December 2023 — Issue 1

Class Issue

Class Issue is a bulletin put together by workers from different companies and sectors. In the articles we are describing our working conditions. The first issue focuses on **the intensification of labor**: *is the intensity of labor increasing, how does this show and how does the intensification of labor affect our health?*



1

TUŠ, Ljiljana Jovanović
Contact the TUŠ union: mjanjic191@gmail.com; 070 509 570

The number of customers in the stores are growing, and with that, the sales. Because there aren't enough employees per shift, workers get transferred from department to department without proper training. Aside from having to shift among departments, we also have to work at the cash register when needed.

This way of working forces us to do the work of three or more workers. And that's how many violations happen: we don't take lunch breaks, we don't follow the health and safety regulations, we don't get the 11-hour rest, we work even after our shifts end. We also have problems with using our vacation days, because either you can't use them or you get called from vacation to come back to work as there aren't enough workers. We workers are exhausted, tired and overworked. This has resulted in an increased number and duration of sick leaves compared to previous years.



As long as we agree to these working conditions (such as taking on the work of two or even three workers), there will be no real change. The company won't have to hire new workers and the number of workers per shift will not increase. It is our excessive self-sacrifice that fills in for the lack of workers. Us exhausting ourselves and running all over the place greatly benefits the company and harms us workers. When we start working according to the rules and regulations, the company will quickly realize they have to hire new people and organize work differently.

2 **IKEA, Tim Vakselj**
Contact the Ikea union: tim.vakselj@gmail.com

The number of orders has increased recently, but this hasn't directly impacted the intensity of my work. **Since the increased number of orders is the result of poor organisation of work, it doesn't make any sense for me to increase my pace of work.**

Since the number of workers in the department is about half of what it was when IKEA first opened in Slovenia, the number of orders per worker is increasing. To put it simply, we are about ten to fifteen pairs of hands short. That's why "voluntary" work on Sundays has recently become very common. While many use them as an opportunity to earn a little extra money, it can mean working up to 11 consecutive days without rest. **In the long run, this of course also means more sick leaves and, as a result, even fewer people in the department. In short, it's like putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound.** My health and wellbeing are steadily deteriorating. **Since working three Saturdays a month has almost become a regular practice, we rarely have two consecutive rest days. One day off every few days (if you work on Saturday, you have one other weekday off) provides you with no rest at all**, because you need the first half of the day to recuperate, and then you can already start thinking about the working day ahead. Particularly problematic are the weeks when I work until 9 pm on Saturday, I'm free on Sunday, and then I start at 7 am on Monday morning. This problem could of course be solved quite easily if supervisors organised our timetables better, but our grievances about Saturdays are yet to be heard.

3 JARŠE KINDERGARTEN, Petra Koritnik

Contact the SVIZ union: info@sviz.si

If we compare our workload fifteen years ago with today, the intensity of work has increased by one hundred percent. **In the same amount of time, we now perform significantly more tasks than in the previous years.** In which ways does this show?

First, in the bureaucracy. Modern applications such as eAsistent require practitioners to daily and constantly communicate with parents, management and other practitioners. In addition, in most playgroups the number of children is at its maximum, making it impossible to also plan and evaluate the work at our workplace. We therefore deal with the bureaucratic work at home, outside our working hours.

The intensification of work also comes with an ever-increasing number of children who are formally recognized as having special needs, requiring individual adjustments of the educational process. A few years back we had two or three children with special needs per playgroup; now there are at least three or four per group. And at least three other children are in the process of getting a formal recognition of their special needs. For workers, this means additional planning and adjustments to adapt to the needs of these kids. But to do that efficiently, we would need additional pedagogues, trained to work with this population of kids, and developmental units integrated in the kindergarten´s infrastructure.

As a result, due to illnesses resulting from high workloads and stress, sick leaves are on the rise, as well as occupational diseases. This also increases the intensity of work, as additional work is placed on the remaining workers.

4 HOFER, anonymous

Are you an employee at Hofer and interested in organizing? Contact us: info@cedra.si

At Hofer, productivity and profits come first. **The total scope of work we have to do is the same as around half a year ago, but there is only half the staff working the shifts. On average, there used to be four to six workers per shift, but currently there are only two to four workers per shift.**

The interesting thing is that there are actually enough of us employed, which means that all the work could be done normally, at a normal pace. **Yet, due to the way that productivity is defined at Hofer, the targeted productivity would not be achieved if they put in more workers per shift.**

To be specific, productivity is calculated based on the turnover and the workers' scheduled hours. That means that they look at the ratio between turnover and labor costs on an individual day. If the required daily turnover, which the store manager monitors during the shift, is not achieved, she sends some workers from the morning shift home two to three hours earlier than planned, and

calls some of the workers from the afternoon shift to come later than planned. A textbook example: I have an employment contract for 30 hours per week and sometimes I am planned to work 8 hours per day for 4 days in a specific week. However, if they send me home two hours earlier each of the four days, I will have worked only 24 hours that week. This means there are six hours missing - I am six hours »in minus«, and I will have to work extra hours in the future to compensate for these missing hours. Thus, at the expense of achieving targeted productivity, the minus hours start stacking up which are »owed« to the company and the workers have to work them off sometime in the future.

