prol-position news

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editorial

This newsletter takes you on a journey through various proletarian realities and struggles. Starting with a sweep of several German factories it hits Citroen in France, continues on through various car-makers in Russia, Romania Poland and the Czech Republic, then hops over the ocean onto a Brazilian oil-rig, back to a strike at a catering firm and a Bosch-Siemens-plant in Germany and then south and back in time to the worker’s struggles in Northern Italy, and finally beaming to the present reality of one of India's Special Economic Zones in Gurgaon.

The emphasis this time is the current situation of class struggle in Germany and the specific situation and struggles of precarious (temp) workers there and elsewhere. In Germany we see - on one hand - the encircled collective struggles of the (old) core work-force, undermined by the new international division of labor and suffocated by labor law and the law obeying union apparatus. On the other hand there is the mostly individual struggle of a new generation of temp workers in the centers of accumulation, facing a stick without the carrot of permanent employment, turning back and board towards a wave of unemployment benefit and low wage sector reforms. But the cracks begin to show, when the permanents get infected by the disillusions and unrepresentedness of the temps, while the temps are recuperating the collectiveness of the permanents and the wage pressure in the East keeps on heating things up.

The first article, Misery is relative..., contains various reports out of the world of temp work in Germany. The text starts with a general over-view on temp work there and the official debate about the introduction of a minimum wage. It argues that the minimum wage is rather a measure to re-define the low-wage sector, to re-adjust the pressure on the unemployed and reinforce the general wage hierarchy than a charity action. The following part is a sequence of stories from temps working in industrial core centers, experiencing the hang-overs of important strikes (the major wildcat at Opel/GM and the small one at Gate Gourmet),
the incredible tedious sense of life in the electronic world market factories (Flextronics and Nokia) and the riff-raff of affective work on shopping mall and casino construction sites in rust-belt towns.

"...got the taste for it" is a presentation of a book recently published in Germany on a strike at the catering company Gate Gourmet (see also prol-position news no. 4/2005 and 5/2006). The book is a detailed and intimate documentation of the long battle and gives the bigger picture (global aviation industries and its struggles, international finance capital) as well as personal insights in the changing work-organization before the strike and the production of the strike itself. The book contains a long strike diary written by one of the strikers and many interviews with the workers. The documentation also sheds light on the scab-work of temps and the way that temp work was the main leverage for the fundamental re-structuring process after the strike, which brings us back to the initial questions.

Precarious, but not resigned! is taken from a Mouvement Communiste leaflet on a temp workers strike at Citroen in Aulnay, France. It seems like a contribution with the necessary bit of optimism. Temp workers at that Citroen plant kicked ass... and it was not their own. Particularly interesting in the context of the increasing use of temp work in the (German) car industry.

The Eastern blocked contains short pieces on the wage pressure in industries in Poland, Czech Republic, Romania and Russia: conflicts at Fiat in Poland, at Skoda in the Czech Republic, at Ford in Russia and a strike of Chinese textile workers in Romania. The dead-lock of class struggle in the West will not be unblocked without this kind of workers’ offensive in the East.

The other day in Cyberspace is documenting the chat between a Brazilian oil worker and a Berlin activist supporting Indian car workers’. The chat demonstrates the beautiful randomness of the proletarian use of electronic forms of communication. By the way, please, feel free to comment on, contribute to and use this newsletter, electronically or not, from your oil platform or your armchair, either way!

“We wanted to make history” is the translation of an article in the Wildcat-magazine on a strike at the Bosch-Siemens washing machine factory (BSH) in Berlin, Germany. [See previous articles on BSH in prol-position news no. 4/2005 and 5/2006] It combines analysis, chronology and detailed interviews around this strike that took place in a factory with a long tradition of workers’ militancy. The dynamics between workers’ self-initiatives, union rank-and-file structures and official (union) politics become most visible. Facing the threat of a closure of the plant the workers struggled with two main aims in their hearts: They did not want to save their jobs at any cost and did want to keep their collectivity. The article asks important questions: What could our practical contribution be in such a situation, and how can we support the elements of self-liberation within?

"Porto Marghera - The last firebrands" presents a DVD documentary and booklet published by Wildcat. The Autonomous Assemblies of Porto Marghera were an independent struggle organization of mainly chemical workers in this vast industrial area in Italy in the early 70s. Former workers activists re-capitulate their struggle against the damaging impact of work and industry, how they gave birth to the environmental movement, the question of representation and delegation, their quarrels with the unions and political parties, how they extended the factory struggle to the area by occupying houses or self-reducing prices, how they got crushed between state repression and (armed) vanguardism. The DVD has English subtitles and the English version of the booklet is about to be finished. If you want to get the DVD and booklet, see article for contact details.

After that you can find a short presentation of the Gurgaon Workers News. This newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region, where India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. It includes information on proletarian experiences and collective action [see also previous articles on Gurgaon in prol-position news no. 4/2005 and 7/2006].

Finally some links on three interesting Metamute-articles.

Enjoy the trip... 
...and pick up your dose of anger!
Misery is relative...

Tales of Temp Workers at Opel/GM, Nokia, Flextronics, Gate Gourmet and Shopping-Mall Construction Sites in Germany

Intro

There have been many formal or campaign-like answers to the problem of ‘precarity’ and casualisation. Instead of relating to everyday proletarian anger and its potential collective expressions, many initiatives merely focus on a spectacle or event to convey general demands. Demands for guaranteed income or global rights and the way they are put forward often end up as alternative background music for the debate of those in power. Employers, state representatives and unions in Germany are currently debating the introduction of a general minimum wage. They see the introduction as a policy to regulate the low wage sector. The following text puts these debates in contrast to the experiences of those who are to be regulated, the experiences of low wage workers.

The first part summarises the quantitative and legal development of temp work in Germany and the official debate on minimum income. In the second part temp workers report from situations in following companies in 2006: General Motors (Bochum), Nokia (Bochum), Flextronics (Paderborn), Gate Gourmet (Düsseldorf), City Palais Construction (Duisburg). At the end you can find some preliminary conclusions. The text focuses on the new composition of temp workers in multinational companies, where temp work is not only used in order to accelerate the re-structuring process, but has become an un-temporary part of production. The quantitative growth of temp work has resulted in a new composition, bringing together young and often migrant workers on the one hand, and older workers who were formerly employed as permanent workers in the industrial core sector on the other. This composition of people circulates within the main core industries, without being too afraid of being unemployed again, without any bigger hope for a potential permanent contract and therefore without major illusions.

Part one

Temp Work and Minimum Income

Temp work expands on a small scale

In mid-2006 about 500,000 people in Germany were employed by temp agencies. During the last decade the temp work sector has had an annual growth of about ten percent. In Germany, compared to other European countries, the share of temp work in relation to total employment is relatively small, about 1.7 per cent. In the UK for example that share is 4.7 per cent. The low number of temp contracts is less due to social conscience of German capitalists, but rather to the existing alternatives to temp work, e.g. temporary limited contracts, state subsidiaries for employing an unemployed person, special union bargained collective contracts which allow the employer to pay only 80 per cent of the wage if they hire a long term unemployed person. The manufacturing sector is the main area where temp work is implemented, and in particular in unskilled work in bigger companies of the electrical goods manufacturing and the metal industry. About one third of all temp workers is found there, because there the re-structuring process is the most intensive and the wage differences between permanent staff and temps the biggest. The importance of temp-work for the re-structuring of certain industries becomes visible during the ongoing conflict about lay-offs at European Airbus. About 5 to 6,000 temp workers and 12,000 permanents are employed at the Airbus plant in Hamburg. In the manufacturing department the temps account for half of the staff and they are the first victims of the current crisis, March 2007. [see: http://www.wswn.org/articles/-2007/mar2007/airb-m01.shtml]

In general, temp workers might earn 70 per cent of the average annual wage of a permanent worker, in cases such as GM (see reports) it might be slightly more than a third. Only about 2.4 per cent of German companies use temp work, but the us-
The official debate on a minimum income is not about improving wages, but about how the low-wage sector will be regulated in future

The conflicting arguments in the German debate on a minimum wage are not about the wage level. Rather they are about how wide the wage gap between the official unemployment money, Arbeitslosengeld II (about 350 Euros plus rent), and the average wage has to be in order to make people take a low paid job and about how to control and enforce this wage difference.

With the Hartz IV reform [see prol-position news no. 1 and no. 3, both 2005] the government already replaced income related unemployment money, which was based on the idea of an insurance, by unemployment money which is somehow a guaranteed minimum income which every unemployed person will get after one year of unemployment, regardless of their previous wage. Thus the first step was made towards a generalisation of proletarian income and the towards setting up the state as the official decision maker for the level of this income.

In most of the EU countries (18 of 25 of them have a minimum income) the ruling class expects the state to be the most capable body to regulate and officially enforce low wages in times of aggravated crisis. In Germany this is the center of the current debate on minimum income. The Social Democratic Party, SPD, and the union head-organisation, DGB, agreed in September 2006 on a two-phase plan to introduce the minimum income.

This plan expresses their will to sustain the alliance of government, employers association and unions and the official negotiation process regarding the low wage sector. After the 'political protests' against the Hartz IV-reform and more recently against the CPE in France the ruling class is afraid of 'politicking' the popular anger and of focusing it on the state. Their hope is that the state of the economy and of the workers struggles allows the holy trinity (state, capital, unions) to continue and to present the low wage outcome as a result of social partnership. In the first phase of the plan, employers and unions are supposed to negotiate a sector-related minimum income, which would then be legally founded by the state.

age of temp work differs according to size of the company. About 35 per cent of all companies employing more than 500 people make use of it. In other European countries where temp work is more common, the limitations of such contractual relations already show. For example in 2005 Spain got an official warning by the European Union because the share of temporary contracts was too high.

This warning was justified by the alleged impact of an disproportionate number of temp contracts on the general productivity. Modern industrial production depends on a certain identification of the worker with their workplace and with their future employment prospects. If temp contracts exceed a certain percentage the carrot of achieving a permanent contract seems out of reach. People loose their motivation, the sick leave rate increases, the productivity drops.

Temp workers get more mobile

Apart from the quantitative numbers, the employment biography of temp workers also changed. Particularly after the legal changes in 2003 (see appendix on legal changes), undertaken by the Social Democratic government, the average duration for which a temp worker is employed by the same temp agency decreases, as well as the duration for which the temp workers is hired to the client company. In 2003 only thirteen per cent of the temp workers were employed one year or longer by the same temp agency.

In addition to that the so-called chain contracts increased in numbers, meaning that the temp agency sacks the worker once there is no employment opportunity and re-hires them if necessary. This became possible only after the legal changes in 2003. This resulted in short-term contracts: in 2003 about 43 per cent of the temp workers had been unemployed before they got the temp-job. The average duration for which a temp would stay in one particular client company was 2.1 months in 2003, in 1997 it was 3.1 months. The increased mobility is also expressed in the fact that more often workers tend to be employed not according to their original qualification. In 2003 about two third of all temp workers had a professional qualification, but half of all workers were employed in 'unskilled' jobs.
This has already happened in the construction and cleaning sector. Only if this process fails, is the state supposed to fix a general minimum income.

**Test-Tube Temp Work**

The different capitalist fractions who participate in the debate about a minimum wage are still undecided whether and how regional or sector-related differences are taken into account when defining the minimum wage. Here the wage differences between east and west Germany still play a major role. The question is whether the advantage of having a collective contract in e.g. the hairdressing trade in Thueringen (East Germany) which allows hourly wages of less than 4 Euros before tax outweighs the advantage of having a state enforced general minimum wage of about 7 Euros or not. There are several union negotiated wages which are below the 7 Euros level, which is debated as a possible minimum wage, but of course there are several sectors and trades which pay more and which might adjust their wage level to the legal minimum.

Like the construction or cleaning sector temp work is a kind of test tube for the debate, given differences between areas and sectors are less distinct and given that the general wage level is very close to the debated level of a possible minimum income. Here the play-fight between the different institutions is the most intensive: after the government accepted the 'equal pay' directive of the EU in 2003 (see appendix on legal changes) the temp work companies reacted using a legal loophole. Basically they negotiated collective contracts with mainly smaller and so far irrelevant unions, exploiting the law that states that if a union agrees to unequal pay between temps and permanents, it is just. Before the legal change there were hardly any collective contracts in the temp work sector, today about 95 per cent of the workers are employed according to a union negotiated contract.

The first contracts were negotiated with the small Christian union PSA-CGZP. At first the main union head-organisation, DGB, refused to negotiate any contracts which would undermine the 'equal pay' directive and questioned the legitimacy of the smaller union to represent workers. After a short time the DGB too signed 'low wage contracts' for temp worker. They justified this step using the usual argumentation that otherwise the smaller union would sign even crappier contracts. Actually the wage difference between small and main union contracts are not that big (see below).

In May 2005 the DGB and the representatives of temp work companies agreed on a collective contract which might be taken on as a general minimum wage for the sector by the state. The main aim, which is to establish a permanent and regulated low wage segment, was achieved: the negotiated wage is only about 45 per cent of the median wage. Median wage means that 50 per cent of all wages are higher and 50 per cent lower. At the end of 2005 about two thirds of all temp workers were said to be paid according to the DGB signed collective contract.

The following numbers show that the wage levels do not really differ much whether they are negotiated or proposed by the little Christian 'bosses' union, the DGB or the state officials. In the west (east) of Germany the Christian unions contract pays 6,80 Euros (5,60) per hour before tax, the DGB contract 7,00 Euros (6,00) and the proposed minimum wage for the sector is 7,15 Euros (6,20). For the individual low-wage worker these differences might not be tangible given that in many cases people can apply for social benefit money which is paid by the state to top up low wages. In September 2005 about 906,000 working people received these social benefits, 280,000 of them worked full-time. In this sense a minimum wage would not change much for most workers in low-wage jobs, it would just change the 'wage transfer' between capital and state.

**Appendix**

**Legal changes in the labour law concerning temp contracts**

1994 Temp workers can be employed continually in one client company for nine months instead of six. After this period they have to be made permanent. People who were long term unemployed (more than a year) can now be sacked from the temp agency once the job at the client company is over. In all the other cases employment has to be continued for a certain period, i.e. about 25 per
cent of the duration for which the temp worker stayed at the client company.

1997 Temp workers can be employed continually in one client company for twelve months instead of nine, before having to be made permanent. Temp companies are now allowed to give people a series of timely limited contracts in succession.

2002 Temp Workers can be employed continually in one client company for twenty four months instead of twelve, before having to be made permanent.

2003 People can now be employed in the client company for an unlimited period without having to be made permanent. People can now be fired and re-hired by the temp agency. Before the legal change people could not be rehired within the following three months after being sacked. The German government implemented the EU labour law according to which all 'employees are equal'. Theoretically, temp workers could now demand equal pay and conditions. The government left a legal loop-hole, which allows the 'equality law' to be undermined. If employers and union agree on a collective contract then its terms and conditions apply, even if they mean that temp workers earn less and work under worse conditions than permanents. Consequently, nearly all temp-agencies now employ people on a collective contract basis.

[Sources: Dr. Claudia Weinkopf, Mindestbedingungen für die Zeitarbeitsbranche?, Expertise im Auftrag des Interessenverbandes Deutscher Zeitarbeitsunternehmen (iGZ e.V.) (Aktuelle Analysen aus dem Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung der Bundesagentur für Arbeit, Ausgabe Nr. 14 / 19.9.2006]

Part two

Low wage reality.
Reports from temp workers

The following reports deal with the working life of those who are actually affected by the strategical debates, the labour market measures and results of the negotiation ceremonies. The reports start with an overview about the respective company and the internal re-structuring processes and then describe the daily life reality at work.

General Motors (GM)/Opel Bochum

The Company

Since the wildcat strike in 2004 about 3,000 workers have left the plant in Bochum, nearly all of them 'voluntarily', cashing in up to 180,000 Euros severance pay [on the strike in 2004 see prol-position news no. 1/2005]. In August 2006 there are 6,799 permanent workers still employed. The strike managed to prevent a radical re-structuring process, since then this process continued, but at a slower pace and targeting only one department at a time.

The complete plant 3 (storage and logistics for spare-parts) was outsourced to Caterpillar, the production department for exhausts and axles was sub-contracted to the US company Magna. GM refuses to give permanent contracts to its apprentices in the manufacturing departments. Once they finish their apprenticeship they have to accept a contract with the temp agency Adecco; they get the basic wage of 13,50 Euros before tax and a guarantee of staying in the plant for half a year. After that they are only 'normal' temp workers at Adecco, their wage is reduced to 10 Euros and they can be sent anywhere in Germany.

In addition to that the management threatens with various smaller outsourcing measures, such as the security service. The following report describes the situation in plant 1 (final assembly of the models Astra and Zafira) in summer 2006. All GM plants in Europe are supposed to compete for the order to produce the Astra follower model (Delta II). In addition to the closure of the plant in Portugal and the cut of the entire night-shift in
England, the outcome of the decision about Delta II would be another plant closing. In plant 1 of GM in Bochum the management demands severe wage cuts and the outsourcing of the entire internal logistic department (which employs about 550 people), a crucial department which delivers the assembly lines with parts. In 1999 the workers prevented the outsourcing by going on wildcat strike. In 2004 the plant in Bochum was cursed as too expensive, in summer 2006 it is hailed as one of the most productive in Europe. The atmosphere inside the plant is rather bad. The collective feeling of workers’ power was weakened by the way the strike ended and fades further due to the individual poker-game around leaving pay (‘people are being bought out’) and the daily announcements of undermining the remaining collectivity by outsourcing.

The temp workers in the final assembly department are hired by an already outsourced company, called SCB (Sils Center Bochum GmbH). SCB is a subsidiary of Ferrostaal, which in turn is a subsidiary of the truck manufacturer MAN. In the GM plant in Bochum SCB has the order to pre-assemble certain parts (the inner lining, the glove compartment, parts of the dash board etc.) and to supply the assembly line just-in-time. In Cologne SCK assembles the front and rear bumper for Ford and SCR in the GM plant in Russelsheim pre-assembles engine parts. The pre-assembly department which SCB took-over in Bochum used to be a so-called convalescent department, meaning that it used to comprise easier work for people who were not able to work directly on the assembly line anymore or not yet, e.g. after recovering from an illness. People were blackmailed with the closure of the convalescent department and told that their only chance to keep their job was to shift to the outsourced company SCB. When they shifted to SCB those people kept the conditions inscribed in their GM contracts. This has the result that at SCB there are three different legal conditions for the same work: old GM contracts, SCB contracts and temp work. Even the hourly wage before tax differs considerably: according to GM contract it is about 16.50 Euro, SCB 13.50 Euro and temp contract 7.00 Euro. Along with the outsourcing of SCB the conditions of Adecco temp workers who were previously working in the department deteriorated drastically: GM used to pay a bonus for all temp workers, so that their hourly wage was topped up to 13.50 Euros, the lowest hourly wage a permanent worker would get. With the takeover in April 2006 SCB scrapped this bonus and 150 Adecco workers saw their wage cut by 50 per cent, resulting in 149 workers leaving the job or being kicked out after taking collective sick-leave. The huge wage differences between GM and temp workers become even more blatant if we take holiday pay, various bonuses and extra paid breaks for assembly line work into account, extra payments which the temps do not receive. The annual total wage of a temp amounts to about one third of a permanent workers wage. In the period from the second world war to the present day such an extreme wage difference only seemed to be enforceable along of racial or gender lines. In the main industries the struggles of the 60s and 70s washed these severe differences away, now they have returned and they are imposed by ‘merely’ legal divisions. In addition to the wage gap there are further disadvantages the temp workers have to face, e.g. during the three weeks of company holiday the temp workers were dismissed and had to apply for unemployment benefit; after the holiday not all temps got their job back. Or another small example: if people do not turn up for their shift it is the temp workers of the previous shift who have to stay until the management finds replacement, for up to two hours. Another disadvantage and difficulty on a daily level is the fact that the temps can be kicked out from GM immediately, from one minute to the other. At the moment there are only about 400 temps working in the plant, including, for example, canteen staff.

