, Poland.)



The actions at **Orange** were called by workers who were employed in the call and customer service center in Salamanca, Spain through Arvato-Qualytel. People at the call center are employed by external agencies, which mean their jobs are precarious and they have different working conditions that those employed directly. A couple of **CNT** activists were fired for their activity. Actions were held in several cities in Spain at the end of 2014 and internationally in January 2015, with pickets in Poland, the UK and France and other actions and protests sent from a number of countries. The protests came before a court case against the company and the comrade managed to come to a satisfactory agreement, with the company recognizing the wrongful dismissal and paying good compensation. A second agreement with another comrade was signed a few weeks later.



(Spain, France, Poland)

The call for action at **Amazon, Manpower and Adecco** was related to campaigns of the **ZSP** union at Amazon, where a majority of members were employed through Manpower or Adecco work agencies. Many workers at Amazon had late payments, were underpaid or lacked elements of their salary, such as payment for vacation, sick days or time scheduled but with no work. As a result of various protests, around 30 workers received what was owed to them and both Amazon and the work agencies had to be more careful. Manpower lost its contract with Amazon, but later started to be used again. Actions were held by IWA affiliates in the UK, Slovakia, Spain, Norway and Brazil and also be other good comrades from Czech Republic, Croatia and the US. The union continues to work in the company, dealing with such issues, which fortunately are less common and trying to organize more people.



(Spain)



(Spain, Brazil, UK)



(Slovakia, Poland)



At the beginning of 2015 we also received a call for international solidarity against **Operation Pandora in Spain**. The operation targetted the anarchist movement and a comrade from **CNT** was one of those imprisoned. The solidarity campaign extended beyond the IWA, with many protests held by anarchist organizations around the world. Sections and Friends held protests in places like Serbia, Sweden, France, Germany and the UK.



(Serbia, Sweden, UK, France)



In January, comrades from the **CNT in Leon, Spain** also informed us of the firing of a comrade from **McDonalds** for union organizing. Solidarity actions took place in Poland, Norway and around Spain. The campaign was very short since McDonald's admitted that it had incorrectly fired the comrade and an agreement was made to pay compensation to the worker.



(Spain, Poland)



In March, members of the **CNT Metalworkers' Union in Madrid** informed us of developments in **Indra**, a company where several CNT unions are present. In 2013, two of their members were fired for denouncing the illegal assignment of workers but in 2015, two of the directors of Indra were charged, among other things, with perjury at the trials of these workers. The comrades reported that a major scandal was underway in Spain, with the directors of Indra accused of bribing judges and prosecutors. Comrades in Poland joined in with CNT unions in Spain in protesting Indra's practices with pickets at a number of locations.



(Spain, Poland)

In July, the Sections were asked about solidarity actions to protest the unfair dismissal of a **CNT** activist from the **Red Cross in Alicante**. Protests and other actions took place in the UK and Poland, with protests being sent from around the world. The comrade still hasn't been reinstated to her job.



(UK, Spain)

Although no international solidarity campaign was called by the **CNT** in relation to dismissals of comrades from **DHL** company, we note that the comrades from for a made actions at DHL all over Argentina to protest the dismissals and the practices of the company.



(Spain, Argentina)

Finally, faxes and emails were sent to the **NGO Dive Maky in Slovakia**, which failed to pay one comrade and has been harrassing **Priama akcia** and the comrade who have been trying to get this money. Members of the IWA Secretariat tried to visit the NGO but nobody was there, (or at least nobody opened the door), and protests were left.



(Slovakia, PA and visitors from IWA)

Some Labour Conflicts and Organizing Activity of the Sections and Friends

UK

During the year 2015 we noted a sharp increase in activity, especially against wage theft, in the UK where the **SolFed** managed to help win wages owed in a number of conflicts. Notable are the campaigns in the hospitality sector, for example in Brighton, with successful actions at a Portland Road cafe, the Proud Cabaret, Kitchen Porter, a restaurant in the Lanes, the Caffe Bar Italia, a pub near Western Rd. The comrades have been instrumental in the organization of workers in a sector filled with casual jobs and riddled with problems of non-payments or insufficient payments, among other problems.



The **SolFed in Newcastle** also won a wage theft case at a call center in that city. They also started a building workers campaign. They started by protesting sanitary conditions at one building site and the problem was quickly dealt with by the company responsible. The local in Newcastle also carried out a “Better Call” campaign to get more contact to workers who would like to organize and fight.



Italy

In Italy, **USI** organized and took part in protests against the Jobs Act. The Jobs Act is a series of labour reforms, allowing, among other things, for easier dismissals and giving the bosses the power to unilaterally change a workers' duties during restructuring. They also have to pay lower compensation for unlawful dismissal and fixed-term contracts were made more flexible. The protests included some municipal general strikes, such as in Parma.



On a nation-wide level, USI began initiatives to organize in the education sector. Among the actions USI participated in were against the “Good School” law which aims to limit the freedom of expression in education and in solidarity with precarious education workers.

The union in San Carlo hospital participated in protests against the running on the hospital, underfinancing and deteriorating working conditions.

The USI-Marche also protested against the working conditions in the cemetery of Senigallia, where there were also dismissals.



Poland

As already mentioned, the **ZSP union in Amazon** carried out successful actions against improper payments at the warehouse.

Comrades from the psychiatric hospital in Bielsko-Biala went on strike in a one-day action. The action was meant to be part of a national escalation of protests to culminate in a nation-wide strike of nurses which unfortunately did not take place since the main nurses union struck a deal with the government. This deal completely leaves out nurses from psychiatric hospitals, as well as workers on civil contracts, so the ZSP is trying to organize in this area.



