

SOUR STRAWBERRIES

Japan's hidden »guest workers«

A movie by Tilman König and Daniel Kremers

The documentary „Sour Strawberries - Japan's hidden »guest workers«“ was shot in March 2008 by a German-Japanese film crew in Tokyo. The movie shows migrants fighting for their rights as workers and citizens. The persons concerned are always at the centre of interest. While describing their situation, they are the protagonists of the movie.



„Sour Strawberries - Japan's hidden »guest workers«“
documentary, G/J 2008, 60 min, O/ST



Former Vice-Minister of Justice
Tarô Kôno (LDP)

The migrants' point of view is complemented and contrasted in numerous interviews with experts and representatives of political and business interests. The Film crew spoke with:

- Dr. Gabriele Vogt, expert on migration at the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)
- Tarô Kôno, former Vice-Minister of Justice and Lower House representative for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)
- Hiroshi Inoue, director of international affairs of the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren)
- Marutei Tsurunen, Upper House councilor for the oppositional Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the only Japanese national politician who has migrated to Japan



A poster of the coast guard portraits
„illegal“ immigrants as a threat



Japanese and non-Japanese union members
at a demonstration in Tokyo, March 2008



Upper House councilor
Marutei Tsurunen (DPJ)

In three chapters the movie presents different aspects of the life of migrants in Japan and sheds light on the fates of people of different nationality and class.



A Peruvian worker talks about her problems with her employer, a producer of vehicle parts.

In the first chapter a Peruvian and a Bolivian worker tell us about the working life of a so-called „nikkei-jin“. That is what Japanese call the offspring of former Emigrants. Since 1990 they are allowed to live and work in Japan without restriction. Yet they remain strangers and mostly find only short-term employment in low wage sectors, which are shunned by Japanese.



In a commuter train a Bolivian worker tells the story of how he lost his right hand in a work related accident



Security personnel is observing a demonstration in front of the head office of the chain store company 7Eleven

In the second part the film crew joins Debito Arudô on a walk through Shinjuku. During the last years here and elsewhere in Japan signs have appeared which prohibit foreigners the entrance of restaurants, swimming pools and other places of business. Arudô discusses the „Japanese Only!“-sign with a nightclub manager in front of his club.



Debito Arudô argues with a nightclub manager



Japanese ultra-nationalists at a rally in Tokyo, March 2008

Shortly afterwards the film crew encounters a group of Japanese ultra-nationalists holding an anti-Chinese rally. In a very remarkable manner the speaker links poisoned dumplings from China with a war crime committed by the Japanese army in World War Two.



Photos of the injuries Torii suffered from the gasoline attack in 1993

In the third chapter the Japanese union activist Torii Ippei is introduced. In his Zentōitsu Workers Union over 2000 non-Japanese workers are organized. The larger part of the foreign union members live and work in Japan without official permit. Due to its activities the union gets into conflict with both the police and the organized crime. In 1993 Torii almost lost his life in an arson attack. The employer of a worker from Bangladesh doused him with gasoline and ignited it with a lighter.



On the streets with activist and union leader Torii Ippei



Later Torii guides the film crew to a squatted motorcycle shop. There the union shelters three Chinese trainees who have fled from their workplaces. Since 1993 foreign nationals without special occupational practice or skills can take part in a three year training and two year internship program in Japan. What sounds like modern labor market policy, in practice often turns into exploitation and deceit by brokers and employers. This is possible, because such training programs are not protected by the Japanese labor laws. After three years of hard work these trainees often return to their home countries just like they had left them: penniless and untrained.

A young man from China recalls his experiences with the International Training Program



A Chinese trainee shows photos of his son whom he has not seen in three years

While talking to the three young men from the People's Republic of China, it turned out that their employer, a big farmer, had tried to „deport“ them, when they seemed no longer of use to him. Already at their arrival in Japan their documents and signing stamps had been confiscated. When finally they were not paid wages anymore, they asked the Zentōitsu Workers Union for help.

Zentôitsu members try to make the airport police stop the violent employer



Hiroshi Nakajima of the Zentôitsu tries to calm down the frightened trainees.

Only two days later they were being kidnapped by a private security agency and taken to the airport in Narita. There the baffled employer encountered three members of the Zentôitsu Workers Union, who have been alarmed by the abducted trainees' colleagues. In the tense situation a brawl breaks out, the airport police intervenes. The scene has been captured by a union member and has been provided to the film makers.

The Zentôitsu forces the employer to return the passports to the Chinese trainees



Sour Strawberries - Japan's hidden »guest workers« © Tilman König and Daniel Kremers 2008

Contact:
sour.strawberries.movie@gmail.com
www.strawberries/Untitled-2.html

By the use of a digital HD-Camera combined with a 35mm adapter and objectives very vivid and - for a documentary of this budget - extraordinary optics have been realized. The documentary provides pictures of high cinematic quality connected with camera angles and movements that put the viewer right into the scene. Intensive and authentic pictures, for example those of a demonstration of non-Japanese workers, far from common imaginations and cliches, give way for a different view on Japan's society and its treatment of strangers. The original footage of the union, which was shot with a Mini-DV camera, produces in its roughness and concreteness even more authenticity. Metropolitan Tokyo offers its visitor an immense soundscape. Thus, only very little music has been added to the movie: two pieces by the Japanese underground cellist Hiromichi Sakamoto.