



The trade union as a people's movement

by SVEN NELANDER, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation
(LO), Wage and Welfare Policy Department



**The trade union
as a people's movement**

© 2004 The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)

PRODUCTION Bilda Idé

COVER DESIGN Pangea Design

PHOTO Nils-Johan Noren lind TIOFOTO, cover and p 20,

Frank Chmura TIOFOTO, p 6, Eva Wernlid TIOFOTO, p 14,

Nina Hellström TIOFOTO, p 26, Martin Palm Bildhuset, p 36,

Mats Bäcker Bildhuset, p 54

PRINT EO Print AB, 2004

2004 05 5000 ex

ISBN 91-566-2076-4

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Alone you are weak – united we are strong	7
3. A long-term approach with a common ideology	15
4. What is the geographical spread?	21
5. Unionisation rate and membership statistics	27
6. The democratic structure	37
<i>Number of members elected to hold office as trade union representatives</i>	37
<i>Members' meetings and other contacts between elected trade union representatives and members</i>	44
<i>A comparison with the political parties</i>	50
<i>Confidence in the elected representatives</i>	50
7. Basic education, adult education and culture	55
Index	58

CHAPTER 1

The Swedish word "folkrörelse"

The Swedish word "folkrörelse" cannot really be translated into English, since there is no exact equivalent in English-speaking countries. For want of a comparable term we use the expression "people's movement". However, the readers can form their own conception of the meaning of the term "folkrörelse" by studying the criteria set out below.

If we examine what the term "people's movement" has come to mean we can see that there are certain differences between various researchers and reports which have discussed the question – but the similarities are nevertheless very evident.

The criteria for a people's movement, which are included in practically all definitions of this term, at least from the forties onwards, are as follows:

- Acts for the promotion of the members' joint interests.
- No entrance requirements, but open to everyone who is part of the group which the respective people's movement represents.
- Has an independent position – determines its own activities within the framework of society's democratic principles and functions.
- Is not commercial but non-profit-making.
- Works with a long-term approach and has continuity.

- Has an ideology – an established idea about how society should be developed.
- Creates public opinion – opposes what it believes is wrong in society and demands the changes it believes in.
- Has wide geographical distribution.
- Has a lot of support. A large number of people are members – includes a large part of the population.
- Is based on voluntariness.
- Works democratically – is led by a democratically elected committee and control is exercised by the members through the annual general meeting. The methods of work should be based on the basic values on which our democracy is based.

On the basis of these different criteria we shall examine *the trade union as a people's movement*.



CHAPTER 2

Alone you are weak – united we are strong

The trade union is an organisation to protect the interests of employees. The basis of trade union organisation has always been the simple and self-evident principle that “alone you are weak – united we are strong”. When there are many who are united it is easier to uphold common interests than when a person stands alone.

The only requirement for membership in the trade union is holding employment – there are no requirements as regards the amount of time in an occupation, income or anything else. Employees who become unemployed are entitled to remain as members. Certain unions also allow those who have retired to remain as members and some national unions, especially among white-collar workers, have even students as members within professional sectors in which the respective national union organises members.

Ever since the emergence of the trade union movement it has been thought that the best way of protecting employees’ interests at the workplace is to be organised in trade unions which are based on occupation or industry. White-collar workers are organised in separate trade unions, as in Denmark and Finland, for example.

In order to avoid conflicts between trade unions there are rules about which trade union an employee may belong to.

This is shown in the organisation plan which, as regards LO, is established by the highest decision-making body, the LO Congress. Also within TCO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) there are established rules as to which organisation a person may belong to. In order to avoid conflicts and uncertainty between LO affiliates and TCO affiliates, various demarcation agreements have been reached between the trade unions concerned. In addition, there has been a committee in existence for a long time, consisting of the leadership of LO and TCO, which deals with demarcation questions between LO and TCO affiliates.

When leading researchers on questions of trade union organisation explain that the trade union organisation rate is so much higher in Sweden than in most other countries, special attention is drawn to the fact that the Swedish trade union movement *at the same time is both more decentralised and more centralised* than the trade unions in countries with a low organisation rate.

By means of a very well developed network of trade union clubs or similar and a large number of trade union elected representatives, the trade union can meet its members directly at the workplace and satisfy the needs or wishes of the members through negotiations or in other ways. The fact that the trade union as an organisation is represented at the workplaces also facilitates recruitment of new members. Powerful central organisations and unions have ensured that no employee groups have remained unorganised, and that anguished fights between various trade union organisations by and large have been avoided. Researchers stress that outside the Nordic area this type of effective combination of decentralisation and centralisation is conspicuous by its absence.

The typical pattern for Sweden and the other Nordic countries was that at a very early stage workers joined together in trade unions and works committees or elected trade union representatives.

“...determined by the members and financed through membership dues”

The Swedish metalworkers opted for works committees as early as at the turn of the century. In that way the trade union became a tangible element directly at the workplaces, which the workers – and from the thirties also white-collar workers – could turn to. Also during periods with central bargaining the clubs have retained their extraordinarily important negotiating role at workplace level.

Inter-union activities were also developed at a very early stage – at local level these go back as far as LO itself. The first local inter-union alliances were mainly for the purpose of agitation and information, but also, as expressed at the time “to help the unemployed in times of unemployment”.

The trade union activities are determined by the members and financed through membership dues. They are non-profit-making. Decisions as to activities and dues are made through a democratic process. The basic elements of the trade union’s democratic foundation are described in other sections.

With continued internationalisation – labour, firms and capital moving across national borders – it is not sufficient for the trade unions to restrict their activities to their own countries. The large companies have at present a considerable advantage over national governments and trade union organisations. Companies have a well-established system of cross-border collaboration, they can move production between different countries and play one group off against another.

International trade union co-operation is absolutely necessary. This is also expressed in LO’s Constitution.

There may be reason to remind people that right from the start the trade union movement was an international movement – which started in the earliest industrialised countries and then spread to Sweden. The first trade union leaders had a highly international perspective, and several of them established wide networks of contacts through foreign travel.

Concurrently with the continuing globalisation, international trade union co-operation is becoming even more important. Today the great majority of the world's workers is to be found in a common market economy, which implies that wages and employment conditions are exposed to still stronger international competition and the risks of social dumping are great. This requires the development and introduction of international minimum standards in working life.

The international trade union movement acts since long for the respect of basic human rights in working life, with the objective of guaranteeing the social dimension of globalisation. Among these rights are the workers' right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

Together with other trade union organisations, LO works actively with the issue of the right to take trade union sympathy action across borders in order to balance the unlimited freedom of capital and companies to cross national borders and to play workers off against each other. Today the competition to attract foreign investments is still tougher between countries. An example of this is the rapid growth of so-called export processing zones. Today there are some 3 000 of these established in some 115 countries and the bait is exemption from taxes and the absence of trade union organisations. If nothing is done, this trend is running the risk of undermining the concerted trade union work to achieve decent working conditions in the world.

