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# Conjunctures of eco-social partnership unionism: The German Trade Union Confederation's climate policies over three decades

## Introduction

Labour unions in Germany have been an active voice in debates on climate policies over the past decades. However, their positions have changed over time, alternating between an ecological critique of capitalism and strategies of aligning climate action with economic growth. The climate crisis poses huge challenges for Germany's economy, and while for long unions' positions seemed in opposition to environmental movements' demands, recent years have seen a rapprochement. In 2019, the coal phaseout compromise marked an important milestone in Germany's attempts to contribute to mitigating climate change, reached with active participation of trade unions IG BCE, Ver.di and IG Metall<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the global geopolitical context has changed quite dramatically, placing questions of production, dependency on supply chains and energy security at the core of the political agenda for political parties and trade unions alike. This has both sparked considerations about re-nationalizing supply chains and a fundamental questioning of the exploitative basis of German welfare state capitalism (Urban 2024).

Attempts in the literature to classify trade unions' positions towards climate action have suggested distinguishing them along an axis of affirmative versus transformative (Steviss and Felli 2015; Kalt 2022) or, put more precisely, from 'collaborative growth' strategies emphasizing green jobs and technological innovation to socialist strategies aiming to challenge the capitalist relations of production more broadly (Felli 2014). This paper contributes to the debate on union climate policies by analysing where German trade unions have positioned themselves in this field over time, and to what degree this has been subject to change due to historical events, societal processes and political conjunctures. We find that there has been remarkably little such change over the past three decades: German trade unions have fairly consistently been promoting a vision of what we call *state-driven ecological modernisation*. By this, we refer to an approach that is broadly affirmative of the given socio-economic order of German welfare state capitalism

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<sup>1</sup> IG BCE mainly organises workers in the chemical and energy industries as well as mining. Ver.di is the largest service union, organising most of the public and service sectors. IG Metall organizes predominantly manufacturing, including the automotive and engineering industries.

and calls upon the state to enable technological innovation to mitigate and adapt to climate change, protect national economies from green dumping, and ensure that workers negatively affected by climate action are compensated. In voicing this position, unions see themselves as a mouthpiece of their members, and they perceive these demands as dictated by the interests they represent. To make this argument and show how this basic stance has been successively rearticulated in unions' official stances under the influence of current events, we examine motions to the biennial congresses of Germany's Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB). In the following, we review the literature on climate change and trade unions, before presenting our dataset and findings.

## Climate crisis and trade unions - literature review

The role of labour in climate change politics has long been neglected. Until the early 2010s, the siloing of the respective research communities – with environmental political scientists studying climate politics and policies and labour scholars considering ecological issues a sideshow outside their main focus on the conditions and forms of work (Räthzell and Uzzell, 2013). This has contributed to a political impasse in dealing with the climate challenge that has been dubbed the “jobs vs. environment dilemma” (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011). In the last decade this has changed. An emerging literature has turned to studying international trade unions' positions (Felli, 2014; Rosemberg, 2010, 2013; Stevis and Felli, 2015) and discourses on climate (Räthzell and Uzzell, 2011), as well as the relationship between climate action and labour at national level (Räthzel and Uzzell 2013), including Australia (see Burgman and Burgman, 1998; Burgman, 2013, Snell and Fairbrother, 2011), South Africa (Cock, 2011; Cock and Lambert, 2013), the US (Stevis, 2013; Sweeney, 2013), South Korea and Taiwan (Liu, 2013), South America (Veiga and Martin, 2013), Austria (Niedermoser, 2017), Spain (Gil and Gonzalez, 2013), Sweden (Henriksson, 2013) and the UK (Hampton, 2015 and 2018).

In an attempt to classify unions' ways of handling the dilemma, Räthzell and Uzzell (2011) identify four discourses: 'the technological fix', 'social transformation', 'mutual interests' and 'social movement'. The first discourse is centred around ecological modernization – and denies the dilemma: green growth through technological innovation protects both the environment and employment, as those jobs lost in old, 'dirty' industries will be made up for in new, 'clean' innovative sectors. The second factors in the loss of social identity that inevitably occurs in such situations, requiring a broader change in social norms and subjectivities as a necessary condition for overcoming the dilemma. 'Mutual interests' affirms workers in struggling for their particular interests rather than abstract moral values but aims to reinvent those interests and associated identities in ways conducive to eco-social justice. Lastly, the 'social movement' discourse frames workers' immediate interests

as being in line with general, societal interests, and positions unions as actors of a broader struggle for a just and inclusive society.

Moving from the discourse to the strategic level, Snell and Fairbrother (2011) present an analysis of the coping strategies of trade unions, which they name “market solution”, “technological political solution”, “a renewable future” and “industrial policy”. Brand and Niedermoser (2019) move from individual strategies to a more coherent overall framework wherein the positions and actions of unions can be analysed. Both technological- and market-based approaches, which have been treated as distinct strategies by Snell and Fairbrother, are combined under the label of ‘ecological modernization’, because they aim to solve environmental destruction *within* the present socio-economic system. Opposed to this is what they call “socio-ecological transformation”, which views not neoliberalism but capitalism as a whole as the root cause of climate change and other forms of environmental destruction (ibid., see also Cock, 2011).

Hampton (2018) adopted Hyman’s (2001) trichotomy of trade unionism as a framework to analyse the UKs TUC climate change politics. Though keeping with the general split between ecological modernisation and social transformation, he differentiated between weak and strong ecological modernisation; the former including technological fixes without the need for state involvement (neoliberal) and the latter highlighting the need for different actors to work together on environmental reform (ibid.). Opposed to the modernization argument, capitalism’s structure of social relations of production and the relationship between nature and society are incorporated in what Hampton (2018, p. 472) calls the “Marxist concept of climate change relation”.

Felli (2014), in line with the aforementioned authors, also makes a distinction between intra-systemic ecological modernization strategies and a socialist strategy that challenges capitalism. Yet within the former he distinguishes between an optimistic *deliberative strategy* and a more pessimistic *collaborative growth strategy*. The former, ascribed to international union confederations and actors like SustainLabour, adopts a cosmopolitan, human rights-oriented approach favouring an institutionalised global social dialogue that is to overcome the climate challenge in a non-conflictual manner through market-based, technological solutions in combination with a stronger welfare state. The *collaborative growth strategy*, typical to unions in traditional, ‘brown’ industries, counters this reformist optimism with the claim that a just transition will not be achieved in deliberation, but only through workers struggling for compensation and retraining and refusing to be ‘blackmailed’ (Felli, 2014, p. 385) with environmental regulations. Unions embracing this strategy highlight the need for competitiveness, to retain domestic jobs and avoid ‘carbon leakage’, as well as for economic growth, as a condition for the surpluses to distribute that from this perspective are essential for enforcing workers’ interests. This, too, is an intra-

capitalist ecological modernisation strategy, as it accepts as given “the broader context of capitalist accumulation within fragmented national territories” (Felli, 2014, p. 388).

