



Introduction

The following questionnaire was produced by the Slovenian socialist research organisation CEDRA (Center for Social Research). We are reproducing this survey, which CEDRA discuss at length in Notes From Below issue #23 *Infrastructure: Fault Lines and Frontlines*, as an example of workers' inquiry in action. Although focused on the experience of work in retail, the political framing of this inquiry can be utilised or adapted, and the questions it poses carefully considered, in any and all capitalist workplaces.

Workers' inquiry is not a static, formulaic tool, rather it is always malleable and open to evolution. While CEDRA's project follows the familiar lines of a series of questions, probing into the realities of work, health and struggle which shapes the everyday lives of supermarket workers, they also utilise the questionnaire to really push worker self-investigation into the social and political reproduction of the world we live within. As their italicised notes show, this is not a supposedly neutral survey just looking for 'facts'. It is militant and partisan. The questions, posed in dialogue with an interviewer, are intended to crack open the certainties of capitalist life and reveal the power workers have to contest 'the way things are.' Question 6, for example, gets to the heart of the matter: how does the unpaid care work which the working class is compelled to take on - primarily done by women and always profoundly gendered - shape our experiences of paid work, and possible avenues for organising. The desire to secure free time, space for leisure and the resources to actually live amidst our work hours, flows throughout and provides an image of what a collective, expansive struggle might be working toward.

The penultimate question of their survey (8c) is primed for political activity. All the sociological detail which has been meticulously tracked across the previous questions spills over into the necessity of action and commitment. If a fight for a 'common good' has been the guiding impulse of their questionnaire, then taking the leap from workplace struggle to wider societal transformation is the logical crux of this exercise. We hope CEDRA's survey can provide inspiration for all of us to keep pushing and experimenting with forms of workers' inquiry.

FEMINIST CO-RESEARCH WITH THE COMMITTEE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

[CEDRA \(Center for Social Research\)](#) is a socialist political organisation based in Slovenia. With organising and co-research methods we are trying to organise and politicise workers into a common socialist front. At the moment we are primarily active in the retail and care sectors: working closely with trade unions and workers in Lidl, Tuš, Spar, and other stores as well as working with a union in Fresenius and the leading care and health union in Slovenia. Together with trade unions, we are hoping to build a Front for the Common Good as a force for socialising reproductive work: public services of long-term care and other services. We are also collaborating with the organisations Ambasada Rog and Infokolpa in organising with migrant workers.

Exploitation by capital in the sphere of production:

We demand a higher salary, which should not be below the current statutory minimum wage. As retail workers, we are dependent on our partners and families, as we find it difficult to survive on our own salary. Economic dependence is a problem in itself: exacerbated especially in the case of domestic violence or the serious health issues of children or other close relatives. The company forges profits at the expense of lowering wage costs, which reduces the interest of workers to work in retail, which leads to a lack of workers, an increase in labor intensity, health problems, numerous illnesses which then burden the health system, and destroy and reduce their quality of life.

By being relocated to remote shops, workers are forced to leave their shop and temporarily go to work in another one. This measure is designed to keep the number of employees at a minimum and to put pressure on workers, who have to adapt to the new situation from one day to the other. The company does not need to hire new people, and the additional burden is borne by the workers themselves. We submit our lives to the will of capital. In the struggle to fulfill our demands, we also struggle to control our own lives.

Oppression by capital in the households (as the primary sphere of reproduction):

Why can't even domestic and care work at home escape the oppression of capital? "Invisible" work at home - from cleaning, tidying, and cooking, to raising and caring for dependent family members - is a key site that enables and encourages the accumulation of capital. When all

this work (which allows us to return every new day fit for and ready for work) is done in the "private sphere", and mostly by women, capital can absolve itself of any responsibility and involvement in domestic work. But if all of this work had not been done, we wouldn't have been able to show up at work the next day. Thus, work at home (place of reproduction) and work in the shops (place of production) are closely connected and together they enable capital to extract high profits.