Every year hundreds of trade union representatives are murdered, thousands are mistreated and imprisoned, and tens of thousands are dismissed around the world because of normal trade union activities. An important task of the trade union international work is to thwart slave and forced labour, child labour and discrimination in working life. The objective of this work is to make all the governments in the world – but also organisations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation, the WTO – respect the basic human rights in working life laid down in the ILO’s core conventions. ILO, the International Labour Organisation, is the UN body for working life. Trade regulations are not to allow countries and companies to compete on the world market without respecting these rights. Besides, international money-lending and development assistance ought to be linked to the respect of these human rights in working life, laid down by the ILO. This creates, above all, possibilities and freedom for the wage earners to struggle jointly for the improvement of their conditions without risking threats of reprisals.

LO has different channels for trying to, jointly with other trade union organisations in other countries, exert an influence on development. The most important tool for the trade union organisations within the EU is The European Trade Union Confederation, the ETUC, which is made up of almost 80 confederations in about 35 European countries. Within The European Trade Union Confederation the main issue is to see to it that different aspects of the labour market are covered by European minimum regulations in the form of EU directives. The European social dialogue between the trade union movement and employers at European level

“...the international trade union co-operation has become even more important”

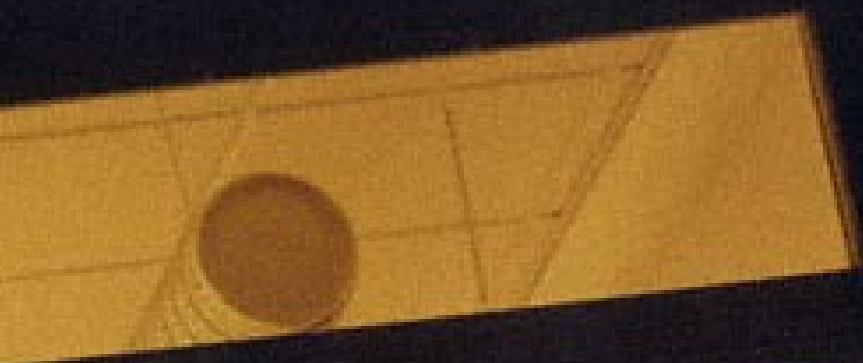
has so far resulted in, among other things, EU legislation on parental leave, part-time work and fixed-term employment. An EU regulation on temporary work agencies is also under discussion. An agreement has also been concluded as regards telework which settles that it is up to the parties themselves to observe the agreement at national level without EU legislation. To guarantee that it is sufficient with collective agreements to introduce EU legislation, that the right to strike is more important than free movement of goods and that companies bringing with them their own work force, must as a minimum pay the wages and comply with the terms of agreements in the country where the work is carried out, are other issues of importance to LO.

The Nordic Trade Union Confederation, the NFS, unites the various trade union confederations for blue-collar workers and white-collar workers in the Nordic countries. The NFS main task is, above all, to look after important issues concerning all the Nordic countries, as for example the free Nordic labour market and to further the co-operation around Baltic Sea as well as the coordination of the Nordic approaches within the European Trade Union Confederation, the ETUC, and in other international bodies.

The global trade union work is, above all, carried out within the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the ICFTU, and various Global Union Federations. The ICFTU has more than 230 affiliated trade union confederations with totally 150 million members in 152 countries. The ICFTU work is principally performed in the form of dialogues with different international organisations and governments.

CONCLUSION:

The trade union organisation is a body to safeguard the employees' interests in working life. The trade union has no entrance requirements and is open to everyone who is part of the group represented. The organisation is independent in relation to the state and local government and determines its own activities. The activities are financed through membership dues. The trade union organisations are non-commercial and non-profit-making. The international trade union co-operation has become even more important.



CHAPTER 3

A long-term approach with a common ideology

The first trade union in Sweden was formed in 1846, but only in the middle of the 1880s could it be said that trade unions had really made a breakthrough. At that time the number of trade unions had grown to over 100, with altogether about 7,000 members.

The trade unions had at that time adopted fairly fixed working methods, with statutes, systems of dues and rules for the financial operations. (Torvald Karlbom: “Arbetarnas fackföreningar” – The workers’ trade unions).

The forms of trade union co-operation were keenly discussed during the first half of the 1880s. It proved difficult, however to achieve an alliance which bridged the occupational boundaries. The differences were far too great between highly qualified skilled workers and the less qualified or unlearned workers. In other countries, where the same problem arose, craft unions or trade unions tied to a certain industry or certain allied industries were formed. This was also the line followed by the Swedish trade unions.

“...the amalgamation of the trade unions into trade union federations was an expression of the need for co-operation for mutual help”

At the end of the 1880s there were seven nationwide federations of trade unions and ten years later over thirty. The local trade unions joined these federations.

The amalgamation of the trade unions into trade union federations was an expression of the need for co-operation for mutual help.

But the individual trade union federations were too weak to protect their members against strong employers and capture the important rights of association and negotiation for trade unions.

The idea of organising trade union federations into a confederation grew increasingly strong and LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, was established at a constituent congress in August 1898. At that time trade union confederations had already been formed in several other countries, for example in Denmark.

The new organisation was not given major powers. LO's first constitution stated that LO's task was "to prepare reports and memoranda in order to achieve as full an overall view as possible of the trade union activities within the country, to gather and distribute these reports through a secretariat and to assist the trade union federations' mutual support at the times when purchasers of labour are using lockouts to try to prevent the work of organisation or workers' attempts to improve their wages or other working conditions; also on all occasions where the right of association is threatened and when workers are locked out when trying to establish an organisation, as well as when major pay decreases take place."

The tasks of the organisation were, as can be seen, to assist the unions during defensive struggles and when the right of association was threatened, as well as to function as a distributor of reports and memoranda.

LO's constitution did not change much until the major revision which took place at the 1941 Congress, when it acquired much of its present shape. At that time, for example, the importance of social questions was emphasised. LO was to participate in social development on the basis of political, social and economic democracy.

Right from the start the trade union labour movement has been politically committed. Its demands and objectives have by and large been the same as those of the Social Democratic Party.

Close co-operation has therefore been natural. It is quite clear that in that way it has been possible to achieve things which would otherwise have been impossible. *"...LO was to participate in social development on the basis of political, social and economic democracy"*

The previously stated principle that *"Alone you are weak – united we are strong"* has, thus, been very much a reality.

As regards the constitutional regulation of trade union-political co-operation, a lot has changed since LO was founded. At LO's first Congress in 1898 it was decided to include in the constitution an obligation for trade unions to apply for membership of the Social Democratic Party at the latest three years after affiliation with LO.

As early as at the Congress in 1900, the resolution was changed to an exhortation to the trade union federations to work towards the trade union's membership of the party and at the 1909 Congress all regulations concerning party membership were removed.

