

## **Felix Bluhm: Collective action under conditions of crisis. Everyday conflicts on the shop floor after the boom.**

(Felix Bluhm: Kollektives Handeln in der Krise. Betriebliche Alltagskonflikte nach dem Boom, VSA-Verlag, Hamburg 2019).

### **1. Introductory remarks**

- 1.1. Research question and method
- 1.2. Research interest
- 1.3. About the structure of this book

### **2. The "shipyard study"**

- 2.1. Working with someone else's material: limitations of feasible perspectives

### **3. Which actions should be researched?**

### **4. Approaches to "the crisis"**

- 4.1. Discussions about crisis in industrial sociology in the 1970s and 1980s
- 4.2. Recent research on the crisis in industrial sociology
- 4.3. Interim conclusion

### **5. Perspectives of labour sociology on everyday collective action**

- 5.1. Neglect of workers' actions
- 5.2. Excursus: using the example of the september strike study
- 5.3. A new interest in everyday labour conflicts?

### **6. The methodical approach**

- 6.1. Secondary analysis of company case studies
- 6.2. Data fit
- 6.3. Re-contextualization
- 6.4. Study selection and sorting
- 6.5. Selection of groups of workers within the shipyard study
- 6.6. Interpretation

### **7. The sectoral crisis of ship-building**

### **8. Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft (HDW) Kiel**

- 8.1. Data on the company and sample composition

- 8.2. Tradition of industrial action and works committee
- 8.3. Sectoral crisis and job cuts
- 8.4. Perception of one's own situation under the conditions of the crisis
- 8.5. Responses to the crisis
- 8.6. Labour processes
- 8.7. Forms of collective action

## **9. Thyssen Nordseewerke (TNSW) Emden**

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- 9.2. Tradition of industrial action and works committee
- 9.3. Sectoral crisis and job cuts
- 9.4. Perception of one's own situation under the conditions of the crisis
- 9.5. Responses to the crisis
- 9.6. Labour processes
- 9.7. Forms of collective action

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1. Collective forms of action and the “structural break”
- 10.2. On the relevance of empirical results in the face of a changed world of work
- 10.3. Reflecting a leftist shop-floor policy

## **11. List of sources and literature**

- 11.1. Archival documents
- 11.2. Newspaper articles and annual reports
- 11.3. Literature

The world economic crisis of the years 2007ff. has put questions about the connection between processes of economic crisis and collective action, about the potential for rebellion, protests, revolts and social change back on the agenda. However, the "Great Crisis" seems to have passed the FRG in some way and especially in the industrial sector the situation could be interpreted as a "crisis without conflict". In the face of permanent restructuring, German companies by no means gave the impression of a stronghold of stability, but neither did they give the appearance of strong conflicts. At the same time, however, there are indications of a seething under this calm surface: Industrial sociology has identified widespread dissatisfaction, even to the point of massive anger, which has not disappeared even with the supposed end of the crisis. So far, however, too little is known about how the employees concerned deal with this dissatisfaction. Numerous studies from recent decades point to a pronounced willingness on the part of employees to make concessions on wages, performance and working conditions under conditions of crisis, and to a strong tendency to shift the burden of the crisis onto marginalised groups. A far-reaching passivity in regard to collective politics in times of crisis has been regularly observed, which also includes the actions described by Rainer W. Hoffmann as "industrial action in everyday working life". In recent publications, the industrial sector appears to have been particularly pacified. At the same time, many publications contain references to a broad spectrum of hidden resistance and collective forms of action. This dissertation investigates these contradictions by systematically reconstructing informal ways of safeguarding interests. It explores which forms of everyday collective action employees develop in different constellations. It examines how the respective work situation affects their ability to act and which changes may occur under conditions of crisis. Finally, it will be examined to what extent everyday practices can provide the basis for more extensive conflicts and for overarching forms of trade union and political organisation. These questions will be analysed on the basis of exemplary company cases. For this purpose, the materials of a study carried out in the 1970s at two West German shipyards - HDW Kiel and Nordseewerke in Emden - are subjected to a secondary analysis. The aim of this secondary analysis is to stimulate new perspectives on current phenomena and debates by way of diving into the past. The analysis focuses on a highly conflict-laden situation characterized by a massive sectoral crisis and extensive processes of rationalization. The materials evaluated in this paper refer to shipbuilding, i.e. an area of industrial production. Accordingly, the study as a whole also focuses on industrial work.

The analysis shows that the results of previous sociological studies on work in times of crisis need to be relativized. Even in times of crisis, it can by no means be assumed that employees are generally incapable of acting or that they solely "bully the underlings". Rather, this study proves that there is often a considerable discrepancy between the verbal expressions of employees and their actual practice, which has been given too little consideration in previous studies. It can be shown that even employees who articulate in interviews a considerable willingness to make concessions and tend towards fatalistic statements can in fact become remarkably active in pursuing their interests. Their informal practices may sometimes not be visible to outsiders, but can nevertheless be decisive with regard to concrete working conditions. By raising new questions and focusing on aspects that have so far wrongly been neglected, the dissertation paves the way for the conception of future research projects.