

# The Amazon Archipelago

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By Ida Ince

*Foreign work-ers at an Amazon 'labour camp' near Bad Hersfeld are subject to shocking and inhumane treatment.*

On Wed-nes-day night prime Ger-man tele-vi-sion chan-nel ARD broad-cast under-cover report-age l con-cern-ing the treat-ment of for-eign work-ers at Amazon's huge dis-tri-bu-tion ware-house near Bad Hersfeld in cent-ral Ger-many. State par-lia-ment-ari-ans called the report "unspeak-able", "shock-ing", "bey-ond the pale", and the Left Party spokes-per-son stated:

We call on the state gov-ern-ment to carry out promptly and with all at its dis-posal checks of the complainant's social secur-ity fraud, the use of an appar-ent neo-Nazi secur-ity com-pany through Amazon and the inhu-mane place-ment in a so-called "resort"

Bad Hersfeld backs up against the old bor-der with East Ger-many at the point, the Fulda Gap, which the US determ-ined was the prime stra-tegic entry point for Soviet forces in any inva-sion of Europe. As a con-quence this wooded-up coun-try became a back-wa-ter of barbed wire and check-points after the war. It is here that Amazon has had built one of its massive dis-tri-bu-tion centres for Ger-many, and it is here that under-cover report-ers infilt-rated. Watch in Ger-man here.

What they found, accord-ing to the report, is effect-ively a labour camp for for-eign work-ers. These work-ers are drawn from across Europe, with the report-ers being placed with Span-ish men and women, ex-nurses, sec-ret-ar-ies, ostens-ibly on short-term work exper-i-ence hol-i-days. They are housed in obsol-ete hol-i-day camps in tiny rooms some 17km from the ware-house, and are required to take a lim-ited num-ber of buses at any hour to travel to work. If the bus is (illeg-ally) over-crowded, they must walk, at this time of year through snow. One of the women inter-viewed ended up in hos-pital. Con-versely, if they are dis-missed from work early, they must stand in the cold wait-ing until the bus takes them back to their digs.

There is no min-imum wage in Ger-many, and these work-ers are paid very little. Indeed, their pay is almost entirely expen-ded on the food they are her-ded in to eat at the run-down staff canteen. Their entire lives are trapped in the middle of nowhere between the poles of the "resort" and the ware-house. There are no pub-lic trans-port links.

Con-trol is abso-lute: the work-ers are under 24 hour sur-veil-lance. They work under guard, they eat at the guards' behest. They travel under guard. They are put into and taken from their rooms by guards. If they are not ready on time, either because they are asleep or in the shower, the guards enter the cramped quar-ters to hurry them on their way.

And par-tic-u-larly shock-ing, the report-ers involved allege that the black bomber jack-ets and leather boots of these guards are not simple affect-a-tions, but back-up evid-ence of alleged links to the neo-Nazi scene. When the report-ers openly attemp-ted to film the ware-house from a pub-lic road, the crew were attacked by the guards and the under-cover team had later to be res-cued from their dorms by the police.

Just one island in the Amazon archipelago. In Pennsylvania in 2011 work-ers at the Allentown ware-house repor-ted strenu-ous con-di-tions in bru-tal heat and sum-mary ter-min-a-tions for ill-nesses such as breast can-cer.<sup>2</sup> Sim-ilar con-di-tions were repor-ted at Amazon UK's Mar-ston Gate facil-ity.<sup>3</sup> Amazon act-ively opposes uni-on-isa-tion, with the former GPMU union say-ing its drive for recog-ni-tion at the Milton Keynes, UK, facil-ity was met with dis-missals and closed, cap-tive meet-ings with staff.

Yes cap-ital must con-trol time to make profit, but, if we may con-jec-ture, it is an iron law in this global age without innov-a-tion of plant that every remain-ing tem-poral vari-ation in the rate of profit is accom-pan-ied by a spa-tially vary-ing prim-it-ive accu-mu-la-tion. Cap-ital, even in the inter-net age, must touch down some-where, prefer-ably a some-where where reg-u-lat-ory niceties can be dis-pensed with, in favour of a quick and bru-tal acquis-i-tion of power. And vice versa: every spa-tial vari-ation in prim-it-ive accu-mu-la-tion is accom-pan-ied by tem-por-ally vary-ing rate profit. Here the vic-tims of aus-ter-ity in Spain for example have been impelled to the middle of Ger-many to provide cheap labour for the inter-net economy.

Unsur-pris-ingly, Amazon have been quick to point out that the secur-ity com-pany involved was not hired dir-ectly by them, and it seems that the work-ers too have been taken on under agency con-tracts. It is pos-sibly also the case that the hos-tels are sub-con-trac-ted sev-eral times over. It has since respon-ded that it is look-ing into the claims and will not tol-er-ate wrong-do-ing in its name, but it seems that justice and respons-ib-il-ity are out of stock.