However, under the constitution of the Social Democratic Party there has long been a possibility for trade unions to collectively enrol their members in the labour union ("arbetar-

kommun”), which is the local body of the Social Democratic Party – allowing individual members to opt out.

Collective enrolment ceased as of the turn of the year 1990/91. Instead it is possible for the local trade union to join the labour union as an organisation, in the same way as the local trade union can be a member of the local ABF (Workers’ Educational Association) branch, Folkets Hus (Labour Movement Community Centre) etc.

The tasks of LO today are presented in the 2001 Constitution for the organisation. The first section of this states the following:

“The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) is a body uniting blue-collar trade union organisations. The LO is empowered to coordinate the endeavours of the trade union movement to safeguard the interests of workers in the labour market and in trade and industry in general, while also promoting social progress based on political, social and economic democracy.

With a view to achieving this goal, the LO shall first endeavour to ensure

that employees in the private, state and municipal sectors are organised and affiliated to national unions, operating through local organisations, in accordance with the plan ratified by Congress

that the activities of the affiliates follow a uniform pattern with respect for the principle of solidarity, safeguarding common interests, while showing consideration for the rights of the individual and the justified requirements of society

that the interests of employees in legal and social policy matters are protected,

that equality of opportunity between women and men is created,

- that** trade union interests are maintained at international level, and contacts with corresponding organisations in other countries are upheld and developed, and
- that** the local branches of the affiliates co-operate in organised cross-union activities within the LO Districts (at regional level) and LO Sections (at local level).”

CONCLUSION:

The trade union movement takes a long-term approach and itself has continuity over time. It is integrated around a common ideology – an established idea about how society should be developed. This is shown in both the objects clause of the Constitution and the various written programmes adopted by LO’s Congresses.

On the basis of the resolutions which have been made, efforts are made to create public opinion – this includes both opposing that which is thought wrong and demanding the changes regarded as justified.



What is the geographical spread?

Trade unions have always been closely associated with the workplace. This structure is, as has been emphasised, by no means a matter of course. In many countries the trade union organisation at workplace level is weak or non-existent.

When people in Sweden speak of the trade union it is quite naturally almost always their own local trade union which is meant – the union which is met with at the workplace. The national trade unions and LO only come second in people’s consciousness. The observation could be made that for journalists and decision-makers in Stockholm the order is usually the reverse.

“...indicates that the trade union work at workplace level will become even more important than previously”

Everything indicates that the trade union work at workplace level will become even more important than previously. We need to create a work organisation in which people’s capacities and skills are utilised. This is in turn a condition for wanting to develop one’s skills and take on new tasks of work.

Through its close association with the workplace, trade union activity is spread over the whole country. The most common form of local organisation is the *club* or *section*. Within the LO affiliates there are altogether over 10,000 clubs or sections. In addition, within the affiliates are *branches*, whose geographical basis for most of the affiliates is the same as the counties.

The number of people at the workplaces who hold trade union office will be dealt with in coming sections.

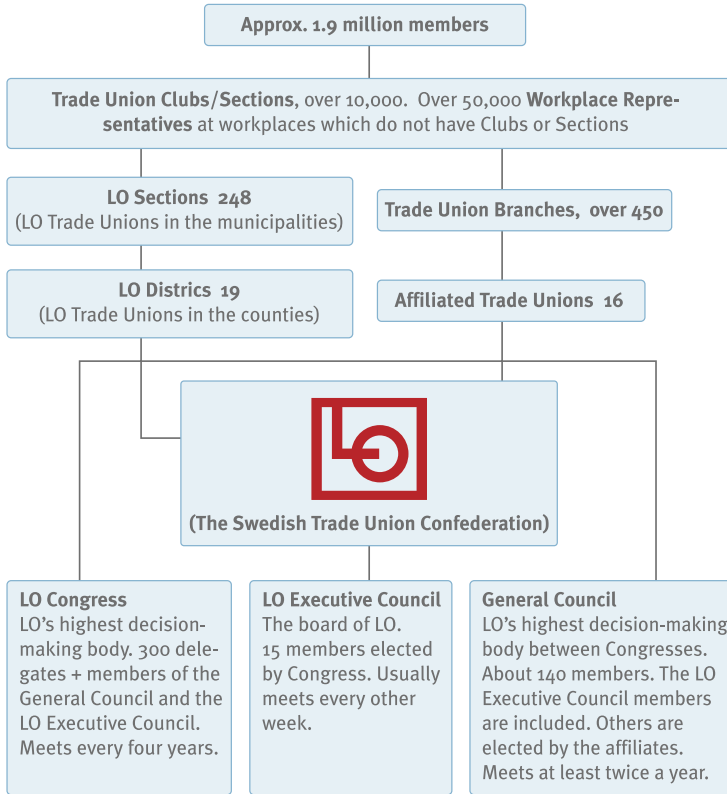
Also among white-collar workers there are well-established local activities, with basic trade union activities very close to the workplace.

The LO headquarters is sometimes called the big brown citadel at Norra Bantorget in Stockholm. It has somehow become the symbol of the Swedish trade union part of the labour movement. But the picture is really deceptive. LO does not only exist in Stockholm – there are many LO citadels around the country.

For co-operation between LO affiliates at municipal and regional levels there are *LO Sections* and *LO Districts*. The number of LO Sections is 248 i.e. nearly as many as the number of municipalities. The LO Sections are for co-ordinating trade union activities within municipalities. In the Sections the local trade union organisations – clubs, branches, trade union sections – co-operate across union boundaries.

In the LO Sections the affiliates' local trade union organisations can make joint decisions on important questions and thus give greater weight to their views when presenting them to the municipality or other authorities. This may apply for example to the municipalities' efforts regarding jobs, child-care, health care or adult education. The LO Sections collaborate with the other local organisations within the labour movement – such as Social Democratic associations, labour unions and Workers' Educational Association – ABF. The 19 LO Districts have an obvious position as representatives of the trade unions in the various regions of the country.

This is LO



Both districts and sections have increasingly come to play an important role as creators of public opinion. They keep the local press and local radio and television informed as to what is going on within the trade union and put forward the views of the trade union on various questions.

More and more tasks which used to be carried out at central level have been transferred to the municipalities. *The things going on within the municipality have thus also become increasingly important to the LO members' everyday life – both inside and outside the workplace.*

This underlines the importance of well-established trade union activities at municipal level.

CONCLUSION:

The trade union movement has extraordinarily well-established local activities – and thus extensive geographical spread. Within LO alone there are over 10,000 clubs or sections.



CHAPTER 5

Unionisation rate and membership statistics

There is scarcely anything which so clearly expresses the value of trade union membership as the fact that people want to join the trade unions – that they apply for membership and that they also feel the advantages to be so great that they continue to be members of the trade union organisation.

“...more than 16 out of 20 are members of a trade union” Of all employees in Sweden, more than 16 out of 20 are members of a trade union. The figure for the first quarter of 2003 is almost 81 per cent.

