



Translation: Transcript

The first broadcast of Radio Überleben

Werner Ahrens: Hello dear listeners, as of today, the “Radio Überleben” station will be broadcasting on the VHF frequency 104 – sorry – 100.4 megahertz for roughly 15 minutes every Wednesday, starting at 17:15 hours. As you can hear, we are live on air. We aren’t professionals, but I’m sure you’ll be able to bear with us. So what is our intention? We have no wish to compete with existing media. Our aim is to report specifically on the situation in our region, and above all on the increasing shortage of jobs. We want to provide background information and give people the chance to speak who otherwise do not have any opportunity to express their opinions in an appropriate setting. Most importantly, however, we would like to request the post office not to arrive with their detector van too quickly. After all, we have a duty to report extensively on the catastrophic job situation. Whether we find ourselves in legal territory in setting up a radio station is something that needs to be conclusively ascertained, ultimately on the basis of the response from the population. Let us now return to the eradication of jobs. In this region, there is one company that has been right at the top of the agenda for years: AEG Olympia. It is not only this firm that has got itself into the news recently, however. Others, such as Krupp, may follow. We need to fight against this. So do not forget, tune in every Wednesday at 17:15 hours: Radio Überleben, VHF frequency 100.4 megahertz! But now let’s get started with our first interview with Manfred Klöpfer, district chairperson of the DGB (Federation of German Trade Unions) in Wilhelmshaven and spokesperson of the citizens’ initiative “Olympia must not die”.

Music: “Die sollen meinen, es kämpft Klabautermann. Ein Untergang ist nie und nimmer zu verstehen...” (They are supposed to believe that the ship’s kobold is fighting. A sinking ship can never be understood...)”

Reporter: Mr Klöpfer, I have been tasked by the radio station “Überleben” with asking you a few questions about the regional situation.

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Manfred Klöpfer: Okay, but first I'd like to know who I'm actually dealing with here. I'm not really familiar with the station "Überleben". Could you please give some brief information about yourselves?

Reporter: Well, I believe that names are not really relevant to the matter in hand, and would ask you to be understanding about that. At present we do not yet find ourselves in entirely legal territory. As regards the radio station itself: we are a group of people who are no longer willing to accept the state of affairs in terms of labour market policy in this region. We are hoping to use this radio station "Überleben" to raise public awareness about our problems beyond the borders of Wilhelmshaven and Frisia and in doing so to create a better foundation for political action. Are you willing to help? Right, good. Okay. So, as far as the state of affairs itself is concerned perhaps: a 12 per cent unemployment rate at the local Wilhelmshaven-Frisia job centre speaks for itself. Which sectors are affected? Which problems are headed our way?

Manfred Klöpfer: Yes, let me begin with a preliminary remark: I can only expressly welcome the intention to raise awareness about the problems as far as possible beyond the boundaries of our region. The particularly intense nature of the problems here in this city and in this region is due without doubt to historical circumstances. In other words, the fixation on military use of this city has frequently and for a very long time closed people's eyes to possible other uses. And it has now become clear that with the withdrawal of key industrial sectors, besides the metal industry, and this is not only one aspect, though the most important is certainly office communication. This also applies to the steel sector, the foundry in Sande, which has really big problems. This part of the metal industry definitely deserves to be mentioned first because of its importance for the employment market. In addition to this segment, however, we also have the textiles industry, which traditionally was very important for this region. After the war, it was mainly firms from Lodz that relocated here. Almost all of them have disappeared again in the meantime. Then of course there are the companies in the service sector, which were hit by the loss of revenues. This affected the entire retail sector in particular, which felt the impact of the lost income directly.

Reporter: Mr Klöpfer, what in your opinion needs to happen to counter these dramatic trends? What would you demand of politicians and business?

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Manfred Klöpper: I already mentioned the fact that there are structural problems here relating to the focus on structures in the area of military use. And this is also something that should be added here: the dismantling of the military presence in our city is also leading to the loss of three and a half thousand jobs. This is a challenge to be addressed at all political levels. In other words the state of Lower Saxony, but also Germany as a whole, needs to provide such financial support to this region that will enable us to create new structures ourselves with the available financial resources. And it's no good to say that local governments have to sort themselves out in a market economy, as we have virtually no revenues here any longer. In other words, tax revenues, business taxes and other options for the local municipality, for the city of Wilhelmshaven, have become reduced to the point that we no longer have any scope to help ourselves.

