

Chapter 19

Cooperation Between Universities and Unions

Edgar Einemann

Background

A process of increasing scientification of society can be observed. Development and research is taking place in businesses, institutes, and universities, separated from the immediate production process. The conditions in a capitalistic industrial society result in private entrepreneurs being, on the whole, able to decide the content and tasks of scientific work and dispose of the results. This applies not only to the research carried on in businesses and to studies done by many consultant-academics, but also to the apparently neutral and publicly financed science. The necessity of good cooperation with the "business world," for example in order to ensure access to the business and to sources of money, or to further the career chances of graduates, place a large section of the universities in a direct or indirect capitalistic connection.

Criticism of the content and tendency of the prevailing science has been voiced in universities, institutes, and businesses: for instance, the fact that the study of industrial management is orientated only towards a mono-economic rationality and not towards a social rationality (as a result of which, the requirements and problems of the worker are not sufficiently catered for in the development of technologies). This exacerbates the problem that the political economy offers inhuman concepts as political advice and the law contributes to the cementation of the socially dominating conditions. Objections are also raised both against the specific use of the results of scientific work, e. g. in order to control people or to build up military destroying potential as well as against the ignoring of human and ecological aspects. Criticism is also made of the internal scientific distribution of work, which allows little scope for multi-disciplinary ideas. The contradiction between the public financing of a

section of science and the private-capitalistic use of the results is a further starting point in the demands for alternative scientific approaches which are orientated not only towards social processes of change, but also towards the interests of those involved and those employed in dependent positions.

A critical science which aims to orientate itself towards those employed in a dependent position and which wants to work at changing the socially dominating structures, should try to establish a relationship with worker organisation, namely the unions (Katterle and Krahn 1980). Local union organisations as well as national union boards could be partners in cooperation with a worker-oriented science. This cooperation must be of a critical and unanimous nature. The independence and self-reliance of science should also be capable of producing results which may not at first meet with the approval of the unions (e.g. as regards ecological problems).

The German trade unions, which are strongly centralised, recognised at an early stage their need for social research in order to strengthen strategic decisions. For example, the analysis of the development and distribution of income, the assessment of global economic development, and the evaluation of legal factors have considerable influence on tariff and other policies. Likewise, unions are forced to react to the use of new technologies and changes in social security.

The conservative traditions of the universities as well as the interest in possessing their "own" scientific resources have led the unions to build up an "internal social science." The basis of these systems are staff members and departments at the respective directorates, the research institute of the DGB (formerly the WWI and now the WSI), which has economic, sociological, and legal competence, and the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung of the DGB, which besides bestowing annual grants also provide several million DM for research support. Although these projects are carried out by research teams outside the unions, a close bond with the unions is ensured by the financing, terms of reference, appraisal, and accompanying conditions, as well as the compulsion of passing on the research results. Over and above this, the union directorates have joint research programs supported by the Ministry of Research and Technology. They have succeeded in gaining involvement in projects supported by considerable personnel and material, e.g. projects for utilising research findings, projects for disseminating information concerning humanising initiatives, for advising workers, for the development of educational material, and for the assessment of the consequences of the use of technology.

Two negative aspects must be mentioned, however:

- a) The scientific analysis of social structural changes and political-strategic perspectives hardly play a part. A self-critical politising does not seem to be of primary interest to those responsible in the unions.
- b) The scientific potential is for the most part centralised, that is, adapted to the requirements of central bodies.

Collaboration Between Unions and Universities

In order to expand quantitatively and to overcome the mentioned deficiencies, the unions have to utilise external resources. Over and above the cooperation practised with some academics and institutes, a broader cooperation with the universities must be started. This must not only be anchored in worker-oriented thinking in teaching, but must also encourage union-oriented social research (Bamberg et al. 1979). The availability of resources for such research, based on practice and interests, as well as the institutionalising of cooperation with the unions, must be required of the scientific institutions.

On the part of the union, the use of such joint cooperation assumes the articulation of factual interests on political-strategic questions, the opening up of their structures for external scientists, an understanding of time periods and the special terminology used in research, and the ability to cope with criticism.

Worker-oriented social science in cooperation with the unions is only a part of the necessary critical science which calls for change in the prevailing society. This science is oriented towards the interests of people who are employed in a dependent position in businesses or administration, or who have founded cooperatives. While concentrating on problems in the business field, the social associations should not be neglected, which becomes clear when handling medical-ecological problems (health, work safety, environment protection), or political problems (e.g. the production of socially useful goods). Interacting with worker interests requires overcoming the traditional academic division of tasks and the cooperation of different disciplines (Franz 1985).

Possible areas of work for the universities within a cooperative relation with the unions include:

- a) carrying out research projects;
- b) writing appraisals, e.g. in connection with legal and labour-scientific questions;

- c) disseminating scientific results through publications, work conferences, and seminars;
- d) setting up advisory bodies for workers and their representatives, e. g. to assess the consequences and options concerning technical changes;
- e) the provision of further education courses, which should also allow the university education of workers who do not have matriculation qualifications;
- f) the development of seminars for adult education and for the training of team leaders;
- g) influencing the university itself in connection with worker-oriented instruction.