The difference between blue-collar and white-collar workers is relatively small – 82 per cent for blue-collar workers and 79 per cent for white-collar workers. This is a state of affairs which distinguishes us from practically all other Western industrial countries, where the unionisation rate for white-collar workers (especially private-sector employees) as a rule is much lower than that of blue-collar workers.

In Sweden both blue-collar and white-collar workers, women and men, private-sector and public-sector employees all have a high rate of unionisation.

In two diagrams we describe developments since the end of the sixties for female and male blue-collar and white-collar workers.

Unionisation rate for blue-collar workers. Per cent



Diagram 1

Unionisation rate for white-collar workers. Per cent

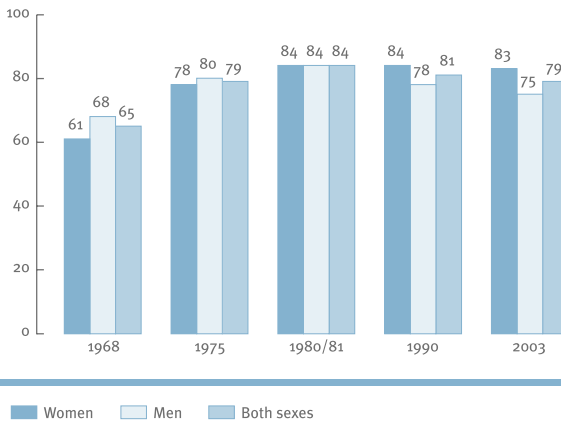


Diagram 2

As can be seen, in 1968 not more than half of all female blue-collar workers were organised in trade unions (more exactly 53 per cent). Now the figure is 84 per cent.

For female white-collar workers the unionisation rate has increased over the same period from 61 to 83 per cent.

The rise in union membership among women is dramatic, seen in this longer perspective.

By the beginning of the nineties, female blue-collar workers had caught up with male blue-collar workers as regards unionisation. *After that the women have overtaken the men* – and the unionisation rate is now a few percentage points higher for the women. Female white-collar workers reached the same rate of unionisation as the male white-collar workers about ten years earlier, i.e. at the beginning of the eighties.

The chart below illustrates the changes for *the whole group of employees* (blue-collar workers and white-collar workers all in all) The diagram shows that the unionisation rate for *women* has increased from 56 to 83 per cent between 1968 and 2003. During this period the number of female employees has increased by more than 800,000 (from scarcely 1.1 million to slightly more than 1.9 million.).

Thus, the trade union organisations have not only been able to recruit the “new” women as their members but in addition have succeeded in considerably raising the unionisation rate of women who were already active in the labour market.

“...the unionisation rate is a very important measure of the value of trade union membership”

The number of *male* employees has changed very little since 1968 – an increase by about 60.000 only, (from scarcely 1,8 to about 1,85 million) and the unionisation rate among male blue-collar workers is the same today as in 1968, i.e.78 per cent.

Unionisation rate for all workers (blue-collar and white-collar workers all in all). Per cent

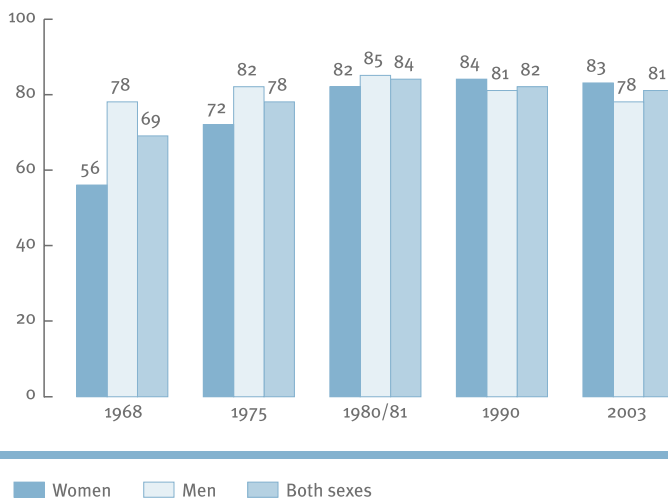


Diagram 3

Altogether the unionisation rate for employees in Sweden as shown in the diagram, has increased from 69 per cent to 81 per cent during the 25 years between 1968 and 2003.

The substantial increase in the number of women in the labour market – together with the dramatic increase in unionisation rate – has meant that the proportion of women within LO has increased from about 27 per cent in 1968 to 46 per cent today. The percentage of women in TCO (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) has increased from over 40 per cent at the end of the sixties to 62 per cent today.

During the nineties the unionisation rate among *young people* under 30, has decreased, which at least to a certain degree

is a result of the high increase of fixed-term employments in this group and that the varied period at the beginning of working life has been prolonged.

A more detailed description of the changes of the unionisation rate is to be found in the LO-report “Summary and conclusions”, report no 5 in the series “Opinions on the union and work”.

There are also differences between *various parts of the labour market* as illustrated by the chart below. We study the changes for *blue-collar workers* since 1990.

Unionisation rate among blue-collar workers. Per cent		
	Unionisation rate first quarter of 2003	Change in percentage points since 1990
Manufacturing industry	90	+ 1
Construction	88	- 2
Wholesale and retail trade	67	- 1
Other private services	74	+ 4
State operations	91	- 1
Municipal operations	90	+ 3

Table 1

As will be seen from the figures, the increase among blue-collar workers of the unionisation rate has been palpable within “Other private services” and within “Municipal operations“. Within the construction sector there has been a decrease (from a high level). Within the other sectors changes are insignificant.

There are obvious differences of *unionisation rate* among persons born abroad – related to on country of origin and period of stay in Sweden. You will find the highest unionisation

rate among persons born in other Nordic countries and with a long period of stay in Sweden. The lowest unionisation rate is to be found among non-European immigrants staying in Sweden during a short period of time. And these are the ones with the most uncertain conditions of employment.

Unionisation rate first quarter of 2003. Female and male blue-collar workers from different countries of origin. Per cent.

	Women	Men
Born in Sweden	84	81
Born in other Nordic countries		
Minimum 10 years of stay in Sweden	89	90
Maximum 9 years of stay in Sweden	.. *	.. *
Born in the rest of Europe etc**		
Minimum 10 years of stay in Sweden	88	86
Maximum 9 years of stay in Sweden	74	83
Born in the rest of the world		
Minimum 10 years of stay in Sweden	82	76
Maximum 9 years of stay in Sweden	74 ***	80 ***
All blue collar workers	84	81

Table 2

*) The selection was too limited.

**) The rest of Europe, US, Canada, Japan, Australia or New Zealand

***) Estimated as an average of the first quarters of 2002 and 2003.

Considering that most of the non-Nordic immigrants come from countries with a low unionisation rate, it is in many ways remarkable and also satisfying, that the figures are as high as they really are. In other words, the results are mainly positive – but entails a responsibility at the same time. It is important for the trade union to *meet the expectations, demands and re-*

quirements that immigrants have the right to make on their trade union organisation. There *should be great possibilities* to further increase the unionisation rate among persons born abroad. The positive attitude to the trade union among many of the immigrants, that in various ways appears in the study, indicates this. Considering the future population trend, with a high increase of the number of persons born abroad, many of the trade union members will probably be employees born abroad.

