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Divided We Stand? Coalition Dynamics in the German Union Movement

Abstract

“Coalitions within national union movements have been an enduring means by which unions pursue shared interests and policy ambitions. Drawing on social movement theory, we focus on the logics shaping union coalitions, and the conditions under which they differ, in order to gain analytical purchase on enduring debates about union behaviour in industrial relations. Taking the German case, we identify four key policy issues that have caused major divisions and competing coalitional activity between unions in the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) over the period 1964 to 2018. Our analysis suggests that there is a degree of fluidity between instrumental and ideological logics, which relates to the evolving socio-political contexts that shape the dynamics of union coalitions over time. In the German context, our findings indicate that the relative importance of the logics shaping coalition activity varies with the nature of the threats unions encounter. In the face of more specific and immediate threats, coalitional decision-making was more likely to be driven by instrumental logic, prioritising the narrower concerns of the union and its core members. However, where unions’ broader social visions came under threat, self-interest played a more modest role, and choices were more likely to be animated by ideological concerns and questions of public good.”

1. Introduction

It is well understood that individual unions often differ in what they want and how they go about achieving their goals, even when they belong to the same national union confederation or grouping. Where unions find common ground, they sometimes cluster together in coalitions to better prosecute their agendas. These coalitions can be powerful forces in shaping union politics. Often, coalitions also imply cleavages that reflect competing interests and demarcations over important policy issues (Ebbinghaus and Visser 2000). This is reflected in the sometimes more, sometimes less, fragmented landscape of union organisations in different countries, with ‘all union movements contain[ing] internal demarcations’ (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013: 82). What drives these union coalitions? What are the primary rationales, or logics, shaping union coalitional activity? And

how can a better understanding of union coalitions help to shed light on ongoing debates about union goals and behaviour?

Contrary to the assumptions of standard economic analysis, which positions unions as rational maximisers, industrial relations (IR) research has shown that union goals and behaviour are multi-faceted, changeable, 'historically contingent and institutionally specific' (Turnbull, 2003, p. 516; Turnbull, 1988; Gahan, 2002). Despite sustained attention, the issue of what unions do, and why, continues to animate research and debate (e.g. Pohler and Luchak, 2015, Budd, 2017). Questions remain over how and under what conditions unions' goals differ, and how these differences shape union strategy, inter-union relations and intra-confederal politics.

These concerns have, for example, been at the heart of recent dualization debates in IR. Some accounts see unions as contributing to the growth of insider-outsider divides in labour markets by pursuing policies that narrowly protect the interests of their core constituencies at the expense of marginalized workers (e.g. Palier and Thelen, 2010; Hassel, 2014). We term this perspective an instrumental logic of unionism. However, an alternative view points to the importance of ideology in more inclusive union strategies geared towards the interests of peripheral workers (Benassi and Dorigatti, 2015; Durazzi, 2017), suggesting a different, ideological logic of unionism. It remains unclear whether and why union behaviour is driven by an instrumental or ideological logic, or perhaps even some combination of both. We seek to provide further insights on these issues by applying a logics lens to the case of union coalitions.

The decision to join with other unions in coalition brings a union's goals into sharp relief. Coalitional activity requires unions to reflect on their goals as the basis for alignment with others, as this sends a clear signal on preferences to the movement at large. The consequences for union politics can be profound (Aleks, 2015). Other unions might object or emphasize alternative goals, and consequently form rival coalitions to pursue such competing objectives; this gives rise to what we term competing union coalitions. Coalitional activity thus offers an apt empirical case for gaining analytical purchase on enduring debates around union behaviour. By allowing for different drivers of union behaviour, the notion of logics provides a useful conceptual foundation for studying the dynamics of union coalitions.

For additional theoretical leverage we look to the literature on social movements, where the coalitional activities of social movement actors have also proven to be an important avenue for expressing and realising shared interests (McCammon and Moon, 2015; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). In recent years, social movement theory (SMT) has provided an important reference point for IR researchers to refine, complement and extend accounts of union behaviour (e.g. Kelly, 1998; Heery, 2005; Tapia et al, 2015). A dedicated strand of the SM literature has examined the factors associated with coalitional activity. While

recognising the power of instrumental interests in motivating the behaviour of social movement actors (such as unions), this line of inquiry introduces other factors such as political opportunity structures, ideology, and social ties as playing an equal if not more important role in explaining both collective action and the dynamics of coalitional politics (McCammon and Moon, 2015; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). For example, studies have highlighted how the nature of threats facing social movement groups catalyses different concerns and shapes their coalitional choices (Wang et al, 2018). These findings suggest the need for a more holistic perspective which integrates both instrumental and ideological action logics along a spectrum embedded within a broader socio-political context.

To examine whether and how different factors shape union coalitions requires a comparison across cases that vary along key dimensions. As noted above, however, union coalitions are often of great strategic significance, and are also relatively rare. We therefore adopt a historical perspective and focus on unions in Germany to generate cases for analysis. At different times in modern history, German unions have divided into competing coalitions over major policy issues (e.g. Markovits 1986a). In our four historical case studies, we identify and analyse four key policy issues that have caused major divisions and sparked coalitional activity between unions in the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) over the period 1964 to 2018. During this timespan the context for union coalitional activity changed significantly. Drawing on SMT we explore the role of different factors that drive the formation of competing union coalitions, and their evolution over time, to gauge when and why ideological or instrumental concerns dominate union logics.

Overall, our findings suggest a degree of fluidity between the two union logics, depending on context. We argue that while coalition decision-making can be driven by both instrumental concerns and ideological principles, a range of situational factors influence which of these two logics tends to predominate at any one time. Our findings shed new light on the factors that shape these dynamics; salient factors include the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions, the nature of specific internal or external threats and political opportunities, and the role of brokers in union coalitions. Specifically, in the German context, our historical analysis reveals that when unions encounter threats that jeopardise their broader social visions, ideology seems to be a more important driver of coalitional activity than instrumental interests. Conversely, over time, as the threats facing unions have become more specific and immediate to organizational functioning and survival, instrumental concerns have become more pronounced in shaping the logics for coalitional activity. In addition, we find that unions are prepared to break away from established coalitions in situations where new logics override old ones. We also illuminate the capacity of union coalitions to achieve their policy objectives, given the need to enlist support from various actors, most crucially the state.

