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After World War II, there was a burning desire for workers unity. This was reflected in the formation of the *Einheitsgewerkschaft* around the Deutsche Gewerkschafts Bund (DGB). This was to overcome the pre 1933 split between social democratic, christian, communist and liberal unions. However, two federations stayed outside the DGB. The *Deutscher Beamtenbund* DBB (representing civil servants) and *Deutsche Angestellengewerkschaft* (DAG) representing white collar workers. The DAG no longer exists. They joined the merger of five unions (public sector, banks, trade, post office, printers, media) into **ver.di** (*Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft*). DBB still exists and has strongholds in civil service, but in wage round there is wide cooperation between DGB unions and DBB. DGB has not got much power. There is no individual membership of DGB. DGB has eight member unions. The power to organise strikes etc rests with these eight unions: IG Metall, ver.di, BCE (Chemical, mining), GdP (police), GEW (teachers), NGG (Foodworkers), EVG (Railways), IG BAU (construction, agricultural sectors). Sum total of six million members under DGB now.

There has been a trend towards some splits and the formation of craft unions (doctors, airline staff, train drivers, firefighters etc.). This is an answer to mistakes of the DGB unions, but also an expression of self conceited craft consciousness. There has been a lot of noise around the issue and some highly effective strikes of these organisations. All in all, however, they represent a mixture of militancy, discontent and reactionary ideas. For instance, the train drivers' union GDL is in favour of liberalisation of the European railways, whereas the ETF unions are rightly opposed to it.

A German specialty is the „*Deutsches Mitbestimmungsmodell*“. After World War I and World War II, there was a revolutionary mood and there were struggles for the nationalisation of industry, above all coal and steel. Those struggles were aborted, but as a by-product we have some „*Mitbestimmung*“ via „*Betriebsräte*“ (works councils) and some form of co-management via workers representation on the supervisory boards of big shareholding companies (*Aufsichtsräte*). So there is an element of integration and buying off of union leaders and leading members of works councils. This system enables union leaders and leading Betriebsräte to make a managerial career. There are many examples of union officials who became top managers. In 2008 the leader of the railway union, Hansen, was appointed personell manager on the Deutsche Bahn board of directors.

Offensive strikes took place from the 1950s to the 1980s : sick pay, wage rises, 6 weeks holidays, 35 hr week in metal industry etc etc. In 1990, the DGB took over the East German FDGB, totalling 12 million members. But enormous de-industrialisation in the East has undermined unions. East Germany has become a testing ground for cheap labour. In the last ten years Germany has reached record dimensions of casualisation of labour (comparable to the USA level). In the 1990es there was also an ideological shift to the right in the unions and a certain depoliticisation. Another challenge for the unions has been the wave of privatisations since the 1990s. This has undermined union strength in traditional strongholds. In the past there was a unified wage round in the public sector. Now there is a bigger differentiation. In many cases, union leaders and Betriebsräte collaborated in the process of privatisation, arguing that this was the way to defend living standards and workers' interests. There was and is no unified resistance against privatisation. There is an increasing mood against privatisation and for re-nationalisation. But no coordinated campaign and still examples of collaboration of union officials in the process of privatisation.

The Merkel administration has not started yet an all-out attack on the unions or the Betriebsräte. No

legislation yet comparable to what is happening in Greece, Spain, Portugal. They rely on the collaboration of the labour movement and deals. „Wettbewerbskorporatismus“: Since the 1990s, most union leaders have swallowed the logic that „we have to be competitive“. There have been many examples of „Bündnis für Arbeit“ i.e. deals on a workplace level involving concessions on the part of the workers on wages or hours in return for „safe jobs“. A major justification of the union apparatus is the existence of the „Flächentarifverträge“- i.e. binding contracts on wages and working conditions for the entire industry. These contracts have systematically been undermined by means of local workplace agreements. There is the outstanding example of Mr. Opel: Klaus Franz, until his retirement in 2011 the president of the German and European Opel works council. An ex maoist and sympathiser of the Greens, late Klaus Franz stood for co management with the Opel bosses, made his own proposals for cuts in wages and staff, reducing labour costs, defending the core of the workforce in the German Rüsselsheim plant at the expense of the Antwerpen plant. Class collaboration and casualisation disguised as „modernisation“ tends to weaken the union movement.

There is an enormous gap between different sections of the working class and increasing casualisation. Old union bastions are shrinking in numbers. However it would be wrong to portray the union scenery grey in grey. Wherever workers see an opportunity to fight and get full support from the union, partially successful struggles are possible. New layers are entering the struggle. On Wednesday [6/3/2013] the workers at the local state theatre in Wiesbaden struck for a day. They are quite new to the unions, have established a branch of 80 members and won further 13 new members to the union this week. This shows that in the struggle, you can build a union. There is the example of the strike at the Neupack packages factory in the North. But we are far from the necessary generalisation of struggles. Every sector of industry or workforce in individual workplaces are left to themselves and often wage isolated struggles and lose. The DGB leaders are also trying to orient towards the election, praising the SPD und Greens for having an open ear for union demands. Yet it was the SPD and Greens who ushered in the worst counterreforms on the labour market from 1998 to 2005. Remember the „Help Heinrich“ campaign of the Belgian Christian unions against starvation wages in Germany.

Before the Bundestag elections due in September 2013 the ruling class and the Merkel administration will certainly be careful not to provoke big resistance. They have even made some concessions such as the abolition of the 10 Euro quarterly fee for going to a doctor. But big attacks will be on the order of the day after the election, whoever wins. This will force the union apparatuses to wage more struggles and forge united movements and help to change the psychology of the masses.

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