

# Feminisation of the Swedish bank sector 1910-1939

– what and why?

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to uncover the determining factors behind the feminisation of the Swedish bank sector 1910-1939, through analysis of time-series and the Union periodical *Bankvärlden*. Economic and institutional explanations are tried, from a structural-analytical and gender perspective. The results show that feminisation was most rapid during the 1910's, driven by a strong demand for labour from an expanding bank sector. An enabling factor was a change in the character of work through mechanisation and Taylorism, which in combination with an unfavourable real wage development reduced the interest of the male corps to stay in the profession. For women, the sector remained an attractive workplace relative to their alternatives. When banking entered a phase of rationalisation from the 1920's and the demand for labour waned, employers were motivated to keep and increase their share of female labour on account of its lesser cost.

Key words: Feminisation, bank sector, *Bankvärlden*, structural change, labour queues, de-skilling.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are three main reasons for why the feminisation of the Swedish bank sector is an interesting topic – and why I have chosen to study it. The first, straightforward cause is the fact that bank employment has gone from being almost exclusively men’s work a century ago, to a pronounced women’s work today. If you have doubts about this statement, go visit your local bank and then google some historic pictures for comparison. In spite of this blatant development, the process has not been investigated and we do not have any greater knowledge of how or why it occurred. The first and most important aim is to change that. Secondly, little is known about feminisation in general even internationally. Any addition to the pool of knowledge is welcome and needed.

The third, more underlying motivation is abstract in the very best sense, and relates to the theory of cyclical structural change – society’s development through innovation-driven phases of transformation, rationalisation and crisis. Structural change has traditionally been explained and approached from the angle of interplay between economic forces and technological development, with data from the industry sector.<sup>1</sup> However, services constitute an essential and growing part of the economy. Furthermore, the process of structural change inevitably also encompasses elements such as attitudes, values and culture – inherently more difficult to measure, and far less investigated. The factor bridging the technological-economical (materialist) approach and the ideological could, arguably, be the organisation and division of labour – at the core of feminisation, including that of the Swedish bank sector. A venture into the area is thus not only motivated in its own right, but could be a small step towards a richer and more holistic understanding of both the process of feminisation and that of structural change.

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<sup>1</sup> See Schön 2000 and 2006

## 1.1 Research question

The question I hope to answer is – which were the determining factors behind the feminisation of the Swedish bank sector between 1910 and 1939? This in turn requires the preceding answering of how said feminisation in fact developed. Since less is more I will leave it at that.

## 1.2 Limitations and definitions

As in all scientific work – especially that which is to fit in the frame of a masters thesis – limitations are required. The first obvious issue is the chosen time period of study, 1910 to 1939. The period around 1910 marks a distinct change in the development of the Swedish bank sector. This is when the “modern” banking we know today starts to take form. Before that decade, the number of female employees was very limited.<sup>2</sup> The number of banks peak in 1908, and two years later the first major bank fusion takes place – a movement that then came to expand and stretch over decades.<sup>3</sup> The interest organisation for bank employees, *Svenska Bankmannaföreningen* (unionised in 1919), reformed and developed its statutes and expanded its sphere of activities in 1910. The following year it published its first periodical, and women were allowed as members.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for choosing 1910 as a starting point are thus many. As for 1939 as an end year, it is chosen primarily for practical reasons. A longer period does not allow itself to be successfully covered in a study of this scope, and with the start of WWII, the factors impacting the bank sector’s labour market are likely to be turned on their head in a less than normal way. Hence the choice to stop at 1939.

Another important distinction is that my study focuses on the bank sector as labour market. While formal institutional, demographic and world economic changes take place in the background they are not explicitly treated here, but through their indirect effect on labour market outcomes, via mechanisms such as the price or perceived use of different kinds of labour. If there for example is a massive increase in the number of women in working ages, this does not in itself make them increasingly employed in banking. Furthermore, feminisation has not developed the same way in all sectors – still today there are occupations with a very limited female labour share, which implies that sector-specific conditions have large importance. While not optimal, I thus think my approach is defensible. No doubt factors like demography and law warrant detailed investigation, but it simply can not be fitted here. The same goes for comparisons to other sectors, countries or epochs, which will thus not be made. Only very brief comments on general or comparative developments in Sweden are included, where they are considered to have special value. To retain focus – and be able to say something meaningful about anything – I have chosen to start at the core. That is the sectoral labour market of banking. With the possibility for me and you to work our ways out in the future.

As for strict definitions, feminisation has two main aspects. Quantitatively, a shift in the gender structure of a profession where an increasing share of the labour force is constituted by women. Qualitatively, a shift in the gender coding of occupational tasks from male to female.<sup>5</sup> Another approach to feminisation is the vertical – the access and presence of women on different levels of the occupational hierarchy. While definitely important and interesting, there are simply no data allowing this aspect to be covered here. In general, there were very few women in senior positions in the bank sector at the end of the 1930’s, and the resistance to any such development

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2 Palmquist 1962:23

3 Bergkvist 1955:432

4 Palmquist 1962:51ff

5 Stanfors 2007:239f

was firm on behalf of the male employees.<sup>6</sup> As a telling example, women's share of the promoted personnel in banking declined from 5 to 4 percent during the last decade of the study.<sup>7</sup> This restriction of feminisation to the lower strata of professions is also a general tendency in concerned occupations, especially early on in the process.<sup>8</sup>

What is meant by "bank sector" is, perhaps surprisingly, harder to define. Generally, the banks implied are private banks. The problem of definition arises because much of the source material used simply talk of "the bank sector", without stating whether only commercial banks or also savings banks are intended. However, the statistics used refer to all private banking.

## 2. STATE OF THE ART

The feminisation of the Swedish bank sector is not an isolated feature. Rather, it takes place against the backdrop, and as an integral part of, a massive societal transformation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the expansion of the tertiary sector from the 1920's and 30's, and the increasing labour force participation of women as central traits.<sup>9</sup> A large majority of this new female labour was concentrated to particular "female" occupations, such as domestic work, retail, textile industry and nursing.<sup>10</sup> While the *occurrence* of these processes are commonly known – well noticed already by their contemporaries<sup>11</sup> – the knowledge of how and why they actually developed is markedly more limited. In part because of a lack of readily available statistical data, and in part because the areas of industry and technology have attracted more attention.

### 2.1 Previous research

As stated above, there are no previous studies of the feminisation of the Swedish bank sector in a labour market perspective. The phenomenon has been briefly touched upon by Karin Kock in the state report on married women's right to gainful employment (SOU 1938:47), and Ann-Marie Sellerberg in 1973 – covering only the period 1930-60, and drawing on Kock's work. Feminisation of the Swedish bank sector has also been studied in a modern perspective, primarily covering the development from the 80's onwards. John Acker (1990, 1991, 1994) is the portal figure of this research. However, Acker's work is not only carried out on a decidedly different period in time, but is also focused on the effects of feminisation on business organisation – a quite different scientific field.

The research on the Swedish bank sector as such is extensive. However, it is almost exclusively focused either on more biographical historical accounts of particular banks' development over time, or on the banks financial activities – primarily what they have done with their money and their significance for the development of society in general and industry in particular. (See Pettersson 2006 for an overview) A common feature in the previously mentioned types of work, is to note that a feminisation has taken place, but to assign it no greater interest or attention. The 2005 dissertation by Appelquist on organisatory change in banking from 1975 can also be placed in this tradition. The bank sector as labour market has thus been subject to very limited attention. In his attempt to sketch the technological changes in banking during the first half of

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6 Palmquist 1962:253, SOU 1938:47:398

7 BFO, 1938:38

8 Stanfors 2007: 239f

9 Greif 1992:13ff

10 SOU 1938:47:94ff

11 BV 1920:9:145

the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Åke Bergqvist<sup>12</sup> starts his article with stating that “you have to use your imagination. You see the literature in this special area is very limited”. That this is the case with the illustrious issue of *technology*, is quite telling for what is known about staff relationships, routines and labour organisation.

If the scope is broadened and made more inclusive, there is an extensive international research on occupational sex segregation and, to a lesser extent, female inroads into a number of professions – from pottery, to pharmacy and also banking – in several western countries. Goldin (1990) and Rotella (1981) are prominent representatives. This research has largely been carried out in the form of case studies of specific occupations in specific countries. The research on female inroads also often focus exclusively on the women and their experiences, leaving the issue of how the process impacts the men in the work place and thus, most importantly, gender relations and the overall organisation of work.<sup>13</sup>

Several case studies of the type mentioned above have also been done on a Swedish setting, for example by Greiff (1992) on the secretarial profession, Wikander (1988) on china manufacturing at the Gustavsberg factory and by Florin (1987) on pre- and elementary school teaching.<sup>14</sup> Stanfors’ and Öberg’s (2007) research on the feminisation of the pharmacist profession, and Nordgren’s (2000) study of the medical profession are other, more recent examples. On an even rarer process – masculinisation – the work by Sommestad on the dairy industry (1992) and Ottosson (2005) on physiotherapists much deserves a mention.

On Sweden but not specifically on occupational sex segregation or feminisation, there is also a number of studies on the general processes of change within (different parts of) the tertiary sector during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or focused specifically on other aspects within it, such as unionisation and technological change.<sup>15</sup> Markedly, a large share of this work has been conducted from a Marxist perspective. The conclusions and explanations derived – international and Swedish – have a rather broad scope, indicating that situated occupational, cultural and many other types of characteristics – in all, context – matter. As does the ideological departure point of the author. Rather than amounting to general consensus, the collective knowledge amassed from this plethora of case studies forms the present, strongly empirically based, *theories* on the subject. More than anything they agree on one thing – “relatively little is known about the factors associated with the changing sex composition of occupations”.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Berqqvist 1955:430

13 Seltzer 2007:2

14 Greiff 1992:27ff

15 Greiff 1992:16ff

16 Reskin & Roos 1990:15



## 2.2 Theory

Theories on feminisation come few and far between. Theories on labour market (sex)segregation on the other hand, abound. While these theories are largely preoccupied with the oppression of women, inequality, discrimination etc.<sup>17</sup>, and generally focus on reasons behind segregation rather than the dynamics of change, they can still be used to identify factors of importance for the sexual division of labour and the gender structure of the labour market. On the aggregate level, who works where and with what is dependent on two factors – supply of and demand for labour. It is in the views on what determines these forces that theoretical schools differ. Three broad strands can be recognised. Self-evident in my account is the gender perspective, i.e. the acknowledgement of “male” and “female” as on-going social constructs and not biologically determined roles to be taken for granted.

### 2.2.1 Economic theories

#### 2.2.1.1 Human capital theory and household division of labour

As all economically oriented theories,<sup>18</sup> human capital theory builds on the assumption that actors are rational, have full information and strive towards maximisation of life time earnings. Education (and experience) is assumed to increase the productivity of the individual, translating directly to a higher wage<sup>19</sup> and/or a better chance at employment.<sup>20</sup> Human capital theory thus assumes that different wage and occupation patterns for men and women are direct logical effects of differences in their human capital through its effects on productivity.<sup>21</sup> Potentially, the productive characteristic sought by an employer can also be the actual gender of the employee as such. For example, women may be hired to meet an increasingly female customer base.<sup>22</sup> However, the sexual division of labour at any given moment is treated as given, and the theory does not calculate on neither men nor women to challenge it. If women for example take for granted that the home and children will be their primary focus, they will invest differently than men in order to maximise earnings, fostering segregation.<sup>23</sup> In a hypothetical explanation to feminisation according to human capital theory, changes in the human capital stock of men and women will thus change the labour market patterns.

The human capital explanation of the sexual division of labour has weak empirical support. For example, it does not explain sex-typing of occupations, or why women with equal qualifications still fall behind men in terms of wages and promotion.<sup>24</sup> The theory can however still have explanatory power in certain cases, and was probably relatively more valid in the past – such as the period studied here – when human capital differences between sexes were greater.<sup>25</sup> The theory's greatest merit is that it treats women as equal to men in their role as actors.

Occupational sex segregation can also be the result of household division of labour. This approach views the household as a unit, making joint decisions to maximise its total utility.

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17 Bradley 1989:50

18 Ehrenberg & Smith 2003:3

19 Salas-Velasco 2006:414

20 Pettersson 1983:23

21 Padavic & Reskin 2002:51, Ehrenberg & Smith 2003:379ff

22 Muzio & Bolton 2006:81

23 Padavic & Reskin 2002:86

24 Bradley 1989:64

25 Padavic & Reskin 2002:53

However, there is also the possibility of social custom, such as the provider norm, or differences in bargaining power between family members affecting the outcome. As in the case of human capital theory, these conditions are considered given and simply mark the point of departure for the household's rationality. Given differences in pay, skill, preferences or other factors, household members can thus decide to specialise within their family. Often this takes the form of the woman assuming responsibility for the home and child care, while the man takes the part of provider. The household division of labour can thus to a large extent be seen as an effect of differences in productive characteristics. The primary prediction from a household division of labour-perspective would be that changes in the relative wage levels of men and women, to women's benefit, would alter the optimal division of labour within the household, and potentially the occupational sex segregation pattern – feminisation. Changes in social custom, or the introduction of an extremely advantageous parental benefit only for men could cause the same outcome.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.2.1.2 Substitution, buffer and de-skilling hypotheses

Labour market sex segregation has also been approached from a Marxist perspective. One of the strands within this theoretical frame starts from the employers' need for two types of labour – a stable core of committed skilled workers, and marginal groups that can be used as a buffer.<sup>27</sup> The buffer hypothesis thus views women as a flexible reserve army of labour whose labour force participation increases during economic upswings and decreases during downturns, giving rise to a pro-cyclical pattern of feminisation in terms of quantity.<sup>28</sup> Feminisation would thus be a result of a strong and increased cost pressure, assuming female wages are lower than men's. The theory does however not explain why some buffer-labour, such as in construction, is made up by men.<sup>29</sup>

Another, similar hypothesis builds on substitution. Women are essentially treated as a source of cheap and available labour.<sup>30</sup> Because of the gender wage gap and assumed lower level of union activity of women, men are substituted with women to cut costs. The hypothesis here is thus that larger the economic need of the employer, the larger the substitution and feminisation.<sup>31</sup> Why the gender wage gap exists to begin with is not explained.

Women have also historically often been let into “male” occupations during times of crisis such as wars, or when there has been a shortage of male labour.<sup>32</sup> While such breaks potentially give women an opportunity to prove their competence, these structural changes have rarely been permanent – women are generally excluded again once the crisis has ended. Though, the experience can be liberating (and eye-opening) for women.<sup>33</sup> According to this approach, feminisation would be a result of a shortage of male labour.

A final strand of the Marxist school of thought, with Braverman as its portal figure, focuses on the concept of de-skilling. Braverman argues that the capitalist employers in their struggle to control labour progressively degrade tasks as new technology is adopted and work reorganised – de-skilling. De-skilling is in turn considered related to employment of women, and an

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26 Ehrenberg & Smith 2003:210ff

27 Bradley 1989:65f

28 Erturk & Catagay 1995:1971

29 Bradley 1989:65f

30 Padavic & Reskin 2002:78

31 Erturk & Catagay 1995:1971

32 Padavic & Reskin 2002:63f

33 Bradley 1989:47

increasingly female labour force is seen as part of the proletarianisation of the occupation in question. If the de-skilling hypothesis holds, feminisation of the bank sector would thus be viewed as a degradation of the labour force, resulting from a degradation of work – a very flattering perspective.<sup>34</sup>

However, the theory of de-skilling does not explain why there is sex segregation in new occupations, or why women are allowed to perform obviously very skilled work – and excel in ranks – in some professions, such as nursing and teaching. General for the Marxist theories is also a failure to account for why labour market sex segregation predates industrialisation.

## **2.2.2 Institutional theories**

### 2.2.2.1 Structural discrimination

Another theoretical strand argues that wage differences and occupational sex segregation can not – at least not fully – be explained through qualitative differences between the sexes. Even with identical productive characteristics men and women are treated differently. Instead, it is considered a result of discrimination, either through personal prejudice, the presence of non-competitive forces on the market (such as unions, monopolies or social custom), or statistical prejudice, i.e. negative stereotyping of certain groups, in this case women. In economic terms, employers maximise perceived utility rather than profit. Furthermore, it is questioned why men and women supposedly have different occupational preferences or productive characteristics to begin with. The answer is that this is the result of pre-market discrimination – unwarranted differential treatment and experiences throughout life.<sup>35</sup> The institutional theories thus bring in parts of the common criticism against neo-classical economics as displayed in the theories above – the individual is not fully rational and does not possess full information.<sup>36</sup> Implied from this theoretical perspective is that the ability to discriminate is inversely related to the need to maximise profits. The prediction is thus that severe economic stress would increase feminisation. The same result could also be achieved from a shift in attitudes so that discrimination was either reduced in general, or targeted against a new group.