2. Explaining coalition dynamics: Insights from social movement theory

As outlined in the introduction, union behaviour sometimes takes the form of coalitions which see unions join forces to better prosecute their agendas. A coalitional perspective emphasizes common ground between unions, since coalitions form when two or more collective actors 'work together on a common task' (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010: xiv). These common tasks might see organisations cooperate for a finite period to address a single issue, or form a more long-lasting alliance, to tackle multiple issues over time (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010: xv). Debate persists over what drives union behaviour in general and union coalitional activity (as one expression of union behaviour) in particular. A central assumption in much of this debate is that union behaviour is far from random, but rather is based on specific union logics (Benassi and Dorigatti 2015: 539). The notion of logics serves to capture differences in the extent to which union behaviour is motivated by benefits that may accrue solely to the union and its members (instrumental logic); or by desired outcomes that may benefit the broader workforce and citizenry,, as when unions invoke major societal concepts such as equality or justice as driving principles (ideological logic) (see Dorigatti 2017: 925).

Recent debate on labour market dualization illustrates the application of instrumental logic in analysing union behaviour. Some accounts argue that manufacturing unions in the industrial core have maintained their members' privileges at the expense of service workers who are forced to toil under inferior conditions in the periphery (Hassel 2014; Palier and Thelen 2010). This view resonates with earlier efforts to explain union behaviour with reference to rational choice theory (RCT), which essentially holds that the satisfaction of individual preferences explains social phenomena (Green and Shapiro 1994). For example, Golden (1997) examined why unions took strike action to resist mass workforce reductions in some countries, but not in others. Her explanation turns on the instrumental calculations of union leaders whose main concern is protecting their own organizations. In the absence of protections for shop stewards during layoffs, unions will strike to the point of suffering 'heroic defeats' to defend their shop-floor organization (Golden, 1997).

However, a persistent critique of these RCT-informed accounts suggests that self-interest alone provides an incomplete explanation of union behaviour, and that other factors must be taken into account (Doellgast et al. 2018; Dorigatti 2017; Turnbull 1988). Where unions have sought to defend members' institutional arrangements, advocates of the more instrumental perspective on dualization have interpreted this as an abandonment of social solidarity (Thelen 2014: 28). However, critics have emphasized that employers' labour market segmentation strategies may backfire, as they 'reinforce union identities constructed around ideas of working-class solidarity and antagonism' (Dorigatti 2017: 922).

Within the IR literature, there has also been some recognition that there may be a shift or interplay between logics over time. This idea was developed by Hyman (2001) in his seminal account of the nature and limits of traditional models of unionism in Europe, which accords union identity an integral role in explaining differences in union behaviour. Hyman (2001)

introduced the idea of an 'eternal triangle' of union identity, whereby each point of the triangle denotes a different union orientation or model: as labour market actors, as vehicles of class struggle, or as a force for social integration. According to Hyman (2001), unions are unable to sustain a singular focus on only one point, and in practice exist in a tension between two points, 'a contradictory admixture of two of the three ideal types' (Hyman, 2001, pp.4-5). Hyman further suggested that the importance of these different orientations, and their resultant union identities, will shift over time, depending on the circumstances. Recently, more fine-gained, cross-national comparisons of union responses to peripheral workers have made important theoretical headway by highlighting the role of union identity in connection with institutional and power resources (Benassi and Vlandas, 2016; Benassi and Dorigatti, 2015; Kornelakis, 2016), although a clear understanding of why unions favour different approaches is still lacking (Kornelakis and Voskeritsian, 2018: 358). Conceptually, an important next step is to draw out more clearly how the interplay between logics occurs, and under what conditions one union logic prevails over another.

We look to SMT to gain analytical purchase on these questions. Essentially, SMT provides an interdisciplinary perspective on the roots, forms, and consequences of social mobilization, contestation, and repression. SMT comprises different theoretical traditions (resource mobilization, political process, and cultural approaches), which have often emphasized different questions. However, contemporary SMT research tends to draw synergistically on concepts and insights from these different theoretical currents to offer more holistic explanations of the overall dynamics of social movement phenomena (Tarrow, 1998; van Dyke and McCammon, 2010). Recent years have seen growing calls and efforts to explore SMT's potential for analytical refinement and theoretical revitalization within IR (Gahan and Pekarek, 2013; Tapia et al, 2015). Here, we draw on SMT to better understand union coalitions as a form of union behaviour.

A dedicated strand of SM research has examined the role of coalitions in expressing and realizing the shared interests of social movement actors (McCammon and Moon, 2015). This literature recognizes the role of instrumental interests - or selective benefits - in motivating coalitional activity, as groups weigh the costs and benefits of joining a coalition (Levi and Murphy, 2006; Van Dyke and Amos 2017: 7). However, this line of research also introduces other factors that play an equal if not more important role in explaining coalition activity: political opportunities/threats, social ties, and ideology (Van Dyke and Amos 2017: 8).¹

Specifically, as the flipside of political opportunities, threats are one of the most powerful triggers. These frequently take the shape of economic grievances (Almeida 2008) and may operate the same way as political threats (e.g. a rival group gaining political power).

¹ Van Dyke and Amos (2017) have also identified organizational characteristics as an additional factor that may shape coalition building. Given our focus on the union movement, where organizations have relatively similar characteristics, we do not examine these organizational characteristics in detail.

Particularly in the field of IR, threats might also arise from specific employer behaviour (Dixon and Martin 2012).

Social ties, as the second factor, are important because they influence which organizations will participate in a coalition (Van Dyke and Amos 2017). In particular, ‘bridge builders’ or ‘brokers’ are central in bringing diverse organisations together: ‘Whether or not a coalition forms, as well as which organizations join a particular coalition, are profoundly influenced by the presence of “coalition brokers” or “bridge builders” - individuals with ties across organizations’ (Van Dyke and Amos 2017: 3). Within union confederations such as the DGB, individual affiliates serve as brokers to mobilize the support of other unions for different policies and strategies.

In the formation of coalitions, one common critical factor is ideological congruence between organisations (McCammon and Van Dyke 2010). As Meyer and Corrigan-Brown (2005: 339) explain: ‘A rational calculus of risks and benefits can only be a starting point in analysing the actual development of cooperative relationships.’ Broadly defined, we consider ideology to be grounded in shared beliefs, values or identities. As Kelly suggests, ‘abstract ideologies that circulate in the labour movement – varieties of Marxism, Christian socialism, social partnership etc. – are consequently of fundamental importance in understanding the concrete day-to-day behaviours of workers [and their unions]’ (1998: 29). For example, such ideologies might manifest in a union’s embrace of militancy or moderation (Kelly 1996). Research shows that shared ideology can enable coalitions, while opposing ideological positions might harm if not prohibit them, even where movements share broad principles and goals (such as the DGB and its affiliates) (Roth 2010).

The social movement literature shows how these factors often operate in combination to shape coalitional activity (McCammon and Moon, 2015; van Dyke and Amos, 2017). For example, studies have found that social movement groups are more likely to overlook ideological differences to cooperation when faced with urgent and important threats (Meyer and Corrigan-Brown, 2005). Overall, this literature suggests the need for a more holistic perspective which integrates both instrumental and ideological logics as drivers of coalitional choices, along a spectrum embedded within a broader socio-political context. Taking post-WWII union coalitions in Germany as the context for this study, we investigate whether and how the four factors said to motivate and enable coalitions in SMT (instrumental interests, ideology, threats, and brokerage) account for coalitional dynamics in the peak union confederation DGB. Our aim is to obtain a better grasp on the conditions under which ideology seems to be more important for unions’ coalitional activity than instrumental interests.

