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DOCUMENTARIES

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FOR THE MANY

THE VIENNA CHAMBER OF LABOUR

A film by
Constantin Wulff



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SYNOPSIS



In Austria, the Chambers of Labour (AK), as the official legal representative for employees, are the daily point of contact for people who are fighting for their rights within the workplace.

In direct cinema, the documentary *For The Many - The Vienna Chamber of Labour* shows this unique institution at a key moment - the preparations of their centenary and the early days of the pandemic. The various insights highlight the daily actions of the AK team and how Labour has changed over time due to digitalization and globalization. A portrait of an institution caught between a rich past and an uncertain future due to the mutations of our economy.

The AK, a unique institution

The Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer or AK), is an organisation that represents the interests of Austrian employees and consumers. Membership is compulsory for all employees working in Austria, and it is thus not to be confused with Austrian labour unions, where membership is voluntary or workers' councils.

The Chamber of Labour is based on the nine Chambers, one for each federal state in Austria. They were founded in 1920 after the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy.

They provide a wide range of services to their members such as informations about diversses issues (labour law, social insurance, tax law, women's and family policy, worker protection etc...), participate in the legislative process by drafting laws or amendments and accompany their implementation, conduct researches on the issues facing workers among other duties



Director's Interview



The themes of your previous documentary films, such as *Into the World* and *Like the Others*, have always been associated with public institutions. So what led you to the Chamber of Labour?

I wanted to portray another institution in Austria, and I had approached several already when my wife drew my attention to the Vienna Chamber of Labour. Her suggestion came at a time in 2018 when the government was a coalition of the ÖVP (the centre-right Austrian People's Party) and the FPÖ (the far-right Freedom Party of Austria). From a social and political perspective I found this period very depressing, especially because those extremely right-wing, populist policies were so dominant and the opposition parties didn't provide any really substantial alternative. In my view, during that period the only genuine opposition was provided by civil society and the unions, and by precisely the Chamber of Labour. So I wanted to take a closer look at this institution. It was also interesting for me in another sense, because it's very c

central to my concept of documentary film that I should discover things I don't know about.

One important focus of the film is on the Chamber of Labour's advisory function. This revolves around the individual, representing an extremely broad range in terms of origin and education. Did you find that surprising?

Every day a huge number of people approach the Chamber of Labour with the issues that concern them. You see very quickly that providing help to people in extreme need is a major part of the institution's activities. From the perspective of the Chamber of Labour and of the film, it's a constant stream. I really was often surprised by the wide variety of problems involved. It brought home to me the extent to which, in my everyday life, I operate in a very restricted environment. In the Vienna Chamber of Labour you realise how multi-faceted our society is these days.

The second focus is on the management of the institution. How does the Chamber of Labour itself function as an employer?

The Direct Cinema method of filmmaking has quite clear rules aimed at making what is depicted as comprehensible as possible. Before I start filming I make that clear to everybody involved. From my perspective, it's not only about capturing the immediate effect of what happens; it's also about using film observation to retain the complexity of situations, actions and figures. As a result, it remains open to the audience how individual scenes are interpreted. My aim is to enable the audience to draw their own conclusions and experience the situation themselves. About 700 people work in the Vienna Chamber of Labour. Purely in organisational terms, it's a major operation. I had the impression that the overriding aim is to be an exemplary employer as far as possible

A third focus comprises the external activities of the Chamber of Labour: press conferences, events, image campaigns. To what extent did your view align with that of the PR department?

From my point of view, the activities surrounding the 100 year anniversary of the Chamber of Labour represented a stroke of luck for the film. When an institution celebrates an anniversary like that, it has to explain itself and come up with a picture of itself. This process of projecting an image involves discussing several very fundamental aspects of the institution.

How much had been filmed by February/March 2020, when the pandemic struck? To what extent did this unexpected situation transform your plans by making some things impossible while at the same time opening up a new dimension?

We started filming in late autumn 2019, and we were in

the middle of filming when we were confronted with Covid. By the middle of March we had to press the pause button, and a lot of things had to be cancelled that couldn't be revived later. But since the gradual development of the pandemic was already part of the film, it was obvious that the film had to carry on following reality. After all, that's the core of Direct Cinema. Naturally the concept changed as a result: the plan to portray an institution with several weeks filming turned into a much longer process of observation. In hindsight, I'm still ambivalent about the whole thing, because everyday life in the Chamber of Labour was transformed at a stroke, and a lot of what I wanted to film simply wasn't happening any longer. On the other hand of course it was also fascinating to see how the institution behaved during the crisis, and how the Chamber of Labour reflected the changes in society due to the health crisis.

Has working on this film changed your perception of society?

Very definitely: yes. Alongside many other things, I found myself thinking for the first time about the fundamental meaning of workers' rights for society. I come from an environment, the so-called cultural sector, where a high degree of self-expectation was a common feature, in the guise of personal fulfilment and cultural participation. Then I could see how well the change of perspective prompted by the film worked in practice during filming: for example, when the crew began to reflect increasingly on their own working situation. In my view this is so effective because the Chamber of Labour is a place which is very close to the needs of working people and which encourages quite naturally a way of thinking and behaving that adopts the position of those people. ourselves and it had to have energy.

Interview conducted by Karin Schiefer, Austrian Films, December 2022

Full interview available [here](#)

Director's Biography

Born in 1962, Constantin Wulff is a director, writer and producer of documentary films.

In 1992, he co-founded production company Navigator Film.

He has organized and curated numerous documentary film series and teaches history of documentary film at the Vienna Film Academy.

Selected Filmography

2022 For The Many – The Vienna Chamber of Labour

2015 Like The Others

2008 Into The World



CREDITS

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY	Constantin Wulff
CAMERA	Johannes Hammel - Michael Schindegger
EDITING	Dieter Pichler
SOUND	Andreas Hamza - Claus Benischke-Lang
SOUND DESIGN	Andreas Hamza
RE-RECORDING MIXING	Thomas Pötz, Cosmix Studios
COLOUR GRADING	Matthias Tomasi, The Grand Post
DIRECTOR'S ASSISTANT	Catrin Freundlinger - Olga Kosanović
PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT	Veronika Hruby
LINE PRODUCER	Monika Lendl
PRODUCERS	Johannes Holzhausen, Johannes Rosenberger, Constantin Wulff
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