

Delegates from Germany for the general assembly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Women's Conference in Nepal

Country Report Germany for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Women's Conference of grassroots women in Kathmandu/Nepal in 2016

*Preceding the presentation:*

*Introduction of the delegates: names, organisation, profession/activities in the women's liberation movement.*

## **1. Germany - General information about the country**

We live in an imperialist core country within the European Union. 80 million people live in Germany today, 20 % have a migration background, half of those 20% have no German passport. 51% of the population are women.

Head of the current government is a woman, Angela Merkel.

Our industry is one of the most productive in the world. Due to the support of the government the biggest corporations have become even stronger in the wake of the deepest and longest economical crisis from 2008 to 2014. Annual operating profits are calculated by the billions e.g. VW 12 billions, Daimler 9 billions, Siemens 5,6 billions a year (figures from 2013). All those profits are generated on the back of the blue- and white-collar workers and their families.

A showcase of the selling methods applied by these corporations is VW: manipulated CO2 emission values boosted international sales figures at the expense of the environment and the health of the people.

Since the introduction of new social security laws - so called Hartz IV laws - the low wage sector has grown. Germany is the country with the highest reduction of wages in Europe and it is above all women who end up in part time and mini jobs with wages too low to secure an independent existence. Old-age poverty among women is extremely high.

13 million women, man and children live below the poverty line in a land that is that rich! Population figures have dropped by 2 million in the last 4 years. On the average women in Germany have only 1.3 children.

In Germany the number of strikes isn't as high as in other European countries although there is a widespread dissatisfaction and huge mass demonstrations on certain topics such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between Europe and the USA or the energy policy. Environmental awareness in Germany is very high.

The government of Mrs Merkel pursues in many areas a moderate course of silent policy making where tiny steps forward are advertised as big achievements in order to dampen the general dissatisfaction amongst the population and distract from the fact that the policy is benefitting big monopolies and banks.

The bourgeois media plays a crucial role in manipulating public opinion.

When in summer 2015 refugees started to arrive in Germany in big numbers, a majority of the population welcomed them warmly.

Countless volunteers, among them many women and teenagers worked day and night to care for the

urgent needs of the refugees.

For two month Mrs Merkel - the head of government - made no comment. When she noticed that the people in Germany are in favour of receiving refugees, she relaxed one of the EU common agreements regarding refugees letting herself be lauded as the “mother of refugees”.

At the same time the government tightens the laws on political asylum rigorously. Many people are sent back as soon as they arrive, family reunification in Germany is bound to be prohibited, which often affects women and children. Are they to die in the hail of bombs in their home countries?

Again at the same time Germany is the third biggest arms exporter in the world and arms deals running into billions are authorized to countries that support the IS. The government prefers to supply the Turkish authorities with money to prevent refugees to reach the European borders instead of promoting an humanitarian corridor to Syria. And Germany has taken up an active role in the war in Syria since December 2015.

Some bourgeois media and some political parties rake up xenophobic hatred, crimes by the far right- wing such as arson attacks against refugee homes are played down. But even if this kind of scaremongering unsettles some people and the political debate is polarized into two camps, it is the solidarity with and unselfish support of refugees that carries the day.

Demonstrations by fascist activists are protected by the police and are vastly outnumbered by their counter-demonstrations most of the times.

Anti-communisms is a very pronounced feature of German society. For instance, it is the only country in Europe where the Kurdish PKK is illegal. Under the cover of “fight against terror” the struggle for freedom and democracy in the world is demonized and denounced as terror in the media. But more and more people in Germany start to see through this deceit.

## **2.Women’s consciousness is growing in Germany**

Of 42,7 million employees in Germany, around 55% have a full-time job.

71 % of women in Germany are employed, the European average lies at 62.3 (only in the Netherlands (71.9%), in Denmark (72,2%), Finland (72.5%) and Sweden ( 76.8%) the rates are higher).

Part-time – and „mini“ jobs have increased to 14.8 million, or 35%. In these kind of jobs almost 75% are women.

Since years it seems like it is has been firmly established that women earn 23% less on average, sometimes for the same job. The consequence is that women are mainly found in the lower income groups. Among the high gross salaries only one fifth are women. (Survey „gender pay gap, DIW 2014). Being a single mother bears the highest risk of poverty.

The number and quality of childcare centres has not kept up with the increasing employment rate of women. There is no comprehensive all-day schooling. A lot of women with children feel like a hamster on its wheel. The bourgeois family order imposes birth, education, regeneration of labour and in parts the care for the elderly to the families alone and women carry the main burden.

Beside their jobs, they have to manage all these demands while having to comply with the current ideal of beauty, which is dictated anew by the media industry every day.