### 2.2.2.2 Sex-typing and segmentation

The basic tenet of the theory of sex-typing is that society continuously labels different occupations, jobs and activities as appropriate for different sexes. This is termed sex-typing or gender-coding, and shapes the expectations of people at all levels about who is suited or even imaginable to perform certain work. The sex-typing of jobs is in part a self-enforcing process – many of our beliefs and expectations about who should do what work is gathered from what we see around us in the sexual division of labour existing at the time.<sup>37</sup> However, a profession can remain coded as masculine though it has been feminised – as the case with law – because of a very strong sexual division of labour within the occupation.<sup>38</sup>

Gender-role socialisation towards different occupations is a life-long process of social control and moulding. This means that while there is a natural inertia to change, input in adult or present life matters.<sup>39</sup> Societal features like laws, language and culture all add to the process. Still,

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34 Bradley 1989:65ff

35 Ehrenberg & Smith 2003:382ff

36 Christoffersson 1988:74

37 Padavic & Reskin 2002:8f

38 Muzio & Bolton 2006:85f

39 Padavic & Reskin 2002:54

according to Padavic and Reskin, “unless external circumstances prompt us to examine the assumptions our ideologies make, they will support gender inequality at work”. The present order may thus need an external shock to make us think outside the box.<sup>40</sup>

Inherent in sex-typing of activities is the ascription of different qualities and characteristics to people of different sexes.<sup>41</sup> For example, women are commonly stereotyped as patient, caring and docile, and suitable for light, safe, repetitive jobs requiring dexterity rather than actual skill. The opposite is held for men. These conceptions are then used to allocate labour. In the extreme, the result is thus a completely segregated labour market, occupying two separate labour forces which simply do not compete for the same jobs.<sup>42</sup>

A possible outcome of sex-typing is segmentation. If occupations are strongly gendered, this can protect employees of the assigned sex from being fired, and is likely to increase job applicants’ of that sex chances of being hired. Again amounting to a self-enforcing process working towards a rigid, segmented labour market.<sup>43</sup> Changes in technology, organisation and production can in turn impact the supply of jobs with different genders – meeting male or female stereotypes – in the economy or even within a trade, resulting in a changed sex composition of labour. One example is mechanisation reducing the importance of physical strength.<sup>44</sup> A feminisation of the bank sector could thus come about for one of two reasons. Either because of a change in the sex-typing of the occupation, or through a change in the characteristics ascribed to women so that they become more in line with what is presently expected of a bank employee.

### 2.2.3 Feminist theories

The feminist theories of labour market sex segregation developed largely as a response to the economic and institutional explanations, which were considered insufficient. The feminist theories sees patriarchy as the force at work. The key actors are men in the role of power-holders – husbands, co-workers, employers and the like. The assumption is that dominant groups, in this case men, attempt to preserve their power and privileged position by excluding subordinate groups (women) from their sphere, and preventing them from making inroads. Women are thus perceived as a threat to be controlled.<sup>45</sup>

The means of control are many. Men are considered to manipulate women’s access to new technology to such that is connected to unskilled, low-status work.<sup>46</sup> Introduction of new technology has historically been used to ensure the best jobs for men.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, differentiated – unequal – ideals for men and women and sex-typing of jobs are considered used to lead women into subordination. The gendering of jobs is an active process, built on someone’s (men’s) interest in differentiation between the sexes. The perceived need to build such a discourse increases with the degree to which women are considered a threat<sup>48</sup>, and its strength is positively related to the men’s ability to organise.<sup>49</sup> In addition, women are not only commonly

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40 Padavic & Reskin 2002:44

41 Padavic & Reskin 2002:71ff

42 Bradley 1989:9

43 Erturk & Catagay 1995:1971f

44 Bradley 1989:171ff

45 Padavic & Reskin 2002:45

46 Bradley 1989:165

47 Bradley 1989:227

48 Walker 2003:629

49 Bradley 1989:145

assigned tasks considered to have low status and importance, tasks are perceived this way largely because women perform them, making devaluation of women's work a self-enforcing process.<sup>50</sup> Feminisation can thus depress the wages of the entire profession,<sup>51</sup> and is often paralleled by masculinisation at the higher levels of the occupation – according to the feminist theory in a drive from men to retain the best jobs for themselves.<sup>52</sup>

Basic potential agents of change in the sexual division of labour – causes of feminisation – are considered to be technological development and changes in the organisation of work and/or production.<sup>53</sup> These usually interact, and operate through increased mechanisation and subdivision of labour. When new levels are added to the hierarchy of tasks, an opening for women is created at its lower end.<sup>54</sup> The introduction of new activities thus allows women to be employed without coming in direct competition with men for the same jobs – or their old jobs – lowering the male resistance to female employment.<sup>55</sup>

The same is considered true when new, presumably better and more skilled opportunities arrive for men, causing them to move on and leave old tasks behind for women.<sup>56</sup> When women enter a new labour market they consequently almost always perform tasks which have been reorganised, degraded or technically transformed; there is no simple substitution.<sup>57</sup> The feminist prediction is thus that we should see such a development in banking between the years of my study.

Lastly, the feminist school emphasises that upon a change in the gender-code and labour composition of occupations, it is the outcome or expression of the sexual division of labour that changes rather than its nature. Work remains segregated, only in a new way.<sup>58</sup> Through introduction of new technology, restructuring of jobs and economic ups and downs, “the pattern of segregation has been largely undisturbed”.<sup>59</sup> Feminisation thus in no way means gender equality – it can just as well be related to exploitation, exclusion and subordination.<sup>60</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Towards integration**

Opinions on where the sexual division of labour is rooted to begin with will determine where reasons for its changes should be sought – relations of production, family and social relations or the productive characteristics of labour. There is no consensus on this issue. Rather, the debate is ongoing.<sup>61</sup> However there are overlaps and interaction between the theories. All in some way deal with profit maximisation, bargaining power and control.

As examples of interplay, the attitudes of customers and co-workers to female labour are highly important for the actual cost (economic *and* social) for employers of hiring women.<sup>62</sup> Employers can in turn play on the societal ideals for women – such as to become housewives when married

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50 Padavic & Reskin 2002:144

51 Seltzer 2007:1

52 Muzio & Bolton 2006:81

53 Bradley 1989:40

54 Bradley 1989:118

55 Bradley 1989:46

56 Padavic & Reskin 2002:10

57 Bradley 1989:145

58 Padavic & Reskin 2002:9f

59 Bradley 1989:13

60 Muzio & Bolton 2006:82

61 Bradley 1989:51ff

62 Padavic & Reskin 2002:79

– to ensure turnover and keep wages low.<sup>63</sup> This gives women less reason to acquire human capital, decreasing their value on the labour market and their chances at senior positions. Through a lack of promotion opportunities for women, employers then create incentives which further support leaving the labour market upon marriage. The end result a self-enforcing process of labour market segregation.

Another example is a conflict of interest between men in different roles. As capitalists for women as cheap labour, as workers for women as weak competition, and as husbands for women as housewives – while earning a hefty income to the household.<sup>64</sup> A possible solution is stronger sex-typing, which reduces men's competition for the same jobs while retaining employment opportunities and incomes for wives and daughters.<sup>65</sup>

#### 2.2.4.1 Labour queues and job queues

Lastly, Reskin forwards an actual theory on *feminisation*. She emphasises the opening into an occupation that is created for women upon men leaving it. The key concepts are job and labour queues. According to Reskin, employers rank - or queue – labour according to their preferences (generally men over women), and labour ranks jobs according to theirs. Since men and women generally rank jobs the same way, and value pay, security and the like, women will gladly step in when men move out and they move up in the queue.

A change in the queue order generally occurs for one of three reasons. The first is labour shortage, due to either a reduced supply of the preferred labour or an expansion of jobs that the preferred labour simply can not meet. Factor number two is changes in the employers preferences thus causing them to rank the labour differently – usually due either to ideological changes, or a change in the economic conditions placing the cost of labour higher on the employers' agenda. (However, the economic need have to be pressing in order to cause employers to rearrange their priorities – other more ideological and personal concerns tend to be overriding). Thirdly, major changes in the composition of the labour queue can spur reversals in its order. If the less preferred type of labour greatly increases its share, it becomes harder for employers to discriminate and/or ignore it, and vice versa.<sup>66</sup> The job and labour queue hypotheses is thus that women will have been let into banking as a result of either men's departure for greener pastures, labour shortage, or a change in the way women as labour are ranked – either for ideological, economical or necessity reasons.

Assuming men leave before female (potentially degrading) entry, the labour-queue theory does not explain why preferred workers (men) leave an occupation in the first place, i.e. why it becomes less attractive in the eyes of the workers. Feminisation can not be said to occur only in obsolete, dying industries – banking is a perfect example.

#### **2.2.5 Feminisation in structural-analytical perspective**

A final overriding factor that might impact feminisation is structural change. The possible relationship between the two has not been subject to investigation before, and the structural-theoretical school of thought is not blessed with a gender perspective at present. However, the potential is there. The point of departure of structural theory is that society develops endoge-

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63 Padavic & Reskin 2002:62

64 Bradley 1989:67

65 Bradley 1989:124

66 Reskin & Roos 1990:30ff

nously in cycles. Each cycle is seen to consist of a phase of transformation, characterised by expansion and renewal and one of rationalisation, each of approximately 20 years. A structural crisis then follows, paving the way for a new phase of transformation to pick up.

The key driving force in this process is radical innovation, characterised by its ability to give rise to widespread complementarities when combined with other features of the time, whether infrastructure, policy or other lesser innovations. Development blocks are created. An inevitable effect of these development blocks is imbalances and bottle necks in the supply of key factors, which can only be overcome through expansion. In a drive to adapt and fully capture the new potential, the transformation phase thus sees major long-term investment and an increased demand for labour, especially such with new competencies. For the Swedish economy in general (i.e. industry), transformation peaked just before the start of my period of study in 1910.<sup>67</sup> As investments increasingly come into place and development blocks are diffused, competition hardens. The phase of rationalisation is entered, with consolidation, specialisation and increases in savings and efficiency as main traits. The demand for labour falls, and to the extent that recruits *are* wanted, they are intended to perform easy standardised tasks for a low cost – because of the simplified nature of work, the productivity premium on skill is very limited. Gradually, the profit-generating ability of the development blocks run out – the wage share rises until the untenable point is reached. Cue structural crisis.<sup>68</sup> Concerning the years of interest to my study, the post-war recession marked the shift to full-blown rationalisation which culminated in structural crisis in 1930-34.<sup>69</sup>

In order to be able to apply a structural perspective to *feminisation*, the place of the bank sector within the structural dynamic must be determined. What is known about the relationship between structural change and the tertiary sector indicates that the relative economical importance of services has increased during periods of rationalisation in industry. One explanation is that a higher wage share during that period translates to raised real wages, leaving the labour with more money to spend – on services. Another angle emphasises the creation of complementarities between the secondary and tertiary sectors. Since the 1980's, transformation in industry has been noted to create a new demand for education, information and the like which largely has to be outsourced. This thus suggests that industry at least in the past cycle drove services, which followed with a lag.<sup>70</sup>

This potential new demand also includes financial services. The bank sector should thus benefit from transformation – which it also has tended to do historically.<sup>71</sup> The question is however if banking has the same role as services at large. A hypothetical answer is no. If transformation in industry is assumed to increase the demand for services as input, this demand ought to evolve in a step-wise manner. To even finance the very first investments, the actors would have to turn to the bank sector – before any other new demand for services is created in a comparable scope. Arguably, banking could thus hold a place between the secondary and tertiary sectors in terms of structural change. Furthermore, the connection between the bank sector and industry can be assumed to have been stronger than that between industry and most other types of services at the time of my study. While of generally increasing importance, educated labour was not as absolutely essential in 1910 as it is today – the need for credit to finance investment was however just as large.

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67 Schön 1994:13ff

68 Schön 1994:35ff

69 Schön 1994:13ff

70 Schön 1994:41f

71 Schön 1994:47

However, a final interesting feature of banking is that it has four facets of its activity to rely on alternately. In terms of clientele, there are the large industrial companies – but also the private customers and actors in the tertiary sector, which supposedly blossom when the industry is rationalising. In addition, banks serve customers with both credits and opportunities to save – succeeding each other in the structural cycle. Partly depending on the balance between different types of customers, banks could thus potentially be less impacted to structural change than other sectors.

Structural change is not a potential explanatory variable in itself – if it impacts feminisation, it is through the mechanisms covered above. Translating structural theory to predictions on feminisation pattern, transformation should lead to an increase in the demand for labour – especially competent labour. A general assumption would thus be that feminisation would increase during transformation only if the demand for labour was very large so that negative sex-typing was factored out by a shortage of male labour. The rationalisation phase would theoretically promote women, since they are generally both less paid and considered more suitable for standardised work than men. If structural phases can be discerned in the bank sector between 1910 and 1939, and these have impacted feminisation, the above patterns are thus those we would expect to see.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 The case study**

As should be clear by now, my investigation of the feminisation of the Swedish bank sector is a case study – an approach that warrants a few comments. The very potential span of the case study makes it something of a bridge between traditionally alien or even conflicting methodological and paradigmatic camps.<sup>72</sup> For this reason, I find the case study to be a particularly suitable approach for me – on an endeavour to bridge theories, research traditions and sectors of the economy. In spite of this sympathetic trait, case studies are however sometimes criticised for their potential weak validity and difficulties in generalising results. There are several responses to such claims.

First off, the inherent character of case studies to contain a multitude of factors, data and methods works as a natural form of triangulation, increasing not only the reliability but also the validity of findings.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, when the case study has a pronounced time-dimension, such as here, each year can be considered a new “case”. Even a single case study can thus actually hold a multitude of cases along the time axis, markedly strengthening the reliability of the results.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, the pronounced aim of the case study to understand context – a quality essential to my investigation – decreases the risk of mistaking correlation with causation. In a somewhat unique way, the case study has the potential to explain not only that, but *why*, certain factors produce certain outcomes.<sup>75</sup> In the quest to achieve this, a bit of the ease in generalising result must inevitably be traded for holism.<sup>76</sup> A generic steel bar is very easily put in a box with all the other steel bars. Does it actually tell anything? Not really.

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72 Luck et. al. 2006:103ff

73 Rosenberg & Yates 2007:450

74 de Vaus 2001:42, Gerring 2004:343

75 de Vaus 2001:234

76 Jensen & Rodgers 2001:236f



All the above merits aside, the major reason for choosing the case study-approach is however another. In sum, the utility and relevance of a case study largely depends on the overall level of knowledge in the field of question. The less is known about a subject, the greater the use and need of the case study.<sup>77</sup> To learn something about feminisation of the Swedish bank sector on a deeper level than simply acknowledging it, the largely qualitative case study may thus not only be the most passable road, but the only option.

### 3.2 Quantitative and qualitative methods

A key feature in conducting a valid and reliable, largely qualitative case study is to use theory as a guide in all elements of work. Consequently, that is what I have done. Through their predictions and hypothetical explanations, the theories above all define factors of potential relevance for the feminisation of banking – the physical (structural) development of the sector, the demand and supply of labour, the wage levels of men and women, the education level of women, work organisation and technology, the relative status of the sectoral labour market and, lastly, norms and attitudes. These seven broad factors are treated as hypotheses. They will thus be mapped for the period between 1910 and 1939, to see if their development can be connected to the process of feminisation.

The primary means of investigation are two. The first is through use of statistics. For all factors which statistical data are available and a quantitative approach can be considered fruitful, time-series have been constructed for graphical examination. This applies primarily to the basic factor of feminisation, and to the hypotheses on physical development of the sector and wage levels. Feminisation will be measured through women's share of the sectoral labour force. Regarding the first hypotheses, time series on factors such as turnover, net production and number of offices and bank companies constitute important parts. In the latter case, series on real and nominal wages for men and women, as well as the earnings ratio, are used. To a more limited extent, statistics are also used in the areas of demand and supply of labour and organisation and technology.

The second, and main means of investigation will be analysis of an extensive qualitative primary material in the form of the Union periodical *Bankvärlden* – the only major source to what was going on in Swedish banks during my period of study regarding the sector as labour market. This material will be used both to collect data – such as *when* female labour is discussed – and as data in itself – such as *how* female labour is talked about. This last feature thus makes my approach in part rely on discourse analysis in its most qualitative sense, drawing on associations between concepts and contexts in whole blocks of text. All issues of the periodical between 1911 and 1939 have been reviewed in full. Articles providing input to any of my seven broad hypotheses have then been collected, and its content organised according to theme. All quotes have been translated by me as the author. Lastly, secondary accounts have also been used where they provide additional information.

### 3.3 Material

As implied above, the study is based on three general types of source material. Primary, in the quantitative form of statistics and the qualitative form of union periodicals, and secondary in the form of sectoral overviews, organisational retrospects, bank biographies, public inquiries and the like. Out of these, The Union periodical *Bankvärlden* is the decidedly most important.

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<sup>77</sup> Gerring 2004:345f

For all topics on which statistics are presented, except for the Union member count, the data is to a very large extent derived from official sources. These include the Historical National Accounts, the Population Censuses, the National Board of Health and Welfare and various publications from Statistics Sweden. All data used is cross-sectional data. For some factors, these official records do not have data for the earliest few years. In some cases, this data exists but have not yet become subject to organised collection. I have therefore complemented these series with data from the sources where it is available. The concerned factors are gross profit and expenses of the bank sector, which have been derived from *Bankvärlden* for the years 1910 to 1912, and the number of bank companies in 1910, which is derived from *Brisman*. All utilised sources are of course accounted for in relation to each graph.