Compared to, e.g. the new plant of BMW in Leipzig in the east of Germany, this is not very many. At BMW 1,000 of the 3,400 employees are temps, many them have been working as temps at BMW for three years. Due to the combative history of the GM workers there are only a few temps at Bochum, but they are highly concentrated, e.g. in the assembly department nearly half of all forklift drivers on night-shift are temps. In contrast to GM the 150 outsourced companies that operate on the GM premises do not have legal constraints as to how many temp workers they are allowed to employ. As part of the competition for the Delta II
the GM management demands that GM itself should be allowed to increase the share of temps from five to fifteen percent.

The temp agency Wico employs about 35 people per shift, only for SCB in the pre-assembly department. After a lot of Adecco people quit, Wico got a big chunk of the order, so most of the Wico temps have only been in the plant since May 2006. Compared to Adecco it is a minor agency with about 150 employees in total, most of them are hired to companies of the automobile sector. Wico temps work at GM, at Ford in Cologne, at Tower Automotive in Duisburg (doors for Mercedes Sprinter and VW T5) and for Nobel in Essen (breaking-systems). During the job interview the Wico manager tells you that you might be hired to any of the above companies.

**Hiring Process**

GM and Ford demand that the temp agency subjects the job candidate to a German test, a second hurdle for immigrants. Apart from that no other formal qualification is required, although the agency prefers people who have assembly work experience. The job interview took about two minutes and ended with the manager saying: ‘You are now on the list, please be available, we might phone you in the afternoon and ask you to do the next night-shift’. And this is more or less how it happened. During the interview the manager emphasized that SCB wants to recruit ‘a permanent pool of temporary workers’. He said that it could be a long stay at GM, but did not promise a permanent contract with SCB, did not even mention the prospect. He also warned about the bad influence of the old GM workers in the department who do not accept the new work standards and quality measures of SCB. He made clear that they can get away with it, but that we would not. The temp agency Wico has their own office on the GM premises, a supervisor who visits the temps before or after shift, who takes care of complaints of either side. If you are five minutes late, at 5:50 am this is, he would phone you and inquire about your whereabouts.

**The Composition of the (Temp-) Workers**

Most of the temps are young, half of them from migrant families, about three quarters are male. Most of them have a formal qualification in an unfashionable profession, such as mechanic in the mining industry or building fitter. They are younger than the average GM worker by about ten years, but apart from that their composition is almost identical (in terms of qualification, migrant background, gender etc.). In the small department that pre-assembles the inner lining we are eight workers, four temps and four permanents. Apart from the foreman only temps do the night shift. A female work-mate used to work at GM with a permanent contract. She did an apprenticeship at GM, her mother had a corner-shop on the premises and knew the works councils, which helped her to get the job. She was then dismissed due to down-sizing of the paint-shop, worked at the counter of a bakery for a while, was unemployed and then got back to GM, this time as a temp, earning half her previous wage. A Turkish and an Albanian temp worked at Nokia mobile-phone plant before and were both kicked out because of problems with the foreman. The permanents at GM radiate a certain coolness, a certain tired self-confidence. Towards the temps they are friendly, mixed with pity. The temps who just started to work at GM are impressed by the dimensions of the plant, the masses of people, the huge locker-rooms, the info-board of the workers’ motorcycle-club. There are remnants of the old political workers’ fortress, which the plant used to be. Displayed in the plant there are quite a lot of union info-boards, shop-steward news, calls for demonstrations and meetings by the MLPD (Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany). People rant a lot against ‘them up there’, but at the same time most of them think that the plant will be down-sized bit by bit and close at some point.

**Work-Organisation**

We work five meters away from the line, preparing the inner lining for the assembly. We can see if the line is moving and we can hear if there are any problems. If there is any problem at any section of the line people can press a button and then a tune is played from loudspeakers positioned at the line. There are different tunes for different sections, so the department manager or the maintenance crew know where to go. Most of the time these tunes play at the same time, badly composed electronic
versions of old-fashioned children songs. Psycho. The work is simple; it takes about two hours to learn it and probably four days to find your rhythm. The temp workers are trained by temp workers. Once you got the rhythm the work is not too stressful, unless there are problems with the supply of parts or with the transport to the line. This is often the case. Meaning that you work more or less constantly. You take the inner lining for the roof, make sure that it is the right one (there are six different types), then you take cables, the spot-lights, foamy positioners and the electronic-parking-aid and stick it all on with masking tape. If you are stressed, the masking tape can get you into a comical fuck-up, a sticky situation, so to speak. You normally need three minutes per inner lining. Every fifteen minutes a work mate with an electric lorry will drive a wagon with ten inner linings to the assembly line, about 200 meters upstream. We are supposed to have two wagons full of inner linings prepared at any given moment, in order to be on the safe side. Because if no wagon reaches the line for ten minutes, the line would stop. This should not happen. There shouldn't be a wrong inner lining model on the wagon neither, nor parts missing, because things get pear-shaped otherwise, people have to run or cycle through the plant and supply the line with the correct item. This is why one person in the team is always supposed to check the wagon and sign for the correct content.

This job rotates with each wagon. After this worker the driver will check the wagon again and then an older GM worker stands at the line and triple checks it. They want to get rid off this worker, but that will be a tough job. There are rumours that the old bugger rejected a 150,000 Euros leaving package. SCB gets in trouble with GM for any mistakes, this is why they increase the pressure on the team; we are held responsible for the quality. To give the wagon a good check and to assemble new linings at the same time is stressful. But it is even more stressful if you don't notice that a work mate in the team forgot to stick on a foamy positioner, because he will be screwed by the foreman and then screw you. The SCB foreman tries to threaten us with the sheer mass of capital involved: 'We are supposed to assemble 370 cars per shift, so if you guys cause the line to stop for a minute, it will cost us 15,000 Euros. You don't really want to deal with that, do you?'. Answer of a temp worker: 'If I actually have such a responsible position in this company you'd better pay me more than seven Euros before tax'. Even a straightforward inner lining, whose production price will hardly amount to more than ten Euros, is the product of an extended international cooperation. The actual lining has left the factory (supplier: Faurecia Sia), in Poland one week ago, the spotlights were supplied by a manufacturer from the South of France and the cable is from the Czech Republic. Interestingly enough Faurecia has a plant in Leipzig, as well, supplying the BMW plant. There the union officially states that it was able to make 20 temp workers permanent and to convert all short-term contracts into permanent ones.

SCB plans to train all temp workers to drive the electric lorries, to organise the supply for the assembly line. The job is dull and you rarely have time to chat with anyone. The workers on the assembly line (who are all permanent workers) are not really up for chatting, which might be due to the work load, but also because the e-lorry drivers change every other day. And what kind of conversation can you have during one minute of handing-over the parts and fetching the empty wagon?!

The temps are also supposed to go to an unpaid one-day training for fork-lift driving. Maybe once the internal logistics is outsourced they will want the temps to take over these jobs. We have to sign a paper that we have to pay back the costs of the training, about 150 Euros, if we leave the job within the next three months. The high turnover is a problem and this may be a way of trying to tackle the problem.

The fact of producing cars, an alleged mass-product, without being able to afford to buy one, is strange in itself. The temps' wages are so low that probably even a ten years credit would not be enough to pay for a new car. This fact becomes even more absurd if you know that the automobile giants have to struggle with huge overcapacities; they produce too many cars.

At the same time we are supposed to work extra-shifts on Saturday twice a month and 30 minutes overtime every day. And for January 2007 the management announces reducing the working
week to four days, which would mean the sack for
some of the temps. Most of us are gutted: the job
is shit, but you can count yourself lucky if you
have one. It is surreal that grown up (wo)men
who keep the biggest industrial giant of the world
running have to be scared of these daft foamy po-
sitioners. In our team six people assemble inner
linings for the roof-part. The new model needs
four foamy positioners less. The older GM work-
ers are seriously worried; they know where it's at.
Four foamy cubes less means 30 seconds time
saved per inner lining. If we assume a daily out-
put of 400 cars, it would add up to about three
and a half hours per working day.

For some Mc Kinsey bastard this would be
enough to kick one of us out. As if the alienation
of the work process wouldn't be enough, the
management invents extra-alienations. Right next
to the assembly line there is a 'wounded car', it is
bandaged and a huge sign says 'mutilation par-
cour'. You first think that it is a kind of health and
safety measure or a warning for future street acci-
dents, but it is actually about the car and in which
parts you might hurt it. Every day an old fork-lift
driver rattles past this bloody 'mutilation parcour',
his neck and spine full of metal screws, he literally
broke his neck at work and is still waiting for
compensation from GM.

Conflicts

The permanents and temps take their break to-
gether, we sit at the same table, there aren't any
animosities, but our problems are of different kind
of intensity. The main worry for the permanents is
the future of the plant, the threat of dismissals and
the question of the leaving pay. For the temps these
conversations are a lesson in modern com-
pany management. They rarely talk about the
wildcat strike of 2004, but when they mention it
then they describe it as the main answer which
they found to managements policy. The next sen-
tence is usually about the fact that since the strike
ended, about 3,000 workers left the plant, that
therefore the situation today is different. The per-
manents have their coffee/fag-break together with
their worst-case-scenario, with the next generation
of industrial workers. The temps can tell them
how life is on unemployment benefit, how the sit-
uation is on other shitty shop-floors and how to
manage your life with 850 Euros per month when
additionally to this problem you have a full-time
shift-job in the German car industry. The perma-
nents are estranged from the 'don't-give-a-toss'-at-
titude of the temps towards the company and the
future of the plant. The main problem of the
temps is of a straightforward financial nature, the
low wages. At the moment there seems to be a
kind of material and moral limit of about 10 Euros
per hour before tax for young industrial workers.
If the wage is lower, it becomes the main concern.
If you earn 850 Euros per month like we do, you
have only about 150 Euros more than on the dole,
of which most is spent on petrol and increased
drug consumption. And then the growing uncer-
tainty of if and where you will actually work next
month. The rumours about the enforced four-day
working-week and unpaid holiday hit the temps
harder than the permanents. And the manage-
ment would not call the permanents at five o'clock
in the morning on a personal holiday and ask
them if they could come to the shift and replace an
ill colleague, as does happen to the temps. And
they don't phone the permanents early in the
morning when they are five minutes late, which
makes coming too late to GM feel like this...

...this sensation, still dozy in bed, the first attempt to
open your eyes, still frazzled and able to fall back into
the soothing abyss when you realize that the time-keep-
er next to you is right, that shift will start in five min-
utes and you are a naked twenty minutes bike ride and
three dream-lands far away from work, a lot of things
happen at the same time, various pictures, sensations,
thoughts, disbelieve, and then five seconds of panic: an
industrial giant with scrap-metal edges gears up,
comes ploughing through your puffy downy cosy
world, through the scent and touch of the other, the
picture of the cars' carcasses lining up to be filled with
meat, the rattling chain and a tiny link missing which
is you still in bed, a missing link with ripple effects, the
debts of the worlds biggest car manufacturer surge to a
menacing wave of dollar-bills, a black-hole of uncov-
ered pension funds, the general motor starts to stutter
and screech, asking for more human energy, for the
missing link, sends the foreman to the department
manager to the greasy temp agency amoeba who slob-
towards the phone in order to sneak into the warmth of
your blankets, naw! 'blow the job, man, get some
sleep!', but behind him threatens the sack, the job cen-

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tre, another dozen of job interviews with similar sticky personalities. Humiliation, silky muscles turning to sour flesh during the race to the plant, running through huge industrial halls, the assembly line moves in the opposite direction, nightmare sensation, you can run, but you will not get anywhere, mocking smiles of already working men, ‘this time it’s you, buddy’, patronizing wagging finger from your foreman, acrid smell of mercy, the shrugging shoulders of your mates and your early morning knees shake for five euro an hour…

All this results in a really bad mood amongst the temps. The rumour that all Adecco temps are about to be kicked out is the last straw. The permanents, even the foreman, suggest that we should ask SCB for permanent contracts. Or at least ask about what is actually going on concerning the Adecco people.

Kick Out

Various factors lead to a rash action, which end in a temp guy being sacked. The atmosphere is bad, people talk about quitting the job, the same talk in the glove-compartment department. When the management sent us to the benefit office during the company holiday they promised that we would all be back on board in three weeks time. Actually a very sound work-mate is not on board now, he is still at home, the management says that he is not wanted because he comes late and sometimes drunk. So somehow they don’t give a shit about us and we don’t about their jobs, or at least not at any cost.

Really, it is like having to pay for having a job. A common action seems to be more plausible than leaving or being made to leave. The idea crops up that we could all go to the SCB office during the fifteen minutes break and ask about the future of the Adeccos and for permanent contracts, at least a bit more money. We tell people in other departments about it, the electric lorry-job comes quite handy for that. Most of the people think it is a good idea, some of them go straight to others, spreading the word, some boast about bringing fourteen people to the date. It is two days before the date and the Wico supervisor snoops the thing out, starts to threaten people individually, saying that the action endangers all the temps jobs, suggests that we should talk to him and leave the Adecco guys alone. Because we work all quite spread out and are more or less chained to the workstation there is no way to get together quickly, to find some common answer. He asks for ringleaders, he really panics, and finally it is the electric-lorry driver who is on number one of his list. Although even the SCB foremen speak in his favour, the guy has to leave the plant and is not allowed to return. This result is even more demoralising because it confirms the opinion of the permanents that the temps are victims who can be kicked out in no time and who cannot stick together long enough in order to get something going. A successful action, however small, of temp workers who know about their position in the final assembly would have been an important answer against the general trend and a possible sign for others in less ‘privileged’ work situations.

Nokia, Bochum

The company

Nokia has been producing mobile phones in Bochum since 1989. In 2005 the plant manufactured 100,000 to 150,000 mobile phones per day for the global market. About 2,500 permanents are employed, over 500 less than four or five years ago. The screen-production was shut down and the complete logistic was outsourced to the company Exel, which now organises the delivery for the production lines and the storage. In addition there are many temp workers from various agencies in the plant (Adecco, Randstad, WIR, Allbecon, Persona).

Like most of the other companies of the sector (see Flextronics) Nokia cut many jobs in 2001 and re-located many jobs within the plant. There have been various ’political’ labour court cases, because permanent workers accused the company that they sacked people, when they already knew that temp work would be increased on a constant basis. Left-wing or critical unionists complain about the fact that so far it has not been possible to establish a union or workers group inside the plant which could have an oppositional position against the management. The existing workers’ representation usually retreats when attacked or else col-
laborates with the management. For example the chairman of the works council, Hammer, boasts that the works council tried to win over the Nokia management for Nokia to become the first company which implements the ERA wage scheme. ERA means that each individual work place is re-assessed and assigned to a new wage band. Most of the 'unskilled' production workers would have to put up with wage cuts and at Nokia most of the jobs fall under this category. About the severely controlled and pre-described work organisation and the very flexible working time Hammer says: "The creativity of our product has to be reflected in the creative solutions found for our work conditions".

At the notice board the union group at Nokia informs about re-structuring measures demanded by the management, allegedly necessary in order to secure jobs. Some of them had already been implemented: the number of temp workers agreed on in the collective contract has been increased from 550 to 800 and starting from autumn 2005, to 1,200. This means that more or less every second worker in the production department is a temp. All extra payments that exceed the general collective contract for the metal sector are cut, which is supposed to result in a 20 per cent drop in labour costs.

For a permanent production worker this would mean a monthly wage cut of about 70 to 120 Euros. The total monthly wage before tax is between 1,600 and 2,200 Euros. The working-time is planned to be increased from 33.5 hours to 35 hours, although due to overtime and extra-shifts people usually work longer hours anyway. The works council asks the workers to refuse to cash in holidays: because of the low market activity last year a lot of people have 'minus-hours' in their working time accounts.

The company is asking to compensate these minus-hours with holidays. The management threatens with official negotiations with the metal union about a 40-hours week without wage compensation (five hours longer working-time per week) in case that there will be resistance against further cuts from the local workers representatives. The works council informs that due to its allegedly weak position it will refer to the worse general collective contract, as well, instead of trying to defend the better 'in-house' contract. A very interesting, recent and detailed study on the impact of global mobile phone production on workers and environment can be found here: http://www.somo.nl/html/paginas/pdf/High_Cost_of_Calling_nov_2006_EN.pdf

Hiring Process

The local temp agency WIR advertised that they would hire people for a company assembling locks for the car industry. In the office a lot of Iranian, Pakistani and Syrian students are waiting, the agency has sent them to work at Nokia. At 2pm the temp manager signs your work contract and you can start working at Nokia the same night. When you listen to his phone calls or the conversations of the students you soon find out that a lot of people did not come to work today, that they have difficulties to find replacements. This might be due to the low wages; you get 6.80 Euro per hour before tax and no extra money for travel expenses. Fifteen years ago a helper on the construction site would not have received a lower wage, but general living costs were probably 30 to 40 per cent lower. WIR employs about 80 people per shift at Nokia, in total 240.

The Composition of the (Temp-) Workers

A lot of the permanents are female, in their forties and from eastern European countries. No-one has been made permanent for years. The temp workers are younger and mostly from Turkish backgrounds, or students from even further south. The permanents have a Nokia patch stuck to their working jackets, the temps don't. I would guess that 60 per cent of the production workers are female and 70 per cent with a migrant background. German men mainly drive forklifts. The temp workers have various working experiences: a single mum who worked on the assembly line at Hel-la (supplier for the automobile industry) before having the baby, or a young bloke whose parents are from Iran and who just finished an apprenticeship as a mechanic in a nearby coal-mine. The permanents refer to 'permanent temp workers', people who work at Nokia for quite a while, but who now are on holiday. The 'temp-temp workers' have to jump in, mainly students on university holiday.
Work organisation

The factory is well guarded. There are special entrance doors for temp workers, where they have to sign for new company ID cards every morning. The management allots them special locker rooms; each temp agency gets a different one. The control when leaving after work is also rigid. People have to queue up in order to return their company ID, some have to open their bags, and every fourth worker is subjected to an airport-like body search. These measures extend the unpaid daily working-time. We have to be at the gates half an hour before shift starts and we wait another half an hour after work to pass the checkpoint.

Inside the plant there are several huge halls. In the departments there are stalls for the various temp-agencies, the managers sit behind them and tell their people where to go. In the production hall the so-called engines are manufactured, the heart-piece of the mobile. The circuit boards have already been assembled somewhere else; the cardboard boxes with plastic parts have Chinese or Taiwanese signs on them. Compared to the assembly and storage hall this hall is nearly empty of people and full of machines. In the assembly hall the so-called SOP (supply operations) take place, there are dozens of production islands, an electrician who works in maintenance says that there are 50 of them. The various elements of the production island (a scanner, an air-pistol, a testing device, an automatic screw-driver, a packaging machine etc.) are fixed on two meters high racks on wheels. These racks are positioned in a square, inside this square - people here call it 'the cell' - we work. Permanents say that the company experiments a lot with the positioning of the racks. They used to have a straightforward assembly line, but in June 2006 the management introduced these production islands. In the company magazine they call it 'pretzel-like production lay-out', maybe because people choke on it, more likely because people run in a pretzel-shaped circle when they shift from work-station to work-station. Usually there are six people working on one production island, three permanents and three temps. Above their heads there is a screen with numbers for the production target, for the already produced mobile phones and the efficiency rate. Most of the time these numbers are on a red background, only rarely on a green one. The production target per island per each seven-and-a-half hours shift is 1,000 assembled mobile phones. The target cannot be achieved without major stress, the ten square meters small pretzel-laid-out cell-structure is supposed to make people generate this stress amongst themselves. Roughly there are about a dozen single work-steps, from single parts to a packaged cardboard parcel with five smaller mobile phone boxes inside.

1) put three small plastic lids onto the 'engine' and the digital camera, check for possible gaps
2) press the created unit onto the key board, check for possible gaps
3) put the joined unit into the automatic screwer and take it out after two seconds
4) put the mobile phone into a testing device and take it out after ten seconds
5) put a label on the mobile and on its plastic bag
6) examine the mobile for scratches, put on the battery cover
7) put the mobile into the plastic bag
8) put batteries, head-set, power-lead into a cardboard box ('inner pulp')
9) put mobile, user manual, two flyers and a CD in the right order into the box
10) scan the label on the mobile phones plastic bag and on the cardboard box
11) weight the box and put another label on it
12) put five boxes into a bigger box and label it.

