



What can we do in workplaces as small unions and groups?

That's the main question posed by this brochure.

The economic development in western Europe is characterized by the movement of production (factories etc) to other continents where it's possible for the capitalists to produce more efficiently. This increasing trend means that fewer well qualified workers are needed, leading to a weakening of the bargaining position of workers in the workplaces, as we are able to be exchanged increasingly easily for cheaper workers elsewhere, who are able to be quickly trained. For western Europe this means a sustained worsening of the working and living conditions of our class.

Large employers and companies as well as the public sector are increasingly being subdivided into smaller production units with formal independence but actual dependence on the largest and most influential parts of capital. Economic risk is shifted by this process onto the workforce of the individual production units as a further method of disciplining the labor force. The internationalization of production is not only through outsourcing of production but also through using cheaper workers outside western Europe, whose levels of unionization and resistance can be lower. The playing off of sectors of the international working class by international capital will only come to an end, when industrial unions are formed, organizing across borders, which can aim to achieve, in each country, the highest possible wages through international solidarity.

In previous decades, the large traditional unions who believed in social partnership, could occasionally lead offensive struggles to get the workers some of the pie from economic growth. Nowadays at best they attempt to minimize the drastic losses in working conditions and wages, or in some cases just try to create the impression that that's what they're doing. They are losing millions of members, because their base is in the larger work places which are particularly affected by the processes of restructuring mentioned above. As part of these developments some disappointed members are leaving these unions. Simultaneously, new industries are developing where the traditional unions lack any significant foothold – for example in IT or in call centers. Broad swathes of the working population are affected by these changes and their accompanying measures of cuts in social services – unemployed people, pensioners, students and school pupils, as well as more secure contracted employees and even to some limited extent traditionally privileged groups such as the German 'Beamte' (permanent, near unsackable public servants).

These developments - internationalization, restructuring and social austerity –look set to further develop in the coming years.

Traditional unions have particular weaknesses:

- 1 – they aren't able to effectively organize workers internationally*
- 2 – they aren't able to organize workers outside of large workplaces easily*
- 3 – they aren't able to pursue struggles flexibly and militantly enough*
- 4 – they restrict themselves to economic struggles and don't organize outside of the workplace (although this isn't part of this brochure.)*

A vacuum is developing within the working class and more broadly. But there are also examples of self organized groups which are able to organize and bargain around the needs of their members.

Anarcho syndicalist unions and groups address in their programme precisely the weaknesses of the traditional big unions. And it's not just theory.

The Freie ArbeiterInnen Union (Free Workers Union) FAU in Germany:

- 1 – is fundamentally internationalist in its approach of unifying workers against capital*
- 2 – has a membership working mostly in small workplaces, and/or with casualized (precarious) working conditions, or are unemployed or students*
- 3 – is organized on a grass-roots federalist basis, so that struggles can be focused on needs and fought flexibly and effectively.*

Likewise the Anarchistische Groep Amsterdam (AGA):

- 1 – is based on principles of direct democracy, which is practiced in its decision-making assemblies*
- 2 – emphasizes self-organization and direct action to create solutions and alternatives to the problems encountered at work or in the community.*
- 3 – actively informs and agitates in communities via flyers, publications and by holding consultations hours at its Anarchist Library*

In our experience, it's particularly in smaller workplaces that the anarcho syndicalist tactics of struggle work best. On the one hand, traditional unions have little presence here, and on the other, the small number of workers means that these employers can be easily put under pressure, strike or otherwise. In this brochure we want to show anarcho syndicalist organisation in practice in smaller workplaces. We aren't writing about the basis of anarcho syndicalist organisation, our views on culture and revolution, or our overall aims and worldview. That's because these, for class struggle, flow from the sum of our practical experience.

That's why what follows are contemporary reports and analysis of class struggle, from which we'll be able to further develop our theoretical perspective. We think that's how we'll be able to, at least here in western Europe, respond best to the current and coming changes in the society and economy, resist effectively and develop a perspective for class struggle in the 21st century.

For more information on organisation and theory, check out the websites listed at the end of this pamphlet.

*Anarchistische Groep Amsterdam
Freie Arbeiterinnen- und Arbeiter Union Bremen
October 2007*



Schorndorf 1991: A Successful Temp-Workers' Strike

The FAU was founded as a union for all wage-workers and therefore also for temporary workers. In March of 1991 a spontaneous and successful strike was launched by temp workers at the Bauknecht Company in the small swabian city of Schorndorf.

Bauknecht, a producer of electronic appliances and devices, had needed to fill a variety of temporary positions in their plant in Schorndorf in order to carry out the testing and repair of microwaves. These were filled with the help of the state Work Office and among those assigned were two members of the FAU-Schorndorf. Conversations about the conditions, wages and temporary nature of the work took place on the very first day and revealed that the most recently hired were earning two Marks more than those who had only been hired a few days before, which led to general dissatisfaction with the situation. The company had obviously not been able to find enough workers quickly enough and had raised their offer in order to make the positions more attractive, an arrangement that was justifiably viewed as unjust. After all, everyone was doing the same work, so everyone should receive the same two Marks extra. This demand was presented to the plant director before work had begun and was firmly rejected with a broad grin.

Now, the task of testing and repairing microwaves is as brainless an activity as one can imagine. While one person unpacked the appliances and placed them on plates on an assembly-line the next person tested the devices for errors, repairing them as needed, before sending them to the last station, where another co-worker re-packed the device and stacked on palettes. The top management of the company had also flown in the japanese developer of these microwaves to aid in the testing process.

Things began with the workers that loaded the microwaves onto the assembly-line, who wrote demands for a wage-raise on the pressboards themselves with thick black markers. Thus the demands were sent around to all the co-workers, who added comments, pictures, names of their favorite football club or metal bands. Within the shortest possible amount of time all the boards on the assembly-line were filled with writing—if I remember correctly there were at least fifty. A comprehensive, non-verbal form of communication had been developed. The only person who wasn't horrified was the japanese engineer, with whom we talked more later. Without success, unfortunately. He was the only strike-breaker that we left alone, since we couldn't be sure what he understood of the strike that broke out soon afterwards or what consequences he would have faced for participating. There were eight of us, all unskilled workers, all males in our twenties. After the end of the workday we decided to get together in a pub and discuss how to move forward. We quickly came to the consensus that we would strike if management did not yield to our demand for equal pay. The FAU was brought up and introduced, the latest edition of its newspaper, "Direkte Aktion," was passed around, and its support for the struggle was guaranteed—for all those involved, not just for the two members.

"Strike 'til Victory!"

The next morning we repeated our demand for equal wages for equal work and received the same sour expression from the plant director as an answer. In an independent development, the Schorndorfer FAU-members had already decided to use their time at Bauknecht as an opportunity to agitate against the First Gulf War. As a consequence, the interiors of hundreds of microwaves were decorated with anti-war stickers from the FAU and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth (ASJ) before being packed for transport. The following day

was chosen as a date for the beginning of the strike. One colleague brought a portable stereo, the other the appropriately revolutionary music. So at 7:00 am the Ton-Steine-Scherben song “Wir Streiken” (We’re on strike) echoed through the assembly hall. The mood was great, everyone joined in. After a while everyone got to know the lyrics and by mid-day the words “out of the way capitalists, we’re going to win the final battle” was being bellowed to the accompaniment of the stereo. At precisely this moment the regional director of the plant rode up on his bike to confirm that a strike had begun, although he stayed a safe distance away and sent the plant director to talk to us.

His attitude had changed noticeably and no longer talked down to us. It was clear that time was on our side, as every delay ate into the company’s profits, which was a plus for us. It was foreseeable that the work would not be finished by the time our contracts were up, so we also demanded extensions, including paid holidays. After a second day of striking, talking about our lives, discussing anarchism and listening to Ton-Steine-Scherben and AC/DC in the assembly hall, the plant director came with freshly-inked new contracts that fulfilled all of our demands. Hourly wages were equalized and the contracts extended, a complete success based on solidarity and fighting spirit.

The only thing left to note is that the two FAU-members couldn’t find any more work in the city. The news of the strike and the involvement of an “anarchist union” had worked its way quickly through the management circles of the small city and the residents were equally well-informed about their activities.

M. V.

(Translation from German by John Carroll)

In this case it is clear that the situation was well-suited to the the concept of direct action as a syndicalist method. The optimal conditions consisted of the following:

- 1) the precarious nature of the work itself and the consequent willingness of the workers to take risks
- 2) the pressure on the company to make shipments as soon as possible and the related pressure on the workers to act quickly by means of direct action
- 3) the speedy analysis [of the situation] and the readiness to carry out conscious, collective action

This is a example that explains the continuous loss of members in the bureaucratic, lethargic and increasingly unattractive reformist unions. In an era of transition in productive relations and precarious employment these organizations are no longer able to react flexibly on behalf of their members.

This task can only be achieved via unions with a federalistic structure, in which union locals and syndicates have a chance to formulate their demands and aims independently and according to their needs and the situation. This should be free of any form of intercession from a higher level of functionaries, in accordance with the principle “the workers’ retain the initiative!”

This applies, for example, to the beginning and execution of strikes, to the content of demands and contracts and, of course, to the ending of strike actions.

The FAU offers its members these organisational and cultural conditions.

H. (FAU Bremen)



Bremen 1998 – Students force the Education Authorities to bend

In the past there were various ways for students to achieve university entrance in Bremen apart from the traditional Abitur (A levels also called Abi) route. One of these was at the 'Bremen school for adults' where a project called 'Institute for the education of adults' (IFE ... in German written 'ife') was established after some struggle.

At the ife there were 'normal' students who got maintenance grants and loans (the German Bafög system) and who could apply for the Abitur exams after 3 years of studying. The prerequisite was that they had to have either completed an apprenticeship or worked for 3 years.

There were other students – especially women- who did not meet these requirements who were allowed to attend classes as 'guest students' but who weren't given any financial support. Two of these guest students were members of the FAU – IAA who had planned to be able to study for university entrance in this way. One of them had moved to Bremen from southern Germany in order to do this.

Then one week before the start of term, the education authorities abolished this guest student status – which would have meant the end of the educational plans for these people. The guest students didn't accept this decision however and proceeded to organise actions with FAU members in Bremen and sympathetic students. They informed other classes about what was going on – their 'lecture bashing' (uninvited visits to classes) got a very good response. Leaflets and general meetings were used to keep the student body as a whole informed of what was going on. The FAU supported the action with advice, connections, a bit of money and a sticker – Abi for all!