In other – unfortunately more frequent cases – data has been missing entirely. This is the case with data on nominal wages 1910-1912 and 1914-1916. Since the calculations of real wages and earnings ratio is based on the nominal wage, these two series show the same gap. A larger gap is found in the data on total number of employees in the bank sector – 1914 to 1919, plus 1921. Neither is there gender and bank sector-specific employment data before 1920. The potentially very useful aggregate data on new employment and discharges are not to be found at all. This is obviously not optimal, but refraining from investigating an issue because of absent data would not only be boring, but a slow death of science. In this very case, as rather often, the lack of data and previous knowledge is part of what makes the topic interesting. Furthermore, no data can be considered data in itself – it is hardly a coincidence that there are no detailed records of women in banking until 1920. Or fully reliable labour market statistics for women in general long into the 1960's, for that matter.<sup>78</sup>

This lack of statistical data, especially gender differentiated data, has motivated my decision to sometimes present overviews of only the administrative labour force in banking. Since female janitors and the like were generally very rare, their limited numbers cause them to be left out of many public records. It is simply considered to skew calculations of average wages and yearly change rates to include them – the same effect it would unfortunately have here. While these women are an interesting group and would probably warrant a study of their own, they will thus have to wait until another time. As will the part-time employees. Though this was a common form of employment for women, there is no such data for the years in question.

Another note on the statistical material concerns the cases where the construction of a measure has changed during the period studied. This applies to the factors of total labour cost of the bank sector (used to calculate the labour share of gross profits) and depreciation for inventories. In the first case the measure is reconstructed in 1916, when the actual information on the labour cost is separated from the general measure of “expenses”. To be able to use the data from 1910, I have calculated the labour cost's share of total expenses for five years from 1916. The result, an average of 0,85 percent with only small variations, has then been multiplied with the number for total expenses 1910-1915. The series on different real values (wages, turnover etc) have been constructed from Statistics Sweden's official Living Cost Index, which uses 1914 as the base year.

My final remarks on the statistics pertain to the population census of 1935, which was partial in scope and only covered a fifth of the population. However since this fifth was selected randomly and is still enormous in size<sup>79</sup>, it can be considered representative. The numbers from the

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78 Ohlander 2005:24

79 Särskilda Folkräkningen 1935/36:1ff

census of 1935 have therefor been multiplied by five in order to be comparable with those from the other years.

Now to the qualitative primary material. The main source here has, as mentioned, been the periodical *Bankvärlden*, published by Svenska Bankmannaföreningen every two weeks from 1919. For the years between 1911 and 1919 the preceding paper, *Svenska Bankmannaföreningens Tidskrift* has been used. However it should be remembered that Svenska Bankmannaföreningen was an interest organisation for employees and not an actual Union at that time – the content is thus less polemic in character. As for secondary sources, the 1962 retrospective from Svenska Bankmannaföreningen on occasion of their 75-year jubilee has been of great use. Worth mentioning are also the biographies over Svenska Enskilda Banken and Skandinaviska Banken by Lindgren and Söderlund respectively. While these volumes focus on the development of specific banks, they also contain some accounts on the general conditions of the bank sector at different times, and broad processes of change. The fact that they cover long periods and have a pronounced comparative time perspective has been a useful complement to the primarily contemporary focus of the Union press.

### 3.4 Discussion on material and methods

When first embarking on the quest to answer my research questions, I approached the issue of material with the intent to make the best of what little was available. Now two months later, I am struggling to keep my nose above the surface. Not because the relevant sources are any more plentiful today, but because so much can be done with them.

The attentive reader will have noticed the preponderance of material stemming from the employee side of the labour market compared to that of the employers. This has mainly practical reasons. The interest organisation for bank employers – Svenska Bankföreningen – is not formed into an actual employer's association until 1937. Its first periodical is not published until 1944, i.e. past the time of my study. The remaining option for employer-side source material – board protocols, official records and such – has not been viable in a thesis of this scope. For one, it is tied specifically to individual banks. To avoid bias, one would thus have to review material from a large number of banks, which would require time beyond the available for this study – not least since the documents in question are generally kept at often inaccessible company archives scattered across the country.

Another obvious issue is whether Union material can be considered representative for the bank corps at large. The general answer is yes – and no. The Swedish bank employees have historically showed a very high organisation rate. Already at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the organisation rate was around 40 percent of the potential members (men), a very good number for its time.<sup>80</sup> The organisation rate has then fluctuated during the years of my study – from almost a 100 percent in 1918, to the less than half of that in the mid 1920's, from which it rose steadily to around 80 percent in 1939.<sup>81</sup> However it should be kept in mind that the organisation rate was consistently much higher for men than women, especially during the first two decades in question. This fact in turn implies that union membership among men was markedly higher than the above numbers suggest. The inference that can be made is thus that the Union material is largely representative for the male part of the corps, but only to a limited extent for its women. This is also the way it has been used in this study.

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80 Palmquist 1962:32

81 See section 4.8.1

Since my statistical data is cross-sectional, there is also the issue of not knowing who the women participating in feminisation are. Between 1910 and 1939 they can differ in fundamental ways that are not captured by the study, but can still cause differences in the feminisation pattern. This creates a problem with establishing causality and its potential direction. However, de Vaus argues that this feature of cross-sectional data is less harmful when used to test a priori hypotheses as here, when theory can be used as a guide for causality and interpretation, than if the approach had been more inductive.<sup>82</sup>

The aspect of my approach most susceptible to criticism is without doubt its very strong qualitative, *interpretative* character – not least in combination with highly subjective data sources such as Union press. That this material is subjective is not something I consider a problem in itself – rather, the entire point is to capture the bank corps own experiences and opinions. However, the process of generating these data inevitably contains an element of interpretation, which opens the study for criticism on bias and subjectivity not on part of the source, but on me as the researcher. That I have nonetheless chosen to proceed with a strongly qualitative approach has several reasons.

The primary reason is that though it is not perfect, I have found it to be the relatively most viable method. The analysis of text-as-data, or discourse analysis, can be performed in a wide number of ways. These stretch between the distinctly qualitative, such as here, and attempts at quantification of narratives, through measures such as word counts, free lists, coding concepts for strength, sign (positive or negative) and salience.<sup>83</sup> Both angles have their pros and cons, and the ideal approach would thus be a combination of the two. However, as much I would have wanted to follow this combined route, the time available for this thesis has simply not allowed it. I have had to choose.

While the more quantitative side of discourse analysis potentially allows the transformation of text into statistically measurable variables, the process is also distinctly reductionist.<sup>84</sup> Since it is more focused on detail and entails a certain element of removing words from their context, there is the risk of missing changes in the use of words and nuances in the text. Since my research question focuses on the determining factors behind feminisation – i.e. a comprehensive explanation, I have therefore found the qualitative approach to be the better choice, since it allows the broad patterns to be captured in a contextual manner.

The focus on pronounced patterns and broad strokes is also a defence against researcher bias – I am not attempting to interpret every last nuance or syllable. Furthermore, it is again worth emphasising that theory has been the constant guide of my reading and analysis, it has not been carried out arbitrarily. Almost all deductions made on part of the Union and bank corps are also backed with references to several articles, thus showing that the interpretation is based on a recurrent finding in the text. To the largest extent possible without damaging the readability of the text, inferences are backed with quotes. Lastly, as will be clear from section four below, the Union is generally not very coy in its opinions. Repeated statements such as "the present extent of underpayment (...) is of an extraordinary size"<sup>85</sup> is pretty hard to misinterpret.

#### 4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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82 de Vaus 2001:178ff

83 Ryan & Bernard 2003:272ff

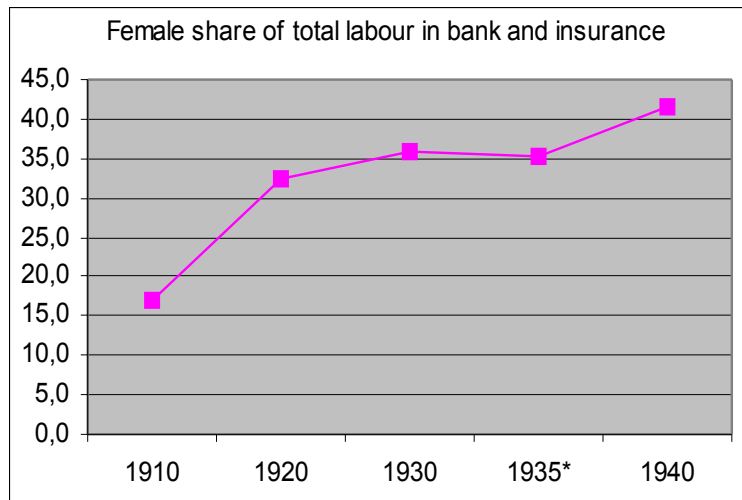
84 Rosenberg & Yates 2007:451

85 BV 1929:12:302

## 4.1 Feminisation

The first two graphs below display the female share of the labour force in the Swedish bank sector. Number one is an overview based on the broad data available for the time back to 1910, and includes the (small) insurance sector. Two main observations can be made from these pictures. One, that feminisation was markedly most rapid during the 1910's, and two that it stabilised at a slow but steady rate of increase during the following two decades. In total, the female share of the labour force grew from 17 to 41,5 percent between 1910 and 1940 – a 140 percent increase.

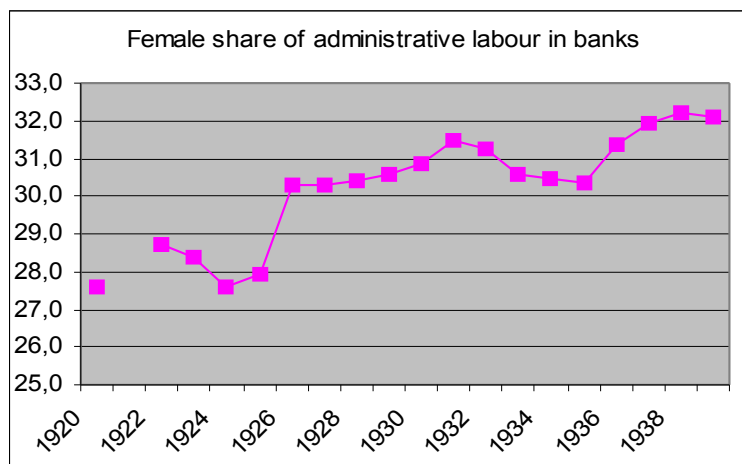
**Graph 1**



Source: Folkräkningarna 1910-1940

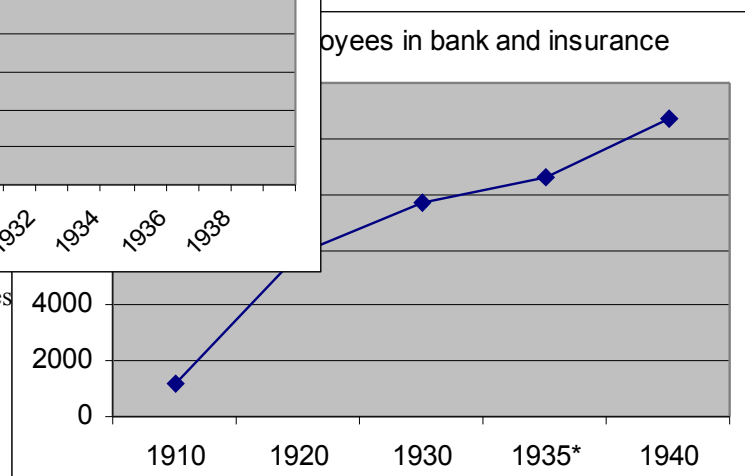
The second graph shows the development of the female share of administrative labour, in banks alone, in more detail from 1920. Note that the scale on the y-axis has been cut to make the changes more visible. If a closer look is taken on this relatively less dramatic period between 1920 and 1939, some patterns can be discerned. The female share of the labour force is slightly reduced during the early years of both the 1920's and 30's, and increases faster during the final years of the decades.

**Graph 2**



Source: Sociala Med. 1921-1928, Lönes

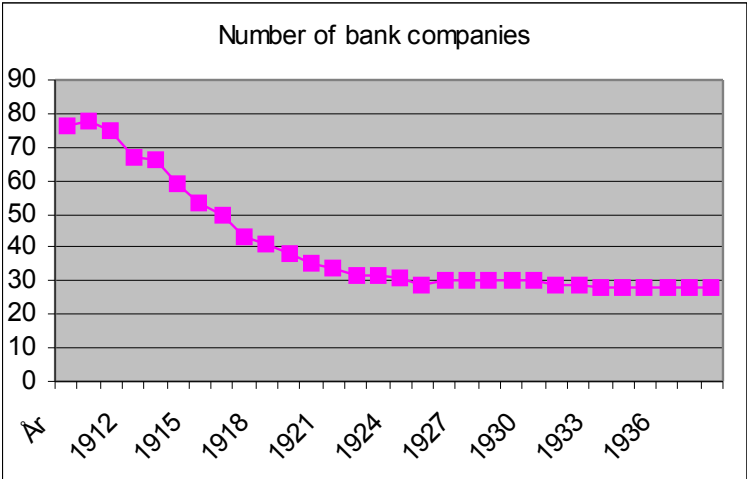
**Graph 3**



**4.2 Physical and structural development of the bank sector**

The physical development of the bank sector between 1910 and 1939 has several distinct traits. From its peak in 1908, the number of banks decreased rapidly until around 1919 and the end of the war. As shown in graph four at the top of the next page, it then continued to decline at a receding pace, remaining stable from 1925 onwards.

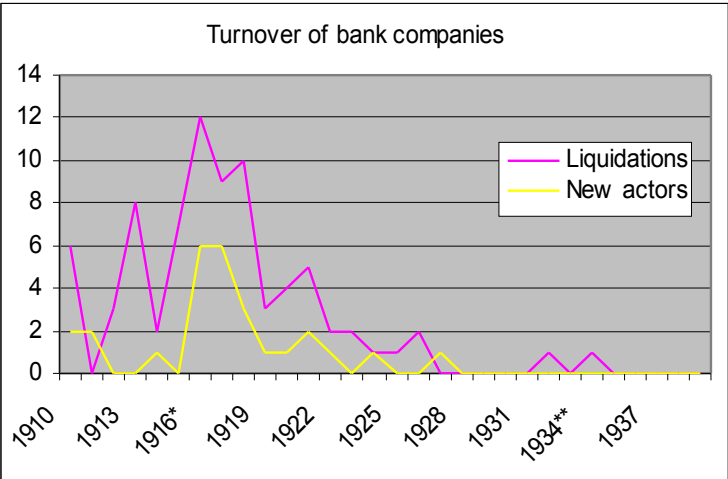
**Graph 4**



Source: Statistiska Med. Serie E 1919-1939

The reduction in the number of banks was the result of two, at times parallel, processes. On one hand, expansion, competition and economic boom, causing the strongest actors to engulf the weaker ones. This was the case during WW1.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, economic hardship as seen in the post-war recession, forcing less competitive actors out of business – either through liquidation or take-over by larger, more financially stable competitors. The turbulence in the bank sector during these years is illustrated by graph five below, on turnover of companies.

**Graph 5**



Source: Statistiska Med. Serie E 1919-1939

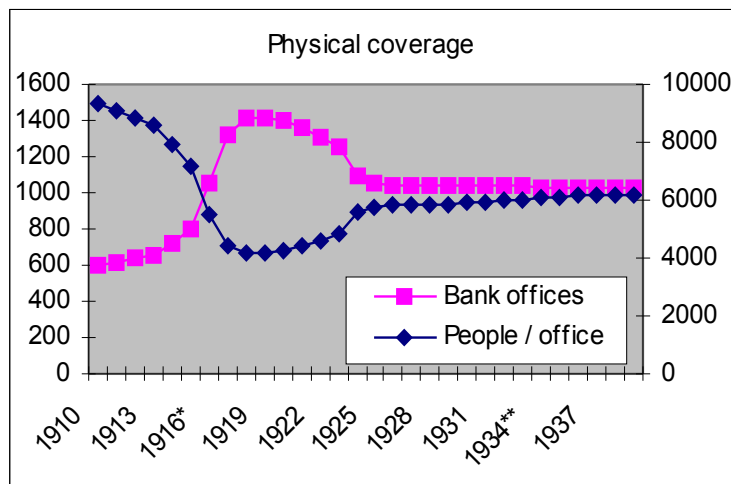
In effect, the banks cleared out during the 1910's were almost exclusively the smaller ones. The outcome was thus not only a reduction in number, but also a marked change in the average size

<sup>86</sup> Söderlund 1978:106f

of the companies. From 1919, there were virtually no small banks left.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the actual concentration within the bank sector was even higher than the numbers suggest, since the size of the biggest banks increased greatly compared to the remaining (relatively) smaller ones.<sup>88</sup> For its contemporaries, the development during the first half of our period appeared no less striking – the employees in the sector saw bank concentration as the “sign of the times”.<sup>89</sup> As clear from the graphs, the remaining years until 1939 proved to be less eventful, and can be described as a time of consolidation.