The *socialist strategy*, contrary to the former two, holds that fighting climate change requires the transformation of social relations of production beyond capitalism and its growth imperative, rather than merely some form of “green capitalism”.

This distinction of optimistic and pessimistic views was also made more recently by Thomas and Doerflinger (2020), who differentiate between opposition, hedging and support, and Kalt (2022), who distinguishes between oppositional, reactive, affirmative and transformative.

We build on these frameworks as sources for a heuristic to help us characterise the positions the German Trade Union Federation has taken on climate policy over the past three decades. Firstly, we adopt the commonly made distinction between affirmative approaches aimed at techno-economic solutions within the given political-economic order and transformative strategies claiming that the climate challenge demands more fundamental, systemic changes.

Secondly, we also draw on the insight that unions’ climate discourses and strategies can be categorized according to the balance they aim to strike between market-based and technological solutions, political regulation and redistribution. Key here is the degree to which unions foreground the role of regulation and industrial policy in shaping the relation between state and market, as well as the role they accord to themselves and their constituencies in this process. Therefore, on the side of the affirmative approaches we consider it important to make a distinction between strategic orientations that focus on the market and those centred on state intervention.

Based on these considerations, we propose to distinguish three ideal typical strategies that unions may in principle adopt in dealing with climate policy: First, a market driven ecological modernization strategy aimed at including environmental concerns into a competitive, growth-oriented economic model with weak state regulation. In this strategy, which we suggest calling **green growth business unionism**, labour appears as just one factor of production, and a subordinate player that can co-manage to defend worker interest, but not fundamentally question the course of policy.

Second, state driven ecological modernisation approaches accord a stronger role to state intervention, as guarantor of both technological innovation and distributive justice. Labour is perceived as a potential driver as well as beneficiary of such modernisation, unions are also presented as agents for workers interests that need to responsibly use their co-management capacities. We term this model **eco-social partnership unionism**. Interestingly, state-driven ecological modernisation can aim at various degrees of climate action, from modernising coal plants to abolishing them.

Thirdly, a socio-ecological transformative model, which we propose to term **climate movement unionism**, the given relations of production are questioned explicitly, and capitalism challenged for both its socially exploitative and ecologically destructive dynamics, advocating for a redistribution of property rights and a democratization of production and investment decisions. In these visions, labour appears as an active agent of change that is antagonistic to the power and interests of capital and operates in close alliances with other eco-social movement actors.

Whilst previous studies offer highly instructive insights into trade unions' solutions, strategies and discourses on different levels and in varying geographical locations, they rarely investigate underlying reasons for the adoption of these different approaches (but see Snell and Fairbrother, 2011). Put differently, they have little to offer as to *why* a certain approach is adopted. Nevertheless, and rather obviously, it seems helpful to employ a perspective akin to the 'varieties of unionism' (Frege and Kelly, 2004) framework, explaining different union strategies in dealing with the climate issue from the political traditions, economic structures and resulting union power resources that characterize different national contexts. In this vein, attempts have been made to explore the role of employment relations systems for unions response to greening the economy more broadly have been made, looking at how industrial relations systems shape union voice within regional 'green economy' policy making (Stroud et al 2018) or union collective bargaining strategies on environmental issues (Tomassetti 2020).

For Germany, such a perspective offers certain assumptions to build on. Germany presents the textbook example of a Coordinated Market Economy (Hall and Soskice, 2001), with industrial unions being a key systemic pillar (Schmidt and Müller 2024) traditionally endowed with significant institutional power resources within corporatist arrangements. This has afforded them a historically significant role in shaping social and economic policies (Dörre and Schmalz 2013). German industrial relations have long been effective in ordering labour markets and distributing the benefits of growth, and this "German model of conflictual partnership" has exhibited a remarkable capacity to change and adapt to new developments (Müller-Jentsch 2018: 634). Key elements to this are autonomous collective bargaining and co-determination both in the workplace through works councils and at company level through representation on supervisory boards. Key political decisions concerning economic affairs have often been made in tripartite corporatist structures consisting of unions, employer associations and the state (Weßels 2002), particularly when navigating economic crises (Urban 2013). Successful crisis management included wage restraint from unions and short-time working schemes. Meanwhile, co-determination has been seen as an 'innovation driver' (Kriegesmann and Kley 2012) pushing a forward perspective and anticipation of future challenges on management.

The *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB), Germany's main trade union confederation and umbrella organization for IG Metall, ver.di, IG BCE and five other unions organized along sectoral lines, lays claim to representing workers throughout the economy. Its member unions have negotiated the vast majority of collective bargaining agreements (Jäger et al. 2022), which cover around 44 per cent of all workers in Germany (Ellguth & Kohaut 2021). Although wage bargaining and co-determination clearly represent their core business, DGB unions traditionally claim a broader role as civil society organizations. Specifically, the DGB's basic programme from 1997 states that unions, beyond representing workers' interests, have ecological responsibilities (DGB 1997).

We thus assume German trade unions are embedded in an institutional environment that both affords them significant institutionalised power resources and, at the same time, constrains them in their actions through the strategic imperatives of preserving that power (Newell, 2000; Dörre and Schmalz, 2013). This is important to consider when assessing their stances on climate and ecology: For example, on the one hand unions pushed for the integration of environmental protection into the Works Constitution Act ("Betriebsverfassungsgesetz") in 2001, making environmental protection an official task of elected workers representatives. On the other hand, over the past half-century economic crises and downturns have repeatedly compromised unions' focus on ecological topics (Urban et al., 2018: 18).