3. Research methodology and empirical context

We adopt a historically comparative perspective to examine the factors shaping the formation and reconfiguration of union coalitions. This approach has a long tradition in IR and political economy research (Markovits 1986a; Skocpol 2003; Swenson 1989). Our aim is to identify common and contrasting patterns of union behaviour over time. We seek to establish more generalizable theoretical propositions or conclusions by validating theoretical constructs across multiple cases (Bradshaw and Wallace 1991). In particular, we aim to attain a clearer understanding of the relationship between dynamic contexts and the motives and behaviours of social actors.

We focus on coalitional activity around key issues that have confronted German unions over the past 60 years. We define key issues as those which involve a majority (if not all) of DGB affiliates, and which are prominent concerns for the peak confederation itself. The literature highlights two such key issues in the period to the 1980s: the conflict over workers' capital funds (WCFs) as a means for addressing growing inequality; and divisions over how to reduce working time as a way of stimulating employment (e.g. Fehrman 2009; Swenson 1989). Since then, two other key issues have caused severe tensions between DGB unions, and saw them split into competing camps: the campaign to introduce a universal statutory minimum wage (Bosch 2018; Marx and Starke 2017); and the call to legislate collective bargaining unity (CBU) (Burgess and Simon 2013; Keller 2018). These four cases also span different decades in which the standing of unions and their capacity to prosecute campaigns varied greatly. Our analysis goes beyond isolated treatments of these individual episodes to explore the role of different factors that drive the formation and reconfiguration of union coalitions over time.

We drew on several data sources to analyse the nature and dynamics of coalitional activity. We conducted extensive analysis of secondary research published in journals and monographs in IR and comparative political economy. We also drew on a range of primary source materials and documents, including union publications and contemporaneous media reports. For example, we closely examined the long-running labour movement periodical *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* (GMH), which frequently featured contributions from high-ranking union officials to important debates. We also undertook research at the archives of social democracy (*Archiv der sozialen Demokratie*) in Bonn to clarify details and corroborate findings. Finally, we interviewed both current and former union officials in senior positions, as well as academic experts in German labour history and collective bargaining. A list of interviews is provided in the Appendix. Our use of different sources served to refine initial understandings and corroborate findings. We analysed these materials to understand the changing contexts of coalitional activity, how unions framed their positions in relation to both broader ideological and narrower organizational and member concerns, and the make-up and trajectories of coalitions.

The changing context of union coalitions: Opportunities, threats, responses

This section briefly sets out the historical and institutional context for our cases, drawing attention to changing political opportunity structures, the types of threats unions have faced, and how both ideological and instrumental considerations have shaped union coalitions. Key institutional features typically highlighted in the literature on German IR include the dual system of workers' representation, involving industry-level collective bargaining and workplace codetermination; the prominent role of well-organized employers' associations and industry unions in setting wages and working conditions for the majority of employees; and a high degree of juridification (Keller and Kirsch 2016). While the legal-institutional framework depicted in traditional accounts of German IR remains largely intact, in recent decades its operation has transformed in practice (Behrens 2013; Keller and Kirsch 2016; Silvia 2013).

In sketching the post-WWII history of Germany unionism, scholars have also commonly identified five distinct phases characterised by major socio-political and economic developments (Keller and Kirsch, 2016; Müller-Jentsch 2018; Schneider 2000): the economic miracle of post-war recovery (1950-1965); social-democratic reforms (1966-76); unemployment, deregulation and recovery (mid-70s to 1990); reunification, globalisation, and neoliberal reforms (1990-2007); and post-crisis capitalism (2008 onwards). For unions, each period brought its own opportunities and threats. However, threats have arguably become more dominant from the 1990s as unions began to lose membership and industrial influence, with declines in both collective bargaining and works council coverage (Behrens 2013). Growing employer hostility and the emergence of a low-wage sector posed further challenges for unions.

After WWII, the German union movement was re-built with the aim of creating a united movement within a single confederation, the DGB (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* or German Trade Union Confederation) (Markovits 1986a: 61-72; Schmidt 1970; Schneider 2000). Based on the principles of industrial unionism (*Industriegewerkschaft*) and unified unionism (*Einheitsgewerkschaft*), the DGB and its unions represent blue- and white-collar employees as well as members with different political orientations and party affiliations (Keller and Kirsch 2016). Although the DGB accounts for the lion's share of union membership, with close to 6 million members, there are some mainly smaller, rival unions which are unaffiliated, or part of the confederation of civil service unions, the DBB (*Deutscher Beamtenbund*, or German Civil Service Federation). A further fraction of union members is represented by a Christian union federation. Notwithstanding the underlying aspiration of unity, there have always been some ideological differences amongst various DGB unions. As Table 1 indicates, these differences flared up at various times, giving rise to competing union coalitions. These coalitions emerged under both conservative and left-led governments, and during times of both economic buoyancy and crisis.

Insert Table 1 about here -

Until the 1980s, union density in Germany was relatively stable, at around 30-35% (Müller-Jentsch and Ittermann 2000). German unification brought a brief surge in membership, before the onset of ongoing decline to the level of 15% in 2017 (Hassel and Schröder, 2018). In response to membership decline and economic changes, from 1989 onwards unions began to merge, halving the number of DGB affiliates from sixteen to eight after decades of remarkable structural stability (Streeck and Visser 1997). This ‘merger wave’ involved a significant recombination of different union cultures and identities (Behrens and Pekarek, 2012), with obvious consequences for alignments between unions and the prospects for coalitional activities. Aside from mergers, unions have also pursued other ‘revitalization’ strategies to reverse their declining fortunes (Behrens et al. 2003).

Overall, this confluence of internal and external challenges has seen the motives for inter-union collective action shift over time, moving from broader programmatic agendas to focus on narrower concerns that have a more direct impact on core industrial functions and unions’ ability to revitalize.

4. Rallying points: Policy issues and coalitional activity

In this section we draw on the key conceptual elements presented in Section 2 to investigate our four cases of union coalitions in historical sequence. Each case begins with a brief overview of the major issues, actors, and outcomes of coalitional activity. We then outline the key contextual parameters before examining whether and how threats, ideology, instrumental concerns, and brokerage shaped the dynamics of union coalitions in our cases.