ZSP also supported a strike of an independent union of nurses after 7 union members were fired. Support included help with forming postulates, solidarity work and participations in meetings with the authorities.

Nurses and local supporters took part in a national protest of nurses in Warsaw, which was to precede the strike that never took place.



The group of ZSP from **Atlantic** company also organized actions against that company and its dependent company, VIS, which closed up shops and left hundreds of workers and contractors without salaries or payments. Actions also took place at the bankruptcy court hearings and at the liquidator's. Dozens of workers have now received payments, but many others have still been screwed. ZSP aims to continue actions to ensure all its members are paid and to expose the shady activities of these companies and their executives, who are still trying to make business with other companies.



ZSP union in Warsaw continues a campaign against exploitation in the public sector, in particular against the use of trash contracts or illegal employment in firms awarded public tenders. This campaign has drawn a lot of attention, with the government adopted a law which would allow public institutions to include social clauses in public tenders but does not require it. Workers who were illegally used to repair public housing in one district of Warsaw, as well as to make repairs for a ministry, have organized themselves to get payment and to expose the practices of public entities, which do not verify the firms they are using.

In Wrocław, members of ZSP met with the CEO of OTTO Workforce at the end of December and are hoping to see a resolution of several problems of workers in Holland. The ZSP held a campaign against the practices of this work agency some years ago and OTTO has expressed a desire to avoid similar problems and resolve the issues. So far they have received a promise to resolve one important matter in a positive way, with a significant payment.

Russia

Members of KRAS Educational and Scientific Workers have been active in several protests of workers at higher educational institutions against cuts and deteriorating working conditions. KRAS has also been active in protests of health care workers and others against cuts in health care and in the social protests of pensioners.



Australia

The ASF has been trying to expand the organization and start new initiatives, for example in Tasmania. A Telecommunication Workers' Association affiliated to ASF, comprised of mainly mobile phone infrastructure technicians.

Spain

Besides the conflicts mentioned in the section about international solidarity, the Spanish section has been active in numerous workplaces.

Workers in **Alumalsa** organized in several unions went on strike in the summer for 12 days, achieving an important victory of a 400 euro pay rise for 2015, 450 for 2016 and 500 euros for 2017. The unions such as CCOO and UGT had signed an agreement early into the strike, but the workers voted in down in assembly and kept on striking. The agreement finally reached with the workers also foresees a gradual decrease in working days and a number of other points. The CNT later also achieved the annulation of contractual clauses which require employees to work overtime, making this now voluntary.



Workers from the CNT and other unions fighting against a redundancy plan in **Rio Madrid**, which cleans and services public parks, won a fight to declare the plan null and void. The union had organized many protests in this conflict and eventually joined the court battle to void the plan.



In the **Casa des Monges** residence, workers from the **CNT Sabadell**, who held a successful strike last year, have managed to get a wage increase.

The conflict started at **Ydilo** company, using direct action when a member of CNT and 8 other workers were fired, also ended successfully with compensation being given to the comrade.

Around Spain, CNT has been organizing in and picketing at **Phone House**, fighting for better working conditions. The campaign continues.



Other conflicts are just started and are still going on. For example, in November the **CNT of Gijon** started a conflict with hamburger joint **Tommy Mel's**. A comrade who was not paid overtime and stood up for his rights was fired. The union has been picketing the establishment.



Another restaurant chain that was picketed was **Foster's Hollywood**, where the CNT has been conducting campaigns for some time.

The CNT Vigo (now disaffiliated) showed the triumph of direct action, picketing the Bonsai cafe where a worker was fired because she was ill and wasn't paid. The establishment conceded to the unions demands.

Among the notable conflicts in restaurants and cafes was the case of Zurich Kebab in Salamanca where the actions of the CNT led to a settlement for a dismissed worker around 17 times higher than normal.



More conflicts from Spain and other countries will appear in Part Two of this article.

Other Protests and Campaigns

Many Sections of the IWA participated in numerous protests and campaigns, ranging on issues such as refugee rights, against state repression or evictions. A list of some of the protests will be published in Part Two of this article.

Repression

The USI union in San Carlo hospital was sentenced to pay a huge fine related to a leaflet distributed at the hospital in 2009. The IWA sent a donation to the union to help pay these costs.

Two members of USI from San Paolo hospital were also brought to court and accused of “interrupting public services”, which can lead to 1-5 years in arrest. We are not sure of the status of the case, so we assume the trial against the comrades is ongoing.

At the end of the year, the CNT from Barcelona and others called for a boycott of the department store chain El Corte Ingles, for their repression of participants in the March 2012 general strike and other problematic issues. During the protests actions, two members of CNT were arrested and dozens of others targetted by police. Solidarity actions were called by different unions of the CNT but, for example, in Madrid the action was repressed and some would-be participants threatened with prosecution under the gag laws.



A comrade of ZSP fought successfully as his own lawyer against criminal charges brought by BRW Sofa factory. The comrade was accused of criminal libel and causing economic damage to the company in connection with the union's defense of another unionist, fired from the factory for speaking out against its violations of the labour code.

A comrade from the CNT-AIT in France was put under house arrest in a racist and xenophobic crackdown that also targetted those involved in social protest. Ali's case was picked up by the mainstream media as a particularly good case of profiling and targetting people before planned social protests related to the COP summit.

More cases of repression will be described in Part Two of this article.

Other International Activities

As part of building links with other activists around the world and sharing experiences of direct action and syndicalist organizing, the IWA organized a number of video conferences to bring people together to share ideas. There were also some discussions and training made for activists in the Balkan area and Sections and Friends organized and participated in a regional anarchosyndicalist conference in that area.

Part Two soon to follow.