These work-steps are supposed to be shared out and combined freely amongst the six workers. If you have a short break at your station, go and help out at another one. If the already labeled mobile phones pile up, you are supposed to help packaging. The model looks similar to the work-organisation at McDonald’s. The company magazine puts it like this: ‘At the end of the day everyone is responsible for the continuity of the process (…) and everyone in the assembly department has to concentrate on the one-piece-flow’ (Nokia People, 02/06). And it works, the people stress themselves out. While working together under such conditions with people from different backgrounds, origins and gender I develop an aversion against those people who talk about cognitive or affective work e.g. in call centres opposed to the temp work
rather unemotional manual work of the ‘Fordist period’. To create human relationships and to maintain one’s own emotional balance under such stress is one of the biggest affective challenges I ever managed to fuck up. As a reminder the foreman visits the cell every now and then and checks or complains about the achieved numbers. He also checks the toilet list, which everybody has to sign in and out from, and please only one person at a time. If there is a lot of work to do, and there usually is, people are not allowed to have breaks together, only individually, while the others keep on working. Once a month a manager visits the cell, she stands in the middle for half an hour, observes the work-flow and ticks invisible criteria on her sheet. Some people would name this behaviour (‘the henchman is snooping around’), others turn it into philosophy: ‘Since March Nokia organises regular Kaizen-Events (original in English - Japanese) in the plant in Bochum. The idea originates in the Japanese production philosophy. It is all about avoiding Muda (waste) in the Gemba (place of valorisation)’ (Nokia People, 02/06).

In addition to the manual stress of assembling 1,000 mobile per shift there is a lot of stress because of quality checks, re-adjustment of the machines and paper work for the packaging. If you see a little piece of dust under the display or detect a little scratch on a plastic part then you have to replace it. The flyers have to face a certain direction, the manual a different one. You risk an official warning if the label does not correspond with the boxes content. If you get three warnings you are out. It happens regularly that dozens of big parcels are re-opened again, because something ‘went wrong’, e.g. the CD cover was put in upside down. There are only two electricians/mechanics for 50 production islands. People complain about the fact that they are shifted to a different job in the assembly department without notice, that things change constantly, about the feeling of drowning in the one-piece-flow. After the experience of such stress and of handling such enormous quantities the fetish character of a camera mobile phone turns into scrap plastic. It is not only the work organisation that changes constantly, so does the working time. People are only told on Thursdays if there will be a Saturday shift or not. Two Saturday shifts per month are normal.

At the moment there is a constant night shift and an alternating early/late-shift, but the management is debating a new model: two days early, two late, two night, two free. The temp workers are handled even more flexibly. At the beginning of each shift the list of temp workers is checked, if there are too many, more humans than the ‘client has ordered’, people are sent home again, sometimes in the middle of the night. Or the temp agency phones people in the afternoon, telling them that they do not have to come to the late-shift as planned, but to the early-shift next morning, because necessary parts have not reached the plant.

**Kick out**

Two female permanent workers were kind of alpha-females of the cell; they were addressed by the foreman as the responsible people. They had the main influence on the pace of work, due to experience and their position. Those temps who worked too slowly or had problems with the quality requirements were told off, always with reference to the general production target or possible formal warnings for quality flaws. A student from Syria was kicked out of the cell only after half an hour. It was not possible to behave according to something like a general workers’ standard, e.g. when the target screen changed to green I ask one of the alpha-female who kept on pushing people: ‘Is it not time to relax a little bit? Otherwise you will have to produce 1,200 mobiles a shift soon’. ‘Whaat?!’, she answers in Bulgarian accent. We keep on arguing a little bit, then I go to the loo. When I come back the Finish manager is already waiting in the cell. ‘You think you can ask people to work slower when the target screen is green?’. ‘Nope, of course not. But maybe we breath a bit, just for a change’. When the manager is gone I ask the woman if she always tells him about what we say inside our cell. Another little argument. ‘We have to make up for the low production numbers of last week’. After the break the temp agency manager arrests me and I have to leave the plant. In the temp agencies’ office they offer a kind of penalty job in a small metal workshop somewhere in the fields, about 40 kilometres away. Thanks, but no thanks.
**Flextronics, Paderborn**

**The company**

Alongside Solectron [see prol-position news no. 2/2005] and Celestica, Flextronics is the biggest ‘non-brand manufacturer’ for electronic goods. Flextronics is a contract manufacturer among others for Sony, Ericsson, Microsoft and Siemens, producing and labeling their play-stations, mobile phones or TV-satellite receivers. In the US about 70 per cent of all electronic goods are already produced by ‘sub-contractors’ like Flextronics; in Europe it is about 20 per cent. In China a single sub-contractor factory produces half of the world markets’ demand and three quarters of the European demand for microwaves, just to give a picture about dimensions and productivity of this sector. And these companies play an important role in the re-structuring process of multinational manufacturers, e.g. in 2000 Siemens contracted Flextronics to produce 33 million mobile phones. Shortly after this Siemens sold the rest of the mobile phone branch to BenQ.

BenQ liquidated the remaining factories soon after the take-over [see prol-position news no. 3/2005 ‘On German anti-capitalism’]. Like most of the companies of the sector in 2001 Flextronics was hit by a severe slump, worldwide 10,000 of the 80,000 employees were dismissed. The high competitiveness of the contract manufacturer is not only based on low wages, but on economy of scale, a high rate of machinery utilization and a worldwide network which is able to order the cheapest components at a given point in time and which coordinates the company internal division of labour on a global scale. A particularly close cooperation exists between the plant in Guadalajara, Mexico and Sarva, Hungary. These plants are identical in their outlay and organisation and they both produce a play station for Microsoft. In Hungary they adjust the production to seasonal up and downs of the market: during the summer some departments produce single-use cameras for Kodak and in autumn they manufacture parts for DVD-recorders for Philips and Panasonic.

The backbone of this kind of flexible production is a new generation of machines that put the electronic components on the circuit-board. They can be set-up for different series of circuit-boards in shorter time. At this point we still have to be careful and distinguish between official ideology of ‘production on demand’ and the reality on the shop floor. The management of the plant in Paderborn state that only 8 eight per cent of all manufactured models (of identical circuit boards) are produced in series of 1,000 or more and that the average series comprise only about 200 pieces (i.e. claiming that it is not mass production). According to official company statements the plant is able to fit 165,000 components per hour, on seven different production lines, for 15 different clients and in total 500 different products. On the line people say that the number of 500 different models is extremely exaggerated. The plant in Paderborn, a small town in the west of Germany, belongs to the SBS-branch of Flextronics (Special business Solution, meaning that the focus is on middle-sized contracts). The clients are, amongst others, Macro System, PWB Technologies, TRW Automotive, Aastra, Wincor Nixdorf, Blaupunkt, Conrad, Fujitsu Siemens, Hella, Bintec Funkwerk, ADVA – optical Network, SUN Microsystems, Siemens, Data Display, KBA and SINN. Flextronics took over the plant from the computer-server manufacturer Fujitsu Siemens. In the 90s Fujitsu-Siemens itself was outsourced from the bigger computer plant of Siemens-Nixdorf, the main employer in Paderborn at this time. The 630 workers who were employed at Fujitsu-Siemens got new contracts with Flextronics. Apart from the server manufacturing Flextronics started to get other contracts. Once a new contract is obtained the achievement is presented to the employees in a general assembly, in English and with colourful screenings. The individual location is portrayed to be in fierce competition with the other global locations, but the example of the computer manufacturer SUN shows, that the competition is ‘artificial company policy’ of Flextronics. SUN wanted the computer parts to be produced in the plant in Hungary, but out of company strategy reasons Flextronics agreed on paying the wage difference themselves, in order to be able to produce them in the plant in Paderborn. [http://www.flextronics.com/Contacts/GlobalLocations/paderborn.asp]
**The Composition of the (Temp-) Workers**

In addition to the 600 permanents, Flextronics employs about 60 temp workers from two smaller local temp-agencies (PPS and Heuer und Koenig). Workers from the big agency Randstad are only hired for the neighbouring plant of Wincor Nixdorf. According to the companies' collective contract only 45 temp workers are supposed to be employed, but the actual numbers are higher. In the production unit half of the permanent workers are migrants, some came from Turkey other from Poland during the 80s or from the former Soviet Union during the 90s. Half of the total workforce are women. In the huge logistics department the composition might be different. Some of the permanents took part in a kind of unpaid apprenticeship that the job centre organised at Nixdorf, the former mother company. Some of them got a proper contract afterwards. Nixdorf still used to train apprentices; some of them now work as mechanics or electricians in the production unit. Most of the permanents have worked in the plant for the last 10, 15, 20 years, but no one has been made permanent for the last five years. The company puts big announcements on the notice board promising leaving pay for any permanent workers who quit the job voluntarily, disregarding the current boom and the lack of experienced workforce. A lot of the temp workers are from migrant background, too, a lot of them are so-called 'Ausiedler', people who were born in the former Soviet Union but have German ancestors. Particularly at weekends there are also a lot of student temp workers employed. Some of the temps have worked at Flextronics before, only for a period of a few months each year, for the last three or four years. All in all the permanents are much more relaxed, they ask the temps to take a coffee break every now and then.

**Work Organisation**

There are seven production lines, two of them dedicated to 'mass-production' for the bigger contracts, mainly audio-circuit boards for Blaupunkt. Until last year Blaupunkt manufactured these boards in France, but then stopped the production. Flextronics bought the machines and started producing the same circuit boards as a contractor for Blaupunkt. The work at the Blaupunkt lines is very standardised and they have a high output. At the smaller lines the output is less, e.g. after 400 circuit boards the machines have to be re-set for a different model. These lines produce about 30 to 150 circuit boards per hour, depending on the model. Apart from filling the machines with electronic components the main task is the setting and re-adjustment of the machines. There are only few women doing this job, most of them work in the department where circuit boards and components are soldered by hand and in the quality department. According to the management you need one month of training at these smaller lines, but actually it is more like two or three months, given the complexity of these machines. At the mass-producing lines the training period is only one week. If these lines are under full steam, the work is quite stressful. Blaupunkt intervened in the production process: at the mass-lines only permanent workers are supposed to do the quality check. Those temp workers who did the job already for half a year had to be given a different job. The control and so-called quality check was intensified. Hourly all workers on the lines are supposed to fill in the number of produced pieces and their efficiency into a spreadsheet and a graph. At the computer at the line you can check these figures. It might say:

```
Production Line Hanover
Type KGBA938177439
Order 10056
Target: 40 circuit boards
Actual boards produced: 30
Efficiency: 75 per cent
```

Everyone has to fill in their figures into the chart at their machine. Most people do this, but only reluctantly and in a rather sloppy way. Everyone knows that this measure is only meant to give people a bad conscience, given that the figures are in the computer anyway and that the bosses could just check them their. If your efficiency rate is under 80 per cent you are also supposed to give reasons. But this measure is not yet completely enforced; a lot of people just forget to fill in the chart. The already mentioned company internal network, which Flextronics uses in order to integrate the various production locations, is to a cer-
tain degree also used by the production workers. You might use this intranet, e.g. if you search for a particular stencil which is used for marking the board with soldering paste. You type in a product code and then you can see the location of the stencil in the storage department. You can also see for which company a certain model is produced, how many are ordered and what the price of the product is.

Whether the production of small series is profitable for an industrial company like Flextronics, depends on the time spent on resetting the machines and on changing the work organisation. From my own experience and after talking to other workers the average time to restart the production of a model which has already been produced in the plant previously - not a prototype - takes about a week: from resetting the machines, re-organising the storage department etc. to full production capacity. The management says that the time necessary to re-set machines from one model to the other is supposed to take twelve minutes. This is under the condition that the machines and storage is already adjusted to these models, that is not a complete start from scratch. In fact the time needed is more like two hours. Sometimes there are problems with lack of components, e.g. last week we produced telephones, but there were parts missing. I only produced 750 instead of 1,000. We will have to make up for it once the components are delivered. Sometimes lines are shut down completely for a period of time.

**Wage and Working Time**

The permanent workers' wages start from 12.50 Euros per hour before tax for 'unskilled' production workers. The temp workers get between 7.50 Euros for 'unskilled' and 10.50 Euros for 'skilled' workers, though 'skilled' only means that they have a contract with the temp agency as a qualified worker, not that their actual work in the plant differs in required skills. After Flextronics took over the plant, and after a new collective contract has been agreed on, a so-called Haustarifvertrag [in-house wage and conditions contract], which is limited to the company instead of the whole sector, the permanent workers had to put up with a monthly wage loss of about 200 to 300 Euros. In addition to that there is fear amongst the staff that the new ERA wage assessment model, which was agreed on by the union and which will be implemented in the whole metal sector, will lead to further wage cuts. ERA triggers anger in a lot of companies (see report on Nokia). Despite this fact, or maybe because of it, only few production workers took part in demonstrations during the last collective contract campaign of the metal union IG Metall. There are three rotating shifts which one week start on Sunday at 10pm, the next week on Monday 10pm, meaning that you work early shift one week, late-shift the following week and night-shift the week after.

For one cycle the night-shift starts on Sunday, the next cycle on Monday. In that way each worker on a Monday cycle has to work three weeks in a row on Saturdays. This model also allows for extending the working week to six days if necessary. The consequence of this model is that on Mondays and Saturdays there are only half of the staff working. The company uses student temp workers to fill the gap. During a five days week we work 37 and a half hours, the temp workers get 25 per cent extra for night-shifts, it might be more for the permanents.

**Conflicts**

A lot of temp workers leave the company after a short stay and there are arguments concerning the low wages. The students asked why there is a three Euros wage difference between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' temp workers although they do the same work. The students in the quality department got a 50 cents per hour 'quality-bonus', the other workers of the same temp agency did not. In contrast to that a lot of workers at the mass-lines, mainly students, are fired more quickly. You cannot follow it up, people just disappear, only days later you notice or hear that another three students have been kicked out. A lot of people quit because of stress, there is a very tight technological control, e.g. no product must leave your machine unregistered and there are very heavy production targets. Often there are no foremen around for hours, then they appear and ask you: "What is wrong with your efficiency?!". Workers have to sign all sorts of shit, without knowing why. If you manage to stay longer than half a year you are the king of seniority amongst the temps.
Gate Gourmet

The Company

A lot has been written about the six months of strike at the airline catering company Gate Gourmet at Duesseldorf airport in 2005-2006 [see prol-position news no. 4/2005 and no. 5/2006 and the book presentation in this issue], therefore only a brief introduction. The following report from a temp worker is based on a very short work experience inside the plant, about three months after the end of the strike. A strike which was mainly defeated because of the scab-work of temp workers.

Gate Gourmet is one of the world’s biggest airline catering companies. In Germany Gate Gourmet took over the catering branch of the airline LTU. Temp workers had been employed at Düsseldorf airport before the strike, but mainly on the basis of actually temporary employment, e.g. students during holidays or on part-time. During the strike, temp work was drastically increased and due to a lot of permanents leaving after the dispute, now most of the workers in the logistics department and the kitchen are temps. There are three different temp agencies, the local agency Avci mainly recruits Turkish workers, whose conditions are even worse than the other temps. It was a challenge for the management to join ex-strikers, scabs and new temp workers in the production process.

The Hiring Process

Apart from the usual hiring ceremony Gate Gourmet demands that the agencies ask the civil aeronautics security board to check possible candidates and their addresses of the last ten years. After the short interview all three candidates who took part got the job, two of them were older than 45 years. The manager of the temp agency Mumme announced that Gate Gourmet plans on establishing a 'permanent team' of temporary workers. Like the manager at Wico/GM he seems to think that the prospect of a permanently temporary status is an incentive to take the job. They don’t even need to promise a possible permanent contract anymore.

Work Organisation

The work at Gate Gourmet is divided into four different departments: kitchen (about 30 people), storage for customs warehouse (about 20 people), general warehouse (about 25 people) and the lorry drivers (about 10 people). The kitchen and the customs warehouse are separated units, and mainly Turkish workers from Avci temp agency are employed in the customs warehouse. They have the worst conditions; they don’t get bonuses for night-shift work and unlike all the others they have to pay for the food (it is not allowed to bring one’s own food). The supervisors in the warehouse are permanents, mainly former scabs. The 'organic' informal foremen are either permanents who have been shifted from LTU during the strike or temp workers who worked as scabs. The permanents at LTU used to only get short contracts and often there was not enough work, so somehow only the scab-job seemed to provide safe full-time employment. All the drivers are permanents.

The management offered a lorry driver’s job to a temp worker, but although it would have paid better, about 10 Euros before tax instead of 6.50 Euros, he refused the job after doing it for one day, due to the higher stress-level. Before the strike the drivers used to help loading the trucks, now they are only supposed to drive. The assembling of the load (magazines, newspapers, bog-rolls, drinks, meals etc.) and the actual loading of the trucks is now done by temp workers, most of them hired after the strike. The result of this restructuring is that now more than half of the work-force at Gate Gourmet are temps, most of them earning about 6.50 Euros per hour. If we take all annual extra-payments into account, the temps earn about 40 percent less than the permanents. However, the main motivation for Gate Gourmet is not the immediate wage costs, but the more flexible employment of the temps: particularly after the strike and during the phase of re-structuring they wanted people that they could get rid of more easily. In addition to that the ups and downs on the catering market intensified, demanding a more adjustable total workforce. The other side of the flexible coin is the high turnover amongst the temps. People often quit after a week or less. Especially for the work in the warehouse you need experience of at least two to three weeks. You have to know a lot...
of minor details: How many tabloids are provided on an inter-European flight? On which side of the lorry do you have to put the trolleys with uneven numbers? How many puke-bags for a trip to the US? The management and the supervisors complain about an increase of delays and wrongly packed trolleys. They blame fresh temps or pissed-off ex-strikers. On the noticeboard they condemn the ‘sabotage’. The delays are a real problem, the time-schedule is tight, if a truck leaves the warehouse ten minutes late it might cost Gate Gourmet thousands of Euros of penalty.

After the Strike

There are no visual remnants of the strike, therefore it is interesting to see how a newly hired temp worker would get to know about a six months long dispute about three months after it finished, without asking about it. As early as during the first day at work another temp worker answers the unintentional question of how long he already works at Gate Gourmet: ‘I have been working here since February. I am one of the strike-breakers’. Two days later in the canteen some permanents talk about the time ‘before the strike’, the harassments and the cost-cutting threats. Apart from that the atmosphere is neither tense nor relaxed, you cannot ‘feel’ an underlying tension, which might be due to the strike; there are no open disputes between ex-strikers and ex-scabs, at least not during the six working days of this report.

If you ask the temps openly about the strike, most of them will tell you that they didn’t feel that it addressed them; that the aim and organisation had nothing to do with them. Three guys say independently from each other that the demands of the strike were on a different league: even if the wage-cuts would have been enforced, the income of the permanents would still have been considerably higher, their workplace still much safer. Practically, the strike was not able to build a bridge to the temps, nor to build up enough force to prevent scabs from working. The current problems at work are more pressing than the history of the strike. A lot of the temps come from the rural areas in the north-west, close to the Dutch border, they have to travel up to 80 kilometres to work. The shift-times are murderous, e.g. six days from 3am to 12am (early shift), then two days off, then six days from 7pm to 4am (night-shift). If not enough people turn up for their shift, workers have to stay longer, up to two hours, which is particularly tiresome after night-shifts. The management announces extra shifts, only giving very short notice.

Facing these kind of working-times and the low wages people often quit spontaneously, e.g. the two older guys from the job interview disappeared after three days. Some people have to stay, e.g. an African guy, who obviously has a bad conscience for having done scab-work, who arrived illegally in Spain, worked in the harvest, made his way working through France and now ended up at Düsseldorf airport loading trucks. The management watches the whole scene with a kind of paranoiac mistrust. After some leaflets with the title ‘Against the Exploitation of the Temp Workers’ appeared in trolleys, under meal trays, in water crates and Playboy magazines, they got nervous. Even more so after some leaflets actually made their way to the passengers in the aeroplanes. The management called the criminal investigation department and created a big fuss. The enormous stamina of the strikers, who occupied the striketent during six cold German winter-months, the spontaneous piqueteros, who blocked the lorries, the alleged acts of sabotage inside the plant, the destruction of a temp agencies’ office during the dispute… must have fucked up their nerves considerably.