Another area that experienced change between 1910 and 1939 was the geographical spread. In the years 1911 to 1920, there was a large establishment of new bank offices on the countryside, driven primarily by strong competition. As is seen in graph six, the development was dramatic, and thoroughly altered the structure of the sector in a matter of years. However, because of the race to “claim” virgin areas ahead of the competitors, the establishment of new offices was not always preceded by the best of planning.<sup>90</sup> In 1921 when the entire Swedish economy was hit hard by post-war recession and deflation, the banks were forced to pay the price for their sometimes frivolous expansion during the past decade. The increasing cost pressure led to closing and merging of offices. While fusions had been the mark of the 1910’s, office closings were the “theme of the day” in the early 20’s.<sup>91</sup>

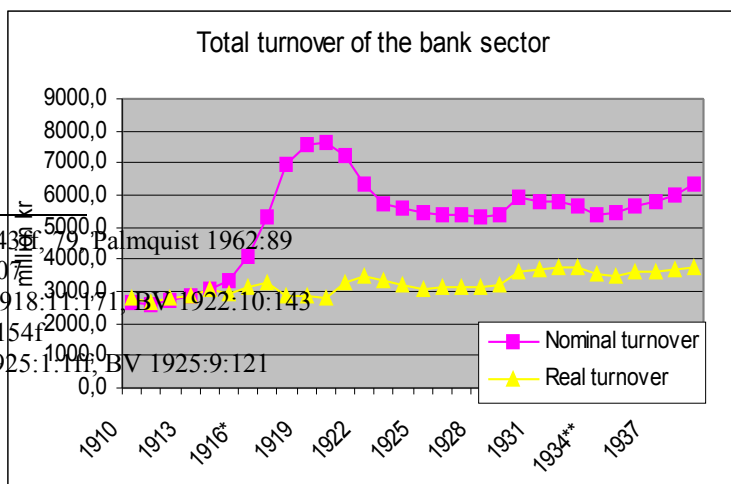
Graph 6



Source: Statistiska Med. Serie E 1919-1939

The changing tides of banking can also be traced through different aspects of the sector’s finances. Turnover is portrayed in graph seven below. The most striking feature is of course the substantial inflation during the war and the following recession, causing a rapid rise and decline in the nominal numbers. The development of the real turnover is more modest – a slow, steady increase, not strongly affected by either the turbulence of the years around 1920, or the depression in the early 30’s.

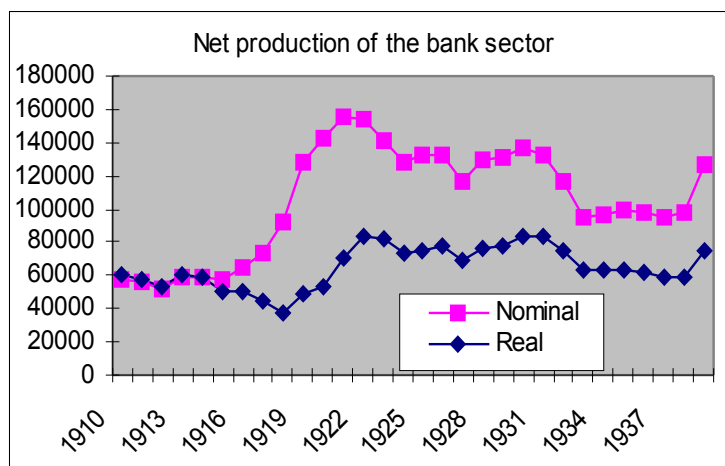
Graph 7



87 Söderlund 1978:438  
 88 Söderlund 1988:207  
 89 quote from BV 1918:11:171  
 90 Söderlund 1978:154  
 91 quote from BV 1925:1:111, BV 1925:9:121

Source: Statistiska Med. Serie E 1919-1939

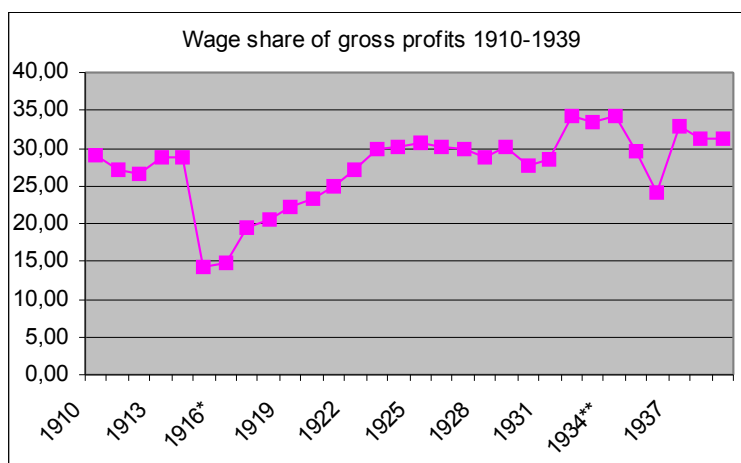
Source: Statistiska Med. Serie E 1919-1939



Source: Historiska Nationalräkenskaperna

Graph nine shows the wage share of gross profits. Data on this factor strengthens the picture of the war years as a time of high profits for the banks. The remainder of the period appears relatively stable, with a drop during the depression and a strong recovery during the end of the 30's. On the very sharp drop in 1915, it is worth noting that the same phenomenon appears throughout the economy at that time on cause of the war.<sup>92</sup>

**Graph 9**



Source: Statistiska Med. Serie E 1919-1939

In sum, the period until the end of WW1 was a time of expansion on all levels.<sup>93</sup> The post-war recession brought contraction. While the economic effect is not dramatic in the statistical data, it was strongly felt by the corps. According to their contemporary accounts the situation stabilised and slowly improved from 1924, but it was not until 1930 that any actual increase in profitability was reached. The worst effects of the recession had thus been overcome<sup>94</sup> right in time for the new depression of the early 30's. While this new downturn impacted the bank sector adversely and increased the already strong competition, the cleansing bath of the 20's had left it better prepared than it had been for the post-war recession a decade earlier. From the mid 1930's, the sector was back on track and stronger than ever.<sup>95</sup>

92 Schön 1994:39

93 Söderlund 1978:99

94 Söderlund 1978:355, 369, 386, BV 1925:9:122, BV 1929:3:58, BV 1937:4:202f

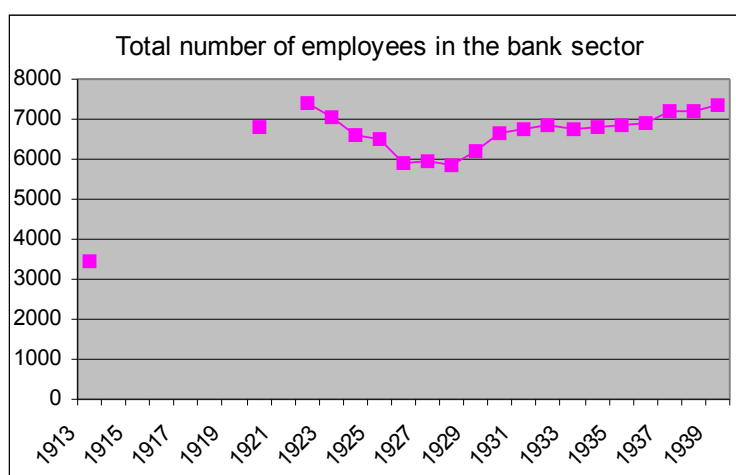
95 BV 1932:3:65, BV 1937:1:7



### 4.3 Demand and supply of labour

The major financial and geographical expansion of the 1910's had a strong positive effect on both demand for labour and new recruitment. The office expansion appears to have played a decidedly more important role in this process than high profit margins – 77 percent of the labour recruited between 1911 and 1920 were employed in the new offices, and many of the remaining 23 percent, while located at the main quarters, were hired to handle the increased administration that geographical expansion and an increased number of units resulted in.<sup>96</sup> The development of the total number of employees in banking is shown in the graph below. According to the state report on married women's right to gainful employment, WWI caused many women to be "thrown into" new areas of employment, and then forced to step back "in large numbers" when the war was over and its participants returned. Whether this was the case for the bank sector is not clear from the report.<sup>97</sup> However there are no mentions in any other sources that banking should have been impacted by the war in this way. Graph ten below displays the development of the total number of employees in banking

Graph 10



Source: Sociala Med. 1923-28, Lönestat. Årsbok 1929-39

While it does not show in the aggregate number, several sources claim that the sector experienced a massive labour flight in the years 1917 and 1918. The reasons for this are elaborated on in sections 4.5 and 4.6 – but basically it was supposedly caused by a reduced attraction force of the bank sector as labour market. This development, coupled with the very rapid rise in demand for labour due to sectoral expansion, caused a significant lack of personnel with the competence and experience that had traditionally been required, which according to the Union lead the employers to lower their demands – “errand-boys were simply promoted to officials”.<sup>98</sup> The increasing mechanisation and standardisation of work, for which “no greater general knowledge is needed”, made the situation sustainable.<sup>99</sup> To find willing workers per se was no problem. Labour from lower social classes was eager to get into the bank sector since it was seen as a climb on the social ladder, and for women – both of the working and middle classes – banks were preferable to the alternatives. Administrative work was considered more prestigious and attractive than domestic or industrial employment, even though it paid less. The 1910's was thus a period when the social recruitment base of the bank sector was expanded.<sup>100</sup>

96 Söderlund 1978:156

97 SOU 1938:47:92

98 BV 1918:11:172, BV 1919:8:135f, quote from BV 1934:9:352f, Söderlund 1978:107

99 quote from BV 1919:8:135f, BV 1920:9:145, BV 1929:9:205ff, BV 1935:3:120

100 BV 1926:10:184, Palmaer 1939:27ff, SOU 1938:47:113, Croner 1939:447

All through the period between 1910 and 1939, the union also experiences a marked change in the banks' view on labour, and their demand for labour with certain characteristics. Already during the war it is felt that banks are no longer driven by genuine concern and care for their employees or the standing of the sector, but short-sighted economic gain. In sum, the competition between banks is so sharp that the cost of labour is assigned increasing importance in the race to rationalise – according to the Union to the point where low-cost is all that matters. The receding qualifications of new recruits was consequently considered a result of reduced demand for skilled labour through profit craving, rather than an actual shortage in the supply of qualified personnel. The same drive is perceived to result in an effort to replace older employees with young and therefor cheaper personnel. The expiration date of an employee is short – when nearing 30, he/she is beginning to be considered old, less useful and ready to be replaced. From the point of the union, “the management cynically exploits the access to labour by sticking to the younger and cheaper labour”.<sup>101</sup> Implied as part of this younger and cheaper labour is women.<sup>102</sup> According to the state report on married women's right to gainful employment, the bank managers also calculated on that the female labour would leave the workplace upon marriage, only occupying their positions very temporarily. Hiring women was thus seen as a way to ensure circulation of labour.<sup>103</sup>

The post-war recession did not only halt the optimistic recruitment of the previous decade, but caused extensive lay-offs, both through office closings and a general drive to cut costs, resulting in what the corps experienced as a pronounced unemployment, hitting it hard. Among those who retained their jobs, a strong feeling of insecurity and fear of unemployment was rooted.<sup>104</sup> That the office closings were later shown to only have caused limited unemployment, and never reached the feared extent, mattered less for the general feeling of insecurity they induced in the personnel.<sup>105</sup> In retrospect three decades later, the union has somewhat revised their view on the development during the post-war recession and the following years. The deflation crisis did cause wide-spread unemployment, but while affected by this, the bank corps was still hit less hard than other comparable white-collar occupations, arguably because of the union's ferocious reactions to any attempted discharges.<sup>106</sup>

The labour substitution process was partly supported by actual discharges of permanent employees – something that had previously been considered unthinkable, and went against all traditional prerogatives and principles of the sector. The response from the corps was massive uproar.<sup>107</sup> Still, the initiated development continued. While unemployment was reduced with the general sectoral and national recovery from 1923,<sup>108</sup> it remained on a level high enough to be considered severe and persistent. While lay-offs become rarer, very little new recruitment takes place all throughout the 1920's, with a modest increase towards the end of the decade. This is largely because of the decreasing resources of the banks, and causes a pronounced ageing of the

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101 BV 1917:11:181, BV 1918:11:172, BV 1919:3:40f, BV 1919:8:136, BV 1922:7:95, BV 1924:6:82, BV 1926:7:125, BV 1927:5:87, BV 1929:1:4ff, BV 1930:6:146, BV 1930:10:249, BV 1931:11:401, BV 1933:1:17, BV 1933:3:113, BV 1933:4:114, BV 1934:1:17, BV 1934:5:129, BV 1934:9:323, BV 1934:9:352f, quote from BV 1935:6:247f, BV 1935:8:317

102 BV 1932:2:52, BV 1935:11-12:248

103 SOU 1938:47:113

104 BV 1922:7:95, BV 1925:1:1ff, BV 1925:9:121, BV 1925:10:146f, BV 1926:5:77, BV 1934:10:352

105 BV1926:5:81, Smbf 1937:22

106 Palmquist 1962:144

107 BV 1918:1:7, BV 1921:10:137, BV 1922:7:95, BV 1922:10:143, BV 1924:6:82, BV 1924:9:127, BV 1925:9:121, BV 1925:10:137, BV 1925:10:146, BV 1926:5:77f, BV 1927:1:3

108 BV 1923:10:166

corps.<sup>109</sup> During the depression of the early 30's, the corps is then again experiencing discharges and increased unemployment.<sup>110</sup> From the post-war recession and onwards, there is thus a strong and increasing focus from the union on uncertain employment conditions and insecurity as a cause of concern and discontent, impacting the joy and pride for the job adversely.<sup>111</sup> While not explicitly voiced by the Union, it was also a general opinion in society that women suffered less from unemployment than men because they had their family to provide for them and traditional female role to fall back on.<sup>112</sup>

From the end of the 1910's, the bank employees also suffer increasing exploitation, perceived as bordering on slavery. Paired with the limited recruitment, the existing staff is forced to work extensive, unregulated and often unpaid overtime. While the situation was worst during the post-war recession, it was still considered to remain a decade later.<sup>113</sup> Adding to the insecurity was largely informal recruitment, promotion and wage-setting practices. The entire work environment of the bank employee is perceived as arbitrary, "displayed through unjustness and nonchalance in personnel matters".<sup>114</sup> In spite of these conditions there is a general reluctance to protest, in fear of discharge – there is an abundance of eager and willing labour – and machines – to take the bank employees place.<sup>115</sup>

No marked positive change takes place until the period from 1935 onwards, when there is a strong rise in the demand for labour.<sup>116</sup> The aggregate picture of the sectoral labour market between 1910 and 1939 is thus a rapid turnover of personnel between 1912 and 1920, which then falls until the end of the 20's, after which it levels.<sup>117</sup>

#### **4.4 The education level of women**

From about the 1870's and 80's, a slow increase in the education level of women can be noted. However the numbers were still limited. A more marked take off was seen around the time of 1910.<sup>118</sup> Throughout my entire period of study, the capacity of the Swedish school system – especially on elementary and intermediate levels was then expanded. Gradually this meant that girls, who had previously been largely confined to more expensive and therefore less accessible girlschools were increasingly getting access to education – and with the same curricula as boys. The major changes in the area took place during the final years of the 1920's, likely affected by the state reform in 1927 through which the state assumed equal responsibility for the secondary education of girls and boys. Education was thus increasingly streamlined, made accessible and gender-neutral between the years of 1910 and 1939, with a concentration in changes to the latter part of the period.<sup>119</sup> The gap between men and women in terms of an intermediate level of education was gradually reduced.<sup>120</sup>

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109 Palmquist 1962:92, BV 1924:9:126, BV 1925:10:139, BV 1927:5:88, BV 1928:7:176, BV 1928:11:254, BV 1929:1:7, BV 1930:3:77, BV 1930:5:123, BV 1930:6:145, BV 1933:1:19, BV 1934:11:377

110 BV 1932:1:1, BV 1932:8:241f, BV1933:10:353

111 BV1918:11:173, BV 1920:8:129, BV 1921:8:118, BV 1923:124, BV 1929:9:205ff, BV 1930:8:198, BV 1933:7:275, BV 1933:12:440

112 SOU 1938:47:85, 127

113 BV 1924:9:126, BV1929:1:5ff, BV 1930:5:118f, BV 1930:6:145f, BV 1930:10:249

114 Lindgren 1988:93f, quote from BV 1924:5:66

115 BV1920:9:145, BV 1929:11:253, BV 1930:6:146, BV 1932:2:52, BV 1937:9:471

116 BV 1935:3:77, BV 1935:4:153ff

117 Söderlund 1978:123f

118 Schånberg 2004:143

119 Stanfors 2003:149ff

120 Schånberg 2004:143

However, the situation that families were less interested in investing in their daughters' education than their sons' remained throughout the period. As did a lack of vocational training for women, causing them to be found primarily in occupations without fixed demands on qualifications.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, only just over a hundred girls received high school education as late as the mid 1910's.<sup>122</sup> The high accessibility of the bank sector in terms of low educational demands was also considered of the most important factors behind the large supply of female labour to this type of work.<sup>123</sup> In the late 1930's, the majority of employees in the bank sector – both male and female – only had elementary or secondary school education.<sup>124</sup>