Case 1: Workers’ Capital Funds

Our first case concerns union coalitions taking competing stances over the demand for WCFs (*Vermögensbildung in Arbeitnehmerhand*, or Workers’ Capital Funds). The ambition behind these funds was to facilitate the redistribution of wealth and control between capital and labour by sharing profits to give workers an ownership stake in private enterprise (Markovits 1986a). The idea was championed by the more moderate, social partnership-orientated unions as a means of addressing growing wealth inequality. This coalition was brokered by the construction union BSE and its high-profile leader Georg Leber, who envisioned the creation of funds generated from foregone wage increases to finance share ownership (Leber 1965). These funds were to be jointly administered with employers and reinvested in the construction industry. This proposal was opposed by a rival camp of more militant unions around IG Metall, who saw this approach as too ‘collaborationist’ and narrowly targeted (Jacobi 1974: 156). They proposed an alternative strategy mix for tackling the imbalance in wealth and power, including the extension of codetermination, higher corporate taxation, and aggressive wage bargaining (Swenson 1989: 201). Ultimately, some

unions adopted more modest forms of profit-sharing through savings schemes for individual workers, embedded in collective agreements. However, more comprehensive attempts to legislate WCFs failed.

The debate over WCFs unfolded at a time of relatively strong economic performance in Germany (notwithstanding slower growth), but also growing wealth inequality. For unions, this polarization posed a threat to post-war visions of a more civilized capitalism and animated coalitional activity (Interview 13). For the more moderate unions like BSE, growing inequality also made society more susceptible to the perceived threat of socialism and the alternative societal model provided by East Germany (Markovits 1986a). In this context, WCFs offered a way of enriching workers materially without depriving firms of funds for investment and further economic growth. In championing WCFs, BSE and Leber also wanted to send a strong signal for the mobilization of anti-communist sentiments (Jacobi 1974), highlighting the significant role of ideology in motivating coalitional activity. This endeavour found a particularly clear expression in Leber's rationale for championing WCFs: 'A system of property and wealth ownership in accordance with the principles of a democratic and social state would constitute a real alternative to the collectivized levelling over there [in East Germany] where the change in the order of ownership meant a loss of freedom' (as cited in Jacobi 1974: 154; own translation). In taking this position, the moderate unions around BSE also challenged the more radical union camp led by IG Metall, whose 'quasi-Marxist' (Swenson 1989: 193) leader Otto Brenner advocated a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism (Markovits 1986a: 97). The debate over WCFs thus reflected deep-seated ideological differences and alternative visions for German society, and centred on broader sets of interests, rather than selective benefits that might accrue to union members alone.

At this time, the capacity of unions to pursue such an ambitious programmatic economic reform was underpinned by their industrial strength and a political environment in which unions had considerable legitimacy (Pirker 1960: 21). Over the decade from 1960, membership of DGB unions increased from 6.4 to 6.7 million (Müller-Jentsch and Ittermann 2000: 85). The election of an SPD-led coalition in 1969 ended a long phase of post-war conservative rule. This new phase of progressive government positioned extensive economic and social reform as more feasible, and unions viewed calls for legislation to support the creation of WCFs as a realistic ambition. During this period, such broader programmatic concerns still featured prominently in union politics, not least in the shape of a special working group on social policy at the WSI, the DGB's own research institute. As one of our interviewees explained, this working group was not only comprised of peak union officials, but also included prominent intellectuals from the SPD's left, such as Peter von Oertzen and Oskar Negt. At the same time, strong adherence to partisan policy positions was also evident in the absence of split votes by representatives of different unions at DGB board meetings (Interview 13).

As we noted in Section 2, a critical question for theories of collective action, including union coalitions, is the extent to which such activity is motivated by either selective benefits or broader ideological concerns. The significant role of ideology in motivating debate and coalitional choices around WCFs has already been noted. At its core, the split between the two competing coalitions concerned questions of major economic reform for tempering capitalism, and thus had broader societal implications. Unions saw growing inequality as a major threat to their visions of social and economic justice. The intended goals for pursuing WCFs were decidedly rooted in public good, rather than selective benefit.

Nonetheless, organizational and member interests also played some role in determining union decisions on whether to fall in behind BSE or the metalworkers, whose prominent leaders acted as brokers for the two competing coalitions. For example, WCFs offered BSE a way to compensate its members for its comparatively modest wage bargaining policy, while IG Metall's position reflected its desire to retain flexibility and control over its strategy of wage militancy (Swenson 1989). As IG Metall president Loderer put it, in a meeting of the DGB's executive committee (*Bundesausschuss*) towards the latter phase of this conflict: 'Workers' capital funds undermine unions' collective bargaining policies as any financial burden imposed on owners will be passed on to unions in the next bargaining round' (minutes of the DGB general committee meeting 04.04.1973, p. 18; own translation).

Case 2: Working Time Reduction

By the beginning of the 1980s, the question of working time reduction had replaced differences over collective ownership as the central issue animating coalitional activity. Mass unemployment emerged as a central threat influencing coalition formation. Unions agreed that the regulation of labour supply through working time policy was a key lever to combat unemployment, but were split over how to achieve this aim. More militant unions favoured shortening the working week, while more moderate unions preferred early retirement. Ultimately, both models found their way into the system; key unions were able to achieve provisions in collective agreements that implemented either lifetime or weekly working time reduction.

The split over working time policy, which a former member of the IG CPK executive described as 'a massive cleavage between unions' (Interview 1), emerged at a time of economic crisis internationally. From the mid-1970s, Germany was in the throes of low economic growth and a significant rise in unemployment. Internationally, the political discourse was changing, with the election of Thatcher in the UK (1979) and Reagan in the US (1981) setting the course for the global embrace of neoliberalism. Over the 1980s, unemployment in Germany almost doubled, rising from 3.8% in 1980 to 7.2% in 1990. The question of how to tackle unemployment was thus a major focus for policy-makers. The election of the Kohl government in 1982 ushered in a long period of conservative rule. This

changing environment narrowed opportunities for advancing more progressive agendas. While unions opposed the economic policies of the Kohl government, they were spared an outright assault as suffered by their counterparts in the UK and in the US. Indeed, high-level dialogue between German unions and the government initially continued, but deteriorated when the government pursued labour market reforms that unions saw as threatening their role in regulating employment (Streeck 1988). Nonetheless, the 1980s were a time of organisational stability for DGB unions, with membership sitting at around 7.9 million over much of this period (Müller-Jentsch and Ittermann 2000: 85). Employers vehemently opposed union demands to reduce weekly work hours, fearing the implications for costs and organizational rigidities (Streeck 2005). Indeed, the peak employer federation BDA ranked working time reduction as the most important issue on its list of non-negotiable union demands (*Tabukatalog*) (Thelen 1991: 162).

