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4. A New World of Work Challenging Swedish Unions

Anders Bruhn, Anders Kjellberg and Åke Sandberg

A time of difficult challenges

The trade union movement today is under pressure in almost every country. Increasing globalisation is a major explanation: goods and services are increasingly produced and provided within the framework of international networks of companies and production units. These challenges are reinforced by the dominance of neoliberal economic ideology and “systemic shifts” in many countries. It has become increasingly difficult for trade unions to organise and pursue their activities, and many have been slow in responding to change and in reinventing themselves. This is particularly manifested by the fact that the trade union movement is on the retreat in most countries in terms of the proportion of wage and salary earners affiliated with trade unions, known as union density. At the same time, differences between countries have grown in this respect; union density remains high in countries such as Sweden and other Nordic countries. This does not mean that the trade unions in these countries are not encountering increased difficulties, but that they have been much more successful in maintaining their positions than their counterparts elsewhere, at least until recently.

In this chapter we will try to explain how this has been possible and attempt to describe and discuss the difficulties and challenges faced by Swedish trade unions too, as well as the kind of innovative thinking and action necessary if they wish to continue as a powerful force safeguarding the interests of wage-earners in the workplace of the future. To begin with, however: what are membership trends in the different countries?

Growing international disparities in trade union affiliation

There is an ever-widening gap between industrialised countries with the highest union densities and those with the lowest. This is also the case within the EU. None of the world’s three leading western economies – the United States, Japan and Germany – now has a union density of more than 20 per cent (see *Table 4.1*).

By contrast, it can be seen that about 70 per cent of the wage-earners in Sweden, Finland and Denmark belong to a trade union.

Union density has been declining in Finland and Sweden since 1993, in Sweden rapidly from 2006 to 2008. Compared with 1980, however, a number of other countries in which union density was previously relatively high have seen much greater declines. Unionisation has fallen by half in Australia since 1980, from 50 per cent to less than 20 per cent. Union density plummeted from 51 to 26 per cent over the 1980–2011 period in the United Kingdom. In Austria, the proportion affiliated to a trade union fell from 57 per cent in 1980 to 28 per cent in 2010.

Table 4.1. Union density in 14 countries, 1980–2012.

	1980	1990	1993	2000	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Sweden*	78	81	85	81	77	73	71	71	71	70	70
Finland**	67	76	84	76	71	71	70	71	70		
Denmark	75	76	77	75	69	70	68	70	69	70	
Belgium	54	54	55	50	54	53	52	52			
Norway	57	57	57	53	53	52	51	52	52	52	
Italy***	50	39	39	35	33	34	33	35	35		
Austria	57	47	43	37	31	30	29	29	28	28	
UK	51	39	37	30	28	28	27	27	27	26	
Australia****	49	41	38	25	20	19	19	20	18		
Germany	35	31	32	25	21	20	19	19	19		
Netherlands	35	24	25	23	21	20	19	19	19	18	
Japan	31	25	24	21	18	18	18	19	19	18	18
USA	23	16	16	13	12	12	12	12	12	12	11
France	18	10	9	8	8	8	8	8			

* The Swedish union density for 1980 is not quite comparable with 1990 and later years. The corresponding density for 1980 might be estimated to about 80 per cent and for 1986 to 84–85 per cent.

** Finland: 1990 refers to 1991.

*** Excluding “autonomous” trade unions.

**** Australia: 1980 refers to 1982.

Comment: The table is generally based on active wage and salary members and excludes pensioners, students and the self-employed. Unemployed persons are included in Sweden 1980 and in Denmark. In other countries (and Sweden from 1990) the figures relate to employees (in work). The figures as a rule are as per 31 December of each year (Sweden 1990–2011 yearly averages (employees) excluding students working part-time).

Sources: Kjellberg 2001a, pp. 27 et seq. (+ supplementary data); Kjellberg 2011a (Sweden); Visser 2011 (Belgium, Italy, Austria, UpK 1980–1993, Germany, Netherlands and France); Nergaard & Stokke 2010 + supplementary data provided by Kristine Nergaard Fafo Oslo (Norway); Brownlie 2012 (UK 2000–2011); *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, August 2011 (Australia)*; *Main Labor Economic Indicators May 2011 (Japan)*; *Union Members in 2012 (USA)*. As regards Finland from 1990: IDS data (Income Distribution Survey; unemployed included up to 6 months) provided by Petri Böckerman Labour Institute for Economic Research, Helsinki. Denmark: own calculations (pensioners and students excluded).

Finally, the decline has continued in countries that already had a low or very low level of union membership (Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, the United States and France). It is worth noting that only 19 per cent of German wage and salary earners in 2008–2010 belonged to a trade union, and yet German unions are often regarded as examples of strong organisations.

In an international perspective, then, Sweden belongs to a small group of countries with a very high union density. A decline in, and increasing instability of, union density can be identified among younger wage and salary earners, however. The government's changes to unemployment insurance – mainly the considerably higher membership fees in many unemployment funds, coupled with lower benefits – led to a sharp decline in Swedish density from 77 per cent in 2006 to 73 per cent in 2007 and 71 per cent in 2008 (yearly averages). In addition, unions have been finding it increasingly difficult since the 1990s to recruit union activists and consequently to maintain local union activity. The number of “clubs” (workplace-level union organisations) at workplaces has fallen (Bruhn 1998). The number of union safety representatives and contact representatives has also fallen (Kjellberg 2001a, p. 297; for management of and participation in health and safety work, see the chapter in this volume by Annette Kamp and Klaus Nielsen). From 1988 to 2006, the total number of union representatives declined from about 523,000 to about 340,000 (Kjellberg 2011b, p. 77), and to about 325,000 in 2011.

The trade union landscape in Sweden has undergone substantial changes over the past 50 years. The majority of union members today are white-collar, and there are more women than men. At the same time as the distinctions between blue-collar and white-collar workers have become blurred, the Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, have continued to have the world's most socially segregated trade union movement through the existence of separate trade unions and union confederations for blue-collar workers (Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, LO), university graduates exclusively (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, Saco) and other white-collar workers including groups of university graduates (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees, TCO).

From an international point of view, however, Swedish trade unions are well placed to press for good terms of employment for wage and salary earners and for sustainable jobs. This is due to a continued high union density, the well-developed union organisation at workplaces working in interaction with the national-level organisations, and the long tradition of cooperation between the labour market parties. Union density and organisation lend legitimacy and strength to the classic role of negotiator and in the use of strikes. Union support for and participation in new forms of organisation, industrial restructuring and technological change is another power base that is an expression of the tradition of cooperation with employers. Cooperation with the central government – controlled for long periods by the Social Democratic Party – has added to union influence in issues of budgets and lawmaking, not least in labour law, in the domains of codetermination and employment security.

The influence of the trade union movement at the national level has waned since the 1990s, although substantially less so than in other countries. At the same time, the unions appear to find it difficult to fulfil their role as an active force for change at many workplaces. The union vision of a “good job” has been difficult to put into effect since government policy for full employment, under pressure from the EU’s convergence criteria and other factors, was abandoned in the early 1990s in favour of controlling inflation. The closures of Volvo’s innovative car factories in Kalmar and Uddevalla stand out as symbols of retrogression in work organisation (Sandberg 1995).

With a substantially higher level of unemployment, there was less incentive for employers to provide good work environments and attractive workplaces. The intensified competition on world markets and tougher demands for cuts in the public sector have led to workplaces with low manning levels where it has become increasingly difficult to find time for union activity.

In the following sections, we will first describe the distinctive features of the Swedish trade union movement, and in so doing explain why it has been able to remain such a strong force, not least in terms of its still high union density. We will then examine the issue of the present-day Swedish union landscape and the challenges that can be identified for unions in a Swedish context. In this section, we will first consider the role of trade unions at the national level and trends in Swedish industrial relations in recent years. We will then address the issue of how union activity has developed at the workplace level and in terms of work content and the work environment. Finally, we will examine the issue of how different groups of wage and salary earners relate to their union, and what the conditions are for collective organisation in the present-day world of work.

The Swedish trade union movement and its distinctive features

How can we explain the wide international disparities in union affiliation?

The reasons for the wide variations in union affiliation must be sought in a highly complex set of circumstances. Different national historical and cultural traditions form the backdrop to the development of different national systems for industrial relations. The ways in which trade unions operate in society and working life, internally within the organisation and in relation to their membership, combine to form a pattern showing wide differences between different countries and groups of countries.

Union unemployment funds

A characteristic shared by Sweden, Finland and Denmark is that they all have union unemployment funds. So does Belgium, but union density there is substantially lower than in the above three countries, which are world record holders

in union density. Norway, where unemployment insurance was taken over by the government in 1938, also has a much lower, albeit more stable, union density than Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The significance of union unemployment funds should not, however, be exaggerated. It is relatively common in present-day Sweden to be directly affiliated to the unemployment funds, i.e. to join a union unemployment fund without being a union member. Almost one in five members of Swedish union unemployment funds have opted to not join a trade union (Kjellberg 2011a, Table 8). In 2007, the Swedish centre-right government raised membership fees and lowered unemployment insurance benefits; in the same year, one in ten members opted out of the union unemployment insurance funds to avoid paying the higher contributions, while the unions themselves lost almost 6 per cent of their members.

Centralisation and decentralisation

An equally important explanation for the high Swedish union density is that industrial relations are at the same time centralised and decentralised (Kjellberg 2007, 2009). This means, first of all, that even though collective bargaining has been greatly decentralised in recent decades, the continued existence of central (i.e. national industry-wide) collective agreements gives unions at workplaces a nationwide agreement to back them up when negotiating. Secondly, fragmentary union representation such as that seen in the US and the UK is avoided. In these countries, the unions are compelled to assert the right of association and negotiation on a company-by-company basis. There is generally no need for this in Sweden, since collective agreements are concluded with well-organised employers; about 80 per cent of all privately-employed wage and salary earners are in companies affiliated to an employers' organisation (Kjellberg 2001b, p. 206, 2010b, 2011a).

At the same time, the Swedish trade unions are more decentralised than trade unions in many other countries. Employees at workplaces are usually represented by local union "clubs" and not by separate works councils, as in many Continental European countries. Apart from the fact that works councils also represent those who are not union members, the councils in countries like France and the Netherlands are usually weak. A direct union presence at workplaces is extremely important from the point of view of union recruitment, not only because it gives the union a face where the members are, but also because it is at the workplace that issues such as the work environment and work organisation need to be handled, and where local negotiations take place.

Unilateral centralisation (such as in the Netherlands) and unilateral decentralisation (such as in the UK) both work against high union affiliation. A combination of centralisation and decentralisation, on the other hand, is conducive to union density (as in the Nordic countries).

In some countries the almost complete absence of local union clubs has put trade unions in a difficult situation, since an extremely centralised system of agreements has been replaced by an equally extremely decentralised one. Sweden

and Denmark are the Nordic countries in which the bargaining system has been most decentralised. Unlike their counterparts in the UK, however, Swedish employers have not succeeded in getting rid of industry-wide agreements, despite the aspiration of attaining completely decentralised and individualised pay-setting.

Individualised pay-setting is often linked to “zero agreements”, i.e. industry-wide agreements without individually guaranteed pay rises. Employers continue to push developments in this direction. To date they have been most common in the professional unions in the public sector and in the *Ledarna* (supervisory staff). This development was partly reversed in the 2007 bargaining round. Groups backed by market forces, such as nurses, have to date benefited most from individualised pay setting, but not without problems. Even in the tight labour market of 2007, widespread discontent with pay-setting among nurses forced their union to start a strike of almost six weeks. Other unions too, including the LO-affiliated Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union, have experienced difficulty in implementing more individual pay-setting. The National Federation of Teachers (LR), affiliated to Saco, has had similar experiences. In comparison with a number of groups in the TCO-affiliated Swedish Teachers’ Union, LR members have had a more negative trend in pay, and members today would therefore prefer to see the union negotiate than do it themselves (*Dagens Nyheter*, 5 February, 2007).

The capacity of Swedish trade unions for industrial action also proved to be largely intact during the mass unemployment of the 1990s and later. Defence of nationwide agreements was also one of the principal aims of the negotiation collaboration initiated by the three most important manufacturing industry unions in 1992 when they formed the collaborative body known as the Bargaining Council (*Förhandlingsrådet*). These unions were the Swedish Metalworkers’ Union (now known as IF Metall, following a merger with the Industrial Workers’ Union), Sif (the Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees in Industry, now *Unionen* after a merger with the Salaried Employees’ Union, HTF) and CF (the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers, now *Sveriges Ingenjörer* after a merger with another Saco union). These three belong to different union confederations: the blue-collar LO, the white-collar TCO and the “professional” Saco, respectively. Faced with this united front, employers gradually had to abandon the ambition to completely decentralise pay bargaining to individual workplaces, although as late as in the 2010 bargaining round the employers again demanded (without success) completely decentralised wage formation. A new form of coordination or centralisation emerged instead. The 1997 Industry Agreement between twelve employers’ federations and all the industrial LO, TCO and Saco unions led to a broadening of bargaining, both vertically (blue-collar workers – white-collar workers – professionals) and horizontally (all parts of manufacturing industry except the graphics industry). The consequence was that the bargaining system has also continued to have both centralised and decentralised components. Industry-wide agreements are particularly important in sectors with many small workplaces and inadequate local bargaining strength.

The trend towards increased cooperation within sectors between unions affiliated to different confederations – the Industry Agreement is an example of this – does, however, at the same time entail an increased risk of weakening cohesion within the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). One consequence of this may be to make it more difficult to push for a pay-equalising “solidaristic wage policy” covering all sectors. In the 2007 and 2010 bargaining rounds, however, solidaristic wage policy played a prominent role in internal LO coordination, i.e. when the LO unions coordinated their wage demands. In these bargaining rounds, LO unions like the Commercial Employees’ Union and the Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Union, both dominated by low-paid groups of employees, obtained wage increases higher than the average and above the “industry norm”. Expressing deep discontent with this development, the Association of Engineering Industries in 2010 withdrew from the Industry Agreement, but re-joined it following a revision of the Agreement.

Substantial international variations in the private service industries

Looking at countries with low union density, very low union affiliation is common in industries dominated by small businesses such as private services. In many EU Member States, they account for almost half of those in gainful employment, and in the US for about 65 per cent of employees (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011; Dølvik & Waddington 2002, pp. 357 et seq.). The low and falling union density in these trades in several countries, combined with their increasing share of the workforce, is a significant cause of the decline in average union density. Union density in a number of private service industries is below average in Sweden too. However, despite high proportions of part-time workers and fixed-term employees, some two-thirds of commercial employees in Sweden were union members before the 2007 sharp rise in fees to unemployment funds; by 2012, density had declined to 58 per cent. Union density is also relatively high at the smallest workplaces in the private service industries.

In Norway, which unlike Sweden and Denmark does not have any union-run unemployment funds, less than one in four retail workers is a union member (Nergaard & Stokke 2010, p. 13). Unemployment funds naturally attain particular importance in member recruitment if there are no other incentives, as may be the case at small workplaces without any developed local union activity, as is often the case in private service industries.

In the case of fixed-term employees, their tenuous attachment to the labour market and to the individual workplace may mean that union membership is regarded as less crucial. Under these circumstances, union unemployment funds can be expected to be a leading factor in membership recruitment, and consequently as facilitating a relatively even spread of union membership. This must be regarded as a key factor in the high or very high union density in the four countries with union unemployment funds (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Belgium). In general terms, union unemployment funds probably play an important

role in recruiting groups that have a weak position in the labour market and that are therefore at greater risk of unemployment than others (Western 1999, pp. 129, 135 et seq.). These include young people, women, immigrants and part-time and fixed-term employees, categories that are often over-represented in the private service industries.