Trade union membership is *voluntary*. The unionisation rate, which expresses the decision of people of full age and capacity to become members of a trade union organisation, is a very important measure of the value of trade union membership, as already indicated.

Some people choose to *remain outside the trade union*. When asked the most important reasons for this, they usually state that they are “doubtful about the benefit of being a member” or “the size of the membership fees”. But some also mention such things as the trade union being too involved in politics, or that they have never been asked to join the union.

In Sweden discussions have been going on, in which some have maintained that new trends and values, including an increasingly marked individualism, make trade unions unnecessary. At certain periods the trade union movement has been portrayed as a sector in crisis, which inevitably will face a dark future. However, the development of the unionisation rate does not give any grounds for these assertions. On the other hand, it is evident that trade union membership is subject to a far higher pressure than before.

During the first quarter of the year 2003, as many as 83 *per cent of all employed women and 78 per cent of all employed men*

were members of a trade union, as indicated earlier in this report.

But the trend cannot be taken for granted. Circumstances which may jeopardise unionisation and have a negative effect on the number of trade union members are for instance an increase in temporary jobs and other more uncertain forms of employment.

Trade union organisations *can never, and should never just be satisfied with the fact that the unionisation rate is high*. Our aim must be *to raise the value or the benefit of trade union membership* – to make sure that the trade unions can meet, in an even better way, their members' expectations and demands.

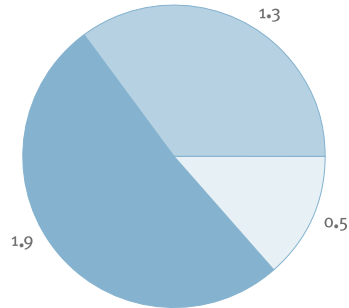
“...altogether the trade unions affiliated to LO, TCO and SACO have just over 3.7 million members”

Working life, and thereby also members' needs, are subject to rapid changes. *A renewal of trade union activities is therefore an absolute requirement.*

Altogether the trade unions affiliated to LO, TCO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) and SACO (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) have just over *3.7 million members*. This is equivalent to *over 41 per cent of Sweden's entire population and about 55 per cent of the adult population* (20 years of age and above).

No other organisation comes even close to these figures. The organisation which is closest – the sports movement – has about 2,3 million members.

Number of trade union members affiliated to LO, TCO and SACO.
Millions of members



■ LO ■ TCO ■ SACO

Diagram 4

CONCLUSION:

The trade union movement has a large number of members among the groups it represents. Trade union membership is voluntary – people of full age have chosen to be trade union members. The trade union organisations with their 3.7 million members represent a great part of the population.



CHAPTER 6

The democratic structure

Number of members elected to hold office as trade union representatives

Together with the large number of members, the many elected union representatives at workplaces are the trade unions' most important resource – they form the backbone of trade union activities. It is they who satisfy the needs, expectations and wishes of the employees and whose job it is to represent the members and their interests in negotiations with the employer and in other ways.

Altogether there are as many as 175,000 *elected trade union representatives* in the LO affiliates and they hold a total of 205,000 *trade union assignments*. These facts are presented in the survey "Röster om facket och jobbet" (Opinions on the union and work). Of these assignments more than 15,000 are in LO Sections and more than 1,500 in LO Districts (in addition there is a large number of assignments in working groups in both Sections and Districts).

"...altogether there are as many as 375,000 members of the affiliates of LO, TCO or SACO who hold office as elected trade union representatives"

By far the most common three assignments are *safety representative* (about 60,000), *member of Branch committee/Section committee/Club committee* (about 50,000) and *Union Liaison Officer* (about 40,000).

Other assignments are, inter alia, insurance advisor, study organiser, auditor, negotiation committee member or election committee member.

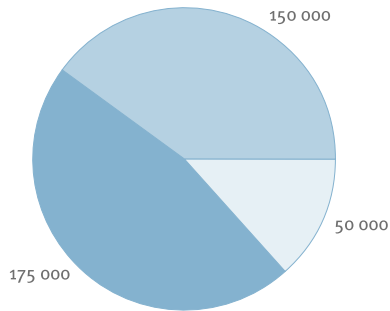
In TCO there are about 150,000 elected trade union representatives with a total of 160,000 trade union assignments.

As regards SACO there are about 50,000 elected trade union representatives with a total of 55,000 assignments.

Every eighth elected trade union representative in LO and every fourteenth in TCO and SACO has more than one trade union assignment.

Altogether, then, there are as many as 375,000 members of the affiliates of LO, TCO or SACO who hold office as elected trade union representatives. The total number of assignments is 420,000.

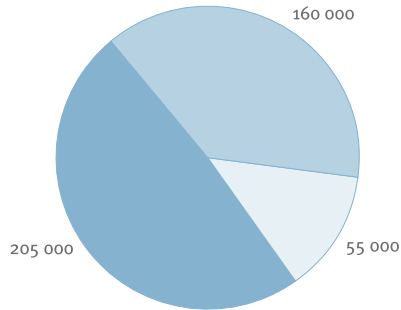
Distribution of the totally 375,000 elected trade union representatives between the different national unions of LO, TCO and SACO



■ LO ■ TCO ■ SACO

Diagram 5

Distribution of the totally 420,000 trade union assignments between the national unions of LO, TCO and SACO



■ LO ■ TCO ■ SACO

Diagram 6

There is a large number of elected trade union representatives at our workplaces. But the distribution of these office holders does not really reflect that of the membership. Despite great progress during the last decade, women are still underrepresented. This is explained more in detail below.

As appears from Table 3, the percentage rate of women holding a trade union assignment in the LO has increased from 27 to 39 per cent during the nine years' period between 1993 and 2002, which is a considerable increase. One can thus state, without exaggerating, *that the representation of women has improved drastically.*

The rate of trade union assignments in LO held by women and men of different age groups. Per cent.

	1993	1998	2002
Women			
18-29 years	3	7	5
30-49 years	16	21	23
50-64 years	8	13	11
All women	27	41	39
Män			
18-29 years	11	12	12
30-49 years	40	31	35
50-64 years	22	16	14
All men	73	59	61
LO total	100	100	100

Table 3

Since 1998 however, the rate of LO women with a trade union assignment has decreased slightly, i.e. from 41 to 39 percent.

The women hold 39 percent of the trade union assignments within the LO, whereas the rate of women LO members is 46 percent. Quite a number of women would thus be needed to reach a balanced representation.