#### 4.5 New forms of technology and/or organisation

During the years between 1910 and 1939 the character of work in the bank sector changed at its core. As shown in section 4.2, the bank sector experienced a strong physical concentration and transition to large scale production during the 1910's.<sup>125</sup> This in turn *potentially* enabled mechanisation, specialisation and division of labour. However, to actually carry this out, banking was highly dependent on the parallel development in “office technology”. This new technology – in the first phase primarily typewriters and simple calculators – entered offices in a wide scale from 1910. After WWI, the introduction of the accounting machine and the carbon paper marked the start of a new era. “The combination of typewriter, accounting machine and carbon paper opened completely new opportunities of rationalisation and labour saving” – a small scale development block of the bank sector. A process of change was thus set in motion, which only came to be reinforced during the decades to come. For the entire inter-war period, the transition from manual to mechanical sequences of work was the sign of the times. Still, because of the large supply of cheap labour against the high cost of new machines, and the strong conservatism of the bank corps, mechanisation of the bank sector was slower than it could have been.<sup>126</sup>

In the middle of this rapid technological change was the labour corps, who experienced a complete transformation of its working conditions from the 1910's onwards. The new technology required a reorganisation of production. With the growth in size, banks turned into large workshops, which increased the distance between employee and employer. The former patriarchal system was soon a thing of the past. This opened the bank sector for the advent of Taylorism. From the 1910's, new “scientific methods” were launched into the area of office organisation. With a sole focus on achieving the highest efficiency, “an increasingly goal-oriented effort is put into simplifying the production and sorting the human labour according to its suitability for different tasks and to the largest possible extent replace it with machines.”<sup>127</sup> However, while Taylorism *applied* technology, it was not at its heart, and taken as given at its present level. The focus was on organisation.<sup>128</sup>

With mechanisation and division of labour came bureaucratisation, standardisation and specialisation of work. The employee, who used to be jack of all trades carrying out a “personal and responsible” job, was “degraded to a cog in a machinery” – forced to work in a mechanical

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121 SOU 1938:47:86f

122 Schånberg 2004:142

123 SOU 1938:47:113

124 BFO 1938:59

125 BV 1918:11:171, BV 1922:10:143

126 Bergkvist 1955:433ff, BV 1930:10:251

127 BV 1923:12:205, BV 1926:4:53, quote from 1929:9:205ff, BV 1930:8:205, BV 1931:2:35, BV 1932:8:256, BV 1932:9:325, BV 1933:12:440 BV 1938:11:359

128 Cooper & Taylor 2000:556

fashion “until he is reduced to a calculator or typewriter”. The feeling of freedom was gradually lost. Responsibility, independence and room for initiative were shrinking fast – along with the chances of in-service training and promotion.<sup>129</sup> That the changes in character and organisation of work had this effect on the future prospects of the employees was a generally held view, also outside the corps.<sup>130</sup> This process was perceived as an insult - “it is indefensible, to hold a large and cultivated corps in a position, which it itself considers to be an unworthy state of incapacity”. It was also seen as a serious deterioration of the work environment. The new system felt cold, impersonal and stripping the employees of both their individual character and human value. Human needs are ignored, and the room for free will and action eradicated.<sup>131</sup> But though “the personnel is almost considered a part of the mechanical equipment”, two important differences remained – “contrary to machines, man has a soul”, and while “machines are looked after, people are neglected”.<sup>132</sup>

The above development lead to that the banks were recedingly considered a place for able men to acquire skill, get noticed and kick-start their careers – a step on the way to being “your own”. Bank employment now rather meant a life-long position as an *employee*, with little or no room for education.<sup>133</sup> A real bank man, it was considered, could only be properly trained in a small office where he got to learn and be tested on all areas of work.<sup>134</sup>

As a result of the above processes came another marked change in the organisation of labour in banking – the split of the personnel into two tiers. “An upper, relatively narrow tier consisting of qualified labour, from which the top positions are almost exclusively recruited, and a lower, broader tier of people, exclusively occupied with routine work”. This work required very little qualification and skill – and was paid accordingly. The result was a mass of bank employees in subordinate positions little or nothing above the manual labourers, in terms of both activities and pay.<sup>135</sup>

#### **4.6 The relative and absolute wage levels of men and women**

Between roughly 1916 and 1936, the bank employees were anything but happy with their wage level and its development. As can be seen in graph eleven below, real wages fell between 1913 and 1918, and then recovered. In 1921 the pre-war level was re-reached. The real wage then increased steadily for men and stagnated for women. This picture is not fully consistent with the experience of the bank employees – neither at the time nor three decades later. Real wages were perceived to fall from 1916, and in 1939, though some recovery was experienced primarily from 1936 onwards, the pre-war real wage level was still not considered to have been re-achieved.<sup>136</sup>

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129 quote three from BV 1918:9:141f, quotes one and two from BV 1920:5:77, BV 1922:10:139f, BV 1924:9:125, BV 1926:7:124, BV 1932:9:316, BV 1933:12:440, BV 1934:1:1, BV 1935:10:227, 1938:5:177, BV 1939:8:311ff

130 Croner 1939:453ff

131 quote from BV 1919:9:161f, BV 1922:10:139f, BV 1930:2:45, BV1932:9:316, BV 1937:9:471

132 quote one from BV 1924:5:66, BV 1926:1:4, BV 1927:9:185, quote two from BV 1930:8:196, quote three from BV 1930:8:205, BV 1930:9:235ff

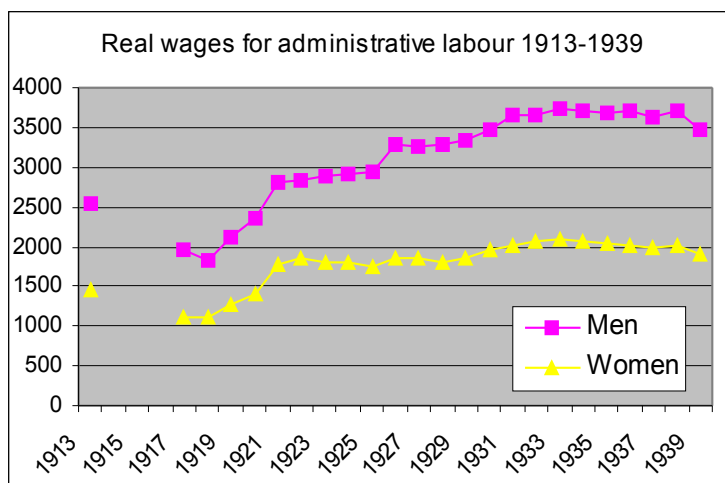
133 BV 1918:9:141f, BV 1918:11:172, BV 1922:10:139f, BV 1924:9:125, BV 1926:7:124, BV 1932:9:316, BV 1933:12:440, BV 1935:10:227, 1938:5:177, BV 1939:8:311ff

134 BV 1929:12:306

135 BV 1919:9:162, quote from BV1920:9:145, BV 1921:3:51, BV 1925:8:103, BV 1926:7:123, BV 1929:9:205ff, BV 1931:2:35, BV 1934:9:353

136 Palmquist 1962:205, BV 1933:179, BV 1937:1:7f

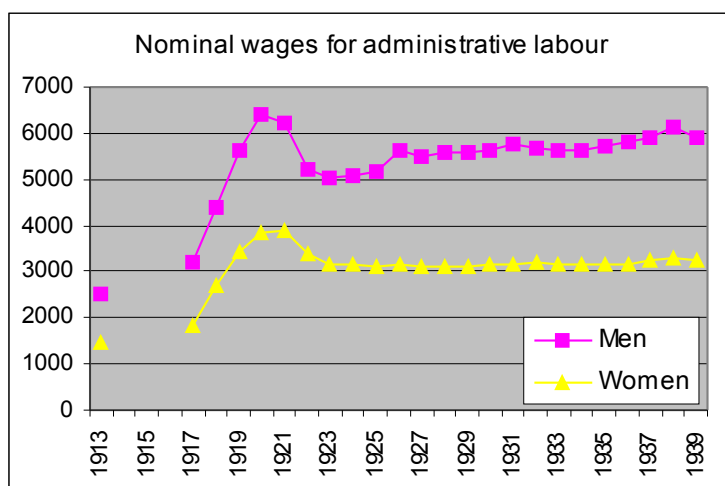
**Graph 11**



Source: Sociala Med. 1923-28, Lönestat. Årsbok 1929-39

The nominal wages, displayed in graph twelve, are strongly influenced by the inflation during the war, and fall when the post-war recession strikes. Their following development is more consistent with the experience of the bank employees – stagnation.

**Graph 12**



Source: Sociala Med. 1923-28, Lönestat. Årsbok 1929-39

While it is stated already in 1922 that “the corps’ economy is undermined (...) has never been worse and can not become worse without disaster striking”, the sentiment remains unmoved for decades. The bank corps considers itself “notoriously underpaid”.<sup>137</sup> From the mid 20’s the corps goes from furious uproar over the “abnormal” wage development during the war, to bitter acknowledgement. It is now considered a simple fact that there is an “extensive spread of wages below subsistence level” – these conditions “do not provide the employee with a living to sustain himself – or perhaps more commonly *herself*”, forcing the families of the employees to subsidise them. When changes in the economic conditions take place, it is usually for the worse. Wages are considered to improve briefly around 1929, just in time for the new depression, which however rough did not cause as much damage to the labour side of the bank sector as the

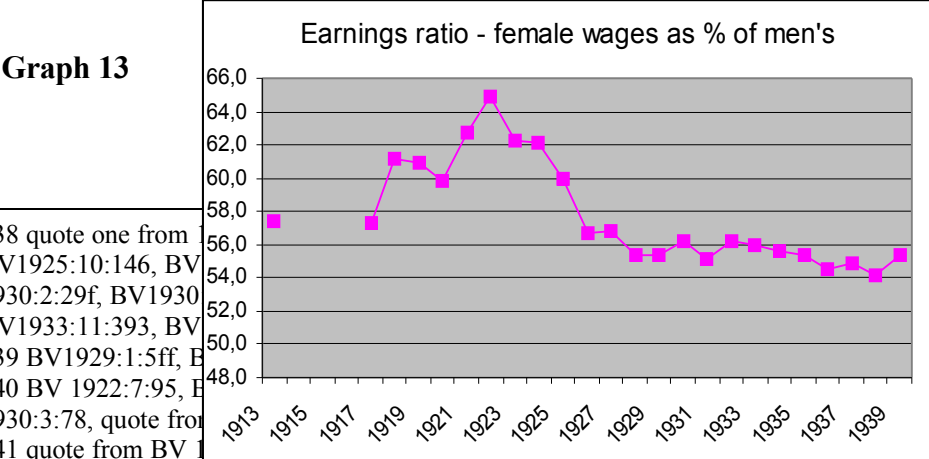
137 BV1922:7:96, quote one from BV 1922:12:177f, BV1929:12:302, BV 1931:1:3, BV 1932:10:346, BV 1933:3:78, BV 1933:5:179, quote two from BV 1935:1:2

deflation crisis of the 1920's. The slow move towards wage increases and an overall recovery of the corps standard could recommence around 1934, without any further permanent damage having been inflicted – rather the depression constitutes a pause in the recovery process. The occasional increases from the 1930's onwards are however still considered intolerably low, and only aimed at the very least paid and therefore youngest employees, leaving the older staff hopelessly disadvantaged.<sup>138</sup> It is further stressed that wages statistically appear to have developed better than they have because of the ageing of the corps.<sup>139</sup>

The Union also emphasises the social effects of the wage level and compares it to that of other groups of labour. The economic conditions are considered untenable, insulting and irreconcilable with social justice. They do not allow the bank employee to enjoy the standard he is used to, and that “he with his intellect hungers for”, such as keeping “a piano or a decent library”.<sup>140</sup> It is continuously stressed that many manual labourers are now better paid than bank employees, even with long experience. In fact, “a large portion of bank employees would be happy, if it could be laid down that humane concern required that they came to enjoy the same wages and benefits in kind as a street sweeper or a maid”.<sup>141</sup>

There is also a change in how the bank corps views the process of wage setting. In 1926, the Union states that anything but individually set wages would have been unthinkable 15 to 20 years ago. But with standardisation of work and a tripling of the workforce it is now possible to talk of categories of work and workers within the sector. The traditional individual wage setting increasingly resembles a lottery since employees are paid arbitrarily rather than according to skill. Coupled with the endemic underpayment forcing the corps into “organised begging” anyway, the thought of a more generally regulated wage regime – previously only conceivable for the working class – appears increasingly reasonable. In 1929 the Union thus presents its first suggestion on a minimum wage tariff, above which the individual wage would be free.<sup>142</sup> It is simultaneously noted that less women than men reach this postulated minimum wage, and that men's wages are diverse while women's are concentrated to the low end of the scale – due to the fact that men primarily hold the qualified positions.<sup>143</sup>

Graph thirteen below shows the earnings ratio of women to men. The trend is positive up until the 1920's, where women's relative wages fall drastically and then stagnate on a very low level. The earnings ratio levelled below that in industry and state service. Still, it is worth mentioning that women in absolute figures earned more in banking than in sectors such as retail, and industry. Only in state service did women actually receive a higher wage.<sup>144</sup>



138 quote one from BV1925:10:146, BV 1930:2:29f, BV1930:11:393, BV1929:1:5ff, BV 1922:7:95, BV 1930:3:78, quote from BV 141 quote from BV 142 quote from BV 1919:9:157, BV 1926:7:123, BV 1935:3:103, Palmquist 1962:107 143 BV 1921:3:52, BV 1930:1:7, BV 1933:11:393, BV 1938:2:59 144 Svensson 1997:16ff

BV 1925:2:17ff, BV 1930:1:1, BV 1931:1:81f, BV 1932:12:385, BV 1928:1:2, BV

Source: Sociala Med. 1923-28, Lönestat. Årsbok 1929-39

Furthermore, the Union notices a connection between the degree of economic stress or concern on behalf of the banks, and their interest in cutting costs through lowering wages. As the banks' balances suffered a general reduction during the inter-war period, measures aimed at lowering costs moved higher on the agenda. In accordance, both the post-war crisis and the depression in the early 30's, caused increased downward pressure on wages, however, in the case of the 30's, the will largely did not translate into an act. Still, the very presence of a negative wage buzz, whether realised or not, induced great fear in the employees.<sup>145</sup> As well as anger, as the banks were considered to be making large profits while the staff struggled.<sup>146</sup>

Incidentally, the relationship between economic pressure and priorities can be seen also in the Union's own activity. In times of economic upturn or stability the Union is more active and *proactive*. At downturns, it is forced into passivity and all other issues than immediate economic improvement – or prevention of further deterioration – are blocked out.<sup>147</sup>

#### **4.7 The relative status of the sectoral labour market**

“A forced social transformation has taken place, which appears through two increasingly evident displacements of groups. On one hand, the striking rise of the organised working class (...) on the other, the impotent attempts of the disorganised intelligence workers to cling to their hereditary social and economic standard, their continuous fall into a meaningless and ignored proletariat ”.<sup>148</sup> This quote from 1924 largely sums up the experience of the bank corps in terms of the development of their social and economic standard between 1910 and 1939.

