

German Trade Unions Oppose the Dismantling of the Welfare State (March 5, 1997)

Abstract

In this action program, the Confederation of German Trade Unions [*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* or DGB] called for reducing unemployment and increasing social justice through deficit spending, shorter work hours, job redistribution, and better employment centers.

Source

For Work and Social Justice

The Action Program of the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB)

This action program constitutes the platform for the work of the DGB and its member unions in the coming years.

Our central challenge remains the same: reducing the number of registered unemployed by fifty percent by the beginning of the next millennium. We are holding fast to this goal. In the next four years, it is both necessary and possible to create at least two million jobs with pay that is commensurate with performance and humane working conditions. New jobs must be equally available to women and men.

Cutting unemployment in half, however, is not possible with neoconservative restoration politics, with the policies of the federal government to date.

It is possible within the framework of a socio-ecological reform strategy that gives equal priority to the creation of attractive [new] jobs and the just distribution of existing ones. This can be achieved through new policies that combine a determined push for future investments in the Federal Republic and Europe with an effective initiative to reduce individual and collective working hours.

We want to fight unemployment and create social justice.

That is the goal of this action plan.

I. CREATE WORK, SHARE WORK

1. Implement Social and Ecological Reforms

New jobs are created, above all, through investments and innovation. We advocate social and ecological reforms in order to open up new areas of employment, especially in the environmental sector, transportation, the development and application of new technologies, and industry and the service sector.

We demand:

The strengthening of **domestic demand** through a just income and assets policy and through investment programs for environmentally responsible construction, the expansion of an efficient infrastructure, and future-oriented transportation systems.

Dialogue-oriented **industrial and service-sector policies** that promote growth industries and create the necessary conditions to continue developing existing industries in an ecological and socially responsible manner.

A **techno-political initiative** that, above all, increases budget resources for research and technology to four percent of the federal budget in order to promote public and private research. [The] research transfer must be improved and accelerated.

An innovation-oriented modernization and growth initiative among all EU member states that corresponds with the White Book of the European Commission in the amount of 0.8 percent of the respective GDP of the EU member states.

The creation of a circular economy based on product longevity and the conservation of resources.

Ecologically binding commitments by companies, the further development of regulatory law, and an **eco-social reorganization of our tax and duties system**.

The further development of **regional structural policies**. To this end, businesses, politicians, and trade unions should consult on models for socially responsible and environmentally sound regional development.

The modernization and development of **public infrastructure and public services** in order to make public services both more effective and more competitive, and also to expand services offered to citizens.

Eco-social reforms must be implemented, and they must be effective. The difficult situation in the new federal states demands special impulses. That is why we are taking action for a joint Initiative for the Reconstruction of the East [*Aufbau Ost*].

2. Reduce Work Hours and Increase Autonomy as Regards Work Time

In order to distribute the existing volume of work fairly, and thereby secure and create jobs, the DGB unions strive to implement additional cuts in work hours. We want to give employees greater autonomy when it comes to work time. It will then be possible to bring work and private life into better harmony.

We advocate:

Various ways of reducing individual work hours. This also includes further reductions in collective work hours. The 35-hour work week must be implemented at a macroeconomic level. In the future, we need to implement further individual and collective work time reductions without jeopardizing the subsistence of low- and middle-income earners. We need new ways of doing this.

Preventing the extension of work hours.

Cutting overtime hours and compensating unavoidable extra work with time off. We are seeking guaranteed annual and lifetime work-hour accounts in order to offer employees greater control over their time.

Combining full-time work with periods of part-time work, parental leave, and continued training, so that women and men can better reconcile paid and unpaid employment.

Offering more part-time jobs that offer social security benefits and meet the needs of men and women.

Developing and implementing new types of shorter work lifespans through semi-retirement.

General part-time arrangements can only be made in agreement with the unions.

3. Secure and Modernize Vocational Training and Continuing Education

We advocate the retention and further development of the dual education system. The available options for future-oriented apprenticeships must correspond with the demand and must be equally accessible to young women and men. The shortage in business apprenticeship positions must be rectified. Vocational training, continuing education, and advanced training programs must be linked and modernized.

