

Globalization from below

Over the past decades international solidarity has been an important issue for parts of the leftist movement in Germany and beyond – solidarity with the colonial and post-colonial liberation struggles in Algeria and Vietnam and against the military dictatorships in Latin America and the Apartheid system in South Africa. Since the 1990's, globalization critics around the world have been fighting an unjust global economic system and its destructive effects. The movement was galvanized by the publication of Naomi Klein's book *No Logo*, the Seattle and subsequent WTO conferences and through the World Social Forum and regional forums. Globalization from below. At first this took the form of demonstrations and protests, discussions and exchanges, but over time thematic and regional networks formed to take collaborative action. It was in this context that experts and activists from around the world met this week in Berlin to consider ways to implement the universal right to health – health for all.

New transnational coalitions are now emerging. Even just a few years ago it would have been unforeseeable that the presidents of three German trade unions – DGB, ver.di and IG Metall – would come together with the development organization medico international as they have in order to support the victims of the fire disaster in the Ali Enterprises textile factory in Pakistan. The catastrophe took place two years ago on 11 September and caused the deaths of 254 people, with 55 more injured. The compensation claims of the families of the victims in Pakistan are being levelled against German textile discounter KIK as the German firm was the main buyer of the clothing produced in Karachi. Initially it seemed as though the chain would provide swift support without undue red tape; US\$ 1 million was paid in immediate relief following the fire. But very little progress has been made since then; negotiations on compensation have been dragging out for months.

Those affected have now had enough. With the support of Pakistani trade unions they have established a self-help organization. Last week in Karachi my colleagues Miriam Saage-Maaß and Carolijn Terwindt spoke with 50 survivors and relatives. A mother who has not cooked at home since the disaster, as to do so reminds her of her dead son. A young dancer who had planned to use the money earned at the factory to forge a career as an artist. Proudly he shows his videos – all dating from before the fire as he has not been able to dance since that day. He saved the lives of many of his colleagues but stayed in the burning building for too long, suffering smoke poisoning and developing long-term lung damage.

Dealt a severe blow by the incident and yet far from helpless, the people of Karachi clearly articulate their concerns and their aims. For them, it's not just about the money but also a question of justice, of securing better and safer working conditions and ensuring that foreign corporations are held legally accountable. Of no longer relying merely on the moral argument but making use instead of their right to have and wield rights. One after another they tell my colleagues their stories and sign the power of attorney for their legal representation.

It's unfamiliar territory for all of us. But as lawyers we are also part of the globalization from below: the trade unions at home and on the ground, medico international, the Clean Clothes Campaign and the attorneys - the Pakistani upper middle class lawyer, the Italian compensation specialists and us, the lawyers from the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR). All of us are working together on the criminal proceedings in Pakistan, the compensation case taken in Italy against the auditing firm that certified the factory shortly before the disaster and on a lawsuit in Germany seeking compensation from KIK. Pakistani workers preparing to sue a German firm in a

court in Dortmund? Some German lawyers may find this idea unusual. But it's something they are going to have to get used to.