Throughout its history, the bank sector had been an attractive workplace for young men. Primarily because of the favourable wage development within the occupation, and because it required less formal (expensive) education – no academic – than comparable work in for example the public sector. The job also entailed other highly valued benefits such as paid sick leave, vacation, employment security and to an extent pensions, only available in very few other occupations. Another distinguishing trait was the positive patriarchy. The management saw the working conditions in their institutions as matters of pride and honour, as well as a form of marketing. They wanted to be eminent – and were. The bank employees were thus a privileged corps, both in fact, in people's opinion and in their own minds – there was no better place to work. This lasted until WW1.<sup>149</sup>

During the war and the years thereafter, the bank corps experienced a “revolutionary deterioration of the living standard”, in terms of both wages, employment and working conditions, which escalated between 1917 and 1919 and lead up to the transformation of Svenska Bank-

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145 BV 1922:7:95, BV1932:12:425, BV1933:10:353, BV 1934:4:97, Lindgren 1988:116f, Söderlund 1978:48

146 BV 1920:4:63, BV 1934:9:323

147 BV 1931:4:105, Lindgren 1988:113, Sbmf 1937:15

148 quote from BV 1924:8:112

149 Palmquist 1962:54ff, BV 1933:1:17, Sbmf 1937:13



mannaföreningen from interest organisation to union in 1919. The process was especially painful since wages and employment conditions did not only suffer on an absolute level, but also increasingly deteriorated compared to both other white-collar occupations and, especially, manual labourers. Through the mechanisation and standardisation of work, the bank corps feels it had been put on par with the working class – only less paid.<sup>150</sup>

With “the dividing line between the middle and the working class to a considerable extent shattered”<sup>151</sup>, a proletariat of bank employees” is constituted.<sup>152</sup> During the 20’s and up until the mid 30’s the situation is only worsened. The bank employee “may wear a collar and cuffs, but that is also all separating him from the manual labourer”.<sup>153</sup> The development is a social trauma for the bank corps and irreconcilable with its traditionally esteemed position, and what it considers to be its key function in society. It is seen as unworthy, shocking, and “a societal injustice” causing “rising bitterness and desperation” that the refined bank employees are more exploited, subdued and incapacitated than the working class.<sup>154</sup>

The employees feel their future is an “inconsolable grey” – “heavy and dreary as autumn days foreboding storm is the mood now resting over the country’s bank corps”.<sup>155</sup> “Young men and women used to enter the bank sector with joy and good hope” however they soon discover that what they thought would be “the road to life, was a road into a dull and dreary dead-end”. Who would have entered into bank service, had they known?<sup>156</sup> The only consolation is that the group has nothing left of which they can be robbed.<sup>157</sup>

According to the Union, this development also lead to that the bank sector was no longer able to attract the best, most skilled and competent labour – it simply no longer had anything to offer. All its old proud merits, gone. The bank sector was not an idyll anymore.<sup>158</sup> The process is worsened by the massive and perceivably warranted labour flight of the late 1910’s, forcing the banks to lower their demands on the quality of new labour – children of the working class – to make up for the loss. This in turn results in a dually fuelled general deterioration of the quality of the corps, which is considered intolerable by the Union. Not least since it is considered to hinder the retrieval of the corps’ old standard – if change is not rapid, the situation “can easily

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150 BV 1918:3:41, BV 1919:9:158, BV 1919:9:162, BV 1919:11:210, BV 1920:5:81, BV 1920:10:160, BV 1924:1:2, BV 1924:9:126, BV 1925:1:3, BV 1926:10:174, BV 1926:10:184, BV 1930:2:45, BV 1934:4:113, BV 1934:12:425 Palmquist 1962:64ff

151 quote from BV 1926:10:173ff, BV 1930:11:302ff, BV 1932:12:385

152 quote from BV 1918:1:8, BV 1925:10:147f, BV 1926:10:173ff, BV 1926:11:191, BV 1927:7:143, BV 1927:11:232

153 BV 1927:8:161, BV 1927:11:232, BV 1928:11:253, BV 1929:1:4ff, BV 1929:11:253ff, BV 1930:3:77, BV 1931:11:425, quote from BV 1932:12:425, BV 1933:11:393, BV 1938:10:299

154 quote one from BV 1920:2:21, BV 1920:12:185, BV 1922:10:137, BV 1924:1:2, BV 1925:7:94, BV 1927:10:221, BV 1927:11:231, BV 1928:11:255, BV 1929:1:4ff, BV 1930:2:45, BV 1930:4:86, BV 1930:198f, BV 1932:9:315, BV 1933:2:50, quote two from BV 1935:1:1

155 BV 1920:5:81, quote one from BV 1920:9:145, quote two from BV 1922:10:137, BV 1922:178, BV 1925:10:139

156 quote from BV 1924:9:125, BV 1933:4:115

157 BV 1921:8:117, BV 1932:1:2

158 BV 1922:7:96, BV 1922:10:138, BV 1925:2:17ff, BV 1925:5:65, BV 1925:7:93, BV 1925:8:103, BV 1925:9:121f, BV 1925:10:146, BV 1926:5:77, BV 1927:10:222, BV 1930:2:45, BV 1933:1:1, BV 1934:5:129

develop into an incurable cancer".<sup>159</sup> The policy response of the Union is *restoration*, on all levels, and lasts throughout the period of my study.<sup>160</sup>

While the above process is violently experienced by the bank corps, the rest of society does not fully share it. Though the daily press in the mid 1920's does note that "the current conditions are *not* a source of pride for our banks", the "bank corps is hit especially hard" and forms "the newest proletariat"<sup>161</sup>, the corps' situation suffers a general lack of recognition from the public. "Without doubt the entire white-collar class is deeply aware of its deterioration (...) But for the other social classes, these conditions are not as clear". These people are so used to envying the bank employees, that they have trouble imagining it any other way. This leaves them with a general impression of the sector which is "essentially false".<sup>162</sup> This unmoved faith in and view on the bank sector is shared by Croner in his 1939 study of the social and economic conditions of white collar workers. Bank employees are considered the elite of clerical work – better off not only in terms of pay, but also regarding vacation, employment safety, work hours etc.<sup>163</sup>

Towards the very end of the 1930's, the corps itself moves closer to this conception. From "social homelessness", the bank employees are increasingly orientating themselves as "the new middle class" – a novel social group. In 1937 it is stated that "the head can again be carried high, and with greater confidence than ever".<sup>164</sup>

## 4.8 Social norms, attitudes and customs

### 4.8.1 Organisation

At the start of our period, the bank corps was strictly opposed to all forms of union-like organisation. Svenska Bankmannaföreningen was essentially a forum for bank employees to build relations and socialise. Union activity was associated with the working class and socialism – both to which the corps had a "pronounced aversion"<sup>165</sup>. In its position as privileged elite, bank employees looked at union strife with distrust and contempt.<sup>166</sup> Organisation along union lines was simply irreconcilable with its self-image. Not only would it violate the perceived close and personal relationship between bank employee and management. Collective action, especially political, was also incompatible with the strongly felt – and actively nurtured – individualism of the corps. Gradually, this position changed. According to the corps a forced development in the face of its persistent hardship and declining standard<sup>167</sup> – and a response to the increasingly successful organisation of the working class.

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159 BV 1918:11:172, BV 1919:2:25f, BV 1919:3:39ff, BV 1919:8:135f, BV1919:9:157, BV 1919:11:210, BV 1920:4:61ff, BV 1920:10:160, quote from BV 1921:8:118, BV 1926:10:184, BV 1928:1:2, BV 1929:9:205, BV1930:3:78, BV 1930:11:301ff, BV 1932:1:2, BV 1932:9:325, BV 1934:9:323, BV 1934:9:352f, BV 1935:8:317

160 BV 1920:2:21, BV 1920:5:79, BV 1921:3:49, BV 1921:8:117, BV 1922:7:95, BV 1923:7:121, BV 1926:5:77, BV 1929:10:230, BV 1930:5:118f, BV 1930:11:301ff, BV 1931:1:1, BV 1932:12:425

161 quotes from BV 1925:10:147f

162 quote two from BV 1924:8:114, BV 1928:5:112, quote one from 1933:12:440, BV 1935:8:317

163 Lindgren 1988:139

164 BV 1934:11:377, quote one from BV 1938:2:60, quote two from BV 1939:9:366, quote three from Sbmf 1937:25

165 quote from BV 1926:10:173ff, BV 1923:7:120, BV 1935:3:101, Palmquist 1962:54ff

166 Palmquist 1962:63

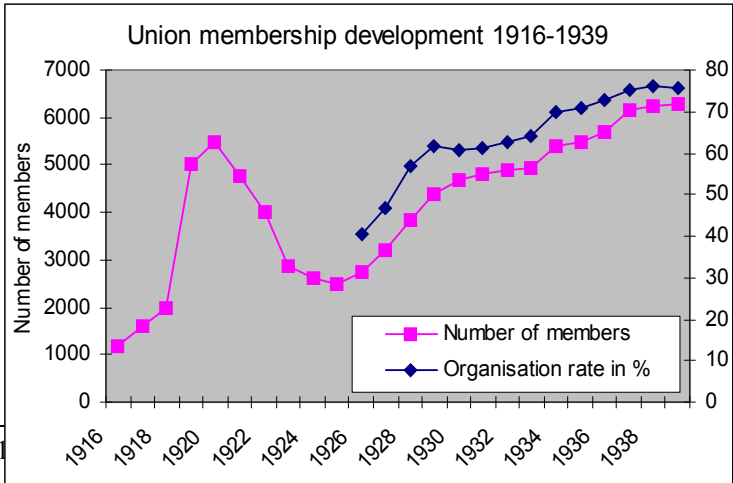
167 BV 1926:10:173ff, BV 1929:10:230, BV 1930:5:118ff, BV 1932:12:425, BV 1933:8:306, BV 1934:4:113, BV 1938:5:177

Being left astern was not a feeling the proud and self-aware bank corps enjoyed. It was perceived as irrational and unfair that “the least intellectually” educated had enforced their rights while the “educated elements” had hesitated and failed to do the same.<sup>168</sup> Even worse, the bank employees felt that they – as well as the entire white-collar class – were squeezed between the employers and the working class, forced to pay for the benefits grabbed by the organised working class as the employers sought to compensate their losses.<sup>169</sup> The lack of organisation of the bank corps was therefore considered partly to blame for its deterioration compared to other (lower) classes – inviting exploitation – and the organisatory vacuum was increasingly perceived as a danger.<sup>170</sup> The corps, who considered itself to be exceptionally loyal towards its employers, also felt it had endured more, patiently and silently, than all other categories of employees – “to the edge of its ability – and even beyond”. But this good will was not being rewarded and patience was running out.<sup>171</sup>

In effect, the thought of organisation gradually gained leeway. According to the Union Chairman, almost the entire corps was organised in 1919-1920. However, from 1921 to the middle of the 20’s a lack of faith in the ability of the Union to make a difference caused member flight. Furthermore, “some members of the corps still find it below their dignity to participate in such “proletarian” movements, others consider it disloyal and “downright sinful”. The Union leadership considered these positions surprising considering the corps situation – organisation was seen as the only way to achieve improvement.<sup>172</sup> Class pride, bordering on conceit, caused the bank corps to cling to the past and hindered them from reacting to the changing circumstances realistically rather than sentimentally.<sup>173</sup>

The Union reached its *official* bottom member number of 2,500 in 1925, however the real number was below 2,000. Through a conscious effort from the leading group, policy was changed to divert the employees attention from the discouraging hardship through side-activities and help-programmes, which resulted in renewed growth in the number of members. The 20’s thus marked the real breakthrough regarding the bank employees unionisation.<sup>174</sup> However, the organisation degree was consistently lower for women than men – from only 6 percent in 1917, it reached a still meagre 25 percent in 1942.<sup>175</sup> The development is illustrated in graph fourteen at the top of the next page.

**Graph 14**



168 quote from BV 1916:12:125, BV 1917:12:125, BV 1918:12:125  
 169 BV 1932:9:315, BV 1933:12:425, BV 1934:12:425  
 170 BV 1919:3:41, BV 1920:12:185, BV1929:10:233, BV 1930:4:86, BV 1930:5:121, BV 1932:9:315  
 171 BV 1919:3:44, quote from BV 1920:12:185, BV 1926:9:157, BV 1930:199, BV 1932:1:27, BV 1932:12:425  
 172 quote from BV 1924:5:66, BV 1925:9:123, BV 1927:10:222, BV 1932:12:426  
 173 BV1939:8:311ff  
 174 Palmquist 1962:91ff, Lindgren 1988:111f, BV1924:8:111  
 175 Palmquist 1962:334

During this time, collaboration was also initiated with other organisations for civil servants on issues of common interest, leading to the founding of DACO – the central organisation for employees – in 1931.<sup>176</sup> Towards the end of the 1930's, the Union declared that organisation was complete and it was now at its full strength. It acquired the right to negotiate on behalf of the corps in 1936, and declared that “the individual spirit is gradually giving way to the spirit of co-operation and solidarity.” The Union's work had – according to itself – changed the corps mentality. However, scepticism and a sense of organisation as disloyal and unworthy of the bank corps still remained.<sup>177</sup> As did a strong need for demarcation against the working class.<sup>178</sup>

#### 4.8.2 Men on women

Still at the turn of the century 1900, the reservations against the very notion of men and women working together at all were widespread in many sectors of the economy.<sup>179</sup> During the 1910's, women also appear to have been largely a non-issue to the Union and the predominantly male corps. In the 1962 retrospect, it is noted that the admission of women into the Union in 1911 was a “major change (...) perhaps met with mixed emotions in some places, but considering the large female staff, which resides in the banks and whose interests in so many respects coincide with the male's, the change must be considered warranted”.<sup>180</sup> However, these mixed emotions make little imprint in public records or the Union press. In fact, apart from general addresses to “the men and women employed in our banks”, the first attention to women waits until 1923 – when the topic opens the year.

This first article focuses on the marked change of the role of women in banking. Only a couple of years ago some banks had still stuck to the old “tradition” not to employ women, but “the past hard years labour shortage broke even these last banks' resistance”. Now, it is said, women probably make up a larger share of the banking corps in Sweden than in most other countries. While it noted that it would be wrong both economically and in regards to their human value to deny women the right to support themselves through bank employment, “it still can not be denied, that there among quite many male employees is a more or less distinct aversion to the women employed in banking”. This is motivated with their depressing effect on wages and generally less reliable and loyal character. Many women, “at least during the first decade of their banking career consider it a more temporary forced work”, awaiting marriage. They thus lack ambition and deliberately choose work that is as little demanding as possible. While this attitude passes with time if women remain in the occupation, it damages solidarity. The Union then ends their article with a note that the negative view and fear of women is exaggerated – generalisations and assumptions about women in banking as a whole based on a few negative examples is rash and premature.<sup>181</sup>

The following years, women appear in the Union press frequently – at least compared to before. In early 1924, the Swedish parliament and the National Board of Health and Welfare take a

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176 BV 1926:5:81, Palmqvist 1962:150f

177 quote from BV 1937:3:88, BV 1933:7:275, BV1939:8:311ff, Palmqvist 1962:178

178 BV 1930:5:122, BV 1935:3:119, BV 1939:8:311ff

179 Ohlander 1995:48f

180 Palmqvist 1962:53

181 quotes from BV 1923:1:1f, BV 1925:2:19, SOU 1938:47:88

principal stand for equal pay for equal work and appointment of jobs to the most qualified candidate regardless of sex – which is not practised at present. The Union refers this event, and throughout the following year, a societal debate on women as labour and (the absence of) equal pay for equal work continues to be reviewed.<sup>182</sup> The novelty of women entering the male labour market is considered “revolutionary”, and “those prejudices which were initially raised against this have gradually become silent.” However, “they have left some erroneous conceptions behind (...) above all the idea of women’s lesser value for these new tasks” – an opinion widely spread and generally held by the public, but only to a little and decreasing degree by the employers. A relationship which made it socially acceptable to pay women far less than men.<sup>183</sup>

Constantly present in the Unions positioning to the general debate is the strong concern that the perceived rapid flooding of women (along with children of the working class) will severely worsen the general conditions on the sectoral labour market and the access to jobs. What we experience is “a ruthless exploitation of the intellectual labour, facilitated by (...) the increasing number of self-supporting women’s participation in the competition”. To prevent labour market flooding and “pure societal disaster”, the Union also suggests everything from restrictive work hour legislation to colonisation of virgin lands as dump sites for superfluous labour.<sup>184</sup> These sentiments were not confined to the bank sector – during both the 1920’s and 30’s there were recurring appeals in the parliament for laws prohibiting married women to work on the market, because of the perceived economic threat.<sup>185</sup>

It is further emphasised that the competition between men and women is the very strongest in white-collar work. This allows the employers to attract labour for a wage below subsistence level – employers choose female labour for its low cost, and women gladly accept because of their “needlessness”. As clear from the state report on married women’s right to gainful employment, the sentiment that women willingly work virtually any wage because they are not family providers and can thus rely on others (men) for support is also generally held by society. The result is a downward pressure on wages, that in some cases have caused occupations with a large influx of women to be abandoned by men altogether.

To avoid wage depression and unfair competition, the Union is of the opinion that the low level of female wages must be corrected – it is also noted that the female labour is exploited and underpaid. The Union thus forwards minimum wage tariffs– with men and women starting at the same level and increasingly diverging from the fourth year of employment – and equal pay for equal work. “Even if, the woman’s intellectual aptitude on average can not compare with the man’s”, the changing nature of work makes accuracy more important than intelligence, and in this respect “the woman ought to be more than equal to the man”. “The female demand on equal pay for equal work is a basic tenet, which should be given general validity (...) Its application would be to everyone’s advantage”.<sup>186</sup> The difference in minimum wage for men and women is motivated with men’s position as family providers and women’s (five years) lower pension age.<sup>187</sup>

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182 BV 1924:3:42, BV 1924:8:112, BV 1924:11:168

183 quotes from BV 1925:2:17ff, BV 1925:3:39ff

184 BV 1924:3:42, quote one from BV 1924:8:112, quote two from BV 1926:10:179, BV 1926:10:184, BV 1927:1:15, BV 1929:10:230, BV 1934:9:301ff, BV 1935:3:120, BV 1935:11-12:248, BV 1936:10:317, BV 1938:2:63

185 Ohlander 1995:33

186 quotes two and three from BV 1925:2:17ff, BV 1927:8:162, BV1929:11:262, BV 1931:1:2, quote four from BV 1934:4:114, quote one from BV1935:3:120, SOU 1938:47:84f

187 SOU 1938:47:398

Meanwhile it is retained that some tasks are clearly more suitable for men than women and the corps maintain a reversed stance. In 1933, while "the woman's right to participate in gainful employment ought nowadays not be denied by anyone who is wary of himself", "according to the result of the latest psycho-technological research, only 37 percent of women are capable of objective thinking.". "Perhaps not without right one often ascribe the feminine some characteristics, which have little or nothing in common with the order and ways in a bank". The future, it is said, will tell.<sup>188</sup>

The ban against married women in banking was the single most debated female-related issue in the Union press between 1910 and 1939. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the praxis that women left their jobs when they married was widespread on the labour market. However, in blue-collar occupations it had never been in use<sup>189</sup>, and at the time of my study, bank and insurance were the only sectors still enforcing it. The institutionalised discrimination against women was thus especially strong in our sector. The main motivations were the provider and housewife ideals of the conservative corps, and an economic interest of the managers in a continuous turnover of personnel, keeping wages down. Young employees were also preferred for their supposed better health. Furthermore, married women were assumed to neglect their wage work and be more absent – none of which had ever been proven. This was justified with the fact that there were only very few married women in banking from which to draw any actual evidence. If married women *were* allowed they would no doubt behave according to the above, and the picture would be confirmed. The bar had in addition been applied differently during different times – it was for example more rigidly used during the 30's depression. When the issue of removing the ban was first raised in 1936 by three female Union members the opinions of the male corps differed, and the Union took no stance.<sup>190</sup> But the debate was on, and soon spread wide outside the bank sector.