However, this tendency is today counteracted in Sweden by the centre-right government's decision to make each unemployment fund more self-supporting, which means that funds in sectors with a high level of unemployment, such as parts of the private service sector (hotels and restaurants are an example), and building trades with their seasonal unemployment, have to charge high membership fees. From 2006 to 2012, union density among hotel and restaurant employees dropped from 52 to 32 per cent.

In countries with very high union density (Sweden, Denmark and Finland), then, practically all groups of wage and salary earners are well organised, whether in the manufacturing industry, the private service sector or the public sector. Changes in the composition of the labour force obviously have consequences for the development of average union density in these countries too, but they do not have such a dramatic impact as in many other countries where density may vary more between sectors.

Separate union confederations of blue-collar workers, professionals and other white-collar workers

One of the biggest international differences in union density relates to white-collar workers in the private sector. In Germany and Japan, for instance, it is common for blue-collar and white-collar workers to belong to the *same* trade unions. Large numbers of white-collar workers decide not to join because they find it difficult to identify with unions and confederations dominated by blue-collar workers. There is also a risk that the political orientation of these unions will deter many white-collar workers. The existence of separate union confederations and central organisations for blue-collar workers, professionals (mainly university graduates) and other white-collar workers in the Nordic countries has without doubt contributed to the high level of union density. This structure appears in its purest form in Sweden, where the blue-collar unions are in the LO, the professionals' unions in Saco and the other white-collar unions in TCO. However, the distinctions between the different categories of employees are now becoming more blurred, something which may undermine the class character of the union structure.

Outside the Nordic countries, it is common for union affiliation to be based on entirely different social demarcations. In Italy, France and the Netherlands, for instance, political and religious forces have had an impact on union structure. In Sweden, political orientation, rather than serving as a separate basis of union organisation, has instead reinforced the class stratification of the union landscape. The LO's strong ties to the Social Democratic Party continue to be a substantial

barrier to the merging of blue-collar and white-collar unions. The TCO and Saco confederations have retained their party-political non-alignment.

The presence of class-based trade unions and the absence of political and religious divisions have contributed to very high union density in Sweden. Besides ensuring that no social group is left with the feeling that it lacks a union to identify with, it has promoted a sense of community in socially relatively homogeneous union confederations. There are, however, examples where individuals can choose between different unions, for example between the TCO-affiliated Union of Civil Servants (ST) or a professional union in Saco, and there are cases of battles over union demarcation (Nilsson & Sandberg 1988), but such situations have generally been rare. In countries with rival union orientations, potential members have not just faced the choice of whether to join a union at all, but have also had to choose between competing unions. This has generally impeded union organisation, quite apart from the fact that political and religious fragmentation tends to weaken the trade unions at workplaces and in society.

The growing strength of the Swedish blue-collar unions from the First World War onwards posed a challenge to the white-collar groups. The LO's alliance with the Social Democratic Party also brought increasing political influence. White-collar workers regarded trade unions as necessary if they were not to be put at a disadvantage in the labour market and in society in general. The first major union confederation for white-collar workers, Daco (Central Organisation of Employees), was formed in 1931 in the private sector, with the successes of the LO unions in many respects serving as a model.

The emergence of separate union confederations for professional employees in the Nordic countries was, to a great extent, due to the strength of the labour movement and the establishment of a welfare state with income-levelling aspirations. Saco was formed in Sweden in 1947 to monitor the conditions of those in the academic professions in relation to other groups. The origins of the professionals' unions lie mainly in the public sector, and their growth has been largely based on the expansion in the number of public-sector employees, although the increase in membership is now greatest in the growing private sector (although almost six out of ten Saco wage and salary members were still employed in the public sector in 2009). There are thus a number of links between the unionisation of Swedish professionals and the prominent role of the welfare state in the Swedish model.

Self-regulation versus state regulation

Another factor that explains the high union density in Sweden is that self-regulation (i.e. regulation by the labour market parties themselves) is generally given priority over state regulation (Kjellberg 2009). Collective agreements have been preferred to legislation. Although a number of new labour laws were passed in the 1970s, these signified a strengthening of union bargaining rights at the workplace. The fact that collective agreements rather than legislation and other forms

of state intervention are a key element of the Swedish labour market model has helped enable the unions to preserve their strong position: they have never been regarded as superfluous by wage and salary earners (Kjellberg 1983; Göransson & Holmberg 2000).

As many as 88 per cent of Swedish wage and salary earners were covered by collective agreements in 2011, with the proportion in the private sector being 87 per cent (Kjellberg 2010b (continuously updated); see also Kjellberg 2011a). Nor has the “new economy” been unaffected: union organisation and the system of agreements have made increasing inroads into the dotcom sector (Sandberg et al. 2005). A large number of dotcom companies, however, still do not have collective agreements. In sectors that previously were largely public-sector monopolies, deregulation has in some cases led to the establishment of companies without collective agreements. This is the case, for example, for a number of new telecom and media companies, as well as airlines. Some associations in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise have offered what is known as service membership since the 1990s for companies that are unwilling to sign collective agreements.

In international terms, Sweden belongs to a small group of countries in which collective agreements have penetrated almost the entire labour market without any use of extension mechanisms. The very high level of coverage by agreements means that companies are unlikely to be able to reduce their payroll costs by avoiding trade unions. In some countries, collective agreements can reach a significant degree of coverage through state mechanisms, albeit that they often set only a minimum level. Where there is legislation on minimum wages, as in France, this tends to counteract union organisation, with the result that it is difficult to build up funds for industrial action.

The Swedish trade union movement in a historical perspective

The characteristic features of the Swedish union movement discussed above must be understood in a historical perspective. A number of circumstances have combined to give the Swedish trade unions a level of strength that is close to being unique in international terms. These include the fact that the Swedish state historically has been less repressive towards trade unions than was the case in many countries in Continental Europe, the UK or the US. Following the introduction of freedom of trade in 1864, trade unions and strikes have never been banned, except for strikes during contract periods and regarding the interpretation of agreements. Such strikes were made illegal by the 1928 Collective Agreements and Labour Courts Act. Legislation in the area of industrial relations was for a long time extremely modest. A contributory factor was that the Liberals opposed legislation relating to trade unions before workers were fully enfranchised (which did not happen until 1921). When this goal was attained, the alliance between Social Democrats and Liberals, which had lasted for several decades, was broken.

In the absence of an anti-union state, employers were forced early on to rely on their own strength to counter the emerging trade union movement. Centralised employer organisations were therefore formed during the first decade of the 20th century, with the big lockout as their weapon of choice. There has always been an extensive right of lockout in Sweden, just as is the case with the right to strike.

From the start, the Swedish trade union movement has focused on safeguarding its own rights and strength through collective agreements. Early on, unions such as Metall built up union “clubs” at the individual workplaces, as well as a strong national union leadership with far-reaching powers so that local advances could be coordinated; that is to say, a combination of decentralisation and centralisation. Strike-breaking was avoided by the trade unions’ turning to *all* categories of workers (including unskilled workers) and setting up substantial funds early on to support their members during industrial conflicts and unemployment. This strategy was important during the long period when Sweden was one of the countries with a high rate of industrial action, and it facilitated recruitment of members, reduced member turnover and counteracted strike-breaking.

A consequence, and one which is still evident today, is that unlike their UK counterparts, Swedish trade unions do not only organise employed wage and salary earners, but also unemployed workers. In addition, the unions in Sweden have ample fighting funds, in contrast with countries such as the UK, France and Italy. During periods of frequent industrial action, these funds have been an important incentive for union membership, because the tradition in Sweden is that unorganised wage and salary earners in general also down tools in the event of strikes and lockouts. As non-union workers, they will get no strike benefits if they participate in a strike.

The non-intervention policy of the Swedish state had the effect that in the early 20th century, trials of strength between employers and workers became a decisive factor in the development of the system of industrial relations. The role of the central organisations on either side was consequently strengthened. These were SAF (the Swedish Employers’ Confederation, formed in 1902 and transformed in 2001 into the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, SN) and VF (the Swedish Engineering Employers’ Association), and LO, founded by the blue-collar workers’ unions in 1898. Key compromises that would be of fundamental importance for the future were reached as early as 1905–1906. They can be regarded as predecessors of the 1938 Saltsjöbaden Agreement between LO and SAF. This came about under the threat of state intervention if the parties did not regulate their dealings themselves.

The principal goals of the Social Democratic government were to reduce the high rate of industrial action and promote economic growth. The situation is reminiscent of the genesis of the Industrial Agreement in 1997, when the two sides – again under the threat of increased state regulation, and again from a Social Democratic government – created institutions and procedures aimed at smoothly-functioning pay setting. The strengthened mediation institute set up in 2000 also fulfils such a purpose. The extensive labour legislation on co-determination

and employment protection that came about during the 1970s partly represented a break with the Swedish model of self-regulation. On the other hand, these were framework laws intended to be followed by negotiations and agreements at the workplace level. Union workplace organisation, which was already strong, was strengthened as a result.

The Saltsjöbaden Agreement of 1938 was signed in a spirit of cooperation by LO and SAF which lasted until the confrontation over LO's wage-earner fund proposals in the 1970s and 1980s (Pontusson & Kuruvilla 1992). The 1997 Industrial Agreement can be viewed in part as a resumption of the traditional policy of cooperation. Cooperation between the parties, centralisation, and self-regulation can be said to go hand in hand. Without close cooperation between the central organisations (the Saltsjöbaden Agreement and a series of cooperation agreements in its wake) and more recently between significant groupings of trade unions and employers' organisations (the Industrial Agreement), the labour market parties are unlikely to have succeeded in tasks which in many other countries are the preserve of government. There is, for example, no legislation in Sweden on minimum wages or on mechanisms for extending the collective agreements to companies that are not affiliated to employers' organisations (as there is in Finland, for example). In practice, the mediation institute created in 2000 does not apply to the employers' organisations or unions that have agreed on bargaining arrangements along the lines of the Industrial Agreement. Issues concerning minimum wages and extending collective agreements to workplaces that do not have such agreements repeatedly appear on the agenda, however, when companies, whether Swedish or foreign, are not willing to sign collective agreements.

Collective agreements are not the only possible alternatives to state regulation of industrial relations. Another alternative is self-regulation by unions. The principal example is the union unemployment funds. When they were converted to state-recognised unemployment funds from 1935 onwards, an increased element of state regulation was the price the union funds had to pay to receive state subsidies. The funds now had to be opened up to non-union members, something which did not have any major consequences until the 1980s. The centre-right government that came to power in the autumn of 2006 has stepped up state regulation of the funds, for instance by imposing substantial increases in member contributions and reducing benefit levels. The centre-right parties have also declared their intention to introduce mandatory membership of unemployment funds. If this becomes reality, they will of course cease to be voluntary organisations.

As has been made clear, trade unions in Sweden continue, to a great extent, to be class-based. In a number of respects, the blue-collar unions served as models for the white-collar unions. One example of this is the four-tier organisation: workplace organisation, local union branch (negotiating at workplaces without union representatives), national union, and union confederation. There are a number of important differences however; for example, the TCO and Saco unions, unlike the LO unions, do not support any political parties. Additionally,

the state played a prominent role when white-collar unions obtained negotiating rights. This is true not only of the large proportion of white-collar workers who were – and are – public-sector employees, but also of those employed in the private sector. The generally dismissive attitude of employers towards negotiating with the white-collar organisations in the private sector led to their forming of a central organisation in 1931 with the task of pressing for legislation on the right of association and negotiation. This legislation came into being in 1936, but it would take many years before white-collar workers gained full bargaining rights on pay issues. The principal importance of the law was that it legitimised union affiliation and activity among white-collar workers. The long period of Social Democratic government that began in 1932 also had similar effects. The close relationship between the two branches of the labour movement (LO and the Social Democrats) meant that LO gained great influence over political decisions. The white-collar unions also benefited from the Social Democrats' strength, by being able to operate in a union-friendly context. Generally, organisations of different interest groups came to play a prominent role in the Swedish model. This has sometimes been referred to as corporatist.

Summing up: what is the strength of Swedish unions?

The strength of Swedish unions has been discussed here first and foremost in relation to their high union density. However, in this context it is important to stress that there are of course other measures of union strength. In France, for instance, trade unions principally consist of union activists. This means that the French union movement has a capability to mobilise workers far in excess of what its membership figures would indicate. On the other hand, as just mentioned, it is difficult to build up larger conflict funds when union density is as low as it is in France. This is one reason why French strikes are often brief and take the form of demonstrations. They attract much attention because they often involve public-sector employees and public communications workers. Another consideration is that an expanded union workplace organisation promotes union affiliation, while also functioning as an independent indicator of union strength.

To sum up the sections above: a number of indicators based upon the history of Swedish industrial relations suggest that Swedish unions have an almost unique strength:

- the high union density
- the strong union workplace organisation
- the strong national union confederations interacting with the workplace organisations
- ample conflict funds for industrial action and extensive rights to take industrial action
- the high rate of coverage by collective agreements achieved by the unions, and the employers, without the assistance of state extending mechanisms

- the absence of a politically or religiously fragmented union movement.

However, it is necessary to make a distinction between union strength and power relationships in the labour market and in society. Power relationships are not determined by the strength of just one party. The employers in Sweden have also been very well organised for more than 100 years. On the other hand, the absence of a repressive state, together with the long tenure of government by the Social Democratic Party (1932–1976, 1982–1991, 1994–2006) has meant that the trade unions in general have acted in a generally favourable environment.

Under the current centre-right government, the environment has become less favourable, mainly due to the changes in unemployment insurance. Another fundamental change in conditions is that Sweden's traditional full employment policy, that was part of what was known as the Swedish model, since the 1990s has changed into a low-inflation policy, with high employment no longer being a basic goal. These developments fundamentally alter the relations of power on the labour market in favour of employers and capital.

The development of industrial relations and the strategies of the labour market parties

Internationalisation and EU membership

In recent years, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (SN), the major private-sector employers' organisation, has stepped up its demands for restrictions on the right of unions to take industrial action. The verdict of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in the Vaxholm/Laval case was welcomed by SN, because it restricted the right to industrial action directed towards companies posting foreign workers in Sweden.

During the Finnish paper industry dispute in 2005, the Swedish Paper Workers' Union took sympathy action against the Swedish plants of the companies concerned. The latter were not directly involved in the dispute in the sense that the negotiations applied to them; they were simply affected by sympathy action because they belonged to Swedish-Finnish forest industry corporations such as Stora Enso. This type of sympathy action is not permitted in most non-Nordic EU Member States.

Repeated employer demands for restrictions on the right to take industrial action should be viewed against the backdrop of companies having become more vulnerable in industrial disputes because of their very low level of stocks due to just-in-time production concepts. This strengthens the bargaining position of the unions, at least in the short term. At the same time, however, power has shifted considerably to the advantage of the employers as a result of the globalisation of companies and the labour market. Transnational companies can move production between different countries if industrial disputes arise, but can also do so more permanently. An example of how this can be used to exert pressure on

the unions in the countries concerned is the more or less successful attempts of the US corporation GM to play the unions at its subsidiaries in Sweden (Saab) and Germany (Opel) off against each other in decisions on where to locate the production of new car models. The only way in which the unions can resist is through international cooperation between unions in a group of companies. This may, however, clash with the desire of the local unions to save their own jobs. Many large Swedish companies have been acquired by, or merged with, foreign companies in recent years, with the consequence that their senior management ends up in another country. Examples of this are Saab Cars – GM, Volvo Cars – Ford, Asea – BBC – ABB, Stora – Enso, Astra–Zeneca, Pharmacia – Upjohn – Pfizer. In 2010 Saab Cars and Volvo Cars were sold to car manufacturers and financial groups in the Netherlands/Russia and China, respectively. The distance between corporate boards and managements is consequently becoming greater, and the Swedish trade unions' opportunities to exert influence are being curtailed.

Changing division of labour – changing union structures?