To this end, the DGB and the unions will exert pressure on private and public employers, using all the options available to workplace advocacy groups, collective bargaining policy, and regional structural policies.

We advocate:

Comprehensive burden sharing between businesses that train apprentices and those that do not through solidarity-based financing for training programs; this would include legally established pay-as-you-go financing.

Combining work, vocational training, and continuing education in order to provide adequate training for all. Young people without professional training and semi-skilled workers would thereby be given more opportunities to earn full qualifications.

The further development of job descriptions and the creation of new apprenticed trades.

Continuing education guidelines that secure and reinforce public responsibility for continuing education and, in particular, ensure that workers with minimal qualifications will continue to have a fair chance of finding a job in the future.

A continuing education initiative within companies in order to impart the qualifications necessary in the information age and in our service society.

The equivalence of vocational, general, and political education, and the permeability of different educational tracks.

The reform of university studies in order to combine university studies with vocational options.

4. Stabilize Publicly Subsidized Employment through Active Labor Market Policy

Publicly subsidized employment remains absolutely essential. It should not degenerate into a second-class sector through the elimination of collective bargaining autonomy and the abolishment of

protective provisions guaranteed under labor law.

The instruments of active labor market policy must be developed further.

Such an approach includes, in particular:

Business-related instruments to prevent impending unemployment and to ensure that structural change within companies assumes a socially responsible form (promoting qualification training through short-time compensation, etc.)

Greater incentives to earn professional qualifications and pursue continuing education through, for example, the combination of part-time work and qualification training.

Special programs for the long-term unemployed (especially at the local level) that open up new opportunities through the flexible use of social support measures and in combination with local employment promotion measures.

Legal entitlement to employment promotion measures for unemployed adolescents.

The inclusion of welfare benefit recipients in the employment promotion measures of the employment offices, which must be financed through tax revenue.

Paying special attention to women with respect to qualification training and job creation measures.

Banning the referral of unemployed persons to jobs that do not comply with wage agreements and effectively fighting illegal employment and illegal temporary work.

[...]

V. OUR WAY

The Alliance for Jobs has failed on account of the federal government's unwillingness to take the initiative in employment policy and on account of the confrontational strategy of the leading employers' associations. Consequently, the unions responded with their campaign for work and social justice. We are building upon that by implementing our action program.

Record unemployment levels show that the policies of the federal government up to now are wrong. The course of its economic and financial policies has led our country into a drastic employment crisis. For this reason, a change in policy is urgently needed.

Hundreds of thousands of people have opposed state-regulated cuts in social services and attacks on collective bargaining autonomy by the government coalition and the leading employers' associations. Policy that is socially unjust and irresponsible as regards employment does not have the support of the majority in this country.

We want our **Campaign for Work and Social Justice** to continue. We will modernize and expand the social movement that sent a signal, in Bonn, on June 15, 1996, to protest anti-worker policy and support eco-social reform policy.

We are counting on the mobilization of workers and on social solidarity that must go far beyond the trade unions.

We demand that employers and politicians assume responsibility and fulfill their obligation to create new jobs and social justice. We want to see resolute and, wherever possible, joint and directed actions to overcome the employment crisis and secure the democratic welfare state.

We trust in the persuasiveness of our arguments. We are counting on the generative power of solidaristic action.

The future of our country is decided not only on election days, but also in our everyday business and social lives. It is of utmost importance that the unions continue to be successful in the future in winning people over and mobilizing them for their goals.

We call upon all working people to join the organizing efforts of the unions.

We will do everything in our power to find more alliance partners in the struggle for the basic values of democracy and freedom, solidarity and justice.

We want to fight together for work and social justice.

Source: DGB Aktionsprogramm, "Für Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit" (March 5, 1997); http://www.dgb.de/themen/themen_a_z/abisz_doks/a/Aktionspr.pdf (retrieved February 25, 2008).

Translation: Allison Brown

Recommended Citation: German Trade Unions Oppose the Dismantling of the Welfare State (March 5, 1997), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/a-new-germany-1990-2023/ghdi:document-3948>> [April 30, 2024].