It appears from the report that there has also been, since 1993, a slight change in the distribution of trade union assignments *among different age groups* so that it reflects, slightly better than before, the age structure of LO members. The rate of trade union assignments held by members of 30 years or younger has increased since 1993 from 14 to 17 percent (Ta-

ble 3). It can be stated, as a comparison, that the rate of LO members of 30 years or younger is some 20 percent.

In 2002 only 4 percent of young LO women held a trade union assignment. This figure marks a heavy decrease compared to 1998 and a return back to the same low level as in 1993 (Table 4). At the same time, the results show that there has been a considerable increase in the average number of assignments among young women who hold a trade union office. No other group of elected trade union representatives hold so many assignments per person as this particular group. Consequently, it is a minor part of the young women who hold a trade union assignment, but the ones who do, *on the average have a larger number of assignments* than other groups of elected representatives. Among young men the number of assignments has increased from 11 to 14 per cent since 1993.

The rate of women and men within LO who hold trade union office. Per cent.

	1993	1998	2002
Women			
18-29 years	4	11	4
30-49 years	10	12	10
50-64 years	9	11	9
All women	8	12	9
Män			
18-29 years	11	14	14
30-49 years	19	17	16
50-64 years	26	17	13
All men	19	16	15
LO total	14	14	12

Table 4

In the 2002 survey “Opinions on the union and work”, it was possible *for the first time* to make a division according to *the country of birth*, while describing the distribution of trade union assignments. According to this division, there are those born in Sweden, those born in other Nordic countries and those from non-Nordic countries. As regards *women*, the results show that the percentage of those with trade union assignments is *highest* among women born in other Nordic countries and *lowest* among women from non-Nordic countries, as women born in Sweden are in between. Among *men*, the standard as regards holding trade union office is considerably different. The percentage of trade union office holders is the same among men

born in Sweden and in non-Nordic countries, but substantially lower among those born in other Nordic countries.

We can turn the figures over and come to the conclusion that, among those born in Sweden and in non-Nordic countries, the percentage of trade union office holders is *clearly much higher among men* than among women – as we can see *the reverse situation* among those born in other Nordic countries, i.e. the higher percentage of trade union office holders among women than among men.

“...many people born in non-Nordic countries are more prepared to hold trade union office than they do today”

Number of LO members with trade union assignment. Per cent

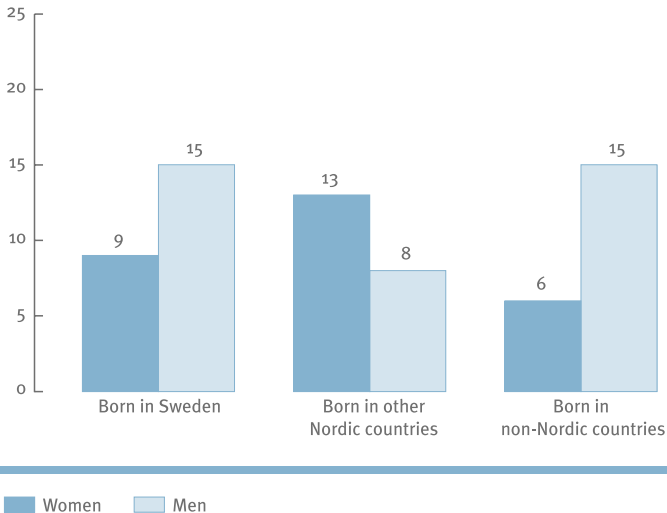


Diagram 7

The survey shows that there should be *a good chance of broadening and increasing recruitment of elected trade union representatives* – not least among young women and LO members born in non-Nordic countries. But also among other groups there are many people who would consider taking trade union office if asked. To take advantage of these possibilities *to broaden and increase recruitment of elected trade union representatives* is an important challenge for trade unions.

CONCLUSION:

The number of elected trade union representatives in affiliates of LO, TCO or SACO is about 375,000 and the total number of trade union assignments is 420,000. Young women and women born in non-Nordic countries are clearly underrepresented among the elected trade union representatives, but many more are prepared to hold trade union office.

Members' meetings and other contacts between elected trade union representatives and members

The trade unions are led by democratically elected committees. The elections to these committees and the members' control over activities take place through members' meetings.

The survey "Opinions on the union and work" shows that 35 per cent of LO's members have participated in *at least one trade union meeting in the past twelve months*.

This means almost 600,000 LO members, and these have taken part in an average of just over 2.5 meetings during the year. These figures also include trade union meetings involving more than one union. More than half – approximately 325,000 – have also spoken at the meetings. 12 per cent of LO

members have participated in *at least three meetings during the year*. Between 1988 and 2002, the percentage of LO members participating in at least one meeting a year has dropped from 42 to 35 per cent. The percentage of those who attend meetings more frequently – at least three trade union meetings a year – has decreased from 17 to 12 per cent.

This survey also provides information about the number of white-collar workers who attend trade union meetings. It shows that about 40 per cent of white-collar trade union members have attended at least one trade union meeting in the past twelve months. More than every fourth white-collar worker has spoken at a trade union meeting during the year. In absolute figures this corresponds to 570,000 and 350,000 white-collar workers respectively.

Those who are members of the trade union have *very good knowledge about their trade union representatives*. About 80 per cent of LO members know a representative of the local trade union organisation at the workplace. The figure is by and large the same for the white-collar workers.

The members take *to a great extent make direct contact with their elected trade union representatives*. As many as 65 per cent of LO's members have contacted a trade union representative directly in recent years to influence a decision or obtain information.

The question which was put was: *Have you in the last few years contacted a trade union representative of your local trade union organisation to influence a decision or obtain information?* By trade union representative is also meant, for example, safety representative and trade union liaison officer, workplace representative and such like. When the period of time was narrowed

“...the members take to a great extent direct contact with their elected trade union representatives”

to the past twelve months the figure was about 50 per cent instead.

This means that *more than one million LO members have directly contacted their elected trade union representatives in recent years*. We do not know how many times contact has been made, but a conservative estimate of an average of 1.5 would give a good many more than one and a half million personal meetings between members and elected representatives.

As far as TCO and SACO are concerned, about 70 per cent have made direct contact in recent years. This means that altogether over one million members in both these organisations have made direct contact with their elected representatives at least once in recent years.

The figures reported imply, however, at the same time that 35 per cent of LO members have *not* had any direct contact with trade union representatives in the past years and that 65 per cent have *not* taken part in any trade union meeting in the past twelve months.

Surveys also show how great a proportion of LO members have *neither* attended a trade union meeting in recent years *nor* made direct contact with a trade union representative. They show that about three out of ten (28 per cent) belong in that group. They are members but nevertheless in some way outsiders. The figure is about the same for the entire group of trade union members.

Being part of that group does not of course exclude a person from being interested, and perhaps also carefully following trade union activities. But they have not utilised either of the channels mentioned to influence decisions or keep themselves informed.

Among both blue-collar and white collar workers *young people* attend far fewer trade union meetings than older mem-

bers. One could wonder why this is. It is hardly the circumstances of the job itself which would explain this, nor can it be the heavier duties of home and family. Nor does it seem to be lack of interest in trade union activities.

