

Preface

This text has been around in limited circulation for a few years. Whilst British workers have been fed this image of happy West German workers signing non-strike clauses, of course the class struggle has been going on remorselessly. With German reunification, the recomposition of the working class will continue apace, as indeed it will across all Eastern Europe.

While war rages across Yugoslavia, and right-wing mobs attack 'foreigners' in former East Germany, we must remember that such apparent chaos serves the multi-nationals. Newly privatised British firms, like British Telecom, are busy setting up in East Germany. The confinement of 'guest-workers' to old army barracks makes it easy for the bosses to intensify the conditions described in this pamphlet. In the 'Soviet' Union, multi-nationals have for years used slave labour drawn from 'soviet' prisons to work in their chemical plants. This is a trend that is likely to continue as Yeltsin and other democrats launch a new assault on the soviet working class.

Notes on key words

Slave Trader — a subcontractor who employs workers and hires them out to other companies. Often, he avoids giving work contracts and complying with federal labour laws which require the employer to cover part of the workers social security payments. Because of the bad work conditions and huge profits connected with this kind of set up, the man is called a slave trader.

Kapo — a foreman. The german word has a very special connotation because it stems from the concentration camps. The kapo was one of the prisoners who was charged with "supervising" (i.e. grassing)

Recomposition of the working class — This term is applied to recent capitalist strategies that aim at diversifying the class to such an extent that there will not be major class struggles for some time to come due to the lack of a common interest on behalf of the workers. This is to be accomplished through part-time work, subcontracting, casual labour, computer jobs at home, the breaking up of large factories into independent departments and an increase of so-called unguaranteed employment, eg by hiring the services of 'self-employed' individuals who sell themselves to the company for a certain period without receiving the usual social security benefits.

Intervention — this is used in the sense that people start working at a place with the aim of investigating labour conditions and participating in eventual struggles.

Casualisation — this means that more and more people have to resort to casual work, thus losing their eligibility for unemployment benefit.

Work Resister — those folk who are consciously "out of work", who refuse to contribute to capitalist society if possible.

CLASS STRUGGLE in a GERMAN TOWN

Capitalism Reconstructs

Up to now, the German anti-nuke movement has mainly emphasised the ecological and military aspects of nuclear power plants, i.e. the danger of contamination to both human beings and the environment, their importance for the production of nuclear bombs and their function as nuclear barrage in NATO military planning.

However the importance of nuclear power plants for the recomposition of the working class has not been a subject in the discussions of anti-nuke activists. It was simply ignored that in the construction work, during maintenance and occasional revisions of the plant hundreds and thousands of workers were being exploited. Whenever the movement was confronted with some of these workers, eg at construction sites, they found themselves on opposite sides of the fence. Also, we sadly remember when in the seventies, the miners' and energy workers' union was able to mobilise thousands of its members for large demonstrations in support of the slogan "For the Atomic Energy Programme — It means Jobs!" This led anti-nuke activists to believe that they were dealing with a hand-picked loyal workers' elite. The rumour still goes around that there are only a handful of technicians employed running a nuclear power plant.

Here we will try to describe the situation we were confronted with during construction works at the German nuclear power plant in Phillipsburg (KKP2), i.e. labour conditions, the composition of the workforce, the function of the slave-trader in the context of rapidly worsening job and social security as well as the workers attitude towards their job and our efforts at intervention.

The little information we have about the normal job situation at a running nuclear plant is taken from an interview and a brochure. However, these sources alone show that it is not only a handful of specialists that work there: at KKP 1, 900 people are employed, three quarters of them by Slave-traders.

Also, we will try to explain the importance of nuclear power plants as a device for the regional recomposition of the working class. The 'nuclear barrages' serve as axes along which industrialisation is being expanded. The 'emergency plans in event of a nuclear accident' are primarily a pretext for exploring the social relations, thus preventively encircling working class resistance in the regions.

Very briefly, we want to point out another important aspect of the various nuclear energy programmes: the technologies, which come (by no means accidentally) as a by product of the programmes, have played a key role in restructuring production and in the recomposition of the class. Such has been the case that in the fifties and sixties,

when the steering devices developed during nuclear research programmes were then used to build modern petro-chemical combines and refineries where the work process is organised as an assembly process and the work force is divided into the 'new type' of supervisor and the casual worker who does odd jobs. This has also been the case in the seventies, when the research led to the development of decentralised computer and control capacities (i.e. grab robots, mounting islands etc)

Meanwhile this has resulted in the curious fact that the main German research centre for nuclear energy in Karlsruhe has, for some years now, given priority to research on robots and computerised production and has continued nuclear research only on a small scale. (The same is probably true for the research centre in Jülich, which specialises in optics and metallurgy.)

Due to the logic of 'practical nuclear research' we are now stuck with huge amounts of nuclear waste to be reprocessed in Wackersdorf or disposed of in Gorleben, even though not a single new power plant has been ordered or planned in years. Those in power have always tried to use nuclear technology to link the survival of mankind to their own survival. We hope this article will help us to put an end to this gross blackmailing.

When we started working at the nuclear power plant in Phillipsburg, the regime had just initiated another round in the struggle between capital and labour. Ever since the beginning of the eighties labour conditions had become steadily worse: anyone trying to get a job, even a casual one, had to present a personal record, had to sign his name on a waiting list — the bosses started to select. Slowly but steadily, the decision of how long, where, and under what conditions to work was taken out of the workers' hands. Now it was the personnel managers who had the say, and they made use of 'flexible employment' (part time work, subcontracting, limited work contracts etc.) to an always greater extent, the way it suited their needs. Even the wages which had up to then almost automatically increased whenever somebody took over a new job were frozen, or even cut occasionally.

