

Briefing on capital and labour in the FRG

Trade Unions: The Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) is the Federal German trade union federation. Its 15 affiliated unions are organised according to the principle "one industry-one union". The most important unions are the IG Metall (metal industry), IG Chemie (chemical industry), Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste, Transport und Verkehr (public service - except for post office workers, railway workers and police - and transport), Gewerkschaft Handel, Banken und Versicherungen (commerce, banking and insurance) and IG Medien (media workers). The DGB and its affiliated unions are non-partisan, though they are politically very close to the SPD. All union chairmen - with the exception of the police union - are members of the SPD.

Besides the DGB, there exist a Deutsche Angestellten Gewerkschaft (DAG) which only organizes white-collar employees and a Deutsche Beamtenbund which is an organisation of state employees.

Collective Bargaining: Wages and other basic parameters of employment like the standard working week, length of holidays are fixed through collective bargaining. Usually, the trade union and the respective employers association bargain on a regional level (mostly coinciding with the Länder. Collective bargaining on national level is extremely unusual. When certain conditions are fulfilled, the trade union can call for strike ballot. Lock-outs are permitted in retaliation to strikes. If a strike is deadlocked for a longer time, the unions and employers associations usually take advantage of the good offices of a mediator. In 1990, a tough struggle between IG Metall and the employers on the 35-hours-week lies ahead.

Trade Unions on a Company Level: In all larger companies the workers are represented by an elected Betriebsrat (workers council). The company has to have the assent of the Betriebsrat to cases of dismissals and working time regulations (esp. generalised overtime). In many other aspects, esp. the introduction of new technology, the position of the Betriebsrat is rather weak. Furthermore union representatives sit in the Aufsichtsrat (supervisory board) which supervises the work of the company's executive board and ratifies major investment decisions. The union representatives are, however, in minority position

on the supervisory board. This structure is Federal
German version of cogestion (Mitbestimmung).

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