The central requirement for the opening-up of universities as institutions is a firm cooperation with the unions and the material provision of cooperation areas with lecturers, colleagues, and material which are financed in the long-term budget of the university. The short-term creation of cooperation areas staffed with one or two scientific workers may increase the possibility of the unions to use scientific results, but cannot fill the gap as substitute for a change in the scientific work.

The Case of Bremen University

An area of cooperation which is adequately supplied with personnel and money, and whose destiny is determined half-and-half by representatives of the university and the unions, exists at Bremen University in the Federal Republic of Germany, which places 5 % of its resources at their disposal. The newly-founded Reformed University of Bremen signed a cooperation contract in 1971 with the Worker's Chamber in Bremen to bring to realisation a "Science in the Interests of the Worker" and to interlock its activities with ordinary workers. The Worker's Chamber is a public institution founded after the Second World War, of which all workers in Bremen are members and whose activities are determined by the unions. In order to carry out the joint work, a special department was set up in the university, called the Cooperation Area University/Worker's Chamber, staffed initially with 6 scientific workers and one professor. The work of this group began with a long-term research project concerning work in the ports, the making of films, the organisation of work seminars, and the development and testing of concepts for worker education. Research, which was poorly developed at the university, together with the

aim of the cooperation-area to factual contributions, led to the extension of the department in the early seventies as a social-scientific research institute, with 6 professors assigned to research and a growing number of scientific workers, some of which were financed from outside. Projects were carried out concerning the use of robots in industry, problems in union education work, and the developments in dock work (Einemann 1979).

The shipyard study (Schumann et al. 1982) was carried out under the leadership of the industrial sociologist Michael Schumann from 1975 to 1981 and was well received. A general achievement of this project was the further development of worker-oriented social research through the reporting of objective structures and the analysis of the "worker perspective," in which workers were taken seriously as subjects and in which their complex outlook was comprehensively represented. However, in the course of the project work three problems for the cooperative relationship were raised:

- a) Difficult research problems forced an extension of the project which resulted in a final report being published 5 years after the start of the work, and consisting of more than 1,000 pages – a time and product structure for which production workers and union members interested in the use of the results could not show great understanding.
- b) The power of the company management prevented access to the place of work, so that the project was forced to seek access in other regions. This meant that the contact with Bremen shop floor workers and union members was not as intense as was wished and was necessary.
- c) The utilisation of the results which was planned at the outset via a direct feedback with the workers concerned in the study and the recording of the experiences gained in this joint discussion of the research results had to be excluded because of lack of time.

Interim results of the shipyard study were disseminated in a worker education project under the leadership of Adolf Brock (Brock and Einemann 1983). From 1976 until 1980 continuous work-relevant educational work was carried out with shipyard workers, within which a "research of those concerned" could be realised. Ideas regarding a humanising of the work soon concentrated on those conditions of work which caused illness. Frequent occurrence of certain illnesses in work groups were identified. The existing work safety system was also identified, regarded as insufficient and worthy of supplementation. The worker experts drew up a questionnaire in the seminars to examine the concerns of the worker. These questionnaires were handed out by shop

stewards in the shipyards. The evaluation of the questionnaire was carried out in a seminar and led to the publication of a small brochure, which formed the basis of discussions in the shipyards. With this self-questioning the workers not only became subjects of research, but also made a considerable contribution to strengthening their consciousness at work. The debates triggered off by the questionnaires also influenced the behaviour of worker groups, e.g. when refusing to carry out specific dangerous work in spite of the economic crisis in the shipyards. A problem was connected with the project, however: the "interference" of the cooperation department in the union works politics met with the criticism of the union after the majority faction in the works council left the education project. The union regarded the continuation of the project work as strengthening internal union opposition.

Before the end of the projects, the cooperation department was subject to severe pressure from the unions, who had serious discussions about withdrawal from the contract. The local union organisation had problems with the political-strategic research and the critical educational work which, from their point of view, revealed a lack of union interest and showed deficiencies in the practical relations with the cooperation department.

A compromise was found involving a positive change in union criticism: parallel to the research work, an institution more strongly oriented towards service was established, with the task of taking care of the more intensive transfer of scientific results, advising shop stewards and unions, and increasing the range of worker education courses. The discussions thus resulted in the restructuring of the cooperation department into a research department and a department concerned with dissemination, media production, and worker education.