This change in power relations was made possible by an accompanying government policy which drastically cut back on the payments of the governmental unemployment agency, thus withdrawing the material basis on which the proletariat had built their self-determined mobility. This was further aggravated by a more aggressive job provisioning practice of the unemployment agencies: millions of workers were mobilised by force and dumped on the labour market. The joint attack of state and capital was directed against the indifference towards such basic capitalist values as performance and career which broad sections of the work force had developed since the seventies. The attack was successful inasmuch as unemployment could now be used to put pressure on the workers. Still the 'cure' did not have the desired incisive effect the regime had hoped for.

Even though the proletarians had to work more in order to keep up their living standards (the volume of work increased enormously in these years) and even though the social spending of the government was diverted to other channels, the overall social spending was not reduced. Plus, state had lost control over the composition of

the proletarians' income.

At the beginning of 1983, the regime made efforts to do away with any loopholes and uncontrolled niches. A campaign for professional training should help to recruit the new generation as a cheap labour force. The kids were to get it into their heads that in this country only those who have proven their work discipline and good performance during their apprenticeship will be given a chance. At the same time, the minister of Labour, Blüm, set off a campaign that aimed at destroying the so-called 'black economy' which had long since become an integral part of the multi-nationals' exploitation scheme. Rather, its real purpose was to regain government control over this part of the labour market, the individual worker, their income, and the social benefits they receive.

Finally the government started to expand its forced work programmes which were mainly directed towards women and youths. This involved 'socially useful work' which was tied to welfare payments, the 'voluntary social year and a 'year of preparatory job training' as well as the 'renting out' of unemployed youths to public institutions.

So the situation has been tense since the beginning of 1983. The state attack can be felt in proletarian life. Capital has decided to put part of the labour market under the control of the slave traders and the state institutions which go along with it. Within weeks, the attitude of the official unemployment agencies towards the slave traders changed. The state itself took over the task of mobilising the slave workers, sometimes even covering the wages of those who are 'difficult to place in employment'. The medical care institutions also collaborated. They no longer concentrated their investigations on the slave trader who evades social security payments but on the slave themselves who takes a day off on sick leave. The campaign reached its climax with regional police raids in the federal state of Baden Württemberg and the Southern Palatinate. In Baden-Württemberg alone, 40,000 workers were checked, 2,000 of whom were summoned.

The situation remains open. Many workers have surrendered to the slave trader, for the job he provides, no matter how much they dislike it, is for many the last chance to find work at all. Many of those who get in touch with a subcontractor for the first time believe that this situation is an intermediary low point in their work life and cling to hopes of the next better job, to the myth of a future career based on qualification. But as individually as the slave workers try to put up with the job and to bargain with the slave trader — for this is always possible, that's what he's good at — just as individually someone may become fed up with it and kick the slave trader's hind parts!

It is the very function of the slave trader to free the capitalists from their obligations towards the workers. The thousands of tricks he applies to hire and fire 'his' people, to cheat them and to discipline them, are unknown to most of the workers. Their individual response to their actions does not seriously challenge his position, especially since he can count on official backing. Still the capitalists are not too happy with the situation. They are freed from certain obligations but the majority

of the jobbers, in turn, feel even less inclined to take over responsibility. Their attitude ranges from indifference to open defiance and this attitude also affects the work they do (this is what the industrialists from Nordrhein-Westfalia spoke about at the end of 1982, still prior to the actual boom in subcontracting, when they lamented that the lack of responsibility among slave workers was undermining social co-operation and the role of subcontractors was limited).

Everyday there is another chance that this attitude finds a collective expression, that the individual bargaining turns into a collective challenge of the slave trader. Such was more or less the situation when we started working at Phillipsburg. A town of 12,000, Phillipsburg was one of the first sites chosen for the construction of a nuclear power plant. The decision was influenced by the fact that the town is located near the Rhine and the Rheinschanz-Island, an ancient fortified position on which the nuclear plant would be constructed. Even more decisive was that Phillipsburg is situated north of the industrial centre of Karlsruhe and south of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen in an agricultural region with few small businesses and a number of medium size firms which exploit the gravel deposits in the region. Since agriculture, widely concentrated and mechanised, provides work for only a very few people, most of the workers are forced to commute to the industrial centres of Mannheim, Bruchsal or the Daimler-Benz factory in Wörth. Up until the sixties the only large factory in the region was a sugar refinery which hired seasonal labourers for about two months each year. So conditions were favourable for attracting industry as soon as the nuclear power plant was constructed. This shows that the nuclear energy programme of the federal government has a far greater importance for the German ruling class than its mere military and technological components: KKP1 and 2 are the pacemakers for a structural policy which condenses the current state of capitalist experience with class struggle, i.e. it is an instrument in the regional recomposition of the working class.