Shopping Mall Construction-Site

The Company

The City-Palais is a major construction project in the inner city of Duisburg, comprising of a shopping mall, a concert hall, a conference centre and a casino. Right in front of the City Palais another construction is about to be started, the Forum, another shopping mall. Germany’s biggest inner city shopping mall is in the process of being built in Essen, which is only 25 kilometers away. In the late 90s the CentrO was opened in Oberhausen, situated between Duisburg and Essen. It is a huge shopping complex where about 4,000 people are employed. It was the biggest single investment in
the whole Ruhrarea since the GM plant in Bochum. The decision to build the City Palais triggered the usual (petty) bourgeois critique lamenting about the consequences for the small shop-owners and about the obvious links of corruption between the planning commission, construction companies and the local political class. More interesting is the question of why there is so much liquid capital flowing in such kind of rather prestigious projects and of the conditions under which workers build and run such new palaces.

The initial estimation for the total investment sum was 160 Million Euros, of which the LEG (Landesentwicklungsgesellschaft, Development Society of North-Rhine Westfalia, a kind of development and housing association) paid 90 Million. The remaining costs for the completion are supposed to be paid by the future tenants of the City Palais. The LEG is one of German biggest real estate companies. It owns about 110,000 flats in North-Rhine Westfalia and 1,200 acres of commercial land. In October 2005 the LEG announced privatisation of all flats, to put them on the market for international investment funds, a current trend in Germany, where thousands of flats are bought by mainly US hedge funds. This decision triggered some verbal protest by tenant unions. In October 2006 the LEG found a buyer for the City Palais, which was still a construction site at his point. The investment fund Hannover Leasing paid 100 Million Euro. Hannover Leasing invests in the international real estate market, in major infrastructure projects, the aviation, rail and shipping industries and in the movies. The fund has an investment pool of about 7.5 Billion Euros and it manages investment projects worth 11.5 Billion Euros. At this point LEG announced that about 85 percent of the total 35,400 square meters commercial area had already been rented out. The biggest tenant is Germany’s biggest casino operator, West-Spiel.

The main construction company is Bilfinger and Berger, they also build the shopping mall in Essen, and the main local company is Hitzbleck. During the early stages about 200 workers were on the site, during the completion phase up to 700. After the police organised a raid on the site during summer 2006 the newspapers reported that some companies employ workers illegally and pay less than the minimum wage. In October 2006, half a year after the construction started, the project lagged four weeks behind the schedule, and the town administrations agreed to extend the working shifts. It also became clear that the costs for the concert hall and the congress centre covered by the City Council would be considerably higher than expected. The town parliament voted for a 3.6 Million Euros top-up in addition to the already allotted 35 Million Euros. The PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) explained the rather swift decision by the fact that the SPD (Social-Democratic Party) town director Brand is at the same time the City Palais project-manager in charge of the completion work. The following report describes the working condition during the completion phase of the project. [http://www.citypalais.de/index.php?typ=html&content=Story&sub=1](http://www.citypalais.de/index.php?typ=html&content=Story&sub=1)

### Hiring Process
Tremonia, a German-wide operating temp agency, looks for electricians to wire fire-alarm systems, video cameras and door-contact systems on the City Palais site. You can start working the next day. Tremonia has a collective contract with the small Christian union (see first part of article), which pays 9,80 Euro per hour before tax. They don’t pay any money for travel costs, no other extras. Tremonia employs five temps on the site.

### The Composition of the (Temp) Workers
Three of the Tremonia workers are in their mid-40s, experienced electricians. They have been unemployed for about a year before they took the job at Tremonia, mainly because the benefit office started to hassle them and the Hartz IV unemployment benefit was too low an income in the long run. One of them has been working for temp agencies for a long time, he worked as a maintenance electrician in coal mines, in the automobile industry, he loaded trucks for supermarkets, he renovated shops in Spain and wired up the lion cage in the zoo of Wuppertal. He is the typical hooligan-type from Essen, a full-monty Ruhrarea prole. The second story he tells you is about his worries: it is his first trip to Nigeria next January, his wife and he will celebrate their marriage ceremony in her Nigerian village and he is a bit concerned about the dancing. This is one of the great
things about the Ruhrarea, where unlike in a lot of more metropolitan areas people tend to mix more. The two other workers are in their early thirties. Since the start of the construction work four months ago, five Tremonia workers have already left the site, two because of the long working-hours, the others were sent back home because the client (hiring) company was not happy with them.

The client company is called Heinrich, a bigger handicraft company specialising in electrical installations. The company is from Leipzig, a bigger town in the east of Germany, about 500 kilometers from Duisburg. There are five permanent workers from Heinrich on the City Palais site, although the number varies given that Heinrich has more people employed on a hospital building site ten kilometres away, people sometimes have to work there, others are coming over.

There are two more Tremonia people on the hospital site, one of them used to work as a temp worker in the famous BenQ mobile phone plant near Duisburg, but was kicked out after the dismissals started [see prol-position news no. 3/2005]. The ten workers from Leipzig share two small flats in an empty nurses’ dormitory on the hospital premises. They drive back to Leipzig on Thursday night or, which is normally the case, on Friday afternoon. They have to return to Duisburg on Sunday early afternoon. According to traffic they need about six to nine hours for their journey back home. They say that there isn’t much work for electricians around Leipzig.

One work-mate from Leipzig used to work in an automobile supplier. (There is a booming Porsche and BMW factory in Leipzig. In the whole of East Germany there are three German car manufacturing plants, and two of them are in Leipzig.) But the supplier demanded CNC skills from him, and although he was employed as an unskilled worker, they wanted him to work Saturday and Sunday shifts without extra-pay. The stress-level was high. This fifty-year-old worker quit the job and as a result the unemployment office cut his benefit money for eight weeks. Another work-mate became unemployed after the small handicraft workshop went bankrupt. He still fights a legal case for unpaid wages. All the workers have been unemployed for a while, half of them for longer than a year, long enough to get your benefit reduced to the Hartz IV minimum. The company Heinrich got a sub-contract from the company Imtech. Imtech in turn got the contract from Siemens. Siemens now only supplies the engineers who manage the technical coordination between the various sub-contractors. The fire-alarm system is installed by several smaller companies, which got individual contracts, e.g. to wire the parking garage.

The minority of workers on the site are from West Germany. The west Germans tend to be the managers, engineers or foremen from the main construction company; managers of the Turkish cleaning gang; temps like us; or some specialists crane drivers or maintenance crew for the machinery. The big chunk of people come from East-Germany, Poland, Bulgaria. Most of the companies are very small, often self-employed gangs, so you might find four or five companies working on the installation of the video cameras, or a dozen companies putting up plasterboard-walls.

Work Organisation

There is a turnstile at the entrance of the site, which you can only pass with a special ID-card. There is a lot of valuable stuff on site, and things do get stolen. Sometimes this is rather uncool, given that a lot of the tools and material belong to the self-employed workers. On the site you are supposed to wear your helmet and the ID-card with a digital-picture of yourself, otherwise they fine you 50 Euros. As a temp worker you get this ID-card too, but no tools to work with. We asked Tremonia several times to give us some smaller basic hand-tools, screw-drivers and stuff, but they found all kind of excuses.

Finally some of us bring their own tools, something that becomes negatively trendy for wage-workers. Others refuse to do that and use tools of the Heinrich company, meaning that they have to uselessly run around a lot. After the shell has been completed the main building company only does little supervising and coordinating work, they organise the site control, the transport of material, the cranes, they allot porter cabins and hassle the thirty Turkish cleaners who have to sweep the site twelve hours a day. The coordination of the different crafts is divided up, e.g. the Siemens engineers command all the smaller companies and work
gangs doing electrical work, often mediated by the direct contractors, in our case Imtech. They also pass the installation plans on to Heinrich and the Heinrich coordinating worker hands them out to us. Usually a Heinrich worker and a temp then leave together and start working, at least the big boss in Leipzig wants that the temp is always with a permanent, but he is in Leipzig and often people prefer to choose their immediate workmates. The main work is to install cables for the fire-system and the cameras, to put them into an already fixed rail if possible, or to drill and hammer in new rails. There are literally thousands of kilometres of cable running through the site, and most of them run at seven metres high. The site is huge, three football fields plus three major sub-terrain garages for about 700 cars.

So most of the time you run around or wobble on mobile scaffolding, banging steel anchors for the rails into the concrete over your head. The time pressure, the hierarchical work organisation and the divisions into dozens of single companies not only creates stress, but unnecessary extra-work and delays, as well. For example often the guys who build the structure for the double ceiling start their work before we manage to get to the cable-rail. It is a real buggy, because you then have to kind of snake-dance yourself and the 500 metres long cable through the metal frames. Or you drive the hired mobile scaffolding to the other end of site, which takes about 40 minutes, destroys various cables on the floor and the already started marble work only to find out that there are already five unused scaffoldings waiting. But they belong to other companies and some people take that fact very seriously.

The main engineers wanted to change two walls in the car garage, which had the domino effect of changing the entire fire-safety zones, which annoyed the Siemens engineers, but they passed the changes and costs on to Heinrich and we then had to rip out cables which took two men one and a half months to install. All this creates the typical construction-site quarrels, mainly between Prussians (big lads from East Berlin) and Saxons (rather skinny moustached guys from Leipzig), which might still be some kind of conflict from times of socialism. But disputes can be settled in comradely manners, even with Albanian marble-stone masons, once you start cursing the general building project’s management. There is no arrogance or rivalry between temps and permanents, mainly because the conditions for the east-German permanent workers is equally shitty or even relatively worse and because the building trade is somehow temporary anyway, meaning that the Leipzig guys cannot be sure if there is work after the project is finished.

Wage and Working Time

Compared to the permanents, from Leipzig the temps from the Ruhrarea earn more and work less. We get about 10 Euros per hour while the east-German get about 8 Euros, we work about 40 hours per week, they work up to sixty. They have to be away from home during the week, they don’t get any extra money for that, they often arrive home late Friday night and half of the Sunday they spend on the Autobahn. An experienced electrician and proper family father, a work-mate from Leipzig tells us that since 1992 he has never earned more than 7.50 Euros an hour before tax and that he is therefore trying to keep this bloody job he has.

He even puts up with the other guys drinking and gambling half the night while he tries to get some sleep on the living room sofa. He also puts up with delays of the wage payment; in October the Heinrich workers had to wait two weeks. A workmate from the Ruhr area slips the collective contract for building workers to the guys from Leipzig. If their company had been in the employer’s association they would have got a nice 40 per cent wage rise, or the sack. All in all there are only few discussions about the possibility of improving the situation. The conditions and relationships seem somehow temporary.

Rien ne va plus

The work ends with an accident, the scaffolding collapsed, it belonged to an unknown work-gang, no one to sue, the wrist collapsed, as well. The doctor, who is in charge of the site says that he gets quite regular visits from injured workers from the City Palais. Broken bones for Starbucks and the roulette. One month later all the temps got fired, Heinrich could not pay Tremonia anymore, the City Palais chaos busted their budged. Tremo-
nia had no other jobs for the temps, so we all got laid off. We don't know what happened to the permanents from Leipzig.

Conclusions

The different reports show clearly that we will not be able to derive a radical and generalising political line from the sheer precariousness of the jobs, from the legal contract relations of temp work. The possibilities and material starting-points for initiatives vary, particularly if we take into account that unlike in the examples above, a lot of the temp work is not done in major companies or industrial surroundings. Very interesting front lines could appear where, due to regional or industrial concentration, (temp) workers come together in a tangible context of common experiences which goes beyond company boundaries. In the Ruhr area this could be the case, e.g. at Gate Gourmet and at GM there were temps who had common experiences with working at Nokia, at GM some temps previously worked in various automobile suppliers.

It would also be important to analyse the political potentials of the fact that hundreds of foreign student-workers are exploited at Nokia in Bochum while at the same time there are various activities and a long occupation at the university in Bochum, against fees and the increasing pressure on students. Contrary to common opinion, it is possible (for people between aged 20 to 45) to get a job in the core industries within a short period of time, but for wages that motivate half the people to leave the job after a similarly short period. This might be an important background situation for possible initiatives. Another parallel between the above examples is the temp agencies using union negotiated collective contracts to justify the low wages. In all four industrial companies the temps are lured with the 'promise' of a long-term stay as temporary workers, the possibility of getting a permanent contract after a certain probation time was never even mentioned.

At Nokia it was clear that the management is able to extend the number of temp workers to over one thousand so that half of the staff in the production department are not really attached to the company. All this in a world-market factory for mobile phones which is situated less than an hours drive away from BenQ, another big mobile phone plant where workers gave a good example of how to loose a struggle by not even starting it. At GM the precarious experiences of the temps mix with the experiences of a combative industrial stronghold under attack. Thanks to the still effective resistance of the permanent workers, temporary work is still a minor factor there, but highly concentrated, particularly in the pre-assembling departments and in logistics.

One of the other tragic results of the long strike at Gate Gourmet is the fact that temp work, which was one of the main levers to undermine and finally break the strike, is now used in order to restructure the work-organisation. The main weakness of the strike was, that it was neither able to prevent scabbing nor was it able to build a bridge to the temps which would have allowed them to join the dispute. The failed little action at GM shows that at least during an embryonic stage of struggle, the legal right of the bosses to kick people out from one minute to the other poses a serious problem. The example of the major construction project made clear that 'precarious conditions' and low wages are not only a concern for temp workers, young folks or the creative self employed, but became part of daily life experience for the family-father-type handicraft-worker, as well. Let’s see who moves first.
gate gourmet strike

"...got the taste for it"

Six months of strike at Gate Gourmet in Germany

We have published various smaller reports on the strike at Gate Gourmet in Düsseldorf, Germany [see prol-position nos. 4/2005 and 5/2006 and short part in the temp workers' reports in this issue]. In winter 2007 the editorial collective 'Flying Pickets' published an amazingly thorough documentation of the long dispute. Amongst other things, the book contains a detailed strike diary written by one of the Gate Gourmet workers, very insightful interviews with several Gate Gourmet workers on the changes of work organisation and the experiences made during the strike and a reflection of the support group on their activities. Given the international character of the aviation industries and its related struggles it would be a great project to translate the documentation (great in terms of quality and quantity; the book has 264 pages). Here is a translation of the preface, just in order for you to 'get the taste for it'. If you want to get in touch with the Flying Picket collective, send an email to: info@gg-streik.net

Preface of the book

Winter 2005/2006. A strike at Düsseldorf airport, at the catering company Gate Gourmet. In August 2005 the name of the company became known thanks to the spectacular strike at the London Heathrow airport. There, the workers' opponent is the Texas Pacific Group, a financial investor which took over Gate Gourmet in 2002 in order to restructure it and then sell it. In Düsseldorf the workers are confronted with the consulting company McKinsey. The work organisation is turned inside out - the work pressure is increased to unbearable degrees. For a long time the workers did not manage to counter this process, until finally the anger against work outweighed the fear of becoming unemployed. The official strike aim is a wage increase of 4.5 per cent. There are only two words on the banner at the strike tent: 'Human Dignity'.

Right from the first day the company managed to undermine the strike of the 80 workers by employing temp workers and employees from other branches. What had been planned as a short strike for a wage rise turned into months and months of trench warfare. At the beginning of December 2005, after two months of strike it seems that the management and union's negotiating board had finally come to a compromise that the strikers might have grudgingly accepted. But the compromise was canceled from above. The Texas Pacific Group dictatorially demanded the cut of payroll costs by ten per cent. Confronted with this kind of opponent the union NGG (food, consumable, gastronomy) was helpless and would rather have ended the strike. But the workers were not willing to return to work without having a proper result. The strike continued.

At the beginning the workers try to block the lorries that transport the catering goods to the aeroplanes. The union stop them doing this after having been threatened with demand for compensation by Gate Gourmet. In December groups of supporters turn up and block the strikebreakers on behalf of the workers. Flying Pickets stand in front of the lorries, they create a big fuss and delay departures. People from the left-wing scene, who are normally not interested in workers' struggle, turn up at the airport. They get enthusiastic about this strike against work stress, about the self-confident strikers and about the possibility of putting solidarity into direct action. A relationship of mutual trust develops between strikers and supporters. In the 'strike village' the idea becomes more tangible of what a connection of workers' struggles and social movements could look like.

The strike ends on the 7th of April 2006, after six months sharp. The workers have enforced a new collective contract, which helps to reduce further flexibilisations, but they have to put up with seven per cent 'cost cutting'. Despite the bad material result a lot of strikers see the strike as a personal success: because after years of keeping quiet and accepting deteriorations they have managed to fight back and by doing so they have learnt a lot; they have had important experiences.

This little strike is exemplary in many ways - regarding the self-initiative and 'self-empowerment' of the workers, but also regarding the difficulty of
developing workers' power in 'modern capitalism'. After the wildcat strike at Opel/General Motors in Bochum in October 2004 [see prol-position news no. 1/2005 and short text in temp workers' reports in this issue] and after the following strikes in the public sector, at AEG in Nürnberg or at the Bosch-Siemens-Hausgerätewerk in Berlin [see article in this issue] there is hope for revitalisation of a lost strike culture. Serious strikes in which the workers play the main role and take the struggle into their own hands replace rituals of collective contract bargaining, which are not supposed to hurt anyone. At Gate Gourmet an informal mode of organisation existed already before the strike and it played an important role once the dispute was on: the 'underground group'. Without this structure such a close cooperation with the supporters would hardly have been possible and it would have been likely that the strike would have finished earlier and with worse results. At the same time the duration of the strike hints at the weakness of the workers. They did not manage to build up economic pressure. Confronted with the employment of temp workers they were powerless. In conflict with a modern form of capital, a 'private-equity firm' they did not manage to enforce themselves. And unfortunately they are not alone in this situation given that the struggles against lay-offs and plant closures mentioned above also got stuck. They did not put capital under pressure effectively, because they did not succeed in overcoming their isolation. And also because the new attempts of the workers at leading the struggles themselves remained too weak.

During the strike at Gate Gourmet there were many occasions to debate all these questions with the strikers. During long conversations in the strike tent they explained the background of the strike and bit by bit we started to understand how this informal structure worked and what kind of significance it had. Initially the strike activists were surprised by the idea of documenting these important experiences in a book: a whole book about this little strike which hasn't turned out to be a success story after all? Books about workers are not 'fashionable' anymore. Together with the old workers' culture, workers disappeared from the public consciousness. Even up to the point that their numbers are underestimated systemati-}

ally. Beaud and Pialoux ('The lost future of the workers') have re-traced this process over twenty years, using the example of the Peugeot plant in Sochaux: on one hand there is little left of the pride of being a worker and having power as a class, on the other hand the 'workers' question' is more pressing than ever. On their strike-promoting tours the Gate Gourmet workers had the experience that deteriorating conditions and increasing work stress are not a peculiarity restricted to their company: "We got to know that these problems exist in other companies, as well. It is just that they don't have the courage to fight back. Our people would not have had the guts either, but then they walked out".

The question of how they did this is of importance for other workers. Often these experiences get lost, because no one writes them down and circulates them. A book has been published about the General Motors strike, shedding light on the background of the conflict "Six days of self-empowerment". With the publication of this book on the strike at Gate Gourmet we want to contribute more material for the debate about the future of the workers' movement.

We met with a great readiness amongst the strikers to sit down together for long interviews. These interviews and the many conversations at the gate and during rallies, when the workers explained their aims and anger, were also moments of self-reflection. The workers gained more clarity about the question of what had happened during the recent years, of why they had put up with it for so long and of why they walked out now in such a unity. Through their narration about the unbearableness of the work they re-assured themselves of their will to continue the struggle. Their own analysis of the background became more and more precise in time.