If we want to spend quality leisure time, we need quality and accessible public services for everyone - so that "leisure time" is not devoted to reproductive (care and household) work, but could be spent as actual leisure time. → leisure time SHOULD NOT BE equated with time for caring for the family and the household. Just as socialising reproductive work is a step towards emancipation on the basis of gender, socialising the means of production is a step towards emancipation from our servitude to capital.

Objectives:

- Establish awareness of the issue of exploitation by capital in the context of production and reproduction.
- Establish a working group within the working committee of Red Tuš, which will deal with the issues of patriarchy and social reproduction (We subsequently make a decision on whether the working group becomes a permanent structure):
- Production of a research paper.

FEMINIST CO-RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE 2023

1. General information

- (a) How old are you?
- (b) What is your job title?
- (c) What is your formal education?
- (d) Describe your household
 - Do you have children (do they already work?) Do you have a partner? Who contributes more? Parents (do they help you out or do you help them)? - Housing (are you owners, do you rent; house, flat)?
- (e) Financial status & income (are there any loans, additional jobs, a garden etc.)?

2. Briefly describe your work process.

(a) **Would you say your work is intense?** (*Explain what we mean by work intensity*)

- (i) Has the pace of work increased in the previous period (e.g. in the past year) - are you working more overtime? During your working hours, do you do more things than you did before?
- (ii) Do you think that the intensity of work affects your well-being and health?
- (iii) Do you or your co-workers have health problems that could be related to your work? (*For example, musculoskeletal disorders, frequent colds due to work in the cold storage, the exchange of the extreme heat with extreme cold etc. We draw attention to the fact that the health problems that they list are due to their job*). Do you ever go on sick leave?
- (iv) What drives you to work at the given level of intensity? Why don't you slow down, make work easier for yourself?
- (v) Is it possible to do all of the work if you would work at a slower pace? (*What happens if you don't complete all the work you were supposed to?*)

(b) **Does the company move workers to other, remote shops?**

- (i) For what reasons are workers being transferred? (*Here, we are interested in the direct reasons for transfers, i.e. the reasons given by the manager: due to sick leaves, dismissals, disciplining, etc.*)
- (ii) How far do you travel when you are being transferred? How much time do you spend on the road? Are travel expenses paid if you are transferred?

- (iii) How does traveling affect your leisure time, relationships? How does it affect the (domestic and care) work that you have to do at home? *Effects of this practice on the worker. (Does the company take into consideration if workers have kids?)*
- (iv) Do you think all this additional driving has an impact on the environment? *(The environmental aspects of relocation are negligible, but it makes political sense to draw workers' attention to this aspect as well.)*
 - (v) Would it make sense for you to have a strong and affordable public transport network that all workers could use? *(We used to have worker buses so not everyone needed to drive to work with their own car, but 50 people were going on the bus at the same time)*
 - (vi) Under what conditions is a transfer acceptable, i.e. in what cases do you find it 'fair' to be transferred? *(This is where we need to pay special attention to how the worker perceives relocation, because it reveals the ideological framework of accepting it – is relocation a question of **mutual assistance, altruism or coercion?**)*
 - (vii) *(Possible sub-question that allows the worker to negatively define when the transfer is 'fair,' therefore within the ideological framework and when not. In the question that follows, we are interested in the mechanisms of coercion in the workplace.)* **In which cases should the worker refuse relocation? What happens if the relocation is refused?**
 - (viii) *(Possible sub-question if, in the previous question, the worker indicates that she cannot refuse the relocation. By doing so, we have shown the helplessness of an individual worker towards individual capital. By sub-questioning, we show that this helplessness is not absolute if the workers decide to take joint action.)* How could you and your co-workers connect to stop relocations *together*?
 - (ix) Why, in your opinion, is the company relocating workers? *(With this question, we move on to the broader issue of the relationship between work and capital; we are interested in 1) the interpretation of workers, if they have one, but at the same time 2) it is necessary to intervene in order to come to the issue of running the business at the lowest possible expenses for the workforce, which comes at the expense of workers' free time, the environment, etc., and to relate to the fact that 3) capital leeches on compassion, friendship, cohesion of the collective.)*
 - (x) How does the lack of workers affect you, your collective? Do you help each

other, do you work together? Why?