We further assume an influence of unions' sectoral foci and the respective emissions intensities (Clarke and Lipsig-Mumme 2020; Thomas and Doerflinger 2020), with workers particularly in key industrial sectors like automotive, chemicals and energy supply having a particular vested interest in using that institutionalized power to shield them and their jobs from negative impacts induced by climate policies. Dörre (2014) has argued that during the financial crisis, unions, particularly in these sectors, have aligned their interests with those of the industries, operating in a "crisis corporatist" mode to pursue, as Hugo Radice (2000) frames it, a policy of "progressive nationalism". There are indications that, particularly under the currently materialising conditions of multiple intersecting crises, there will be strong structural pressures and political incentives for industrial unions to follow this path (Cremer 2024; Weishaupt 2021; Bohnenberger et al. 2021).

In line with this, recent research has emphasized that unions perceive climate change mostly as a problem of energy efficiency in a technologically optimistic manner ("technikoptimistisch") (Flemming 2023), albeit with some heterogeneity and differences between unions (Keil and Kreinin 2022). In particular, public and transport sector unions have partly tended toward more transformative demands and strategies, joining forces with climate groups in campaigning for greater public investments in climate-friendly infrastructure (Lucht and Liebig, 2023). Kalt (2022) has recently suggested a framework

for interpreting these different outcomes of unions' "strategic choice" as guided by their respective power resources and their attempts to seize on as well as protect those. However, accounts of how this diversity of strategies among unions translates into positions adopted by the confederation DGB, of how these compromise positions may have changed, over time are so far lacking.

## Methods

The data basis for this paper are trade union delegate conference motions and protocols at congress from 1990 to 2022 for the DGB. Motions represent long-term visions and political goals developed and discussed by people active in union politics. We analysed all motions from 8 congresses and coded 97 motions. We used Mayring (2010) to analyse this body of data, reducing the material by focusing on mentions of climate change, climate crisis, industrial policy, structural policy, crisis, and social inequality. We did not just look at motions that explicitly had climate or environment in the title but searched for key terms across all motions debated.

We read the relevant sections of motions in detail, across the team independently categorizing the positions adopted in them according to the three types developed above, discussing any disagreements and reconciling our readings of these. In some instances, we also considered DGB press releases and policy documents from the same periods, to add further context and see how the political will expressed at congress translated to the policy level. We analysed the data chronologically, comparing the positions adopted within each timespan with the conceptual scheme we have developed in the theory section – market driven, state driven, or socio-ecologically transformative. For some years, we had access only to position papers, for others we had access to both motions and position papers. Where possible, we try to compare the two to understand whether and how the political will expressed at congress translated to the policy level.

## Findings: The DGB and the climate issue – rhetorical adjustments, strategic continuity

We classified the motions over time with motions available for congress since 1994 distinguishing five phases 1994-2002, 2004-2013, 2014, 2018 and 2022.



## The 1990s: The status quo and transformative ideas

In West Germany, the 1980s had been a phase of high unemployment but also of intense social movement activity, and unions had to quite some degree opened up to cooperation and alliances within larger movement networks, including with environmental movements (see e.g. IG Metall 1988). With the end of socialism in Eastern Europe and the triumph of neoliberalism, as well as in the face of the enormous challenges of transformation unions were facing in East Germany, that rapprochement gave way in the 1990s to more 'sober' union policies focused on what was perceived as the 'core business' of promoting worker interests. Motions from the era thus convey both an echo of earlier aspirations and socialist traditions and an attempt to come to strategic terms with new realities.

This was evident in the environmental policy positions debated at the 1994 federal congress. Motion 50, an ambitious attempt to sketch out a comprehensive "socio-ecological reform strategy" that was brought forward by the industrial unions from the metal and chemical sectors together with the postal workers' union, for the first time adopted the concepts and language of the international discourse on sustainable development into German unions' policies. Temporarily sidelining the previously predominant notion of "qualitative growth" as a political goal in favour of "sustainable growth", it represents a remarkable compromise between the industrial unions' insistence on protecting competitiveness and the more transformative demands that had in the previous years gained a foothold on the unions' left flank in the wake of a strong environmental movement and the debates around the Brundtland report.

In its more general framing, it articulated a rather fundamental critique of an "economic mode of operation" described as damaging to both people and the environment "in being characterised by the separation between economy and ecology and the contradiction between microeconomic savings and macroeconomic waste" (DGB 1994, p. 152). Reflecting the heterogeneity of the unions that had introduced it, many of the concrete political demands were in line with a state-led ecological modernization strategy, while others bore a more transformative character, such as the call for a "democratisation of the world of work" (ibid. p. 343) and of firms' decisions on "production and products" (ibid. p. 344) in particular, the demands for replacing national income accounting by a new system of "environmental economic accounting" (ibid. p. 338) and for a "socio-ecological restructuring of the world economy" (ibid. p. 346) and establishment of a "UN Environmental Security Council" (ibid. p. 345), as well as the recognition that all this would demand both changes in individual lifestyles and a broader "cultural renewal" leading to the establishment of "societal structures enabling collectively shared responsibility" (ibid. p. 346).

The topic of climate was mentioned once in calling on the federal government to push for global and European climate accords, setting mandatory emissions reduction quotas (ibid. p. 341). The main field to achieve this was seen in the energy sector, in "drastic measures for saving energy", increases in efficiency and expansion of renewables. Overall, however, a political logic that aimed to achieve environmental sustainability aims through political reforms and through the action of unions in concert with government and employers remained dominant. It was also clearly reaffirmed that all this was to lead to a "new growth model", that leadership in environmental technology was eventually to boost macroeconomic sales (ibid. p. 336-7) and that "the social and ecological reorientation called for here is beneficial to the current competitiveness concerns of firms as well as to their sales interests in future markets" (ibid. 335).

The motion could thus be seen as a successful attempt to overcome disagreements among German unions under the banner of "sustainable development" and eco-social partnership after a phase in which some of them had been drifting closer to environmental movement positions. Motion 51, sponsored by the public services and transport union, addressed a similar set of topics, but did so in a much more sombre tone and with a consistent framing as an ecological modernization strategy. It also espoused the concept of sustainable development yet put this in highly pragmatic terms, opening with a call for state regulation, stressing the importance of competitiveness (ibid. p. 159) and arguing for cooperation, coordination and participation (ibid. p. 160-1).

