

Interviews mit Arbeitern auf der AKW Baustelle im finnischen Olkiluoto

Zusammenfassung

Ende 2005 wurde im finnischen Olkiluoto mit dem Bau des Europäischen Druckwasserreaktors (EPR) begonnen. Dieser neu entwickelte Reaktortyp wurde vom französischen Atomkonzern Framatome zusammen mit Siemens entwickelt und sollte das Flaggschiff der Atomindustrie werden. Doch der Bau eines der ersten Reaktoren entwickelt sich immer mehr zum Desaster. Immer mehr neue Sicherheitsmängel und Pannen kommen ans Licht – bisher zählte die finnische Atomaufsicht rund 2300 Sicherheits- und Qualitätsprobleme. Auch die Fertigstellung verzögert sich erheblich. Ursprünglich sollte der Reaktor bereits 2009 fertiggestellt sein, nun wird damit frühestens 2012 gerechnet. Zudem explodieren die Kosten, mittlerweile geht man von nahezu einer Verdoppelung der Anfangs geplanten 3,2 Milliarden auf mehr als fünf Milliarden Euro aus. Den Kosten- und Zeitdruck bekommen die Arbeiter massiv zu spüren. In Interviews berichten sie, wie sich dies negativ auf die Bauqualität, Sicherheitskultur und Arbeitsmoral auswirkt und damit zu ständig neuen Sicherheitsrisiken am Reaktorbauwerk führt.

Zwischen Mai und Dezember 2009 befragte ein polnischer Journalist im Auftrag von Greenpeace ehemalige und aktuelle Arbeiter auf der Baustelle des EPR-Reaktors in Olkiluoto.

Die Arbeiter berichteten von massiven Baumängeln. So ist die Stahlarmierung der Reaktorhülle fehlerhaft. Verbindungsbügel, die die einzelnen Stahlteile stabilisieren sollen, sind falsch installiert oder fehlen ganz. Zudem sind Schweißnähte so instabil, dass sie bei geringer Belastung nachgeben. Viele Fehler in der Stahlarmierung wurden jedoch nicht korrigiert, sondern nur mit Beton verfüllt (*siehe Frage 1. Quality failures*). Ein eklatantes Sicherheitsrisiko, da die Stahlarmierung von großer Bedeutung für die Statik und somit für die Stabilität von Bauwerken aus Beton ist. Es ist also nicht auszuschließen, dass die Statik der Reaktorhülle durch die fehlerhafte Armierung erheblich schlechter ausfällt als dies aus Sicherheitsgründen notwendig ist.

Zahlreiche Baumängel bleiben unentdeckt, da Arbeiter und Vorgesetzte keine gemeinsame Sprache sprechen. Doch selbst wenn in der Vergangenheit Mängel entdeckt wurden, versuchte man häufig, sie zu vertuschen. Arbeiter bekamen Anweisungen, Baumängel mit Beton oder anderweitig zu überdecken. Selbst fehlerhafte Komponenten in der Erdung des Kraftwerks – ein sicherheitsrelevanter Bereich – wurden nach Aussage der Arbeiter während offizieller Überprüfungen kaschiert. Den Arbeitern war es entweder aus Verständigungsgründen nicht möglich oder sogar verboten, mit Kontrolleuren zu sprechen (*siehe Frage 2. Bad safety culture*).

In allen Interviews wird deutlich, dass ein großer Druck auf den Arbeitern lastet, die Arbeitsleistung zu erhöhen – auch wenn dies auf Kosten der Qualität geht. So muss der laufend angelieferte Beton verarbeitet werden, für Mängelkorrekturen bleibt keine Zeit. Bei Unterbrechungen der laufenden Arbeiten droht den Männern die fristlose Kündigung (*siehe Frage 2. Bad safety culture*).

Die meisten polnischen Arbeiter unterstehen portugiesischen Vorarbeitern, die bei der französischen Firma *Bouygues* beschäftigt sind. Alle Befragten beschreiben die Vorarbeiter als inkompetent und unerfahren in anspruchsvollen Baumaßnahmen.

Spendenkonto

Postbank, KTO: 2 061 206, BLZ: 200 100 20

Greenpeace ist vom Finanzamt als gemeinnützig anerkannt. Spenden sind steuerabsatzfähig.

Einer der Vorarbeiter war sogar ein Analphabet. Die Angestellten von *Bouygues* sehen die Arbeit in Olkiluoto als eine Art Exil, den EPR also als ein Bauprojekt zweiter Klasse (*siehe Frage 2. Bad safety culture*).

Fristlose und illegale Kündigungen sind auf der Baustelle der Normalfall: Gewerkschaftsmitglieder, Arbeiter, die krank gemeldet waren (auch aufgrund von Arbeitsunfällen), und Arbeiter, die für ihre Rechte eingetreten sind, wurden nach Hause geschickt. In vielen Fällen gab es für die Kündigungen keinerlei angemessene Begründung wie Betroffene erzählen (*siehe Frage 3. Illegal firing*).

Kranken- und Sozialversicherungsbeiträge wurden nicht bezahlt. So bekamen viele Arbeiter riesige Probleme. Die Beiträge wurden auf den Lohnabrechnungen zwar einbehalten, aber nie weiter gegeben. Die finnischen Behörden fordern von diesen Arbeitern nun Nachzahlungen von mehr als 10.000 Euro. Zudem funktionierten nach Verlassen der Baustelle ihre Krankenkarten nicht mehr und so hatten sie keinen Zugang zur Krankenversorgung. Einige benötigen dringend medizinische Hilfe, erhalten sie aber nicht, da ihre Krankenversicherungsbeiträge nicht bezahlt sind (*siehe Frage 5. Insurance and social security fees not paid*).

Auch beim Lohn, den Arbeitsverträgen und Arbeitszeiten wurden die Arbeiter systematisch unter Druck gesetzt und betrogen. Details in Arbeitsverträgen wurde nachträglich verändert (*siehe Frage 6. Changing terms of employment after signing contracts*), Arbeiter werden genötigt, sechs oder sieben Tage die Woche zu arbeiten. Es gibt 16- bis 24-Stunden Schichten, wobei Überstunden oft nicht bezahlt wurden (*siehe Frage 4. Illegal overtime work and unpaid working hours*).

Die folgenden Interviews liegen Greenpeace als Tonbandmitschnitt im Original vor (polnisch).

