

***“They called for workers but
humans arrived” -
Turkish guest worker struggles in West
Germany in the 1970s***

Mark Bergfeld

Queen Mary University of London

m.d.bergfeld@qmul.ac.uk



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Introduction

- The strikes and resistance by migrants and Gastarbeiter has largely been written out of history. Amongst the radical left these events are mythologized.
- Migrants are not only victims of racism but also have agency, transport forms of struggles into their new countries, and remake the working class
- Consistent under-representation of migrant workers in the trade union movement remains the case
- These stories highlight the way in which many of these struggles were fought over issues of reproduction and expand the field of vision of what is 'class struggle'
- Raises interesting points in regard to what Germans label 'Gastrecht' (rights of guests) and the newly arrived refugees from Syria

THE SITUATION OF THE GASTARBEITER IN THE 60S & 70S

Failed integration from the outset

- Miserable living and housing conditions “ghettoization”
- Racist work regime
- Under-representation in the trade unions
- “*Behördenangst*” – scared of officialdom, thus pay third parties to help them out
- No civil and political rights → political organisations are outlawed (‘stateless’)
- Image of the Turkish guest worker as worksome, naïve, unknowledgable





“Single Building Ghettos”

“Almost half of the Turkish workers at Ford had been distributed across the 30 company-owned dormitory. The rent of 78DM for a shared room and up to 126DM was directly taken from one’s wage. [...]. Most of them but especially those looking for contact with Germans were openly rejected by landlords and neighbours in the housing market [own translation]”

- *Jörg Huwer, “Gastarbeiter” im Streik: Die Arbeitsniederlegung bei Ford Köln im August 1973 (2013)*

The racist factory regime

“There are six categories of nonqualified workers. Starting at the bottom: three categories of laborers (M1, M2, M3); three categories of semiskilled workers (OS1, OS2, OS3). The distinction is made in a perfectly simple way: it’s racist. The Blacks are M1, right at the bottom of the ladder. The Arabs are M2 or M3. The Spaniards, Portuguese and other European immigrants are usually OS1. The French are automatically OS2. And you become OS3 just because of the way you look, depending on how bosses want it.”



- Robert Linhart, *L'Etabli* (1978)

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IGM Migration

RESORT MIGRATION / INTEGRATION



Fachkräftesicherung: Gute Strategien

NEU: GUTER WERBEBER

BMW Landshut:
Die doppelte Chance

NEU: GUTER WERBER

Anonym bewerben: Damit
die Herkunft nicht zählt

NEU: GUTER WERBEBER/INTEGRATION

Flucht: Kolleginnen
erzählen ihre Geschichte

Polarisation of representation

“In 1973 only 5633 foreign colleagues were voted in the shop stewards’ committees (‘Vertrauensleutekörper’) of the IG Metall. That’s only 4.7 per cent of all elected shop stewards despite 12 per cent of all IG Metall members being foreigners. Hence there is only one representative for forty organized foreigners while 15 German workers are represented by one rep (‘Vertrauensmann’). [own translation]”

- *Gauer & Schloesser, Die ausländischen Arbeiter in der Krise*

Lack of representation at Ford Köln

- At Ford Köln the Turkish works council is elected with more than 6000 votes was not given facility time
 - The Ford works council leader was very anti-communist which was highly unusual for the time
- The IG Metall strategy in the plant at Ford Köln is “faithful co-operation”

Political organisations of Gastarbeiter_innen are outlawed

“Besides having an unlimited supply of cheap labour the presence of foreign workers had another significant advantage: it kept a growing section of the working class without political and civil rights” [own translation]

- *Kosack & Castles, Ausländische Arbeiter und Klassenkampf (1972)*

1973: A turning point

- Since the late 1960s and especially in 1969 and even earlier there were a number of wildcat strikes which confined themselves to single factories and didn't spread
- This has led a number of student activists to “adopt the strategy of proletarianisation”
- End of a period of economic growth (OPEC oil crisis)
- More than 300, 000 workers take illegal strike action in 1973 (John Deere in Mannheim, Buderus in Wetzlar, Klöckner-Hütte Bremen, Hella-Werke Lippstadt)