The spirit of both these motions could be said to pervade the new basic programme that the DGB passed at an extraordinary congress held in 1996. The document positioned trade unions as a "societal organisation with a comprehensive mandate" (DGB, 1996, p. 2), which was claimed to reach well beyond the representation of worker interests, extending to broader aspects of socio-economic life. It claimed to bring about a future characterised by a mutually beneficial interplay of social justice, prosperity and ecological sustainability. At the same time, this was framed as something that has to be achieved against powerful forces, underlined by recurring motives of exploitation and the "unleashing of destructive powers" through free-market radicalism. This partly Marxist terminology gave a rather system-challenging ring to the DGB's demand for a *social-ecological restructuring* (ibid. p. 15) of the German economy, which, it was claimed, could not be left to the market but had to be orchestrated by the state, which was called on to take an active role, spurring the restructuring towards sustainable development through investments for "qualitative growth" (ibid. p. 14).

To achieve this, the DGB advocated a comprehensive societal reform programme, addressing agricultural and industrial production, product design, consumption, regionalization of markets, the introduction of European-level environmental standards,

measures to reduce energy consumption while pushing the expansion of renewables, a phaseout of nuclear energy, revised transport policies to meet environmental goals, tax reforms, consideration of climate-induced migration in immigration policy, and a fair distribution of the costs associated with all these reforms. As early as 1996, this programme in many respects, came close to concepts of social-ecological transformation that were politically debated much later (WBGU 2011), even including notions such as that of an "extensive circular economy" (DGB 1996, p. 16) based on resource-efficient production and product design for material lightness, longevity, ease of repair and recyclability. To protect jobs throughout these extensive changes, the DGB called on the state to intervene and support energy-intensive industries facing losses in competitive advantage due to taxes on raw materials and energy (ibid. p. 17).

Still, the guiding line of thought behind all this was not a critique of capitalism as such, but an interpretation of problematic trends as outcomes of the 'excesses' of free-market capitalism or neoliberalism. In line with a state-driven ecological modernisation agenda, the emphasis of governance should shift from the market to the state as a condition for the transition towards a green economy characterised by 'green' or "qualitative growth". By calling neither growth as a paradigm nor the basic capitalist relations of production and property into question, the programme thus nevertheless clearly set itself apart from a socio-ecologically transformative approach. Instead, the state-driven modernisation approach clearly limits the ecological aspirations by aiming to protect jobs in high-impact industries from the effects of undue burdens imposed by 'unilateral' climate regulation (ibid. p. 17).

In sum, despite some socialist rhetoric, the DGB's 1996 Basic Programme, although ahead of its time in some respects, would in its entirety be misconceived as endorsing a socialist or transformational strategy. Rather, its advocacy for green growth enabled by technological innovation and state intervention and the emphasis on neoliberalism as the problem mark it as an example of eco-social partnership unionism.

The same holds true for the motions at the 1998 congress. While anti-globalisation movements were strong at the time, this found its way into some motions with a somewhat more radical or transformative undertone in some of the motions.

Next to a pervasive harsh critique of neoliberal globalisation and marketization, this manifested in a statement in the opening paragraphs of a programmatic motion that implicitly questioned the affirmation of economic growth: "Despite all advances in environmental protection through new technologies, energy savings policies, new production methods and environmental services, the threats to the survival of humanity and nature on this planet remain. In fact, in case of unbridled growth they would destroy the natural foundations of survival" (DGB 1998, Motion 1, p. 8). In a similar vein, motion

58 on the redistribution of work in society advocated a “radical reorientation in economic and employment policy” (DGB 1998, p. 118) with successive reductions of working time as its centrepiece. Apart from tackling unemployment, this was to further gender equality, free up time for self-determined socio-political activity and contribute to “developing alternatives to the currently predominant model of wealth. The concrete form of consumptive wealth that has emerged in industrial nations could neither be generalised nor continued due to its ecological impact and the squandering of natural resources” (DGB 1998, p. 120).

Climate found a single mention in motion 27, which stated the DGB youth’s policy priorities. In a document generally marked by a harsh critique of the then-ruling conservative-liberal government’s “neoliberal economic ideology”, it was stated that Germany’s per capita emissions were far too high and that “despite this insight, environmental policy is step by step being sacrificed to economic interests and a questionable logic of the industrial location” (DGB 1998, p. 58). This, however, was not formally passed by Congress, but merely assigned to the board as “material”.

However, in motion 26, which stated the DGB’s core policy priorities, environmental policy was mostly considered as a competitiveness factor (DGB 1998, p. 52) and a field of possible investments that could generate new jobs (ibid. 53). Similar points were made in two motions (DGB 1998, p. 43&44) on socio-ecological tax reform, which were centrally concerned with preventing possible negative impacts of eco-taxes on workers and firms, particularly in energy-intensive sectors.

## The early 2000s to 2013: Industrial competitiveness and ecological restructuring

Over the years, the DGB’s agreed positions on climate change action have increasingly tended toward sidelining more general concerns with the ecological and social unsustainability of the modes of production and living characteristic of industrial capitalist societies, in favour of a narrower focus on ‘energy transition’. In the early years of this century, this focus on energy policy stays the dominant concern.

At DGB’s 17<sup>th</sup> federal congress in 2002 energy policy is considered the main pillar of “socio-ecological reform of the economy”: (DGB 2002, p. 77). At DGB’s 18<sup>th</sup> federal congress in 2006, climate change found no explicit mention in delegates’ motions, but the emphasis of relevant positionings was again on energy policy. Two motions were passed that rejected a phase-out of coal mining (DGB, 2006, E005 and E006). They called for “maintaining hard coal mining indefinitely” (E005, p. 10), and even the use of lignite as an energy source

through new, “environmentally friendly” power plants (E005, p. 10). Carbon capture and storage was advocated as a long-term solution for achieving carbon neutrality (DGB, 2006, E005).

Again, at the 18<sup>th</sup> federal congress in 2006, economic growth was seen as a necessary condition for reviving the domestic market and increasing employment (DGB, 2006, D001, E002, O001). Although the term “qualitative growth” was used once again to set DGB positions apart from narrowly quantitative understandings of the term as favoured by the employers’ side, it was stressed that forgoing consumption could not be an option to achieve that aim (DGB, 2006, D003). Instead, “effective environmental consumption policy [would] promote acceptance of industry in society” (DGB 2006, E002, p.6). This focus on industry, the need for the state to foster growth and competitiveness, was at the heart of the DGB’s motions. Most claims and policy suggestions in the motion promote a state-driven ecological modernisation. Environmental taxation and market-based instruments like the European Emissions Trading System (ETS) were welcomed – on the condition of not interfering with German industrial competitiveness (DGB, 2006, C001, p. 4).