Of Sweden's fifteen largest unions in 2012, six belonged to LO, five to TCO and three to Saco, while one was independent. The almost complete dominance of the LO unions in 1950 no longer applies (all but one of the fifteen largest unions then were LO unions). Of the largest unions in 2012 only *Unionen* (the largest TCO union), IF Metall (the largest private sector LO union), *Sveriges Ingenjörer* (the largest Saco union) and *Ledarna* (the largest independent union) had a substantial majority of their members in manufacturing industry. All of them except *Ledarna* belong to the cooperative grouping Unions within Manufacturing (*Facken inom industrin*, FI) which was formed in 1996. As a result, manufacturing industry has succeeded in retaining a strong position in the Swedish bargaining system. The LO manufacturing unions are unlikely to have been able to attain such a position on their own.

Many of the largest TCO unions are vertical unions. Of these, two are in the public sector representing government (ST) and municipal employees (SKTF), respectively, and one in both manufacturing industry and private services (*Unionen*). Particularly among public sector employees there are also a number of occupational TCO unions organising teachers, nurses and police officers. The former TCO union *Ledarna* (the former supervisors' union, now aspiring to organise all middle managers) may perhaps also be regarded as a kind of occupational union. Because of its opposition to TCO's organisational plan and its aggressive competition for membership with other TCO affiliated unions, *Ledarna* was expelled from TCO in 1997. The two largest TCO affiliates today are *Unionen* and the Teachers' Union. While almost all LO unions (such as IF Metall) and many TCO unions are vertical, all Saco unions are organised along occupational lines due to their role as professional associations.

A question for the future is what will happen to the union structure, in view of the fact that the boundaries are becoming blurred between blue-collar and white-

collar workers, between professionals and other white-collar workers, between public and private sector workers, and between manufacturing industry and private services (Nilsson & Sandberg 1988). This is taking place through a number of processes:

- Vertical integration of blue-collar and white-collar tasks with an increased element of multi-skilled employees who to a large extent manage planning and execution themselves, as well as administration and production.
- Increased demands for higher education mean that many more white-collar workers than those who traditionally belong to professional university-trained groups now have some type of university education. This is partly because the post-upper secondary school courses that were previously provided outside the university system (for example those for nurses, primary and lower secondary school teachers) are now provided in a university setting.
- Conversion of authorities into separate state-run companies and privatisation of public activities mean that many people who used to be classified as public sector employees now belong to the private sector.
- The increased use of “New Public Management” has reduced the differences between the way in which private and public enterprises are run.
- Increased integration between the industrial and service sectors because industrial companies often outsource work to service companies (examples include such diverse activities as IT, cleaning and reception services) or use the services of temporary employment agencies.

The first two of these processes may pose a challenge to the strong union segregation with separate trade unions and central organisations for blue-collar workers, professionals and other white-collar workers. This may lead to a sharper competition between unions as well as to closer union cooperation followed by mergers across social divisions in the future.

The collective agreements of blue-collar and white-collar workers have become increasingly similar due to the development of industry-wide agreements, but they are far from being identical. Employers in the engineering industry have at times pursued the issue of joint and all-embracing “single-status” “co-worker” agreements, but have failed to win support for this approach at the local level. The first single-status agreement in manufacturing industry concluded by an employers’ association was signed in 1995. It covered the whole pulp and paper industry, but only with reference to general conditions, not wages. Single-status agreements in the private sector are most common in the service industries, but they are still relatively rare. The pioneering companies are former government agencies in the post and telecom areas. Despite the hierarchical character of these state bureaucracies, there was no blue-collar/white-collar divide even when they were government agencies. The partitions between different categories are even less clear in the IT and dotcom sector. It is therefore not surprising that unions af-

filiated to LO, TCO and Saco all compete for members here (Sandberg et al. 2005, pp. 81 et seq.).

Sif used to have a vision of “one company – one union”, which if put into effect would mean a radical recast of the union landscape in the industry. By the merger with HTF, which organised white-collar workers within private services, Sif did not pursue its vision. One of the reasons for the merger into *Unionen* was that many white-collar jobs in the industry had been transferred to private service companies. The merger between Metall and the Industrial Workers’ Union to form IF Metall in 2006 also followed the pattern that union mergers almost exclusively take place *within* union confederations and not across them. Another example is the merger in 2007 between CF (graduate engineers) and the Swedish Society of College Engineers (engineers with lower qualifications and with the emphasis on the public sector) to form the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers.

The conclusion to be drawn is that in the foreseeable future we can anticipate that wage and salary earners in manufacturing industry will remain split between all three union confederations (IF Metall and other LO unions, the TCO-affiliated *Unionen* and the Saco union Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers), in addition to which there is the independent *Ledarna*.

No blue-collar and white-collar unions have yet merged in Sweden. The links of the LO unions to the Social Democratic Party pose a significant obstacle, since the white-collar unions by tradition are politically non-aligned. (In 2003, however, the Danish Trade Union Confederation cut its ties to the Social Democratic Party to clear the way for mergers with white-collar organisations.)

Nor is a merger between TCO and Saco to be expected in the foreseeable future. TCO has proposed a merger, but Saco has rejected the idea. One aspect is that Saco is the smaller but more rapidly expanding union confederation (*Table 4.2, p. 162*) and is unwilling to abandon its professional character. On the other hand, collaboration between several of the professional unions in Saco and TCO has been intensified. The officers’ unions in TCO and Saco merged in 1995. After a transitional period, the new union joined Saco, but for negotiations on agreements it belongs to the Public Sector Employees Negotiating Council (OFR), which is dominated by TCO unions. Another four Saco unions have become members of OFR since 2002, among them the National Union of Teachers (LR), which has initiated close cooperation with the TCO-affiliated Swedish Teachers’ Union.

Trends in working life are thus making social segregation in the trade union movement between blue-collar workers, white-collar workers and professionals increasingly obsolete. Major obstacles to various types of mergers remain, however, although the trend towards increased cooperation is at the same time clear. Historically there are several examples of unions first cooperating and then gradually integrating and merging, but not across the collar line (see e.g. Ekdahl 1988). The founding of *Unionen*, bringing together a TCO union with its strong-

hold in manufacturing industry (Sif) and a TCO union within the private service sector (HTF) closed the door on a merger between TCO and LO unions within manufacturing.

Employers' organisations and strategies

The traditional Swedish model of consensual regulation and cooperation between the labour market parties began to erode during the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the large number of new laws on co-determination, employment security, work environment and so on. The LO proposal for wage-earner funds in particular were met with strong opposition from employers.¹ These pro-union actions in the field of legislation caused the employers to change their strategy. Significant blows to the traditional Swedish model were the withdrawal of SAF from centralised bargaining in 1990 and from the boards of government bodies in 1992 (Rothstein & Bergström 1999). This resulted in changes in the management of government bodies, so that the trade unions also lost channels of influence on policy in the fields of employment and working life.

A major role during the last three decades has been played by the Timbro think-tank and lobbying activities which have replaced employer representation in government bodies. Given the general dominance of think-tanks linked to employer and right-wing interests, and the communication departments of major companies as well as the almost total dominance of liberal (in the European sense), neoliberal and conservative news media, the decreased role of the labour market parties in government bodies and commissions has clearly weakened the Left and labour.

Some components of the labour market policy of the centre-right government may also in the long run have strategic consequences, through a gradual weakening of unions. As actually suggested in an editorial in a prominent liberal journal (picking up a blog post by Bengtsson 2006), Henrik Berggren (2006) writes: raising fees and diminishing benefits in the union-run unemployment insurance system has reduced membership of the system, and as it is linked to the unions, they have also lost members. In a second step, the government is considering creating a state-run mandatory insurance. As discussed elsewhere, the union-linked unemployment insurance is a lynchpin of the Swedish model and Berggren's (2006) impression is that the government has "an ambition to permanently weaken the trade union movement". Such a change seems to be well under way today, although of course denied by the government. Another example that is weakening the unions is the reduction in sick pay (which tends to reduce pay in low-income jobs), the removal of support for the training of union representatives on company boards, a 30 per cent slash in the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the total shutdown of the Arbetslivsinstitutet/National Institute for Working Life. It is important to remember that despite these changes, the tradi-

1. The general idea of this was a law forcing all private companies to annually issue stocks equivalent to 10 per cent of their profits to a fund controlled by local and national unions (Pontusson & Kuruvillea 1992).

tions of consensual solutions and collaboration between the labour market parties continue at other levels, partly through sector-based cooperation and partly, and above all, because the union at the local level is regarded as an important partner and a substantial help to company management (Levinson 2004).

Swedish employers have long had the vision of completely decentralised and individualised pay setting, but this appears to be a long way off. The trade unions have been weakened at many workplaces, but this contrasts to some extent with collective bargaining at the industry level, in which the capacity of the national unions for industrial action proved to be virtually intact even during the mass unemployment of the 1990s. The collaboration mentioned above between the unions in manufacturing industry succeeded, through a united front which started in the engineering industry, in overcoming employer proposals for completely decentralised pay setting. The 1997 Industry Agreement led to some centralisation in manufacturing industry through the establishment of a common negotiating scheme and coordinated bargaining. The spirit of cooperation too had something of a renaissance. In addition, the state mediators acquired a certain coordinating role for the whole labour market in the 1990s. The new mediation institute introduced in 2000 is even better placed to fulfil such a role. As well as this, there is the internal coordination in LO and in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. All this has not prevented successive decentralisation of the specific contents of agreements, both in manufacturing industry and in other sectors. “Zero agreements”, where pay is entirely decided at the local level, have also become common in certain areas, above all in the public sector. The “managerial agreement” reached in 1992 between SALF (now *Ledarna*) and the SAF association Almega came to assume great symbolic significance in this development by putting the individual manager-employee process at the centre and introducing individual discussions on pay (Trogen 2003, pp. 121 et seq.).

The decentralisation of the collective bargaining system that was initiated in the 1980s, and which employers pushed hard for, gradually also made increased collaboration necessary between the employer associations, in part because there was a very large number of them and in part as a cost-cutting exercise (Kjellberg 2001b, pp. 214 et seq., 259 et seq.). Greater cooperation was also brought about by the growing differences between different categories of companies, particularly between companies like the big transnationals in the Association of Swedish Engineering Industries and the large number of SMEs that often are located on the domestic market, in retailing for example. During the second half of the 1990s, collaboration between the SAF member associations was upgraded, and has since intensified further when SAF became the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (SN) in 2001.

Two years later the two local-authority employer organisations the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of Swedish County Councils merged to become the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL/SALAR). In addition there is a special government agency, the Swedish

Agency for Government Employers, with employer responsibility for wage and salary earners employed by the government. Although SN covers an unusually large part of the private sector by international standards, there are still separate employer organisations for banks, newspapers and some other categories. SN organises no less than 36 employer associations (2012), 13 of which are in manufacturing industry (including energy production and forestry) and 5 in the construction sector, 7 in the transport sector and 11 in other parts of the private service sector. There are also a number of branch associations not concerned with employer issues but with issues such as industrial development.

The gap between organisations for the industrial and service sectors continues to exist on the employer side, despite the increasing integration of these sectors. There continue to be large differences between industrial and service companies with regard to collective agreements, union counterparts, pay systems, working hours and employment conditions. Since 2007, a rift has appeared across unions and employers' organisations between manufacturing industry and private services, as the latter call into question the dominant position of the former in wage formation (Kjellberg 2009).

Threats to the system of collective agreements

Swedish collective agreements today face threats from a number of different quarters, one of which is Swedish membership of the EU. Employers have questioned whether Swedish collective agreements must always apply in the Swedish labour market. In a European Court of Justice case known as the Vaxholm case (also known as the *Laval* case), a Latvian building firm asserted its right to apply Latvian agreements to its Latvian workers for work carried out for a Swedish principal on Swedish soil. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (SN) took up the case of the Latvian firm after the latter was bankrupted following union action. To the disappointment of Swedish unions, the ECJ ruled that union action to bring about a Swedish agreement with the company was illegal. This of course is a severe challenge to the Swedish collective bargaining model. SN views its own financial guarantee to bring the process to a conclusion as an "insurance premium against similar new cases" (*Nytt från Svenskt Näringsliv*, 21 November, 2005).

Like its predecessor SAF, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise demands a ban on sympathy action. It also wants to ban blockades of employers without collective agreements. If such legislation is introduced it will obviously become more difficult to bring about collective agreements where none exist, for example in private services in which there are many small workplaces without collective agreements.

In the haulage sector in particular, it is common to have foreign drivers who are not covered by agreements on Swedish roads. Not signing collective agreements is sometimes also used as a competitive tool among companies using Swedish labour. An example among airlines is Ryanair's refusal to sign collective agreements, which has been linked to very stressful working conditions for its workers.

A consequence of these problems is that a discussion has been prompted on whether statutory minimum wages are needed to prevent flagrant pay dumping for foreign workers in Sweden. Such a change would, however, have consequences that go far beyond the issue of pay dumping. As mentioned above, it may pose an additional threat to collective agreements. For the government to set minimum wages is a breach of the Swedish – and Nordic – model of consensual regulation by the labour market parties. A possible alternative is mechanisms that extend the collective agreements to workplaces without agreements. It should be observed that no state mechanisms exist in Sweden to extend collective agreements to non-affiliated companies. Instead, extension requires negotiations between the company and the local union branch concerned. To avoid risking the loss of the *raison d'être* of unions in the eyes of their members, LO in the 1930s rejected a proposal by the Social Democratic government to extend collective agreements by law to non-union companies (Söderpalm 1980, p. 22).

Another threat to collective agreements consists of new forms of employment and business, through more complex or looser conditions of employment. Although there are collective agreements for temporary employment agencies at the central level (among them, a strong one including all LO Unions), the presence of agency workers at a workplace signifies a fragmentation of the collective group of wage and salary earners with regard to terms of employment and from a union viewpoint (employees with identical duties will not belong to the same workplace union club). Similar effects are produced by the increased use of fixed-term employment (particularly among young people), self-employment, franchising, outsourcing etc. (see below on the labour market dichotomy that this entails).

Collective agreements may additionally be undermined by far-reaching decentralisation and individualisation of pay negotiations. For instance, the Swedish Association of Health Professionals, supported by a favourable market for nurses, has for a number of years been successfully conducting a locally and individually-oriented pay strategy. At workplaces where strongly placed individuals have become skilled at negotiating with the assistance of the union, it is in the future “not certain that collective agreements will be required to bring about good conditions for members” according to the president of the association until 2005, Eva Fernvall (Fernvall 2003, p. 58). This is without doubt true for certain groups during times when the professional group concerned is in short supply, but in other circumstances, without the backing of either industry-wide agreements or market forces, it is much less certain. That such a strategy is not always enough despite a favourable labour market was evident from the discontent that caused the almost six-week-long nurses’ strike in 2008.

National collective agreements may, however, also play an important role in the future. As well as supporting local agreements, the nationwide agreements, if they are coordinated, can fulfil the function of keeping costs under control. At least one prominent employer representative is convinced that “the Industry Agreement has been a crucial factor in keeping cost increases down at a reason-

able level in recent years” (Trogen 2003:123). In addition, collective agreements are increasingly emerging as an alternative to the pattern of implementing EU directives through legislation. In addition, without collective agreements there is no mechanism that guarantees industrial peace for the foreseeable future (i.e. for the lifetime of the agreement) or that evens out competitive factors between companies with regard to pay and so on. If unions increasingly begin to compete for members as a consequence of the blurring of occupational boundaries, collective agreements may, however, be called into question by employers, because employers will risk industrial action by unions other than the ones with which they already have agreements.

Employer organisations in Sweden have lobbied quite hard since the 1990s with the aim of amending large areas of Swedish labour law. Examples are proposals to repeal the laws on employment protection and codetermination, and introduce a ban on sympathy action. Overall, and in combination with fully decentralised pay setting, the proposals would substantially weaken the unions. The demands for changes to labour law have however been rejected by the centre-right government. This is particularly true of the conservatives, the Moderate Party, which is the dominant party in the centre-right coalition government (which also includes the Centre, Christian Democratic and Liberal parties) that took office in 2006 and was re-elected in 2010. What the government has done is to make major changes in the unemployment insurance system, involving large hikes in contributions and cuts in benefits from 2007. Such changes tend to have the largest impact where the union workplace organisation is weak, i.e. in the private service industries.