(c) Are you being transferred between different departments at your store? For example you work at the vegetables department, then you have to go to the bread department etc.? (We are interested in how management operates at the lowest possible costs for the workforce in such a way that the workforce practically liquefies and must work in all the workplaces of the shop.)

- (i) Does everyone do all of the different jobs? Do you need to cover multiple jobs or tasks at once, e.g. bread + shelf filling?
- (ii) When was this kind of 'multitasking' introduced? *(Here we want to know if multitasking increases over time.)*
- (iii) How does this shift in jobs affect your well-being and how does it affect the pace of work? *(Effects of this practice on the worker.)*
- (iv) What skills do you need in the jobs you cover - do you get training to be able to cover other jobs? *(The question is aimed at distinguishing between the 'liquefaction' of a de-skilled workforce, which constantly jumps from one generic task to another, and the acquisition of new skills, that is, the 'real' polyfunctionality of the workforce, which also strengthens its negotiating position).*

- (d) Who does the work if the worker on shift does not finish all of the work, if someone works slower than others, if they cannot do it? *(This is again the place where we must pay attention to the ideological framework of accepting the existing situation – is mutual assistance ensuring that the collective operates at the lowest possible level of employment and the highest intensity of work, the issue of mutual assistance, altruism or coercion?)*
- (e) Do you help others? Does that seem fair to you? *(Pay attention to where the employee directs their dissatisfaction - to a co-worker who has not done the work, or to the company that intensifies the work to such an extent that they cannot complete it. To show the possibility of solidarity against capital - if they come together when the work needs to be completed and thus act in favor of capital, there is the possibility of collectively resisting this and coming together with co-workers who cannot do the work).*

- (f) **Do you often get called to work on your days off or when you are on holiday?** *(If the answer is negative, skip to question no. 3 below.)*
 - (i) What are the most common reasons for calling you? *(For this question, we are interested in direct reasons for calling, i.e. the reasons stated by, for example, the manager: unexpected sick leave or other absences)*
 - (ii) How do the demands to return to work affect your free time, relationships, and the (domestic and care) work you have to do at home? *Effects of this practice on the worker.*
 - (iii) Under what conditions is calling acceptable, i.e. in what cases do you find it 'fair' to be called to work? *(This is where we need to pay special attention to how the worker perceives this because it reveals the ideological framework of accepting it – is it a question of mutual assistance, altruism or coercion?)*
 - (iv) *(Possible sub-question that allows the worker to negatively define when the request to return is 'fair,' therefore within the ideological framework and when not. In the question that follows, we are interested in the mechanisms of coercion in the workplace.)* **In which cases should the worker refuse the request to return to work? What happens if one refuses to return to work when on holiday? What are the sanctions?**
 - (v) *(Possible sub-question if, in the previous question, the worker indicates that she cannot refuse this. By doing so, we have shown the helplessness of an individual worker towards individual capital. By sub-questioning, we show that this helplessness is not absolute if the workers decide to take joint action.)* **How could you and your co-workers connect to stop the demands for return to work?**
 - (vi) Why do you think the company calls workers during their days off and when on holidays? *(With this question, we move on to the broader issue of the relationship between work and capital; we are interested in 1) the interpretation of workers, if they have one, but at the same time 2) it is necessary to intervene in order to come to the issue of running the business at the lowest possible expenses for the workforce, which which at the expense of workers' free time, the environment, etc., and to relate to the fact that 3) capital leeches on compassion, friendship, cohesion of the collective.)*