At the 19<sup>th</sup> federal congress in 2010, although qualitative growth from an expanding industrial sector, achieved through technological improvements, persisted as a central theme (A001, A007, A009, A013), the general framing of the ecological issue changed. In the face of a global financial crisis that had brought capitalism to the brink, the DGB did not become more fundamentally critical of that economic system itself, but reacted by adopting a positive notion of a “modern capitalism” that, through strong regulation and powerful unions, would be insured against the excesses of the “neoliberal capitalist model” that was to be blamed for the current “big system crisis” (DGB, 2010, A001, p. 1). “Modern capitalism” was also characterised by an “ecological modernisation” (DGB, 2010, A001, p. 6) strategy, including a focus on innovation and efficiency in the industrial sectors, expansion of renewable energy, phase-out of nuclear power, promotion of public transportation, low-energy refurbishment of buildings, and taxation to internalize social and ecological costs into product prices.

Notable shifts in relation to the previous congress were evident in energy policy. A transparent and efficient phaseout of fossil fuels was now generally adopted as a goal – but envisioned for the longer term: along with gas as a “bridge technology” (DGB, 2010, A009, p. 1), coal was expected to still serve up to 50% of energy demand until 2050 (A012, p.2). Also, the caveat that energy-intensive industries should be exempted from policy-imposed burdens to protect competitiveness was reaffirmed (DGB, 2010, M001). Another point raised was international coordination, which was to be furthered through a motion with a proposal for a political framework for sustainable development at the G-20

level (DGB, 2010, N001). Lastly, to mobilise energies that could turn ecological restructuring into an engine of growth, the DGB called for the establishment of an “Alliance for Climate, Environment and Work”, which included unions, employer associations, environment and consumer associations, as well as the church and other groups.

~~So, on a rhetorical level, we do find elements of a socio-ecologically transformative strategy that questions core principles of capitalism including the growth imperative., but this did not translate into any policy proposal. At the policy level, the DGB continues to pursue a state-led ecological modernisation route crucially reliant on technological innovation.~~

## 2014: Siloing climate as an energy and transport issue, keeping transformation debates at bay

The positions adopted at the 20<sup>th</sup> national congress in 2014 echoed broader societal and political debates around a socio-ecological transformation that had recently been introduced into policy discourse by the government’s Advisory Council on Global Change in its landmark expertise “World in Transition: A Social Contract for Sustainability” (WBGU 2011). The DGB affirmed the Council’s rhetoric about the necessity of a far-reaching remoulding of society and economy in a scientifically informed and democratically supported, yet government-led effort (for a critique, see Brand, 2016). Emphasis during congress was put on tax policy, of transitions in energy and transport, of future trade deals as well as of Germany’s role as a G-8 and G-20 member, respectively. It thus called for fair income and wealth taxation (DGB 2014, E001), investment “in education, infrastructure, ecological modernisation and social development” (DGB 2014, G001), regionalization of infrastructures and economic activity (DGB 2014, E018) and building refurbishment (DGB 2014, E017), as well as for energy efficiency measures and expansion of wind and solar, to reach the target of 100 per cent renewable energy by 2050 (DGB 2014, P001).

It is striking that there was not a single mention of climate change or climate policy and only a single reference in passing to “ecological reason” (in the very last section) in the main motion stating DGB’s central work-related policy priorities (DGB 2014, A001). It appeared as a central concern only in the federal board’s two programmatic motions on the energy transition (DGB 2014, P001) and the “ecological transport transition” (DGB 2014, Q001), i.e. siloed away into specific, largely technical policy fields rather than perceived as a crucial cross-cutting issue. Following the DGB’s tradition of closely associating climate and energy policies, P001 put climate change and the need to meet climate targets front and centre, calling on the government to meet its global responsibility and act as a climate forerunner – and in the same breath insisting that unilateral climate

action at the national and European level must not "further distort competition" and threaten jobs. This, however, would require massive investment and bold efforts at conception and planning that only the state could deliver, and a broad range of technology-related measures as well as market design and emissions trading, accompanied by policies for a socially fair distribution of costs and targeted measures to protect workers and allow them to adapt to changing conditions and requirements. This was the first time that demands moved past the emphasis on avoiding job loss to deal with concrete impacts on workers and how they can be supported in these transition processes.

The motions can be interpreted as presenting a rather coherent programme of state-led ecological modernization, but its ecological aspect at this time remained largely restricted to energy and transport and stayed a rather marginal concern with a view to the whole set of motions at the congress. This is true even in places where one might in retrospect expect something different: for instance, for the lead motion on "structural change" (DGB 2014, O001), in which environmental issues figure far subordinate to technological development, globalisation and digitalisation. The word "climate" appears a mere two times in that motion – not as a driver of structural change, but a policy field secondarily affected by active strategies in this field. In all, of the 78 political (rather than purely organizational) motions passed, five mentioned "climate" once in passing, two made repeated mentions of it, and only two (DGB 2014, P001 and Q001) engaged in any substantial treatment of climate-related questions. If and when it did come up, it was always accompanied by the insistence that stricter climate regulation must not come at the expense of German energy-intensive industries.

This phase was thus again heavily characterised by a state-driven ecological modernisation, but more emphasis was put on the role labour and unions have to play, in underlining that "unions need to take an active role as consultants for politics and the economy" (DGB 2014, O001). While tendencies toward a stronger role to the market were present as an undercurrent in the strong general support for emissions pricing, and a few more fundamentally critical points and transformative demands were raised from the unions' youth wing (DGB 2014, Z001) and one of the regions (DGB 2014, B003, G003) (but found no majorities), these remained marginal.

## 2018: the turn towards "Just Transition"

By the time of the DGB's 21<sup>st</sup> congress in 2018, the notion of "transformation" had entered mainstream union discourse. In the Federal Board's lead motion A001, climate change had now advanced to the status of an overarching, general policy concern for unions, as one of the "great disruptive changes of our time", along with "globalisation and European

integration, [...] digitalisation, migration, societal value shifts and demographic change" (DGB 2018, A001, p. 1).