This book is a reading book. You can read the different parts independently from each other. We start with the wildcat strikes at London-Heathrow: *Hot Autumn 2005* - containing more info on Gate Gourmet and Texas Pacific Group. A worker who we asked for an interview said that he would rather write something himself. This is how the *Strike Diary from Düsseldorf* evolved. His describes the strike in a retrospective and reflects on his personal impressions. The *Chronicle at the
end of the book can be a different introduction to the strike, providing an overview over the most important facts and background information. In the centre of this book is the Production of the Strike - Workers’ conversations. It is a collage of interviews and other footage. Thirteen workers reflect on their strike, its prelude and impacts. Part of the prelude is the brutal restructuring which happened with the collaboration of McKinsey. Detlev Hartmann contributes a text on this matter and we have documented a recording from a strike discussion meeting: They are not supposed to be able to hide. After the strike some of the supporters met and debated about their experiences: The last blockade did not happen. A union secretary, who accompanied the strike during the whole time, said in an interview: It was good that we fought. Finally there is a Glossary providing, amongst others things, names and terms typical for the aviation industry which are marked with a * in each chapter.

Many people took part in the production of this book. They all did it for free, for solidarity reasons. The starting point was the discussion process between strikers and supporters, which began during the strike and which still continues today. The different texts were created out of this process. Some of the ex-strikers accompanied the whole production of the book, they answered questions that arose during the process, they gave advice and made suggestions. Those texts that are signed with individual names have also been debated and changed collectively. For all the other texts we take the editorial responsibility. In this sense Flying Picket is not a fixed collective. It represents the diffuse collective cooperation that developed during the strike and it stands for the action form of roaming pickets that the cooperation made possible.

Flying Pickets, November 2006

[Websites (in German):
http://www.associazion-a.de/neu/Auf_den_Geschmack_gekommen_.htm
and
Euros cut, which was the last straw. Finally the strike kicked off. Surely, with only one hundred out of six hundred temp workers taking part it was a struggle of a minority, but of a determined minority. Right away the Citroen management threatened with the termination of the temp contracts in order to mobilise the temp agencies to put pressure on the strikers, but confronted with the threat of the strike the management gave in: the four days will be paid. The measure is presented as an advance payment reduced from the compensation which all temps would get for the lost days at the end of the contract, but in the end the temps will receive the full pay. The workmates went back to work, proud and happy about the fact that they managed to force Citroen to their knees. They exchanged addresses and telephone numbers in case that Citroen wants to take revenge once the contract is about to run out.

Renault Flins
Currently there are about 900 temp workers at Flins. Only a few months ago there were 1,500. Since October the factory went on short-time work, closing on Mondays and Fridays every week. There, as well, the temp workers are not given any pay for these days. The famous time account of nearly all permanent workers is in the red. They have to borrow from the time allotted for further training. The unions voice their disagreement (and not even all the unions do this). This is their job and it won't get far. It increases the feeling of resignation of all those who think that we cannot do anything about it anyway. The strike at Citroen has proven the contrary. The workers' resignation is the source of the bosses' strength. The previous generations of workers defended themselves, they struggled and gained achievements for the working class under conditions that often were more difficult than those we experience today. A young striker from Citroen told a journalist from Parisien libéré: 'What is it that I would risk? I have got nothing to loose'. The management of Citroen understood the situation well, they gave in. They know that they can easily tell how a strike began in the first place, but that they can never tell, which way it will go. (...)

the eastern blocked

Here are some short news items that we came across recently, which seem to be important indicators for future front lines. Unfortunately we could not get hold of any first hand reports or further details...

Revolt of low-wage workers at Michelin and Renault in Romania
The 'shopping' for low-wage work force is a well known practice of multi-national corporations. But the machine starts to shudder: in the factory of Romsteel Cord (in Transylvania), a 100 per cent subsidiary of Michelin, the unions started to denounce the working conditions (seven day weeks, unpaid over-time, holidays not granted, one timely limited contract after the other). They called for strike.

The 11,000 workers at the Dacia factory (subsidiary of Renault, manufacturing the Logan) in Pitesi are about to make the same step. On 25th of February 2007 they announced a general strike. The main demand is a considerable wage increase, which compensates for the rising inflation.

[Source: l’Humanite, 23rd of February 2007]

Chinese Textile women workers on strike in Romania (27th of January 2007)
Hundreds of Chinese textile workers are on strike in the Romanian town of Bacau, north-east of Bucharest. They are demanding better pay and living conditions. About 400 Chinese women, the first to be employed legally in Romania, have asked for their monthly after-tax pay to double, from $350 to $700 (€262 to €525). But their manager has refused, saying it would bankrupt the textile company.

He has accused employment agencies in China of inciting the workers. The Chinese employment agencies take a commission from the workers’ monthly salary. Sorin Nicolescu told the BBC that he was paying about 1,200 lei ($450, €337) to each worker before tax. That is roughly equivalent to the average wage in Romania. Mr Nicolescu said he had also offered to reclaim the $5,000 which he says every worker paid employment middlemen
in China. He has also alleged that some of the Chinese workers have assaulted him.

Romania faces a severe shortage of skilled workers in the garment industry, since many of them have sought employment in Western Europe. The 400 Chinese women arrived in Bacau last year, but since then have been totally isolated. None of them speak Romanian and only a few can muster basic words in English. "We are hungry all day", one Chinese worker told the BBC, explaining that the Chinese food was very poorly cooked.

Meanwhile, Chinese diplomats have visited Bacau and spoken to the workers and the local authorities. A small number of workers have said they want to return to China, and up to 100 others are said to have agreed to return to work. But the majority are still on strike and Mr Nicolescu has said he wants to bring over other workers from a different region of China. The Italian embassy has also stepped into the dispute, summoning Mr Nicolescu for an explanation, since Wear Company is partly Italian-owned. After the recent struggles of Eastern European workers in Western Europe this example of Chinese migrant workers in the East can be seen as another evidence for the importance of migration for the current re-formation of political class composition.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6286617.stm]

Wage dispute at Skoda in Czech Republic

Union opposition has persuaded Skoda Auto to back out of its proposal plan for a new performance-related pay system in the fifth round of wage talks held March 13. The unions had warned they might consider a strike if talks on wage modernization prevented the signing of this year’s overall collective agreement by March 31, when the present deal expires. The unions are asking for a 17 percent increase and a one-year agreement, while so far the car-maker has offered only 6.1 percent for the period April 1, 2007, through March 31, 2009. With the new Korean Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Czech (HMMC) factory in Nosovice, North Moravia, set to start mass production in 2009, car-makers are under considerable pressure to attract and retain the Czech Republic’s limited number of suitably skilled workers.


Third strike at Ford plant in St. Petersburg, Russia

Some 1,500 Ford workers laid down their tools and occupied the plant in a day-long strike on 14th of February 2007. It is the third strike in the plant, which was opened in 2002. The strike cost Ford an estimated $4 million, NTV television said. More than 1,000 workers voted overwhelmingly for a sit-in strike at the plant after a mass meeting lasting several hours Tuesday, with only 20 votes in favor of management’s offer.

Ford management is offering workers a pay raise of between 14 percent and 20 percent, interest-free loans and a one-off loyalty bonus of 10,000 rubles ($380) for those who have worked at the plant for more than five years, among other concessions. Average monthly salaries at the plant are between 16,000 and 19,000 rubles ($600-$720). The strike comes as Ford plans to increase production at the Leningrad region plant by 20 percent to 75,000 units this year.

Last year, Ford emerged as the country’s best-selling foreign car-maker, with 116,000 vehicles. The plant assembles about 300 Ford Focus cars per day. Management plans to import 2,300 Ford Focus cars to cover the shortage of the model in Russia, where people wait for months for the cheap car. St. Petersburg and the adjacent Leningrad region have become the new hub of the country’s auto industry, with General Motors, Nissan and Toyota moving to build plants in the area.

This is a short documentation of an informal letter exchange. A friend from Brazil tidies up his electronic inbox having some spare time on the oil-rig. He comes across a one and a half year old mail from Berlin, posted on a PGA mailing list. It is call for solidarity with Honda workers who have been beaten up by the police in a suburb of Delhi during summer 2005. Some letters go back and forth. Here is a summary...

The other day in Cyberspace

Brazilian oil worker bumps into Berlin activist engaged in Indian car workers’ solidarity

Berlin, Lebanese Internet Café: (...) We were mainly influenced by Italian Operaism before Negri took an overdose of magic mushrooms. And I like the early Saramago, as well. And your job? I have no idea what kind of status oil workers have in Brazil. Is it difficult to get such a job?

Brazil, Oil Rig: I’m also a very fan of Saramago. I used to say during some time that I was marxista-saramaguista, but I was leaving this “tendency” some time ago, on the Cuban question. About my work here, first of all you should try to google: oil-rig, then you see a common picture of my workplace. The rig I work is medium size, with about 240 workers. We come here by helicopter, cause it’s 80 km offshore, and we stay here for 14 days. Then we got 14 days (in my case 21 days) of “vacations”, depending on the kind of work. When we are on board, we work 12 hours a day, during day and night, so you can imagine that I also hate wage work, and I really want to abolish it!

There are two “kinds of worker” on the rig. Those like me, who are employed by the Brazilian public company (Petrobras) and those who are employees of other companies which provide services to Petrobras (so-called ‘contratados’). On my rig about half of the workers are from contractors. The main difference between permanents and contract workers is not the wage, but the jobs duties. The contracted workers get the less technical work, cleaning, cooking, painting, carrying weight, and some other things I don’t know how to say it in English... (like building some small platform, when people need to work on a place difficult to get to).

Officially, there’s no hierarchy between permanents and contract workers, but sometimes it is possible to feel it. Anyway, there is a positive approach concerning this trouble among the workers themselves, they generally try to make things equal. A great difference indeed is the duration of work. Cause we work 14 and have 21 of vacation, and they are still on 14-14. The permanent workers have more rights, a certain stability and a good income, although it is lower than the average in the oil industry. Compared to a normal industrial worker the wage might be twice as high, mainly because of the extra-pay for dangerous work. Whoever has the opportunity to choose usually prefers to work here on the rigs, mainly because of the job security.

The others, who are contract workers, have lower incomes and mainly longer working hours. In order to be employed by the state owned company (which as a matter of fact is only half owned by the Brazilian State) you need to pass on a public test, that is sort of difficult. When I did it there were more than a hundred thousand ‘fighting’ for 700 or 800 hundred vacancies! You need to be a technician or something similar for most of the place, and at least completed high school. For the ‘contrados’ its more like a recruitment in the market. These two groups have different trade unions and nowadays there isn’t any movement of them together. As a permanent you have to do a six months course before starting to work. You learn technical stuff, about mechanics, electricity, chemistry, mainly focused on oil production. It was a good course.

For most of these workers the job is seen as a life opportunity. Although being on the rig day in day out gets boring. People are always counting how many days are still left, when someone is seen without the uniform, which means he will take the helicopter, he is normally also showing an ‘un-hideable’ smile.

Berlin, Lebanese Internet Café: What about the importance of the Brazilian oil sector? Do you have to be scared that some people might suddenly
spread rumours of Brazilian weapons of mass destruction, or can you expect the coming of a father christmas like Chavez?

Brazil, Oil Rig: I guess neither. Nowadays Brazil has equilibrium between production and consumption. So it’s only as important as it makes the country move, but it’s not a source of dividends like in other oil producing countries. 80% of Brazil oil is produced on ‘Bacia the Campos’ fields, where I work. I guess there are roughly one hundred oil-rigs similar to the one I am working on.

There is some institutional information which informs us about other rigs, but it is nothing important. But unofficially, well, generally you know someone on a different rig, the other guy knows someone else, and so info is circulating. We can call people on other rigs by phone. And there are some conflicts, mainly about health and safety.

The last big movement was in 1995, lots of people got dismissed, and the incomes were cut for lots of days when the strike was on, but some people now receive compensation for having been dismissed illegally. This is about as much Christmas you get with ‘Lulinha’, our president. These last days, I had even some talks about global warming, people are somehow concerned with this question, possibly more than outside. I guess it is due to the connection with production.

Berlin, Lebanese Internet Cafe: So what are you up to when you are not rigging?

Brazil, Oil Rig: I’m on FLP from Rio de Janeiro, part of the squatters or homeless movement. We took part in the occupation of three buildings in Rio during the last two years. It’s a growing movement inside the cities. And it’s somehow connected with the landless movement, as it was a source of inspiration. Mainly working people squat houses, there are some few houses squatted by young left people, but it’s another movement, even when they’re well related. Rent is often more than 30% of a family’s income, but inside the favelas, many people don’t pay taxes or rents. The occupations are big, generally with more than 100 and sometimes more than a thousand people involved. In São Paulo they occupied a piece of land (that was owned by Volkswagen...) with some 5 or 6000.

They had a strike in Belgium right now, didn’t they? Some activists (students mainly) and some trade unions support the squats, but the movement is mainly autonomous...

If you want to get in touch, particularly if you work in or on the oil sector, please write to: ogrc_br@yahoo.com

bosch siemens

This article on a strike at Bosch-Siemens Washing Machine Factory (BSH) in Berlin, Germany was first published in Wildcat no. 78, Winter 2006/2007:

“We wanted to make history”

The Prelude

“BSH will continue to manufacture home devices in Berlin - Planned closure for the end of the year is off the agenda”. This was the heading of the Berliner Zeitung on the 29th of June 2006. The article continued: “The BSH-management, the works council and the IG Metall union representatives agreed to negotiate about a new concept for the production location in Berlin. ‘The plan is that we keep parts of the production’, said the head of the BSH plant Gunther Meier... in exchange ‘considerable cost-effective concessions’ would be expected from the employees... Arno Hager (a union chairman - see appendix) said: ‘I believe that we will find a solution in order to keep the production running in Berlin long-term’. Hager did not want to comment on the concessions of the employees for the time being. Meier said that he expects ‘a cost reduction clearly in the millions’”.

At the beginning of July 2006 the works council rejected the cost-cutting plans. The works council first announced that “we are open for all plans”, but some workers made clear that they were not. People want a high leaving package, but refuse deteriorations of the existing conditions in any way. They know that their struggle has become a reference point “Now They Call Us Heroes Everywhere!” [See interview with a BSH-worker in Wildcat no. 75, translated in prol-position news no. 5/2006]
On the 25th of July BSH announced the shutdown of production for the beginning of 2007. This would not effect the research and development department. The IG Metal union and the works council start to negotiate about a social plan for the effected 570 of 1050 employees. When negotiations failed in August a strike committee was set up and production was interrupted by a continuous “extraordinary company assembly”, starting from the 6th of September. On the 17th of September is election day in Berlin, therefore the entangled red-tape of SPD and IG Metall has to prevent any further public debates about the conditions of workers in the capital, particularly after the plant closures at Samsung, JVC and CNH, all situated in Berlin.

On the 18th of October the IG Metall and the BSH agree on the following collective contract:

* 400 blue-collar workers get a job guarantee till 31st of July 2010, meaning that they will not be laid off (270 jobs in the production department, 60 in the washing department, 40 in the logistics; 30 jobs are shifted to other companies belonging to the BSH group)
* In 2007 there will be no wage increases or other raises due to collective bargaining
* The performance bonuses that are prescribed in the collective contract are cut by 100 Euros per month on average (this would effect 500 workers)
* All workers who are not employed in the production department will have to work 40 instead of 35 hours, without wage compensation
* All workers have to work an additional hour per week (scheduled as “training time”)
* The annual extra-pay (“dividend”) is scrapped, which used to be about 1,500 Euros
* The holiday and Christmas money is cut by 20 per cent
* The half-day extra-holiday on the 24th and 31st of December are scrapped
* 216 workers will be sacked

The wage cuts of about 300 Euros per month (of total 1,500 Euros after tax), the sacking of 216 workers, who will receive a meagre leaving pay of about 1.5 monthly wages, is a shitty outcome comprising about 90 per cent of the deal which Meier and Hager initially aimed at in June 2006. But between these two dates the most important strike in Germany in 2006 took place! It can teach us how workers managed at least during a short period of time to turn a seemingly hopeless and badly prepared struggle into an offensive. And we have to learn from it why they did not manage to continue the struggle after the treason of the IG Metall, despite an impressive revolt of a lot of the strikers.

On the following pages we present a chronology which has been assembled from various report, then the article continues, at the end there are some collage-type interviews with workers – they are product of conversations with various people whose real names do not appear out of safety reasons.

[Before the chronology, here is a list of the]

**Persons and Places of the Events**

**The Strikers**

Güngör Demirci
The chairman of the works council at BSH Spandau, Berlin. Since he got elected in the works council he has been off duty from the regular shop-floor work.

Luis Sergio
IG Metall secretary, responsible for the industry in Spandau, Berlin. He is the official strike leader.

Arno Hager
First representative of the IG Metall in Berlin. He is responsible, e.g. for structural and industrial policy of the IG Metall and crisis prevention for companies in the area. He defends the Hartz IV unemployment benefit reform. He is joint-owner of the employment transit company ABZ, which was formed as a temporary employment opportunity for laid-off workers from JVC and the Siemens Dynamo plant. After this constellation created a scandal at the beginning of 2006, it was
decided that the laid-off BSH workers would be employed not by ABZ, but a different transit company called Weitblick. The laid-off CNH people are dealt with by Weitblick, as well.

Oliver Höbel
He is the IG Metall representative of the federal states Berlin, Brandenburg and Sachsen.

Berthold Huber
He is the second chairman of the IG Metall, he used to be a member of the KABD, the preceding organisation of the MLPD (Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany). The renegades are always the worst. About the BSH conflict he said: "The production of home appliances in Germany has no future – I will not ruin a collective contract for this".

Günther Meier
Manager in charge for the BSH plant in Spandau, Berlin.

Osram
A light-bulb manufacturing plant (specialised in supply for the film and car industry), about 750 meters away from the BSH plant. The plant belongs to the Siemens group, as well. Berlin is the central production location of Osram in Germany, employing 1,900 workers.

BMW
A motorcycle plant of the BMW group situated about 2 kilometres away from BSH. About 2,200 employees produce about 92,000 motorbikes per year, up to 540 per day. A seventh of the total product is car parts.

CNH
Formerly Orenstein und Koppel, a metal plant about 6 kilometres away from the BSH factory. On the 1st of June 2006 after 102 days of strike, the longest dispute in the history of Berlin’s metal industry, the IG Metall representatives (the same gang of people like at BSH) agreed on the following social plan: "The closure of the plant will be postponed by four months to the 30th of November 2006. The people effected by the lay-offs will be employed by a transit company for another twelve months". The transit company Weitblick belongs to the union umbrella organisation DGB, like the scandal-shaken ABZ. On the 100th day of the strike Höbel and Wowereit (mayor of Berlin) both make speeches in front of the strikers. These two gravediggers of the Berlin workers movement both belong to the SPD (Social Democratic Party).

BSH Bosch Siemens Hausgeräte (home appliances)
The company employs about 14,000 people in Germany, mainly in the seven manufacturing plants Traunreut, Dillingen, Giengen, Bretten, Bad Neustadt (Saale), Berlin and Nauen. Worldwide the group employs over 37,000 people in 40 countries.

BSH Spandau, Berlin
Since 1953 the factory manufactures washing machines. In 2006 there are 1024 workers in the Berlin plant, 566 in the production department, 345 in the department PW (Development, Quality Management, Purchasing and Information Technology) is situated on the premises, too. Further 55 employees work in the logistics department preparing washing machines and spare parts for the transport. There are many Turkish and Polish workers in the plant. It has a long history of militancy, with particular combative years during the 80s.

BSH Hausgerätewerk Nauen GmbH
The plan is located in about 35 kilometres distance from the Spandau plant. The location in Nauen was built in the 90s, receiving major subsidies. Formally the plant does not belong the BSH group, which means that the company does not have to pay wages according to the collective contract. On the premises there are two factories, manufacturing washing machines and tumble dryers. In the long term the plant will more likely be a location for logistics.

BSH Dillingen (in the north-west of Bavaria)
About 900 employees, the location was founded by Bosch in 1960. Global centre for the development of dishwashers.

BSH Giengen
About 2,200 employees, founded in 1944. The production of refrigerators and freezers started in
1949. The location coordinates and supervises the worldwide research and development work for BSH refrigerating products.