On the other hand, the centre-right government has to date refused to give in to employer demands for a ban on sympathy action. In addition, it supported the union side in the ECJ in the Laval (Vaxholm) case on the grounds of a wish to safeguard the Swedish collective agreement system. Nor are any major changes planned with regard to altering statutory employment protection, something which continues to be an employer demand and a demand from some of the right-wing parties in the government coalition.

Summing-up: industrial relations and the trade unions in society

Unlike the case in a country like the UK, the balance of strength between the labour market parties has made it impossible for employers to bring about a dismantling of industry-wide agreements and completely decentralise and individualise pay setting. Although the trend has also moved in this direction in Sweden, the industry-wide agreements have been retained and have even become the object of *greater* coordination in industry. Despite the fact that the union workplace organisations have been supported by industry-wide agreements in local negotiations, unions have been weakened at many workplaces, which has

meant that the support of branch union representatives has become increasingly important. Trade unions affiliated to LO, TCO and Saco collaborate in the grouping known as Unions in Manufacturing (FI), but to this date very few union mergers have taken place across the central organisations. No blue-collar and white-collar unions have ever merged in Sweden. The strong social segregation that is characteristic of the trade union movement in Sweden has historically contributed to the high rate of unionisation, but it makes international cooperation between unions in a large company group difficult. When the German IG Metall union wants to cooperate with its Swedish counterparts in the engineering industry, no less than four unions are involved, which in turn are affiliated with different confederations.

Although the Industry Agreement has led to a renaissance for cooperation between unions and employers, the employer organisations are demanding far-reaching changes such as bans on sympathy action and the abolition of employment protection. They also supported the Latvian company in the Laval case at the ECJ. The centre-right government was not prepared to grant the wishes of the employers on some of these points, but nor did it accept union demands either.

The negotiations between the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (SN), LO and the private sector white-collar cooperation council PTK about a new basic agreement, replacing the 1938 Saltsjöbaden Agreement, collapsed in 2009 because the employers did not consider they had obtained enough in exchange regarding their demands for restricted employment protection and restricted conflict rights. In 2010, the new SN president declared that he had a positive attitude to new negotiations on a basic agreement but that the employers first had to evaluate the 2009 failure and internally consider their future strategy.

The rapidly deteriorating business cycle in autumn 2008 and winter 2009 resulted in lay-offs within Swedish engineering of a magnitude not seen since the depression years of the 1930s. To escape from further mass redundancies or at least check their acceleration, IF Metall signed a temporary, historical “Crisis Agreement” with the Association of Engineering Industries and other employers’ associations in March 2009. This one-year agreement, which might be considered a supplement to the regular three-year agreement 2007–2010, opened up for local negotiations on reducing working hours by up to 20 per cent, and a corresponding reduction of the monthly wage, although hourly wages should not be affected. The 2009 Crisis Agreement might be looked upon as a step towards the introduction of working hours adapted to the business cycle, which the unions had so far fiercely resisted. By the end of June 2009, every fifth employee in firms affiliated to the Association of Engineering Industries was covered by local crisis agreements with an average length of six months.

Although the blue-collar confederation LO and the former white-collar bargaining cartel PTK no longer negotiate about wages (the employers’ confederation SAF closed its bargaining unit in 1990) there are still some collective agreements at the confederal level on other issues than wages. The importance of the

LO-SAF agreement on occupational pensions is successively increasing due to the worsening of the terms of public pensions. The same applies to the agreement between PTK and the employers' confederation SN on occupational pensions for white-collar workers and to similar schemes in the public sector. Secondly, the so-called adjustment agreements provide support and benefits to unemployed workers by means of the job security councils (Diedrich & Bergström 2006). These collectively agreed schemes have a prominent place in the Swedish labour market model, as an important supplement to the labour market programmes run by the Employment Office.

The union at the workplace: issues of work content and work environment

As we have seen, union density remains high in Sweden. Locally, however, unions are facing increased difficulties in recruiting and activating members for union work. This is particularly evident in the increased difficulty in maintaining local union club activity, particularly in the metropolitan areas and in the retail and service unions. More than half the members of the Swedish Commercial Employees' Union today belong to clubs without a board, which is to say clubs that in practice are non-functioning.

There are also clear difficulties in recruiting members to serve as safety representatives. The total number of safety representatives fell during the 1990s from 114,000 at the end of 1989 to 88,000 in 1999, but recovered over the 2001–2003 period to around 106,000, before falling back to below 100,000 in 2006 (Swedish Work Environment Authority). In Sweden, every workplace with more than 5 employees must by law have a union safety representative. This means that nearly 120,000 workplaces have to appoint safety representatives. According to statistics combined with some estimates of unreported figures, there are probably currently 40,000–50,000 workplaces that have safety representatives (in many cases this includes a single regional safety representative covering several workplaces). Private workplaces have 17 safety representatives per 1,000 employees, while public-sector workplaces have 44. The private service sector, which today is the most expansive, has relatively few safety representatives. Overall it can thus be said that union safety representatives are lacking at a majority of workplaces which are legally compelled to have them (Frick, Eriksson & Westerholm 2004). Workplace safety representatives are however supplemented with regional ones, but resources are small and have been cut.

If all trade union posts (including safety representatives) are included, the decline is nevertheless relatively small. In 1993, 14 per cent of LO members held elected posts, and by 2006 this figure had dropped to 12 per cent (LO 2007:1, p. 20), recovering to 14 per cent in 2011 (LO 2011:3). Due to decreasing union density among blue-collar workers (86 per cent in 1993, 67 per cent in 2012), however, the ratio of union representatives to employed workers has decreased. Both TCO and

Saco have experienced considerable declines: from 18 per cent of members holding elected posts in 1993 to 13 per cent in 2011 (TCO) and from 18 to 9 per cent (Saco). Quite a large number of members say that they are prepared to assume union posts if they are asked: this group includes about twice as many LO and TCO members and three times as many Saco members as those currently holding a position (LO 2011:3). The young (aged 18–29) have the most positive attitudes of all the members. This is striking in view of the fact that only 9 per cent of young LO members in 2011 held a position (information provided by Mats Larsson, LO), suggesting that the unions do not sufficiently address young people. Part of the explanation may be that many young LO members have temporary jobs.

The decline in local trade union activity obviously greatly affects the union's work on what are known as the operational issues, which are issues concerned with the organisation, development and change of the work, as well as the physical and psychosocial effects of this on the work environment. It also has a great impact on union regeneration, the potential to recruit new union activists (this is described in more detail in the section on the trade union as a mass movement). How have Swedish unions worked with organisational issues, and what has happened on this front in recent decades?

Negotiation and collaboration: twin requirements for union action on operational issues

The traditional model for pay bargaining is inadequate to deal with issues of work organisation, the work environment and so on (Sandberg et al. 1992). It is not so much a matter of sharing a cake as it is one of creating something new, for example a new organisation that is both stimulating for the employees and offers the company competitive advantages, and analysing and minimising risks in the work environment in conjunction with organisational change or the introduction of new technology. Here, we can talk about “negotiated cooperation” (although with regard to activities dealing with the work environment alone, the cooperation is legally mandated). The negotiations may relate to the objective of a change project and the evaluation thereof, as well as securing time and training for the employees and the union in order to be able to take part in a meaningful way. It may also relate to the forms of union influence, and collaboration between unions and employers in multinational corporations. Swedish legislation gives unions the right to representation on the boards of companies and company groups. The EU Directive on European Works Councils (EWC) offers further means of meeting group management. To give substance to this, negotiations may be necessary in order to more closely regulate the forms of union influence in a group of companies and for the dialogue between company and union. Successful cooperation between unions and employers may be rewarding for both parties in such a negotiated framework, not just at the group and company level but at the individual workplaces too. In particular, the necessary conditions can be negotiated for the

direct involvement of blue-collar and white-collar workers in change processes in a way that interacts with influence via the union.²

The way in which the unions work today thus includes negotiation and cooperation as well as representative and direct influence and collective and individual influence. Direct influence is often individual, but may also be collective if the individuals in a work team jointly exercise influence that the individual is unable to wield alone. The great challenge for the union is to find a balance that successfully combines negotiation and cooperation. Work on traditional pay and distribution issues obviously continues to be fundamental in itself, but it is also closely interwoven with the operational issues (Levie & Sandberg 1991).

How work is organised has direct consequences for the work environment and the distribution of “good” and “less good” work. Stimulating and sophisticated tasks often mean opportunities for better pay. One union line is to seek to integrate pay issues with production issues (principally work organisation and skills acquisition). This close relationship is becoming even more a key issue as a result of modern management strategies. One example is “management by objectives” in a wide sense, where work groups are allocated specified quantitative and qualitative production targets lined to performance-based pay. Management by objectives then also becomes a pay issue. A paradox here is that work in groups has become more and more common and that it is the *group’s* performance that determines how much is produced and at what quality, but pay-setting at the same time has become increasingly individualised. Here, the ambition of the unions is to monitor two things: whether the criteria for pay-setting are clear and transparent and seen as fair by the membership, and that the production targets are not set so high that group members with somewhat lower capacity are put under excessive physical and mental pressure. We could talk here in general terms of “negotiated management by objectives”, where not just pay but also production targets and resources (number of employees, machines, time for planning and training, expert support, etc.) are negotiated.

What means are at the disposal of the unions to respond to the new organisational and management strategies of companies? If we allow ourselves a simplification, we can say that the goals of the companies are clear: profitable business with the market as the judge. Work organisation and skills are the means the companies employ to attain this goal. The employees and the union organisations also have other, more multidimensional goals – employment, pay, qualifications, influence, etc. (see Offe & Wiesensthal 1980).

2. It can in fact be claimed that the actual collaboration situation is a kind of negotiating situation in which the individual actors attempt to negotiate their way to unity about the reality at hand, and what needs to be done about it. Here, however, we refer to negotiation as the phenomenon is usually understood in everyday language, i.e. as a mutual give-and-take in an encounter between two or more organised counterparts with the aim of reaching a regulated agreement in an area.

Developing clear, union counter-images may prove necessary and provide strength, and also form a basis for discussion with company management. Union organisational developers argue for the creation of new meeting places, arenas and forums for dialogue among employees and for the growth of ideas so that the union organisations can emerge as a democratic challenger to a homogeneous corporate culture and to company management that claims to know best and therefore wants to take important decisions by itself. The involvement of the unions in decision-making processes can add knowledge, ensure broad endorsement and facilitate the implementation of decisions. As already mentioned, management in Swedish companies usually has a positive view of union influence on the quality of decisions from a business economic viewpoint (Levinson 2004). From a union perspective, however, it is worrying that younger executives (below 38 years of age) are less positive than their older colleagues (Levinson 2008, p. 45). Secondly, private-sector management in a 2003 survey considered that union influence on decisions (regarding working environment, work organisation, working hours and transfer of personnel) had decreased since 1996 (*ibid.*, p. 49).

Union work methods that differ from the pay bargaining model are therefore required in order to exercise influence in companies and groups. This applies not only to internal union work to develop visions about good jobs and concrete proposals for solutions, but also to new ways of attaining them by combining, at the local level, negotiation and collaboration with the employer and direct involvement of rank-and-file members in development processes. Internal union work has proved to be crucial to success as a basis for both negotiations and dialogue (Levie & Sandberg 1991). This includes widespread studies among the members, the unions' own investigative efforts, expert support and support from the central level in providing ideas and knowledge as a basis for local efforts. The distinguishing feature of the most successful cases is that trade unions, on the basis of this internal union work, develop sophisticated interaction between negotiation, on the one hand, and collaboration in joint employer-employee groups, on the other, located directly in production and with extensive involvement among the employees (Sandberg 1992).

Influence via representation on boards of companies and groups also requires suitable union work methods if the interaction between different union levels is to work. This applies to the dissemination of information upwards and downwards in the organisation, and to the positions that are taken up on issues. An even greater challenge to unions is the growing global value chains where there is no clearly identifiable board at the top, but a combination of market relations and hierarchical relations between the actors. As production chains and production networks acquire greater significance, it is probably beneficial for unions, as secondary organisations, to try and develop corresponding networks of unions and employees at workplaces which have common knowledge requirements and which are parts of the same value chain in which each link influences the others and with one or a few key units that set the conditions for the others.

The union at the workplace is a secondary organisation in relation to the company. The company's structure and work practices therefore form a basic framework for union activity (Boglund 2003). Union structure, in order to be successful, must be adapted to that of the company. When companies are merged into multinational groups, or relate to each other in global networks and value chains, the importance of international cooperation between unions across the group and network increases. However, this does not diminish the importance of union activity at the individual workplaces. That is where the members are. It is where the specific problems faced by the members are located, whether they relate to pay setting, the work environment or other issues, and without strong unions at the workplaces it is difficult to undertake successful co-operation between unions in a group. At the same time, it is necessary to make a concerted effort at the group level so that the unions do not lose influence. A union model that combines centralisation and decentralisation is thus becoming increasingly relevant in companies and in groups too. As we write elsewhere, managements have an easier task when globalizing, because they have simpler goals as well as hierarchies with no need to be democratic. How, then, has local union work on operational issues developed in recent years?

Work environment and work organisation issues: what has happened?

Less of a priority for unions, less interest from employers

The rapid change in Sweden from a situation with almost over-employment at the end of the 1980s to one of mass unemployment a few years into the 1990s was a major step backwards for union work on operational issues. For natural reasons, employment issues, meaning the battle to save jobs, became prominent. Issues of work organisation and the work environment were less of a priority. The consequence was that the proactive attitude that characterised the trade union movement in 1980s Sweden was now replaced by a defensive posture. Several serious reverses were suffered in the 1990s by union efforts to bring about stimulating jobs and pay systems adapted to them (Huzzard 2000). There are however great differences between different workplaces and industries. A great deal depends on how active the workplace union clubs are and whether they are successful in establishing collaboration with company management (Huzzard & Nilsson 2003), or as we prefer to put it, a strong independent basis of knowledge and mobilisation for both cooperation and negotiation.

The importance of active union clubs was also confirmed in Swedish Metall's own evaluations of work on operational issues. In summarising their evaluation ten years after the report on the "Good job" (Metall 1985), Metall emphasised the importance of the tough labour market situation, with high unemployment, which makes a good job strategy more difficult. The report also self-critically concluded that the unions had not been particularly successful in influencing public opinion about the value of good jobs (including qualifications and creativity) for the development of competitiveness and welfare. The local clubs were given a

key role here, and those who received knowledge support from the national level were satisfied, but the union did not allocate enough resources to give the support needed to fulfil the good-job strategy (Metall 1995). While there were many examples in Metall of extensive local collaboration between the labour market parties, often informal in nature but based in strong local clubs, the same is less common in for example the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union. This can be explained by the much weaker workplace organisation in the latter union; only 5 per cent of its members hold elected union office compared with 12–18 per cent in the LO industrial unions (LO 2007:3, p. 68).

The growing reserve army of unemployed, reduced labour turnover and tougher rules on sick leave with resulting lower rates of sickness absence in the first half of the 1990s additionally meant weaker incentives for companies to stand out as attractive employers by creating good work environments and work organisations compared with the days of full employment in the 1960–1990 period. It was during this period that Volvo, in cooperation with the Metall union in particular but also with the Association of Graduate Engineers (CF) and Sif, developed new ways of organising work in more or less autonomous work groups, especially at its Swedish Kalmar and Uddevalla plants (Sandberg et al. 1995; see also other chapters in this volume.)