Taken together, these processes were now presented as the drivers of a "transformation" that was not (like "conversion" four years earlier) conceived as an actively pursued project, but as a wave of changes already in full swing that unions, like other societal actors, could only take on as a challenge for them to try and shape through policies of "progressive modernisation". Again, the three-pillar model of sustainability was drawn on as a normative framework to guide those policies, with unions assuming responsibility "to openly name conflicts among sustainability goals and foster convergence on constructive solutions" (DGB 2018, A001, p. 7), with "legal regulation, collective bargaining and firm-level agreements" as key avenues to achieving this. Unions were seen as societal actors who "co-create and shape big transformations such as (...) climate change by aligning themselves to the aims of sustainability" (ibid., p.8).

Yet, within that eco-social partnership paradigm, the DGB moved on from restating that detrimental impacts of climate policy on workers must be avoided to engaging more seriously with how this was to be achieved. The concept of "just transition" was now promoted as a strategic approach to ensuring "that the change will be shaped in a socially just manner from the perspective of working people" (DGB 2018, C011, p. 1). Principles for a just transition were set out in the lead motion on economic policies (ibid.), and the concept figured as the guiding principle of a programmatic motion on the DGB's climate, energy and mobility policies (ibid.). In that motion, the DGB committed itself to the Paris climate goals as well as to the Federal Government's for climate neutrality until 2050 and laid out demands for a just transition towards that goal. To be just, transitions would have to rely on collective agreements and co-determination, active and regionally focused structural policies, qualification and relocation programmes to help workers cope with and adapt to change, as well as measures to ensure fair distribution of costs and a secure and affordable energy and mobility supply (ibid. p. 1-2). To achieve all this, massive investment and a strong role of the state in close partnership with firms and unions were deemed essential. The government was called on to build on closely knit cooperative networks and fora such as a "transformation council" for developing specific policies. Several concrete suggestions were made for the fields of energy and mobility.

In effect, whilst the language around transformation and "just transition" was new (DGB, 2018, C001, C011), and these topics had moved much higher on the agenda and were spelled out more coherently, the nature of the actual proposals had changed little. The core strategic perspective was still one of state-driven ecological modernisation, with a focus on partnership and cooperation for ensuring the competitiveness of an expanding industrial sector and a socially-acceptable transformation supported and driven by massive



public investment. ~~At the European level, the DGB proposed to re-direct EU and member states' industrial policy to be employment-oriented and "a level playing field, that substitutes environmental, wage and social dumping for a competition in quality" (DGB 2018, p. 2).~~

Interesting to note is that in 2018, there passed a motion (DGB 2018, C011) that foresaw the provision of coal-fired power stations for the time being: "As long as there are not enough alternatives available, flexible and efficient conventional power plants based on gas and coal must be maintained to ensure a secure electricity supply" (DGB 2018, C011, p.8). The affirmation of the government's decarbonization goals had been a bone of contention between industrial and service unions (Kreutzfeld 2018), and in the runup to the congress there were no attempts to call for a more imminent phaseout.

Nonetheless, the political decision on that phaseout came just a few months later, and the process leading up to it was very much in line with the DGB's strategic preferences: It was a corporatist commission instituted by the government in 2018 and with unions, industry, environmental NGOs and affected populations on board, that in early 2019 presented a plan to fully phase out coal until the end of 2038. These recommendations, with the end date representing a hard-won compromise that especially the energy union IG BCE had been pushing hard to move further into the future, were enshrined in law in 2020. The deal included providing 40 billion euros for compensation and structural change in the affected regions, to fund creation of new jobs, social supports for workers, early retirement packages, and compensations for the mining and energy generation companies. The law was later amended due to the energy crisis caused by Russia's attack on Ukraine, extending operation of some coal plants in the short term in exchange for raised ambitions as to the final phaseout date, for which 2030 is now being aspired to.

## 2022: "Transformation is a social question, not just an ecological one"

At the DGB's most recent federal congress in 2022, climate crisis had moved into the centre of attention, and was a central theme, stating that ecological transformation "is going to change the entire economic and employment world fundamentally" (DGB 2022, A001). Trade unions' role in mitigating climate change was seen as helping Germany's economy and society to decarbonise in a socially just way. Motion A001 was adamant that technological innovation and economic growth were key to any successful management of transformation: "wealth and qualitative growth" were declared a condition for a "good and self-determined life for all" (ibid. p. 21), and to resolve any possible ambiguity, it was added that "debates on post-growth and deindustrialization won't help with this" (ibid. p. 23). Among the transformative challenges further elaborated on, climate was a central,

but not the sole key aspect. In fact, here as in a whole number of other motions, climate and digitalization were referred to in tandem, in a notion of a double, "socio-ecological and digital transformation" (ibid. p. 22). In this context, the DGB conveyed very clearly its self-conception as an actor that has always been used to cooperatively managing structural change in negotiated and socially cushioned ways to ensure rising wealth for all:

*"The history of the Federal Republic is marked by permanent structural change in regions and sectors as well as by macroeconomic disruptions and crises that have shaped our work as unions. All these processes of change had to be shaped through social partnership and supported by the welfare state to make the locations and industries affected fit for the future, avoid layoffs, maintain jobs or open up new employment opportunities"* (ibid. p. 22)

Out of this habitualised vision, both digitalization and climate change appear simply as further external sources of "disruptions and crises" that need to be addressed following the strategic recipe that had always proven the most successful.

Still, the overall salience had increased greatly: Out of the 37 political motions passed, eight different motions substantially engaged with climate policy, including the lead motion A001, the lead topical motions for economic policies (DGB 2022, C001) and European policies (DGB 2022, D001) and an in-depth topical motion on issues of social-ecological transformation (DGB 2022, C008). Another four motions made repeated mentions of climate, and three mentioned it in passing. Out of these 15 motions, nine routinely made this connection between climate and digitalisation as two closely interrelated transformations. At the same time, the notion of "just transition", central as it had been four years earlier, had all but disappeared from the policy language, except for mentions of the EU's Just Transition Fund (DGB 2022, C009, p. 205) and the Just Transition Centre (DGB 2022 , D004, p. 232).