Since turnover has been significantly lower lately, we have a lot of minus hours. That's why the company wanted us to sign annexes to our employment contracts, shortening the number of working hours per week. Making us work for fewer hours (and for less pay). But since we refused to sign these, as a form of punishment and pressure the company moved us to other stores around the country, which are much further away from our place of residence, sometimes even 90 or 125 kilometers away. This is when I took sick leave, because I just couldn't handle it.

5 LIDL, anonymous

Contact the LIDL union: info@cedra.si

At our Lidl store, there used to be five, six or even seven of us per shift, and even then we couldn't get everything done. Now there's an even higher turnover with only four or five of us working per shift. Our productivity is constantly increasing. We are doing 30% more work than before for the same monthly wage.

Because there's too few of us, we're forced to work during our lunch break, after and before the end of our shift, and without regard for health and safety regulations. Had we followed the rules, used our lunch break and lifted goods in the way that protects our backs, we would not be able to do all the work we're asked to do in one day. Every day we get huge amounts of products and everything has to be stocked, discounts have to be labeled and in between we have to run to the cash register and keep the shop clean.

It can happen that you come to work in the morning, and after three hours the manager decides that you have to finish your shift at another store. In this case, you have to de-stamp, go to the other location and re-stamp there. Travel time to the other store is therefore not included in working time. We all know that they shouldn't do this. However, we also know that if you refuse, the manager will almost certainly discipline you, because they need to achieve the targeted productivity. You will also almost certainly get angry glances from your coworkers who will be transferred to the other store instead of you.

Excessive physical labor takes its toll on our physical and psychological health. It is also hurting our relationships with our coworkers and family members. **A recent survey conducted by Cedra among Lidl employees showed that out of 88 respondents, as many as 78 (89%) already feel health problems associated with the high intensity of work. Among the most common problems are exhaustion, burnout, pain in the knees, spine, shoulders, and wrists. And also insomnia, foot deformi-**

ties and pelvic inflammation as a result of lifting heavy goods.

When you've been doing 17 years of such work in Lidl, you can no longer keep up with younger coworkers and the required pace of work. But you also haven't reached the conditions for retirement yet. That's why they give you a 25-hour work week contract to sign, which means a monthly net salary of EUR 640. The question is: how can you survive with that salary?

6 GLOVO, anonymous

Are you a courier for Glovo or Wolt and interesed in organizing? Contact: info@mladiplus.si

Delivery work for the Glovo platform is organized through schedules which are planned by individual riders a few days in advance. Through managing the workers' availability, the platform exercises a great deal of control over the workers. A rider's access to time slots depends on their »excellence score«, which is above all based on their reliability during the already chosen time slots. The system thus **mostly relies on workers whose income is based on continuous relation to this one platform.**

Since we are paid by delivery and not by duration of our availability, **our earnings also depend on the varying value per each delivery.** This value depends on the »bonuses«, whose factor depends on the predicted demand for deliveries during different time slots or seasons. In the beginning of 2022, the "bonus" factor fluctuated **between 1.92 and 1.95**, but in the last few months this factor has decreased and today varies **from 1.74 to 1.84**. Since the entire formula for calculating the price of deliveries is constantly changing, and the changes are made one-sidedly from the platform itself, the value of our work is in fact completely unpredictable. For this reason, in addition to other unexpected costs such as regular meals, holidays, loss of income due to accidents or illnesses, such unpredictability can put additional pressure on workers' regular payments.

These »bonuses« tend to balance the number of available deliverers according to anticipated demand. When the demand is higher, the value of the delivery also gets higher, which makes riders **compete for better priced time slots** or even **self-impose more intensity to their tasks**. **When the number of deliveries per individual is lower due to a bad season, a longer absence or an increased number of deliverers, we compensate for the loss of income by not taking lunch breaks, speeding up individual tasks or extending our availability.**

This type of organization makes it possible for workers to press on the platform through direct action, as was demonstrated by several union actions and strikes during the spring of 2023. Although the platform did not recognise the union, it responded with some benefits and introduced new bonuses for working during bad weather. But the small successes were short-lived, as organized delivery workers found themselves in a small minority against a large number of new workers who had not yet experienced the long-term pressures on the value of work. At the same time, sanctions for cancellation or failure to turn up for appointments were tightened in the autumn. **In the last two years the value of delivery work hasn't changed, which because of the inflation means it has slowly been decreasing.**