At the same time, economic policy shifted to giving priority to the fight against inflation rather than unemployment. Sweden had for a long period of time been notable for high nominal pay increases which, however, were undermined by recurrent devaluations to restore the competitiveness of companies. A government commission was then set up to restrain pay rises and a “stabilisation agreement” was reached in 1991 between the labour market parties. The work organisation policy of employers also focused to a great extent on reducing wage costs and other costs. This was justified by the need to cope with increasing competition in the world market. The ability to compete internationally is of particular importance to a small export-dependent country like Sweden. Focus therefore shifted during the 1990s from the “good job” as an instrument of both work quality and productivity to Lean Production and other new production concepts, without much concern for the quality of working life. Subcontractors, not least in the auto industry, were also put under pressure to trim their organisations by the increased competition and tougher requirements imposed by big companies. After the loss of a large number of industrial jobs at the time of the sharp downturn in the economy in the early 1990s, competitive companies became an increasingly important goal from the union point of view too. It was a question of safeguarding those jobs that remained and creating new ones. The unions therefore largely stopped pursuing their own agenda on development issues during the 1990s (Boglund 2003, p. 126). Although the trade unions often play an active part in local development work, they do so from a perspective in which improved competitiveness and increased efficiency are fundamental, in addition to quality of work.

Tough demands for savings have also led to extensive staff cuts, reorganisation and increased outsourcing in the public sector. The latter obviously makes long-term planning of the work environment difficult.

The example of the Metall Union: the difficulty with putting the “good job” into practice

Metall was the leading union that launched the concept of the “good job”. The Food Workers’ Union also took early initiatives (see Ullmark, Steen & Holmgren 1986) and the Municipal Workers’ Union was somewhat successful in implementing the ideas through local development projects, as noted also by Metall (1995) (for a discussion see also Higgins 1996). At its 1985 Congress, Metall adopted as mentioned a report entitled “The Good Job”. The union commissioned a number of assessments of developments in this area. Several questions were put to Metall’s own clubs in 1994, 1998 and 2002 (Kjellberg 2003: pp. 363 et seq.). Following the 2006 merger of Metall and Industrifacket into IF Metall, similar surveys were carried out in 2007 and 2010 (as previously including only clubs with at least 50 members).

Between 1994 and 1998, the clubs’ assessment was that detailed control of work had diminished in virtually all assessed areas. The fact that opportunities for more independent jobs had improved was one of the highlights of the 1998 survey. In 2002, on the other hand, four out of ten clubs reported that detailed control had *increased*. A general deterioration from 1994 to 1998 was noted for the four other aspects of working conditions examined, and the trend was particularly negative with regard to intensity of work and stress. The clubs additionally emphasized that there was an increased risk of elimination due to shorter cycle time and less variation in assembly work.

More than half of the metalworkers were affected by a favourable trend in work organisation in 1998, i.e. by a broadening of the tasks performed in traditional industrial work, such as an operator also doing testing and packing. In the IF Metall surveys, this share declined from 45 per cent in 2007 to 35 per cent in 2010 (IF Metall 2011a, pp. 14 et seq. and supplementary information from IF Metall). The most dramatic decline took place in the automobile and kitchen appliances industries. In process industries the trend was more positive. At almost all workplaces the organisation of work developed at least to some extent, but considerable variations exist both between and within workplaces. In 2010, one out of three workers were at workplaces at which work had developed for all *successively over the previous five years*. Further 23 per cent were at places where work development primarily affected already skilled workers, and another 4 per cent at places where it primarily affected unskilled workers (ibid., p. 20). The remaining 40 per cent worked either where there was no work development at all (7 per cent) or where there was negative development (33 per cent). This shows a clear polarisation of work opportunities.

Another form of work development outside the traditional industrial context is the performance by some workers of tasks similar to white-collar work. In 2010, 18 per cent of male workers and 13 per cent of female workers performed such tasks (*ibid.*, pp. 17 et seq.). The trend was most evident in car repair firms and in the process, plastic, rubber and mining industries.

The greatest opportunities for development in work were enjoyed by those who worked in groups with more than a doubling of opportunities in 1998. The extent of group work increased from 68 per cent of metalworkers in 1998 to 74 per cent in 2002; according to IF Metall surveys hardly any change occurred from 2007 (about 75 per cent of workers) to 2010 (about 77 per cent; *ibid.*, p. 21). Irrespective of this development, the negative trend has continued. In 2002, 85 per cent of union clubs reported that stress had increased and more than 40 per cent that cycle times had become shorter in the last five years. Nearly six out of ten clubs reported that the risk of elimination from the workplace had increased. In addition, opportunities for learning at work were not improved. Much of this trend was attributed by the clubs to inadequate manning levels. This also has an impact on opportunities for skills acquisition, which is also a low priority for employers. According to the 2002 survey, manning at many workplaces has been cut to a minimum. Increased demand was met by overtime, employees on fixed-term contracts, hiring of temporary workers, customer-adapted working hours, etc. The increased proportion of metalworkers working in groups was regarded as positive, but the low manning levels of the groups at the same time raised problems, such as difficulty in taking time off for union activity, and higher stress levels in general.

The on-going negative development of cycle times is evident from a comparison between the 1994 (Metall) and 2010 (IF Metall) surveys. In 1994, 72 per cent of the workers were found at workplaces with increased cycle times in the last five years compared to about 10 per cent in 2010 (IF Metall 2010b, p. 14). Conversely, in 1994 very few worked at places where cycle times had shortened. In 2010 every second person surveyed worked at such places. In this respect “an enormously negative development” associated with the increasing frequency of assembly lines has taken place since the mid-1990s. According to the 2010 IF Metall survey the trend towards shortened cycle times was strongest in the automobile and white goods industries and in electronics (*ibid.*, p. 4).

Similarly, a clear trend towards more detailed control of work could be observed. While one out of two metalworkers in 1998 was employed at workplaces where detailed control had declined in the last five years, less than one out of four worked where such control had increased. In the 2010 IF Metall survey the proportions were reversed: one out of two workers now worked where detailed control had increased and barely one out of five where it had declined (*ibid.*, p. 16).

Thirdly, a large majority of workers (about 80 per cent) both in 1998 and 2010 were at workplaces where stress had increased in the last five years (*ibid.*, p. 21). On the other hand, very few worked where stress had diminished (8 per cent in

1998, 1 per cent in 2010). The clubs cited inadequate manning as the principal cause for both increased stress and risk of elimination (ibid., pp. 20, 23). According to the 2010 IF Metall survey, stress had increased in all industries and most noticeably in the kitchen appliances and pharmaceutical industries, laundries and electronics (ibid., p. 22).

Interestingly, the clubs' efforts to develop work organisation were somewhat more intense in 2010 than in 1998. Almost 40 per cent of the IF Metall members in 2010 belonged to clubs with action plans relating to work organisation, which marked a considerable increase in 2002 and 2007 (IF Metall 2011c, p. 27). All clubs with action plans also engaged in joint consultation between union and management on these issues. The share of workers in clubs with action plans relating to skills acquisition was much higher in 2010 than in 2007 (ibid., p. 43). Whether or not the club was proactive and dynamic was crucial to company development. Where joint consultation worked properly, the share of women workers experiencing development in work in 2010 rose from the female average of 33 per cent to 44 per cent (ibid., p. 27). For the male workers the presence of a union plan of action was more important. Where such plans existed, 49 per cent of the male employees benefitted from development in work compared to the male average of 36 per cent. Obviously the union did least where there were no clubs, and declining club coverage therefore had adverse consequences in this area. In recent years, IF Metall has given higher priority to work environment and related issues. At the 2011 Metall Congress, special measures were launched under the label "sustainable work". One of the measures involved assigning local union branches to appoint "leaders of change" who were to be trained in sustainable work and change processes in joint consultation (IF Metall 2011d).

Finally, all the successive evaluation reports emphasise that working conditions for workers will *develop in two directions* unless strong measures are taken: a smaller group will get interesting and secure jobs, while conditions for the majority will be the opposite. Similar forms of polarisation are found in recent surveys of "good jobs, bad jobs" in the US, at the same time as all jobs, both good and bad, have become increasingly precarious (Kalleberg 2011). Analysing changes in qualifications on the Swedish labour market at large, Åberg (2013) finds a clear tendency towards polarisation: jobs with high and low wages and qualifications have grown more than jobs in the middle.

What are the trends in union work on organisational issues in the new situation?

A dilemma for the unions is that at the same time as they try to link the demands on work development to companies' increased requirements for efficiency, flexibility and quality, these two types of wishes, at least in the short term, may clash. Out of concern for competitiveness, the unions may sometimes feel that they are forced to give priority to increased productivity ahead of rewarding jobs, within the ruling hegemony of what is regarded as "the one best way".

The unions' programme for "good jobs", including teamwork and broad skills, can, if combined with high production targets and low manning, lead to increased work intensity and increased negative stress, conveyed from management through pressure from the other workers in the team. Union influence on planning issues, targets and resources in production, may therefore have a crucial bearing on the health of members and their opportunities for development in the new forms of organisation. An important task for the unions is thus to press to ensure that teamwork is not given too narrow a framework, to negotiate the preconditions and resources, and to bring forward alternative productive models in the longer run and given different social, economic and political contexts (Boyer & Freyssenet 2000).

Where trade unions twenty years ago or more wanted to bring about "good jobs", today it is more a matter of what in EU terminology is known as "employability". The aspiration to *shape* the work organisation and jobs is being toned down, and there is a desire to secure opportunities for members to get the jobs offered by the *market* (Augustsson & Sandberg 2004). The union strategy for "good jobs" for all members appears to have moved to the background during the current decade, and where it is pursued in various collaborative processes locally, it seems to be fairly disconnected from pay issues and from strategic issues of production management. In the foreground today, and not just in the white-collar unions where it has been most logical, we find strategies to support individual members to ensure that they are "employable" through skills acquisition and careers guidance. From a strong commitment to systematic and long-term influence on the *shaping of new jobs*, there has been a move in the direction of supporting members' chances of *obtaining the jobs offered* by companies and the labour market. On the other hand, the endeavour to safeguard the training and skills acquisition of members towards higher-level jobs can contribute indirectly to the development of the work organisation. This applies primarily to areas in which there is a labour shortage. Unemployment in Sweden is substantially higher than during the full employment years of the 1980s when employers were more receptive to that era's concept of good jobs. It can generally be noted that this development reflects changes in power relations in the labour market in favour of management (see Osterman 1998; Augustsson & Sandberg 2004).

At the start of the current decade, however, growing sickness insurance expenses did not just raise issues of sickness absence and benefit levels but also issues concerning the significance of the work organisation for health and ill-health in working life. It has clearly been possible to relate the increased rates of ill-health to organisational restructuring, lean organisations and increased stress (Wikman & Marklund 2003, pp. 53 et seq.). This has resulted in issues associated with the psychosocial work environment having become the focus of attention in a different way than previously. There is also a clear trend here

towards the unions once again having begun to prioritise work on health and safety issues at the workplace (Thörnquist 2008, pp. 58 et seq.).

Summing-up: trade unions and operational issues

The issue of the stimulating job is very much a social equality issue which does not just relate to working conditions, the work environment and opportunities for continued training, but also to opportunities for better pay, employment security and job mobility. It is an equal opportunities issue and a gender equality issue that is important not only for the development opportunities of the individual and social relations at the workplace, but also for the social climate in general.

The Swedish unions started seriously developing a line on these issues in the 1980s. The launching of the “good job” by Metall had particularly great impact. From the time of the crisis of the early 1990s onward, however, the unions have fallen behind the employers, who with their ideas on flexibility and Lean Production” seized the initiative in both the public debate and at companies. In view of increased workload and lack of skills acquisition at the companies, the president of Metall – the union that has been most active on these issues – self-critically emphasised during the 1999 Congress that the union would have to return to prioritising work environment issues and tackle skills issues much better (Kjellberg 2003, p. 365).

Inadequate manning levels were emphasised at the Congress as a source of ill-health and lack of skills acquisition. At the 2001 Congress, the union leadership stressed the importance of increasing local union activity in order to better deal with skills acquisition issues and the continued major work environment problems.

In comparison with most other countries, however, the unions in Sweden have been successful in influencing conditions at the workplace. Besides a much stronger and better developed union workplace organisation than in many other countries, there is a long tradition of cooperation between the labour market parties and a positive union view of technological development in Sweden. This positive union view is based on an active labour market policy, giving support and training to workers affected by restructuring. Such second chances for training are being reduced, however, by the present government and partially replaced by “job coaches” with the aim of helping the unemployed to find jobs with their existing knowledge.

The issue is simply what impact union views might have during times of high unemployment and times when many manufacturing jobs are being moved abroad and/or outsourced to subcontractors who are being increasingly squeezed. When unemployment turns into a shortage of labour and high labour turnover, possibly combined with continued high rates of sickness absence, increasing numbers of employers may, on the other hand, become convinced of the importance of investing more in a work organisation adapted to people’s needs. In this

situation, employers can be expected to see the presence of competent workers and of trade unions focused on improving the work environment and development of the work organisation as an asset for companies and public administration in Sweden.

Here we have focused on the role of constructive industrial relations and tight labour markets for the employers' acceptance of innovative work organisations. Another factor is that of product market demands for quality and variety, which may put pressure in a similar direction, as a way of raising productivity and diminishing "production losses" (see e.g. chapter 6 in this volume, and several contributions in Sandberg 1992).

The union as a popular movement and its members

The causes of declining membership and lack of activity: where are the members today?

So far we have been discussing circumstances and problems in union work that can be attributed to an organisational level, that is to say union strategies, etc., at the level of society and the workplace. Ultimately, however, the union is its members. A Swedish union is a stakeholder organisation organised according to the principles of a popular movement, meaning that it endeavours to recruit the biggest possible number of employees in the area it covers. The strength of the union is consequently dependent on the number of members it has and on these members rallying behind union policy, plus that sufficient numbers are prepared to work actively on union issues. We have seen earlier that the Swedish unions are in a strong position in terms of union density, but that membership recruitment has shown a downward trend since the mid-1990s. We have also seen that the unions are facing increasing difficulties in maintaining local workplace activity and that it has become increasingly difficult to activate members so that they take up union posts, such as safety representatives.

Three factors are of particular interest here. The first is that union density has become more sensitive to the economic climate. Statistics confirm that large groups, particularly younger employees, have a short-term view of their membership. The step into and out of the union is short and not a dramatic one. The second is the continuous increase in the numbers of non-union members directly affiliated to the union unemployment funds. This indicates that ever increasing groups fail to see the benefits of union membership. Their only demand is financial security in the event of unemployment. However, if unemployment threatens, Swedish unions can perform other important functions. Under the Employment Security Act it is the union alone that negotiates with the employer in the event of redundancies. It is serious from a union viewpoint that a substantially smaller proportion of members in 2006 compared to 1988 appeared to see the importance of this potential support and assistance in the event of threat of unemployment (LO 2007:1, pp. 74, 191). However, in the 2011

survey a clear swing was observed when the survey was carried out just a few years after the deep economic crisis that began in the autumn of 2008 (LO 2011:2, p. 14). The increase of those who are directly affiliated to the unemployment funds is also an indication of the third important factor, namely that union activity and union representation at local workplaces have weakened.

Difficulties in attracting and activating individuals are nothing unique to the trade union movement. In most areas of society in which collective interest organisations are active, they can be seen to be currently facing difficulties. This applies particularly to politics: political parties today face evident difficulties in recruiting new members and activists (Bruhn 1999b). The reasons for the slippage for unions cannot, therefore, be solely sought in the working life situation; they must also be sought in a broader societal context (Bruhn 1999a).

In this section, we shall take a closer look at the motives and considerations that lead an individual to join a union, and the challenges the union faces if it is to respond to these. Why are people in the union, or not? Under what circumstances can people become active? What factors militate against union recruitment and activity, in society, in working life/at the workplace and internally in the union organisation? First of all, however, let us take a closer look at who union members and leaderships are today.³

Who is in the union today?