Both broader ideological concerns and more narrow, self-interested considerations played a role in animating these competing coalitions over working time reduction, with some unions pursuing different policies for specific groups among their membership ranks (Interview 3). The more radical coalition led by IG Metall viewed this issue through the lens of its more critical view of market capitalism, and the role of trade unionism in transforming institutions and redistributing wealth and power. For IG Metall and many of its coalition partners, the struggle for working time reduction would not only serve to create new jobs and improve work-life balance, but was viewed as potentially increasing solidarity between employed and unemployed workers, generating what Markovits has identified as ‘an essential ingredient of the union’s collectivist counter crisis strategy’ (1986b: 99). This solidaristic principle also underpinned the demand for reduction of hours at full pay as a means to redistribute income, and to ‘redistribute access to the labour market in order to attain a stronger and more uniform position vis-a-vis capital’ (Hinrichs et al. 1985: 215). As the head of IG Metall’s collective bargaining put it at the time: ‘...ultimately, using the 35-hour week to fight unemployment concerns questions of socio-political power and issues of distributive justice’ (Janßen 1984: 3, own translation).

Given that IG Metall called a major strike for the 35-hour week in 1984, its leading role in brokering the coalition for weekly working time reduction appears obvious. However, it should be noted that internal ‘conflict and controversy’ (Bahnmüller 1985: 36) marked the path to this position, suggesting that brokerage had a longer gestation.

The position of the more moderate unions, led by the chemical workers, was likewise informed by broader ideological concerns. The mechanism of early retirement, they argued, would not only reduce unemployment and offer young people new employment opportunities, but also strengthen social partnership and protect the existing social contract with employers. For one, the early retirement option ‘posed no challenge to managerial prerogatives in production management’ (Swenson 1989: 222). Moreover, much of the cost would fall to the statutory pension system and largely spare employers (Kädtler and Hertle

1997: 160-164). This approach was also favoured by the government and employers. This coalitional position was informed as much by pragmatism as by alternative ideological motives, and centred on the concern that reducing working hours would further undermine economic growth and negate the ambition of creating additional jobs (Markovits 1986b: 100). Notwithstanding the significant role of ideology here, programmatic agendas were arguably less ambitious in scope than in our first case, which effectively concerned the question of who owns capital.

Instrumental concerns played a more limited role in explaining unions' coalitional positions. In particular, more moderate unions were not only concerned about the impact of working time reduction on employment, but also argued that early retirement offered a far more substantial benefit to members than a marginal reduction in working time. As Markovits has observed, 'this strategy protected a threatened and deserving group' (1986b: 100).

Case 3: Statutory Minimum Wage

A decade and a half after German unions clashed over working time reduction, a new issue gave rise to major tensions within DGB: the call for the introduction of a universal statutory minimum wage. The unions championing this policy saw it as a critical intervention for fighting the ongoing spread of low-wage work (Sterkel et al. 2006). The debate was initiated in 1999 when NGG, which organises food manufacturing and hospitality workers, first called publicly for a statutory minimum wage, and gathered steam when ver.di joined the cause in 2004 (Sterkel 2006: 22). A rival coalition resolutely opposed to state intervention in wage-setting coalesced around the principle that it would put autonomous collective bargaining (*Tarifautonomie*) at risk. This alternative coalition, which centred on IG Metall and BCE, argued that unions needed to regain their capacity to set wages by mobilizing members and running traditional industrial campaigns. Moreover, these critics contended that existing institutional mechanisms, such as provisions for universal *erga omnes* extensions (Allgemeinverbindlicherklärung) and the Posted Workers Act (Arbeitnehmerentsendegesetz), could be leveraged to introduce sector-specific minimum wages (Bispinck and Schäfer 2006). However in 2006 – with the adoption of a compromise position at the DGB's national conference, which prioritized collective bargaining but provided space for an industry-level minimum wage where it could not be established by negotiation (Bosch, 2018) – the issue lost its force in animating union coalition dynamics. Unions went on to mount a more unified push for a universal statutory minimum wage, but it would take years of sustained campaigning before it was finally introduced in January 2015 (Marx and Starke 2017).

This coalitional split over minimum wages emerged in a context of deteriorating economic conditions, ongoing decline in union membership and collective bargaining coverage, and a push by the Social Democratic Government for more extensive neoliberal social and labour

market reform (Hinrichs 2007). After 2000, the German economy remained sluggish, with annual GDP growth averaging 0.9% over the decade to 2010. This record of slow growth had significant consequences for employment and the IR environment. Unemployment exceeded 10% until the middle of this decade, falling to 8.7% by 2008. A critical factor contributing to these economic woes was high unemployment in the former East Germany, which remained above 13% until 2010 (Destatis, 2019).

The outlook for the union movement was equally pessimistic, reflecting a growing number of threats and shrinking opportunities to pursue significant campaigns. Unlike the previous coalitional periods examined so far, these new threats centred on unions and their capacity to effectively defend and advance member interests. Since the early 1990s, German unions had suffered a significant loss of organisational power, with union density declining by almost 10 percentage points between 1992 and 2002, dropping from 33.9% to 23.7% (Visser 2016), or an overall decline of around one-third. Similarly, collective bargaining coverage of employees in the old federal states had also contracted by 10 percentage points, falling from 72.2% to 62.9% between 1995 and 2002 (Ellguth and Kohaut 2014). Meanwhile, the government's reform strategy (*Agenda 2010*) further fuelled the expansion of low-wage work, which had begun in the mid-1990s (Bispinck and Schäfer 2006; Kalina and Weinkopf 2012).

Unions, aware of growing threats and contracting opportunity structures, were now actively exploring new tactics and strategies to shore up their power and influence (Behrens et al. 2003). When NGG initiated the push for a statutory minimum wage, it took its cues from international experience. One of our interviewees, a retired top-level NGG official, recalled that the union president was initially sceptical of pursuing a statutory minimum wage. However, research by NGG's collective bargaining department highlighted the positive experience with minimum wage laws in other countries, where such provisions worked to complement, not undermine, collective bargaining. This evidence was ultimately instrumental in convincing NGG's leadership to support the policy (Interview 6) and becoming a coalition broker. As another interviewee, the president of one of NGG's biggest state branches, told us:

'It was a great idea for us, simply because it also meant we had to acknowledge one of our weaknesses. And we had, and still have, a weakness, because we are unable to organize some of our jurisdictions. I'd love to have 200,000 members in hospitality here, but as long as we have only 5% density we have no power in collective bargaining' (Interview 7).