The survey “Opinions on the union and work” shows that young people are not appreciably less interested in the trade unions than other people. About two out of three LO members under the age of 30 consider themselves to be interested or active in the trade union.

Of what significance are the circumstances which apply to the young people themselves, such as competing interests – and what part do the content and forms of activity play?

It is often shown that many young people find trade union meetings far too formal and the possibilities of affecting the outcome far too small. It is not, then, surprising that many refrain from going and devote themselves to something else instead. There is much to indicate that the character of trade union meetings must change if more young people are to participate.

“...young people attend far fewer trade union meetings than older members”

But our investigations also show that young people seek other ways of exercising influence and obtaining information about trade union activities. For example, young people make *direct contact with trade union representatives* relatively more often than older members. One conclusion to be drawn from this may be that a well-established workplace organisation, with close access to trade union representatives, is especially important when it comes to young people.

Of all trade union members (blue and white collar workers together):

- 37 per cent have participated in at least one trade union meeting in the past twelve months. Six out of ten of these (22 per cent of all members) have also spoken at the meeting.
- 14 per cent have participated in at least three trade union meetings in the past twelve months
- as many as 66 per cent have contacted an elected trade union representative in the past years to influence a decision or to obtain information
- ... but about 27 per cent have neither had any contact with an elected representative in the past years nor participated in a trade union meeting in the past twelve months.

CONCLUSION:

About 1.2 million trade union members have participated in at least one trade union meeting in the past year, and nearly 700,000 of these have also spoken at the meeting. The average number of trade union meetings per participant is about 2.5.

Direct contact between elected representatives and members is of very considerable proportions. More than 65 per cent of all members of LO, TCO or SACO have had direct contact with their elected representatives in the past years. In absolute figures this means a good many more than two million members.

Knowledge about the elected representatives is good. But more than every fourth employee has neither participated in a trade union meeting nor had any direct contact with an elected trade union representative in the past year – and thus not utilised either of these channels to influence a decision or obtain information. Young people do not attend trade union meetings at all to the same extent as older members, but have had relatively more direct contacts with elected trade union representatives.

A comparison with the political parties

As has been pointed out, the percentage of LO members who have contacted their trade union representative to influence a decision or obtain information is about 65 per cent and the percentage who have taken part in a trade union meeting in the past twelve months is 35 per cent.

This could be compared with the figure of 7 per cent of LO members who at some time have contacted a person in a responsible position in a political party to influence a decision – and the percentage of LO members who have participated

in a meeting of a political party in the past twelve months is about 5 per cent.

“...the number of elected political office holders is, then, far lower than the number of people holding trade union office”

Both direct contacts and participation in meetings are at a much lower level than within the trade unions.

The number of people holding trade union office within affiliates of LO, TCO or SACO is – as mentioned previously – about 375,000. This can be compared with the fact that altogether there are about 125,000 elected political office holders in our country, according to a report from Statistics Sweden “Associations in Sweden”, report no 98 in the series “Levnadsförhållanden” – Standard of Living Survey. The latter figure refers to the year 2000. *The number of elected political office holders is, then, far lower than the number of people holding trade union office.*

Confidence in the elected representatives

Could it be said, then, that *the elected trade union representatives can correctly interpret the needs and wishes of the members and the trade union members have confidence in their elected representatives?* We can try to illustrate the question on the basis of three perspectives:

– Are there differences between the elected trade union representatives and the members as to what are regarded as important trade union questions.

– What general confidence do the members have in their elected representatives?

– Do the employees believe that the trade union organisation should have more or less say as regards the workplace?

The question of whether or not the elected representatives have the same view as the members in general as to what the organisation should mainly concentrate on *is a classical democratic issue*. Here we can compare three different groups in LO: active trade union members, members who are interested but not themselves active and finally members who are not interested in the trade union. It is so that the three groups have *the same priorities*. The respondents were asked which tasks are particularly important for the trade union and the results show that the ranking of a total of 20 different areas is practically identical.

*“...is a classical
democratic
issue”*

Even if the ranking is the same there are, however, certain differences between the active group of members and the others. In some questions it is clear that that the active group are most positive towards making a commitment, while those who are uninterested are least positive. It would seem that the active members are “ahead of” the ordinary members in certain questions.

Through their experience of trade union work they have come to the conclusion that the trade union must push harder for such issues as trade union co-operation in Europe.

Without there necessarily being a difference of opinion between the elected representatives and the members, there is, nevertheless, a sluggishness which means that the members’

demands and wishes do not always affect trade union activities to a sufficient extent, or sufficiently rapidly. Such issues are education and training at work and the development of member benefits, where interviews show that the members, especially the young ones, think the trade union should do more than ten years ago.

How much confidence do the members at the workplaces have in their elected representatives? In Statistics Sweden's surveys of living conditions people are asked how *they regard the way the elected representatives carry out their duties in the local trade union organisation*. The results show that as many as three out of four members of LO, TCO or SACO believe that the elected representatives have carried out their duties well. This percentage is about the same for the three organisations.

The differences between the sexes and various age groups are relatively small. The trade union members are, then, expressing great confidence in their elected representatives.

"...how they regard the way the elected representatives carry out their duties in the local trade union organisation"

Another more indirect measure of confidence is *if the members want the trade union to have more or less say as regards the workplace*. The results show that the local trade union organisation, which meets the members directly at the workplace, has a very strong position and enjoys a high level of confidence. About 50 per cent of all employees want the trade union to have more say as regards the workplace, while very few want to reduce the trade union's influence (less than 5 per cent).

Even when we distinguish between the trade union organisations (such as LO, TCO and SACO) it can be seen that the vast majority believe that the trade union's influence should increase or stay the same, while a small proportion believe it should be reduced.

CONCLUSION:

Elected trade union representatives and ordinary members are of the same opinion as to which areas are to be given priority in the trade union work, but the commitment to some questions varies in strength. An example is trade union co-operation in Europe, where the active trade union members seem to be ahead of the ordinary members. The elected representatives in the local trade unions enjoy a high level of confidence among the members – the employees think that the elected representatives carry out their duties well. It is also an expression of confidence that may would like to see the trade union organisation have more to say as regards the workplace, while very few want to reduce the influence of the trade union.



CHAPTER 7

Basic education, adult education and culture

Areas which in several ways have close connections with several of the criteria discussed in the report, especially those concerning ideology and creation of opinion, are education and culture.

Since the earliest days of the trade union movement there has been a clear understanding that *education* must occupy a very prominent position among trade union tasks. This has been true of both exercising influence over education policy and offering the members the training they need for carrying out their trade union assignments.

The fact that the members are still of the same opinion today is made very clear in the large interview survey "Opinions on the union and work". The possibility of attending courses is emphasised as an important part of trade union membership and it is regarded as being an important trade union task to ensure that the members are given training at work.