**BSH Bad Neustadt (in the north of Bavaria)**
The factory was founded in 1937 and belongs to the BSH group since 1996. Bad Neustadt is the biggest vacuum cleaner manufacturing plant in Germany. The department also coordinates the global research of BSH into floor cleaning.

**BSH Plants in Turkey and Poland**
Since 2005 here is a BSH plant in Lody (Poland) and since the 90s there are factories in Istanbul and Cercezkoy (Turkey).

### Chronology of the Strike

**6th to 22nd of September**
The production is stopped by "extraordinary company assemblies".

**15th of September**
The company tries to take away the machines, but workers prevent it.

**19th of September**
Strike ballot, 95 per cent vote for strike action.

**1st day of strike, 25th of September**
At 3 am workers block the factory gates, first strike assembly at 12:30 pm.

**2nd day of strike, 26th of September**
The chairman of the general works council of the Bosch-Siemens corporation from Munich visits the strike tent. Arno Hager turns up, as well.

**3rd day of strike, 27th of September**
The strike newspaper is distributed in front of the factory on Bernauer Street. At 11 am the apprentices of a nearby construction technology school visit the strike tent together with their teacher. At 12:30 a delegation of three workers from Siemens-Messgeräte (PTB) arrives. During the strike assembly people read out solidarity messages from the Siemens general works council and from unionists working at the company AEG.

**4th day of strike, 28th of September**
During the morning school classes visit the strike tent. Klaus Ernst, rep of the WASG (Party for Social Justice), makes a speech. He draws parallels to the long march of workers employed in the ball bearing industry of Schweinfurt who organised a protest march to Bonn during the 90s. He promises to help organising the march to Munich (BSH head-quarter) and to establish contacts with union bodies in Bavaria. The second speaker of the day, Oliver Höbel, criticises the general lack of workers participation in companies.

**5th day of strike, 29th of September**
The management tries to refuse the members of the works council admittance to the company premises. A group of 20 to 25 strikers return from a spontaneous trip to the BSH plant in Nauen. Several school classes and their teachers come for a visit. The climax of the day is the appearance of Gregor Gysi (leading figure of the Left Party, Party for Democratic Socialism) at 11 am. The former Berlin mayor Momper arrives without announcement.

**7th day of strike, 1st of October**
A calm Sunday, the striking workers and their families and supporters have a common meal, the chat and debate...

**8th day of strike, 2nd of October**
During the morning various media reps arrive: Welt, Berliner Morgenpost, ZDF, WDR and Spiegel TV. Petra Pau from the Left Party arrives, Klaus Lederer (ditto) presents a solidarity petition signed by participants of the last party assembly plus a donation of 400 Euros. The notorious Monday Demonstration (in the tradition of the anti-Hartz IV protests, see prol-position news no. 1/2005) arrives at the strike tent; only few people took part, hardly any workers. The debate in the tent is dominated by the MLPD.

**10th day of strike, 4th of October**
Today there are no guests apart from Spiegel TV and the unionists from BMW. The official strike leader Luis Sergio and Güngör Demirci are nearly the only people who attend the strike assembly. During the afternoon a washing day takes place at
the Breitscheid Square. Dirty washing is washed by hand, symbolising the future of Berlin without the BSH. The turnout for this action could have been better, but despite the rain the workers attracted a lot of attention.

11th day of strike, 5th of October
The march of solidarity starts at 9 am, delegations from BMW, Daimler, Otis and Siemens take part. Amongst others the DGB-boss Michael Sommer, Oliver Höbel, mayor Wowereit and the town senator for economics Harald Wolf (Left Party) make speeches. The demonstration lasts till 12 am and brings the whole of Spandau to standstill. After the demo people embark onto eight buses while being greeted and seeing off by Gregor Gysi. First destination is the plant in Nauen. The village policeman is confused and despaired: "But the IG Metall guaranteed that all lorries would be able to enter and leave unrestricted!" Answer: "This might be true, but we don't agree. We are here in order to block the gate". About determined 250 people manage to block the plant effectively.

According to the first impressions while watching workers arrive and leave after shift most of the staff in Nauen are between 17 and 30 years old, most of them from East Germany, amongst them a lot of temp workers. There are hardly any signs of solidarity; one guy gives a 20 Euros note for the solidarity fund. The workers from Spandau form a long row on both sides of the exit road and enjoy letting the workers from Nauen drive pass it. All people who are too cool, too grumpy or with too short of a haircut have to drive through a particularly long and narrow pen. The unionists and works council of the plant in Nauen do not seem to be interested in the action. A sole works council shows solidarity with the struggle. Only later on and half-heartedly the works council picks up the demands of the strikers.

12th day of strike, 6th of October
During rainy weather most of the workers sit together in the strike tent. Six works council and the shop steward leader of the former Ford plant arrive. At 12:30 pm the strike assembly starts. Luis Sergio and the official strike leader ship: "The action yesterday was a complete success. Right on the first day we managed to get into the main television news. Our colleagues in Eisenhüttenstadt did a very good action today. Now a new stage of the struggle begins. We have to use all forces. Therefore we should travel to Leipzig tomorrow, because the famous priest of the Nikolai church, Christian Führer, announced his willingness to address the strikers at 2pm".

13th day of strike, 7th of October
About 200 strikers travel to Leipzig. They gather on the yard in front of the station and march towards the Nikolai church, distributing leaflets on the way. In the Nikolai church a panel discussion about welfare cuts and the reform of the health system takes place.

14th day of strike, 8th of October
Relaxing, chatting and reflecting.

15th day of strike, 9th of October
Since the start of the solidarity march the attitude of the media is surprisingly positive: Spiegel TV (RTL) broadcasted an objective report on Sunday evening, mentioning as the main reason for the dispute the profit seeking policy of the company. The local RBB wants to broadcast a documentary on the indefinite strike on Monday prime time.

16th day of strike, 10th of October
The march of solidarity reaches the washing machine plant of Miele in Bielefeld. The strike activists report that the IG Metall has completely retreated from the march, that wherever they arrive they would not get any support, contacts etc. from the union.

17th day of strike, 11th of October
A delegation of the Siemens Dynamo plant pops by for a visit. Solidarity messages from the IG Metall Nürnberg, the GEW (union for education) and the IG Metall Rosenheim arrive. Arthur Fischer, main representative of the IG Metall in Rosenheim wrote a letter to Jürgen Peters (union boss) and Berthold Huber asking them to develop a common strategy for the strike at BSH. He suggests that all employees of all BSH plants in Germany should take part in the demonstration on the 19th of October.
18th day of strike, 12th of October
Short messages from the strike buses on their way to Nürnberg, all seems fine.

19th day of strike, 13th of October
Apart from the picket there are only a handful of people on the strike premises, six buses left for a visit at BenQ (former Siemens mobile plant) in Kamp-Lintfort (over 500 kilometres from Berlin). Around noon a delegation from the nearby Osram plant arrives together with the shop steward-leader, they have a long chat with the official strike-reps. At 4pm the work-mates send a message from Kamp-Lintfort. The mood rises.

20th day of strike, 14th of October
The atmosphere on the strike premises is livelier than ever. Unionists from Osram and Icom (formerly Herlitz) arrive in the early morning hours in order to get an up-date on the situation. Afterwards Günörgür Demirici informs about the current stage of the legal process at the labour court: the court did not pass a sentence, but in respect to the wish of the management of BSH a settlement was decided on: the strikers have to leave a three meters wide alley for people and trucks to be able to enter and exit the plant. After the decision Oliver Höbel says: "Great respect for this motivated staff. This exceeds all expectations. You should not stop before the counter-party pays tribute to you, as well". A team of the state TV-channel ZDF arrives. Panel discussion with unionists from Poland, Turkey and Spain (Hasan Aslan from DISK, Todeos Felizinski from Solidarnosc and the translator Gesine Traub on behalf of the Spanish unionists).

Hasan Aslan: Since 1997 BSH produces home appliances in Turkey, about 3.5 Million products each year. In 2005 BSH increased profits by 55 per cent, to a total 55 million Euros. The workers get 2.13 Euros per hour; this amounts to 680 Euros before tax per month. This is only for the permanent staff, which account for only a third of the total work force. Most of the workers are temps; they only receive the minimum wage of 284 Euros before tax per month.

Todeos Felinzinski, member of the regional committee in Lodz, conveys a solidarity message from the BSH workers in Lodz. He says that he was not able to contact any official representatives. He describes the desolate condition of his union, which lost about 90 per cent of its members during the last ten years. The workers cannot count on the support of the unions. The wages range between 300 and 400 Euros, all contracts are timely limited. In Poland the unemployment rate is about 15 per cent, meaning that 3.5 million people are without jobs. The unemployment rate dropped by five per cent compared to the previous year, which is not due to more employment, but due to people leaving Poland, mainly to Great Britain and Ireland.

21st day of strike, 15th of October
Family Day, common meal and drinks. The Offene Kanal (Open Channel, an independent media collective) films and interviews people.

22nd day of strike, 16th of October
There is no alley for the trucks! As early as 6:30 am a huge mass of people, amongst others workers from Osram, BMW and Siemens Messtechnik gathers in front of the factory gates. The SPD has announced to organise a rally from 6 am to 6 pm, in order to support the workers. The speeches are as daft as ever: Lucy Redler from the WASG calls people to participate in the DGB-demonstration on the 21st of October. But for the first time all people get involved, a different, more combative atmosphere spreads. Neither bosses nor scabs show up. According to unofficial declarations the bosses will not try to enter the factory neither today nor tomorrow. Luis Sergio guesses that at the moment the compromising faction within the Siemens Company board dominates the hard-liners. Initiated by the employer there will be an attempt to reach an agreement in front of the regional labour court tomorrow at 8am. Many people have objections against it. The work-mates from BMW organise their works council meeting inside the strike tent. Another big bulk of solidarity greetings arrive, amongst others from Switzerland and Austria. The work-mates working at Miele announce that they will send two buses full of people to the protest in Munich.

23rd day of strike, 17th of October
A delegation that has been at the labour court arrives at the strike tent. The lawyer Thomas Berger
summarises the proceedings on behalf of the strike leadership: he has the impression that BSH wants to keep the plant in Berlin open. BSH does not want to appear as the job terminator of the nation, they do not want to provoke a situation similar to the one after the closure of AEG in Nürnberg. Luis Sergio announces that the strike leadership will have to elaborate a concept for the partial continuation of the production by the 22nd of November. This would be a rest time for the strikers which they can use in order to get prepared properly. He supposes that there won't be any results concerning closure or dismissals before Christmas. Güngör Demirci begins to speak "News of success are coming in from all sides. BSH workers in Dillingen walked out today. The willingness of the employers to enter negotiations can be seen as a positive signal. We will join the negotiations and repeat the known demands". On Friday, the 20th of October there will be a strike party, all strikers, their families and friends will have a common meal, listen to music, watch a documentary about the strike.

24th day of strike, 18th of October

In the early morning hours the compromise between BSH and the IG Metall, which has been agreed on during the night, is presented to the workers: out of the 616 currently employed people 370 are supposed to stay under considerably worse conditions; 30 people are supposed to be employed in the mother company in Berlin; 216 will be dismissed. There won't be any additional dismissals till 31st of October 2010. The IG Metall signs that they will abstain from organising any protest actions outside from Berlin. The official end of the strike is dated 20th of October 2006, midnight. While Höbel announces these results the strikers spontaneously throw their strike vests and stickers onto the stage. During the whole day very controversial debates take place. The strikers feel betrayed by the negotiation delegation and strike leaders. The atmosphere got tense when Luis Sergio claims that the numbers of demonstrators mentioned in the strike newspaper has been altered in favour of the strikers.

During the afternoon a helpless anger prevails, some dream about revenge or hope to continue the struggle, others try to talk themselves into a state where the official result seems better than it is. It is rather overwhelming to see the impression of defeat even in the eyes of those workers who will vote against the acceptance of the agreement tomorrow. Even the angry workers are clueless about what to do in case the ballot will be in their favour, which is highly unlikely.

Later on I understand that there is often a unionist (a guy from the negotiation delegation or a works council or another official rep) standing in the middle of the discussing groups, answering the questions and complains. A kind of human lightning conductor, who consoles and calms down. Amongst them the works council chairman and another colleague from CNH, who sit together with strikers and make jokes: "I will de dismissed, as well, but I am contented with our result. We could not have achieved more. The people were worn out by being on strike. Some started building their own house recently, they could not afford to be on strike...". Yeah, right, but they can afford wage cuts and unemployment!

25th day of strike, 19th of October

The strikers disagree with the result and express their anger during intense discussions on the strike assembly. Surprisingly many people take the mic and get applause for it. They are particularly angry about the joint action of strike leadership and IG Metall renouncing the planned protest rally in front of the BSH head quarter in Munich. A worker takes over the mic and criticises the fact that the result is even worse than the last offer made by BSH, he demands that the workers should not accept this sell out, but continue the strike. He claims that neither BSH nor union has handed out the written agreement to the workers yet, so there cannot be a secret ballot about it amongst the workers. He received standing ovations from 95 per cent of the people. Sergio answers that the ballot would have to be secret, but that he would postpone it and explain the agreement to everyone in a following assembly. After this announcement the atmosphere is less agitated. A female worker accuses the works council Demirci of betrayal, he told everyone that he would not share a table with manager Maier, but now they both signed the agreement. Demirci feels more and more trapped and is pushed into a
The situation escalates again after a worker calls him a scab and demands that he is therefore excluded from the ballot. The works council loses his mind and screams that he started fighting monopoly capital aged 18 and that no one could accuse him of breaking the strike.

There is a break.

After the break they discuss each point of the agreement. When point 9 ("no protest rallies outside of Berlin") is read out the situation finally gets out of hand: all workers in the tent get off their seats and shout "Work for all - Solidarity!" The panel loses control, Höbel and Hager search refuge behind the last row of seats. Several standing ovations and speeches, people chant, "We want to fight", and on the stage people fix a banner "Say No" which receives a long applause. There is a Solidarność-flag, as well. The whole increasing tension seems strangely torn, developing in stages.

The workers demand an open, instead of a secret ballot. The union insists on their statute, but finally a unionist says that the reaction is an obvious vote against the cancellation of the strike. A speaker, who took part in the march, asks at the end of his speech: "Who is in favour of the continuation of the strike"? Many people (not all) raise their hands; there are no votes against the strike. Later on Güngör Demirci proclaims during one of about a dozen personal statements that the works council has the right to topple the agreement by revoking the settlement that has been declared in front of the labour court. He says that for him 50 per cent plus X is a majority and that of course he is on the side of the workers. At the end of the assembly he stands on the stage, his fist in the air, while the unionists look around in distress. Nearly all people in the assembly accept Demircis announcement and greet it with applause. The tent trembles. Then the ballot starts.

26th day of strike, 20th of October

The ballot box closes at 12 noon. The public counting begins. At about 1:15 pm Sergio announces the ballot result. When he addresses the workers as "dear colleagues" they start to shout: "We are not the dear colleagues of strike breakers!" He does not repeat the address, instead he announces that people on sick leave, people on holiday and strike breakers are not allowed to take part in the ballot, but that according to the statute their vote will automatically be counted in favour of the negotiated agreement. People get agitated, there are catcalls. According to the strike leader-ship 539 people were allowed to vote, 513 people voted, which are 95.8 per cent. Out of which 167 vote in favour of the agreement (32.5 per cent) and 344 vote against it (67.5 per cent). Two votes are invalid. According to the German union regulation 75 per cent of the total staff has to vote in favour of strike action in order to get union support. The BSH workers would not be able to continue the strike legally.

After the announcement of the result Olivier Höbel wants to say something. Someone tells him to piss off. 'I will stay", he answers. 'Then we will piss off'. If anything left a little chance for the future struggle than it was this action of the workers leaving the assembly in protest. My impression was that people are really angry, but that it is difficult to find alternative ideas. The idea "to piss off" illustrates the problem. Höbel's answer triggered the reaction of the workers. Would Höbel's answer had been different; their reaction would have been, as well. The tent grows empty, the IG Metall officials, the strike leadership stays alone with the media people. People shout while leaving: "We will continue the strike! Solidarity!" Shortly after the action a cop car turns up, someone must have called them, probably the union. Outside the tent people debate about how things could continue. Later on the works council's chairman joins the crowd and announces that he will do everything in order to make the continuation of the strike possible. Despite the result he wants to try to convince the union local and IG Metall committee to continue the strike for political reasons (although in Germany political strikes are illegal, as well - note of the translator). He wants to convey the three main demands of the workers: no dismissals, higher leaving pay, better conditions for early retirement. By acclamation the gathered crowd votes unanimously in favour of the suggestions. The vote for a new strike-leadership is announced, but the vote does not happen.

Another break again!

It remains completely unclear how things are going to be continued from here. The fact that, after all what happened, Luis Sergio (and to certain ex-
twelve Concluding Points about the Strike

First. All union lead struggles end in an official victory - it is only the rank and file who might experience it as a defeat. The IG Metall arranged the struggle at BSH in a way ("against the plant closure") that would enable them to sell the outcome as a success: the BSH management never said that they wanted to shut down the plant completely! The research and development department was supposed to stay in Berlin and already as early as June 2006 the union and management agreed on a partial continuation of production. The fact that even two months after the end of the strike there has been no official IG Metall document hailing the victory means that something did not work according to the official plan.

Second. How to struggle against plant closures? What can be done once the strike in itself does not hurt the employer anymore? The workers’ "march of solidarity" was a way to get out of the trap. The move to give the brand Siemens a bad name aimed at a vulnerable part: companies which threaten with re-location of production to other countries (two years ago it was Opel, at the beginning of 2006 AEG, now Siemens...) still depend on the consumer market Germany. Siemens paid a lot of attention to the so-called "AEG-effect" (double digit decline of sales after the strike in Nürnberg), after all their own brand profited from the AEG crisis.

Third. In a way the workers took the offensive behind the back of the official bodies. The IG Metall has sent them to Kamp-Lintfort (mobile phone plant threatened by closure), where we could see scenes of fraternizations on the street. A spark to the powder keg: an explosive mixture of downsizing and wage cuts on one hand; corruption and self-service-mentality in the boardrooms on the other. The march of the BSH workers started to bring together affected workers from the shop floor. A joint workers’ action in Munich would have had a signal of enormous impact and attraction.

Fourth. During the days of the march the workers finally started to take the struggle in their own
hands. In Berlin they refused to open an alley for scabs and trucks, against the court rule. In the buses they left the official route of the union, they formed a creativity collective. On the background of the dynamic of other workers joining the struggle in solidarity ("towards Munich"), these "little signs" of self-determination were strong enough in order to turn a seemingly hopeless struggle into a threat. By the way, any workers struggling against the closure of any plant is able to create these "little signs": a few thousand Euros for the buses and 40 people who are willing to have a one week trip to other workers in a similar situation.

Fifth. When twelve loads of BSH workers started their earlier trip to Munich on the 31st of May 2005 the management was afraid enough to cancel their balance press conference. In 2006 Siemens was under even greater pressure: the corruption scandal, the sell-out to BenQ, the 30 per cent income increase of Siemens board members... and in this situation they had to face a joint demonstration. During the strike assembly someone described the situation as follows: "We were about to grab the Siemens group by the throat when the union smacked our hand". The political function of unions is to take the brunt out of the direct confrontation between workers and employers. Secret ballots and statutes are part of the game, if they don't work there is still the option to black-mail or to enforce decisions: already during the night of negotiations point 9 of the agreement was implemented, they canceled the march to Munich, they called back the buses. "Munich" was a charged issue for the unions, as well. Immediately before the German wide union demonstration on the 21st of October the action in Munich would have become a guideline for the general struggle. Workers in struggle who combine their action spontaneously would create a dynamic difficult to control.

Sixth. As soon as the struggle increases its strength, the employers calls for negotiations and thereby divides the strikers. In a previous interview with wildcat [no. 74; also in prol-position news no. 4/2005] a worker said "only about 30 per cent would accept the deterioration of conditions [in order to save jobs]" - exactly these 30 per cent have won the ballot! As long as the company refused to negotiate they united the workers and it was possible to increase the demands for leaving pay. A conscious unity was a prerequisite for the struggle. Only the demand "No dismissals!" was able to create it. The bad thing about struggles against closures: a foreman or master has got more of an interest to save his job than an assembly line worker.