The “white-collar explosion”

The trade union landscape has changed fundamentally in the last hundred years. Having previously been entirely dominated by male industrial workers, the majority of Swedish union members are now white-collar workers (59 per cent of employed union members in 2012). These also comprise the majority of the country’s wage and salary earners. Union density was in 2005 about the same for blue-collar and white-collar workers. Since 2008 it has increased among white-collar workers (73 per cent in 2012) but declined among blue-collar workers (67 per cent, *Table 4.3*). To explain this, it is necessary to con-

3. Similar issues are also discussed elsewhere, for example, in Turner’s et al.’s analyses and proposals for “rekindling the movement” (2001). Several authors argue for the importance of organising and for social movement unionism (in contrast to a service union) that links together movements and communities involving women, immigrants (Milkman & Wong) and other groups. See also Ruth Milkman (2010) on organising low-wage workers, including immigrants and women, in L.A. A way forward is addressing the media and getting public support. Such a strategy may be especially important for unions that are not that strong. A special challenge is organising a mobile workforce that is not closely associated with specific workplaces (Heckscher). (Also discussed by Greenbaum 2012, related to mobile technologies used in cafés, that is no regular work place at all). In some contexts a way forward may be to relate to environmental and human rights communities and issues concerning international rights and standards in working life (Compa). Cooperation between consumer groups in developed countries and unions in developing countries may be especially fruitful in consumer goods sectors.

For similar reflections on union renewal in a Swedish context, see Ingemar Lindberg and Anders Neergaard 2013. As discussed in this chapter preconditions for union organising are fundamentally different for the US and Sweden. For instance, in the US only 7 per cent in 2012 are union members in the private sector, in Sweden 65 per cent. Still Swedish unions have much to learn when organising new groups and in small service workplaces. Also US academic labour education is advanced.

sider the reinforced differentiation of fees for unemployment funds introduced by the centre-right government in July 2008. Members of funds with a high unemployment among their members had to pay, from then on, substantially higher fees than members of funds with low unemployment. As the economic crisis in 2009 and 2010 in general hit blue-collar workers much harder than white-collar workers, the former have to pay considerably higher total union fees (including fees for union unemployment funds) than white-collar workers (Kjellberg 2011a). This development was reflected in increasingly diverging union density between these two categories of workers.

The growth of white-collar workers as a group, combined with their high union density in international terms, has led to substantial shifts between the union confederations. Over the 1950–2012 period, LO's share of union members fell from 78 to 45 per cent (*Table 4.2*), and TCO's share rose from 17 to 35 per cent. From a modest start with 1 per cent of union members in 1950, the share of the professionals' organisation Saco has risen steadily, and by 2012 had reached 16 per cent.

Women make up a majority of union members

Half of the wage and salary earners in Sweden are women. Women make up a slight majority of employed union members (53 per cent in 2012). The union density of women is now higher than that of men (73 and 68 per cent, respectively, in 2012). Many women work in the public sector, and union density is generally higher there than in the private sector. Among workers in the private sector, on the other hand, the union density of women is lower than that of men. This should be viewed against the backdrop of many women working in the private service industries (for example retailing and the hotel and restaurant industry). These have a low union density by Swedish standards. Union organisation here, for obvious reasons, reflects the strong gender segregation in the Swedish labour market. Men are heavily over-represented among industrial and construction workers, while women are heavily concentrated in industries with either a very high union den-

Table 4.2. Share of members in different union confederations 1950–2012 (per cent).

Year	LO	TCO	Saco	Other	All
1950	78	17	1	4	100
1970	66	28	3	3	100
1990	58	34	8	1	100
2000	54	32	11	2	100
2005	51	33	13	3	100
2010	47	34	16	3	100
2012	45	35	16	3	100

Comment: Based on active wage and salary-earning members, i.e. excluding the self-employed, pensioners and students.

sity or a relatively low one, that is to say public sector and private service sector, respectively.

Eight of Sweden's fifteen largest trade unions are dominated by women (2012). Two of these unions are affiliated to LO, four to TCO and two to Saco. All of these female-dominated unions are in the public or private service sector. In 1950 two LO unions, the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union and the Swedish Commercial Employees' Union, were male-dominated, unlike today. On the other hand, another LO union, the Swedish Metalworkers' Union (Metall), was *more* male-dominated when it merged with the Industrial Workers' Union in 2006 than it was in 1950. One factor behind this is that manufacturing companies have to a large extent outsourced staff canteens, cleaning and other service functions.

One in eleven union members is born outside Sweden

A hundred years ago, Sweden was a comparatively poor country of agriculture and emigration. About 1.5 million emigrated, out of whom 1.2 million to North America, representing 23 per cent of Sweden's population in the year 1900, placing Sweden near the top of the emigration league. Only Ireland, Norway and the UK had a higher rate of emigration per capita. Today Sweden is a country of immigration, with alternating periods of labour immigration and periods of immigration of political refugees. One in seven wage and salary earners nowadays was born outside Sweden, four-fifths of them in countries outside the Nordic region. Apart from labour migrants, there are also many political refugees from places such as South America (not least after the 1973 military coup in Chile), the Balkan countries, Somalia, and Iraq, with the town Södertälje south of Stockholm having received more Iraqi refugees than the whole of North America. Somewhat less than one in seven union members is an immigrant. Union density among Nordic immigrants is, however, considerably higher than among non-Nordic immigrants. Fourteen per cent of LO members in 2004 were born abroad, as were eight per cent of TCO members and nine per cent of Saco members (Nelander & Goding 2004).

Unions and the young: generational differences in union affiliation

In contrast to the economic boom in the late 1980s, when the decline in union affiliation of young people was most noticeable among private-sector employees, the decline that has occurred since 1993 (*Table 4.3*) covers all categories of young people irrespective of region, sector and gender. As well as a sharp increase in temporary employment in the younger age groups, which exerts downward pressure on union density, increased union instability among the young should also be viewed against the backdrop of the fluctuations in unemployment and the fact that unemployment has been highest among the young. All this signifies a loose connection to the labour market and the individual workplace. Young people on fixed-term contracts are often not even contacted by the union representatives at the workplace. Many young people in the lowest age categories additionally work

Table 4.3. Union density by age among wage and salary earners in Sweden 1990–2012 (per cent).

Age	1990	1993	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	1990– 2012	2006– 2012
A. All wage and salary earners											
16–24 years	62	69	46	40	36	35	34	34	36	-26	-10
25–29 years	78	81	68	64	61	59	60	58	57	-21	-11
Sum 16–29 years	69	76	58	53	49	48	48	47	47	-22	-11
30–44 years	85	86	77	74	72	72	73	72	71	-14	-6
45–64 years	88	89	85	82	81	80	80	80	80	-8	-5
Sum 16–64 years	81	85	77	73	71	71	71	70	70	-11	-7
B. Blue-collar workers											
	82	86	77	74	71	70	69	67	67	-15	-10
C. White-collar workers											
	81	83	77	73	72	72	73	73	73	-9	-4

Comment: Relates to wage and salary earners 16–64 years in employment. Swedish Labour Force Surveys (AKU) annual averages produced for Anders Kjellberg's research project "Union Density in Global Perspective" (Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research). Full-time students with work alongside their studies are excluded.

in sectors such as hotels and restaurants, where union density by Swedish standards is low and there are often no union representatives. Furthermore, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union was hit on 1 January 2007 by one of the largest increases in fees to unemployment funds introduced by the centre-right government. With rising fund fees, union dues were perceived to have substantially increased, since the former are generally included in the latter. This change was the main explanation for the sharp drop in union density between 2006 and 2007.

One of the consequences of the decreasing numbers of contacts with union representatives is that many young people today have only vague ideas of what a trade union is and the implications of collective agreements for wages, working hours, pensions, etc. As a rule companies with no collective agreements do not contribute to their employees' occupational pensions. If they do, employees receive less favourable conditions than trade unions that have several thousand members. The 1994 reform of public pensions means that occupational pensions will become more and more important for young people, as the terms for the public pension have progressively worsened and will continue to do so. Consequently, an urgent task for trade unions is to inform young people and other newcomers on the labour market, like newly arrived immigrants, about the significance of collective agreements and the role of trade unions at workplaces and in society. In the private service sector, and particularly in big cities, there are relatively few union workplace clubs. It is the task of the local union branch to visit such workplaces to recruit members, start union clubs and encourage employers to sign collective agreements. In order to reverse declining union density trends, Swedish unions in general have to intensify their efforts at the workplace level. During

the long period when there were very high rates of unionization, Swedish unions often neglected recruitment campaigns.

Summary of union membership today

The image of a union member for many people is perhaps a quintessentially native Swedish middle-aged or elderly male industrial worker. As we have shown here, this is a very outdated image. Unfortunately, this image of the union activist and representative still holds true in many respects, something which in itself indicates that the unions are finding it difficult to adapt to a new situation. A major factor in union decline among blue-collar workers since 1990 is that the proportion of industrial employees among workers has decreased.

The much more heterogeneous union landscape that exists today naturally presents differing challenges for the various unions. A stakeholder organisation should be representative of its members and to a certain extent reflect differences and similarities among these. Large unions can be home to different types of special interests and internal differences of opinion in which affiliation to the collective and the overarching community is not always evident to everyone. As discussed previously, not only have the numbers of white-collar workers increased, the boundaries between blue-collar and white-collar unions have also become less clear (Nilsson & Sandberg 1988). In particular, many LO members today carry out tasks of a white-collar nature, for example programming computer-controlled machines or being responsible for customer contacts.

A large number of these members have crossed to the white-collar Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees in Industry (Sif) (*Unionen* since January 2008), where they have better prospects of pay increases. The growing group of assistant nurses also counts as blue-collar in Sweden; this means a raised level of qualification for many members of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union, the LO union which organises this category of workers, but also increased differentiation at the same time since the union also organises less qualified care assistants. As well as public-sector employees, the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union now also organises employees in the private sector, particularly in care. Vertical and horizontal differentiations of the fields in which the unions recruit have in many cases both increased. A number of union mergers have contributed to this trend.

Increasingly diverse working conditions and activity among union members have made it more difficult to identify with "your own collective". Nor is identification made any easier by differences in gender and cultural background. There is, on the other hand, a trend in the opposite direction as a result of the companies outsourcing certain functions; as we have seen, Metall lost many female members when staff canteens and other functions were transferred to external companies. This increased the already heavy male dominance among the union's members. The proportion of women increased again as a result of the merger with the In-

dustrial Workers' Union in 2006. In addition, the IF Metall union covers substantially more sectors than the Swedish Metalworkers' Union did.

Collective cohesion in an increasingly individualised working life

Several studies have shown that large groups, particularly younger employees, take a short-term, conditional and often instrumental view of any union membership. Only a small proportion gives reasons of principle for remaining outside the union (Bruhn 1999a; Allvin & Sverke 2000; Kjellberg 2001a). This means that it is often the situation prevailing at the time that dictates the attitude to membership: "do I need the union or not?" and "what does union membership mean to me?" Membership can then function as a form of insurance ("just in case..."), but may also be based on a specific feeling that the local union can fulfil a utility and community function at the workplace, and even that one's own union activity can provide great personal benefit. Depending on the specific situation, the step between union membership and remaining outside can be very short: "At my previous workplace there was a need for the union, but here the relationship with the employer is so good that I don't need to join". An attitude like this is not based on any deeper experience of a community of interests and identification with one's own wage-earner collective. It is based more on personal interest and an assessment of how involvement serves personal ends. At the same time, however, it does not entail any rejection of or distancing from the union as an idea, but rather an openness and receptiveness to arguments. The focus on personal benefit does not signify a lower need to belong to communities either. However, what community one belongs to is not pre-determined, it is not self-evident (Bruhn 1999a).

The same factors have been found to apply in studies of young people's views of collective action and organisation in general (Melucci 1992, 1996; Trondman 1999; Bruhn 1999b). The attitude to collective organisation of special interests and consequently also to union membership and activity has changed, or is in the process of changing, in large groups. These changes can be related to ongoing individualisation and increased adoption of what are referred to as postmaterialist patterns of values (Bruhn 1999a; Inglehart 1977, 1990). This text will not look more closely at what distinguishes this trend and how it can be explained. One key question is how individual motives and value patterns change under new circumstances; another is how the continuing sharing of work and differentiation are breaking up natural communities and group affiliations (see Lysgaard 1967 and chapter 8 in this book).

There are fewer obvious group affiliations in today's complex and highly differentiated working life. People move between and spend time in many different social contexts. Class positions and interest-based group affiliations at the workplace are becoming unclear due to increasingly individualised working and living conditions. Conflict fault lines other than those that are primarily based on employment relations are also becoming more prominent; gender and

ethnicity for example. It can be emphasised here, however, that old and new conflict fault lines to some extent dovetail in working life as a result of the strongly gender-segregated and in part ethnically-segregated Swedish labour market. It can be mentioned, by way of example, that the subordinate position of a group of workers in working life can be strengthened if the group is principally made up of low-paid women. Class and gender can thus interact in the identity-creating process and combine to create strong cohesion and a sense of “us”. The internal coordination of LO in several bargaining rounds in Sweden has had the major aim of raising the pay of these groups in relation to that of other LO groups. Public opinion has generally supported this, such as when low-paid LO members in the care sector have been taken out on strike.

An increasingly complex and differentiated society and working life, and the ongoing individualisation and change in values that are partly a result of this, are leading to two effects at the individual level that are important in this context. One is that individuals increasingly cherish values such as self-realisation, and are becoming more independent and critically competent, with greater abilities to solve their own problems, as well as having a critical attitude to authorities. The other is increased individual vulnerability, through lack of a voice and self-evident group affiliations and authorities. In some groups, primarily those which are well educated and hold a strong position in the labour market, the first aspect becomes particularly prominent, and for the sake of simplicity we can call these “winners”. In other groups, whose individual circumstances are less good and which have a weak, insecure position, the second aspect is probably more prominent, and we can call these “losers” (cf. TCO 2000; Trondman 1999). Regardless of which side dominates, there is a need for belonging and community. The general need for security, though, is understandably more prominent in the second group.

Values concerned with community and affiliation appear to be just as strong in young generations as in older ones (Bruhn 1999a). The difference is that they do not feel an obvious sense of belonging to any specific group. Group affiliations are based on reflection and choice rather than on clear and fixed ties (Melucci 1992, 1996). Studies show that younger people may very well consider involvement and participation in groups and collectives. However, this is conditional on the commitment resting on personal influence, and work for the collective must also provide some kind of personal reward (Bruhn 1999a, 1999b). Another important aspect is that younger people often have stricter requirements about the content of work and the opportunities for personal development this provides than do older generations, who to a greater extent emphasise material income and employment security.

According to a survey among people aged 18–29, young people do not, however, differ from older people as regards the question of whether unions are needed to get results in negotiations with employers (Furåker & Berglund 2001, pp. 9 et seq.). According to a more recent survey, two out of three employees consider unions to be necessary for successful negotiations, while only 13 per cent reject such

a statement and one in five expressed no opinion at all (Bengtsson 2008, pp. 137 et seq., 200). On the other hand, almost one in two employees prefer individual negotiations. Several respondents express a mix of collectivist and individualistic attitudes. Employees aged 25–44 are most positive to individual negotiations, while there is no difference between those aged 16–24 and 45–64. At the same time, employees aged 16–24 – to the same extent as those aged 35–54 – think that trade unions are needed for successful negotiations.

Work still occupies a dominant position in people's lives. As long as this holds true, and paid employment dominates as a way of providing for oneself, the necessary conditions for union organisation exist. However, this is not so clearly evident for people in present-day society. It constantly has to be proven and argued. The local level of the union is crucially important here. The challenge is in proving the benefit of belonging to a union in practice through good union work and good personal relations in the vicinity. It is important to pursue the issues that directly affect people, and if people are to be activated there is a need to find work methods which, particularly with regard to the younger members, meet the individual's need of influence and personal reward. This is logically the road to identification with the collective and with union values. This cannot be achieved without maintaining basic union activity close to members. It is doubtful, however, whether this proximity can be created solely through local workplace activity. The labour force today is tied to a particular workplace to a lesser extent than in the past. New arenas for member-based activity might need to be created. In his recent book Manuel Castells (2012) explores new forms of protests and social movements and networks made possible by the Internet and mobile technologies. They may inspire participatory democracy in unions.