Mainly women, working in education and social careers, went on strike with their union ver.di confidently for 6 weeks in the beginning of 2015. They fought against the discrimination of women's work and for the social recognition of their important tasks with children and teenagers. This predominantly women's strike was primarily directed against the social disdain of their work with children and teenagers. Despite a media smear campaign, 70 per cent of the population backed the strike even after several weeks and it made obvious that this is a fight for the interests of the broad population. It helped to increase the women's consciousness in the working-class and women's movement.

### **3. Young women in Germany**

Every 6<sup>th</sup> child in Germany is poor; a lot of children grow up at the poverty line. The youth unemployment rate is at 7%. Compared to countries like Greece and Spain it is quite low. The government and the media use this to lead the people to believe that the people in Germany are still well off and thereby distract them from grievances. These quotas conceal: Despite good school education a lot of young people find themselves in contract labour, temporary jobs or internships after their occupational training. Many go on visiting schools because they do not find trainings. After their trainings they often are no longer employed in their profession. Contract and temporary work implies that young people earn a lot less than the core staff and have less protection against dismissals. Young women and girls are more often affected by unemployment than boys. There have never been so many students before. For many of them studying is a stopgap, because they do not find trainings. Even today girls and young women often end up in typical "female professions": nurses, kindergarten teachers, office clerks, saleswomen, hairdressers. These jobs pay less than the typical "male professions".

In general young women and girls are really self-confident nowadays. The younger ones often think that the oppression of women does not affect them. But as soon as they enter the companies or found a family they realise that they have to fight: against bad salaries, against everyday sexism, against bullying and subtler forms of violence.

Sexism in Germany has many faces. Since a new legislation in 2002 Germany has become a European hub of prostitution and women trafficking. Young women from all around the world are lured by promising them jobs and have to prostitute themselves. Again and again there are cases of drugged young girls sent streetwalking by their pimps, young girls disappear or are simply killed.

A subtler form is "everyday sexism". This is reflected in the wide spread obsession with beauty and slimness. There are TV shows like *Germany's Next Top model* and other shows and magazines that present us the picture of the perfect women; she looks great, does everything for herself and her family on her own, has a successful career. For most women and girls an unattainable image. Many do not accept this pressure anymore. With campaigns like *One Billion Rising* or on International Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> March women and girls stand up against violence against women. It was important for the militant women's movement to have a representative of the struggle against violence against women at the World Women's Conference.

The youth league REBELL conducted several song contests, where women and girls confidently brought their wishes and dreams to the stage. It shows: To fight against sexism is only possible when you are organized! And also young women in Germany are learning how to fight organized better and better.

#### **4. Our struggles, our dreams, our visions**

The **women's committee *BASTA!*** carries on the torch of the strike at OPEL.

2104 the first automotive-plant in the history of Germany was closed down.

For years there had been a struggle in which women, female workers at Opel, mothers, wives and sisters of workers at Opel Bochum played an important role. They founded the women's committee *BASTA!* And fought side by side with the men. With contributions at staff meetings, polls at the factory gates, t-shirts with the print "*Darling, we don't sign, we fight*" etc. they attracted attention and became a militant part of the entire workforce. A public appearance at the huge motor fair in Frankfurt in 2014 was especially impressive.

The *BASTA!* women proved that they can fight organized and self-confidently. Particularly in the plants of the super monopolies militant workers fighting for higher wages and improved working conditions with their colleagues increasingly experience bullying. That puts pressure on women, they are trying to isolate us etc. A struggle arises and some see the only solution in changing the job or even give up. We women can set a power against this, if we organize ourselves. As worldwomen we support each other and strengthen our solidarity and unity! That is what we would like to discuss in particular at the World Women's Conference:

#### **The *Project Joly* – concrete Internationalism**

Women of the union *ver.di* in Duisburg took the initiative of the organizer-project "*Joly*" after the Rana Plaza catastrophe in Dhaka/Bangladesh with the active support of the European Coordinator Monika in the World Women's Conference's network. *Joly Talukder* is an Asian Coordinator from Bangladesh and president of the Union *GWTUC*. The colleagues from *ver.di* collected more than 4.200 € donations until the end of 2015 and thereby financed 8 organizers in Bangladesh. They also support the next World Women's Conference. 500 new members organized themselves in *Joly's* union *GWTUC* during the last strike. The *ver.di* women from Germany made their contribution to make this success possible. Here the idea of the "worldwomen" is alive!

#### **Women are warriors for the environment**

The daily question what we eat in the family is a question of the struggle for the environment! Genetically modified food, carcinogenic pesticides such as glyphosate, factory farming and overfeeding with antibiotics and other medications, endangering of agricultural land through hydraulic fracking, increase in allergies etc. put our health at risk.

So-called "organic food" promises to be freed from it but it is much more expensive and whether it really keep its promises – one cannot always be sure of. This struggle for our natural livelihood should be increasingly adopted by us worldwomen.