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Interview	Name	Worked in OL3	Position
1	Mr Andrzej Miciak	2007	steel fixer
2	Anonymous	2007 - present	carpenter
3	Anonymous	2007 - 2009	gangleader
4	Mr Zbigniew Mulczynski	half a year in 2007	foreman
5	Anonymous	2007-2008	crane operator
6	Anonymous	2006-2009	administrative

1. Quality failures

#1

Even some of us saw that they accepted something that was bad. Fill it with concrete. It was quiet. [...], reinforcement is damaged, something is crooked, centimeters do not correspond. They will not check everything. There are tons of metal. If they had wanted to check it they would have had to check every single element. And for this you need much time. And it was all about filling this concrete as fast as possible.

If there were big deviations they would notice them. But these smaller ones... just let go.

We had these smaller defects. They [controllers] were turning a blind eye to this because of the concrete. You have concrete, that's all you have to fill. Someone was already filling someone still correcting. We pressed on, in a rush.

Some elements were missing. The elements of the reinforcement were numbered. And some parts were missing. From where? They were counted. And if they didn't notice, we pumped [concrete on it].

You poured concrete on something that had missing elements.

Of course.

What particular elements do you mean?

Links between bars. They were falling down somewhere. Various things. One could write a book about where, what and how. It is a fact that these are small parts but I think it IS important. Normally, like everywhere – they will not notice it, so we will fill. [...] if they overlooked it, then we filled.

[...] If there was access [to the faulty part], we rather corrected [the mistake] more or less. But if not, then we left it as it was and when they come and if they accept it entirely then nobody was going to tell them. Who would go? It must be a big element, so that even a blind one would notice it. But if some small one and no access... People fill it and it will rise up anyway. I don't know if it had any influence. [...]

And these smaller pieces that were missing...

Links between steel bars. If they were missing, we had to correct it but if they missed it too then we did not fix it.

The concrete was coming in truck after truck. And we were pumping. [...] Even if the reinforcement was not completed one had to pour the concrete because it was waiting. [...]

So is it possible that, when you pour concrete, a weld breaks but you don't notice this because the flowing concrete covers it?

Everything is possible. I suppose it happened. That the bars gave in. But when you work the concrete you can't see it. If it's at the same place, the concrete will keep flowing, I don't know if it has any influence. But it's hard to notice something like that. You are walking on this reinforcement. You would understand it, as you have to grab this pump while pouring concrete. It's quite a big pressure. It depends on the controller, how he lets the concrete flow. Sometimes when this was being done, a man could almost drown together with that pump. This construction site is too big to make it all beautiful. There are inevitably mistakes. Nobody knows how many mistakes have been covered with concrete, flooded.

But there are some.

For sure.

[...] **And what we are talking about is a power plant.**

Of course. And this is the worst thing.

Did [the welders] have any directives concerning the voltage, temperature?

I don't know. The weld just had to be strong enough to hold. In fact, at the beginning some people... the way they were welding, the welds were breaking. You walk on reinforcing steel and sometimes it collapses. So you had to weld it strongly. Some people, who knows, learned to weld at home.

#6

Has the mistreatment of workers had an impact on safety culture?

Well, if you are negligent, the employees might be negligent as well. But it's not so much the treatment of workers, it is more direct orders to breach safety requirements. E.g. on one occasion, not that long ago, Bouygues inspectors gave an order to cover up clear defects in a safety classified structure, the earthing system. Areva inspectors consequently missed some of the defects.

2. Bad safety culture

#1:

Who from among the workers was talking to quality controllers?

From workers nobody! [...] But who would make them understood in Finnish? [...]

Could anyone go and report to the quality controllers the mistakes that they did not notice?

No, nobody was going to them.

Workers did not speak English.

Exactly. But even those who could speak English were not allowed.

Were people going to quality controllers?

Nothing of the kind!

Was there a [ban] issued regarding contacts with AREVA?

Officially not. But they don't recommend this.

How do they give this information not to contact with AREVA?

Officially they don't.

And unofficially?

For example, I was telling them I was fed up with this so I would go to AREVA. “No, no, go to us firstly. To us.” AREVA knows it. AREVA lets us understand they know this.

#4

And the concrete was supposed to be poured in a moment so you had to do the job faster...

Yes, and faster means you will find faults later on. Many things have to be done precisely, on time but it needs enough time. Not head over heels to fix it at any price. And then problems occur.

There was pressure because “the concrete will arrive, if you don’t get it done it’s the end for you, we’ll send you home” and so on.

[...] You entered the construction site through a gate with a reader. And there was a sign that hung there telling 500 days of delay, 600 days of delay.

[...] There were some procedures, quality controls. People from AREVA were visiting or from some other organizations. Could the workers talk to them?

No. Absolutely no. No it was unthinkable. They treated the workers like pawns on chessboard. Or even worse. These were mainly Germans from AREVA. I was working there for some time. I will not tell you they disliked Poles, they even hated them. It was unthinkable that they would talk to us. Absolutely. It was unthinkable. There was one man from AREVA, a young guy whose parents were Poles. He was talking to us. And it was sometimes on Saturday when his German bosses were gone. Then sometimes he spoke Polish. But still in a way that nobody else would hear it.

[...] Who talked to AREVA?

The Portuguese generally. There were also some Poles who talked to them. But they were engineers, assistants of Bouygues employees. They could speak English and they were allowed to speak. But it was impossible that someone from the workers would speak. Absolutely.

I imagine there is a welder who is experienced enough and has been hired. He does his job. Than he is told to hurry up so he makes unacceptable welds. Than it turns out it’s not good and they decide to fire him, right? Under normal circumstances he would make proper welds. It was not his idea, was it?

Exactly. But it’s an illusion. In this particular case, it’s even worse that he did it faster as over the time he makes it longer as he has to correct it and so on. And if he was doing this slower, more calmly, he would do it properly without going back to this. All in all it would take less time. But they ordered him to go back to it. There was some shouting and stress, unnecessary really.

[...] I’ve heard that there was a pressure on the workers to work faster and faster but on the other hand the blueprints were arriving not on time. But you had to work in spite of this.

Generally, yes. One started the first job and had to stop and start the second one due to the lack of documentation. The documentation was not coherent, was contradictory. There were quite a few of such cases. [...]

