

Organising – A Strategic Option for Trade Union Renewal?

Klaus Dörre, Hajo Holst, Oliver Nachtwey

Against the background of a deep crisis in trade union representation, the authors seek to determine some possible starting points for a renewal of trade unions. The employees' organisations are seen as actors who have a strategic choice as to which power resources to tap. Though the specific national systems of industrial relations influence the unions' strategic options, there are nevertheless various opportunities for trans-national learning processes. This contribution analyses the potential for trade union renewal, drawing on several examples of organising approaches in the USA and Germany.

Key words: union revitalisation, power resources, organising, industrial relations

“I do not view the labour movement as part of the problem. To me, it's part of the solution.”

Barack Obama (www.tagesspiegel.de, 30 January, 2009)

The decline of organisational power of the trade unions has been discussed in the social sciences for a while (e.g. Dribbusch 2003). Between 1993 and 2003, the European trade unions on average lost 15% of their membership. German DGB trade unions are no exception, currently their total membership is the same for united Germany as it was for West Germany alone in 1969/1970. Lately, however, some positive counter-tendencies have become apparent. In 2008, IG Metall, for the first time in many years, was able to