Adult education, in Sweden usually called "Education for the people", has been particularly important in trade union activities. The People's High Schools and study circles figure mainly here. The public libraries should also be mentioned in this context.

"...education must occupy a very prominent position among trade union tasks"

“The People’s High Schools” can best be described in the Nordic tradition of adult education as a free school form for all adult citizens, who take their life experiences as a basis for further studies. (Bernt Gustavsson: “Folkbildningens idé-historia” – The history of ideas regarding popular education.). The People’s High Schools have given a very large number of members of LO affiliates important knowledge and experience. LO and its affiliates still own and run several People’s High Schools.

The study circle is another form of study which allows the exchange of experiences. The first adult education association, ABF (the Workers’ Educational Association) was created in 1912 and has had a great impact on popular education and trade union work.

What is regarded as particularly important in adult education is the critical angle – not immediately taking the authorities’ assertions for granted, daring to believe in your own experience and trusting your own judgement.

Access to words, language, images, music – and other forms of expression which culture has to offer – have always been important in the trade union struggle. This was already realised by the early trade union movement.

“...the form of education we usually call “education for the people” has been particularly important in trade union activities”

Culture provides opportunities to learn and experience – acquire new knowledge, skills and sensations. It provides the opportunity to communicate what you want to say to others. It provides opportunities to reach new groups.

It gives increased self-confidence, which also means that a person dares to question things and follow new lines of thought. It provides the opportunity to learn one’s history and carry on traditions.

If culture is left to the mercy of the market and commercialism, the trade union and political labour movement's patient and long-term work for equality and equal treatment will not be worth much.

Let us consider what view of humanity is being expressed in the arena where important parts of mass culture are communicated – in television, newspapers and advertisements

Should we allow commercial media moguls to be the major bearers of culture – who at home in our living rooms, not least among children and young people, persistently graft in values which say that everything can be bought with money, that some people are worth more than others, that it is all right to feel contempt for things concerning justice and equal rights etc?

“...access to words, language, images, music – and other forms of expression which culture has to offer – have always been important in the trade union struggle”

Unless the trade union and political labour movement involves itself in cultural issues better than it has in the past we will be hopelessly lost in the fight for a society which reflects our basic values: human equality, solidarity (the practical meaning of which is “equals helping and supporting equals”) and respect for each others' opinions.

CONCLUSION:

Education in the broadest sense and culture are important components of trade union work.

Index

with page reference

- Collective enrolment 17–18
- Elected trade union representatives
 - contact with the members 44–49
 - members' confidence 50–53
 - number of people 37–44
 - total number of assignments 37–41, 44
- Foundation of LO 15
- General Council 23
- Growth of the trade union movement 7–9, 15–18
- International trade union co-operation 9–13
- Cross-union activities 9, 22–24
- LO Congress 8, 23
- LO Districts and LO Sections 22–25
- LO Executive Council 23
- Membership statistics (affiliates of LO, TCO and SACO) 34–35, appendix
- People's movement – criteria for 4–5
- Rules and Constitution 19
- Trade union – political co-operation 17–18
- Trade union branches 7, 15–16, 23, appendix
- Trade union clubs/sections 8–9, 22, 23
- Trade union meetings
 - number of members who participate 44–49
- Unionisation rate 27–35

Appendix: Number of members in the various affiliates of LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation), TCO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) and SACO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations). December 31, 2003.

LO		TCO		SACO	
Swedish Municipal workers Union	586 569	Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employers in Industry, SIF	365 990	Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers	98 655
Swedish Metallworkers Union	379 051	Swedish Teachers Union	225 951	National Union of Teachers in Sweden	79 960
Swedish Commercial Employers Union	168 693	Swedish Union of Local Government Officers	176 948	Swedish Federation of Lawyers Social Scientists and Economists	66 208
Swedish Union for Service and Communication	161 325	Union of Commercial Salaried Employers, HTF	168 733	Swedish Association of Graduates in Social Science, Personnel and Public Administration, Economics and Social Work	45 221
Swedish Building Workers Union	130 206	Swedish Association of Health Officers, SHSTF	111 511	Swedish Medical Association	37 304
Swedish Industrial Union	87 543	Union of Civil Servants	96 883	Swedish Association of Graduates in Business Administration and Economics	35 791
Swedish Transport Workers Union	72 034	Union of Financial Sector Employers	41 389	The DIK Association	20 132
Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union	58 272	Union of Swedish Policemen	21 063	Swedish Association of University Teachers	19 835
Forest and Wood Workers Union	55 499	Swedish Union of Journalists	18 456	Officers Association of Sweden	18 041
Swedish Food Workers Union	51 827	Union of Insurance Employers	15 647	Swedish Association of Scientists	16 783
Swedish Building Maintenance Workers Union	39 152	Swedish Union of Theatrical Employers	8 733	Swedish Association of Engineers	14 214
Swedish Graphic Workers Union	29 504	Union of Civilian Employers in the Defence Forces	6 961	Swedish Association of Registered Physiotherapists	11 576
Swedish Electricians Union	26 637	Union of Chemist's Employers	7 315	SACOs General Group	11 424
Swedish Paper Workers Union	24 591	Swedish Union of Customs and Coast Guard Officers	4 249	Swedish Union of Architects, Interior Designers and Landscape Architects	9 397
Swedish Painters Union	17 758	Swedish Union of People's High School Teachers	2 278	Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists	9 302
Swedish Musicians Union	3 474	Professional Musicians, symf	2 193	Swedish Dental Association	9 202
		Association of Forestal and Agricultural Employers	1 225	Swedish Physiological Association	8 034
		Union of Scientists and Researchers, DoFF	450	Swedish Association of Graduates in Agricultural, Horticultural, Forestry and Nutrition Sciences	7 916
				Swedish Pharmaceutical Association	7 514
				Swedish Association of Headteachers	7 270
				Association of Church of Sweden Employers	5 448
				Swedish Railway Officers Association	4 453
				Reserve Officers Association of Sweden	4 251
				Swedish Mercantile Marine Officers Association	3 854
				Swedish Veterinary Association	2 388
				Swedish Association of Masters in Forestry	2 102
Total	1 892 135	Total	1 275 975	Total	556 275



WHAT EXACTLY IS A PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT and how can we describe the trade unions out of the perspective of a people's movement? This is the main subject that this report deals with.

At all times, the fundamental motive for getting unionised has been the simple and obvious principle that “alone you are weak – together we are strong”. Many people, united, can push for the common interests in a far better way than someone standing alone. This principle runs all through this report.

Over 16 out of 20 employees in Sweden are trade union members. The trade union movement is with its over 3.7 million members and nearly 400,000 elected trade union representatives the outstandingly largest people's movement in Sweden.

This report describes the development of the Swedish trade union movement and its democratic structure today. It also lists the affiliated unions and their membership figures. The subject index helps the reader to find the information desired.

www.lo.se

ISBN 91-566-2090-x