Seventh. How can you think that you can delegate a struggle "against dismissals and deterioration of working conditions" to the IG Metall, knowing that they always mediated job cuts and deteriorations of the remaining jobs (for example at BenQ)? Because at BSH there were hardly any independent organisational structures of the workers left! The active workers were busy stabilising the strike and had now energy left in order to take care of leaflets, a strike newspaper, demonstrations and so on. The union's legitimacy is based on this situation: their job is to defend weak workers (Sergio in the strike tent: "We doctored the numbers of participants"). On the other hand the union perceives the independence of the workers as a threat (Oliver Höbel: "If you won't cancel the strike we will never again call any workers who are threatened by closure of their plant to walk out").

Eight. The workers learnt a lot during the strike (therefore we limit our contribution to these concluding points and let them speak for themselves in the following interviews). But there is no way to condense these experiences if now mainly the active generation of workers leave the plant. "They will start working somewhere else and their experiences will contribute to the situation there", this hope expressed during a conversation would only become true if they would be part of a different struggle soonish. At least statistically the prospect that this will be the case has considerably improved (the numbers of strike have clearly increased).

Ninth. We can see the same problem like during the public sector strikes during spring 2006: The workers block production for seven and a half weeks and stand on the picket for nearly four weeks, but hardly anyone comes by in order to support them. Neither workers from other compa-
nies nor people from the Berlin radical left scene. (Struggles about) the conditions of expenditure of labour power are not perceived as something political. Strikes will have to re-open up this space. Only a "workers' struggle", which neither represents "the general interest" nor fits the paternalistic pigeonhole of "victims needy for support" would be able to break with the current understanding of politics. Only an offensive "egoistic" struggle for the interests of those fighting would have the potential to overcome the isolation of the various struggles and to change the world.

Tenth. The phase of "extraordinary company assemblies" and the first ten days of the strike have been wasted ineffectively. The workers neither established contacts to other companies nor created an external impact on possible supporters. The IG Metall gadgets and official leaflets and the self-painted banners ("We want to work") rather frustrated people who came to Spandau in order to support the strike. The brave rebellion against the agreement came too late, the workers would have needed months of preparation, of forming relations with allies, establish contacts and so on.

Eleventh. Some simple rules which we always tend to forget: never send individual persons to the negotiations; never demand a strike ballot before you have lost the struggle; all workers should take part in the decision-making; contacts should be established by the workers themselves; paint the banners yourselves, write the leaflets yourselves... Who could write an "ABC for strike beginners"?

Twelfth. What can we do in order to support such a strike from the outside? Visit the people, talk to them. Offer support. Catch some ideas; make a leaflet out of it (give them a voice). Conversations also have the simple effect of serving as a mirror for the strikers. Whoever wants to do more: just go fly-posting, or put stickers on Siemens devices in sales rooms, leaflet in front of the job centre, on weekly markets, in the public means of transport. We can also get involved as "colleagues", students or professors can organise (nightly) courses (for the night picket) in front of the factory. School students can leaflet at their schools and call for visiting the strikers, for participation in their demonstrations (their have been huge school student mobilisations of school students in Berlin recently). People in other companies can establish contacts; drag their work-mates along to the gates...

A Conversation with a Colleague from BSH

The strike

On September 6, we started with work meetings and so we stopped production. On September 25 we blocked the Gate; this was the official start of the strike. It was not our plan to have a three week long work meeting, we though after three days we would have nothing to say anymore. The chairman of the works council talked almost 45 minutes to an hour every day, and two consultants of the works council talked 30-45 minutes daily. The works council had invited many people to talk: works councils from other plants, politicians, Hartz IV consultants and tax consultants

...who explained you in detail what stays left from your compensation money...

He wanted to talk about compensation money and taxes. We didn't care how to make an eight hour works meeting over weeks, we were ok with everything even tax consultants... But then he explained a lot of bullshit and scared people - it wasn't wrong, if you have 80.000, in any case 20.000 are gone!

Actually the strike should have started at the 18th, but when it finally started we had talked about everything three times. We had nothing to debate about in the first days of strike, so we watched movies, everyday strike movies.

But haven't you been watching movies at the works meetings, too?

Yes! Infineon strike, AEG strike, this Interconti strike, where they were striking over three years in Mexico... We also invited people from Charité (hospital in Berlin); they talked for about two, three hours.

Was there any effect? Did they show up when you were on strike?
We wanted to have a common works meeting with them and railroad workers in front of the Brandenburger Tor [historic monument]. The strike at Charité was canceled and the railroad workers disappeared. The people from Charité didn’t come to visit during the strike. But it was good that they came to talk. It isn’t easy to prepare people for a strike, who had never been on strike before. The more people came from outside the more brave the colleagues became: "We are not alone! We can make it!"

You didn’t get much support, didn’t you?

The most people from other plants were delegates. Not many workers showed up, only from CNH, four or five people came often. One works council from BMW was here almost all the time. But from Osram only two works councils visited two times! All in all we had expected more. We didn’t get much support from other plants.

Why?

I guess, it’s common sense: everybody dies alone. If BMW would have been on strike, maybe only five from our plants would have gone to visit. When the workers of CNH were on strike, not more than 10 people from our plant went. If there would be a strike today maybe 30-40 people of BSH would go and support them. But these are experiences, which developed during the fight, you need help and you should help others. Just like the ones from CNH who visited us, before I didn’t even know that this factory existed, you’ve never seen them at mobilizations! Lots of people got a little political during the strike. They know now were they stand and where the capital is and something about the background stories. Some were really scared in the beginning: "Okay I want to be on strike, but the boss shouldn’t see me." Later this constraint was gone, the second week, when the strike breakers came, these people were up front. Others were ashamed to distribute leaflets the first time in their life - and than it became just logical to distribute leaflets. That kind of practical stuff, that’s clear now for people.

Who proposed ideas? Were all actions initiated by the strike administration?

Yes, it was organized by the strike administration, to block Nauen (little town outside of Berlin, another BSH factory) and so on. Sometimes things just happened. For example some colleagues went to Osram, they had coordinated that before. Two times leaflets were distributed at Nauen without asking the strike administration...

Did you get any contacts at Nauen factory after distributing leaflets and the blockage?

After they sacked 600 people in Nauen, now more than 50 per cent working through temp agencies at the plant, they don’t give a shit. The rest of them are appointees or people with any kind of positions. No, we don’t have contacts.

Your strike administration was accrued through coincidence, is that true?

In August, when 70 per cent of the people were on holiday, we needed to build up a strike administration to develop demands. The IG Metall (Industriegewerkschaft Metall - union) arranged a meeting of union members, only 38 people came. Out of this group 15 people were campaigning and got elected. This went according a quota: one Polish, two women, one appointee, one industrial worker and so on.

Was there any other group except the strike administration? For example a Polish or Vietnamese group?

No. Sometimes people had proposals. German skilled workers proposed to build up a music group, which should play at Kudamm (Down-town Berlin), to get attention for the strikers. But this didn’t happen. Everybody participated but not on their own initiative. It’s a kind of BSH tradition: if you call, they join it! It’s a little strange if you compare it with other factories.

Why did the people who talked at the works meeting shut up after the strike had started?
Maybe their goal was to strike - with the start of the strike their goal was reached, and everybody was happy. There were no ongoing political demands. The people felt just fine, they had enough food, and THE weather was good... you know, there was no atmosphere of really fighting. This happened at the end of the strike, that people stood up and spoke. Before the strike was just like a works meeting. Politicians came and got 'cheered': "Colleagues, stay tame, maybe they can help us."

What else have you done besides a strike newspaper, website and a march of solidarity? And how many people participated at those actions?

Before the strike we had an auto convoy and a rally in front of the headquarters of Siemens. During the strike we did laundry at Kudamm and distributed leaflets in front of shops like Saturn, MediaMarkt, Karstadt (Big household appliance shops) and so on. At Siemensstadt (neighborhood in Berlin) we distributed leaflets in the morning to people on their way to work. And of course at the traffic light in front of the gates we distributed a lot of leaflets every day. We said: Who is going to participate? We need 30-40 people. And 30 - 40 people announced to do it. People didn’t ask for actions! Sometimes there were only 10 people for an action.

Were those all ways the same people?

The ones who distributed leaflets were mostly skilled workers - electricians, locksmiths and assembly workers. We thought they wouldn’t even participate in the strike. At the laundry day two works councils, assembly workers, two or three skilled workers and a few women were washing clothes. It was a different composition than distributing leaflets.

By the way, how many people were on strike?

Out of 1000, 470 got strike money. The first week was bad; a lot of people were looking for a chance to walk off! The strike itself, the picketing was a job for 150 people. Once 100 people had signed in, but only 20 were actually there. At another day we got back from an action and only 10 people were at the strikers’ tent. Until then a lot of people didn’t understand the political meaning of the strike. "I just want to sign in to get my money; I don’t care about anything else." Then it was decided that people have to sign in and out with their group leader.

What was the positive surprise during the strike?

That a lot of people, you would not have thought that they would even participate, were very active in the strike! Never been at a demo, never distributed leaflets! It was important that the skilled workers were there. They had never before been at a demo or distributed leaflets. And the Polish, they have a clear workers consciousness, they may not be lefties, but they can easily keep the classes apart. Out of maybe 100 Polish, 80 were very active.

Where there also people on strike who were not union members?

Yes, a few. A lot of non-members took a sick leave, a very little group participated. The clerks were working or used all their vacation time. In Nauen, they had only work for 120 or 150 people.

How did it work with the strike newspaper? This was an idea of IG Metall, wasn’t it?

Yes, it’s a standard at strikes. But the IG Metall censored the paper from the beginning. Once someone answered the question, about how long we want to be on strike: "I already ordered a Christmas tree, don’t worry." They had it in the paper, but they had to take it out again.

IG Metall distributed the money, the common stuff and the flags...?

Yes, the first day they had put up everything. Sergio (Luis Sergio - union secretary and official strike-leader) was there every day, the other came over for two or three times, solely to have speeches at the tent. At the strike meetings everybody was allowed to speak, the MLPD (Marxist Leninist
Party of Germany) with the Monday demo, or who ever.

But there is a different impression if you put up all the IG Metall flags, wear the IG Metall t-shirts and draw all the sandwiches with "work, work, work!" or you take your own matters into your own hands. Those t-shirts were printed by the union, but then they wanted 10 Euros each. We took them all, sold them for 5 Euros and put the money into the strike cashier.

For a lot of people it was important that IG Metall announced the strike, because then you don't need to worry about your wage at the end of the month - the union was your boss. And a lot of people, actually the majority said: We're not gonna make it without them.

How was the effect concerning this question on the strikers? Did a few people realize that 500 people can manage something?

A few of the active colleagues say: They didn't want to, a lot was possible, but the IG Metall didn't want to.

The End

When did you realize that negotiations were going on?

Already on Friday! They didn't tell what they were doing, but they said something about signals for negotiations. Most likely they would have an agreement by Tuesday, but no one should know about it, because of a possible failure. A week before they had a supervisory board conference; Huber (Berthold Huber - vice chairman of IG Metall) is also a member there. I believe, at this time they agreed on the vertices of the agreement. It was very strange that the bosses were so late in asking for a legal application for passing the picket. They could have had this application in between three days, but they let it go for two weeks and until the third week they went to court to ask for the application.

And still you weren't prepared for the betrayal!

On Monday one of us said openly: "People, tomorrow there will be negotiations." The people asked right away: "What's about Munich?" And IG Metall and works councils promised: "No matter what kind of agreement we will have, we're going to Munich! If the workplaces are going to be saved, we go to thank them." Something like that bullshit. The next day, they canceled the trip. That was one of the main critics of the people: "You lied!"

The leaders of the strike had voted 9:6 to end the strike...

Yes. The chairman of the works council and his deputy are members. One fore worker and two German women who just wanted to work are too. Especially people who are not threatened with lay-off and go with best interest of the existence of the plant, no matter under what conditions. They didn't care if 216 people have to go.

Were the strike breakers allowed to take a vote?

32 percent voted for "yes", there was no manipulation. With 3 percent of the strike breakers they got 35 percent. The Yes-voters took their vote on Friday. A lot of those who were active in the tent, voted for "yes" and were even more active in discussion afterwards not to get remarkable. Sometimes it wasn't possible to say openly, "Yes, I vote for the end of the strike." It's always that way. There is still a split in the plant between Yes-voters and No-voters. "With your "yes" vote you agreed on a lay off of 216 people."

What would have been a goal for the strike? What would have been possible to reach?

That there wouldn't be any lay-offs! That's what the people said from the beginning: And no worsening of the working conditions. At least five years of job security and capital investments. That's what everybody said: "If they don't invest capital, they again want to close down in two years." This is the reason for the overall estimation: "This time we're strong, this time we have to pull through everything."
After the strike

What is the situation in the plant?

30 to 40 percent are on sick leave.

According to the agreement, the arbitration committee needs to be done by December 15. Are they going to make it?

The pressure on the bosses and the IG Metall is pretty strong. They would have problems to push such bullshit through, if they don’t make it now. Everything needs to be set by December 31.

The union was busy to bring down the strike for a whole week. At the end Olivier Höbel (chairman of the IG Metall Berlin-Brandenburg-Sachsen) even threatened: "If you don’t stop picketing, we will never support a strike when a staff is threatened with plant closing!" That was not a faked threat; an union has to guarantee to get workers back to work after a strike.

IG Metall realized that they would loose control, that’s the reason for ending the strike. They had underestimated that the things would change during a strike. Two things were important: the big solidarity in Kamp-Lintfort (Siemens-BenQ factory, going to be closed soon) and that we didn’t let people into the plant. That scared IG Metall. We said in the strikers tent: "We don’t let anybody in!" One failing attempt to get in would have been 25000 Euros or something like that, but we answered: "We don’t care, we don’t let anybody in!" That threatened IG Metall. Since Monday morning 6 o’clock, we had closed the gate. But no one of the management showed up, we were surprised. Later I heard that it was already clear that they would have negotiations on Tuesday. IG Metall had obviously agreed with management that they wouldn’t provoke the workers with opening the pickets.

Four days earlier the spontaneous fraternization in Kamp-Lintfort showed them that something could happen...

It wasn’t like, that we wouldn’t have been warned! Workers from AEG came over to us and said: "They’re going screw you, watch out!" People from CNH said the same. But you don’t fight with the IG Metall eye-to-eye, it was our first strike, but it was their hundredth betrayal, they know how to do it. If there would have been 20 experienced people behind us, who have been screwed by the IG Metall like the workers at AEG, then the story would have ended differently. We would probably not have been screwed a second time.

You don’t get a second chance, that’s the bullshit. The workers at AEG wouldn’t have been screwed another time either...

But our problem was: If IG Metall would not have announced the strike, we could have worked our asses off - would have the people go on strike? No! We didn’t make it. If we would have been stronger, we wouldn’t have needed them. We were just able to go on strike, because they announced it legally.

It’s always difficult to fight closings. Normally the power is to go on strike...

We live in modern times: You don’t win a strike in front of the factory gate! Publicity doesn’t change anything either; auto convoys or demos to Roten Rathaus (town hall) didn’t change much. They are afraid if you go to other factories, or even better when you get something done in the same firm. For example Siemens, firm wide, or together with BenQ, then both are threatened to loose control IG Metall and management. They can tell 500 people: "Piss off, the strike is over, go back to work!" But with 10000 it wouldn’t be possible.

Now and then one could have the impression that the belief in the leaders was much more of a deterrent in this strike than the past years. This huge rage: "They betrayed us!" is the opposite side of the hope one had with these leaders.

At the beginning the belief in the works council and IG Metall was very big. This trust is gone now. For the IG Metall it was unexpectedly difficult to kill our strike, but they made it anyway. The control mechanism over the working class still works pretty GOOD; it doesn’t matter if it
comes from the local works council or from the unions. With words we couldn’t break peoples trust in IG Metall. But the IG Metall does it with what they do, that is also means to politicize people.

**All the bullshit happened before the strike**

The union had demanded a social agreement, that’s something you can have for a legal strike. But it’s not possible to fight for job security under that demand, because you will cause the inevitable question about compensation payment.

During the negotiations before the strike, in June or August they offered the whole agreement as a present. Back then they claimed: “They will close the plant anyway, we have to offer everything, so we will be in a good light in publicity.” And that’s why they even offered the underwear. This whole bullshit happened before the strike even started!

The management knew beforehand what it would get, when they would get at the table: A 40 hours week, vacation and Christmas benefits... everything was offered already!

At the end of the strike you once said: the last days were so wonderful, they compensate for the whole drudgery. 20 years of slavery away and now I was allowed to be a part of it...

It was worth in the sense that the people didn’t listen to anybody and decided their own things. It didn’t matter if it was a works council or the chairman of the works council or IG Metall; they always fought them back and decided about the story themselves. The IG Metall said stop and the people opposed.

Do the people have now more confidence in themselves?

Before the strike it was an illusion, now it is a normal thing. So in that sense: Yes! Before the strike maybe a lot of people would have accepted the result we have now, but during the strike they developed such a dynamic, a lot got active. Once I talked to two, three older workers, they told me: “If you would have told me two years ago, you were going to be outside the plant and block the gate, I would have laughed at you.” See, what’s possible in life! (laughs) One of them had never participated in a warning strike and now he is outside with us in front of the gate. The people see how good it is, if you get active together. For example the question of nationality didn’t play any role. During work it is different; Kurds, Turks, Germans, Vietnamese or Poles sit in their separated corner to have lunch. If there wouldn’t be layoffs we easily could build something on that. We got to know new people; we know who has what abilities. It would be a very fruitful soil to plant on... Well, but those 500 people are not going to stay unemployed for the rest of their lives; they will start to work somewhere. That’s an important thing: How do they develop their fight and keep talking about at other places?

**How is it going on?**

After every strike there are discussions about what could have been better; what can we learn for the future? The problem is that there is no exchange. For example, maybe it is going to hit Volkswagen, but the people from Volkswagen are not interested at the moment to listen to our experiences during the strike and how we got betrayed to prevent it in the future. We have to analyze the strike politically: What did we gain? What did we forget? I think the march on solidarity is a new form of fighting. How can we spread this out? It doesn’t need to be a bus always, but I think about actions not in front of the gate only. What kind of fights can we use? How can we make it better? If we get to another place by bus, we should stay there and invite people for discussions. Then we can have political discussions and set up the next steps. Unlike: go over to AEG; clap your hands and good bye! And we have to do something downtown, it’s important: in the morning a rally and afternoon a discussion round or something like that. Otherwise you don’t get in contact with people! Then it gets stuck on the level of IG Metall or another... Secondly: we got to that form of activity spontaneously through the miners [Miners’ strike in Turkey]. Maybe there are other ways to
fight, we don’t know about at the moment, which we can present in Germany.

"Suddenly everything fitted together"

You folks had the idea of a ‘March of Solidarity’ already earlier on...

Yes. We were inspired by the huge miners’ march towards the capital in Turkey in 1991. But only shortly before the strike kicked off we started to form a commission.

The IG Metall paid for the buses, organised the accommodation...

Yes. Initially we actually wanted to walk. Always 30 people walking, for three days, then others take over. In order to get to Munich in four weeks, we would have had to march 30 to 40 kilometres daily on average. In the end that seemed too much to us. Why should we not pass through areas where there is not much happening anyway by using the bus? We presented this idea to the IG Metall and they said on the spot: “so we give you a bus”. We only started to talk about the question of how we actually want to organise this action when the march had already started! The selection of people who joint the trip was also rather unfortunate. Some thought it would be funny to have a ride through Germany. Others thought that instead of standing on the picket you travel for free. May be 15 people were convinced of the thing they were doing, mainly the Polish, some of the Turkish, two or three German work-mates. To all the others the significance of the bus trip was actually unclear.

Why did you need the IG Metall for getting the bus?

The bus costs 1,800 Euros per day; we did not manage to raise this money. In addition to that the accommodation, one night plus breakfast for 40 people cost 700 Euros. For the logistical and financial support we needed the IG Metall. Furthermore we did not know how to establish contacts. If we had had our own contacts, for example to VW, we would have been able to decide ourselves where to go. After the march started everything was in the hands of the IG Metall, the contacts, too. They decided where to go.