It has been said that in response to the struggles led by the working class, the capitalist dissolved the old massive concentrations of workers with the aim of establishing new subclasses. The concentrations of large numbers of workers and the number of large factories were to be reduced as far as possible, by the relocating and decentralising entire factory departments. This development can be clearly seen in the Phillipsburg region. While in Mannheim, which has traditionally been a working class strong hold, the unemployment rate occasionally rises above ten percent, and in Karlsruhe mechanical engineering factories and companies, primarily employing women, were closing down, industry, especially the chemical industry, started to resettle in the nowhere land around Phillipsburg, attracted by wages which were up to 20% lower than the wages in the cities, by cheap properties and a modern infrastructure which followed on the heels of the nuclear power plant.

As early as at the end of the sixties, two chemical giants established factories near the site — Goodyear settled in Phillipsburg and two ICI factories were constructed, one on each side of the Rhine, along a new East-West connection that would eventually be expanded into a new motorway. The next to come was a concrete producing company which works in three shifts, just like the chemical factories, and

a plant of the Ferguson Motor Company. Together with the Siemens Bruchsal plant, which has been facing a slow close down since the early eighties, these factories have been the largest ones in the region in terms of employment during the restructuring period. They were followed by companies which had just fled the workers militancy in the neighbouring cities. After the closure of the old IWKA plant in Karlsruhe the same company opened up a smaller, 'restored to health' version of the plant in Blankenloch, 15km north of the old site. The John Deere company, which had been the focal point of workers' strike action in the seventies, opened up a new mounting plant in Bruchsal, a town which, along with Phillipsburg, was named 'state expansion area', i.e. a government promoted industrial area in the seventies. Both towns gained further attraction when they were included in the modern Mannheim-Stuttgart high-speed railway net. The region will experience another dramatic change upon the construction of two north-south motorways (nickname: the cooling tower autobahn) which, starting out in Mannheim, will hit the east-west axis near Phillipsburg. According to the development plan of 1980 the villages and satellite towns situated along these axes are to provide industrial sites for small and medium size companies only. Thus, the sweatshops and relocated departments of the energy and metal industry will move to the villages of former commuters.

But there is more to infrastructure than just planning and transportation facilities. It also includes determining the future composition of the working class. By constructing the east-west connection which connects the Palatinate to the Kraichgau region on the right bank of the Rhine, the planners wanted to make sure of mass access of workers from the Palatinate to the former commuting areas. Similarly, the north-south connection, a project promoted by the federal, state and local governments but so far impeded by the protests on the part of the residents, is to facilitate the increased exploitation of cheap Alsatian labour in the northern part of the state as well.

In order to comply with the industry's demands for sufficient and mixed labour supply, the regional planning commission worked out so-called standard population figures based on regularly conducted labour market investigations. Whenever the actual development differs from the prognosis, the state provides infrastructural means. In compliance with this strategy, the town of Phillipsburg solved the housing problems for Yugoslav and Turkish workers hired by Goodyear, and later on even constructed a camp for Eastern refugees of German origin in the immediate neighbourhood of the nuclear power plant right before construction works started.

Not only the composition of the work force, the job situation and the infrastructure change in the wake of the construction of a nuclear power plant. By the same token, police observation in the region increases and the social relations are militarised. The concentration of military facilities in the Phillipsburg region has probably influenced the decision to construct the plant there. Phillipsburg alone houses German and American barracks, a nuclear arms deposit and a guided missile battery. In addition there is a tank unit of the REFORGER troops, the largest one outside of the US, stationed in Germersheim, situated on the Rhine's left bank. Apart from the permanent military presence, the population has to endure the kind of living

conditions that shook up the public in the mid-seventies when the same happened in the Ruhr region, a highly industrialised coal mining district: every year during the REFORGER manoeuvres, the GoodYear plant which neighbours the largest military training area in the region, is surrounded by tanks.

Above all, the construction of a nuclear power plant and the necessity to control several thousands of workers for decades, led to an enormous build up of police forces. Today, there is one cop for every 200 Phillipsburg inhabitants. This means that there are twice as many cops in the town than in Berlin or Karlsruhe, the cities with the highest concentration of police forces. Since the majority of the policemen come from the region, the ruling class has almost perfect control over the social relations which can be seen from the jump in solved case figures in crime statistics, especially concerning juvenile delinquency. In Phillipsburg, there is a special anti-drug department and a Youth Officer to fight juvenile delinquency.

Concerning the nuclear power plant, the co-operation of company security guards, private guards and official institutions has reached an extent that has formerly only been known from emergency plans drawn up by civil war strategists. While the number of company security guards is kept to a minimum and their duties are limited to checking ID cards at the gates, the private security forces are charged with the responsibility of guarding the fences, the site itself, the streets and with detecting suspicious movement. And any movement is suspicious. The only entrance to the gate is under police observation. Regularly, people are confronted with state-of-emergency measures, eg. when the cops close down the street and, following unknown criteria, search cars and passengers. The people here have long realised that they must be ready for police attacks at any time.

These actions are made possible by the co-operation of civilian, military, private as well as public institutions. The legal framework of this was laid down first in the state of emergency act passed in the sixties and later in regional emergency plans drawn up under the pretext of protection in the case of a nuclear accident. The plans also provide for this co-operation to be applied against workers on strike and even on the job. How well this co-operation between police and private security guards works can perhaps be seen from the application form for a company ID card. The front has the worker's name, and formal information, such as the kind of work he's doing, the name of the sub-contractor etc, while the back has empty space for the security checks by the police and various secret service agencies.