3. Work Relocations

- (a) Who really benefits from relocations, requests to come to work during your free time, not going on sick leave when sick; from minimum possible number of employees, which workers overcome by helping each other and by doing so doing even more work, to get everything done and to make sure that the work process continues smoothly? **Who benefits from the current situation?** *(The question is aimed at how capital leeches on compassion and mutual assistance. Ask the same question below regarding flexibility in doing household chores.)*
- (b) Do you feel that you are creating value and profit for the company through your work in Tuš?
 - (i) Do you have the ability to decide how to use the profits you have made? Do you think it is right that what happens with the profits you make as workers is decided by people who do not work at all and have not created them?
 - (ii) We talked about how the work you do, and even your collegiality and compassion for co-workers, benefits someone else who doesn't work, but simply *has* ownership of a *company* – do you think it's right for someone to claim the results of other people's work just because they *have* ownership (of a company, machines, premises, money for employment), even though they *don't actually work*?
 - (iii) Is it necessary to fight for a society where there would be no such exploitation (and workers will decide where the results of their work go and what needs will be met)?

4. Mutual Support & Solidarity

- (a) Do you think there is any difference between such mutual support and this support or solidarity now that you have come together as a union, that you have resisted poor conditions, wages, high intensities in the workplace? **Who benefits from this in this case? How would you describe such solidarity, against whom and for whom?** *(The question is aimed at the difference between personal feelings of mutual affection under the command of capital and class solidarity against capitalist exploitation – it is successful if it produces awareness of this difference)*
 - (i) How did such solidarity come to be, such ties of resistance to exploitation?

- (ii) Do you think that workers in other stores also work in the same conditions as you in Tuš? What about the students? Did they support you on your demands, on your strike? Would it make sense to connect with them and make changes together? What about workers in other industries? Who else has supported you? **Why connect with them?**

5. The problem of economic (in)dependence:

- (a) Would you be able to live and survive alone with the job you have? If not, how do you help yourself financially to survive? If you are married or have a partner, who makes more money, you or your partner?
- (b) Are you and your coworkers economically independent – can you survive on your salary if you are alone or a single parent? (*the problem of violence and the inability to leave a (violent) partner*).

6. Unpaid Care Work: Are you ever tired, exhausted by the work you do at home?

- (a) Do you take care of your parents, grandparents or sick relatives at home?
 - (i) If yes: Do they also benefit from institutional help? Are you hiring a caregiver or is all the work performed by family members? (*depending on the answer, the following questions are asked*)
 - (ii) If not, do you have grandparents in a retirement home? Do they live in a public or private retirement home?
- (b) Can you afford to pay for retirement home/home care for your family members?
 - (i) Do you have a child in a public school?
 - (ii) Are kindergartens and retirement homes still accessible to anyone who would need such services? (*kindergartens still are, while retirement homes no longer*) If not, what's the reason?
- (c) Do you think we would need more public institutions like this? How do you rate the quality of the current ones? What do you miss the most?
- (d) Do you think it's important to fund public institutions with taxes? (*What does this actually mean, how are public institutions funded?*)
- (e) Why are such public services beneficial to our society? Is it important for a worker who performs this type of work to be educated? (*professional staff provide health, care and educational services. Point to the parallel of professional staff in these*

services and the worker's polyfunctionality in the workplace. Education, care ... is also learned, not something that comes naturally to us.)

- (f) How many hours a day do you work at home? *(Do they actually do “two work days” a day? Pay attention to what they see as work.)*
 - (i) What do you do when you get home from work? Is this all that needs to be done (e.g. Do you deal with children and their homework, take care of your parents ...)? *(Encourage them to list everything they do at home, where we expect primarily household chores ... **If necessary, ask another question, where we draw attention to another aspect of reproductive work, which is even less often perceived as work - care for family members.**)*
 - (ii) What makes you want to do all this every day? *(Here we are interested in the motivation to perform reproductive work, that is, ideological justifications.)*
 - (iii) Compared to your partner, do you do more or less household work and care for other people in the household? Who takes care of the kids, cooks, etc. when you're on vacation with your family? *(Pay attention to whether a worker considers reproductive work primarily her duty, while other family members only “help”, for example, saying that her partner works a lot at home does not mean that he works more than she does, perhaps it just means that he works a lot according to the expected gender norms.)*
 - (iv) *In this case, possible sub-questions:* Does your partner work a lot “for a man” / more than your friends' partners or does he work more than you?.
 - (v) Under what conditions do you think it is acceptable for a woman to do more housework and work with children than a man – if at all? *(Here it is necessary to pay attention both to possible essentialist notions, for example, women are more fit ‘for this kind of work,’ as well as the purely ‘rational’ type: he makes more money, so we decided to ..., which show that his labor power is worth more and is perhaps even more insidiously ideological.)*
- (g) Do you feel that your partner can spend more time on other activities (e.g. paid work, socialising, rest) because you do more housework? *(Note the possible unequal distribution of work according to gender)*
- (h) Why do you do more housework and care for other household members more often than your partner? *(Again pay attention to essentialist and/or rational*