#5

Many people were going back home. But they were recruiting new slaves. Job crisis in Poland. They put out an advertisement and people came. Not really professionals. But if one has a certificate one can go. Rimec was not checking it carefully. [...]

Incompetent management

#2:

They, the administration, treat this job like an exile. This is it. And different people who didn't come true on construction sites. Who can't coexist with people properly etc. These who couldn't work in France are sent here. And they remain here somehow.

[...] You said some workers treat this job as an exile.

That's how it seems to us. Some people really treat this as an exile since they can't get a job somewhere else. There are also many foremen from Portugal. They are not good in this job but I'm not the one to judge this. But in terms of these relations with workers there are many rows, screaming, it is a hot temperament. [...] Many foremen are fired because of their wrong decisions.

It is the construction site of the most modern NPP in the world. And the safest one. But it's a mess, typical French thing. I can't describe. Not to microphone. First of all, the materials are missing. Nothing is on time. I was talking to the workers who worked in Bouygues but in France, on other construction sites. They claim that the work, human relations and organization is entirely different. It's as if we were in some other world here. Maybe it's because of the distances to Finland and so on. For Frenchmen... not everyone will come. They, the administration, treat this job like an exile.

[...]Scaffoldings are missing. There is no way to build it but they order to do it. And then it happens that one pilfers materials, well not exactly materials but so called tools, the elements of scaffoldings because it's missing. I don't know why. Maybe for cost savings or the transport doesn't arrive on time. Or someone has just planned too few pieces.

#3:

This is a French company, most of the people are Portuguese. However they called them. And the majority of them had the education of a swineherd etc. Really, our boys with normal orange helmets surpassed those with white ones. I have no idea what was the personnel policy regarding supervisors but there were people who couldn't write. There was such an example. Supervisor couldn't write.

But he had some group under him to supervise.

Right. And how did I learn he couldn't write. There were some robberies. And a man comes to work and has no work trousers. A normal supervisor writes and says go to the storage and you get it. But he couldn't write this voucher/assignment. He started to write this, I'm observing but he is writing this like a first-class pupil. He is studying these columns and is placing these letters carefully...

...How could he be a supervisor?

... he threw it away, threw away the next page, writing again. He tried 3 times and went away. And Jaroslaw is standing. There was a kind of a shelter. Standing, standing. And what can he do? He went back. And the supervisor got lost. Instead of going to a colleague to ask to write this. Moreover, Jaroslaw lost a day's wage. He didn't get to work because of his [supervisor's] mistake. He stayed for a few hours. Went and didn't get a day's work registered. These are the hilarious moments.

[...] There was major squandering.

Of the materials, tools?

Of the materials etc. I guess this building would be much cheaper if it was arranged properly. I don't mean the organization. But on wages and prices, I guess Rimec takes 24 euro per hour and pays 8 to a worker. So this building costs much.

But organization-wise too. Like your colleagues had told before. They were trying to do their job properly but for example the blueprints were not delivered on time.

This was justified. Maybe some people don't know about this but all this mess, how I call it laughingly, could be foreseen. There were issues with the project itself and the documentation. And then modifications had to be

made. It is indeed a prototype. It's understandable. But even a prototype has some limits to how much it can cost. So I guess it could cost a third less. It wouldn't be 2 or 3 years delayed.

[...] The whole truck of drilling machines, of hammers, tools etc. was coming. The Portuguese were hiding all of this. There was nothing to work with. It was disappearing. [...] tools we used were good. But they were disappearing. [...] And they proved it. The security popped up and was taking tools away from supervisors' wardrobes. They were fired. It was miserable. [...] It's probably painful for TVO to be paying for this. That it costs so much. Really. It could be done in a more clever way. On one hand they boast of the fact that it's a prototype.

[...] As I said, Frenchmen hire Poles whom they give 8 euro [an hour]. And they hire a supervisor, not Frenchman or Englishman, but Portuguese who used to herd goats recently and built something at his farm. This is his knowledge about building.

[...] I suppose there is some money allocated for this. As it's a prototype the upper limit is high. And they take advantage of this. A concrete pump. It's how I discovered this. While concreting. I was by a pump. I'm looking at the label. The year is '79. It's impossible! Repainted. Like a new one. Metal plates all new ones. But in fact...

#4

the foremen, masters, were mainly Portuguese. [...] They could speak only their mother tongue. They knew the job only on a basic level. It was impossible to have contact with them.

I've heard that one of these Portuguese was illiterate.

Yes, there was one. It sounds funny. And he only screamed. Funny, funny guy. I don't know how he came there and why.

They had white helmets. They had serious responsibilities. They had a group to supervise.

Maybe it was like this because the main boss was Portuguese too.

[...] During my stay there were seven different Portuguese guys [as managers]. So please imagine how the co-operation was. [...]

Please imagine that in half a year I had seven superiors, masters. That's the first thing. Before he gets to know the job... The second is the language barrier. [...] A job is underway and a man comes and may not know it. And it takes a time for him to learn it. Even if this Portuguese manager does his best it has to take some time. It's impossible in one month.

#5

One of the Portuguese supervisors was illiterate. Two people confirmed that.

Yes, they didn't know the language, they were screaming at our people. They were looking down on Poles.

Abuse of workers

*2 workers made to sleep in tiny single rooms

3. Illegal firing

#1:

[...] Sometimes it was workers' own decision to leave the job, when they realized what was going on. They were buying tickets, waiting for the money to appear on their account and then escape to Poland.

One was going to work, and five minutes before you normally finish the job you hear: go away, tickets are booked for you. Later on, you were not thinking of the job but of when you would go home to Poland. It was like a lottery. This was the most stressing thing. That you go and don't know if you will work. Thus, I didn't want to work longer than half a year. [...]

When they finally got to know I was active in the trade union, I was on a black list. But I didn't care, I knew I'll not want to stay there for a longer time.

#2:

Was Rimec giving trouble to union members?

And not officially, there were different talks to be careful, that it "would be a pity if we lose the job". Even before the strike, workers, Poles were warned that they could lose the job if there was a strike etc.

Were people fired because of taking part in protests?

It was unofficial. It's always done unofficially, silently. People are told, face to face, that "if you go on acting this way you will unfortunately have to say goodbye" etc. Some people were fired but with the official reason being reduction in workforce.

What if there is an accident in work?