In contrast to the first two cases of coalitional activity examined so far, this example suggests that organizational and member interests, rather than programmatic or ideological concerns, were more important in explaining the motivations of coalitions that either supported or opposed a statutory minimum wage. In the case of both NGG and ver.di, the

policy's two most important supporters, the labour market and IR developments experienced in the decade after 2000 presented a more immediate threat to their members' interests and organizational survival. These two unions covered workers in those sectors with more significant and growing low-wage employment, especially in services (e.g. hospitality, accommodation, retail, or call centres). These unions often struggled to secure good wage floors in collective agreements, or even to conclude agreements at all, given low membership density and growing employer hostility (Hinrichs 2007). Advocates like NGG sought an institutional fix to compensate for limited organizational clout. By comparison, the rival coalition comprising industrial unions like IG Metall enjoyed stronger membership density, higher collective bargaining coverage and relatively high wages in their sectors (Thelen 2014: 47-56). These unions perceived the introduction of a universal minimum wage as being in direct conflict with established strategies and organisational priorities. In particular, opponents like IG Metall feared the encroachment of the state on their capacity to set their own bargaining agenda. As Michael Guggemos, then in charge of IG Metall's political lobbying in Berlin, put it:

'[It] would strip a degree of autonomy from unions, by ceding responsibility for wage regulation to the state, where we might have very little influence over the process, rather than improving our own capacity for action (...) In this core policy area unions must regain, secure, and extend their own capacity to act' (Guggemoos 2006: 266, own translation).

Differences in collective bargaining power not only provide a stronger explanation for the competing preferences and coalitional activity around the statutory minimum wage; they also help explain why the composition of competing coalitions on this issue differed from the cases previously examined. As Table 2 shows, these two coalitions also involved collaborations between some unions that had previously found themselves in opposing camps².

- insert Table 2 about here -

Perhaps ironically, IG Metall, which had led the militant camp in the clash over working time reduction, was initially fierce in resisting the call for a statutory minimum wage. In doing so, it joined forces with BCE, a union created from a merger involving two of the main protagonists from the traditionally moderate union camp: the mine workers' union, and the chemical workers' union. Similarly, NGG, previously in the moderate camp, now stood with ver.di - most of whose pre-merger predecessors had been aligned with the militant coalition pushing for a shorter working week.

² In the literature, affiliations have typically been described in dichotomous terms, with one camp variously designated as traditionalists, union left-wingers, the class-militant or conflict-oriented faction, while the other side has been labelled union right-wingers, reformers, moderates, modernisers, or the social-partnership faction.

In union struggles over the statutory minimum wage, ideology and the notion of public benefit played an important, albeit secondary, role in informing the position of both supporters and opponents. For IG Metall and other opponents, a crucial concern was how state involvement in wage determination offended a key ideological tenet of Germany's post-WWII approach to IR: union autonomy from the state in collective bargaining. This concern injected a more ideological dimension to inter-union politics than any analysis focused exclusively on instrumental interests might suggest. From the perspective of NGG and its coalition supporters, a statutory minimum wage reflected a pragmatic approach for addressing its ideological concern with inequality (Peter 2006: 180). Many of those who would benefit from this policy were not union members, and perhaps not likely to become union members. Overall then, both instrumental interests and ideological concerns played some role in motivating coalition choices and activity. Nevertheless, of the two, concerns around organizational and member interests were the predominant factors shaping union choices. In comparison with our previous two cases, we suggest that where coalition activity is motivated by more specific threats, instrumental concerns would be expected to predominate in coalition dynamics. The final case provides an opportunity to explore this proposition.

Case 4: Collective Bargaining Unity

Our final case concerns competing union coalitions campaigning around the principle of CBU (*Tarifeinheit*). Historically, this principle had underwritten a high degree of stability and coherence in the way collective bargaining was conducted within and across enterprises. In particular, it ensured that only one collective agreement would apply to each enterprise, essentially limiting competition between rival unions. This approach, much like the notion of autonomous collective bargaining, was a core principle that defined the German IR system. However, from 2000 some occupational unions began to conclude separate agreements to prosecute their members' sectional interests (Keller 2018). This, in turn, reflected both the industrial and labour market power of the more skilled or specialized occupations represented by these smaller unions. This phenomenon not only undermined CBU at the enterprise level, but further ruptured historical conventions around industrial action, with some of these unions initiating high profile and at times disruptive strike actions. This fragmentation of bargaining also heightened concerns about jurisdictional competition between unions within the workplace.

These debates came to a head in 2010, when Germany's Federal Labour Court ruled that different collective agreements negotiated by competing unions could apply simultaneously within the same enterprise. This decision was seen as a grave threat to the long-standing principle of CBU. Supported by the peak employer federation BDA, the DGB responded by calling for legislative intervention to restore the principle of CBU. This proposal, however,

proved highly controversial, both within and between unions. IG Metall and IG BCE, who had become unlikely coalitional partners in opposing the statutory minimum wage, formed the core of a union coalition supporting a legislative solution, while ver.di, NGG and GEW jointly took an opposing view. The intensity of the disagreement was reflected in the unprecedented reporting of internal dissent in a DGB press release (DGB 2014). Ultimately, legislation was passed on the issue in 2015. However, ver.di and some occupational unions launched a constitutional challenge, which required some amendments to the legislation (Keller 2018).

The contextual attributes of the period during which this final case study played out overlap to some degree with those shaping coalitional activity in our third case study. As we noted above, the period after 2000 was marked by declining union membership and bargaining coverage, and a growing climate of hostility by many employers towards unions and collective bargaining. This institutional fragmentation intensified over the period of our final case. It was especially evident in threats to the coherence of collective bargaining structures and processes, which stemmed from employer-driven concession bargaining (Bispinck 2011), deviations from industry agreements, and union deviation from CBU at the enterprise level. Employer animosity towards the collective foundations of German IR was also intensifying, as employers facilitated inferior collective agreements with Christian unions and undermined the role of works councils (Behrens and Dribbusch 2018). While the economic shock of the global financial crisis (GFC) posed a further challenge, employment remained remarkably stable despite a significant decline in GDP growth, in what has been termed the “German labour market miracle” (Herzog-Stein et al. 2010). During this period, unions regained some standing with Angela Merkel’s government for their role in facilitating measures to moderate the potentially adverse impacts of the GFC, such as temporary working time reductions (Müller-Jentsch 2018). Even after the make-up of the CDU-led governing coalition became more conservative, with the free-market FDP replacing the SPD as partner in 2009, unions retained some currency with the chancellor’s office.

Much like our third case study of the minimum wage, the split over CBU saw coalitions motivated predominantly by sectional interests and instrumental concerns. This was evident both in terms of how unions aligned in each of the two coalitional groupings, and in subsequent developments. Nonetheless, important ideological concerns and political values played some part. As with the case of the minimum wage, these broader concerns, whilst programmatic in orientation, were narrowly focused on long-held principles intended to support autonomous collective bargaining and the right to strike. While many unions in this debate expressed concerns about union and worker solidarity, questions about broader social goals, such as reducing rising inequality and civilizing market capitalism, were clearly more peripheral. Reflecting the nature of the challenges this issue posed, organizational and member concerns were primary motivations for union choices. For those unions prosecuting separate agreements which undermined CB unity, sectional interests in the form of higher

wages and improved benefits were valued, even when they came at the expense of solidarity and the interests of less powerful unions and workers.