Fuelling the discussion was the rise of the "population issue" – reduced childbirth – on the societal agenda. Women in banking were described as "modern nuns", and there were fears that the stress of the marriage ban would "lead to nervous breakdowns and suicide thoughts", while the "double burden of being both housewife and professional woman" would damage either work performance or home life – "should we wish that on the Swedish people?" the provider norm was very much alive and kicking.<sup>191</sup> The debate hovered between making it easier for women to combine the two roles, and confining them to the former – both camps claimed their route would promote childbirth. One day the bar "appears out of date", the next "modern attitudes" have taken a hold of women. The following week a new law would be detrimental to women because no one would hire them or take it out on their pay, and immediately another voice takes the opposite position – etc.<sup>192</sup>

Preceded by a vivid discussion with widely differing stands, the Union board expresses their principal support for the women's struggle for lifting of the marriage bar, but also states they will not act on the issue but leave it for state investigation.<sup>193</sup> When the law is then passed in may 1939, the Union calls it "a textbook example of what firm, goal-oriented organisations for employees can achieve", followed by a detailed referral of the union's support of the issue – and an emphasis that the new law is not intended to give women any special positions of

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188 BV 1925:2:17ff, quotes from BV 1933:4:173ff

189 Ohlander 1995:30

190 SOU 1938:47:319f, Lindgren 1988:124ff

191 quotes from BV 1936:12:391, Palmquist 1962:301

192 quote two from BV 1937:4:206f, BV 1938:10:313ff, quote one from BV 1939:2:63, BV 1939:3:119f, BV 1939:4:143, BV1936:5:165, BV 1939:5:205

193 BV 1937:5:279

privilege.<sup>194</sup> In the 1962 retrospect, it is stated that the employment conditions for the female workers have been a major recurring issue in the Union's work. When asked to comment on the matter, the Union's ombudsman Hallnäs begins his account with the situation in the late 30's, with the above question of the marriage bar.<sup>195</sup>

#### 4.8.3 Women on women

Women were well aware of the strong presence of discrimination against them – “even if you did the exact same work as your male colleague, his wage was half or even twice as big”. However, they were way into the 30's generally of the opinion the Union could not (and would not) help them and were thus reluctant to become members.<sup>196</sup> While not voiced at all during the 1910's and only very sparsely during the 1920's, women does not appear to have been entirely happy with the treatment and reception they received from neither employers or the Union. When opinions and issues were forwarded by women, they were often met by condescending attitudes. At best there was a bit talk, but little action. This was also considered applicable to the poorly employed principle of equal work for equal pay – even though the “illoyal competition” it inevitable resulted in was to the detriment of men and women alike. If the gap increased, the directors were considered likely to increasingly replace male labour with women to cut costs – “a tendency in this direction is already discernible. But this a tendency that serves neither male nor female employees. I can say on behalf of my female colleagues, that we do not wish to compete with depressed wages”. An address received no immediate response by the Union.<sup>197</sup>

From the mid 1930's women thus appealed for a change in their minimum wage tariff to align it with men's. The response from the Union was an offer to forward their opinions for handling by the central board. The board then decided to pass the issue on for *treatment by experts* on matters such as “calculation of living costs and budgets (...) and assessment and appraisal of work performances”.<sup>198</sup> The year before, 1933, the same board had included its first female member, Gertrud Lingström. In the retrospective three decades later, she says that her entry into the board was a matter of appearance. “I became a front to the public. They wanted to show, that there was female representation on the board”.<sup>199</sup>

While women in the mid 1930's felt that it had become expected of the unmarried woman to support herself, “she is still not welcome on the labour market”. Furthermore, women noted that they were used as scapegoats for unemployment, labour market overcrowding and economic hardship. “If you only got rid of *her*, everything would be alright”. However, apart from wage equality, the biggest target of female discontent was the marriage bar. Every woman was considered to want a home – but for the woman working at a bank it was not an option. The young girl is thrilled when she finds employment in a bank and think her future is secured – disillusioned when she wants to marry.. and has to choose. When the female employees present their case for the Union in hope for support in 1936, “the time was not considered ripe”.<sup>200</sup>

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194 quote from BV1939:5:185, BV1939:5:203

195 Palmquist 1962:253

196 quote from Palmquist 1962:302, BV1924:12:185

197 quote one from BV1924:12:185, quotes two and three from BV 1929:12:304

198 quote from BV 1934:5:149

199 quote from Palmquist 1962:302

200 quote on from BV 1935:3:123f, BV 1935:11-12:247, BV 1936:11:355, quote two from BV 1936:12:375f, BV1939:2:63

Women were very aware of the twists and turns of the issue's following development. In the light is on the population issue "the surprising discovery was made, that it is the woman who gives birth to children – and that even the working woman could be able to have children, if she was not prevented from it or driven to abstain thereof. The scapegoat was turned into a Madonna."<sup>201</sup> When the law forbidding discharge on account of marriage is passed, women are happy – hundreds of postponed marriages, some for decades, can now take place. But the battle is not considered won. While the situation for women might be improving, many men remain sceptical to these changes. Rather than thanking the Union, they note their appeals long after 1936 were met by strong resistance repeated remission. The decisive factor was rather considered to be the strong support by the press, representatives for other occupations and also the general public. As for the employers, they were even more negative and reluctant than the Union.<sup>202</sup>

Furthermore, women do not perceive of the welcome changes in a romantic gloss. The times can change fast – as late as 1934 the state appointed a group to investigate the possibilities to legally forbid married women to work. On the surface, the current development is attributed to the population issue. On a deeper level, women feel the change has been slow and gradual. Not until now has society found a way to accustom it self and deal with the place of women in industrialised society. Women's adaptation has also been gradual – not least in how they view wage work. No more do they for only being housewives anymore. We will see a continuously increasing number of married, working women. "there is no way to prevent it"<sup>203</sup>

## 5. DEEPENED ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From section 4.1 it is very clear that the strongest increase in the female share of the labour force took place during the 1910's. In comparison, the development then levelled on a slow rate of increase, with slight regress of feminisation during the early years of the 1920's and 30's, and stronger progress during the end years of the decades. This is the picture we are dealing with.

So which were the determining factors behind this feminisation of the Swedish bank sector between 1910 and 1939? Let us start with removing the ones that do not appear to have played a decisive part, from the discussion. One such area is the productive characteristics of labour. For example, it is quite clear that women on average increased their education level during the period in question. However, no sources imply or even discuss that this or any other change in productive characteristics impacted the sex composition of labour. Neither are there any accounts suggesting that work changed in a way that would have warranted higher education, more skill or experience – rather, everything points to the opposite. While education and experience have no doubt been essential to women's *sustained* stay on the labour market, it can thus not be used as an explanation my particular question. The changes came at the wrong time

Another factor that is not indicated to have developed in a way that suggests a positive connection to feminisation is norms and attitudes to female labour. While it can not be taken as unquestionable evidence, the fact that women are entirely absent from the discussion during the 1910's definitely speaks against a major attitudinal change taking place in that decade. The very reserved position and mixed emotions of the male corps during the following decades strengthens this interpretation. In my opinion the recurrent demand of equal pay for equal work

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201 quote from BV 1935:3:123f

202 Palmquist 1962:302ff

203 BV1936:11:355f, Quote from BV 1939:7:281ff



of the Union does not reflect idealism or a genuine concern for female labour – rather a talented way of presenting self-interest as consideration and morality. The issue perhaps most emphasised of all by the corps is poor pay and a concern for wage dumping, equal pay for equal work is a very politically correct way to cure the problem. Notably, the Union is strongly in favour of a minimum wage tariff, which would keep wages from dropping below a certain level. The tariff also suggests the same minimum wage for men and women during the first three years of employment – then wages diverge. Consistent with concern of male wages, yes, with the principle of equality and female wages, not so much.

Furthermore, the major issue related to women debated in the Union press is the right for married women to remain at their job – from 1936 onwards. This display of changing currents in society thus comes too late to explanation feminisation from 1910. And while the Union afterwards and in retrospect claim to have fought relentlessly for this crucial right of women, and secured its favourable outcome, the fact is that they definitely did not. They were passive, reluctant to express opinions and take a stand and even more so to take action. It is also noticeable that those official statements which were most positive to female labour and in favour of enhancing its rights, originated from Daco, the umbrella organisation for unions for civil servants, and not from Svenska Bankmannaföreningen in itself. While it can not be proven from the material presented here, it is thus possible that the representatives of the bank sector were relatively more reserved or even negative to female labour than those from other occupations, and the central organisation. The fact that structural discrimination – the ban against married women – was more prevalent in the bank sector than any others points in the same direction – and against positive changes in attitudes having supported feminisation.

The women's own activism and security in their roles as labour force participants and bank employees appears to have been strengthened between 1910 and 1939. However, here too the major upswing comes during the second half of the 1930's, too late to have been a driving force behind the strong process of feminisation in the 1910's. Still I find it likely that an increased organisation and vocal self-awareness of women was important to sustain a further strong female interest in the bank sector as labour market. Had they not driven crucial issues related to their employment security, the subsequent changes in these areas had probably been severely delayed, and banking become a less attractive workplace compared to most of the other, relatively more progressive labour markets.

Now on to the more potentially decisive factors – those which saw major change during the time of feminisation, and that were also emphasised by the corps itself. Between the years 1910 and 1939, the Union strongly emphasises changes in the demand and supply of labour, wages, and in the character of work, leading to decline in the relative status of the sectoral labour market. This is in turn seen as a result of the physical and structural development of the sector and new forms of technology and organisation. The question is then how this bundle of processes and circumstances interacted to create feminisation.

### **5.1 The 1910's – feminisation takes off**

The obvious point of departure is the 1910's, which was the decade the bank sector saw the most dramatic structural change. Characterised by strong structural expansion – both geographically, financially, unit-wise and in terms of employment, it is not a weak assumption that feminisation is related to this development. Since banks were making good profits during this time, and female activism, social norms or productive characteristics of labour had not changed markedly, the most likely driving force of the feminisation during the 1910's is a rapid increase

in the demand for labour. The sector more than doubled the size of its total labour force during the decade and it is reasonable that employers were if not forced then at least impelled to tap new sources of labour.

The parallel technological and organisational development appears to have been an important enabling factor in this process. One of the most apparent changes during the period in question is the rapid shift from craftsmanship to large-scale production in banking, with mechanisation, standardisation and extensive division of labour. The Union is of the understanding that this supposed simplification of work – de-skilling – made it possible for the employers to hire women since virtually anyone was now able to do the job. I do not share their interpretation that women could not have performed most of the tasks in banks without this development. Since employees were traditionally educated on the job in the bank sector, it is not that technology as such made it possible for women to perform most work – they could have been trained at site too. The relatively low demands on *pre*-knowledge and skill was one of the distinguishing marks of the bank sector long before the office technological revolution and the 1910's.

In my opinion, the factor in play is rather that development towards standardisation and simplification made work in banks more in line with what was expected of women (diligence but not intelligence) and considered socially acceptable and suitable for women to do. Women would thus have appeared as an increasingly “logical” choice of bank labour. This would also lower the social cost of employing women. Even if employers would have wanted to hire women in the absence of technological change, they would have refrained, at least in part, if they knew that customers (or co-workers) would oppose it strongly enough. It would simply be bad for business. Aligning bank work with “women’s work” also makes it easier for female labour to even consider banking, and to then actually apply. The larger the congruence between bank employment and the female ideal, the easier women’s entry.

On the topic of potential resistance to women being employed in the bank sector, I find it very interesting to return to one of the factors partly dismissed in the first section of this analysis – changes in norms and attitudes. Or rather, the lack thereof and its delay. An in my opinion enabling factor for the feminisation of the 1910's is the complete lack of organisation and unity among the bank employees. They appear complete unprepared for and taken off guard by the rapid sectoral changes – including the entry of women – and were thus severely weakened in their ability to oppose it whether they would have wanted to or not. If organised, they may also have been able to slow down parts of the developments during the decade such as mechanisation and division of labour.

Now when mentioned, the changes in technology, organisation and feminisation from the 1910's is also consistent with the theoretical suggestion that increased division of labour and introduction of new categories of work creates openings. In part because new tasks and areas are not necessarily gender-coded or “claimed” by men on outset, and in part because women can enter at the new lower end of the hierarchy without a loss of position for the present male labour force, thus lowering their resistance to the process. The very turbulence within the sector during these years, with fusions, take-overs, office openings and closings etc is also likely to have made it easier to break old ways and patterns, including the sexual division of labour, since the ordinary rut was often disturbed anyway.

Furthermore, the technological and organisational development is at the centre for what that the employees themselves experience as degradation and hollowing of the value of their work between the years in question. This in turn contributes to the perceived loss of status of the bank

sector as labour market, and to lowering the passion and interest of many old employees in remaining in the occupation. Notably, the most emphasised factors in this process of lock-ins and reduced future prospects are specialisation and standardisation – a new *organisation* – rather than the technology in itself, even if the two are related.

Technological and organisational change along the lines displayed in the bank sector was hardly unique during these decades. This is thus not a factor that *actually* damages the relative status of the occupation compared to others. However, it is possible that the development was perceived as especially painful for the bank corps in light of their traditionally very high social status (and their own reverence of that status). The contrast to their self-image could thus have caused a strong reaction, adding to the decision of many employees to leave their old posts in the late 1910's – remember the Unions claim that half the old corps left in 1917 to 1918. Even if there is no data to check this claim against and it might be an exaggeration, it is still likely to be based on some sort of true events.

It is likely that physical expansion of the bank sector – especially the shift to larger units – was necessary to make efficient use of the new technology, and warrant a shift to new forms of organisation of work. At least in such short time. Through all its further entailed effects – perceived degradation of work, aligning bank work with women's work – the expansion and structural change during the 1910's can therefore be seen as a major enabling factor for feminisation, for many reasons other than increasing the absolute demand for labour.

The so far completely unmentioned factor is perhaps the most central one to the corps. Wages. Apart from a few years at the beginning of the period, the staff feels *so* underpaid. Paid below subsistence level, paid below all human decency, and especially paid less than what they are worth in their esteemed and immensely important role as bank employees. And its not all whining. From 1913 until rock bottom is hit in 1918, real wages are reduced with a third. It does not seem as a coincidence that it is after these years of drastically falling wages, at their absolute low, that the bank sector suffers massive labour flight adding to the opening for women. The question is then of course why the women do not leave or stop coming. There are a couple of possible explanations.

For one, it is a fact that women did not have as many labour market options as men. This likely caused them to be more reluctant to leave a workplace as good as a bank even in times of falling wages. Minimise risk rather than maximise profit. Secondly and related, the primarily male Union makes a huge point of how banking is losing ground to other sectors in terms of attractiveness. The job queue of the male corps is potentially re-ordered. However, the female queue may not change in the same way. It is possible that the bank occupation is still so novel and relatively preferable to women – precisely because they do not have as many alternatives – that banking is rather moved up than down in their queue in response to the male reaction, simply because it makes working in a bank a more viable alternative to them.

Thirdly, the provider norm was very strong at the time – as throughout the entire period. The Union may have been right in that at least some wages were below subsistence level, and that women did not suffer from this to the same degree that men did because they were supported by either a husband or more commonly, a father. Lastly, we do of course not know if a bundle of women actually did leave banking during this time. But considering both the development of feminisation, and how the Union describes the event, it seems unlikely.

## **5.2 The 1920's and 30's – feminisation persists**

As clear from the theory section above, there have been many instances in history when women have entered a male labour market during extraordinary circumstances (such as war) creating an acute need for new labour, and then been excluded again upon normalisation. While perhaps not as extreme, I believe that the development in banking during the 1910's could be considered and compared to such an exceptional event. The question is thus why women were not booted when the conditions stabilised.

An easy answer is that the limited changes in the sex composition of the bank labour force during the majority of the 1920's and 30's is a result of the small new employment, and an absence of substantial amount of discharges. The female share of labour could of course have been altered through natural leaves, generally retirement for men and marriage for women, but since both recruitment and labour force composition was limited, these two factors obviously largely balanced out. Is then sustained feminisation only a result of low turnover of labour? No, for two reasons. First because the explanation does not account for the still present fluctuations in the sex composition of labour. Secondly, for the same reason that another relatively simple answer – there was no group of male labour to return to the bank sector and take the women's place, such as after a strike or war – does not suffice. Let us get to that reason.