I know two cases. Two workers were fired after about month or month and a half since an accident. But they had a sick leave that time. It was probably not to pay any salary or compensation. And it was a sick leave issued by Finnish health care.

Can a company discharge its workers while sick leave?

It is the first time I've seen such case. I have run an own company, I have been working in [several countries]. And especially that it is sick leave after an accident that took place at work. In the whole European Union such workers are protected especially because they were injured due to their work. In the case of our company they are just thrown out on the street. [...]

[...] For me it's strange that in such a country of law and order, that Finland is supposed to be, there are such violations of our rights. And human rights. For me it's unimaginable that if someone gets injured at work... Such a person should be protected especially like in the whole European Union. But you can lose your job instead. [...]

#3:

People were fired on a sick leave.

Yes. And I stress that it was sick leave from a plant doctor. But this is evidence of their impunity. When the prohibition in the US finished Al Capone had no job to do for living. So what did he do? [...]

#4:

[...] There were three breaks during a day. During 8 hours. It was very strict that a break was for example 12 minutes. And Bouygues representative stood upstairs. And one had to go up, there were about 300 steps to the top. And it was 12 min to go up, have breakfast and go down. And there was a case that a Slovak guy, a foreman... [...]

[...] And he started his break two minutes earlier. He was noticed and had to quit and go home as a punishment. I know this case quite good as this man was complaining

on his situation and he came there to earn money. He was a good worker and was fired this way. [...]

#5:

[...] We want the company to explain why they take half of our gross income and we don't know for what. It was only written tax and insurance. But why was it so much? They just couldn't explain that. Mainly, I was interested in that. And they got rid of me, in that strange way.

How did they justify their decision to fire you?

A director from Dublin came. [...] I'll tell you that if the company had acted towards me in a fair way... Any company or any worker has a right to terminate employment. I don't question this. But it needs to have a legal basis. I mean: if they don't want me because I don't do my job then I get, let's say, a 2 week notice. And I agree with that, I accept two weeks of notice because the company doesn't want to work with me. But this is what they did: I receive a notification, as I call it, that I won't work anymore starting [in two days]. I got angry about that. I couldn't imagine that one can act against a person this way. I understand that they can fire you, it's a normal thing, it is even said in the contract that the company, and the worker too, has the right to dissolve a contract. But you have to follow legal requirements. The company wants to fire me – two weeks of notice.

And in your case there was no notice time, right?

Right! I have this paper. They told me not to work starting [on a particular day]. But on [that day and the next day] I came to the site and worked. And they paid me for those two days. But according to the law once I'm fired and my contract is dissolved I shouldn't work at all. But I was working till [two weeks from the day of firing]. They paid me only for those two days and didn't pay for the rest.

And you said it was security that took you out [from the site].

Yes it was security. And a director came too. And I asked him why they dissolved my contract. They said it was because I was not only involved in construction work but also in other things. It's common knowledge. [There was a row] about vacations, retirement fees and things like that. [...]

[...] I started a court case. And I won a case with Rimec about unfair termination of a contract. And a court will make a decision about compensation.

So the court case that you started concerned your notice.

Yes. The fact that they fired me in an unlawful way. And I wanted to get a financial compensation because I didn't work for two months as I lost the job. [...] I stayed jobless for two months and I felt offended about this. [...]

And what about that compensation for your notice?

[...] Many were afraid and wanted to run away. But my nature is that if a company cheats me I'll fight for my rights. There's no other way. Consequently. So we'll see how this unlawful termination case ends. [...]

[...] [One of the big bosses] called me a few times. He said that Rimec will sue me and they have lawyers that would be able to deal with this. He was threatening me not to engage, otherwise he would deal with me. [...]

And I asked him why they dissolved my contract. They said it was because I was not only involved in construction work but also in other things. It's common knowledge. [There was a row] about vacations, retirement fees and things like that. [...]

It was about your activities for workers' rights.

Yes. This is how I understood that. They worried me. That boss of the site. He said that if he would see me again... I was in trade union. Trade unions couldn't help

either. For me it was very strange. A strike was supposed to be organized. 10th September. But they agreed somewhere that it wouldn't happen. And when the security took a person the work was stopped. About 80 people came – crane operators, and they came to the main gate. And a reporter came there too I think. And people were asking why they had stopped. Because the trade union leader was fired unlawfully, against the law. Next a general strike was supposed to take place on 10 September. But afterwards it all fell apart. All people withdrew from the trade union. [...]

4. Illegal overtime work and unpaid working hours

#1

And what about overtime?

Normally we always worked for 10 hours. But it was also possible that we had to work for 14 or 12 hours.

How can one work under such circumstances?

I don't know! Some people were doing concrete starting in Saturday morning and were back on Sunday. They might have worked for 24 or 26 hours.

Such a long shift?

One shift. Others could have go there to change them. But no. And Monday – again back to work.

#2

There is quite much work overtime. All Saturdays. [...] Quite often there is work on Sundays. There are people who work twelve hours etc. There is a yearly limit of overtime hours. You can't exceed it officially. One does it in different ways. [...]

In some companies, not Rimec, if one doesn't work on Saturdays, he is fired soon. There are such companies too.

I'm happy I left and I'm at home and work in Poland calmly. And it's good. I would never go back there. For any money. Truly. It's not the most important thing. The stress is unbelievable.

#3:

[...] Obviously the working hours were never right. One had to have hours registered. One always had to check it afterwards. There were always hours missing. One was reporting his weekly wages signed by the supervisor. And in Rimec there were always hours missing. And any hours haven't ever been added for anyone. Interesting, isn't it? One can make a mistake. But if you do it, mathematically, it's sometimes this way, sometimes the other. But there it was always to one side's advantage. By the way, it was common. But with such big crew, when 100, 200, 300 euro was not corresponding... Interesting situation, it was before Christmas, the reactor is concreted before, it needs forming, the boss of the section, of the project even, says that the part of the crew has to stay. So a group, including me, stayed. It was supposed to be paid 300 %. It's very good earnings. I wanted to have a vacation on summer. And it turns out they haven't paid that. 940 or 930 Euro. I don't remember exactly.

How many people could they have cheated that way?

Many. One didn't think much about this that time. I was fighting for this. That time Rimec managers, Mr. and Ms. ---, were replaced by some others. I talked to their successor but he didn't know anything about this. Evidently. And he will not pay this. Always, always the same things. For example vacations. And it was not right.