A number of visits to the education authorities were made, press releases were sent out and other ways of raising the pressure were found – for example a summer festival was held on the school site. Legal routes were also pursued – a lawyer was consulted - which wasn't seen as being contrary to anarcho syndicalist politics by the FAU Bremen.

The students didn't take no for an answer and began attending classes despite the ban. The pressure grew on the administration ... and 'suddenly' a legal loophole was found (thanks of course to the pressure from our side) which was then used to let the students study ... and the story gets better ...

Some weeks later the two students were enrolled as full students with maintenance entitlement. As part of this the previous regulation which restricted students to guest status was removed and the students received a significant grant back payment!

A few months later the FAU formed its first education syndicate which was active at Bremen Uni as well as the School for Adults.

(Translation from German by John Carroll)





Small scale anarchist class struggle in Amsterdam's restaurants. Raffle's Grand Café and Phuket Thai.

The Anarchist Group Amsterdam (Anarchistische Groep Amsterdam/AGA) was formed in response to one specific labour conflict at the end of 2000 and beginning of 2001. The conflict was the result of a short and precarious working experience by one of our comrades earlier in 2000. Because AGA has developed into a proper anarchist group over the past years, we have been involved in many social issues besides labour conflicts. What follows is an account of the first labour struggles that we were involved in, including a more recent one. The article will finish with some reflections on our practices. But to have a better understanding of the conflicts a few words need to be said about the Amsterdam hotel and catering industry and the social and political context within which AGA is acting.

Characteristics of the Amsterdam hotel and catering industry

The jobs in the industry are very diverse. There's the more 'front office' jobs like those of the waiters, which are mostly performed by white people, then there's the kitchen and cleaning work done mostly by workers of foreign descent. Through a combination of not giving contracts or giving only temporary contracts and bad working conditions, there's a high turn-over of workers. This is something the employers are counting on since the work is partly seasonal (in the summertime Amsterdam has many more tourists than in the wintertime). Another thing is that workers have to be officially registered after the first month of work. If the turn-over is very high, this means a lot of workers don't have to be registered or the risk in not registering them is low. This saves paying social taxes.

Social and political context

AGA is part of the squatting and wider 'radical left' movement of Amsterdam. Therefore there are always people who are interested in the group's activities and are willing to support the group in some of them. So when we carry out actions we mobilise amongst these people. With the conflicts described below we worked together with groups which are somehow related to this movement. None of them are aligned to any political parties or other parliamentary organisations. It must be said that for instance the research collective on casualised labour, Searchweb, has been able to have a few of their people doing subsidised jobs for the collective. This is due to particular choices of the Social-Democratic government in the nineties, which wanted to lower unemployment. Therefore activist groups whose members had formerly been living on the dole, were being paid from another government pocket. AGA has always stayed far from these practices. We strongly believe that our group should be independent of any government funding. This doesn't mean that we're not working together on certain issues with grassroots groups/organisations who have slightly different views and practices. When a group is as small as AGA, having this sort of surroundings of sympathetic people and a circle of friendly groups provides an extra mobilising base for actions and activities.

Raffle's Grand Café

Our comrade, Leon¹, had been working thirteen days as a dishwasher in Raffle's Grand Café in January and February 2000. The café's only shareholder and director was Hugo Alberto Fernandez, who also owned two other restaurants called Alberto's. All three of them are situated in the most touristic parts of Amsterdam's city centre. After working without a contract for a week, Leon was offered a contract with a gross salary of 9.35 euros per hour². It was common practice to work without a contract for a while to prove suitability for the job. Workmates told him they often had to wait for their wages until three months after the month

they had worked. Workers without papers were exploited more fiercely. One of them was working seven days a week for a wage of 5.45 euros per hour. Leon decided not to sign the contract and quit the job after thirteen days on the job³. These were days of an average of 7.5 hours. This meant he should get a total gross salary of 911.63.

Because he knew it was quite normal to wait for one's wages for a long time, he decided to be patient. How naive can even an anarchist be! A period of travelling across Europe for several months followed. He finally settled back in Amsterdam in late September and tried to organise some friends and anarchist comrades through the Vrije Bond⁴, because he had still received no money whatsoever.

A first visit

At first he and a Dutch speaking comrade visited the administration of the café. The office clerks couldn't find any information about him. Two of them were talking to each other saying that obviously he hadn't worked for the restaurant legally⁵. Eventually they found 53 of the hours he had been working there in the working schedules. This still wasn't the complete 97.5 hours he actually had been working. But L. and the comrade went home after the clerks had told them they would talk to Alberto and phone L. later. When they phoned him the same day, they told him to come and get the money. At arrival he was paid 4.55 euros per hour for 53 hours. These 240.62 euros were paid cash, accompanied by a simple receipt. Although he accepted the money at first, he didn't feel quite satisfied and decided to go on to get all of the money. Which was 671.01 gross salary.

From this moment it was decided to take further action with AGA. The first step was to go to the restaurant with a small group to demand the rest of his money. During this visit he was told the old owner had gone broke and had sold the business to a new one. A third account had been opened and a judicial institute was now taking care of back payments. According to the Chamber of Commerce there was no new owner though, so we decided to pay another visit. We made clear that 4.54 euros per hour is illegal, because it's under the legal minimum wage of people over 23 years of age. The person we were talking to could only respond by



A 150-person-strong First of May demonstration organized by AGA finishes in front of Raffle's Grand Cafe. The police has to keep protesters from entering the premises.

saying they had paid 6.01 euros per hour for only 40 hours, while another woman from the office of the café still said he had received 4.54 for washing the dishes. Then the person said Leon could call him to explain the situation and then get the money. When he called, he was told they would pay him 6.01 euros per hour for 53 hours, so not for the 97.5 hours he had been working.

Direct action

It was then decided within AGA's assembly not to accept the money and to take on a form of direct action. A leaflet explaining the conflict and calling for a boycott of the three restaurants of H.A. Fernandez was made. Three leafletting actions followed. The first time we entered the cafe with about 10 people handing out the leaflets, one of us explaining aloud what the situation in the café was like and telling people they could leave the place without paying. This was April first 2001. The second time the restaurant was the final stop of our 150 people strong First of May demo. Some of us managed to get in for a few seconds before the cops kicked us out and formed a line between us and the café. [include picture] The third time was on June 30. At first it appeared to turn out just the way the first two had done: an unfriendly verbal confrontation with the manager. This was the second manager we had to deal with—the first one had left in April, after our first visit. We would like to think we were the extra 'stress factor' that made him leave. Eventually the talk got a little friendlier and the manager 'promised' he would talk to Alberto. We could call him later to make an appointment. It appeared to be quite hard to get to speak to the manager by telephone. In one of the calls a worker said that the manager would be there on a certain day from five o'clock. So Leon and another member of AGA went to see the manager that day. The manager was present and willing to talk both of them. Again he made a 'promise', saying he would talk to Alberto and look in the books for any administration relating the case. When Leon called him a few days later, he was told that they would pay him 90.90 euros. He could call back later to let them know whether or not he would accept the money.

This was discussed in our assembly. We all decided not to accept this hush money and to send a registered letter with a short history and the exact amount of money we demanded from Raffle's Grand Café. A few days after sending this letter, Leon called the manager. He told him that he had seen the letter, but that he could not do anything other than offer the 90.90. The most remarkable thing he revealed was that he would leave Raffle's in two days. So the pressure must have been on...

Even though it seemed we had gotten rid of two managers within the six months, the conflict continued and there was very little chance of us getting the rest of the money. As can be seen by the long periods of time between leafletting actions, the AGA and Leon became more and more reluctant to continue this conflict. We had been jerked about for too long. Instead of dealing with the owner directly, we had been dealing with some office clerks and two different managers, who themselves apparently found the working conditions in the restaurant intolerable because they didn't stay longer than a few months. An attempt was made to organise one more 'proletarian eating' action as compensation for the money that was still owed by Alberto Fernandez, but this failed miserably in its organising stage. After that we decided to call it a day and accept the fact that we had only received part of the money⁶.

Phuket Thai⁷

During the following years we dealt with two similar cases which ended successfully. In these cases it was enough to just pay one visit: we explained that we were the worker's union, that we were coming one last time to see if matters could be resolved in a friendly fashion and that otherwise we would start direct action and legal proceedings. In October 2005 we were approached by twenty-five year old Achmed⁸, born in Burma and raised in Bangladesh, who was living in the Netherlands without papers. We got to know him through Searchweb, a research collective in Amsterdam investigating precarious labour since the

eighties. The collective have always supported AGA in its activities, offering us office space and joining in some of our actions in the hotel and catering industry.

During six months Achmed had been working for a number of restaurants managed by Rashid. A major part of this period he worked six to seven days per week, from noon to two or three in the morning. Achmed's wages changed from the initial 25 euro per day to 30 euro as he became a skilled cook and finally to 1,000 euro per month. These wages were far below what a worker is formally entitled to and they were apparently still too high in the eyes of the employer, who stopped paying. As a result, A. missed out on 1,200 euro.

Rashid accused Achmed of stealing 20.000 euros in cash money from his house. This was a blatant lie. We set out to get ourselves informed. We organised assemblies with AGA, a person from Searchweb, Achmed himself of course and a group called Flexmens⁹. We discussed the case, made a file with the history of the conflict so far. Achmed was very clear he was willing to take direct action. We set a date for a first visit to Rashid in his restaurant and gathered information about his business interests through the Chamber of Commerce. As Achmed was still supported by Amsterdam's Support Collective for Refugees (ASKV), we were also in touch with them. One of them visited a lawyer with Achmed. The lawyer seemed willing to take up this case. If successful a civil suit would have cost Rashid loads of money; therefore this would be an effective means to put pressure on him.

Tense

On 17 November we confronted the owner with about fifteen people. He appeared frightened, and came up with an incoherent story. Contradicting himself every couple of sentences, he first said he did not know Achmed, then he said he had given him shelter and Achmed had only been in the restaurant to have dinner. Finally he admitted Achmed had been working in the restaurant and said everything had been paid already. Smilingly we told him, that if this was the case we would like to see the pay checks. Obviously this was impossible, so he threatened to call the police. He started pushing the buttons of his cell phone and said something in Bengali. A man came over from another restaurant. "That was something of a surprise, for I recognised this man. I had been giving him advice for quite some time when he was having a conflict with this very same restaurant owner. Apparently, this conflict had been resolved"¹⁰.