The construction of a nuclear power plant means a lot of money for the region, especially for the medium size firms. This starts as early as in the planning phase when the energy company donates, for example, a new public swimming pool in order to win over the residents and the local authorities. Once construction works have started the town is definitely in the money (it gets a new school, new community facilities, a new hydro-electric power plant) and so are the private clubs (when the river has to give way for the new motorway, the fishing club simply gets a new lake) and the local construction firms: even though the nuclear energy industry draws its supplies from international sources, there is hardly any local business that does not profit from construction works, whether it be a house painting business that

paints the banisters, or the oil deliverer who refills the oil tank at the construction site, or the farmer who removes the old planking with his tractor. In addition, construction works for the new school, the swimming pool and streets are under way and this definitely makes the local construction and carpet businesses boom (alas, the end of the construction phase is often the end of the local companies. In Phillipsburg, many craftsmen and producers of building materials went bankrupt when construction works for the power plant were finished. Only those businesses which had invested in new production techniques and introduced three shift production remained in the market.)

Even those not directly involved in the construction boom have sufficient opportunity to get their share of the cake. The invasion of migrant workers drives rent, food and other consumer prices up to city levels. If a person is smart enough to have his house built when construction work starts, they will be able to cover their expenses simply by the rent payments they receive from the migrant workers. The fact that the destruction of the environment took place without any major disturbances, that there was no resistance whatsoever in a place like Phillipsburg must be attributed to the profits everybody makes. This is just as true for work resister who gets himself a job as a lifeguard at the new swimming pool, as for the member of the local council who is provided with a job at the hydro-electric power plant, or the young "mass worker" who, in their opinion, makes a hell of a lot of money working 50 hours a week at the construction site which then allows them to enjoy unemployment benefits for a certain period of time, just as they have already figured out.

In the construction of a nuclear power plant, several thousand people are employed over a period of ten years. Only a few of them fit into the picture of what is considered a stereotypical worker at a nuclear power plant i.e. the well-paid specialist employed by the large, well-known construction company, such as Siemens, Mannesmann or Gut-Hoffnung-Hütte; specialists who work at large construction sites all over the world, fully convinced of what they do, a hundred percent loyal to their bosses and used to lording it over the underdogs. But the majority of the workers is made up of the pariahs of the labour market. It's migrant workers from all over Europe that actually do the work, the plaiting of steel mats, the scaffolding and welding, wiring and cleaning. If all these workers were recruited from the region itself, unemployment would soon be down to zero and the pressure for high wages would immediately increase. Therefore, parallel to the start of construction works, workers from all over the world are mobilised and t, therefore, the majority of the pariahs have something in common: they are all hired by slave traders among which the few who work legally are rare and bright exceptions. Quite often the slave trader with his office in the trunk of his BMW disappears right before payday. At the site we met a French worker who had been hired by a French subbie, who handed him onto a Swiss slave trader who in turn hired him out to DIS/Phillipsburg (the company we worked for). There were English, Yugoslav, Turkish and Spanish workers as as immigrants from Eastern Europe.

However, the construction of a nuclear power plant influences the local labour

market. Most of the local workers have at least one time held a job at a nuclear power plant. Information on who hires where, who pays the most etc. are passed from jobber to jobber. And the head of the local unemployment office openly admits that it's his job to keep local unemployed busy by sending them to work at the construction site. No fun being on the dole ...

If someone is considered to be 'unwilling to work' the unemployment office quickly classifies them as 'hard to place in employment' and sends them to the next slave trader who even gets their labour costs reimbursed by the government. And yet, much attention is paid to keeping the regional unemployment rate above a certain level. The 'mass hiring' that got us into the nuclear power plant — about 80 people were hired at a time — was a co-ordinated action of five unemployment offices within an area of 80 km. For the hiring procedures, space at the regional unemployment office was made available to the slave trader.

On the Job

We were hired by the DIS company and this company rented us out, together with another 250 men to Siemens as wiring workers. Prior to that I had mainly held jobs at metal factories, this was my first construction job and with this background I'll describe what I saw.

At that time there were about 4,000 workers at the site who changed daily and weekly. Between 80% and 90% of them were hired by slave traders but labour conditions varied considerably; those employed in cleaning made, at best, 10 Marks an hour, before taxes. Most of them were Turks and they were treated like shit. Then there were the plumbers and painters who made about 15 Marks an hour and the welding specialists who supposedly had about 10,000 Marks 'cash a month'. We, the DIS workers got 11 Marks an hour and were ranking second last as 'mounting assistants'.

With 4,000 workers the KKP was of course far larger in size than the construction sites the workers were used to. This fact may explain some of the frustrating experiences of the first days. In the beginning, you were absolutely on your own, the kapo showed you what to do and that was it. There was no co-worker to show you the tricks, to inform you on the usual way or to tell you how to sneak away from the job for a while. If you were lucky, someone stopped by and told you when the official breaks were. The whole first work day I met only one guy who let me know that he didn't work as fast as possible but as fast as bearable.

