

## Abstracts WSI-Mitteilungen 10/2009

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### **Activation with no future - or future investments?**

Labour markets are characterized by increasing flexibility and mobility as well as growing demands for more skilled worker. This development is increasingly challenging social security systems that are based on wage labour and the standard employment relationship. The first part of the article concentrates on this aspect. The second part introduces labour market and social policy measures that are suited to promoting social security while at the same time improving individual skills for coping with increasing demands of labour market flexibility. Moreover, these measures support the need for more flexibility in companies and the need for adaptation of operational flexibility and an improved functioning of the labour market.

Ronald Gebauer

### **Assistance instead of responsibility? Easing the way out of unemployment and poverty**

The labour market reforms that came into force at the beginning of 2005 entered into the code of social law amidst the rhetoric of the motto 'Fördern und Fordern' which translates approximately to 'assistance and responsibility' – the German answer to New Labour's 'rights and responsibilities' concept. Since 2005 representatives from both politics and economics have evaluated the concept positively. This article examines two antithetical positions: one, implicitly based on the labour market forms, assumes that unemployment benefits hinder job-seeking. The counter position is that motivation for job-seeking increases because persons in difficult life situations cannot be satisfied with low wages or unemployment benefits for long. Both theories are checked against data from the German Socio-economic Panel (SOEP). A comparison of recipients of social assistance from different birth cohorts (sequence pattern analysis) reveals strong labour market orientation, both before and after the reforms. It also verifies the labour market difficulties facing young people starting out from a disadvantaged position. The previously less developed component of 'assistance' has therefore to be extended and qualitatively improved.

Vera Trappmann,/Susanne Draheim

### **Lifelong learning: trade unions and competence development in the active welfare state**

Eight years after the implementation of the first collective agreement on qualification in Baden-Wuerttemberg, the preliminary results of promoting continuing education and lifelong learning (LLL) in Germany are not particularly impressive. Nevertheless, according to the argument put forward in the article - the implementation of programs for lifelong learning and competence development represents an important field of activity for trade unions, albeit accompanied by many contradictions. The article initially outlines the political development of LLL from an emancipatory idea to a functional adaptation strategy, and then takes a look at further education in Germany. Based on selected pilot projects in which trade unions were involved, it is shown how the certification of competencies and consultations about learning can take place. At the same time these projects in the field of lifelong learning reveal unsolved problems. On this basis, the specific challenges for trade unions are discussed, as well as the policy of competence development.

Silke van Dyk/Stephan Lessenich

### **The ambivalence of (de)activation: growing old under flexible capitalism**

Society's view of elderly people who have left gainful employment has changed significantly in recent years. In the face of the virulent debate on demographic change in the form of an

'over-ageing' of society – and with reference to the shift in the ageing process – the picture of the 'well-earned retirement' gives way to considerations of how older people can contribute towards tackling the challenges of flexible capitalism. Receiving a pension no longer means taking the role of the inactive retiree, but rather of being a 'best-ager', whose lifestyle represents that of an active citizen. Because of the discourse on the ideal active citizen in the fields of age science, politics and the media on the one hand, and the fact that in the field of activation research elderly people are extensively faded-out, this social phenomenon has attracted very little critical attention to date. This article discusses the ambivalence of this development.

Henning Laux/Hartmut Rosa

### **The accelerated democracy – considerations on the global economic crisis**

In the course of the modern age a process of erosion can be perceived, erosion of those conditions, resources and foundations necessary to make rational decisions. The political class is particularly affected: nation state politics seems to be increasingly helpless in the face of the challenge posed by differentiated and accelerated controlling systems. The ensemble of democratic institutions appears less and less capable of regulating or activating social developments which result from soaring complexity (in the social and time dimensions, as well as in specialist areas). The change of time structures turns out to be eminently debilitating in this connection. In the present organisational system the expectations of citizens, trade unions and enterprises are systematically and inevitably not met. It may be assumed that these problems emerge particularly virulently in times of crises. Hence, to validate the general diagnosis, we will take a closer look at the politico-economic decision-making behaviour within the global economic crisis of 2008/2009.

Michael Behr

### **The unfortunate success factor – accelerated, activated but not future compliant**

East German workers have made a significant contribution to the successful restructuring and consolidation of the east German economy. Skilled workers with high qualification levels, and strong work ethics could be mobilized in order to produce an economic turnaround following the catastrophic decline in the wake of re-unification. Many skilled workers found their aspirations and demands concerning work content and participation fulfilled in the post 1989 era, when many companies were engaged in a struggle for survival. However, more recent research points to growing feelings of frustration among qualified workers as management shows disregard for worker's efforts and contributions. This article argues that deficient management cultures and recognition policies are undermining the motivation and commitment of the employees. In the medium term these deficiencies might thus contribute to an erosion of the very basis of flexible quality production.

Karina Becker/Thomas Engel/Diana Lehmann

### **Activating participation in occupational safety and health**

Practical policies of occupational safety and health (OSH) are one of the major instruments for creating humane working conditions and synchronizing the demands of work with employees' private needs (work-life balance). New and modernized regulations on the European and national levels intend to strengthen employees' participation as "experts for their own health". This kind of activating or empowering approach relocates responsibility for OSH with a company's workforce instead of its management. The article investigates preconditions for participation in OSH, as well as examining opportunities and risks. An empirical case study carried out at a company illustrates the extent to which chances for participation are influenced by varying micro-political degrees of freedom for employees' individual or collective action within the company.

Michael Corsten/Romy Seidel

**Voluntary civic engagement – a re-activating force?**

Volunteer work is one element in our contemporary rhetoric of activism. Some expectations are that volunteer work may not only enrich the civic life of modern democracies, but also activate unemployed workers on the labour market. Recent research claims that the chances of reactivating unemployed persons and incorporating them in society through their involvement with volunteer work are extremely low. We contrast these results with examples from our own research into volunteers in east Germany - indicating the long-term benefits of volunteer work with regard to work-biographical transitions, including periods of unemployment. Especially people who have taken up volunteer work early in their lives have also developed a rich social network in their local context. Therefore, actors with high potentials of social, cultural, and economic resources are likelier to profit from volunteer work than those with low potential. In this way, the discourse on civic engagement reinforces the new discourse on social distinction – the one between ‘active’ and ‘inactive’ subjects.