The visit had been quite tense, but served as a clear sign we were putting the pressure on. As expected we left empty-handed. We went back to our meeting point and evaluated the action for a bit. It was decided some of us were going to meet several former employees, the upstairs neighbour of the restaurant and a former business partner of Rashid who all had troubles with him. They could provide us with information about Rashid's behavior towards Achmed. We wanted to know more about his background, his way of working. But we also needed testimonies that Achmed had been working for Rashid. Under Dutch law, if someone had a verbal contract and the boss denies this, one needs six witnesses' written testimonies to the effect that one has been working for this boss. The idea was to wait for a bit while doing this and then send a letter from AGA and a letter from the lawyer posing a deadline for the payment. The first Saturday after this deadline we would visit the restaurant around six or seven in the evening with a group of people and a banner and flyers. This was not necessary, for Rashid's brother phoned Achmed about a week later. He could get 500 euro, and the remaining 700 euro a few weeks later. When Achmed picked up the money the first time, one of us joined him and a group of three persons was waiting just around the corner. Earlier on, before Achmed got in touch with us, he had been attacked one night when arriving in the brother's restaurant to ask for the money and we were not going to stand for any more of that. So if anyone was going to do some beating, it would be us. Luckily the brother paid the 500 euro without any problems and two weeks later the rest of the money was collected. It is worth noting that a friend of Achmed was still working for Rashid's brother. He had overheard the brother saying on the phone to Rashid's wife: "Why doesn't he just pay the money and get rid of the nuisance?" Through another person we heard that Rashid had apparently told people he had been visited by a group of "Dutch terrorists".

Although we can never be a 100% sure that a court case would have been successful, Rashid got away with it cheaply. We would have been able to get the six testimonies and with these it was quite likely we'd have won. Then Rashid would have had to pay the legal minimum to Achmed, which would have been almost twice the amount he did pay. But as legal proceedings could have had an influence on Achmed's stay in the Netherlands, he preferred cutting a deal.

General remarks about organising workplace resistance

In the six years since the inception of the Anarchist Group Amsterdam we have been involved solely in small workplace conflicts in the local hotel and catering industry. Besides actually intervening in four conflicts, the group was contacted in two other instances to get involved as well. In these two cases the workers contacting us abandoned the possibility of action due to reasons that remain unclear to us. This shows that fighting back in the workplace is not the most common thing to do. This is especially true for people who are in the difficult situation of needing to work in the margins of the labour market, meaning doing the highly flexible and casualised jobs, which are very often unregulated, so called 'black' jobs. In these cases they find it often more favorable to go look for another job as soon as possible in order to secure a minimum income to survive. Besides they often fear repression by the boss. So far the methods we used could be seen as an 'exit strategy'. In all the cases the worker had been fired already or had left. So for us the only thing we could do is to make it as expensive as possible for an employer to 'fire' a worker. The last part of this article deals with how we organise and the methods we use. In reading it a few things should be taken into account. First of all, all conflicts the AGA was directly involved in were in the Amsterdam hotel and catering industry. Secondly, it always concerned one worker, so it was always individual conflicts being dealt with. And thirdly, in all cases the workers had already quit the job.

Dedication

The first and most important thing is the complete dedication of all people involved. This does not necessarily mean everybody has to concentrate her/his whole life on this case. It means being realistic about how much can be done, making clear agreements on it and living up to them.

The central person is the injured worker – or group of workers, but the AGA only dealt with individual conflicts. To prevent a situation where the whole support group is taking the case out of the worker's hands and starts to function as most unions with specialists, it should be the injured worker who is the one deciding what should be done, when and why. The rest of the support group is there to give options of what can be done, help to organize and voice their opinion, but it should never take over the case. On the other hand a group should be very careful not to become the sheep of the injured worker

Take the worker(s) legal position into account from this stage onward. In particular workers without papers can suffer serious consequences from taking action against a boss. So it is important to discuss how to avoid interference by immigration or other investigative authorities. Many times there will still be people without papers working in a place and a raid by the foreign police, for example, will result in detention and very likely deportation. And finally, be aware of how far you want to go and don't let the conflict drag on too long, it's better to accept a defeat when it's there instead of trying to ignore it and letting the organization get bogged down. This is lethal to morale.

A two-lane road

The AGA always chose to take a two-lane road of legal action and direct action. The main focus should always be on direct action, since legal actions are always taking place within the framework of the bourgeois justice system. But it is a good way to get oneself informed about the rights one has and at what point the demands made to the boss become 'unreasonable'. Then also a lot of bosses are scared to have to go to court, especially in an

industry like the hotel and catering industry where a lot of dodgy business is going on. Going to court means the eyes are on one's business and one is risking more of one's illegal activity being discovered. So apart from actually going to court, it's already a good way of exercising pressure on the boss. Show that you know your rights and use the threat of a court case.

Direct action was always used to slowly build up tension. Doing it slowly was done for mere practical reasons. First of all, if light actions already get the goods, it prevents too much work being done. Secondly it gives the group time to get more information on the case, whether about legal rights or about the owner's activities. In the Raffle's case, for instance, we were fooled with a supposed bankruptcy of the company and it being taken over by another owner. If they realise you're badly informed their power to bluff grows. Thirdly if the pressure's on too high in the early start it can result in such a heavy counter-reaction that the fight will have to be prolonged over a long period of time. If the group is small that means it's very exhausting and dangerous for morale.

Communication and documentation

A very important point is also documentation, not the nicest aspect, but absolutely necessary. First of all the worker's side of the story should be clearly written down on paper: so information like working period, working hours of different days, when which discussion with the boss took place and other information that is relevant. Then everybody has a clear reference. This prevents a lack of clarity in debates about the case.

The next step is getting additional information. This means finding out how many businesses the boss owns, which ownership structures are used in the different companies, if the boss owns real estate. Finding out what kind of real estate owner he is, how does he react on squatters for instance? In Amsterdam there's a squatting research collective which has information on all if not most owners ever involved in a squatters' conflict. Getting in touch with people who in the past had some kind of relation with the boss, like ex-business partners, workers and so on is also important.

All this extra information makes one able to get a better view of how the boss might react to the support group's activities. Reports should be made of all visits to people. Other information



In front of Raffle's Grand Cafe

should also be written down or copied. This way over time a serious file will come into being. This is useful, because the more you know the more you can forget and the bigger the group the more different the stories become over time.

If there's irregular intervals between the meeting of the support group or if a group of people that help out occasionally exists around the support group, but is not actively involved in the organising, it can be useful to send a regular 'update' to the people who in some way or another are involved in the conflict.

Building up tension

After getting the first information on paper, action can be planned. Here we'll describe a way of working that was quite successful for us. Together with the injured worker we'd pick a date for a first 'friendly' visit. The friendliness of this visit largely depends on how much the conflict has escalated already. This is different each time and has to be decided anew each time as well. The first visit is used to let the owner know about the new situation. He is not only dealing anymore with one individual worker, but with a group, a union. This visit can best be characterized by the words impressive, but open and friendly. You want to make sure the owner knows you're serious about it.

After such a visit, you can wait for a first reaction of the owner. This reaction could be given directly to the group or the worker. But it can happen that you get to know his ideas about your appearance in the workplace through other workers. Use the time you wait for this – which can differ from a few days to let's say a maximum of two weeks – to gain more information and prepare a possible legal case.

A next step could be one more visit, which is less friendly. Or you can decide to write a letter to the owner, stating your opinion for the final time. You can explain what the problem is according to you and say you give the owner one final possibility to solve the problem in a friendly manner, without giving public notice to the case. It's good to set a deadline then. This letter is always a good moment to show up with a lawyer. So if you can have a lawyer send a letter as well, then the pressure will be rising. Awaiting reply to this situation, preparations should be made for direct action. In the case of restaurants it's always nice to do your first action on a Saturday evening for instance. Make a nice flyer for the customers and passers-by. Explain the story shortly and call for leaving the place without paying or not entering at all. Once the conflict has come to this point it becomes tricky. We only have experience with it in one case, the Raffle's case, which, as you have read already, was not that successful. The owner can become very annoyed and will challenge your determination and your ability to get a small group of people organised to do an action every week or two weeks for instance. In the long run we had serious trouble doing this.

If at any point you realize you're running on empty it might be good to decide to quit and do a final action, which preferably hits the place financially. Something like the proletarian dinner we were planning in the Raffle's case.

Unfortunately we don't have experience yet with these kinds of actions. Hopefully we'll gain this in the next couple of years.

So the fastest way to victory is a good acquaintance with the injured worker and the support group and a maximum of dedication by those involved. A clear approach, so everything can be dealt with without doubts or discussions at the wrong moments. And finally, a careful build-up of tension, properly informing those involved by making a file and sending updates.

¹ This is not his real name.

² The amounts are the equivalents of the old ones in Dutch guilders

³ Until about 2001/2002 it was relatively easy for legal foreign workers, like Leon, to get a job. So even some of the precarious jobs 'gauranteed' reasonably enjoyable working conditions.

⁴ Vrije Bond (Free Union), was founded at the end of the eighties, early nineties when the anarchists within the only Dutch revolutionary syndicalist union O.V.B. were partially pushed out or left voluntarily. Some of them went on to form the Vrije



Kid Gloves or Bare-Knuckles

The Experiences of the FAU-Hannover in Public Sector Strikes - Organizing, Radicalizing and Participating in a Strike at a Public Health Institution (2005)

Background

In May of 2003 the employers of the German Public Services and the reformist “United Service Union” (Ver.di) began negotiating a series of fundamental changes to the existing wages and conditions. This should have been completed in January of 2005 but was repeatedly delayed. Their goal was to completely replace the wage-structure of the “Federal Employee Agreement” (BAT), which had been in force since 1961, which would affect more than 2 million employees. Ver.di and its predecessors (ÖTV and DAG) had long spoken in favor [of this reform], arguing that the BAT, with 17,000 different employment categories, was unmanageable and out of date. It was clear at the start of the negotiations that Ver.di had thrown itself at the feet of the employers. The need to “adapt to the competitive environment” and “open space for negotiation” in order to “accommodate the special requirements of individual branches” were statements usually made by employers, but were now heard from Ver.di. Both sides agreed that working hours had to be flexibilized and wages made more dependent on performance. This was, of course, sold to the employees as a success by Ver.di, who claimed a number of benefits, for example more individual control over working hours. But supplements were cut, and a new low-wage group within the Public Service was created. Ver.di claimed to oppose the out-sourcing and privatization of “core services” like canteens, hospital laundry services, etc. It was clear, however, that this was not a selfless position. Until then the employees affected by out-sourcing were considered removed from the Federal Employee Agreement, but [it was hoped] that the new agreement would influence the employer to refrain from such measures. These sectors would thus remain under the coverage of Ver.di, in return for which the employees would have to accept menial pay.