7 **TUŠ, anonymous**
Contact the TUŠ union: mjanjic191@gmail.com; 070 509 570

When Tuš implemented shopping through Wolt, cashiers got extra work preparing Wolt orders. After the cashier gets the Wolt order, she has to respond to it in three minutes and, regardless of the number of items ordered, she has 45 minutes to prepare the package. Speed is really crucial in this instance. The cashier has to send away the customers at the cash register where she works and redirect them to another cash register, then close her cash register or call for a replacement at her post. **Sometimes orders come during lunch time, which means that the cashier has to stop her lunch break and start gathering products. She continues with her lunch break when she collects the ordered products. It often happens that another order will come in the meantime, and in such cases the worker may be left without time to eat lunch or a break in general.** Sometimes several orders come at the same time and they need to be equally quickly accepted and prepared. It can also happen that in the meantime a worker also has to prepare a »quick purchase« (products ordered on the Tuš website). **Cashiers do not get any additional bonuses to prepare the Wolt orders even though they further add to the workload and severely contribute to the intensification of work.**



8 SPAR, Damjana Ajd

Contact the Spar union: damjanaajd@gmail.com; 070 411 334

The intensity of work slowly began to increase, which first became evident especially when workers went on holidays or took sick leave. In recent months, we have witnessed a dramatic decrease in the number of employees: in departments where there were eight of us, there are now only six or even five workers per shift. The departments of fresh meat, fish and deli are big departments with plenty of work, where there are things to be done all the time and so it is almost impossible to go to the toilet or take a break.

Another example of work intensification is **scheduling shifts in a way that enables the company to avoid paying overtime or extra hours. Workers simply call it "shortening of hours".** During the week I work seven hours a day from Tuesday to Saturday and five more on Mondays, which adds up to a full 40-hour work week. Since I work only until 11 AM on Mondays, my coworkers from the fresh meat and deli department work all by themselves until the end of the afternoon shift (1:30 PM). This means that beside their own sections they have to work in mine as well. Because of this, each of us has to do the work intended for two or even three job posts, and are at the same time also expected to fill the shelves. Other days are even more interesting: from 6:30 AM I'm in the fresh fish section: I take care of the pickup of goods, I load the fish, print the price tags, declarations and delivery receipts, then I go to the grill department, where I stay until 1:30 PM. Due to the lack of staff, I also have to cover for the workers in the grill and cheese department.

The third aspect of the work intensification is thus **multitasking - changing job posts.** At first, I found it interesting: the rotation is nice, there is a change in work dynamics. But it seems nice only at first glance, because **they want me to be able to know how to work in several departments. From the perspective of the company this means that they do not need a new employee. I come home exhausted every day, and continue wondering even after the end of the workday if I forgot to do something because there is just too much work to be done.**

9 SPAR, Katja Šalamun

Contact the Spar union: damjanaajd@gmail.com; 070 411 334

In the Spar Supernova Maribor shopping mall, the intensification of work is increasing. The reason for this is a serious decrease of workers and a growing number of customers. Why is the number of customers growing? Those who know the area have noticed a lot of new houses and apartment buildings. And even more are planned to be built, so the reasons are obvious. Since the work still has to be done, workers are more and more physically and mentally exhausted.

10 **retirement home worker, anonymous**
Are you a worker in a public or private reitrement home and interested in organizing? Contact us: info@cedra.si

~~I live to work.~~ I work to live.

It's not hard to do a job that you like. It's not difficult to work hard if you see a clear goal ahead. It's not difficult to put your job first if you feel satisfied with the work done. Especially if the satisfaction is measured in people's smiles. All of that is true. However, it's also true that along the way of giving it your all, you forget to ask yourself where you are and how you are. Do you still exist? If you give everything for your job, do you still have your life or does your life become the job?

How did you fall into this vicious circle in the first place? Because you're capable of doing many different things and they know it. Who will they ask if not you? You. Because they know you're going to do everything they ask for, you're going to do it well, and you're not going to say no. And what would happen if you said "no" after all these years? Would your boss be as happy as when you said "yes"? Would they applaud you because you finally took care of yourself?

If you suddenly said »no«, you would, at that moment, become the worker who cannot be squeezed to the last drop. You would suddenly become a »common« worker who does the things listed in their employment contract for eight hours a day, and who is not ready to do anything at any time: organize, make arrangements, imagine, write, design, call, take something over every minute of the day...

All of this cannot be done in an eight-hour workday. That's why you're thrown into the wheel of working overtime, which you can even delete from the register yourself. You give up vacation days and let them go to waste. Because you are in a vicious circle. Because you've already crippled yourself through these years and don't know how to act in any other way. Go on vacation, think, change your job. And start living.

(This is a letter to myself.)



Join the Class Issue bulletin team
write to us: **info@cedra.si** or call us: **+38631836883**