C001, the lead motion on the DGB's economic policies, and C008, which spelled out the socio-ecological aspects, together painted a comprehensive picture of how the DGB envisioned the management of "transformation". This vision built on active structural policies for regions and sectors, substantially expanded public investment in infrastructure and technological innovation, as well as participation and co-determination. One of the most radical demands was that for a "democratisation of the economy" through expanded rights in economic matters for works and staff councils as well as greater participation on supervisory boards (DGB 2022, p. 160). Training and compensation to help workers cope with change as well as regional "transformation fora" were named as strategic instruments, but without invoking the label "just transition". Re-regionalisation of value chains and ecological import standards were further recurring elements, new aspects were the mention of carbon contracts for difference as a way to incentivize private investment in

new technologies (ibid. p. 164), improving the EU's taxonomy for a sustainable finance sector (ibid. 165) and (under certain conditions) CO<sub>2</sub> pricing (ibid. 190). While the latter three might be seen as a slight shift toward market-based strategies, the political demands for public spending, an end to Germany's 'debt brake' and redistributive tax reform made very clear that in the DGB's vision, the state was to stay in the driver's seat. That vision of managing "transformation" through socially cushioned ecological modernization strategies was also consistent with earlier approaches in its emphasis on competitiveness, calling for "an industrial strategy that sets a frame for the development and modernization of industry.

D001, the lead motion on European policies stated that "The transformation must be understood as a social question, not just an ecological one", requiring an active industrial strategy, worker participation, common social protection standards and programmes for requalification and compensation (ibid. 208).

This position is mirrored in the DGB's more recent policy statements. As a role model, the confederation has lauded the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which links public subsidies/tax credits to unionisation, employment and domestic production. Key demands include massive public investments and creation of conditions allowing it, conditionality of subsidies on working conditions and employment guarantees, a push for renewables expansion by easing and speeding up planning and implementation, better working conditions and training in trades and local administration to ensure qualified labour supply, diversification and re-regionalization of value chains and subsidized energy prices for industry to protect competitiveness (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, 2023d).

These key demands build the foundation of the DGB's climate change policy position. They are repeatedly stated in DGB commentaries on recent governmental draft bills (e.g. DGB, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024a, DGB et al., 2024). Their overall thrust is to manage the transformation in a socially just and cooperative way, reconciling climate policy, employment and good work to increase public acceptance. The post-2022 congress era thus still marks no departure from the state-driven ecological modernization strategy.

## Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the German Trade Union Federation's policy towards climate change over time has revealed a strong continuity. Overall, we have shown that the DGB has consistently followed a *state-driven ecological modernisation strategy* during the past three decades, at least in its officially adopted and declared motions. The DGB views climate action as requiring combined efforts of the state, business and workers. Strong emphasis is put on technological innovation and state funding to enable the innovation needed at a massive scale. The foremost concern is energy transition, including the phase-

out of coal, the impact on workers and regions and the introduction of renewables. The DGB's main aim is to protect workers from any negative impact of decarbonisation and related economic restructuring. This requires a state that is "capable of acting, that actively shapes the transformation, invests strategically and finances it fairly" (DGB, 2022, C008). This position, which we call *state-driven ecological modernisation*, has been consistent since the 1990s.

The DGB's angle on climate action has mostly been one that views the challenge as primarily technological, evident in motion proposals centred on the expansion of renewable energy sources, efficiency measures in buildings or the modernisation of fossil power plants for efficiency. Although it generally supported more stringent environmental regulation, highlighting the potential for green growth and the compatibility of environmental and economic concerns, the DGB's consistent calls for ensuring competitiveness and exempting domestic energy-intensive industries from the ETS clearly echo core notions of a collaborative growth strategy. Most of the claims are directed at the state, be it the German government or the European Union. As Schulze Waltrup (2023) observe and Felli (2014) for international trade unions, the DGB follows a "green Keynesianism" approach, placing strong emphasis on state-funded and regulated technological modernisation, aiming at "qualitative growth" and redistribution of the benefits. This paradigm has been dominant over time.

Very few motions to congress ever engaged in fundamentally critical ways with the prevailing social relations of production or suggest challenging capitalism as a system and/or its compulsion for growth. In the 1996 programme, this consolidating strategy came mixed with some Marxist/socialist language, and the confederation confidently defined labour unions as societal institutions with a socio-political mandate, thereby still hinting at some elements of a socialist strategy. Although the rhetoric of motions suggested time and again that environmental considerations must not be subordinate to economic concerns, concrete policy propositions, especially when competitiveness seemed threatened, often contradicted this. This corresponded in the 1990s to more open political-strategic differences between member unions and competing positions in motions, sometimes resulting in contradictions between rhetoric and the direction and content of policy demands. Over time, however, the socialist, more radical rhetoric has largely disappeared. One reason for this may be generational change, where older socialist unionists have been retiring. More crucial has been the compounding of crises in recent decades, with German reunification as a massive challenge to employment and social peace, in concert with globalisation resulting in the fragmentation of employment relations and eroding collective bargaining coverage, the dualization of the labour market, the global financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and most recently the energy crisis due to the war

in Ukraine. The more unions saw their constituents' core interest in maintaining employment threatened by these crises, the more it appeared logical and necessary to rely on their proven cooperative recipes of crisis management and the institutionalised power backing it up, pulling them of necessity into the nexus of a 'crisis corporatism' (Dörre 2012) which has more and more become the norm rather than the exception. Although still remarkably influential in comparative perspective, German unions are using their institutional strength in a reactive response mode, and under constant pressure to act 'responsibly', making it seem ever riskier and more utopian to ponder seriously transformative visions of remaking the economy to achieve environmental sustainability. Emblematic for this shift is their use of language around climate action, ecological concerns and societal change more broadly.

Until 2014, the notion of "transformation" was rarely used in addressing change. Rather, motions used terms like *Umbau* (literally "conversion" or "rebuilding"), or *Wende* ("transition", "turnaround"), and the focus of demands was clearly on the social requirements of that process. The DGB urged the government to "design the socio-ecological conversion" with a view to "establishing social cohesion" (DGB 2014, E001, p.1). The unions' discourse around climate policies thus clearly set them apart from that of "green" policy actors who had been practising a "strategic use" of the term "transformation" since 2011 (Brand 2016), conveying that an impending comprehensive change would require questioning the entire economic and social order to safeguard the ecological basis of the planet.