Most of the workers at the construction site had some kind of training and had therefore preserved a certain 'craftsman mentality'. I am referring to their attitude towards work as well as towards their co-workers. We were doing dirty work, locked in small, wet, dark rooms all day long. Or we had to balance on high scaffolds, risking life and limb. And yet it was not the same as working at the omnipresent, tight and suffocating assembly line or doing piece work. At the construction site, the term 'shitwork' was also an inevitable part of the workers' vocabulary but people had a different, a rather intimate attitude towards 'their job' which served to protect their

self-esteem. This attitude is promoted by a kind of truce between workers and kapos that holds the possibility of taking, for example, (tolerated) individual breaks as long as you work hard enough when there is work to do. Individual breaks, the workers' attitude towards 'their' jobs, 'their' tools, the (necessary) distrust towards the fellow workers concerning money, hiding places, and knowledge about easy jobs — all this reflects the individualism we were confronted with at the construction site, an individualism that would have been considered pathological at any factory. Once they even got into a fight over the best seat during lunch hour. Taking advantage of the relative freedom of movement at the site, many workers went around desperately looking for individual escapes. There were a few who, after a 10 hour work day, worked at another place without pay hoping to 'qualify' themselves because they had been promised a better job. There were others who thought of becoming subcontractors themselves. Meanwhile, another man worked at the site because he had just gone bankrupt as a subcontractor and lost all his money in that. It is typical that there is hardly any communication about these experiences — everyone looks out only for themselves.

The gangs

We were divided into 'wiring gangs'. The gang size varied from 6 to 15 or 20 workers. Depending on the size, every gang had one or two Siemens kapos and, for every six DIS workers, one DIS kapo who earned an extra 50 Pfennig an hour and assisted the Siemens kapo. Little details such as the organisation of a work gang make you aware of the fact that even a large construction site is by no means chaotic or organised and you realise that you are confronted with a system that makes practical use of several hundred years of experience in exploitation (well, several thousand years if you include the construction of the pyramids). Such a work gang is an extremely effective means for getting the workers to co-operate and for supervising them. In his chapter on co-operation Marx cited a tenant who investigated this as early as a hundred years ago *"Undoubtedly, there is a considerable difference between the value of work of one man and that of another because of difference in strength, skills and honest industriousness. However, my careful observations have fully convinced me that any group of five men will do the same amount of work as any other group of five of the aforementioned age. This means that among these men will be one who has all the characteristics of a good worker, one is a bad worker, while the other three are of average skill and range between the first and the latter. Therefore, even in a group of five you will find the total of what five men can do."* (Burke, quoted in Marx/Engels, Complete Works Vol. 23, p342, German Edition)

In this sense, the gang I was assigned to was a typical one. It consisted of a young ambitious Turk on his way up to a DIS supervisor position; a young Yugoslav comrade who had acquired a kind of 'working people's mentality' at a large factory, who liked Led Zeppelin and played the drums — and who was the only one to speak openly in favour of working slowly; a 'Volksdeutscher', a Romanian immigrant of German origin, who was a workaholic and absolutely obedient; a young family father

who could hardly sustain his family from the little he earned; a Turkish student of politics; and father and son 'self-employed', who worked 'on their own account' at the site as well; and a Siemens kapo who was nuts and always pushed us to work harder. The situation escalated quickly and the unfortunate outcome was the Yugoslav quit the job, I was transferred to another gang and the Turk really became supervisor.

In the very beginning we noticed that there was another work gang which was pretty cool: the Siemens kapo had no intention at all to push anyone because he hoped to be transferred to another place this way. This gang worked very little, but when they worked they did a terrific job. Due to the good atmosphere there was room for open discussions among the workers so that, in the end, they wouldn't see why they should work at all — the problem could only be solved by the final dissolution of the gang.

For Siemens the division of the workers into gangs held another advantage: the kapos had full authority over the placement of workers. This meant that one could lower the general working speed two or three times, but by then every dummie knew who the troublemaker was, and he would be transferred to another gang. For such cases, the Siemens kapos had created 'punishment gangs' which were assigned 'special tasks'. So hardcore derelicts and troublemakers found themselves united, with the Siemens kapo usually being a drunk too. These gangs only hung out, got drunk and were simply written off as calculated losses, designed to be a dead end for people who fell out of line.

At first it was depressing to see the working speed, work quality and the attitude of the gangs towards each other were much more influenced by the Siemens kapo than the workers. The kapos' attitude was largely determined by their very character which is that of the experienced construction specialist who gave his orders at the KKP in the same dictatorial manner he had displayed at other large construction sites where he had worked (the Moscow airport, a Brazilian dam, an Australian nuclear power plant). This was best expressed in remarks such as 'If you'd been better at school, you wouldn't have to do the job' and an arrogant master's attitude towards his foreign 'subordinates'. I think it was the kapos who were for the most part responsible for the horrible racism at the site. Never before did I work at a place where there was so much racism. These guys are part of the greasy layer of 'German experts' who, while lunching at the canteen, quickly set a time for a new meeting at some site in Iran or send greetings to Latin America etc. For them, the world is for once and all divided into two classes: the Siemens kapos and the rest, who in their opinion are work-shy, dumb and lazy. Their loyalty towards Siemens is based on their secure position and the possibility of making a lot of money during assignments to foreign countries by smuggling etc. These guys were so efficient because they were not able to build any kind of solidarity amongst themselves to defend themselves against their bosses.

If there were any conflicts at the site at all they arose because of the working conditions created by these kapos, for example, when the Siemens kapo would rather make ten workers sweat than switch on a machine (for the workers are there anyway

and they don't use electricity) or when we had to break our necks because they wouldn't send anybody to get the tools ('just a waste of time'). The comparison with the fellow who built the pyramids and the galley slaves was frequently drawn.

On such occasions there would eventually be a slow down. Or important tools were ruined. Or the workers would demand additional breaks and get them.