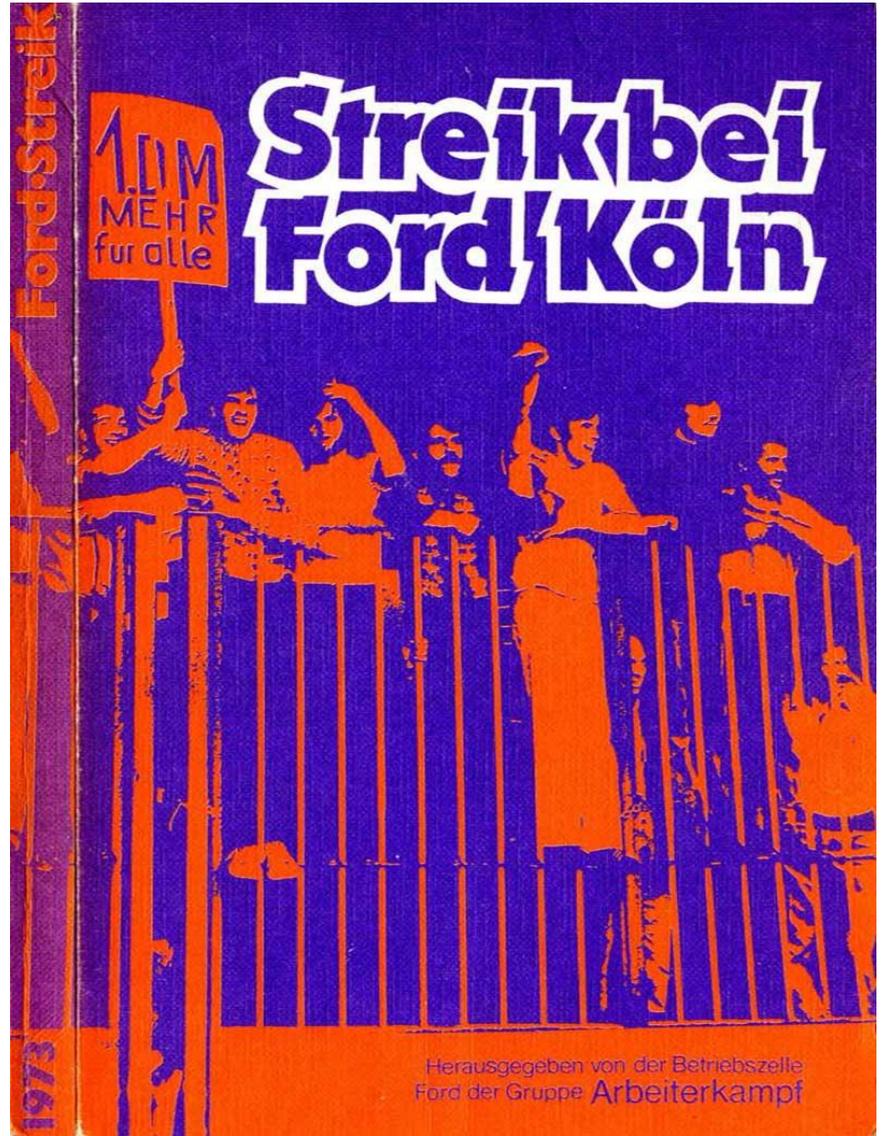


Wildcat strikes

- Wildcat strikes are one of many forms of resistance taken by guest workers and migrants during that time
- Wildcat strikes were seldom in post-WWII Germany
- Some authors argue that it was enabled through ‘feudalistic forms of community’
- Inspired by the four strands of resistance
 - student revolt
 - women’s liberation movement
 - struggles against dictatorship in their own countries
 - bring trade union traditions from their own home country

Strike culture

- Anything which the Germans had ever seen
- Heterogenous
- Carnivalistic → Turkish storytellers
- Election of independent strike committees



***“THIS IS REVOLUTION” – THE WILDCAT
STRIKE AT PIERBURG NEUSS***

Women workers strike at Pierburg-Neuss

- Work at conveyor belt treated as “leichte Lohnarbeit”
→ women and migrants most affected
- First strikes at Pierburg in 1969/1970 which led to the election of a new and left-wing works council (‘Betriebsrat’), then in May 1973 two-day strike with more than 300 female workers
- 13 -17 August 1973: 2000 female workers go on strike without support from the IG Metall trade union
- Greek socialist activists at centre yet DKP and Maoist groups no influence
- The women managed to convince German skilled workers to act in solidarity
- Successful strike: The gender pay gap manifested through Leichtlohngruppe 2 was abolished while it still existed up until the 1990s

WILDCAT STRIKE AT FORD-KÖLN

Wildcat strike at Ford in Köln I

- Wildcat strike from 24.08-31.08.1973
- The strike at Ford Köln is exemplary for the tensions between Germany and its minorities and the reality of *the Gastarbeiter-regime*.
- On 24 August 1973: 300 Turkish workers are instantaneously fired as they aren't back from their holidays on time
- Demonstration through the factory grows to 8000 workers
- Turkish student Baha Targün is elected as representative and independent strike committee
- Sit-in strike and occupation of large parts of the factory
- Works council ('Betriebsrat') and IG Metall mobilise actively against the strike – The shop stewards committee doesn't meet a single time during the strike

Strike leader Baha Targün

- Had been working in Germany since 1969
- First as a student then as a worker, translator and white collar employer
- Spiegel labelled him a “multifaceted hero of the people”
- After the strike he disappeared, lives back in Turkey











Splits in the Ford-strike

- Ford management pays double overtime pay (Teuerungszulage) → buys off German workers
 - Turkish national symbolism → racism
 - The IG Metall workers' group distance to the strike weakens the demands
 - Perception of 'student chaots' leading the strike is harnessed by the media
- the roots of the defeat at Ford lay in the defeat of Ford-Aktion of the IG Metall in the 1960s
- success more likely if the works council and shop stewards committee support strike

Counter-mobilisation

- At least 80 Turkish workers are injured on the last day of the strike
- Media -> “Türkenterror” (BILD)
- The German corporatist system is mobilized against the strikers (works council, company and the state)
- Repression against Turkish workers: many of them fired, others forced to quit and some even deported and not allowed to enter Germany until today

Outcomes I

- Showed that they might live in Germany but definitely were not at home
- End to recruitment of foreign workers ('Anwerbestop') by Brandt government in November 1973
- However one of the strikers said that by the mid-1970s there no longer was the migrant/non-migrant distinction at Ford in Köln
- Image of Turkish guestworkers changes from passive to impulsive. However they remain naïve and subject to the rhetoric of radical left wing groups (Huwer)

Outcomes II

- A new city-wide IGM from the left is elected by the whole membership
- By 1978 you have the first Turkish guestworker as a works council leader and on the board of directors → “deep integration” vs “co-optation”
- Only a quarter of a century later the German government acknowledged that Germany was a country of migration



What can we learn for today?

- New forms of capital accumulation
- Migration patterns differ
 - no longer state-managed but today's role of intermediaries and third parties
- On the whole, the trade union movement is weaker and less hegemonic
- New social struggles over reproduction