One of the largest unions to initially support the DGB position was ver.di. This support was motivated by a desire to limit competition from smaller occupational unions seeking to accumulate members and influence. The breakdown of CBU had a greater immediate impact on ver.di than it did on any other union (Burgess and Symon 2013; Keller 2018). Echoing ver.di's initial stance, IG Metall also supported legislative intervention. Along with other supporters such as BCE, the metalworkers' union invoked notions of solidarity to explain their support for legislation. This stance reflected the argument that if unions were to compete *within* an enterprise, they would inevitably pursue narrower sectional interests, to the detriment of more encompassing objectives. This would ultimately divide workers, potentially leaving some groups behind and many worse off (Vassiliadis 2015). More directly, these unions also expressed growing concern over competition and the prospect of destructive and costly jurisdictional disputes. In part, ver.di's abandonment of support for legislative intervention reflected ideological differences within the union, particularly over the potential erosion of solidarity and the rights of smaller unions to strike. However, it also reflected a growing realization that state-imposed CBU would ultimately limit opportunities to extend ver.di's own organizing efforts and compete along emerging jurisdictional boundaries (e.g. in third-party logistics) with unions such as IG Metall and smaller occupational unions. The coalition of unions opposing state intervention which then formed around ver.di was generally motivated by these same industrial concerns (Schiermeyer 2015a, b). Ultimately, in this case the coalitions were formed in response to a powerful threat: the prospect of intensified union competition arising from an unexpected legal change in how collective bargaining was regulated.

5. Discussion

To explain union coalition activity, we began by distinguishing two different union logics. Under instrumental logic, union behaviour is more narrowly motivated by potential benefits to the union and its members, while ideological logic refers to broader motivations related to major societal concepts such as equality or justice. We sought to understand the interplay between these two logics by studying whether and how they shape coalitional activity. Our case studies of union coalitions in post-war German IR allow us to reflect on the explanatory potential of these two contrasting approaches. In particular, we discuss whether and to what extent instrumental concerns, ideology, threats, and brokerage animated coalition dynamics in the DGB.

- insert table 3 about here -

As summarised in Table 3, we found instrumental concerns played a decisive role in our two most recent cases. When NGG and ver.di led the push to introduce a statutory minimum wage, they were predominantly motivated by the need to find an institutional fix for their own weaknesses in collective bargaining. Similarly, in the case of CBU, instrumental concerns about the opportunities and challenges posed by union competition were critical in driving unions' coalitional choices. However, our analysis suggests that a focus on selective benefits does not provide sufficient analytical purchase to account for coalitional activity in the case of WCF or working time reductions. As predicted by SMT, other factors were sometimes equally or more important in bringing unions together in competing coalitions. Indeed, in our first two cases, ideological concerns emerged as more significant in animating union coalitions. In particular, we found that in the German context, competing union coalitions reflected broader programmatic concerns regarding the redistribution of wealth and power, and the relationship between labour and capital. These findings cast doubt over the decisive importance attributed to an instrumental union logic. Contrary to what this view would suggest, self-interest played only a modest role in driving the first two of our four union coalitions.

The ebb and flow of ideological and instrumental concerns is reflected in the changing compositions of union coalitions over time (Table 2). The major unions forming coalitions for and against WCFs, and in favour of either weekly or lifetime working time reduction, are identical. The key issues changed while the coalitions they brought about remained largely stable. By contrast, our two more recent cases saw a significant reconfiguration of union coalitions, with former rivals IG Metall and BCE joining forces in coalitions over the minimum wage and CBU.

Our study also sheds light on the relationship between dynamic contexts and the motives and behaviours of unions. A key insight from examining coalitional activity across different historical episodes concerns the nature of threats themselves. In all our cases, threats were the catalyst for coalitional activity, although these threats differed in nature. We found that motivating threats emerged during both better and worse economic times, and from different parts of the German political economy (markets, governments, the courts). It is clear from our analysis that over time, threats have become more immediate or closer to home, in that they are increasingly threats to union organisation and their capacity to perform unionate functions. Moreover, a comparison across cases would suggest that where threats involve fundamental distributional or core social justice issues (e.g. wealth in the case of WCFs, and unemployment in the case of working time reduction), and are located in the domain of collective bargaining, broader questions of union ideology played a more significant role in influencing union preferences and coalition activity. In our first two cases, unions were primarily motivated by a vision of what constituted the public good, as opposed to defending their own sectional interests or providing selective benefits to their members. By contrast, when threats originate outside of the field of collective bargaining and involved third parties (the court system in the case of CBU; government deregulation of

employment protections, leading to an increasing low wage sector in the case of the statutory minimum wage), unions deployed coalitions primarily to defend organizational interests.

The final element of our conceptual approach, brokerage, emerged as an important spur to coalitional activity. Brokerage played a particularly prominent role in our first and third cases (WCF and the minimum wage, respectively), where brokers were able to instigate public debate and mobilize union interest to push different solutions for tackling emerging threats. When construction union president Georg Leber championed the idea of WCFs, the ensuing debate polarized unions and gave birth to rival coalitions. NGG played a similar brokerage role when it took the lead in calling for a universal statutory minimum wage. By taking a vanguard role in championing particular policies, these unions initiated debate and effectively prompted other unions to take sides. While not central to our analysis, social movement scholars highlight the role of leadership in realising potential opportunity structures through sensemaking and deciding what matters (Barker et al, 2001).

6. Conclusion

This article set out to examine the factors animating union coalitions. We have drawn on insights from SMT to apply a union logics perspective to a historical comparison of union coalition dynamics in Germany. Our study adds novel empirical evidence of the motives driving union coalitional choices. Further, our historical approach has allowed us to explore the conditions under which different logics predominate, and to highlight changes in the configuration of competing coalitions over time.

As suggested by social movement research on coalitions, our findings confirm the need to consider different organizational and contextual factors – ideological and instrumental concerns, political opportunities and threats, and brokerage – and their interplay in shaping the dynamics of union coalitions (Van Dyke and Amos, 2017; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). Beyond providing additional evidence of threats as pivotal to coalitional activity (McCammon and Moon, 2015; McCammon and Van Dyke, 2010), our work also helps to further disentangle how threats interact with other causal factors to influence coalitional processes (McCammon and Moon, 2015). Specifically, we showed that the logics driving coalitional activity vary with the types of threats unions face. While threats to unions' broader social visions engendered stronger ideological concerns, more specific or immediate threats to organizational functioning and survival saw unions prioritize instrumental considerations in coalitional choices. Our findings thus help clarify how different types of threats shape coalition behaviour, suggesting that where unions see their capacity to deploy established repertoires of action imperilled, instrumental concerns tend to predominate. In elaborating how threats interact with coalition logics, our findings also help to account for processes of coalitional realignment across previous ideological divides within movements.