Reporter: In recent days, there have been very many reports in the press that 48 million deutschmarks in funding are to be made available by the federal and state governments in order to – according to the public statements – cushion or soften the blow of AEG Olympia's closure. Is this the kind of funding or help that you were imagining?

Manfred Klöpper: No, this is really not the sort of thing we were imagining. Essentially, they are making out that this sum of 48 million is somehow additional. But it is not additional. In the past, we also received regional funding. It's true that this funding is being topped up a little, but it still has to be spent according to regional funding criteria. This means that new businesses can get funding or investment subsidies. But what we need is actual money in our hands so that we can really take action – not 18-percent investment subsidies to do something additional. That isn't enough for us at all. Neither the sum of 48 million, nor the measures that have been mentioned here. That is not by any means sufficient, and will not even be enough to alleviate the symptoms. And linking that to AEG Olympia and making out that policymakers are helping us in this way, well, that is pretty much a question of taking the piss, in my view.

Reporter: Right, well, there are still workforces that actively engage in industrial disputes. If we take the relatively recent example of the worsted spinning mill, what role was played there by the DGB in the industrial action that took place, or didn't take place – it all happened relatively

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quickly? What role is played by the DGB or by the individual unions in the active disputes of the workforces at AEG Olympia, or at Krupp? Can you give us some more details here?

Mr Klöpper: It is certainly the case that there are very considerable differences between the labour disputes being fought by workforces at KSW, Olympia and Krupp – if I may mention these three examples that you alluded to. As far as KSW is concerned, that is probably how one must ultimately view it. Both the union responsible there, the “Textile Clothing” union, and the works council, which represents the interests of the workers, are faced with the structures of our economic system ... namely that production must take profitability into account, and if this profitability is no longer there, then the jobs have to be abandoned. If one accepts this, with all the consequences for the staff, then one can say that those responsible at KSW and the union acted consistently. The employers said that no more could be earned there, making the jobs superfluous. In my opinion, however, unions have a completely different role. So let’s go one step further and say that those who have to earn a living with their work are not prepared to simply swallow the bosses’ views of returns on investment and profitability. KSW is therefore an example of something we do not wish to see repeated. And in this sense the DGB is quite emphatically on the side of those who are fighting to save their jobs at AEG Olympia and at Krupp.

Reporter: Mr Klöpper, I have very often heard you say that we must go one step further, that we have to roll our sleeves even further up. If you look at what is happening at AEG Olympia, for example, where the industrial dispute is now in its fourth year, yet definitely nothing has happened so far. We have not seen any kind of change in mindset on the part of the company bosses. What is your assessment then of the political successes that you have just mentioned and should be forthcoming? We are seeing very little of this.

Manfred Klöpper: Well, for a start I believe that one shouldn’t view it so pessimistically. For one thing, the industrial action by the Olympia workers resulted in the entire region identifying with the dispute. “This region is fighting for survival” can be read on posters all over this city. And that would never have been possible without the labour dispute by the Olympia workers. This also results in people identifying with workers’ interests. I think that can be seen as a success in itself. Secondly, however,

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I am quite sure that if it had not been for the industrial action by the Olympia workforce, the company would have quietly closed its doors a long time ago, and the unemployment rate would have soared to 25 percent. It is without any doubt the workers who are battling for their jobs that we have to thank for this not having happened so far. And regarding the question of how this industrial action is being fought, and how it is viewed and what its prospects are, I would seriously advise you to talk to representatives from different companies in this region. I believe that this will give you a much clearer insight into the prospects of this industrial action.

Reporter: Thank you for the interview, Mr Klöpfer.

Music: "Tja, das war's dann ja wohl. Ist eigentlich schade. Ich fand das total gut bei euch. Aber ich muss jetzt nach Hause. Mein Mathe Tee brennt an. Tschüsskes." (Well, I suppose that's it for now. A shame really. I really enjoyed it with you. But now I've got to get home. My mate tea is burning. Bye bye.)

Werner Ahrens: Hang on! Don't switch off your radio yet. Next Wednesday at 17:15 hours on the same frequency. 100.4 megahertz. Your "Radio Überleben" station. Till next time.

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Translation: Chris Cave

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