#6

Format paid their workers no wage during sick leave and in fact workers have had to "compensate" the company for sick leaves by having cuts in their wages. In another company, worst cases are men have worked 300 hours in a month and get 1300 e. No social security or insurances. When they came to work their visas were taken from them and they were not allowed to move, kept under control.

5. Insurance and social security fees not paid

#1:

Did the company help people with health problems anyhow?

We were treated like slaves. You don't like it, go home. [...]

People were not insured in work, were they?

No they weren't.

Isn't it obligatory for the company to insure people?

Yes, of course! It had been all supposed to be entirely legal!

And if someone had an accident it turned out he was not insured. And he hadn't known about this before, had he?

No he hadn't. But if anything happened, the company paid the money. If there was a bill for a particular worker for particular treatment, like hospital, the company paid this. But who knows if they paid all of them. Maybe a bill will come to me again in some time.

It must have been difficult for people.

It was difficult. People didn't want to show it, but they were woeful. [...]

#2:

[...] Are there any other problems?

Yes, obviously. We are working on the biggest construction site in Finland. Priority one. It's the construction site of the nuclear power plant. And despite this we often feel like we were working illegally. Because of health care. For some time the doctors from plant health center were not seeing us. Rimec was not paying for appointments and examinations. There is something wrong with our social insurance. In June 2008 a Rimec representative told us that from January 2008 we were not longer the workers of English company like we used to be. But the company moved its premises to Cyprus supposedly and now we are the workers of the company registered on Cyprus. It is probably related to taxes and insurance. We don't have health cards, so called European Health Card, we don't have a possibility to get health care in Poland. In Finland, Rimec covers the costs of health care in a health center and two hospitals. Bills are sent to Rimec. But after going abroad, to Poland, we are not provided with any health care. No insurance. We can only get treatment at our own expense. [...]

[...] And there are more workers who go to Poland due to health problems and run into trouble because of lack of health insurance. [...]

[...] Due to the lack of social care we prepared a strike action. A strike was prepared. For one day we were not working. [...]

[...] for us, Rimec workers, the worst thing is this tax problem, lack of health care, lack of support. If someone gets injured he must be aware that he would be fired.

Fortunately, there hasn't been any fatal accident. Then it would be a problem. Or if someone becomes permanently handicapped, where would he get his pension from? This is the problem, some people are afraid of this. [...]

[...] We are not granted workers' rights, we are not properly insured, nobody told us what kind of pension insurance we have. But we should have this as we work there. We work there legally apparently. Apparently legally but yet with no permit. After finishing work it's difficult to get any documentation that would prove I worked there. To have it for pension. [...]

#3:

[...] You were on a sick leave that time.

Right, but, it was quite far from the camp, I was going to office, hoping that as soon as I get this [treatment] I would leave. I take a ticket, I leave and go to a [medical specialist] to start treatment. But why should I cover the costs of my treatment here as I haven't been paid for E-4. And that time I made a basic mistake. A few days later I went to his office again. *You have an address, let me write it down.* He bluffed I would receive all the things in Poland. *You can go [to Poland], there is no problem.* So I went. And once you left there is nothing you can do. Telephone. How much money have I spent on phone calls? So much they were not answering my phone calls anymore. Unfortunately we have this technology that displays the caller's phone number. So when I called from another number they answered. Childish.

What was your situation afterwards? You were back to Poland on a sick leave theoretically and officially. But what could you do then?

Nothing! I'm on a sick leave. So I can't go to any job. I can't register myself as unemployed in Poland because I'm an employee on a sick leave. And I can't be treated because I have no basis I have no insurance. When I think of this it's unreal. In the middle of Europe such things happen. [...]

Go and call anyone who recruits workers to OL3. Or go today to OL3 and today they will tell you that all your taxes are paid and that you have all the insurance, social one, retirement one. But they will only tell you. There are serious accidents. One man broke his spine and they were making him go to Poland. How?! You need a special place on a plane for someone who can't sit. Cracked spine! Can you imagine? Like this movie title *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* A horse seems to be treated in a better way. A man is an object. [...] I'm not telling you all I think because otherwise I'd have to swear. If we were now in OL3 as workers and asked if everything is fine, if the tax will be paid, if insurance case is clear. *No problem!* They still claim this. It's enough to go to Krakow or call and say you want to work they will promise everything. [...]

#4:

[...] And it worked on people's mind that there was a delay that one had to hurry up. And to make it faster. But it didn't go hand in hand with it. It's known that you can't jump over some things. There were two serious accidents when I was there. It was a Slovak or a Frenchman. Such things happened.

Was there a pressure on the workers?

Yes indeed. And I think it's still like this. [...]

[...] we were supposed to be provided with health care but when you went to had to go to a dentist you had to pay for it.

But theoretically, you were told you were insured.

Yes! We were supposed to be insured. But it was not true.

And they collected money for it.

Yes. Our gross income was high. But the net income... Everybody asking what does this and that item stand for [on the paycheck] etc. We didn't have any vacation.

#5:

[...] what was wrong with your health insurance?

Apparently that card was not valid anywhere. There was a number. I can't say personally. But people who were visiting doctors told that that EU card was not valid. It was because Rimec didn't pay health insurance fees. They said so. I can't tell that. It's from what people said.

And what happened if someone had an accident?

My colleague had an accident. He now works in [another country] with me. And I ask him: why didn't you try to get compensation? I, for instance, would not give up on this. People give up on many things. A lawyer told me that if there were more people like me, who were not afraid to fight for what they deserve, those companies would look at it differently. They were just afraid to fight for this. They have worries. I don't. If the company acts improperly I can't leave it like that. [...]

6. Changing terms of employment after signing contracts

#1:

Before going to Finland, I signed contracts in Northampton, 4 papers. But on the spot they gave us other contracts to sign. They were different and worse than the initial ones. People had similar problems – they signed Rimec contracts in Poland, Cracow – and in Olkiluoto were given other, different ones. They lacked many things [that were in the original contract]. They gave away our vacation payment although we deserved it. And people from other companies had their vacation payment.

Did the company explain this?

No! They beat around the bush! Such an explanation that nobody understood it. "You just do not deserve it". That's all. How come if worked for the same company but different subcontractor? [...]