Planning the Attack

Until Spring of 2004 all three public employers (the federal, state and municipal governments) were still at the bargaining table. Ver.di only had the federal government and

Bond. The course of revolutionary syndicalism was abandoned after a few years and the union entered a period of silence, with just its solidarity fund and magazine *Buiten the Orde* (Outside the Order) still functioning. A few years ago AGA joined the *Vrije Bond* and is currently trying to help revive it.

⁵ Imagine the old houses of Amsterdam’s city centre. These houses on the sides of the streets very often have another house behind it (back or rear houses). The office was a small smoky room in such a back house connected to the Café. This added to the dodgy atmosphere already around the case.

⁶ In 2006 it was reported in several papers that Alberto Fernandez had been threatened by a thug hired by one of Amsterdam’s number one real estate owners during the same period when we were bothering him. This man wanted to buy Alberto’s restaurants, who owned the property himself. But he wouldn’t sell it so the real estate owner had one of his heavies threaten him, unsuccessfully though. Maybe this was part of the reason Alberto wasn’t impressed by us: we didn’t threaten to kill him or his kids, we just tried to keep customers out.

⁷ An earlier article on this conflict was published by Dirk Kloosterboer in December 2005 under the title *Thai restaurant made to pay back wages*. It can still be found on: [//www.nieuwsuitamsterdam.nl/English/2005/05123101.htm](http://www.nieuwsuitamsterdam.nl/English/2005/05123101.htm)

⁸ This is not his real name.

⁹ Flexmens, Flex Human, is a small group of people publishing a quarterly magazine of the same name and which wants to pay attention to the issue of precarity. They are involved in the EuroMayDay network. They had been formed about a year prior to this conflict and AGA had been organising a Precair Forum together with them and MayDay actions in 2005.

¹⁰ A person from Searchweb quoted in *Thai restaurant made to pay back wages*. See 7 as well.

the Union of Municipal Employers (VKA) to negotiate with after the state (*Länder*) governments, under the umbrella-organization TdL, announced the end of Christmas bonuses and paid vacation in June of 2003 (later to be followed by the federal government) and the end of the previous work-hours agreement on April 30th, 2004. The State of Hessen went so far as to leave the TdL entirely, which meant that the new wage agreement and regulations for public service (known under the acronym TVÖD) would only apply for federal and local employees as of October 1st, 2005. For the 900,000 employees of the state governments the BAT would no longer apply. Several states had already long since lengthened weekly working hours: in Bavaria all those whose employment began after May 2004 had 42-hour work weeks, in Baden-Württemberg it was a 41-hour work week. This was comparable to a nine percent decrease in income. Ver.di, in a separate wage agreement with the Berlin city government, had already agreed in 2003 to a 37-hour week without wage compensation, which represented an 8-to-12 percent reduction in earnings.

Charging to the Rear

The federal and municipal governments strutted in full expectation of victory, brazenly demanding no wage increases and threatening to break off negotiations otherwise. But that was not to be expected, even if Ver.di did concede priority to the reform project. As a consequence, Ver.di abstained from terminating the existing contract on January 31st, 2005, as originally planned. Due to the existing ‘peace agreement’ clause in those agreements, Ver.di had thus simultaneously abandoned the use of union action. There were a few public displays of resistance, such as “Warning Strikes” in a few states, but only employees of the individual states were mobilized as part of an effort to bring the state governments back to the bargaining table. The state governments remained unmoved. In February Ver.di came to an agreement with the federal and municipal governments, which put the stamp of approval on the TVÖD. Minister of the Interior Schily, a former Green and current Social-Democrat who served as chief negotiator for the government, could proudly announce that the agreement and the reforms were not only cost-neutral, but actually reduced expenses. Ver.di presented itself once again as the victor. Only the workers lost out. Some regulations of the TVÖD were not to be ironed out between Ver.di and the employers until later, when the employees no longer had any influence, since their initial vote in favor of the agreement still applied.

As the chief negotiator for the TdL, Treasury Minister Hartmut Möllring (Christian Democrat, Lower Saxony) made it clear from the beginning that the state governments would not accept the TVÖD or any arrangement that they had not personally had a part in. Negotiations would not be taken up until Ver.di conceded an extension in working hours—Lower Saxony was already threatening with lay-offs. Ver.di demanded the restoration of the original wage structure and the acceptance of the agreement made with the federal and municipal governments. The threat of escalation was made repeatedly over several months, but no concrete steps were taken in this direction, leaving the impression that an open-ended fight (as opposed to warning strikes) would never come to pass.

In the snowy February of 2005, for example, the lots of the street maintenance workers in the Hannover area were subjected to blockades. However, as soon as police called on the workers to clear the way for the vehicles they complied. Strike breakers, both in the form of municipal employees and private services, were brought into play.

The Union Bureaucracy hits the brakes

Ver.di still wanted to cut a deal with the individual states and showed itself ready for compromise. The offers it made to the employers were tantamount to a betrayal of the interests of its members. The employers, however, had other plans. In the central questions they refused to budge—the TdL saw in Ver.di’s concessions an admission of weakness and demanded more:

a retroactive inclusion of a 42-hour work-week for new employees in the contract and a loophole which allowed for the extension of employees' work hours. On April 25th, 2005 Ver.di finally declared the negotiations a failure. After talks were broken off, Wolfgang Denia, then the Ver.di Chief in Lower Saxony, speedily promised the states a "long and hard fight." Hartmut Möllring, chief negotiator for the TdL dismissed this wearily: "We'll outlast a strike." In fact Ver.di had relatively little to use against the states: the level of organization was relatively low, although capable of mobilizing. The readiness of the 900,000 employees to take action in support of the TVÖD had its limits, however. Many had recognized that, compared with the previous BAT, the TVÖD represented a major setback. To save face the Ver.di leadership sidestepped a major confrontation at the last minute: widespread strikes would be held off for the time being, announced Ver.di Chairman Frank Bsirske. Instead the focus would be on "unpredictable, flexible and creative actions." In the end, however, the union bureaucracy had to yield to the increasing pressure of their base. The employees of the University Hospitals in Baden-Württemberg were the first to join the fight, where Ver.di had to call for an open-ended strike at the beginning of October. Nurses, care workers, as well as administrative, technical and kitchen personnel were at the forefront of the strike against the extension of their working hours and the reduction in their pay.

Divided

By coming to separate agreements with federal and local governments Ver.di had buried its principal of negotiating unified and universal agreements in the public services. Its leadership thus carried the lion's share of the blame for the weakening of its members' fighting resolve in the strike against the state governments that followed. First and foremost, they had created a situation in which public service employees were divided from one another. The local government employees were traditionally the group that fought hardest and most effectively, bringing vulnerable sectors and services, like garbage removal, to a standstill.



Workers Manifestation at Public Sector Strike in Hannover.

Now, in the conflict with the state governments, they were being left out of the equation entirely, forcing Ver.di to mobilize across all sectors. Motivation and morale were not very high during the period of warning strikes in the individual states and the principal participants were workers in the area of street-maintenance and hospital kitchen and laundry staff-most of which had never participated in a strike before.

The Silver Lining

Interestingly, the public employees knew very little about the wage-reform negotiations until 2005. Many weren't even aware of what was coming their way. Consequently, the members of the FAU employed in the public sector set to the task of informing their colleagues. Their goal: warding off attacks by the employers and union leadership on wages and working conditions and forcing the repeal of the changes to the contract. For the FAU-Hannover this would mean a fight against both the Ver.di leadership and the employers in the event of a strike.

The situation favored a fighting alternative to Ver.di. The physicians' Marburger Union (MB) ended its alliance with Ver.di after 40 years of cooperation and carried out an independent strike in University Hospitals starting in August of 2005. The MB made its own wage demands, mobilized for a labor struggle and as of September led separate negotiations with the TdL. Another of Ver.di's junior partners, the DBB Wage Union, which represented 40 bureaucratic associations, pushed its own aims and interests again and again in an effort to be heard.¹ It should not be forgotten that these associations have nothing in common with the anarcho-syndicalist concept of labor struggle: they are neither democratic, nor based on principles of solidarity and class struggle, not to mention lacking a social perspective or revolutionary aim. Nevertheless, these conflicts between the various unions left members with a new perception of the labor landscape. At the large demonstrations and rallies that took place in 2006 a number of small unions joined the march, illustrating the fact that alternatives to the amalgamated giant of Ver.di existed. Moreover, Ver.di's surrender on the point of a unified wage agreement proved a great help-the struggle could no longer be confined to the sensitive areas of the public sector, rather it encompassed all public services. A further factor was the dissatisfaction with the union bureaucracy, which issued calls for strikes without consulting its rank-and-file members. At this point many recognized that they were being called on to fight for the deterioration [of their working conditions] and came to distrust the Ver.di leadership. These factors all contributed favorably to the ability of the FAU-Hannover to make its presence felt.

First Steps

Ver.di had called upon employees in the institutions of higher education in Lower Saxony to carry out a warning strike on November 23rd, 2005. Very few heeded this call in Hannover, however. 40 workers gathered before the strikers' tent in the course of the morning to protest the "Wage Agreement for the Sciences" proposed by the Rectors of Higher Education (HRK) and call for the adoption of the TVÖD, which applied for federal and local employees. These Ver.di members simultaneously demanded that the 38.5-hour-week be retained-an objection to the wage structure that provided for a 39-hour-week. The University employees organized in the FAU-Hannover were the ones to get to the root of things, however. Together with their colleagues from other public sectors (the Wunstorf State Hospital and the Youth Association) they expressed their support for the fight against the TdL and the HRK, but also their opposition to the TVÖD negotiated by Ver.di. The four members of the FAU present spoke instead in favor of retaining the BAT wage structure, which should then be retroactively applied for all new employees and part-time student employees.

proposals with interest, resulting in a fair amount of discussion on the subject. Questions regarding the FAU were answered and Ver.di's political monopoly was broken. A Ver.di functionary, by way of contrast, reacted with sour suspicion of this "split-attempt," but in the end he had no choice but to respond to the arguments of the FAU. He too finally had to admit that the introduction of low-wage jobs through the TVÖD would not hinder further outsourcing in the public sector.