In the first half of the 1980s three integrated educational and research projects were carried out by 6 scientific staff members of the worker education sector. Seminars, which were built up in accordance with the one week annual study leave guaranteed by law in Bremen, were carried out jointly with union educational institutions. Within the project "Crisis, Rationalisation, Humanisation" (Einemann and Lübbling 1985), continuous education work closely connected with practice was carried out from 1981 until 1985 with employees in the aviation industry. Altogether 66 employees, among them many engineers, took part in a total of 7 weekly and 7 weekend seminars. In 1982 a factory working group for alternative production was founded, which demanded the conversion of production to manufacturing socially useful goods instead of the reduction of jobs

and the production of armaments. Monthly meetings of an organizational group and working groups (including ones concerned with specific technological areas) were introduced.

The main working group, together with the works council, planned a poll in the employee seminars and evaluated the responses. Through the distribution of questionnaires and the presentation of the results, a considerable internal discussion was triggered. A small brochure concerning the aims and activities of the working group was compiled and distributed (Fischer et al. 1984). In addition, the evaluation of all works newspapers distributed in recent years led to the listing of over 80 examples of useful civil products developed in the business concern. The working group now has contacts with similar groups in other factories and also with local initiatives, e.g. in the fields of health, environment protection, and peace. It has also taken part in several talks held in universities, churches, political parties, and unions. Initiated by the working group, meetings of the cooperation department arranged in conjunction with professors on the theme "Alternative Production" and with theoreticians and practitioners concerning the theme "Jobs Through Regional Energy Concepts" were organised.

Conclusions

On the whole, we can argue that a successful and intensive cooperation between science and unions has been achieved, in which a worker-orientated social science has been realised. This form of cooperation differs from concepts of action research in that the scientists have confined themselves to a supporting role, without using their status as publicly paid and secure research workers to gain leading political positions.

At the beginning of 1985, a further re-structuring of the cooperation department was decided upon. Austerity measures by the government and the changing of political majorities within the university in favour of conservative tendencies brought the department once more to the limits of its existence. The result of the discussions has been the laying down of an average of about 5% of the university budget for the University/Worker's Chamber Centre, which, since mid-1985 has consisted of:

- a) a research centre at the university, open to all lecturers, and which does not allow exemption from teaching;

- b) a legally independent media institute which has the task of finding new sources of finance;
- c) a transfer department to support university research "cooperation" and to supply scientific results to the unions;
- d) an Academy for work and politics, which offers long-term courses for workers (without matriculation qualifications), lectures, and seminars held by scientists.

The future will show whether the new structures will lead to the optimal cooperation of university and unions, whether they will meet the requirements of a worker-oriented social science, and whether the development of research of the people involved is possible. A number of important lessons can be learnt from the "Bremen Model." It would be desirable, for example, to integrate more strongly the engineering sciences and medicine, as well as strengthening the interdisciplinary cooperation. The cooperation of critical science and workers can at the same time make a politically important contribution to the understanding between different cultures and to cement the union of traditional and new social movements.

Hard work awaits the scientists involved, however, as has been identified by Gerhard Leminsky (in Franz 1985) of the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung of the DGB, using a project as an example:

Hereby it is made clear, how varying changing relationships between "research" in the strict sense and meetings, publications, and various transposition forms are developed, which lay open new dimensions for the work of the social research worker. At the same time, however, they demand qualifications which the usual discipline-oriented scientific work does not provide, and which are frequently not rewarded in an academic career, such as the connection and transmission of research, integrated ways of thinking concerning several disciplines, and research management."

References

- Bamberg, H.-D., Kröger, H.J. and Kuhlmann, R. (1979): *Hochschulen und Gewerkschaften*, Köln: Bund-Verlag.
- Brock, A. and Einemann, E. (1983): *Lernen am Konflikt*, In: Görs, D. (ed.): *Arbeiten und Lernen*, München: Max Hueber Verlag.
- Der Senator für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kunst der Freien Hansestadt Bremen (ed.) (1985): *Arbeit und Technik als politische Gestaltungsaufgabe*, (authors: Fricke/Krahn/Spitzley and Schröder) Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft.

- Einemann, E. (1979): Zur Institutionalisierung der Kooperation zwischen Wissenschaft und Gewerkschaften, *Arbeitshefte der Juso-Hochschulgruppen*, (Bonn) Nr. 21, May 21: 36–58.
- Einemann, E. and Lübbling, E. (1985): *Anders produzieren. Alternative Strategien in Betrieb und Region*, Marburg: SP-Verlag.
- Einemann, E. and Lübbling, E. (1987): *Politisches Lernen und Handeln im Betrieb*, Marburg: SP-Verlag.
- Fischer, J., Ladewig, L., Einemann, E., and Lobbing, E. (1984): *Alternative Produktion statt Arbeitsplatzabbau und Aufrüstung*, Universität Bremen.
- Franz, H.-W. (Ed.) (1985): *22. Deutscher Soziologentag 1984: Soziologie und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Katterle, S. and Krahn, K. (Eds.) (1980): *Wissenschaft und Arbeitnehmerinteressen*, Köln.
- Schumann, M., Einemann, D., Siebel-Rebell, Ch. and Wittemann, K.P. (1982): *Rationalisierung, Krise, Arbeiter*, Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.