#3:

[...] I signed the contract in London. With an agent, a man. The contract was signed, all the conditions and so on, including insurance documents. After signing I didn't get it in my hand but I got it only in Finland. It was changed, scanned, with dotted gaps. [...] It was not my contract anymore.

It was changed to your disadvantage.

Obviously to disadvantage. [...] For example there is a set rate. You have a rate in a contract. It was let's say 13,6 Euro. So in the signed one, where I have one copy and the other side has the second one, there is nothing, zero, no rate. There is an empty gap. So it's not the same page.

#5

For example we were supposed to get so called PKs. This means that there is one free day a month for example. It was agreed with trade unions. Under the same conditions that Finns or other nations had. We deserved that. I was going to the office asking about that. As it turned out, a lady from the office told me ironically that if I manage to make the company provide workers with those free days she will also benefit from that. They were not interested in it.

Please tell me if the info about that mess reached the top, like Bouygues?

Yes it did. I even have papers at home from Bougues signed by a main constructor of the reactor. We got these papers. And they asked Rimec, as there are some concerns on the construction site, that people were threatening to make a strike and to quit the job. They asked to explain those fees cases. They didn't want to have problems on the spot. So they informed Bouygues that there was something wrong. Nobody could understand how come that they cheated about vacation. It says in a contract that 18,5 % of gross income is a vacation sum. And we were going for vacation for free. Two weeks and not a single zloty [PLN].

And there were also cases that somebody was fired being on a sick leave.

I guess it was Josef.

What was wrong with your health insurance?

Apparently that card was not valid anywhere. There was a number. I can't say personally. But people who were visiting doctors told that that EU card was not valid. It was because Rimec didn't pay health insurance fees. They said so.

It's also not good situation that a company takes money but you are not insured.

Right.

And what happened if someone had an accident?

My colleague had an accident. And I ask him: why didn't you try to get some compensation? [...] They were just afraid to fight for their rights.

#5

The company had two contracts. In the first contract it was said we had a rate of €9.40 net including vacation. And in the second contract, the one for the controls, it said that vacation is added to gross rate. It means vacation is counted as 18,5% of gross income.

#6

How about contract terms, have they been changed from what workers were promised in their home country?

Rimec workers signed their contracts in Poland. When they arrived in Olkiluoto, they found that all other pages than the signature page had been changed and the terms were different.

7. Tax evasion

#1:

[...] I knew I won't want to stay there for a longer time. I was afraid enough of these surprises with problems tax payments. So much money they withheld for taxes... And what kind of paycheck do you get? They gave you papers, no stamp of the company on it. I can print such a thing on my own and give it to people. It was too many bad surprises. You had thought it would be all right. And how many people suffer from this now. How many tragedies. Either you have to sell everything or a bailiff will come. How is it possible that such companies exist on such a big construction site? That there are no controls. But it is too much money. They have their own lawyers. It's really hard to control it.

How do people try to deal with this afterward? Do they sue?

They wave it aside. They know you can't win with them. They give up. Where will they go to? To Ireland? Or to Cyprus where the company is registered? In olive

grove? As there is no address, anything. And what to do? You would have to know where they are based, at least. But you don't know. Before [when I was working in another country] I knew I had to go [to the city where the headquarters were]. And yet it costs money to go there. And to pay lawyers. And how long will it take? Travel costs too. And accommodation. People resign and cope with what they face. [...]

[...] And Rimec took almost all the money workers were paying as membership fee for trade unions. Hardly any was paid to trade unions. It would appear on paychecks but trade unions were not receiving this.

Money was supposed to go to trade unions through Rimec, right?

Yes. There was a point 'I'm a member of trade union..' and a percentage of the salary was supposed to go to trade union. Nothing went there. There was a Finnish guy who helped Poles. A good guy. So he was fired. [...]

[...] There were protests, the issue was in media. There was a focus on Rimec.

And nothing. There was a guy appearing sometimes telling that the taxes problems will be fixed. And then disappearing. He was telling people what they wanted to hear. That's all. There are thousands of people like me. You can promise anything. They were always promising but doing different things. [...]

[...] They were telling lies! How come that there were no constant tax rates? Like for instance 20%. No. They were changing it almost every month. And we had to pay taxes even during first six months when you are exempted from paying this. There were even special Finnish brochures on a gate telling this. But they didn't accept that. They were in different languages, in English, Polish, German, French. They told we would get this money back. And nothing. We were deceived. It's an unbelievable company. It will continue to exist even if it gets closed down. They would just change their name. [...]

#2:

[...] There was a problem with paying taxes to Finnish authorities, to Finnish tax office. They were constantly, always avoiding paying taxes. Delays. And even not paying.

Were workers paying taxes to Rimec but the money was not sent to Finnish authorities?

The tax was withheld [from payroll]. Very often the sum that was withheld was even bigger than Finnish authorities should get. But it was often kept by Rimec who didn't give it to Finnish authorities.

But if the tax is withheld should a worker worry about this anymore?

According to Finnish law, if the company doesn't have its premises in Finland, it is a worker not the employer who is directly responsible for taxes that Finns are supposed to get.

What the consequences may be like?

In consequence, if the company doesn't pay taxes, Finns demand paying tax from a worker. And tax can be charged from a worker for a second time. First time was when the company took tax and didn't give it to Finnish tax office. Just two months ago Finnish debt collection company made more than one hundred calls for payment. I even know one case that money was confiscated from a worker's bank account for Finnish tax office.

Do you have similar problems?

I did have. But fortunately about one and a half month ago most of my tax was paid finally.

What did you have to do?

I intervened repeatedly. Workers who work in Rimec's office in Finland permanently (there are three workers now) were sending mails repeatedly to Ireland, directly to the company, asking them to pay tax, asking why my tax hadn't been paid. And so on. I personally was meeting Rimec's representatives coming from Dublin. I claimed that my tax be paid. Something happened. Not everything but most of my 2008 tax was paid.

What was the amount of it?

In my case it was almost 15 000 euros. There is about 800 euros left to pay.

What if you hadn't intervened?

I would have had to pay it myself. I think tax office wouldn't exempt me.

How do people deal with this?

It concerns a lot of people. Usually they pay something but there are still problems with this if more than one hundred people got a call for payment from debt collection company. It's quite a big number. And there are about 350 Poles hired in Olkiluoto by Rimec. [...]