The craftsman's mentality many of the workers shared was questioned at the nuclear power plant because for the first time the wiring had been entirely standardised and worked out beforehand. It had to be done according to detailed computer plans, depending on kind, length and quality of the cables, and the installation works were supervised at thousands of check points. There were even first attempts to set time limits for certain jobs. This is an important step towards employing unskilled labour which will enable the company to construct a nuclear power plant with the labour of Latin American Indians, or with Ghanaian migrant workers. It implied that all the freshly trained, qualified workers would never be able to make use of their newly acquired skill.

All in all, the division of the workers by distributing them on different slave traders and different gangs worked quite well and they succeeded in getting the best out of this mixture of young work-resisters who had dropped out if their training programme, others who still had to undergo their military service after finishing their job training, older 'burnt out' workers, derelicts and toughs. There was little opportunity for unifying this mixture: people who crept out of the place a few hours early everyday (secretly so they wouldn't get their pay docked) had to work with folks who following the motto 'work hard, play hard' laboured like crazy for hours and then went off for 10 minutes to have a beer. People who smoked their first joint before breakfast worked next to an alcoholic who was literally half-dead. Guys who let themselves be overburdened with work were tackled by their work fellows once the shift was over: "Know what — I only worked about 20 minutes today. The rest of the day I took naps, looked around for tools and hung out at the canteen. 'n what about you?" The only ones to put up some resistance occasionally were the former factory workers. They had their own ideas about how much shit they had to take. And they were aware that they needed unity if they were to gain anything. Most important was that they knew how to build that unity, they came up with the right remarks at the right time: "for eleven Marks an hour I don't work — for so little money I don't even pretend to work!", "half an hour before we knock off, you don't start a new job", "when one of us stops working you stop too — and when two men stop all stop!"

These blue collar workers were the only ones who tried to make certain discussions among the workers opaque to the Siemens kapo and who also attacked grasses. We found that such an attitude which could be called "taking the mass worker's stand" was perhaps the most unifying position we could take: for eleven Marks an hour you don't break your neck, after a tough job is done the whole gang needs a break etc. These were things we could openly demand from the kapo and which would even be accepted sometimes. In case the kapo yelled back at you the situation could easily be escalated and you could take advantage of the contradiction

that anywhere else in Europe people think that way but that the workers at the site were expected to think differently. Encouraged by such minor successes, we were then able to knock off time together, to discuss minor sabotage actions such as repeatedly knocking out the lights in a room so that work in there was prolonged for hours (in protest at excessive work speed) and so on.

Scenes

After a while we were able view the 'chaos at the site from a worker's perspective. Most of the workers didn't stick around much with their gang but with the buddies of their 'scene' (that's what we called it). There were the 'poker players' who would lose a day's pay during lunch hour at a certain table, there were the 'dopeheads' who painted 'legalise it' and 'free dope' literally all over the place, there were the foreign workers etc. Groups also formed along 'regional lines' including people from one village or region. The scenes did not only counter the isolation between work gangs but also helped to overcome the division between workers from different slave trader companies. Through these channels information was passed about better jobs, job openings, 'experts' on qualification programmes and the like. The scenes were also trading places for smuggled cigarettes, dope, soap and other essential supplies. Sometimes the available information included company secrets since the secretary of the DIS office also came from a nearby village. With the help of these scenes we learned to move around freely, to gather information systematically, start off discussions, distribute leaflets, publicise suggestions etc. Soon we knew much more than the kapos about the current state of affairs, the sickness rate, newly hired workers and so on. And this in turn was important for our reasoning to hold water.

Only when we had become part of the scenes did we discover the mentality that was hidden behind the mask of the 'construction worker who does his job and that's it'. Only then we noticed that we weren't the only work-resisters and saboteurs at the site. And we started to understand why the construction works at nuclear power plants always take much longer than scheduled, why the cables were always installed wrong at the check points (thus, a whole days work of a gang was screwed). The books that contained the cable maps were ripped off which meant that twenty or thirty cables were not installed until someone who wanted to connect them noticed that they were missing, i.e. a delay of weeks and months. There were meeting places for exchanging news, smoking dope, tools were ripped off together, bundles of already installed cable were cut apart (undoing two or three weeks of work of a gang and destruction of several thousand Marks worth of cable) and so on, and so on. Now we started to like the place. We got the impression that the struggle against nuclear power plants can be led from the construction sites as well (or that it has already started) and that it could find its most effective forces here.

Along these lines we then tried to initiate actions or deepen discussions. But we met with problems, for two reasons: for one, such scenes always made up of people from both 'classes' — in the dope scene, you'd find kapos, in the poker players

scene you'd find even higher ranked supervisors. If you planned to rip off a walkie-talkie you can perhaps count on the help of your kapo, he may even come up with the idea. But when you talk about money things will get more difficult although he may be able to do something 'for you'. but you certainly can't discuss a work slow down or a strike with him that may cost him his job. That's the disadvantage of such scenes: they are formed to help you survive at the job, they are not conspiratorial structures. The political recomposition of the class will definitely not be achieved by adding together these scenes or any other community, but diametrical to them. Also it would be impossible to combine these scenes anyway. On the contrary there is much distrust between them: the dopeheads considered the others to be 'ordinary family men and straight squares', at times they even made contemptuous remarks about the Turks. The poker players in turn thought the dope-heads were kids without any sense of responsibility, the family fathers kept their distance from the work-resisters and the 'good-for-nothings who don't care about anything'. The split between the scenes was much deeper than that between workers and kapos.