On Strike

In February of 2006 the votes of the reformist unions for a series of short, open-ended strikes in the public sector finally came. A number of individual FAU members worked in the public sector, in the State Hospital of Lower Saxony, a psychiatric clinic near Hannover, and at the University of Hannover. From February 16th to May of 2006 the University was the site of an on-going strike. One FAU member was almost continuously engaged and was even elected to the strike leadership at the end of February, a post he held until the end of the strike. His membership in the FAU was soon a article of common knowledge among his colleagues but this presented him with no special difficulties. During this period he was involved in the preparations for and the organization of the strike assemblies and took part in numerous actions at the university and in Hannover, in addition to joining strike delegations in Lower Saxony. During this period Ver.di and the DBB-Wage Union called only for one-day strikes at the Wustorf Hospital, normally in conjunction with large demonstrations and rallies. After each of these strikes further labor action was called off by the strike committee, an unelected body composed primarily of members of the works' councils from Ver.di and the DBB, which were mostly made up of shop stewards. The open-ended strike was thus continuously interrupted, although not ended, but could be launched again at any time.

The FAU member who was employed at the hospital participated in these one-day strikes. Furthermore, he attempted to influence the discussions in the strike assemblies and mobilized both organized and unorganized colleagues, engaging employees of other clinics in discussion. During this period he did not present himself as a member of the FAU in his workplace; he had decided against this course of action after a patient outed him to several of his co-workers a short time prior to the strikes. In the weeks following this incident he encountered problems with colleagues that labeled him a "leftist extremist" instead of recognizing him as a union activist. Eventually the situation cooled down; he had always had a good collegial relationship with his co-workers, and after some time this atmosphere was restored. So, while he did not present himself as a member of the FAU, he was able to present its demands at his place of employment.

At the demonstrations and rallies in Hannover the scene was quite different, with the FAU Hannover distributing flyers and "Strike Information" and carrying their flags. In the beginning the strikers from the hospital were bussed to Hannover, including the FAU member. There the striking and supporting members of the FAU-Hannover met and continued to the rally point together. While this members' colleagues didn't make an issue of this they also showed no more interest.²

Thus the FAU joined 1,500-2,000 strikers from the Hannover area as a union in its own right. The goal was to spread the FAU's message among the employees of the various public services. The demand for the retention of the BAT met with positive reactions from many of the strikers, and the group itself found considerable resonance among the crowd; they were asked repeatedly what the three initials stood for. One among the interested knew better: she asked the comrades if they were the "German CNT."

In March the striking public sector members of the FAU-Hannover printed 400 copies of an pamphlet titled "Strike Info #1," in which they detailed the labor rights of those employees

not organized in unions. These were distributed among local and state employees in the Hannover area. The response was overwhelming: Ver.di members helped to distribute the pamphlets, too, as their union couldn't offer anything like it. The first strike newspaper produced by Ver.di at the University of Hannover even cited the pamphlets in their first edition in March.

On March 9th, 2006 the FAU-Hannover took part in the state-wide public workers' demonstration on the Opera Square (Opernplatz) with an estimated 20,000 participants. Two more "Strike-Infos" were originally planned, one in April concerning the status of the wage negotiations and another in May in connection with the Wage Agreement for State Services (TV-L). Unfortunately, due to time constraints these could not be produced.

Inside the Workplace

The situation in the Wunstorf Clinic can serve as an example of the FAU-members' ability to influence the strike in workplaces. Here 120 employees per shift went on strike from the 14th to the 16th of February, 2006. The enthusiasm for the strike was still very high at this point in a number of clinics and hospitals—nearly 100% of the workforce was behind the strike. In many locations only the minimum staff necessary remained. Those colleagues that formed this "skeleton crew" not only prevented strike-breaking, they also showed their support by wearing buttons that made clear their solidarity with the strikers. Just a day before the strike (13th February) the employees were informed by the hospital administration that an emergency service agreement had been signed between the hospital, Ver.di and the DBB's Hospital Union of Lower Saxony (FNL) to ensure patient care. No one explained to the employees in what way this agreement was to be carried out, however, so they took the initiative and organized this for all hospital wards, with considerable influence from the FAU-member on-site. It was decided that hospital operations would be limited to the weekend and holiday service levels, which had immediate consequences, as the strike enjoyed only limited support from the hospital professionals. In fact, starting on the very first day of the strike, those colleagues on emergency duty were subjected to attacks from the chief physicians and even individual doctors and psychologists, and conflicts arose regarding the definition of emergency services. The on-duty colleagues refused to fetch patients to the visiting room or transfer



Streikrecht für Unorganisierte

Vieleorts herrscht große Verunsicherung darüber, welche Rechte die Kolleginnen und Kollegen während eines Arbeitskampfes wahrnehmen können, die sich nicht organisiert bzw. keiner etablierten Gewerkschaft angeschlossen haben. Oftmals vermitteln uns gerade Gewerkschaftsfunktionärinnen und Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre, aber auch Vorgesetzte, den Eindruck, dass uns grundlegende Rechte als Arbeitnehmerin erst dann zustehen, wenn wir Mitglieder dieser Gewerkschaften sind. Dem ist nicht so! Wir haben deshalb bei mal die Fragen beantwortet, die die Kolleginnen und Kollegen am häufigsten stellen.

Oft herrscht Unsicherheit darüber, wer sich an einem Arbeitskampf beteiligen darf. Wer kann streiken?

Das Streikrecht wird in Deutschland aus Artikel 9 Absatz 3 des Grundgesetzes hergeleitet. Alle Arbeitnehmerinnen habend das Recht, sich an einem Streik zu beteiligen. Dabei ist es völlig egal, ob sie Mitglied der zum Streik aufrufenden Gewerkschaft sind oder nicht. Auch gewerkschaftlich nicht organisierte Arbeitnehmerinnen können streiken! Auszubildende und Praktikantinnen und Praktikanten haben als Arbeitskampfricht, wenn es um ihre beruflichen Beschäftigungsbedingungen geht. Eine Ausnahme bilden lediglich Beamtinnen und Beamte: ihnen wird das Streikrecht bisher pauschal bestritten.

In bestimmten Bereichen des Öffentlichen Dienstes, z.B. Krankenhäusern, schließen Gewerkschaften so genannte „Notdienstvereinbarungen“ mit den Arbeitgebern ab, um eine notwendige Mindestversorgung zu gewährleisten. Um den Umfang dieser Arbeiten entbrannt im Alltag immer wieder Streit. Was muss beachtet werden?

Abgeschlossene Notdienstvereinbarungen sind öffentlich zugänglich zu machen; jede Kollegin und jeder Kollege kann sich über Inhalt und Umfang informieren. Alle, die Notdienst leisten müssen, sollten auf die Einhaltung des Umfangs der zugesicherten Arbeiten achten. Darüber hinaus gehende Leistungen müssen nicht erbracht werden! Streikbruch muss nicht unterstützt werden!

them from one station to another for therapy, for example. The FAU-members' good relationship with his co-workers paid off during these days, as both pro- and anti-strike workers refused to carry out these tasks—no one wanted to stab their co-workers in the back. The atmosphere in the hospital's strike locale, by contrast, was less than united: in principle the different sections kept to themselves. The proposal was made again and again to march across the hospital grounds, which was vetoed by the strike leadership. Only on the afternoon of the 14th were two such marches organized. By contrast, attempts by the representatives of Ver.di and the FNL to convince the hospital workers to distribute their informational leaflets were practically boycotted.

In the course of the weeks and months that followed the motivation of the striking workers at the clinic went down. After more than three months

the majority of the state employees were suffering from strike-fatigue. The growing holes in the wallets of the workers began to have an effect even on those who wanted to continue the struggle. Ever greater numbers of colleagues gave up and in the period around Easter the level of mobilization declined considerably. This could be largely attributed to the union leadership of Ver.di and the DBB. For many it wasn't clear after a certain point why they were still on strike. When some members of the strike leadership took up work again while the strike was still on, it was clear that the struggle was being run into the ground. The incompetence of the union leadership in individual workplaces took on grotesque form. Calls for days of action often didn't reach the colleagues in the Wunstorf Clinic wards until shortly before they were to take place, which meant that few were even aware of them. As a consequence, the influence of the FAU-member also declined, limiting itself primarily to colleagues in his ward of the hospital, which stayed solid. But the strike no longer had the same effect that it did in its first days.

The Contract

On May 19th, 2006, the state employers of the TdL came to an agreement with Ver.di, known as the "Wage Agreement for the States' Public Services" (TV-L). 83.5% of Ver.di's membership voted for the agreement and an end to the strike. Nevertheless, in the Wunstorf Clinic and at the University of Hannover a number of votes from Ver.di and DBB members were cast for continuing the strike. Others had long since demanded an end to the strike, hoping for a return to the original contract. Neither were successful. The details of the TV-L were to be negotiated in the following months, a process from which the union rank-and-file were excluded, just like in the case of the previous TVÖD agreement. Broadly speaking, the TV-L was based on the TVÖD but included a number of "state-specific" conditions. Differences arose in working hours, for example, and not just between the individual states, but also between different occupations. The workers in the hospitals and clinics, street workers and those in the child-care sectors came away in the best position: the work-hours among these groups spanned 38.5 to 39.9 hours a week. Here it became clear that those who had gone on strike the most achieved the best results, although this had little connection to actual participation in the strike, as a comparison between the Wunstorf Clinic and the University of Hannover shows. In eastern Germany a 40-hour work-week was maintained. Yearly bonus incentives were also staggered, ranging from 30-95% of pay, depending on occupation. The equalization of pay for "new employees" is being carried out in progressive steps rather than immediately. Escape clauses were accepted that made it possible for employers to discard these working-hours and the incentive bonuses after the 31st of December, 2007. These would then have to be re-negotiated with the individual states. A far-reaching division of the various employees has been all but pre-programmed by the unions.

Summary

During these strike months Ver.di got down to brass tacks, which was noticed by everyone involved in the strike and even those who weren't. For the first time in over a decade the public employees were on strike—but alone. The Ver.di national office and the DBB had suffered a major blow and were now faced with a dilemma. The leadership needs the rank-and-file in order to carry out a labor struggle with sufficient force. But the bureaucratized unions had done everything possible to make sure that the workers never learned *how* to fight. In many places the union leadership lost credibility due to its actions: empty promises and deception of the members; strategic and tactical errors during the strike; a lack of presence and engagement in the workplace on the part of the functionaries; disinformation and a lack of coordination between the various strike committees, which acted alone and lost influence as a result. While many voted for the strike who did not participate in it, as time went on even organized workers began working again, and thus became strike-breakers. This was the cause of considerable anger among strikers, at the Wunstorf Clinic, the University of Hannover and

elsewhere.