Richard B. Freeman and colleagues have ideas about how union renewal may use the Internet in an "open source unionism", from a US and Anglo-Saxon perspective where basic union recognition and organising is the main issue (Freeman 2005), but much of the reasoning seems to be applicable also as a way of broadening union membership and deepening the dialogue with members. Young, urban workers may be one important target for a more open unionism, creating a first contact and perhaps a growing interest. The web and social media may facilitate contacts with employees and members in workplaces without a local union, and virtual local unions and communities may be created, in turn in interaction within the sector and internationally. Two-way communication, and union internal democracy, may be strengthened, including minority groups within the union. Horizontal communication directly between members will be facilitated, for example when exchanging experiences of work and conditions. Expensive international meetings may be partially replaced with web platforms with translation capabilities. The service dimension of union activities, like legal advice and coaching, may also be strengthened.

New companies for job coaching and legal advice are now being created, using the Internet as a tool.⁴ In comparison with these, however, unions are often well positioned to make use of the Internet, just as in the world of business where established firms adding Internet-based services had an advantage compared to total newcomers. Of course the web on its own does not provide unions with solutions to all challenges, but the web may be part of a process of renewal. The unions, for example Unionen, are using Twitter and Facebook in campaigns and information sharing during strikes and negotiations (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 19 April, 2013).

Unions may reach out a hand to consumers, e.g. the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union aims at putting up signs reading “Decent conditions” at the entrance of establishments with collective agreements, so that clients who so wish can use their consumer power and make a conscious choice (Niia 2008). In a similar manner union cooperation with social movements, like Fair Trade and the Clean Clothes Campaign, may ameliorate working conditions in the consumer products sector in third world countries.

In the public sector, unions are trying to use the Public Procurement Act (LOU) to introduce conditions into contracts (without breaking EU regulations) regarding e.g. manning levels, qualification demands and time for skills development, demands that are essential for their members’ daily work, as well as criteria for the quality of the products and services they deliver (Junesjö 2011) Privatisation of elderly care homes has led, for example, to their being sold to tax-evading and bonus-distributing venture capitalists, with examples of maltreatment as a consequence (Szebehely 2011; Sandberg 2013). Privatisation of schools and care has been radical and fast in Sweden and a major element in the centre-right government’s transformation of the general welfare system into a free choice system with segregation as a consequence, not least in basic education.

Another strategy is to link union work to the workers’ and union members’ role as consumers at the workplace, consumers/users of new technologies and IT-based systems for planning and control. The TCO confederation first developed a screen-checker, a tool to be used by local unions and members in order to evaluate and influence the choice of monitors at their workplace, and in a second step, together with other workplaces, the producers of monitors as well. The mechanism for the latter is a union-run system for labelling and certification of monitors that comply with union demands as to ergonomics, energy, emissions and external environment. The methodology has been further developed to be applied to wider areas like office and workplace design, mobile phones and, with LO as key actor, to systems for production planning directly influencing work and working conditions (the Users Award project, Boivie 2007).

4. One example is a new company, Jobbgarant, offering unemployment insurance and job search coaching. Debate on “The future of unions” in Sveriges Radio, P1, 17 November 2011, at 15.00.

Does the union need to tear down pyramids?

The union as a *popular movement* is a fundamental idea in the discussion above. A popular movement is carried forward by the active participation and involvement of the members. It must be close to its members and offer a practical community of action. However, discussions on the trade union movement do not always take this idea of popular movement as their point of departure. Another line of argument instead points towards professionalisation.

The latter can be clarified by some metaphors: the insurance institute and the coaching union. The first metaphor points towards a development in which the members view their union as part of the *social insurance* system. The insurance policies that provide benefits are taken out, and are there when something unexpected happens, such as an accident. The union provides security and protection during unemployment, legal assistance when one falls foul of employers or authorities, etc. This can then be supplemented by all sorts of life assurance, pension plans and sickness insurance policies, etc. The idea of the *coaching* union can be partly seen as a way of adapting the union to individualisation, more precisely to the individual's belief in his or her own strength and demand for control over his or her existence. The union representative here is a kind of sounding board which offers professional advice and support. The union can also offer *interactive websites* and computer software to support members' self-reflection and career planning. But individuals act on their own, pursuing their own agenda (for example in negotiating on pay). Sif/Unionen were among those unions which developed such tools rather early.

The insurance model and the coaching model are both needed, and both fall within the remit of the unions. But if they become the main aspect of union activity, the result will be a qualitative and quantitative change from mass organisation to expert organisation. The goal of active members is pushed into the background. Although the individuals are active in the sense that they negotiate themselves and contact the union for advice (negotiating is, however, often also handed over to the union, even in cases where pay-setting is individual), it is not really a case of taking part in a community where union issues are discussed together and common goals established.

From the point of view of mass organisation and popular movement, such a development is accompanied by great risks, firstly because local union work can be expected to become even more difficult to maintain and secondly because the union becomes more dependent on decisions at the political level. A shift to a compulsory unemployment fund, which the Swedish centre-right government has flagged, may deal a heavy blow to union activity if this is not ultimately based on voluntary efforts on the part of members. The trade union movement faces a large number of organisational challenges, particularly in relation to the popular movement ideal.

The representative system that applies to the governance of the Swedish unions today is problematic from several points of view. Although it is ultimately

intended to act in accordance with democratic principles, it also entails centralism, bureaucracy and unwieldiness. This is problematic firstly in relation to the employers, and perhaps principally at the local level. Union clubs which have to operate in the often flat and flexible, often group-based work organisations of today must find various ways of organising that enable corresponding flexibility in their ability to reach out to all parts of the company organisation, and at the same time be able to develop action strategies in unique and changeable situations. This requires increased scope for action in relation to union decisions and policies adopted in the traditional way. At the same time as the clubs may need to “tear down pyramids” locally to reach out to the members – IT and the Internet can become important tools here – the increasingly strategically significant work of unions in groups of companies requires greater activity at the top of the corporate organisation. In other words, it requires a kind of combined decentralisation and centralisation of union work in large groups that are increasingly transnational (Sandberg 2003; Lamm 1991). The globalisation of production manifests itself not only in transnational corporations, but also in networks and global chains of design-production-marketing-outlets that are not parts of one corporation but linked together through market mechanisms, but where there are powerful nodes in the networks, like in – to take two Swedish examples – IKEA in the furniture industry and H&M in clothing. In both cases, the unions are challenged. Both IKEA and H&M have concluded global agreements with global union federations (IKEA with the Building and Wood Workers’ International).

Secondly, it is crucially important for an active and strong union movement to be able to recruit new union activists, and particularly important for the future that it is able to recruit younger people. As we have discussed, research shows that these younger people demand influence and insist that involvement in the collective “gives them something” for themselves. Along with requiring of the union, in terms of content, that it pursues issues that have particular resonance for young people, it makes demands on the development of more elements of direct democracy in the organisation.

Thirdly, the trade union movement has shown considerable inertia in its ability to ensure that the issues that are pursued substantively, and the composition of the union leadership, both correspond to the composition of the membership. Middle-aged men continue to be heavily over-represented among union elected officers today, even in unions which are dominated by women. Over-representation additionally increases the further up the union hierarchies we go (Kjellberg 2001a, pp. 211 et seq.). It has also proved difficult to get the union movement to consistently pursue gender equality issues and issues relating to discrimination against various groups in the labour market, but for the last few years, for instance LO is pursuing a feminist agenda, supporting legislation about a more equal division of parental leave between the two parents. Fourth, and finally, the trade unions have found it difficult to create organisational structures which make it possible for unemployed members, or members who lack permanent employment,

to undertake organised union work. As unemployment as well as temporary jobs are growing, this is becoming a major problem for unions.

What issues are important to the members?

In a number of sections above we have discussed various issues the unions pursue, and what types of issues are important to different groups of members. A first distinction between such issues is that made between the union's traditional task of working on redistribution issues and its task of tackling operational issues about organisation and production. Within this framework there are different types of demands and expectations among different groups of members. Another major field is that relating to employment, unemployment and the actual relationship of employment. There are also various issues that specifically relate to different groups of members, such as gender and ethnic discrimination in the work situation. Finally, the local union is a secondary organisation in relation to companies and workplaces. The union strategy at the local level therefore has to be developed in relation to the conditions and circumstances that prevail in the unique company organisation (Boglund 2003).

Issues of wages and employment security, etc. are traditionally important areas in which members have high expectations of the union; various studies also show, however, that the members have fairly high expectations of unions in issues concerning the work environment and work organisation. Almost 60 per cent of IF Metall members in 2006 regarded development of the content of work as being an important area for the union, although this represents a decrease compared with previous surveys (LO 2007:1, p. 179). This issue was reformulated in the 2011 survey and therefore not comparable with the previous surveys. The lowest proportions were found among Saco members employed in the private and government sectors (*ibid.*, p. 37).

It is clear that the work environment is high on the wish list: almost all LO, TCO and Saco members in 2011 identified it as an important union matter (LO 2011:4, pp. 10, 14). About 75 per cent of LO, TCO and Saco members regard influence over their own work as an important union area. In reply to the question of what they felt they got out of their membership, considerably fewer in 2011 replied in the affirmative with reference to their own work situation than in the same survey in 1988 (LO 2007:1, p. 191; LO 2011:2, p. 12). A somewhat lower share of LO and TCO members in 2011 compared to 1988 thought that union membership increased their chances of influencing the work environment. Respondents in 2006 thought that they obtained far less benefit from the union than in 1988 in terms of achieving better terms of employment, pay increases in local negotiations and increased employment security (LO 2007:1, p. 191). In the 2011 survey the question on pay was changed to "better wage growth"; 63 per cent of LO members (almost the same as in 1988) agreed, 44 per cent of TCO members (49 per cent in 1988) and 39 per cent of Saco members (46 per cent in 1988). With respect to increased employment security, a significant swing in favour of the unions was observed

from 2006 to 2011, reflecting the deep recession that occurred between these two points in time. The responses can be partly interpreted as signifying that the unions today are less successful than before the crisis of the 1990s or that members' demands have been raised to a higher level, or both. The latter explanation is similar to the idea of "the discontent generated by rising expectations" which was used by the long-term Social Democratic Prime Minister Tage Erlander to explain criticism of shortcomings of the growing Swedish welfare state.

At the same time as unions have found it increasingly difficult to pursue workplace issues, demands for stimulating jobs and personal development have increased with the entry of the new generation into the labour market (see above on individualisation). With the lack of results or only inadequate results in these and other areas, it is not uncommon for the benefit of union membership to be called into question. This is manifest in, for example, the membership surveys of the Swedish Association of Health Professionals and the Swedish Medical Association (both in 2000). Many wage and salary earners additionally find it difficult to influence the local union.

Unions and the new boundlessness

Winners and losers, free and controlled

In the remainder of this chapter we will discuss what challenges and opportunities the ongoing two-way division, or polarisation of working life, presents to the trade union movement. The increased flexibility in work and forms of employment can be related to a great extent to the conditions for those we have referred to above as "winners" and "losers". We can also refer similarly to "free" and "controlled" professional groups (as discussed in a report from TCO in 2000). The challenge faced by the unions is in responding to, and developing union policy in relation to, both of these groups. Union organisational structures and the union strategy in particular both appear undeveloped with regard to those with insecure employment conditions. At the same time, "winners" put forward their new demands for qualified support and professional development.

Flexibility, flexible work, new forms of "soft" management, decentralised responsibility, etc. emerge as key characteristics of the current trend in working life, at least if the rich flora of management literature is to be believed. Questions relating to the actual meaning of these terms, how far development has progressed, and the consequences for workers (like flexibility for whom, actual centralisation v. decentralisation etc.) are discussed in some chapters in this book. Here we can merely note that those issues are essential elements in management strategies applied today. These strategies have without doubt left clear traces in working conditions and terms of employment for large groups of people.

The "flexible firm" model contains three types of flexibility in relation to people's terms of employment (Atkinson 1984). The first is functional flexibility. This affects what we can call the core workforce: employees with good employment security and relatively good terms. Here, the company makes a commitment to

skills acquisition, career opportunities and so on. In return, these employees are expected to be development-oriented, highly committed and prepared to cooperate fully in the introduction of various productivity-enhancing programmes and suchlike. The second can be termed temporal and financial flexibility. This affects both temporary and permanent employees, and is concerned with developing flexible forms of remuneration that encourage individual effort, timetabling that makes the workforce more available, responding when the company calls, working hard from production demands and taking leave or working shorter hours during quieter periods. Numerical flexibility, finally, means that the company uses various types of “loose” forms of employment, and hiring workers during periods when there is an increased need for labour. Temporary substitute posts, employment in projects, part-time work, consultants and temporary workers are examples of this (Thompson & McHugh 2009, pp. 204 et seq.).

Based on these types of flexibility, it is possible to speak of two forms of *boundless work* in modern working life (Allvin et al. 2006). Boundlessness means that the boundary between work and the rest of social life disappears, that there is a risk that work will so to speak colonise the rest of life.

A first type of boundlessness is characterised by flexibility through trust. This affects the core workforce. Their working conditions are characterised by secure employment, a high degree of self-control, good opportunities for development and often good employment benefits. The other side of the coin is the requirement to be willing to make an effort in all situations, prioritise the work, be devoted, and give a hundred per cent (or more).

A second type of boundlessness is characterised by flexibility through replaceability. This affects all those who, in accordance with numerical flexibility, are in a situation of uncertainty, who enter and leave temporary employment and are constantly at risk of unemployment. These people have to be constantly available for work, they have to develop themselves so that they become attractive for employment; “employable” using current EU vocabulary. They have to be at hand. The issue of finding a job – for being prepared the whole time is a job too, or rather a constant battle for one – tends to colonise the whole of the person’s social life (Allvin et al. 2006, pp. 35 et seq.).

These forms of flexibility are important aspects of the ongoing polarisation of working life and the labour market. Polarisation is not, however, the same thing as the issue of forms of employment. Free and controlled, winners and losers are to be found among permanent staff and those on open-ended contracts, and various forms of temporary workers. According to the TCO survey referred to above, the private service industries are distinguished by a clearer division of the workforce into winners and losers and free or controlled people than is the manufacturing industry (TCO 2000). The free professional groups can be considered to include, for example, the branch managers of banks and claims adjusters and field staff of insurance companies. The proportion of independent positions and more stringent skills requirements has also increased in the industry, however (Bruhn 1999a,

pp. 286 et seq.). The free groups often have a strong individual negotiating position, in contrast to the controlled ones which are less valued and easy to replace.

Free white-collar workers tend to emphasise the importance and freedom of the individual and stress the importance of the work being stimulating and free/flexible; for employees in dotcom companies, the opportunity of contributing to innovation and product quality is of great value (Sandberg et al. 2005).

The controlled groups make much lower demands in these respects. They prioritise a sense of community with their colleagues instead. Working hours are also considered an important issue, since they work on the basis of a “time contract”, in contrast to the “results contracts” of the free groups, where working time and leisure time readily flow together. The two-way division into controlled and free also has a gender dimension. The controlled are often women, while men are over-represented among the free. Examples of “controlled losers” are the growing hordes of women, young people and/or immigrants in for example burger chains, catering firms, call centres and cleaning firms (Bernhardt 2012; Dølvik & Waddington 2002, p. 358), as well as women in care work with children and the elderly, often employed in the public sector. These are often low-paid jobs with high labour turnover and conditions that differ from normal employment; need-based and part-time employment, fixed-term jobs and “self-employment”. This counteracts the emergence of a collective identity and makes union organisation more difficult. From an international point of view, however, there are wide variations in the extent to which such tendencies have made a breakthrough.