Only in struggle will the class reunite

The high sick rate (about 20% which was a lot in 1983), the high potential for conflicts and the daily disputes stood in sharp contrast to the isolation of the workers who rarely attempted to defend themselves collectively and this contradiction was solved the way it has always been solved: the biggest troublemakers were fired or quit the job. Here again the scenes fulfilled their function: although the labour market was supposedly 'very tight' most of those dismissed had a new job before their month's notice ran out, but none of the scenes would have been able to put up resistance against the dismissals. Whenever you organise at a place you'll run into the same problem: it's always the most militant workers who leave first. And they will only stay if, by joint struggle labour conditions will be improved to such an extent that "it's worth staying".

In order to get something going at the site we tried out three types of action (at the time we did not do it systematically but I'll put them in order now to make it easier to explain): actions for 40 x15;

sticking up leaflets, notices etc. on the walls of canteen container,
discussions about forming a workers' council.

a) 40 x 15: reduction of weekly working to 40 hours and a wage rise to 15 Marks an hour. We had a very important experience when the February wages were paid: within ten or fifteen minutes about 200 workers gathered around the DIS office container to pick up their pay check. The February wages were due in mid march and they were about 1,200-1,300 Marks each. Yet, most of the workers had taken advantage of getting weekly advances and had thus spent a large part of their money already. Now that they received their checks, people got really pissed off. They had been working about 46 hours a week and all they got were a few quid. In this situation little was needed to spark off an explosion. What was missing was the right mobilising slogan and a handful of jobbers were ready to act. At that time we had

only been at the site shortly, we knew hardly anyone and were totally caught by surprise in view of that "sudden" anger. I also think we were lacking experience in escalating such situations spontaneously and successfully. In any case we then agreed that next time we would be better prepared or provoke such situations ourselves. In the following weeks we walked all over the place and started discussions with the buddies about wages or joint discussions on the issue. In these talks we always pointed out that we wanted better pay and less work. In order to avoid the usual defeatist remarks such as "Nobody's going to join us", "Well, I'll join you if the others do", "a strike's no good, better get me a gun", ie all those remarks which justify doing nothing, we always asked: "If there were 40 or 50 men ready to walk into that office — would you join us?" After a while we had a group of about 10 or 12 men together who would participate in such action. We then publicised the issue further by stickers "40 x 15 — more pay — less work" which we put up all over the plant and inside the DIS containers. However, we did not succeed in making the demand more popular or in raising a more combative spirit although most of the 10 to 12 people actively participated in the campaign. We could only wait for another situation similar to that in February, but it never came up again (due to "dismissals", a high sick rate or our own hesitating attitude?).

b) The organisational structures established in that campaign were then used to distribute leaflets etc. But we spent too much time on thinking about how to get a large number of leaflets inside the plant in view of the constant security checks by cops and company guards. In the end we only distributed about 12 to 15 copies of our first leaflet and we gave them only to those folks we knew from earlier talks to be the most militant. Actually, this turned out to be the best way of doing it and we then used this method several times. We wrote up notices and handed them out. This served to stabilise the organisational structures. The papers in which we summarised and generalised the discussions also helped to consolidate the "discussion circle" of the "militants" — from that time all of us somehow belonged to a conspiracy — and in the course of events it proved that, in spite of all reprisals, the slave trader was not able to undo this consolidation.

Finally, the discussions and leaflets helped to intensify certain progressive patterns of behaviour. The family fathers joined our campaign on their own initiative. They now openly demanded certain changes, for example, that working conditions be in accordance with the laws, work contracts and other papers that somehow appear to be invalid concerning slave work. In dealing with the slave trader, they quickly noticed what an ordinary pig he was in spite of his fine manners. So they started to bargain with him collectively, which, of course, had the "small side effect" that their demands grew very popular. In the course of the struggle these guys turned into live wires. For example they read out certain paragraphs of a brochure on "ways to wisdom and wealth", openly provoked discussions about our papers and leaflets, referring to the papers in the discussions with the kapos etc. In short, they ceased to be the "straight squares" who openly displayed their high work morale. Now they put their cards on the table: they only used their work morale as a facade that would allow them to establish their own work gang, to have joint additional breaks and to

make similar comfortable adjustments. This showed that the division into scenes can be overcome and that new organisational structures will be developed in the struggle.

A very important factor in this process was the container where we met during lunch break. Unfortunately, it took us weeks to become aware that the most important means of keeping the workers apart was their division into work gangs. The only possible way of building other structures was to meet during lunch breaks, and the slave trader was quite aware of that. There was a special container for the students. The slave traders, well informed about who had lunch with whom, always intruded into these places to control them and to use them for his own purposes (to do his paper work, to put up memos). We were really pissed off by their dropping in regularly during our short breaks and bothering us with their business. One day when the slave trader dropped in again during lunch break to put up one of his important-sounding memos: "attention! Important! Please note that ..." we sat down and wrote a memo of our own: "Attention! Important! Note that a) breaks are here for the workers to relax. DIS may take care of his paper work during work time. b) they planning to raise weekly work time to 48, and after that to 60 — we demand 40 hours working week DIS must hire more people, there are millions of unemployed on the streets while we must work like crazy." All the workers gathered around the notice immediately, they read and discussed it and one of the family fathers took it outside and posted it up at the outside wall so that everyone could read it. After break there was a mass gathering. Immediately, the Siemens kapos made remarks such as: "Now we are in for trouble, the DIS men are going to strike" (this of course happened on the background of certain changes in the workers attitude they had noticed lately: pressures to work faster had been openly rejected, racism ceased to be a means of dividing the workers). With the memo we really hit the point: the containers were the only places at the site where the workers could get to know each other and talk freely and there had been quarrels before during lunch breaks (are we allowed to drink alcohol, to play cards, we are fed up with them doing their paper work in here etc.)