What happened in these months was the result of the internal policies of those associations that are based on bureaucratic full-timers, a lobby-group mentality and passivity among the rank-and-file. Consequently, majority of members waited for directives from above. That the strike took on other, more combative forms and in some places a type of network between the various workplaces arose is a credit to a number of individual workers. Many workers had never even discussed the conditions of their workplace or what to do about them before the strike and were taking their first steps, so to speak. Of great interest was the openness with which everything was discussed, from raising consciousness about the strike and scabbin, to the goals and aims of the strike, and what was wrong with the union and the negotiations and how things should be run. During this time labor struggles elsewhere that were gaining momentum were discussed. On February 13th, 2006, garbage workers in Osnabrück blockaded the dump trucks of an industrial complex, which got a violent response from the police. Elsewhere public employers tried again and again to subvert the strike. Strike breakers were sent in, or at least used as a threat. These were subjects that were taken up during the struggle.

The positive result of these developments was that certain amount of self-organization became standard. This did not extend into the daily affairs of the workplace, unfortunately, where the union base retreated into passivity.

The public employees organized in the FAU-Hannover participated in the strike from day one. The fact that they continued the struggle despite the fact that they were not eligible for Ver.di strike pay raised their standing in the eyes of their colleagues. Their goal had been to mobilize as many colleagues as possible for the strike, regardless of union membership, and promote self-organization. With their “Strike-Info,” in which they answered a number of legal questions surrounding the labor struggle, they tried to dissipate any fear of participating.

Overture for the Future

In the course of the strike a number of Ver.di sections were formed at workplaces that kept their distance from the union leadership. The workplace newsletter “Netzwerk” is still published at the University of Hannover and the member of the FAU there participates actively in its composition. On August 7th, 2006, two FAU members (from the University and the Wunstorf Clinic) who were active in the strike accepted the invitation of a Ver.di section opposed to the union leadership to introduce the principles, structure and activities of anarcho-syndicalism. The local section showed great interest and declared its readiness to cooperate with the FAU Hannover in the event of further conflicts. Since then, however, this section’s membership has shrunk to the point where there are very few active members.

In the Wunstorf Clinic such structures failed to materialize at all. Here there was considerable overlap between the issues of the public services strike and the privatization of the majority of hospitals in Lower Saxony since the summer of 2006. Workplace and public actions took place in reaction to this in which FAU members also participated. Following the conclusion of a further wage agreement between Ver.di and Lower Saxony, however, the resistance collapsed.

At the end of December, 2007, the clauses of the wage agreement concerning working hours and yearly bonuses run out, and the FAU-Hannover is preparing for the struggles to come. Since the time of the strike a number of new public employees have joined the FAU. In the May of 2006, during the strike, the FAU-Hannover decided to set up a local strike fund to aid its members involved in labor struggles. Offers of material and financial support during this first strike came from the FAU sections in Bremen, Hamburg, Hannover and Osnabrück. In case FAU sections elsewhere go on strike a regional strike fund has been established. In

the coming strikes the FAU-Hannover intends to act far more aggressively and with heightened public presence. The goal is to build membership so that permanent workplace groups can be established.

Heiko (Local Federation Hannover)

(Translation from German by John Carroll)



Putting Pressure on Deadbeat Bosses: The FAU-Bremen aids Member in retrieving Unpaid Wages Bremen 2005: Bringing in Owed Wages

Jobs in the transport sector are among the lowest paid occupations. Wages in this branch are placed under intense pressure by the transport companies, which are in turn highly dependent on their customers. By exerting pressure on the transport firms, these customers, corporate or otherwise, exert indirect control over wage levels. The workers have a weak lobby, and the level of union organization is low.

In order to cut costs and reduce risk numerous subsidiary transport companies are founded. These are often limited in size, so there are neither works' councils nor workers' organizations that stretch beyond the level of the individual company. The employers are often highly organized, via family ties, for example. Such was the case in Bremen, where a syndicalist was employed by a food transport and logistics firm.

His fight for owed wages began with the following letter:

Bremen, January 24th, 2005

*To: Dähn Logistics & Transport
#X Street
28XXX Bremen*

Re: Payment of Wages for December, 2004

Mr. and Mrs. Dähn,

With this letter I formally request the payment of my wages (349.48•) within the next three days, via bank transfer. Although you already have my account information (it is listed on my wage statement) I have provided it again below.

(...)

I would like to add that Mrs. Dähn, who refused to pay my wages earlier today, errs in her assumption that my verbal termination of employment is not official. The end of my employment at the company as of the 31st of December, 2004, has been noted on my wage statement, which you produced. Consequently, all the legal requirements concerning the termination of employment have been fulfilled.

¹ The DBB is a fairly conservative set of associations that represent various public employees. It should be noted that the DBB rarely resorts to anything resembling labor action and usually acts as a negotiating agency.

² It should be noted that a *Berufsverbot*, essentially banning an individual from working in a certain profession or field, can follow from association in a radical organization, although it is rare that such a case is actually brought before a court.

I have fulfilled my duties as an employee, you are delinquent in the payment of wages. If the money owed to me is not transferred to my account within the next 3 days I will file suite for non-payment of wages at the Labor Court in Bremen and use all legal methods available, including a request for support from the Employees' Association and a demand for interest on the late wages paid.

(Worker X)

He promptly called on his union for assistance. On the webpage of the Bremen Free Workers' Union (FAU) he explained the case and announced that if the wages remained unpaid the union would take action. After an official statement by the union on its webpage, reprinted below, the owner paid up within days, hoping too avoid further damage to his small company's image:

“Enrico Dähn Transportation refuses to pay wages

Dähn Transportation and Logistics is a major sub-contractor for Menke-Menu (Meals on Wheels, Worksite Catering), as well as a deliverer of newspapers and magazines in the greater Bremen area. The employee turnover at Dähn is high, due to the low wages and crowded delivery schedule. The majority of workers are employed on a 350-Euro-a-month basis. The contracts offered are among the worst in Bremen. The questionnaires distributed to new employees put workers at a disadvantage—inquiries include union affiliation and plans for pregnancy.

In this particular case the driver announced his intent to terminate employment in December, and was duly noted on his wage statement and accepted. Mr. and Mrs. Dähn, however, are refusing to pay the last of his wages. According to Mrs. Dähn, her husband wanted to “speak to the driver personally.” The worker in question responded that he'd be ready to speak to Mr. Dähn immediately, at which point Mrs. Dähn informed him that a business appointment had been moved up and her husband was indisposed and unreachable by phone. In classic robber baron style they refused to acknowledge his documented claim to payment. The behavior of the Dähns demonstrates the arbitrary nature in which they handle their workers. The individual affected set Friday, the 28th of January as the final deadline for payment, after which point the case will be brought before the Bremen Labor Court. The FAU-Bremen has demanded that Dähn Transportation pay the owed wages immediately and announced public action should this not occur. The union will continue to inform the public on further developments.

Wie gleiche Bezahlung für gleiche Arbeit und vergleichbare Vergütungen wie in anderen Bremer Krankenhäusern, ausgesprochen. Seit nunmehr über zwei Wochen wird die Klinik Dr. Heines deshalb bestreikt. [weiter](#)

■ Warum nicht gleich so Herr Dähn ?

So wie es scheint geht Enrico Mike Dähn und seine Ehefrau Silke zu denjenigen Unternehmern die die Rechte und Würde ihrer ArbeiterInnen nicht ernst nehmen. Wie berichtet verweigerte das Ehepaar einem Fahrer den Lohn für Dezember 2004. Dieser und die FAU setzten ihm eine Zahlungsfrist bis zum 28. Januar. Während die FAU in dieser Zeit die ersten öffentlichen Aktionen vorbereitete entschieden sich die Dähns dann doch den verweigerten Betrag zu zahlen und überwiesen ihre Lohnschulden. **Wir fragen uns: Warum nicht gleich so, Herr Dähn?** Gleichzeitig zeigt dieses Beispiel dass gewerkschaftliche Organisation gerade im Niedriglohnbereich unverzichtbar ist um wätkürlichen Handlungen entgegenzutreten und gemeinsam erfolgreich zu kämpfen. **Join the Union !**

■ Enrico Dähn Transporte verweigert Lohnzahlung

Der Bremer Transport- und Logistik – Unternehmer Enrico Dähn verweigert die Lohnzahlung an einen Fahrer. Dieser hatte im Dezember gekündigt und die Lohnabrechnung auch erhalten. Die Eheleute Dähn verweigern jedoch die Auszahlung. Die FAU ist nun aktiv geworden um den Lohn zusammen mit dem FAU-Mitglied zu erstreiten. [weiter](#)

■ Agenturschluss am 3. Januar 2005 in Bremen

Wie bundesweit in ca. 80 Städten so kam es auch in Bremen zu einer Agenturschlussaktion vor dem Arbeitsamt. Im 9.00 Uhr

Cough up the money, Mr. Dähn!”

The debtor was clearly concerned about his company’s name, which is demonstrated by the fact that he demanded that the article be removed from the union’s website immediately after transferring the owed wages. The union complied, but added a new article with the title:

“Why didn’t you do it in the first place, Mr. Dähn?”

It appears that Enrico Mike Dähn and his wife Silke are among those who don’t take the rights of “their” workers seriously. As reported, the pair refused to pay a driver’s wages for the month of December, 2004. He and the FAU set January 28th, 2005, as the deadline for payment. While the FAU was preparing for the first public actions the Dähns decided they’d pay the wages after all and transferred the funds. We’re just wondering, why didn’t you do it in the first place, Mr. Dähn?

At the same time, this demonstrates the need for union organization in the low-wage sector to successfully combat employers’ arbitrary actions. Join the Union!”

In the Union paper, “Direkte Aktion” (DA), an article appeared in the March/April edition:

Sub-contractors and Unpaid Wages - Bremen: FAU helps worker obtain pay

Raise profits, cut risks, that’s the motto of companies that outsource to sub-contractors. These sub-contractors naturally do the same: raise earnings, cut personnel costs. This generally takes the form of low wages and flexible conditions of employment. In Bremen there is the transportation sub-contractor “Enrico Dähn Transportation and Logistics,” which delivers periodicals and performs services for “Menke Menu.” Among the practices employed by this sub-contractor are “morally questionable” questions posed to new workers concerning union association and planned pregnancies (which no one is required to answer!). Can it get any worse?

Apparently, as we have recently learned that one of our members, a driver employed by the firm, has been denied his wages. Our colleague informed the Dähns about the unpaid wages, but since this fell on deaf ears he turned to his union, the Free Workers Union (FAU) in Bremen...A demand for payment was delivered to Dähn with the support of the FAU-Bremen, in which a deadline was set. Public union action and a lawsuit through the Bremen Labor Court were threatened if payment was not received. The wages were paid quite quickly at this point—after four weeks’ delay!