justifications)

- (i) Why do you have to take care of your family and your household? *(The question is aimed at directly given, i.e. ideologically mediated notions of care work, e.g. labor of love for close ones.)*
- (j) How does caring and general household work affect your leisure time? *(here it may make sense to explore what she understands under leisure: whether the actual absence of tasks and obligations or just the time when she is not at work)*
- (k) Do you ever get any rest? *Effects of this practice on the worker.*
 - (i) What does free time mean to you?
- (l) How much free time do you have? How do you spend it, what do you prefer to do?
- (m) Why do you think we have to do the housework ourselves?
- (n) What if you didn't have to worry about this work? For example, what if we had public canteens or laundry rooms just like we have public kindergartens and retirement homes?
 - (i) Why do you think such public services are insufficient or non-existent? *(Aim: to find out it's because they have a cost/price)*
 - (ii) Could the profits made by workers be allocated to such services?
- (o) Do you think anyone benefits from the care and household work you do at home? *(With this question, we move on to the broader issue of the relationship between labor and capital; we are interested in 1) the interpretation of workers, if they have one, but at the same time 2) it is necessary to intervene in order to come to the issue of business being performed at the lowest possible expense for the workforce, which is at the expense of the free time of women workers, the environment, etc., and to relate to the fact that 3) capital parasites on interconnections, love for loved ones.) (address: even domestic and care work at home do not escape oppression by capital. "Invisible" work at home, from cleaning, tidying, cooking, raising and caring for dependent family members ... is a key site that enables and encourages the accumulation of capital. When all this work (which allows us to return every new day fit and ready for work) is done in the "private sphere" and mostly by women, capital can absolve itself of any responsibility and involvement in domestic work. But if all of this work had not been done, we wouldn't have been able to show up at work the next day. Thus, work at home (place of reproduction) and work in the shops (place of production) are closely connected and together they enable capital to extract high profits).*
- (p) As we have previously talked about solidarity as resistance in the workplace, can

you imagine that something like this could happen among households?

7. Demands

- (a) What could be the demands that would benefit you and your co-workers and other working-class households, especially women, and would ensure quality of life for everyone, such as leisure time (because we would have public canteens and laundries and we would not have to cook and cook and iron), equal opportunities, quality and free education and student dormitories, upbringing, care, health care, safe aging ...?

8. Organising and activities

- (a) **Should the trade union (membership + committee with DS for the common good) fight for these demands?**
 - (i) (If she is not yet participating in the DS for the common good or in the committee) **Would you and your colleagues join together and** engage in activities to try to fight for the demands that would improve the position of women in society and to demand a better quality of life for all workers?
 - (ii) Would you collaborate with other trade unions, organise protests, strike for the requirements for the common good, participate in the public care front (public, quality long-term care services), public canteens, public laundry and the like?
- (b) Do you think it makes sense to fight for a society where the work that is now done mainly by women in the household, and which benefits mainly capital, is organised in the way that other services in the public sector are now provided (where it is possible), is appropriately paid and directed according to the needs of the people, so that everyone benefits from it?
- (c) Do you think that we must therefore change this society where those who claim ownership, but do not work, also claim the results of the work done by others?
- (d) **Would you like to join an organisation that fights for such a society?**
- (e) *How did you find this interview?* Is there something we forgot to ask? Would you do such an interview with your co-workers, maybe in a small group?