
Within and Against: Class-Making of Tech Workers in Berlin

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Abstract

Long considered an affirmative ‘labor aristocracy’, IT professionals across the world have been involved in an increasing number of labor disputes in recent years. What are the causes for tech worker organizing, and how broad is the shift? On the basis of qualitative interviews and ethnography, my presentation sheds light on class-making practices and organizing strategies of tech workers in Berlin, Germany. The study shows how tech workers have developed political self-understandings in recent years and how they negotiate their (contradictory) class position in labor conflicts. I argue that a shift towards social conflict can be observed in both the self-understandings and actions of white-collar tech workers. In Berlin, this development is intertwined with struggles around migration and citizenship. At times, this combination has opened avenues for coalitions with other groups, such as migrant delivery workers or housing right initiatives. Conflicts between organized tech workers and established trade unions in Berlin have led to difficulties, but also to experimental and more political forms of organizing that might revitalize the union establishment more broadly.

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