Since unpaid wages are a logical consequence of the economic factors mentioned above we have to expect that this will occur more often. As this example shows, this can only be fought by organizing all wage workers. Any sub-contractor who thinks that he can improve the conditions of his own exploitation by exploiting others more ruthlessly won’t just encounter pressure from above! Get organized and contact your local FAU!”

Max Hilse (FAU-Bremen)

(Translation from German by John Carroll)



Berlin 2006: The long road

Organizing the unemployed can be as strenuous as trying to repel the Labour Exchange's impudences

In front of Berlin-Neukölln "JobCenter", 11th of April 2006: a big banner signals some dozen activists' rejection of the local Labour Exchange's practices. Members of the anarcho-syndicalist FAU Berlin distribute leaflets which list grievances, name malevolent staff, and give useful hints for the unemployed on how to avoid being conned by the agency in a quarter which is notorious for high unemployment rates and increasing social disintegration.

"The way the JobCenter's staff treat the unemployed is scandalous", explains Marie Krieg of FAU Berlin. "Many applicants' forms for the dole allegedly disappear, often more than once. People don't receive their money in time. The employees create a climate of intimidation and persecution. Sanctions and cuts in subsidies are being implemented as it seems arbitrarily and with hardly any public control."

Marie Krieg can tell: she herself was given a hard time by the agency when her dole was cut by 90 percent based on false accusations in a striking violation of the anyhow derogatory regulations. As a consequence, Marie went to confront her not-so-competent official directly, accompanied by two FAU-comrades. Although the outcome of the visit was ambiguous, it was an example for practical anarcho-syndicalist solidarity. "We try to make sure that no one needs to go the Labour Exchange on her or his own", stresses FAU member Gerd Fischer. "Showing up in two or more makes the staff assume a different, that is more cooperative, attitude, less inclined to fool you or twist your words."

Marie Krieg was not the first member of FAU Berlin drawn into quarrels with the Labour Exchange: shortly after the implementation of the so called Hartz IV law in January 2005, intended to reduce the costs of social welfare and to help expand the low-income-sector, Inge Menzel was kept waiting for her money for weeks on end without any explanation. Official inquiries by other FAU members on the whereabouts of the due payments only led to further annoyances and dirty tricks on the part of the agency. "This experience of a comrade being exposed to official arbitrariness and chicanery led us to work against the Hartz laws on a regular basis", explains Gerd Fischer. "In accordance with the anarcho-syndicalist principles, we wanted to become active primarily in situations when we ourselves and our comrades were directly affected. So we decided to take up Inge's JobCenter in Berlin-Pankow – of the various that exist in Berlin - first."

The activists established a working group, the so called 'Anti-Hartz-AG', as a cross-section institution of FAU Berlin. The aim was to enable members of the four different branch syndicates in Berlin to become involved in activities against cuts in welfare without being forced to quit their proper syndicate and join something like a syndicate for unemployed. Gerd Fischer underlines the reasons: "We reject constructions like syndicates for unemployed, as they exist elsewhere, because we don't want to organize along lines established by state and capital. Besides, we find it necessary for FAU members to remain linked to their original branches in order not loose contact to their professions. Finally, also our members which are still employed can be better informed about the Hartz related problems, since they are often affected indirectly by these laws.

The Anti-Hartz-AG decided to meet publicly on a weekly basis. Marie Krieg: "We wanted to establish a forum for unemployed and employed alike who want to get involved in anti-Hartz-activities. Right from the start, we intended to become engrained in the neighbourhood. Initially, our meetings mainly served as tutorials – we would exchange information about the

new laws and the consequences for ourselves and other unemployed. Basically, we needed to train ourselves for being able to advise others.” But it was not long before the idea of a quarter based advice centre actually took off.

To prevent others from being conned by the JobCenter like Inge Menzel, the anti-Hartz-activists made available a pamphlet that depicted Inge’s case, gave useful hints on precautions to take and pointed out to the weekly meeting of the working group. Every week, Marie and her comrades handed out about 300 leaflets to the visitors of Inge’s JobCenter. Soon, the FAU office was flooded with unemployed seeking consultation. “We could hardly cope with it”, Marie Krieg remembers. “At the beginning, there were only three or four activists, but at peak times something like 12 people seeking advice, plus heaps of requests via telephone.”

The good resonance was partially due to the novelty of the Hartz laws, which created a great demand of information. Another reason for the unexpected massive feedback was the activists’ persistence: “We kept distributing our pamphlets for months on end”, says Gerd Fischer. “We continuously improved the contents to reflect our growing experiences and practice.”

In addition, the syndicalists arranged a meeting with the JobCenter’s managing director. “That was more or less futile”, remembers Alexander Panagoulis. “The manager was keen on finding out how many unemployed we represent, that is if we might pose a danger to his agency. He probably saw the ‘anarcho...’ in our letter-head and figured we might be a bunch of unpredictable radicals. Basically he wanted to check us out, but it was impossible to discuss any actual problem with him.” Consequently, the working group distributed letters to all the employees of the Labour Exchange in a surprise action. Panagoulis: “With some ten comrades we went into the JobCenter and handed out a letter to almost every employee, in total about 300 copies. Without any comment, we put them onto their tables or shoved them through underneath their office doors.” The letter, written in a respectful and courteous intonation, encouraged the staff to treat the unemployed respectfully and refrain from applying disadvantageous measures. Furthermore, the employees were asked to get into contact with



Members of FAU Berlin by public protest in Front of Job-Center Berlin-Neukölln.

the FAU, anonymously or not, in cases of dubious internal regulations which were not intended for the public to become aware of, or just to exchange viewpoints.

It became quickly apparent that the Labour Exchange was not really pleased with the stiff-necked syndicalists: not only did none of the employees respond to the letter, also the director was pissed off by the surprise action. “We were handing out leaflets when he passed us by, uttering that our little action had not exactly been a nice thing to do”, Marie Krieg recalls. “Next thing we saw were two cops approaching. They asked for our documents and made it seem like we had violated some laws, committing vile gossip or the likes. Next came a letter from the police department, informing us that an examination was being carried out and asking if there was anything we had to say and the usual blah blah just to intimidate us. Of course nothing ensued, except that since then the security watchmen in front of the JobCenter are obviously instructed to keep an eye on us and let us not distribute our pamphlets right in front of the entrance.”

In spite of these attempts to discourage their efforts, the anti-Hartz-activists kept up their weekly presence in front of the JobCenter for more than a year, recently also turning to the even more notorious Neukölln Labour Exchange. Other activities included public lectures and discussions about the scandalous conditions and chances for resistance as well as articles for the FAU bimonthly “Direkte Aktion”. At all times the syndicalists kept close contacts with activists from other groups and individuals working against social deterioration in order to exchange experiences and forge alliances. Very gradually, the working group grew in numbers and now comprises of five regulars and two to three persons showing up every now and then.

One point of culmination was the before mentioned day of action in front of Neukölln JobCenter on April 11th. The aim was to confront the JobCenter with critique right at its gates and inform the public about its methods. During the opening hours, the Job Center’s visitors and employees could hardly miss the protestors, which made their reason for being there clear via megaphone, a big banner, leaflets and discussions. Furthermore, the visitors were encouraged to rate their case workers by awarding them marks, according to their competence and behaviour. One important aim was to drag the perpetrators behind the desks out of their anonymity, so detailed accounts of typical cases of ill treatment were given on the leaflets as well as to the media via fact sheets issued beforehand.

Asked to estimate the day of action’s success, FAU Berlin member Alexander Panagoulis reveals contentment and frustration at the same time. “The participation of FAU members and the ‘usual suspects’, that is social activists from different groups, was great. We are also very happy about the fact that we made it into the media, with two newspapers and one local TV station reporting. What was frustrating was the ignorance on the part of the unemployed themselves. Many of them rushed by, ignoring us or just grabbing our leaflets without even considering joining our protest.” Marie Krieg agrees: “They just don’t seem to care enough. Whether it is scepticism in being confronted with radicals like us, whether they have no hopes or whether they are just too lazy, I can’t tell.”

Both Marie and Alexander feel pretty much disheartened by the fact that the unemployed offer resistance against their situation almost exclusively on an individual level, if at all, but hardly ever collectively. Alexander Panagoulis: “They do come to our office to seek advice alright. We are obviously something like a service institution for them. But then they go home and continue with their battles against the JobCenter on their own. In times of an ever intensifying witch hunt against unemployed by politicians and vast parts of the media, individual sneaking through is definitely not enough to stop the attacks against everything which is social.”

Gerd Fischer on the contrary is far from displaying such defeatism: “We definitely have achieved something since we started our working group. We cannot measure to which extent

our consultations and pamphlets affect the situation, but I suppose just the fact that there are folks keeping a close eye on the Labour Exchange has an encouraging effect on the unemployed. And the officials know that somebody is watching them. Besides, we do work the authorities should be doing: assessing the effects of the new laws, doing evaluation right at the base. Therefore we know what is going on and can contradict the politicians who claim everything goes through smoothly.”

Marie Krieg agrees: “We would have no idea about how bad the situation actually is if we didn’t speak with so many people affected, be it while standing in front of the Labour Exchange, be it within the scope of our weekly public meetings or through our alliances with other groups and individuals working on the same topic.”

The three activists however agree in one point: since the Anti-Hartz-AG was started and managed to acquire solid competence, FAU Berlin has sharpened its profile and is now perceived much more than beforehand as a radical yet reasonable actor in the local political scene, creating a serious option for those who want to become involved in social activities. “Keeping up a public working group that gets together regularly in addition to being present in front of the Labour Exchange for months on end is definitely a way anarcho-syndicalists can interfere with current social affairs even in meagre times in terms of numbers of members and activists”, Gerd Fischer estimates. “As usual, persistence is the key.”

Anti-Hartz-AG of FAU Berlin

Strassburger Straße 38, D-10405 Berlin
www.fau.org/ortsgruppen/berlin
contact: faub16@fau.org



Attack is the Only Way Forward.

The struggle of the GGB (Healthworkers Syndicate) Hannover (Germany) at the Wahrendorff Clinic.

The healthcare system is in upheaval. For years public sector provision has been cut back and private companies are pushing in and expanding. The effects are seen not only in the quality of care for patients but also in the increasingly bad working conditions for workers. The rapid growth of the private sector in German healthcare is shown by the fact that one out of every 4 hospitals here is now under private control.

Effects of privatisation

Privatisation in the public sector always means job cuts, intensification of work, the introduction of new methods of work and wage cuts. About 80% of the costs of running a hospital are wages so if the companies want to make a profit, they need to cut here.