Until the most recent congress in 2022, the notion of transformation as used by unions (and government) had itself undergone a thorough transformation, now defined as follows:

*"What we are currently experiencing is a great and all-encompassing transformation that is different from earlier processes of structural change in affecting not only specific sectors and regions, but fundamentally changing our whole economy and world of work. This transformation is characterised by the complex interplay of multifaceted processes of change: the climate turnaround and the conversion to a greenhouse gas-neutral economy and society it requires, the digitalisation of products, services and processes, globalisation and globally increasing migration as well as demographic change and increasing societal diversity – all of these forces are effective at the same time. As drivers of change they reinforce each other, unfolding an immense dynamic."* (DGB 2022, A001, p. 21)

This usage of 'transformation' blends the climate issue in with other ongoing societal and economic changes that workers and trade unions need to respond to and pragmatically manage to avoid the worst. However central the notion of "transformation" may have become in DGB policy language, it doesn't mean that its climate policy approach actually became more transformative in our analytical sense. A visionary, normative use of the

word (Brand 2016) – as a project of change actively pursued for the better of workers, humanity and the planet – is lacking from the motions. Against the background outlined above, however, the turn to strategic use of the term can be seen as a strategic act for defending German unions' institutionalised power resources through engaging in co-management of this transformation.

In effect, the socially balanced management of "transformation" as an ongoing and inevitable process can be seen as a reiteration of the long-favoured state-led ecological modernization strategy.

That strategy may also be described as an **eco-social partnership unionism**: Out of a felt responsibility to "co-create and shape the big transformations (society) is facing" (DGB 2018, A001), German unions build on their strength within the existing institutional arrangements of German corporatist capitalism to level specific forms of climate action, arguing for their necessity for achieving a new 'win-win' growth constellation and renewed gains to distribute, and aiming, in turn, to strengthen these institutions by arguing that climate action needs participation both at the institutional level and through worker engagement. "As unions, we are shaping the socio-ecological restructuring massively through collective bargaining and a strong co-determination which claims sustainable development of companies and push through by dialogue as bargaining partners". This is considered vital for establishing the trust required to prevent workers from becoming alienated from climate action and convince them to support it.

The mode of change that unions' climate policies are pushing thus sits firmly within the existing economic and institutional order and accepts as given "the broader context of capitalist accumulation within fragmented national territories" (Felli 2014, p. 388). Most policy proposals accepted by the DGB's congresses over the last 30 years exhibited little transformative ambition to challenge the key systemic features and mechanisms of the capitalist economy that are broadly recognized as driving climate breakdown, such as property rights, the primacy of the market, the externalisation of costs and the need for constant expansion (e.g. Lessenich 2019). Eco-social partnership unionism relies on existing institutions for climate action, and unions have made partial successes in adapting them to push for energy transition and decarbonisation. As such, they have so far been quite effective at defending workers' rights domestically. However, the solutions at hand do not guarantee sufficiently fast emissions reductions (Vogel and Hickel 2023) and furthermore decisive action is needed, posing the same challenges at increasing intensity.

Overall, we see a continuity of unions' traditional self-understanding as corporatist actors in the web of German industrial and political relations. In this role, when it comes to climate policies, they stress the state's role as a regulator and investor. This path-dependency is not surprising given the strong dependence of the German economy on

export-oriented manufacturing: With the highly skilled workforces in these sectors increasingly threatened by rising energy and carbon costs, the calls for more public investment to achieve technological carbon reductions and for subsidies like bridging energy prices seem logical. In the past, corporatism has time and again proven capable of navigating the German economy through crises, and unions have internalised the logic of power and simultaneous restraint that their institutional role has imposed on them (Müller-Jentsch 2018). However, signs of erosion of the class compromise underlying their institutional power have been mounting for a long time (Hassel 1999; Silvia 2013; Streeck and Höpner 2002). Currently, the collapse of the Social Democratic-led 'traffic light' government and the overall rightward shift ahead of new elections, alongside a wave of announcements of job cuts by companies of the core sectors in 2024 are posing very real questions about the future of German corporatism.

What's more, Germany is seeing a climate backlash, with far-right anti-climate-policy agendas attracting substantial shares of the vote. There is little sign of what Felli describes as a "political consciousness amongst workers and their social environment, one which makes it possible to imagine the existence of alternative relations of production oriented towards the satisfaction of human needs and sustainable socio-ecological relations" (Felli 2014, p. 390). This contrasts with the 1990s, when there was still a greater openness to more transformative policy proposals in unions' political debates. Although it is unclear to what extent union organisations or individual union officers, or even large parts of the unions' clientele, would support a more active climate movement unionism (Schulz and Trappmann 2023), current political developments suggest that they would be well-advised to consider what sort of strategy and alliances to build if their institutional power resources are further blunted.

In this article we have suggested a heuristic framework for assessing unions' visions of climate action, of decarbonised futures and of how to achieve them, and what role unions see for themselves in this transition. We believe this framework can be useful for other case studies beyond Germany as well. Obviously, unions' positions towards climate change are shaped by the institutional setting in which they operate. The UK Trade Union Congress (TUC), for example, has adopted much more radical socialist motions, but was much less effective in influencing policymaking, given its lack of institutional power resources; intermittent successes in campaigning for greening the economy with a network of green reps (Hampton 2018; Farnhill 2014) were dried out under Conservative governments (Cutter et al. 2024). A systematic comparison of motions of national union federations would fill an important research gap, currently, there are only studies on federal union federations, based on interviews (Houeland et al. 2021; Snell and Fairbrother 2010)

A limitation is that we could not yet consider variation in positions among unions as well as between national union policies and their regional varieties. Whereas in the 1990s, key policy motions came from individual unions, policymaking has become more centralized in recent years, with key motions generally proposed by the federal board of the confederation, and disagreements among unions sorted out beforehand. Yet, it's evident from motions, word protocols of congress debates (where available) and journalistic reports that differences exist both between unions and regional DGB organisations. Our aim here was merely to give an initial account of how DGB's positions around climate and transformation have evolved, but these differences and the changing strategic constellations behind those consensus positions definitely merit closer attention. Further research should also investigate more thoroughly the semantics around the transformation. It is striking, for example, that 'Just transition', which had advanced to the status of a key term at congress in 2018, had again disappeared as a notion at congress in 2022.

While eco-social partnership unionism so far has defended workers' jobs in Germany, it is to be seen if it is far-reaching enough to address climate change or if more transformative policies are needed. These policies could only be successful if they are based on a broad societal consensus. In all, the late 1990s appear as a phase in which some more radical positionings gained ground in parts of the union movement under the influence of intensifying alterglobalization protests, while the dominant policy logic in the actual work programmes for the coming years remained on a state-led modernisation course that can hardly even be labelled "ecological". Current union strategies and routines in dealing with a variety of related challenges make it seem unlikely that unions will part from tested waters in the near future. If eco-social partnership unionism will also help future generations of workers is to be seen.



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