Several unions in Sweden have set up special sections for members who are self-employed and/or own their own firms. A growing number of journalists are freelancers and they may be members of a section of the Journalists’ Union *SJF*. Another TCO union, *Unionen*, that organises white-collar workers in the industry and in the service sector also has a section for self-employed, who receive the same benefits as other union members (insurances, education and seminars, and also legal and economic advice). This section was started after Ericsson, the telecom company, laid off many engineers and other staff and there was a demand from those who set up their own one-person company to continue as union members. Being a union member is for many in Sweden as “natural” as having a job.

Although a polarised labour market based on the Japanese or American model is still a long way off, it is possible to identify a trend in present-day Sweden towards a two-way division of the workforce into: (1) a core of permanent employees with relatively good opportunities for development, and (2) a group of temporary employees that grows or shrinks depending on the company’s needs, and that often lacks opportunities to develop in work. At the same time there is another, partially overlapping, two-way division between free and controlled jobs. A tough challenge for the trade union movement is therefore to develop functioning union strategies that encompass both the free and the controlled. This applies within workplaces as well as in relation to those who oscillate between uncertain employment situations and unemployment.

Work content: self-realisation and boundlessness in the work situation?

For Swedish unions, it is primarily the workplace (union clubs), and professional affiliation (principally the Saco unions) that have been important sources of cohesion between union members. Local union activity at the workplace can be expected to become increasingly important, particularly in view of the situation-bound motive of benefit expressed by younger generations. Direct, personal contacts with union representatives are especially significant for young members. It is at workplaces that the trade union has a direct face that the members can see. The importance of the local union is further emphasised by the decentralisation of bargaining and by the fact that the workplace represents the natural arena for work environment and work organisation issues.

On the other hand, the occupation has also come into focus, with the increased importance ascribed to skills acquisition. It is therefore an open question whether the future lies in workplace-based, relatively heterogeneous unions or in more specialised profession-based trade unions. The possibilities for viable union workplace organisations based on *occupation* increase with the numerical growth of professional groups. The Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers, formed by a merger between CF and the Swedish Society of College Engineers, thus has clubs at many workplaces, particularly in big companies with large development departments such as Ericsson.

When differences between the individuals at the workplace increase and when working conditions are increasingly individualised, fundamental lines of conflict and contradictions become more diffuse and difficult to grasp. As we noted above, younger people in particular have a more conditional view of solidarity and affiliation than older people do. Whom to feel a sense of community and solidarity with is based on how people see the actual practical situation. Group affiliation is not self-evident. There is a tendency that the role as employee in the company is strengthened at the expense of the role as member of the union (Boglund 1989). This points to the importance of the union being nearby, in people's everyday existence, and to its pursuing a political/ideological battle for "souls", fighting for union values etc. The necessity of such a battle, and preferably seeking to wage it on the basis of closeness in actual relationships, is also reinforced by management strategies of the last few decades to influence these "souls" (internal marketing, building corporate culture, fostering a sense of "us"), perhaps in parallel with a kind of lack of critical distance from company policy that may be effects of the actual work organisation for certain groups, through increased freedom and personal control in work. Whether the primary connection is to be felt with the company, or one's own group, or both, is thus to a great extent an open question.

The new way of organising work also entails new work environment risks. Boundlessness and management by objectives can cause stress and a risk of depressive exhaustion (see for example Allvin et al. 2006; Hallsten 2005; Sandberg et al. 2005). Different team-based forms of work may pose risks of individual vulnerability, etc. At the same time there remain many tightly-controlled jobs

with their known work environment risks, and for many people a fundamental need for security in employment and community at the workplace. Alongside traditional issues of distribution, then, it appears important for the local union to ensure that improvement of the work environment, work content and skills benefit everyone. The presence of what Sverre Lysgaard (1967) called “the workers’ collective” appears today as even more urgent to counteract the constant pressure from employers for the intensification of work. In addition to such informal means to protect workers, an important task of union workplace clubs is to work for sustainable manning levels.

Skills acquisition in general has proved to be something which in the slimmed-down organisations of today is often made the individual’s own responsibility. Employers devote least effort to training for fixed-term employees. Substitutes receive only half as much training as permanent employees (measured as a percentage of working time) and those brought in to cover peaks, less than a quarter (Nelander & Goding 2002). In present-day working life, which is notable for constant changes and increased knowledge content, ongoing training is more important than ever. There is otherwise a risk of being left out in the cold and being eliminated from the labour market. Groups that generally hold a weak position in the labour market run a particularly great risk: Those who have the least education received the least training. Wage earners affiliated to LO receive substantially less training than those affiliated to TCO, who in turn are disadvantaged in comparison with Saco members. Training decreased between 1994 and 2003 principally for Metall (from 2.6 to 1.8 per cent of working time), the Industrial Workers’ Union (from 1.7 to 0.8 per cent) and the Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union (from 4.3 to 3.3 per cent).

Today there is a vicious circle: those who lack a permanent job or have low education receive less training than others, which restricts the type of flexibility based on breadth of knowledge and skills. There may be a number of negative consequences, such as strain injuries and monotonous tasks, impoverishment, stress and a sense of insecurity. We thus enter what is perhaps the most undeveloped union area, that relating to those who are replaceable.

Employment security and opportunities: rootlessness and boundlessness

Several studies have shown that permanent employees often feel a strong sense of belonging to, and solidarity with, their own company (Bruhn 1999a). This comes at the same time as they feel a sense of belonging to, and benefiting from, the union and cohesion with their own group of wage-earners. But what happens when the company itself becomes an insecure arena? When people are forced to regard their presence at the company as more temporary? Can they develop the same sense of belonging? Can they then invest as much trust?

In view of the development outlined above of increasingly insecure forms of employment, it can be noted that different mechanisms counteract this kind of identification with companies and company management that modern manage-

ment theories aim to produce. Looking at permanent employees in modern transnational groups and their subcontractors, identification and a sense of belonging may be focused on the local workplace and colleagues, combined with a lack of confidence in company management. This kind of sense of belonging is based on an endeavour to secure jobs, which also stands out as one of the most important tasks of the local union

However, particularly with regard to “the replaceable”, opportunities for identification with, and a sense of belonging to, the local workplace understandably diminish as employment conditions become more uncertain. This applies horizontally to work colleagues and vertically to companies and company management. Just a generation or so ago, employees, including those who were in subordinate positions at the workplace, could take quite a long-term view of their existence there. Lasting relations and strong senses of belonging to the workplace could be developed. Today, presence at a workplace cannot be regarded as a life project in the same way. Where are the “replaceable”, the “losers”, to find a connection and community when their roots at the workplace are so uncertain? This group is presumably the one with the greatest need of a collective community in working life or at the workplace. They are the ones who have the subordinate tasks, they are generally locally tied and they do not have any career opportunities.

These problems, with inadequate roots at workplaces for many individuals, also apply by extension to the potential for identification with a local union community, although not necessarily with the union as such. There is a kind of vacuum here with regard to connection and community, a greater individual need to find new roots and new connections. If the union is able to create new arenas for this, arenas to maintain occupational and wage-earner group identities alongside the workplaces, perhaps this vacuum can be filled and those who experience exclusion can be attracted? (See also the discussion of Freeman’s ideas of “open-source unionism” above)

The young in particular have experienced the weakened position of the trade unions at workplaces. During the deep recession of the 1990s and with a weak market position of the young, employers sharply increased the proportion of fixed-term contracts. Today, more than half of all employees in the 16–24 age group lack a permanent job. In the absence of permanent employment it is natural not to involve oneself particularly in the problems that exist at the workplace, and so union involvement is not particularly relevant either. The unions have either not succeeded in preventing the increase in fixed-term employees, or in dealing with the extensive use of substitutes and part-time employees in some parts of the labour market. Nor have suitable organisational forms been found for union participation and activities for members without permanent employment. One clear indication of this is the lower union density among temporary employees.

Should development of union work in issues regarding sources of livelihood, employment and also skills acquisition and professional development perhaps

take place mainly outside the confines of the workplace? At the same time, such work should be characterised by proximity and the possibility of identification through practical relationships and a sense of cohesion among the members. Might the union's opportunities in this arena lie in the expansion of regional networks or clubs dealing with professional and employment issues?

Finally: international networks also need to be developed. The European trade unions' earlier efforts in relation to General Motors were an example of successful international union cooperation within a corporate group. A difficulty, however, is that competition for jobs can despite this allow companies to play off the employees in different countries against one another (see also the discussion above about unions in global value chains and production networks).

Summary and concluding remarks

The increased diversity of forms of employment and the ever higher levels of permanent unemployment in the western world have previously been interpreted by a number of sociologists as meaning that we are moving towards a society where work as a social category is losing its importance (Gorz 1999; Offe 1985a, 1985b). By extension, the foundation for class-based social movements such as trade unions ought to be weakened. Advocates of these theories still have much to prove, however. In a global perspective the trend appears to instead be moving in the opposite direction. The importance of paid work as a means of livelihood is increasing as global industrialisation progresses (Castells 1996). Nor has the importance of work decreased in the highly industrialised and service-oriented western societies. Paid work remains the predominant means of subsistence, and people are forced to work hard to support themselves. Although rationalisation and technical development have led to the disappearance of many types of jobs, these have largely been replaced by new industries and new production sectors. Long-term unemployment still leads to elimination and social exclusion, not to freedom and self-realisation. Without furnishing further proof here, we would assert that work, and therefore also social affiliations created through participation in the work process, are of key significance in human processes of identification. Surveys conducted in recent years on the values and attitudes of the younger generations bear witness to the key significance of work in people's lives. They make clear the importance of work from the point of view of general security and sustenance as well as for personal development (Bruhn 1999b).

Many young people in particular want to have jobs that contribute to personal development and thus do not just serve as a source of livelihood. There is a desire to get more out of work than the pay itself. There is potential here for union ideas about rewarding jobs. Work also exerts many influences on leisure time, which is also a source for union demands:

- The time that is devoted to education is mostly preparation for working life.
- Physically demanding, risky or stressful jobs impact on non-working time: difficulty in relaxing, occupational injuries, sickness absence, disability pension, etc.
- Boundless jobs tend to colonise free time.
- The arrangement and length of working time dictate the arrangement of leisure time more often than the converse.
- Lack of work causes unemployment, and unemployment is most often experienced as an undesirable state.
- Pay level affects consumption (standard of accommodation, opportunities to travel abroad etc.), something which continues to apply after the work has ceased for one reason or another, because unemployment benefits, pensions, etc. are greatly determined by the previous level of income.

In the future, trade unions will still have important tasks to fulfil in each of the above areas. Historically, Swedish trade unions have acted to minimise the number of accidents, limit the length of the working day (the battle for the 8-hour day, the right to holidays), the introduction of period of notice for termination of employment, the goal of full employment and above all bringing about pay growth that enables rising standards and appear fair (the “solidaristic” wage policy: same pay for same job irrespective of profit level of the company as a mechanism for equality as well as industrial restructuring). Demands for rewarding jobs and insight into companies’ decision-making processes grew over the course of time. Some trade unions have acted throughout as professional organisations and emphasised the quality of education and examinations.

As international competition becomes tougher, an increased proportion of employees in corporate groups with headquarters in other countries, cuts and reorganisation in the public sector, deregulation, continued problems in the work environment (particularly psychosocial), relatively high unemployment, etc., there will be a persistent need for organisations that attend to the (collective and individual) interests of employees. However, workplaces with low manning levels and employers with an attitude to trade unions and collective agreements that is not always positive limit the opportunities for union activity. If the union workplace organisation continues to be depleted and the union does not achieve sufficient results in the eyes of the members, the trend towards declining union density will be difficult to break. The shift in employment from the industry and the public sector to private service industries also acts in the same direction.

Trade unions have been weakened in the former industrialised countries and have not yet gained any great strength in the expanding market economies of Eastern Europe and Asia. In Sweden too, the globalisation of enterprise has meant a shift in the power balance in favour of employers, although the trade unions are still maintaining their positions better here than in many other places. Swedish trade unions face a number of important challenges. The almost unique position

internationally that is occupied by transnational corporations in the Swedish economy may, together with increasing foreign ownership, force the trade unions to make ever greater concessions to preserve jobs in Sweden. Foreign construction companies, haulage firms, etc. and Swedish and foreign temporary agencies that engage foreign labour in Sweden may, as the Laval case shows, pose a threat to Swedish collective agreements, in any case if the right to take industrial action is restricted. The latter has long been a demand of the employers in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and its member associations. At present, collective agreements cover as many as 88 per cent of all wage and salary earners (2011), but this may change if the trade unions lose the right to take action against companies without agreements. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise now offers companies that do not want to have collective agreements a “service membership”.

Another challenge to collective agreements is the trend towards more individualised pay setting and “zero agreements”, that is to say industry-wide agreements without individually guaranteed pay rises.

The unions face a number of challenges when individual pay setting is introduced; they must, for instance, find a new role that may consist of anything from individual advice and support to assisting in the design of new pay systems so that the criteria for pay setting become clear and are regarded as fair by the members. As for operational issues, it is crucial for the union to create work methods here that encourage member involvement; otherwise, the union risks losing the character of a popular movement and functioning more as a professional organisation that serves its members in various ways. The interaction between central and local union levels and how well the trade unions manage to assert the interests of members in relation to employers and the state are also crucial to union strength.

Abbreviations

CF, *Civilingenjörsförbundet* (Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers) merged in 2007 with *Ingenjörsförbundet* to become *Sveriges Ingenjörer*

FI, *Facken inom industrin* (Unions within Manufacturing Industry)

Handels, *Handelsanställdas förbund* (Commercial Employees’ Union)

HTF, *Fackförbundet HTF* (previously *Handelstjänstemannaförbundet*) (Salaried Employees’ Union)

IF Metall, *Industrifacket Metall* (formed in 2006 by a merger between the Swedish Metalworkers’ Union and the Industrial Workers’ Union)

Industrifacket (Industrial Workers’ Union)

Ingenjörsförbundet (Swedish Society of College Engineers)

Kommunal, *Svenska Kommunalarbetareförbundet* (Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union)

Ledarna (Association of Managerial and Professional Staff)

LO, *Landsorganisationen* (Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions)

LR, *Lärarnas Riksförbund* (National Union of Teachers)

Läraryrket (Swedish Teachers’ Union)

Metall, *Svenska Metallindustriarbetareförbundet* (Swedish Metalworkers’ Union)

OFR, *Offentliganställdas Förhandlingsråd* (Public Employees’ Negotiation Council)

PTK, Förhandlings- och samverkansrådet (Council for Negotiation and Cooperation)

Saco, *Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation* (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations)

SAF, *Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen* (Swedish Employers' Confederation)

SALF, *Sveriges Arbetsledareförbund* (Association of Supervisors and Foremen), which changed names to *Ledarna*

Sif, *Svenska Industritjänstemannaförbundet* (Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees in Industry)

SKL, *Sveriges kommuner och landsting* (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions – SALAR)

SKTE, *Sveriges Kommunaltjänstemannaförbund* (Swedish Union of Local Government Officers)

SN, *Svenskt Näringsliv* (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise), formed in 2001 by a merger between SAF and *Sveriges Industriförbund* (Federation of Swedish Industries)

ST, *Statstjänstemannaförbundet* (Union of Civil Servants)

Sveriges Ingenjörer (Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers), see also CF above

TCO, *Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation* (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees)

Unionen (in English literally “the union”) formed in 2008 by a merger between Sif and HTF

VE, *Sveriges Verkstadsförening* (Swedish Engineering Employers' Association), now *Teknikföretagen* (Swedish Association of Engineering Industries)

Vårdförbundet (Swedish Association of Health Officers)

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Nordic Lights

ÅKE SANDBERG (ED.)

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Work, Management and
Welfare in Scandinavia

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