There are many similarities in what they do. They leave employers federations and break old contracts¹ about wages and conditions, they employ new workers on worse wages and conditions, sometimes they set their own pay levels. They will cut or abolish yearly bonuses, introduce so called performance related pay and lengthen the working week, without of course any corresponding increase in pay. In order to drastically reduce sickness levels, case management systems designed to scare workers off have been introduced. These include home visits and calls, and so called “return from illness” discussions. Last but not least, the screw is further turned by reducing the staffing levels. Short term contracts are not renewed,

people who leave are not replaced. For the workers who stay this means much harder work – they have to do the same work in the same time with less people. If necessary, qualified workers are replaced with less or unqualified staff. Agency staff are also increasingly used.

Ready to Struggle

In January 2007, members of the FAU in Hannover who worked in the Healthcare sector, formed a new industry syndicate – der Gewerkschaft Gesundheitsberufe - (Union of Healthcare Workers - GGB Hannover. The GGB stands up against the privatisation of public parts of the healthcare system, against the rationing of healthcare services and against the worsening of conditions for workers. The GGB's declared aim is to develop a health care system based on solidarity rather than just sitting back and taking the attacks of the government and employers – public or private.

Our Everyday Reality

The Wahrendorff hospital in Sehnde – Ilten near Hannover has always been privately run. It is one of the largest privately run psychiatric hospitals in Europe with 222 full time beds, 55 part time beds, 660 residential places and 785 workers.

Dr Wilkening, a Consultant for Psychiatry and Neurology bought the bankrupt hospital for a 7 figure sum in 1993. from the Wahrendorff family.

Until the 13th of December 1992 staff were covered by a contract called the PKA which covered private hospitals in the German state of Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony) – the liquidation administrator had decided to leave the employers federation and break the contract. The new owner, a self-declared opponent of unions didn't rejoin. Lacking a new contract the old agreement applied for new workers up 'til 1998. From 1999 only new individual contracts were given which no longer followed the old PKA contracts.

New employees were then force to negotiate their wages etc. individually with the management, they were robbed of the ability to collectively pressure the management.

In 2003, some workers were given contracts with a wage cut of some • 800 a month before tax. One care assistant had to apply for income support to top up the wage, a nurse was meant to be happy with just •1,185 per month. The reasons for these wage cuts were flimsy – the workers were awarded back pay by an industrial court. The court's judgement didn't change the fact that everyone had to keep on going to court to force payment of parts (supplements etc) of their wages. Wilkening always paid only the exact amount ordered by the court – and after the cases he never updated the wage payments to include the tribunal decisions.

Under Pressure

At the end of 2004, a new contract for 2005 onwards had been signed by 95.7% of the workforce. This included longer working hours (up by 1.5 hours a week to a 40 hour week) and a wage freeze. 'Performance related' pay was also introduced. Beforehand, Wilkening had made clear that he could rule out sackings on economic grounds, but he offered to delay these until the end of 2008. The Christmas bonus was set at a half a month's pay², but in 2004 Wilkening tried to wriggle out of paying any of it. After complaints from staff, he offered vouchers instead – these saved him money on tax, and social insurance payments. The vouchers could be used in a petrol stations, at a travel agent as well as within the clinic – e.g. at the in house canteen and garden center.

To deal with the high level of staff sickness at the hospital, the management set up a system of case management. The staff turnover at the clinic is high – qualified care staff in particular leave. The intensity of work for individual staff is very high ... some have developed psychiatric illnesses themselves.

Anti - Union

The attempts by union officials from the services union 'ver.di'³ (and its predecessors ÖTV and DAG) were always half hearted. In reality, their reliance solely on membership drives and casework based on individualised complaints put a brake on union activity. They certainly never tried to get the membership active or be confrontational with the bosses.

The efforts of a small but determined ver.di union group at the hospital – made up of up to a dozen of the 200 members – couldn't change things. A lot of people were very unhappy but many didn't have the confidence to take a stand. A climate of fear reigned. If someone 'went too far' they'd either be transferred or given a disciplinary warning. Wilkening had challenged the unions, and everyone who wanted to get organised, from day one. Union leaflets would be ripped down from notice boards. At union meetings, people would attend who nobody knew⁴. Most employees relied on the activity of the Work's Council and signed away their personal responsibility.

The Work's Council was exposed to heavy attacks. After '94 its members faced regular warnings and (attempted) sackings. 4 militant members of the ver.di group on the Work's Council had 10 sacking attempts directed at them – although 9 of these were quashed by industrial tribunal. There were a further 3 attempts to remove members from the Works Council. A former personnel manager (Eicholz) gave evidence in February 2007 to the



March 14th 2007 some 20 union activists from ver.di, the local DGB (German Trades Unions Federation) and the Hannover FAU picketed the AGM of the Hospital.

Industrial Court in Hannover where he made clear that fabricated evidence was used as the basis for dismissal proceedings.

In elections to the Work's Council at the end of 2005 some 70% of the staff supported the more militant list – 'Courage' – which got 9 of the 13 seats – the other 4 went to the pro management group 'Future Dialogue' – which included some union members as well.

Struggling together

At first the GGB rejected the system of Work's Councils as it is in Germany⁵. However in this case the GGB was the view that it was an act of solidarity to support fellow workers who were getting fired purely for union activities. The more militant members of the Work's Council tried to keep the rest of the workforce fully up to date with what was happening in the hospital – the pro management faction tried to stop this. Over time, the GGB realised that the reformist union ver.di began to lose its credibility with its own members, also amongst Work's Council members, because it left them in the lurch to sort out their own problems.

The GGB saw that through supporting these workers who were being disciplined, it had a real chance to spread anarcho syndicalist ideas amongst the workforce. It wanted to make clear that hitting back against management attacks is only possible through using workers one real weapon – their solidarity.

Our Challenge to the Hospital Management

We wanted to break once and for all the dynamic that management was always on the attack. So on March 14th 2007 some 20 union activists from ver.di, the local DGB (German Trades Unions Federation) and the Hannover FAU picketed the AGM of the Hospital which was being held at the Luisenhof hotel in central Hannover. Our protest against the anti union practices at the hospital surprised the 75 invited guests who came from political or hospital management backgrounds. The guests' reaction to their unexpected welcome at the hotel ranged from pure ignorance to a noticeable surprise and uncertainty. Passersby and workers from neighboring shops came and asked us why we were there.

The next day the GGB began an international protest campaign to further raise pressure on the hospital management. About 80 protests letters followed in the next month. These letters to the hospital management came from anarcho-syndicalist, syndicalist and class struggle unions from around the world – it was an unprecedented example of international solidarity for a workplace in Germany.

It went way beyond local and workplace groups of the German FAU-IWA. Letters came from numerous union branches of

- the french Confederation Nationale de Travail (CNT-F) and
- the spanish Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT-E), as well as
- the Anarcho-syndicalist Federation of Croatia,
- the Eleftheriaki Syndikalistiki Enosi from Greece (ESE),
- the Federation Democratique du Rail Syndicat des Cheminots Marocains from Morocco (FDR),
- the OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza Poznan from Poland (IP),
- Industrial Workers of the World in Australia (IWW - ROC),
- the International Solidarity Commission of IWW,
- the Libertarian Movement of Cuba (MLC),
- the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) of Bangladesh,
- the Norwegian Syndikalistik Forbund (NSF-IWA),
- the Priamia Akcia from Slovakia (PA-IWA),

- the REPERG from Guinea,
- the Siberian Workers Union (SKT),
- the Malmö local group of the Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation from Sweden (SAC),
- the algerian Syndicat National Autonome des Personnels de L'Administration Publique (SNAPAP),
- the british Solidarity Federation (SolFed-IWA) and
- the Workers Solidarity Alliance New York from the USA. (WSA).

The letters demanded that the hospital management stop attacking union activists and to withdraw the sacking notices issued against militant members of the Work's Council.

Other protests came from Mexico, Slovakia, from the Spanish Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT-E-IWA) and from Germany – amongst others from the DGB - transport workers unions TRANSNET. GLAMROC (the IWW in German speaking parts of Europe also sent its solidarity to the GGB in Hannover. The support of many web pages played a big part in making the dispute known internationally. This included various union sites in Germany as well as the site of the CNT-F, the Unione Sindacale Italiana in Italy (USI-IWA), the IWW, the PA-IWA and the REPERG. There were also newspaper reports in 'Direkte Aktion' from the German FAU, 'Combat Syndicaliste' (CNT-F), 'Industrial Worker' (IWW), 'vers beaux temps' (Hannover), and 'Neues Deutschland' as well as interviews on the FAU Dresden's radio programme 'Das Syndikat ist nicht die Mafia', on coloRadio, an independent radio station in Dresden.

The protests left a definite impression, not only on the affected workers, but also on the hospital management, whose lawyer raised them more than once at the court.

Moving towards a workplace group.

After the success of the solidarity letters, the GGB Hannover leafleted the workers at the hospital on May the 5th 2007. In the leaflet they were urged to take their rights as employees seriously and to show solidarity with each other. One aim of this was to form a militant workplace group.

The leaflets were simultaneously distributed in both parts of the hospital, other Hannover FAU members helped make this possible. Later in May we posted letters directly to the workers on the wards and residential units. The publicity work is meant to spread news about the situation at the hospital as widely as possible. The GGB's activism is in for the long haul. It is orientated on the concrete problems – there are always new ones to add. Overtime the GGB Hannover has found sympathisers within the workforce. Our aim is to build upon these and to form a workplace group at the clinic.

Heiko GGB Hannover,

¹ Translators note: these are like national pay scales in the UK or industry wide awards in Australia

² Translators note: these are traditionally a full month's pay

³ Translators note: newly amalgamated

⁴ Translators note: presumably private detectives employed by management

⁵ Translators note: these Work's Councils are a consultative mechanism set up by law and are seen as a method to co-opt struggles and undermine even moderate unionism, they are a major feature of industrial relations in so called 'Rhineland Capitalism' and have been expanded across the EU.

MORE INFOS ON THE NET...

Anarchistische Groep Amsterdam
<http://agamsterdam.wordpress.com>

FAU Bremen
www.fau-bremen.tk

OTHER ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST RESOURCES

Freie Arbeiterinnen- und Arbeiter Union FAU
www.fau.org

Anarcho-Syndicalist Review
<http://www.syndicalist.org>

Anarchosyndicalism 101 - Class Struggle Online
<http://www.anarchosyndicalism.net/>

Workers Solidarity Alliance - USA
<http://www.workersolidarity.org>

Solidarity Federation - British Section of IWA
<http://www.solfed.org.uk/>