There was a trust relation-ship, like, the IG Metall will organise the thing...?

No, not at all! The IG Metall organised it badly and everyone noticed. But for us the question was ‘are we able to organise the factory occupation and the March of Solidarity at the same time?’

Once the bus was sorted you had the idea to pay a visit to Eisenhüttenstadt, Kamp-Lintfort and so on (towns where struggles against plant closures were going on at that time)...

Initially Kamp-Lintfort was not our destination. That was rather an idea of the IG Metall. We wanted to walk through some eastern German towns, our destination was Wolfsburg, where we wanted to pitch up for some days.

Why? Wolfsburg is not at all on the way...

But it is a huge plant!

You wanted to go anywhere where you could meet several thousand workers?

Yes, exactly, this was our aim! But then the IG Metall said that Wolfsburg is in process of finding a production location agreement, they do not want us; we might harm the negotiation process.

I think it is peculiar that Kamp-Lintfort was the idea of the IG Metall! I had thought that they would be afraid that two similar kinds of struggles would come together.

Exactly this is what happened: the whole town was up and about, they promised to come to Munich, as well. It was the climax of the march! And this is what scared the union and the employers. The IG Metall might have thought that once we drop in for a visit may be 20, 30 BenQ-guys would come along - we only got to know in Kamp-Lintfort that they have not worked since two weeks! So it was not the case that they left the plant anyway heading home after work, no, they arrived
specially for the demonstration, a lot of them are commuters (so they had to make a journey and effort to come to the demo). If this action in Kamp-Lintfort had remained small scale, we might have gone to Munich. But they have seen a fraternisation taking place. Later on we got to know that 600 people would have come to Munich from Kamp-Lintfort alone: before that the EKO-Stahl people had said they would come, Miele wanted to come; people from Bosch wanted to join... suddenly everything fitted together.

Please tell us chronologically what happened. On Thursday, the 5th of October the bus first went to EKO in Eisenhüttenstadt, which went very well...

We were delighted by Eisenhüttenstadt. The visit at EKO was not the usual ceremony. The came out of the plant and immediately started talking to us: 'Don’t let them tell you what to do and want not to do! We have decided ourselves, too. It is about your own arse, so you may well decide yourselves what to do, which action to take!' They occupied the highway and the Treuhand (institution for winding up companies), this is what they told us. They offered that they would take over our picket for the time when we head towards Munich. As an sign of solidarity they also wanted to send a bus to Munich.

After that you went to Leipzig?

The bus was just about to arrive in Leipzig when we got to know that there was a DGB-rally (main union head-organisation) against the reform of the health system, so we send three additional buses. The people from Leipzig looked at us and our leaflets strangely; we were not popular there. We were a lot of black-haired guys, we from Turkey, the Vietnamese. Then we gathered in the Nikolai Church, the priest talked to us. Then, the next Sunday in the Frauen Church was shit, as well. The priest called Führer talked to us. On Monday, the 9th of October we went to Bosch-Buderus in Zwickau. Hardly ten people came to meet us, amongst them three works council members and the town mayor. In the East only EKO-Stahl went fine, during this week the atmosphere in the bus was rather bad; a lot of people were so down that they wanted to get off the bus... On Tuesday, the 10th, the bus arrived at Miele, we had to walk for miles, through fields, although we wanted to go to town centre! On the 11th in Nürnberg again several buses from Spandau joint us. That was much better; people came on their own accord in order to take a leaflet, which surprised me. We nearly walked an hour through town centre in order to get to the factory... cars stopped to take a leaflet, Nürnberg was completely different from how it usually goes. In front of AEG the situation was strange: you are on the road since a week, the work-mates stop work and come outside, the works council chairman talks for an hour, after him the union regional representative and then one of us. Then 'it was all nice, but now goodbye!' No contact established, no talking about what we want them to do or anything alike.

On the way to Kamp-Lintfort we discussed about our problems. We visited Duisburg spontaneously, distributing leaflets. That was quite good - and Kamp-Lintfort (Thursday, 12th of October) was very good. After that the bus was in Bad Neustadt. Only during the weekend in Stuttgart we started to paint or own placards, we wrote our own leaflet and formed a creative group. On the 17th in Dillingen...

Dillingen, as well, was a surprisingly positive experience, wasn’t it? You would not have expected them stopping work for an hour and coming outside the factory, like they actually did.

Yes, they do not have this kind of tradition. On the same day in Giengen things did not go that well. Two years ago they signed a production location agreement there: the 36-hours week slashed, the annual extra-payment slashed, increasing piece-work load etc... The following year only 45 percent took part in the works council election. It was clear that not many people would come outside when the IG Metall calls for it, because they are rather cross with the IG Metall. But we were very happy about the fact that in Dillingen 300 to 400 people came to meet and discuss with us. In the night after that the IG Metall put three people from the bus into an aeroplane to Berlin, and these three guys tipped the balance
during the strike committee's vote. The vote ended with 9:6 against the strike.

Later on Sergio claimed during a speech in the strike tent that the march did not have much of an effect, that everyone knew that the numbers have been polished up.

He had also claimed that less people than expected would come to Munich, maximum 1,000! He was right about that because his organisation, the IG Metall, had started to demobilise the action as early as one week before Munich was planned to happen!

Your initial idea was to give the employer a bad name in public. Then the dynamic changed completely: the bus travel started to bring together various groups of workers who faced the threat of factory closure. This was neither in the interest of the IG Metall, nor of the employers and the politicians. This is why the bus got ordered back.

...the travel was supposed to join these groups of workers who face closures and their mood: 'This has to stop. We fight back together!' In the end the bus travel contributed a lot to this shitty agreement. Without the bus travel the agreement might not have been reached at all. We threatened to pitch up in front of the Siemens head-quarter and camp there and travel from there to the DGB-demo in Stuttgart on the 21st of October. Siemens wanted to prevent this action in front of their Headquarter at any costs. Because the BenQ story was in their face at the same time. The hotter thing was our strike; they had to finish it off first. The IG Metall underestimated the dimension that suddenly group of workers joined directly. The board of the IG Metall was very concerned about that, they were able to see the political impact. It is never their aim that workers from different companies fight together.

The opposite is true; their aim is to keep them apart.

Exactly. And then they finance a bus under the slogan that we are supposed to fight together! (Laughs).

Nuran's story...

I started working at Bosch-Siemens 23 years ago, when I was 15 years old, officially 19 years.

Two and a half years ago a lot of people got dismissed. Amongst the dismissed were three of my female work-mates who had already worked in the company for twenty years or more. And of course, the work council signed the dismissals! People who were in the plant since eight, ten or twelve years where allowed to stay. The reason given for this decision was that the dismissed workers were not able to do the allocated job. That's bullshit! We have learnt that we are not stupid, that we are able to learn quickly. It is not a computer game, they are simple washing machines. The wage bracket was the problem, of course [due to seniority the dismissed people had been in a higher wage bracket]! When they dismantled our assembly line we applied for jobs in the laboratory. They told us, that there were any vacancies. Six months later they dismantled another line and suddenly there were jobs in the labs, for people who worked at Bosch Siemens for eight or ten years. At this point they kicked out four people who I knew very well, who had worked in the plant for twenty years or more. A man amongst them had no children, so he got fewer points, two women were single mums, and one was single, without kids. According to the social plan they have less points, although they had been in the plant for a long time. They now receive Hartz IV. A female work-mate told me that during the first visits to the job centre she always had to cry. They have threatened her in strange ways; they accused her of having left the job voluntarily. She told me: "It is really bad out there, you cannot imagine!" And this will be the case for the 216 [sacked] people, as well.

We hold one company assembly after the other; in September we crippled production holding a company assembly that lasted several weeks. Then we discussed: when do we finally start the strike? It took a long time, because for a long time the IG Metall did not want the strike. When the strike finally started, the employer had already had the time to get prepared. The works council always said: we will not be able to make it without the IG Metall. We need a union behind us.
This is what they told us, the kindergarten. They wanted to be our educators.

I was at the picket every day. My son was ill at the time, but I prepared something for him and went to the strike every day, ten hours, twelve hours. I wanted to go to Munich, as well, my sister was supposed to look after him during that time.

I was outside a lot, leafleting in the trains, in the buses and so on. A lot of the drivers gave us permission. We stood two hours in front of Osram, I always tried to talk to people, they took a leaflet, but they were not interested. At that day at Osram the management had decided to lower the wage brackets, so people were in a bad mood. But although they had problems, too, and although I invited everyone to come to the strike tent, no one came - apart from some works council members.

On Tuesday we came back from the strike and we went shopping after 7pm, for the bus trip [to Munich], little drink bottles and the alike. Tuesday evening it was the first time that I said: slowly but surely I start to believe in Demirci, I said that for the first time! I think we might achieve something after all. And then, on Wednesday morning I have a look at my mobile, and there were two missed calls from my work-mate, who normally rarely calls me. I rang him back and he said: "Please, come here and tell the others, do you know, they sold us out. Demirci has signed". I just did not get it. I have never thought that I would cry, but I had really bad feelings when I was in the strike tent. We arrived there at half ten, everyone was there, everyone was shocked, many people in tears. The Wednesday was really bad, it was packed, everyone was told to come. Demirci had a completely weird face. Olivier Hübels from the IG Metall wearing tie, of course, Luis Sergio... was really bad! Then they wanted to hold another strike ballot, 25 per cent for them, 75 per cent for us. We did not make it, we got 67 per cent! Shame. I said right away that once we start the ballot, we have lost. Once we trust Luis and Oliver, we have lost.

We wanted to go to Munich; people were full of anger and hate. I was very noisy, too, I shouted "IG Metall out, IG Metall out!" But the main guy to blame was our works council chairman, because he has signed! After the ballot I was so angry, I lost it. I shouted "IG Metall out!" we did not want to continue with the IG Metall, we wanted to occupy the factory, organise the strike ourselves. We had done a lot of illegal things previously anyway. We occupied the gate; we did not let people enter, which was already illegal.

We fought well, but at a lot of points we did not act sensibly, we lacked the experience. We only went on token strikes before. I don't have a clue about some of the things, but I talked to a lot of people and I wrote to people in Turkey. Our colleagues from Turkey and the unionist from Poland both told us: everywhere people are forced to go on strike without receiving strike pay. In March a unionist from Turkey came for a visit, he told about the strike of 800 workers, who walked out for eight months without a single Cent strike pay. I would give up one or two months of wages if it were necessary for the struggle! But there are a lot of people who talk radically, but without the pay from the union they would not do a thing.

Having to go back to work after the strike was very bad. It was on Wednesday when I went pass it. I did not look in the direction where the tent had been; it gave me a real pain, when I went pass it. During the first three days I did not meet the piece rate. Now I got my pay slip and they reduced it from my wage, but I just was not able to meet it! And I did not want to meet it. During the first day I worked together with a work-mate who did not meet it either. Then I heard from other work-mates, that they did not want to meet the rate, too. We talked a lot about it. I did about two thirds of the normal rate. Usually the foreman is very greedy for work, but during the first week he was really tired, he was in a terrible shape. And a lot of people were on sick leave, of course. One week, two weeks. Their soul was troubled. A lot of people over-exhausted themselves during the strike and became ill, some have been on the picket or running about for 24 hours.

I don't know yet if I will stay. I would stay one or two years, till my husband has his job situation settled. I counted on about 70 to 80,000 Euros leaving pay. My husband has a job now. In case I won't be working tomorrow, at least he would earn. But after 22 years I don't just want to leave like that. That will be terribly painful. I started working there when I was a child. And of course I suffered. I was a single mum for a long time, my husband was in Turkey. When my child was six
months old I went back to work. That wasn't easy. I cried on the assembly line, I always had bad feelings about letting my baby alone. If I look at it now, I wouldn't do it again. But I had to work. That wasn't a nice life, tough times. I spent my youth in the plant. If I see my daughter now, who is still acting like a little girl... I did not have this chance.

I don't know what will be the outcome of the 15th of December. Then people will know who has been sacked. I don't know if I belong to those who have to leave. But it is not about me! This is what I always tried to explain to other people. Some people wear themselves out, because they are afraid of loosing their job. Of course, they are right, I am scared of loosing my work, too. But first of all it was the injustice of the agreement, we went into their trap, they have played with us. We have done what they asked us to do, although we told ourselves during the strike again and again: they fuck us over!

Of course I neither want to work under the conditions which they try to enforce now: 23 per cent wage cut, no annual extra-pay, which is another monthly wage, no holiday pay, working-times up to 42 hours per week. May be I won't stay till 2010 anyway. And who knows if the plant will still exist in 2010.

"Porto Marghera - The last firebrands"

The winter 2006/07 issue of the German Wildcat magazine features a DVD and booklet documenting a historical experience of autonomous workers’ organisation in the industrial area around Venice, Italy in the late 60s and early 70s. Unlike most of the more or less academic historical documentations of Italian Operaism, which tend to focus mainly on the leading organisations and figures, in the 2004 documentary the worker-activists themselves talk about their experiences. Wildcat and friends subtitled the documentary in German, English and Polish (the original is in Italian plus French subtitles). Soon there will be an improved version with subtitles also in Slovakian, Turkish, Romanian. In addition they put together a very detailed booklet containing more historical analysis and interviews which will soon be available in English. Amongst others, the following characteristics and problems of this particular phase of class struggle are still important to debate and tackle today: - The workers at Porto Marghera fought for better working conditions and at the same time against the damaging impact of the chemical industry and of work itself. The split between workers defending their health damaging jobs, whilst being deeply critical; and a middle-class moralist green movement did not yet exist. - The workers-activists developed their independent forms of organisation within the actual struggles of the time, reassessing the relationships between the mobilisations of the workers and their own role as active workers, between factory and wider social terrain, between workers’ struggles and the new forms of union representations and ‘professional’ political groups like Potere Operaio, between mass movement, armed insurrectionist groups and state repression. Below we publish the introduction and content list of the booklet. If you want to get hold of the DVD or the English version of the booklet, please get in touch with: redaktion@wildcat-www.de

Porto Marghera - the last firebrands. The title of the documentary has various meanings: the Italian word 'fuoco' means 'fire', and also a 'shoot-out'. In this case, the word also means the flames of the
petrochemical works that make the industrial zone visible from miles around. Its future is uncertain. The environmental damage that it has caused cannot be overlooked. The hundreds of deaths from cancer can never be made good. The most polluting parts of the industry have since been outsourced east, but Italy still belongs to the largest PVC producers.

The fire in the industrial wasteland, where the illegal immigrants warm themselves, is a symbol in the film for the new class composition, making an immigration country out of an emigration one.

But the phrase ‘the last firebrands’ also refers to the heat waves of class struggle that swept across this industrial zone in the 1950s, 60s and 70s; struggles that characterised the area and left a lasting impact upon it. Sometimes history takes a violent leap: in 1968 inexperienced peasants from the countryside were catapulted into the centre of the worldwide revolution. No working class had previously identified the factory as a trigger of fatal diseases and as a destroyer of life, as clearly as they did in this struggle. The union shut out the organisers of the struggles. Those shut out found their own organisational forms. The autonomous assemblies in Porto Marghera in the early 1970s not only co-ordinated the struggles in the factories of the industrial zone, but also squatted houses, formed neighbourhood committees, organised price reductions in the supermarkets and together with thousands of workers burned their electricity bills. The unions and the government could only look on.

On the DVD you can find... the film *Porto Marghera - gli ultimi fuochi*, created by Manuela Pellarin 2004. It was filmed with funding from the Venetian Province, amongst others. It was first screened in Venice and was going to be screened on Arte (a French / German TV channel), but then nobody wanted to know anything more about the film. We saw it for the first time in January 2005 at a private screening and were excited, because here, speaking in their own words, were the protagonists of the struggles of the 50s to the 70s: the workers. The production company ControCampo was pleased that someone was interested in the film and gave us the rights to it. So we can now give it out as a free addition to Wildcat subscribers. Because we could not afford to buy the rights to use the original music (Johnny Cash), we have completely re-done the film’s soundtrack: the only music left of the original are the two songs by Gualtiero Bertelli, who accompanied the struggles with his guitar at the time.

We have subtitled the film in German, English, Polish and Slovakian. The French subtitles were already there. As an addition you can find on the DVD a portrait of Augusto Finzi, in which he give a personal resume of his political activities. Manuela Pellarin made this new cut from the existing material and showed it at the presentation of the ‘Augusto Finzi’ workers archive. We subtitled it in German and English.

**Precarious work, subcontractors, poisoning**

The old workers interviewed talk about the situation in the 50s and 60s in the booming industrial zone and how they fought against it. The themes are very relevant today: - Precarious work with four week contracts were the rule in the shipyard - Similarly, subcontractors were very common, employing workers who came from far away, for low wages and worked under bad conditions. The workers from Porto Marghera lead a huge, very militant strike against outsourced companies, demanding direct employment and equal treatment for all workers. - The handling to highly toxic materials does not just belong to the past: The introduction of a new EU wide chemical industry standard, that includes a ban on the usage of toxic material if there is a possible replacement material, is being fought over hard by the Chemical industry and the relevant unions at the moment (Autumn 2006). The film contains various levels alongside each other:

- The history of the workers struggle in the 50s and 60s in the industrial zone
- Environmental damage and disease through the industry
- Discussions of young workers in 2002 about the closure of their department
- The new composition of workers through migration

**The hidden history**

Three of the workers interviewed were activists with the radical organisation Potere Operaio, who placed their hope in the autonomous organisation
of the working class and built up their own structures outside the unions. We have collated material about this on the following pages of this booklet. At the end, we have reprinted an old text of the worker committees of Porto Marghera from 1970. One needs to have a little patience here to get used to the language, even more so because it is [a translation of] an old German translation, which took up the Italian monstrosity of a word, Operaism.

Content of the booklet:
- Intro to the DVD
- Presentation of the workers archives 'Augusto Finzi'
- History of the Porto Marghera industrial zone
- Short chronology of class struggle in the Veneto 1967 – 1981
- The class struggles in Italy 1968 - 1973, a political summary
- Unions versus workers autonomy
- Operaism, an overview on the political development
- About the history of the Potere Operaio (workers power)
- The history of the workers committees in Porto Marghera
- Talk by Italo Sbrogio, one of the workers-activists, June 2006
- "The workers should take things into their own hands" - Interview with Gianni Sbrogio, October 2006
- Appendix: The process against Montedison and Enichem; The dioxin cloud over Seveso; The new chemical industry standards and the German unions; 'Struggle is worth it', speech by Gianni Sbrogio, March 2006 - From a meeting about the struggle against asbestos, Padua, March 2006; 'Work refusal', Text of the workers committees in Porto Marghera from 1970; The characters in the film; Glossary

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the front facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people loose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling credits to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop, at the outskirts of Gurgaon India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please have a go at:

www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com
gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk
For those you who don’t already know it - Metamute website and journal [http://www.metamute.org] has loads of good articles and discussion lists. They have a focus on media and the arts from a radical, anti-capitalist and analytical perspective. Some recent highlights are:

**Egyptian Textile Workers Confront the New Economic Order**

In echo of the recent reports posted at Mute on the large scale workers activity in the textile industry of Bangladesh someone posted this excellent report from Egypt. The report covers the last few years wave of strikes initiated in the Egyptian textile industry but by spreading to other sectors, effectively shaking the stasis of a State approved union infrastructure and the autocratic pro-privatisation political order.

**Strike at Big Shipyard Is Yet Another Effect of Katrina**
[http://www.metamute.org/en/node/10334]

A collection of articles about the current economic and social problems facing people in the aftermath of Katrina. Rising prices, stagnant wages and layoffs triggered a strike in the local shipyards.

**Naked Cities – Struggle in the Global Slums**

A collection of articles about the shanty towns and slums around the globe including 'Thinking Resistance in the Shanty Town'. South African Activist and academic Richard Pithouse gives an inside view of the social and political movements inside some of South Africa's shanty towns and also give a sharp critique of the on-going tendency of western academics to see things from a western perspective, to generalise, and to miss the real struggles going on on the ground.