[...] To what extent are the workers aware of the fact that the taxes are not paid?

They always tell us, the workers, that taxes are paid, that they will be paid. Every time they claim it was some kind of a misunderstanding. But if there are hundreds of such cases how can you talk about mistakes? I think it is a deliberate act.

Deceiving the workers?

Yes. For sure. What's more, as far as I know, if a worker doesn't work longer than six months in a particular year, than he is not obliged to pay Finnish tax. So many people go home before sixth month but tax is withheld. And the company doesn't give it back to them.

So a worker works less than six months, the company withholds the tax but neither gives it back to him nor pays it to Finland.

Yes. They keep it for themselves. I don't know any case that withheld tax was given back to anyone. [...]

#3:

[...] But they were taking money from your salary to pay insurance etc, right?

Yes. And you must have seen the paychecks. On the paychecks there is a tax, insurance and I was also paying a membership fee for the trade union. I'm still a member of a trade union. But no fee was paid to the union head office. A bandit on the street is friendlier than they are. I value more a thief who steals cars like Mercedes A Class than a scoundrel who cheats poor people. [...]

[...] And the first sign of dishonesty came from the Finnish tax office. People got phone calls demanding that taxes are paid. A man or a lady in our office was telling: *what do you want? Everything has been paid!* There is an official document. And I have a contract telling clearly that all the taxes are paid, moreover I have paychecks showing that taxes have been withheld, so the company takes the money. And despite this I am told I owe money to the Finnish tax office. The policy of Rimec was based on this loophole that for 180 days, half a year, one doesn't have to pay tax in Finland. So when someone wanted to work for them longer it was difficult for them, they were trying to send such a person somewhere else. [...]

[...] The first things started when they were called to pay by tax office. Indignation. Like during the break the group gathered, this manager appeared.

... the one from Rimec...

...yes. And he promised that the director would come. He was supposed to come a few times. And finally he came. But he had no time, only 15 min. He said he must go to AREVA or TVO. He promised that everything was regulated, no worries. People got receipts typed on computer and signed that it was paid. So since it's paid I go there and show it but the lady in the tax office says it's not paid. [...]

#4:

[...] A few people have told me that there have been problems with taxes, with insurance.

Exactly. Regarding taxes, if you work in Finland up to half a year, you pay your taxes to British tax office. But if you are there longer than half a year, you have to pay Finnish tax, that is quite high, and English one. So double. I personally didn't experience that. But my colleagues who stayed there were promised that the Finish tax would be paid through the company. And from what I have heard, as I have a colleague who has been there for two years already and from time to time I'm in touch with him as he visits Poland, they pay it by withholding it from the payroll. So they keep them in check as there is always some sum of money that has been withheld but not paid to the tax office yet. So if someone decides to go back to Poland, he would probably have to pay the rest of the money on his own. And these are serious amounts.

And have the building workers opposed to it anyhow? Have there been any protests?

Yes. When I was there there were four protests. And a meeting with Bouygues representative. And it was about taxes. Among other things I left back because I didn't want to be entangled into this tax spiral. My fate was not sure. Some people took the risk and stayed. I didn't. But there was a time that Rimec's representative from UK came and promised, assured that it would be paid. But in fact, nobody got it in writing, in black and white that it is paid. As I say, they pay it the same way still. [...]

#5:

[...] We didn't know what was going on with pension fee. I'm [quite close to retirement age] and I'm interested in these things. So firstly they answered that fees are paid to England. But it's difficult to say what fees. I sent a paper to England asking for a certificate and I didn't receive any answer. Our contracts were made with an English company. And as late as in July we found out that the company had moved to Cyprus not informing us at all. Nothing. Since January till June our paychecks were just worthless papers that I could print on my own. And a stamp of a company appeared there as late as in July. There were problems with taxes. The company transferred 750 euros to the authorities but took 3 000 from us. We want the company to explain why they take half of our gross income and we don't know for what. It was only written tax and insurance. But why was it so much? They just couldn't explain that. Mainly, I was interested in that. And they got rid of me, in that strange way. [...]

[...] There was also that case that people who worked less than half a year had to give really much money. But the regulation in Finland says that if one doesn't work longer than 183 days a year, one is not subject to Finnish taxes. So they should give back that money to the people who go back home. But they didn't give that money back at all. They were asking about this. And it was told that once they would go back home they would receive that money. And many people were afraid of those taxes, of that company and went back home.

Can we say that the company scammed them?

You know, if the company takes money for tax, for instance 2500 Euro and doesn't pay that tax for half a year. And if a worker stays half a year he is not obliged to pay taxes. So under these circumstances, they should settle accounts with the Polish tax office. But the company took that money for themselves.

So in fact, such a worker who is less than half a year does pay taxes but to Polish tax office, right?

Yes. And in that report, that Juha Granath was making, he asked about this in Polish ministry of state treasury in Warsaw. And they said that if it's less than 183 day one is not obliged to pay taxes in Finland but is obliged to pay taxes in Poland. And the company took money from people and didn't give it back.

And people had to pay double.

And I told them to sue the company to make them explain it. For me it's...And pension fees... because of the EU. And they moved to Cyprus. They changed their location in January. I had a contract with an English company. And that ends in 2007. And since January I work for Cyprus. In a company based in Cyprus. And next thing they tell me they transferred a 1500 Euro fee. It's a funny sum. And from England they transferred 7500 Euro. And when I called them they told me we had only minimal fees transferred. I got angry. It didn't bother other people as they worked, earned money. But I get angry when someone acts improperly. And it all affected me.

Weren't you thinking of suing them for the money they had taken for tax?

I stayed a longer time. But I was keeping an eye on this, I was checking and I received a paper from them that they transferred 21 000 euros. I went and checked and it was OK. But some people came back home after a year or so and now they received papers from Finnish tax office to pay 11000 euros in tax and they send it back to a company asking what's going on. I received a paper from tax office that the 21 000 euro payment tax has not been received. And I started to make inquiries about it and a main constructor of a power plant heard of it. And they answered that Rimec was a very good company and that they had a contract with Rimec to deliver people. And they also said that I slandered in Poland. But later on I received a paper showing that that the money was paid. But it's hard to say how it was. [...]

From my point of view, I can see not one but many similar cases of many workers. All in all it looks like a real scam.