While not amounting to an army, a large part of the corps left the sector in 1917-1918, with low wages and a new character of work as the main reasons. In 1921 the real wage is back on the level of 1913, before the drop. While the Union does not recognise this (or let it on), it does note that the situation improves and most importantly stabilises during the mid 1920's. Labour that moved to other sectors during the 1910's will also most likely have noticed by now that typewriters and Taylorism were not reserved to banks and that there is no escaping them unless you trade the white-collar for a plough. If not converted back to pull, the factors pushing labour away from the bank sector have been weakened. The indisputable presence of a severe unemployment in the early 1920's shows that there was a large supply of male labour at that time. Since women had no legal employment security and were no strong political force, they could easily have been substituted for men if the employers had wished so. Consequently, it appears that something changed around the shift from the 1910's to 20's that caused employers to keep their female staff even with a fully viable alternative open. I think that these changes can be related to incentives and bargaining power.

The Swedish bank sector can be said to contain three main groups of actors – the employers, the male labour and the female labour. The key question is what they care about. The major causes of concern for the male labour are wages, employment conditions and the character of work, amounting to a perceived degradation of the occupation. During the 1910's, while real wages were falling, indications in section 4.6 suggest that it – somewhat surprisingly – took a couple of years for the corps to grasp this. In their own account from 1933, they claim real wages fell from 1916 to 1921, when they had in fact been dropping for several years before that. Furthermore, the demand for labour was strong and there was no imminent risk for unemployment. Women constituted an addition or compensation of labour rather than a substitution of the present corps. According to the Union, part of a second-rate solution to the bank's labour problem – but not the ultimate reason for deterioration as it was perceived at the time. The picture that women are not the primary target of male discontent during that decade is strengthened by the fact that there are no mentions of female labour in the Union material from the 1910's.

With the post-war recession, all circumstances are turned on their head. In the face of economic crisis and unemployment, the value of pay and a secure job increases manifold. As labour market insecurity and competition grows, women become a threat. However, women are not perceived as the root of evil, and to the extent that they contribute it is not in their capacity of women as such, downgrading the bank sector simply by associating themselves with it. Rather, women are perceived as a problem by the male corps because they are willing to accept work on conditions that men would not and “could” not because of the provider norm. Women are thus not perceived as neither worse nor better than (male) children of the working class or any other abundance of un-picky willing labour. They do however, according to the Union, enable and increase wage depression and unemployment. In effect, the incentives of the male labour to restrict the labour market entry of women are strengthened.

The stability during the 20's and 30's can thus possibly be interpreted as a result of male employees finally getting their act together and producing a successful organised resistance to female entry. While organisation undoubtedly grew stronger with time, I do not personally think it played a decisive role – if turnover is close to zero, there is not much to impact. However it is possible that Union activity shaped the *slight* changes in the sex composition of labour from the 1920's onwards indirectly - through their intense fight for employment security. As it appears, women made up the buffer labour in banking. They increase their share when new employment is actually made, and reduce it at times of discharge. First in last out, the basic tenet of employment security.

While men do not appear to have used their increased organisation to help women to any larger extent, I still think the development is interesting – it could be seen as a general enabling factor of collective action. While collective action can of course be used both to the benefit and detriment of women, it might be a precondition for “female issues” to even be raised. Since the bank corps had traditionally been so strongly opposed to all forms of acting and thinking of people in groups, the mental barriers in combination with the social pressure might have suffocated any attempt at female organisation if the boundaries had not at least been stretched by the Union first.

The timing of strong and active organisation on behalf of the male labour was less than optimal also for other reasons. If the understanding of the Union is correct, there is a change in what the employer-side base their recruitment decisions on during the 1910's. From assigning great weight to image, financial profit increasingly pushes all other motivations aside. This process was most definitely gradual. While it appeared during the 1910's, this was a time of astounding profit margins and record low wage shares. Though the employers grew a keener interest in the economy of things, this decade hardly inspired tightened budgets. A situation that was rapidly change with the post-war crisis – allowing this budding feature of the employer side to come into full play. No was the time for cutting costs, and the difference in wage level between men and women is likely to have gained in importance. Being male might actually recedingly have been an advantage, and as in most times of unemployment, the employer has the upper hand – especially if the labour is weakly organised. This relatively strong cost pressure then remained throughout the period and the profits of the 1910's were never re-achieved.

The male labour (nor the female or the employees) is of course not a homogenous group. While many men may have fought for bank employment in the face of increased insecurity, others may have lost interest in the sector permanently. One possibility is that part of the labour left banking because of negative absolute changes – a fall in real wages, a new character of work. A while later at least part of these conditions improved. But while the old labour were gone, the

sector still fell behind relatively, and the very presence of new groups of labour can be perceived to have downgraded the occupation to the extent that it is no longer attractive. Interestingly, the group which appears to have the strongest degrading force is not women but *workers* – the old bank corps appears to have derived its identity more from its class position than its gender. Some men may thus not have cared (as much) that more and more women were hired – they would rather work in the police force anyway as the situation was. As for why association with the working class was perceived as worse than mixing with women, it is a very interesting question unfortunately not quite fitting within the frame of my study. One brief suggestion is that the male labour felt more secure in the roles as men (note the lack of changes in attitudes to women) than in their class belonging.

Moving on, the female labour is harder to interpret since it not as vocal or visible as the male. Even though the female wage level is stagnant throughout most of the period, and the employment conditions insecure, the bank sector still appears to have been held in rather high regard by the female labour force. Hardly an ideal workplace from today's measures, but preferable at the time compared to many of the alternatives. The supply of female labour willing to work in the banks appears to have been consistently large, and in sum, women's incentives appear largely unchanged. If anything they were strengthened during the 1930's, as women's work conditions got increased attention and structural discrimination was gradually removed. Women wanted to work in banking. Yes they were discriminated against and yes they were underpaid but they wanted in. That hundreds of women had postponed or given up on marriage altogether in order to keep their jobs – while they could have gone round the problem by seeking work in another sector – says quite a lot about how high the women rated their employment.

A brief comparison can be made to the present-day export processing zones in Southeast Asia, or the Maquiladoras along the Mexican-US border. These sites are the workplace of millions of women and are commonly criticised for their ruthless exploitation of female labour. While few would contest that the women work long hours under very hard conditions for poor pay, the fact remains that most of them still see it as an opportunity and prefer it to the alternatives. Dismissing under-rewarded women – or men for that matter – as exploited and oppressed, whether they type annual reports in 1920 or sew Nike sweaters in 2008, does not help them. It does however declare them incapacitated and deny them their agency. Plus, it sure is hard to get even and ahead if you do not get in to begin with.

### **5.3 Feminisation and structural change**

My third aim with this study was to see if the issue of feminisation could be related to cyclical structural change. As stated in section 2.2.5, increased employment of women has traditionally been linked to the rationalisation phase of the structural cycle through the employers' drive to cut costs. The results of my study both affirm and diverge from this view. According to my analysis, while rationalisation definitely played an important part in women's continued stay in banking, it does not appear to have been the factor initiating the process of feminisation. That part was played by expansion and transformation. Another important basic point is that structural theory's traditional explanation to female inroads to male labour markets have focused primarily on the employer-side. The third actor, the male labour force, has been largely left out even though it has great potential importance.

On a more general level, it could be suggested that the structural phase plays an important part in determining the bargaining power of different actors on the labour market. As displayed in

the discussion about changing incentives above, the relative importance for the employer-side of access to labour, price of labour and labour with certain characteristics varies over time depending on the needs of the sector at its present stage – the structural phase it is in. If the labour force is differentiated into groups, whether by sex, age, ethnicity or any other factor, the employers' queuing of this labour will interact with cyclical change. And obviously, when the need for something particular increases, the bargaining power of those in possession of that resource grows in response.

The question thus arises whether it is relatively easier for marginal groups to make inroads into previously restricted labour markets and occupations at a certain point during the structural cycle. And, if this is the case, if flight or reduced resistance of the pre-existing labour force, or changed motivational factors of the employers is the initiating spark – if they can be separated at all. Likely the relationship varies between sectors – banking alone shows that the relative *change* in status of the occupation plays a part. An affiliated question is if the factors potentially causing the pre-existing labour force to (perhaps) partly leave the occupation is associated with transformation or rationalisation. As far as this study goes, the evidence is mixed in both cases. Features of both structural phases have benefited women in different ways, and inspired labour flight in men.

And what features do belong to which phase exactly? A changed character of work dependent on new technology and forms of organisation is usually connected to transformation. But the precondition for its introduction is an increase in the size of units driven by weeding, typical rationalisation. And as if that was not enough, the motivation for introducing the new technology is to slim production and cut costs – rationalisation again!

Part of the answer for this apparent paradox might be found in the fact that the character of structural phases are not necessarily the same between sectors – especially not between service and industry. And as stated in the introduction, the theory is built on data from industry. One of the important differences lies in the area of innovation. In industry, innovations are generally in the area of new technology or processes. These are in turn applied to production, gives a competitive edge and drives expansion and transformation. In services the relationship is another. In the case of banking, the innovation driving the expansion during the 1910's is not a new technology but the *service* of banking as such, here in its phase of diffusion made accessible to the masses. Innovation in the industrial sense is in part used for facilitation, but enters the process at a later stage than in industry. Arguably, the use of new technology and forms of organisation is more used for rationalisation purposes in the service sector, drawn from the existing pool at will. The relationship between labour market entry of marginal groups and structural phase, would thus be different depending on the sector in question.

To conclude, the above discussion more than anything shows the need of further research into virtually all mentioned areas. Clarity and certainty would not suffer from being improved. The scope of the task is daunting (especially at 4am). So the sooner we get started, the better.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY**

The questions I asked at outset was which the determining factors behind the feminisation of the Swedish bank sector between 1910 and 1939 were, and how this feminisation actually developed. Investigation shows that the female labour share in the sector more than doubled between the years in question – from roughly 17 to 41 percent. The increase was most rapid during the 1910's, and then levelled throughout the remainder of the period with slight peaks at

the end of each decade followed by small decreases. The initiating spark behind the process of feminisation appears to have been a massive expansion of the bank sector during the 1910's, which caused a very strong demand for new labour – largely met by hiring women.

A crucial enabling factor seems to have been the change in the character of work, to large-scale production, mechanisation and standardisation that the expansion entailed. This not only increased the congruence between work in banking and what was considered “women’s work” – suitable and appropriate for women – but also, in combination with falling real wages, reduced the interest of the male corps in their old profession during the economic boom of the 1910's. The result was thus a dual opening for women.

When this extraordinary period of expansion ended with the post-war recession, women were not booted from their new arena. While increased labour market insecurity and a relative wage recovery renewed men’s interest in bank employment and spurred them to organise, the persistent economic pressure that followed created incentives for keeping women on because of their low wages. Turnover of labour then remained low throughout the period of study. Judging from the small actual changes in the sex composition of labour, women appear to have been assigned the part of buffer labour during this time – hired on at upswings, and laid off when times were rough. In spite of discriminatory wages and employment conditions, women’s interest in bank employment appears to have been strong throughout the period between 1910-1939 – the bank sector remained preferable to other viable alternatives.

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Appendix 1. Full list of articles from *Bankvärlden*, with titles

### **1917**

1917:11:181 En missgynnad bankmannagrupp

### **1918**

1918:1:7f Bankerna och deras personal

1918:3:40f Bankerna och kristidstilläggen

1918:9:141ff Banksammanslagningarna, en nackdel för tjänstemännens utbildningsmöjlighet..

1918:11:171ff Frågor i samband med banksammanslagningarna

### **1919**

1919:2:25ff Om automatisk lönerreglering

1919:3:39ff Svenska Bankmannaföreningens möte i dyrtidsfrågan

1919:8:135ff Personalrekryteringen i bankerna

1919:9:155ff Bankernas lönesystem och löner

1919:9:161f Tidkontroll

1919:11:209ff Prisrevolutionen och tjänstemännens löner

## 1920

1920:2:21ff Återställelse  
1920:4:61f Bankmannaföreningens närmaste uppgifter  
1920:4:63 Banktjänstemannens lönefråga  
1920:5:77f Tillfredsställelse och samverkan  
1920:5:79 Årsberättelse  
1920:5:81 Motarbete storbankerna tjänstemännens framtidsmöjligheter?  
1920:8:129 Missnöjet i bankerna  
1920:9:144ff Svartrocksproletariatet  
1920:10:160ff Svartrocksproletariatet, forts.  
1920:12:185ff Bufferten

## 1921

1921:3:49ff Utredningen rörande affärsanställda  
1921:8:117ff Val  
1921:10:137ff Ordinarie tjänstemän

## 1922

1922:7:95ff Nedpressningssträvandena triumfera  
1922:10:137ff Bankmannamöten  
1922:10:143 Svenska Sparkassan  
1922:12:177ff Misère!

## 1923

1923:1:1ff Bankmannakårens kvinnliga element – och manliga  
1923:7:119ff Svenska Bankmannaföreningen  
1923:10:166ff Stabilisering  
1923:12:205ff ”Taylorsystemet” och kontorsarbetet

## 1924

1924:1:1ff Dyrtingspropositionen  
1924:3:41ff Lika lön för lika arbete  
1924:5:66ff Inför representantskapet  
1924:6:81ff Representantskapet den 8 juni 1924  
1924:8:109ff Den pågående sociala omvälvningen  
1924:8:114 Sanningen om banktjänstemännen  
1924:9:125ff Bankmannen – löntagaren  
1924:11:168 Lönerna för kvinnor i statstjänst  
1924:12:185 Missbrukad kvinnokraft

## 1925

1925:1:1ff Indragningen av filialer än en gång  
1925:2:17ff Likalönsprincipen

1925:3:39ff Löneprinciper  
1925:5:65ff Årsberättelse  
1925:7:93ff ”Bankerna som arbetsgivare”  
1925:8:102ff Bankerna som arbetsgivare  
1925:9:121ff Trygghet i anställningen – ett livsvillkor  
1925:10:137ff Sista rekonstruktionen och personalen  
1925:10:146f En hederssak för våra banker  
1925:10:147f Pressen och bankmannakåren  
1925:10:148 Apropos..

## **1926**

1926:1:3ff 1926 – Ett gott nytt år?  
1926:4:53ff Tjänstemannaorganisationernas samarbete  
1926:5:77ff Handelsbanken - Mälarsbanken  
1926:5:81ff Årsberättelse  
1926:7:123ff De privatanställdas lönenivå  
1926:9:157ff Lojalitetens princip  
1926:10:173ff Omvärdering  
1926:10:179ff Ett samhällsproblem  
1926:10:184ff Arbetslöshetsfrågan  
1926:11:191 Medelklassens existens börjar konstateras!

## **1927**

1927:1:2ff Missuppfattningar  
1927:1:15 Kolonisationsfrågan  
1927:5:87ff Årsberättelse  
1927:7:141ff Smålandsbanken  
1927:8:161ff Arbetslönernas fluktuationer  
1927:9:185f Pudelns kärna  
1927:10:221f Fria Spalten – mera om pudelns kärna  
1927:11:231ff Lönepolitik och socialt ansvar

## **1928**

1928:1:1f Nytt decennium  
1928:5:109ff ”Höjda löner”  
1928:7:177 Jag sitter och funderar,  
1928:11:253ff Lönerna

## **1929**

1929:1:3ff Vad vi vilja och varför  
1929:3:57ff Årsberättelse  
1929:9:205ff Ett par synpunkter på rationaliseringsproblemet  
1929:10:229ff I frågan om topporganisation  
1929:11:253ff “Bankerna såsom arbetsgivare”  
1929:11:261f Mötet den 17 november 1929  
1929:12:302ff Ytterligare från mötet den 17 nov.

## 1930

1930:1:1 Ett nytt år  
1930:1:2ff Svenska Bankmannaföreningens löneutredning  
1930:2:29f Ljusglimtar och misräkningar  
1930:2:44f Tjänstemännens förhandlingsrätt  
1930:3:77 Jag sitter och funderar,  
1930:3:77f Regleringen av lönerna i bankerna  
1930:4:86 Befordringar  
1930:5:116ff Den planerade centralorganisationen  
1930:5:122f Göteborgs Handelsbank övertages av Göteborgs bank?  
1930:6:145ff Arbetstidsbegränsning för anställda  
1930:8:196ff Den psykologiska bakgrunden  
1930:8:205ff Arbetets psykologi  
1930:9:235ff Arbetets psykologi, forts.  
1930:10:249f Arbetstidsbegränsning  
1930:10:250f Rationalisering  
1930:11:301ff Årsskiftet och lönerna

## 1931

1931:1:1f Nytt år  
1931:1:2ff "Kritik över kritiker"  
1931:2:33ff Medeltal och medellöner  
1931:4:105ff Årsberättelse  
1931:11:401f I rekryteringsfrågan  
1931:11:425f Föreningen och konjunkturen

## 1932

1932:1:1ff 1932  
1932:1:27 Med sax och blåpenna – tjänstemännens förhandlingsrätt  
1932:2:52f Arbetslöshetshjälp åt tjänstemännen  
1932:3:65f Skärpt konkurrens  
1932:3:81ff Årsberättelse  
1932:8:241ff Tjänstemännens arbetslöshetsproblem inför Riksdagen  
1932:8:256 Kontorsfolkets arbetstid  
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1932:10:344ff Svenska Bankmannaföreningens löneutredning  
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## **1936**

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