In 2009 wives, mothers and daughters of miners founded a consortium "miners' wives in the women's league Courage". We value their experiences and actions highly.

In Germany, as well as in the whole of Europe, all coalmines are to be shut down by 2018 following a decision of the EU. Thousands of jobs - especially for our young people - will be destroyed and an entire region will be ruined. The miners' wives hold the opinion that coal mining in Germany has to be maintained. However we are against burning coal. Coal is a valuable raw material, too good for burning it!

With closing down the mines they plan the entry into the extremely polluting fracking. It is supposed to obtain natural gas and oil from the shale. To open the shale formations to acquire natural gas and oil, a vast quantity of water, sand and toxic chemicals is pressed into the ground. This pollutes the ground- and drinking water and causes earthquakes.

In 2015, the miners' wives consortium has organized vociferous protest. Armed with cooking pots they marched to the location of one of the last pits or made a performance at the 125 anniversary celebrations of the miners' union.

The whole campaign was encouraging in the struggle against the pit closures.

Also we worldwomen know there are two ways of dealing with our environment: either sustainable and careful or destructive and as unrestrained over-exploitation of nature. To ensure survival of mankind and a future for our children and grandchildren, we woman must organize ourselves worldwide, together with the millions of workers, the environmentalists and the youth, only then we will be a force that is superior to big monopolies of the world.

### **Three women's-political days of struggle**

The three days of struggle for the liberation of women, decided upon at the World Women's Conference of grassroots women in Caracas are taken to the streets in Germany.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2015 more than 10.000 people took to the streets in Germany.

There were broad unities of action where the concerns ranging from Christian, unionists to Marxist-Leninist women were discussed on rallies and demonstrations. In many cities especially the women's league Courage and many migrants' organisations like the Kurdish-Turkish women's organisation Ceni (Kurdish women's office for peace) and the ADKH (democratic women movement in Germany) contributed to its success.

In 2015 the victory of the YPG/YPJ in Kobanê was in the focus on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, there were celebrations and dancing on the streets. Trade unionists of many different companies took part in activities on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. The significant victory over the IS was a worldwide signal for the struggle for freedom and democracy against the oppression of women and fascism.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of May is a special highlight of the unity of the women's and the working-class movement. And on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November – a day that had been unknown in Germany until a few years ago – there are now many activities, above all against structural violence against women. Internationally compound rallies and demonstrations in the city centres, often linked with the flag campaign of Terre des Femmes, as well as numerous hall events bring this subject into the public.

In many towns the protest against the unpopular "Hartz" laws is program for the women's movement every Monday. On Mondays they discuss what can be done against poverty, against discrimination, the worldwide struggles are announced. Women learn to take up the microphone self-confidently and to discuss the issues of the militant women's movement publicly.

A special challenge in Germany is the fight against one of the crudest forms of the exploitation of women in the prostitution industry. Many women's associations, as for example Solwody and a movement called „stop-sex purchase“ are active in this area.

Impoverishment and refugee's misery constitute a booming business for pimps, particularly in the

border regions. An example: for every 1.500 inhabitants there is one brothel in the so-called „sex-capital“ Saarbrücken. Directly on the border to France, where sex purchase and brothels are forbidden, one of the biggest brothels in Germany was opened on 6.000 square meters in 2014. Ironically under the dishonest cloak of the “protected practice” of prostitution huge profits are made with the actually industrialized sex business. The growing streetwalking is the other side of the same coin. 70% of the prostitutes are young women from Eastern Europe. Also prostitution because of poverty is a force and form of the oppression of women. Even Amnesty International has spread out its protecting wings over the prostitution industry, which caused a public outcry in Germany immediately.

### **Organize, Organize, Organize**

To organize oneself in the full-packed women's life is not easy at all. There is still a striking contradiction in Germany: According to a survey women believe that one can achieve changes only organized.

Already 11 times the militant women's movement has organized the women's political council. In 2014 the 11<sup>th</sup> women's political council took place in an Eastern federal state of Germany with quite a new broad alliance. In 2008 the idea of the World Women's Conference was born on the women's political council. In this movement of worldwomen women from different groups, organisations and individuals are working together. Especially the internationalist cooperation has strengthened the militant women's movement in Germany.

One of the decisive organisations is the women's alliance Courage, whose non-partisanship is reason enough for the Secret Services to mention it constantly in their annual reports. On account of that its non-profit status was withdrawn. There are not many women's organisations working across party lines, most women's organisations are closely connected to a political party. Courage defends its important principle of non-partisanship and does not accept to be dictated with whom to work together and with whom not.

The militant women's movement follows the path of non-partisanship and financial independence. In the internationalist association it is democratically decided which activities will be tackled.

The future lies in the international alliance of grassroots women, as it becomes reality at the World Women's conference 2016, in societies that are free from exploitation and oppression – of that the militant women in Germany are sure and we will win them together.