c) Now things had got to the boiling point: the slave trader tried to get rid of the "troublemakers" and in doing so he almost ruined himself. Step by step he cut down the number of workers from a maximum of 250 to 80, hoping he would get us. And even after we had already been fired, the workers pushed through an extra day off by putting up another notice. The notice took advantage of the illegal practices of the slave trader: since the "renting out" of workers to construction companies is illegal, we had to be given official work contracts by DIS not Siemens. In the notice the work contract was interpreted according to the law i.e. we were not supposed to take orders from the Siemens kapos, we had to use DIS tools and so on. After reading the notice, people stopped working and lined up in front of the Siemens tool department to hand in their tools.

The slave trader had obviously underestimated the impact of our "attack". Once publicly attacked by his workers, the slave trader has to lead a war on two fronts, for the construction company has no interest in 'rebellious slaves'. In order to please Siemens he had to strike back so hard he lost a good deal of money.

In this period the DIS workers were searching for possibilities to improve their

situation and to protect themselves against reprisals. Practically everyday there were conflicts over incorrect pay, because people demanded more paid vacation days etc. For negotiations with the slave trader people entered the office only in groups, the family fathers dug out legal books from somewhere, in which they marked important paragraphs. And we quickly tried to distribute as much information as possible on how to avoid at least dismissals without notice by emphasising certain legal formulas. We wrote up two leaflets on that subject and distributed them so heavily that the slave trader got hold of a copy.

In this situation, when the most militant workers had already got their marching orders and others had been reprimanded, obviously in preparation for their dismissal, we started to discuss the forming of a workers' council. This discussion held a number of very promising aspects because people from all scenes showed interest in it and took part in the discussions, because most of our previous experiences were once again evaluated together, and because all participants considered a workers' council to be a necessary step from individual protest to a collective structure that would enable them to take up the struggle against the slave trader and Siemens. At the same time we had little idea about the function of such workers' council and the comrades involved in the intervention feared that it would soon become a reformist tool, especially since its very difficult to form a workers' council without coming under the influence of the official union. Today we say that we focused too much on the "final product workers' council" even though it was still questionable if we could ever be able to establish it and we underestimated the importance of discussions on the issue and of the experiences we would have made while trying to establish it (agitation by leaflets, and so forth). However, the idea failed not only because of our hesitant attitude, but also because, at that time, dozens of people were fired. Apart from that it was summer and many of the workers preferred to enjoy the summer days at the lake and to live on their unemployment benefits for a while. After all of us had been fired we jumped on the last remaining opportunity, as we saw it i.e. we brought charges before the labour court and publicised our complaints. We lost a lot of time in that the "political parts" of the trial were lost and the article which finally appeared in the metal workers Union paper had been censored three times before publication so that not a single sentence appeared in its original form. The unemployed agency then initiated what they called "the largest action so far against illegal sub-contractors", which, in the end, resulted in nothing.

Theses and consequences

From the experiences at KKP we have developed most of our current concepts and ideas; that is to analyse the function of slave traders and to start a campaign that would not be limited to one region; a concept of militant investigations and a territorial network; to put out a handbook and more.

Yet our suggestion to start a broader campaign against slave traders met with fierce resistance in mid 1983 because supposedly nobody in the movement had at that point had some kind of encounter with these "strange animals", even though it

would have been a practical opportunity for liberating all the jobber groups from their restriction to the radical ghetto and for taking up issues such as casualisation and super-exploitation from "below", and not from "above" as the German journalist Günter Wallraff now did in his book *At the Very Bottom*. Also, due to our weak group structures, we did not manage to realise the idea of forming a workers' network at that time (after all, Phillipsburg is 46km away from Karlsruhe, where we live). In addition, we did not have the patience required for such a project. From the people we are still in touch with we know that they have made the typical jobber career since then: driver, factory worker, small business employee, unemployed, moonlighter.

We have waited so long to publish this article not only for security reasons (at the beginning we couldn't write about it because our buddies were still working for KKP, because the cops read the paper too, because the law suits were still pending), but also for political reasons: we wanted to start a new discussion on how to reach a new quality in the work of jobber and unemployed groups.

— the hand book is in the making. In it we will describe experiences and give legal advice, but we also want it to go beyond the normal individual counselling brochures and to discuss, for the first time, possible unifying types of action.

— the discussion on militant investigations must be opened up now and many groups must participate in it. The committee on militant investigations at the workshop in Hamburg has agreed on a phase of "preliminary investigation", the important question now is how to evaluate the experiences and to make practical use of them. Currently there are dozens of jobber groups looking for new perspectives and many working women and men are starting to challenge the most diverse exploitation schemes.

We also want to discuss the idea of a "slave trader campaign". May be it is already too late for that, but there is still a chance that we can build a movement so that this whole lousy strategy of recomposition of the class, super-exploitation, casualisation and marginalisation is challenged from below by agitation and information, and which will be sensitive to the signals of new militancy on the part of workers.

Won't be fooled again!