Our findings also illuminate the capacity of union coalitions to achieve their objectives, with the policy consequences of coalitions an understudied area in the social movement literature (McCammon and Moon, 2015; Staggenborg, 2010). Our cases show that coalitional activity yielded mixed policy results, often turning on the capacity of unions to enlist government support for institutional change. In our first case, WCFs never materialized, because the coalition behind this demand was not strong enough to secure government backing for the necessary legislative changes. The outcome was different in the case of working time reduction, where the two rival concepts both diffused throughout the union movement. While the coalition in favour of early retirement succeeded in winning state support for its policy, the rival camp was nonetheless able to introduce working time reduction via collective bargaining. Some 30 years after the issue divided the movement, both weekly working time reduction and early retirement provision can be found in the collective agreements of unions from both sides of the original conflict. In the two more recent cases concerning the statutory minimum wage and CBU, proponents of these concepts succeeded as they were able to encourage if not drive legal changes in support of their demands. In doing so, the coalition pushing for a minimum wage benefited from strong public support for its introduction, while union demands for legislative intervention on CBU were backed by the peak employer federation. As far as outcomes are concerned, it thus appears that union coalitions succeed in their aims where they are powerful enough to secure state support for changing the regulatory framework (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2010; Korpi 1983).

For many union movements around the world, unity in the representation of workers' interests is a long-standing ideal, and in Germany it is the foundational principle for the organization of the main trade union confederation DGB and its affiliates. Notwithstanding, as the title of our paper indicates, our findings suggest that episodes of division between competing coalitions are positively associated with the German union movement's capacity to innovate and place policy issues on the political agenda. Future research should examine whether this also holds true in countries where multiple peak-level union confederations are divided on political grounds, such as France, Italy or Spain. Alternatively, comparative analysis might suggest that different institutional configurations create other transmission mechanisms for conflict within union movements.

Not only do our findings provide a better understanding of union coalitional activity, they also have important implications for broader debates on union behaviour. Notably, the somewhat artificial differentiation of two contrasting logics – ideological and instrumental – means that neither on their own will adequately explain union behaviour (Benassi and Dorigatti, 2015; Dorigatti, 2017). Our cases demonstrate that even when a weaker union movement faces threats, both logics interact. For example, when unions turned to the state for support, seeking institutional interventions to make up for their own weaknesses, the instrumental logic of union behaviour proved more significant, but was still closely tied to ideological considerations. While subjects may have become narrower and visions for

alternative models of society more remote, unions are still engaged in struggles for alternative ideas, and remain informed by ideological concerns. Our approach also shows that there is still much to be gained from further dialogue between IR and SMT.

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Table 1: The context of union coalitions in Germany 1964-2017

Key issue	Formative phase of issue	Average annual GDP-growth	Unemployment rate	Parties in federal government
Workers' capital funds	1964 (publication of Leber's book)	4.4% (1960-70)	0.8% (1964)	Chancellor Erhard (CDU-led government)
Working time	1977 (IG Metall, 12. National Union Convention)	2.9% (1970-80)	4.5% (1977)	Chancellor Schmidt (SPD-led government)
Minimum wage	1999 (NGG demand)	0.9% (2000-11)	11.7% (1999)	Chancellor Schroeder (SPD-led government)
Collective bargaining unity	2010 (judgement by Federal Labour Court, BAG)	4.1% (2010)	8.6% (2010)	Chancellor Merkel (CDU-led government)

Source: Own composition, destatis

Table 2: Union coalition dynamics (1964-2017)

Issue	Total number of affiliates within DGB	Coalition 1 (militant)	Coalition 2 (moderate)	not classified/neutral
Workers' capital funds (1964 ff)	16	IGM, ÖTV, DPG, GEW, GdED, HBV	IG BSE, GTB, BE, IG CPK, NGG, GHK, IG DruPa, GGLF, Leder, Kunst	.
Working time (1977 ff)	17 (GdP has joined in 1978)	IGM, ÖTV, DPG, GEW, GdED, IG DruPa, Kunst, HBV, GHK	IG BSE, GTB, BE, IG CPK, NGG, Leder, GGLF	GdP
Minimum wage (1999 ff)	8 (result of several mergers between 1989 and 2001)	Ver.di, NGG	IG BAU, IGM, IG BCE, Transnet	GEW, GdP
Collective bargaining unity (2010 ff)	8 (Transnet changed to EVG)	Ver.di, NGG, GEW	IG BAU, IGM, IG BCE, GdP, IG BAU, EVG	-

Source: Own composition based on: Höhnen (1974), Jacobi (1974), Mendius (1982), Bahnmüller (1985), Schmidt and Trinczek (1986); Sterkel (2006), G. Deter (2005), various union documents, interviews No. 2,5,8,9,11 and 13

Table 3: Factors animating union coalitions

	Instrumental interests	Ideology	Threats	Brokerage
	Concern with organizational survival and more immediate member interests	Shared beliefs, values and identities	Perceived dangers arising from economic, labour market, or regulatory developments	Unions as policy vanguard
Workers' capital funds	Compensating members for modest bargaining results	Socialism/ownership	High growth rates, unequal distribution of wealth	IG BSE (Leberplan)
Working time	Early retirement benefits	Social partnership, distributive justice	Sluggish mass unemployment	IGM and CPK
Minimum wage	Compensating for bargaining weakness	Autonomous collective bargaining	Declining bargaining - coverage, growing low-wage sector	NGG, international pioneers
Collective bargaining Unity (CBU)	Limiting union competition	Right to strike vs. unity	Growing importance of rival (non-DGB) unions, Judgement BAG	DGB

Appendix

List of interviews conducted

Interview number	Organization of interviewee	Function of interviewee	Date of interview
1	IG CPK	Former executive board member	21 Sept 2011
2	IG Medien/Ver.di	Former executive board member	22 Dec 2009 and 19 June 2017
3	Hans Boeckler Foundation (HBS)	Director collective bargaining archive	04 May 2010 and 12 Dec 2016
4	Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES)	Former director archive	18 July 2011
5	GGLF/IG BAU	Former executive board member	04 Feb 2010 and 07 July 2017
6	NGG	Former executive board member	02 Jan 2018
7	NGG	State-level union president	15 March 2010
8	GEW	Collective bargaining coordinator	08 June 2017
9	GdP	Union secretary, collective bargaining department	19 June 2017
10	Sociological Research Institute (SOFI)	Collective bargaining expert	19 June 2017
11	Gewerkschaft Leder	Former collective bargaining secretary, union headquarters	14 June 2017
12	IG BAU	Union secretary, collective bargaining department	08 June 2017
13	Journal "Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte"	Former chief editor	08 June 2017