Some time ago there was talk on the Internet that Rimec is a really shady company. It was written that way. People write so. They give a worker as little as possible. I agree – salary was not bad. But I can't accept that they don't pay taxes or fees or vacation payment. A paper was written to a director in Dublin. And 75 people signed it. It said that there were no stamps on paychecks and that vacation payment is missing. We were asking what was wrong with our allowance. As we were hired by an English company and we were registered in England we deserved allowances formally. But the company ducked away from that. They said: you have what you have, that's all. [...]

[...] And I advise that if they work less than half a year than they should write a paper to the company to ask them to give them back the money that they had had withheld from their paychecks. Because they will not transfer this money to tax authorities. It's a big sum of money. The company took 50% of my gross income but we didn't know what for. Other companies that worked on that construction site like Optima or Bouygues had numbered paychecks. 246 was tax. 247 was an insurance fee. Retirement. Health fees. Every cent and every euro was counted and listed. In black and white. We were trying to deal with that together with trade unions. But it was impossible. [...]

[...] Everyone was afraid to work longer than half a year. It was always about that tax that a company would not pay. From what I hear, many people have a lot of unpaid taxes.

Like your colleague who was cheated and owes 11 000 euros to tax authorities.

I called him some day and he said he sent it [the claims] to Rimec. What else can he do with it? [...]

#5:

[...] We want the company to explain why they take half of our gross income and we don't know for what. It was only written tax and insurance. But why was it so much? They just couldn't explain that.

#6:

How have employees been treated in Olkiluoto in your experience?

Employees of companies registered abroad have been treated much worse than employees of Finnish companies. The problematic companies include Rimec, Format and Sakiribau.

Are you aware of problems with foreign workers' taxes and fees?

Rimec has evaded all possible taxes and insurance payments. At maximum they have had 400 men working in Olkiluoto at once. They have operated at the site from Autumn 2006 until present. There were some improvements after a YLE current affairs program that drew attention to these problems in 2008 - they started then to withhold taxes from payroll based on annual earnings of EUR20-25k while the actual earnings were double as large. When they started to pay according to real wage levels, they took 35% of the wage while the real rate was 25%, and kept the difference. They claim they pay accident insurance "abroad". No Polish worker has, to my knowledge, received compensation from insurance even though there have been work related accidents.

The insurance fee amounts to roughly 150 e per month for a wage level of 3000 e per month.

Format: overtime is paid in cash. Many workers who worked at the site in 2007 had had no taxes paid in 2007 records, only management. Has had up to 200 workers at one time. The company claims the workers have social security coverage in Poland, but the E101 documents have not been presented.

Sakiri Bau: a company registered in Finland, brings workers from Makedonia and Kosovo. They report the absolutely lowest wages they dare to the tax authorities and pay the rest in cash. Worst cases are men have worked 300 hours in a month and get 1300 e. No social security or insurances. [...] Up to 80 men at a time.

There are people in Olkiluoto who have accumulated tens of thousands of euros in cash because they are afraid to get caught and cannot open a bank account.

At the turbine island there are about a dozen Serbian men who have worked for 1.5 years, earning 10 euros per hour, and the tax authorities have no record of them.

If you check the public tax records, you find that fairly highly paid workers like engineers and crane operators, with salaries of above 50 000 € a year, have incomes of 25 000 € in the record. It means the company pays more than half less tax than they should. But it also means people do not get the benefits like pension or unemployment benefits they deserve.

Tax authorities said it is a hard task for them because Rimec does not have a fixed location [toimipaikka]. They do not have an obligation or even right to withhold taxes from payroll, it is in their view an agreement between employer and employee. They don't view it as a crime.

When there was a special inspection by the tax authorities in Spring 2009, Rimec got clean papers and was allowed to continue operations. The tax authorities view paying even a small portion of the overdue payments as a demonstration that the company is doing their best to pay so it is not a crime. The workers are hung by

their necks, have to behave nice and continue working in hopes that the company would make the payments by the deadline, and by then there are new overdue payments.

Areva and TVO have been aware of these problems at least on some level. TVO is saying they have a turnkey contract, they cannot influence the subcontractors that are used. They have wanted to know about these things.

Areva has made inspections and asked about overdue payments etc. The issue has never been taken forward to Bouygues.

8. Trade unions let workers down

#1

Do workers plan a new protest?

No, unfortunately there will be no other protest after what trade unions in Helsinki did to us. It's impossible. Everything was ready. Everyone had his function. The strike was ready. And this organization collapsed due to the trade union. As I say, any employer didn't harm us as much as Finnish trade unions did. This harm is irreversible. What the employer is doing to us can be fixed somehow maybe. But trade unions killed any hope for law and order. The idea that Finland is a country of law and order.

What did trade unions do? There must have been some negotiations.

Yes, there were. But everybody wrought themselves out of it. And Rimec took almost all the money workers were paying as membership fee for trade unions. Hardly any remittance came to trade unions. It would appear on payslips but trade unions were not receiving this.

There was a Finnish guy who helped Poles. A good guy. So he was fired. There was also Taija, at trade union headquarters in Helsinki. She was also bullied. The lady wanted to quit the job.

Was she bullied at work?

Yes at work.

But it was a trade union. So they should be happy she tried to help.

Trade unions in Finland used to be very strong. But now it is money that starts to matter there too.

#1:

During the protests, did trade unions stand up for you?

What? Finnish trade unions, they betrayed us! We were sold out.

There was a compromise.

Of course! But trade unions didn't want to make a compromise. So half of them, those who were in trade unions, were eliminated. Went back to home country.

But there is hope anyway.

Yes. Like our former system collapsed this also has to see the light of day sometime.

#2

The most outrageous case was when the chairman of our trade union was fired, It was before the protests. It was a surprise for us that the trade union that said that they would help us, didn't do anything about this. And it's been a year already since he was fired. Without any explanation.

#5

Trade unions couldn't help either. I found it very strange. A strike was supposed to be organized. 10th September. But they agreed somewhere that it wouldn't happen. And when the security took a person the work was stopped. About 80 people came – crane operators, and they came to the main gate. And a reporter came there too I think. And people were asking why they had stopped. Because the trade union leader was fired unlawfully, against the law. Next a general strike was supposed to take place on 10 September. But afterwards it all fell apart. All people withdrew from the trade union. [...]