

**Speech by LO President Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson  
at the LO's 28th Congress on Sunday 19 June, 2016.**

**The spoken word applies**

Friends, Congress participants,

It's great to have a Congress!

It's great to meet friends from all over Sweden - and the whole world!

It's great to debate, to vote and to discuss late into the night!

So many thanks to all of you active and audacious union representatives.

Keep it up!

It reminds us of who decides at the LO.

Because it's not me or the other leaders that do that.

It's not the Board.

And it's not the ombudsmen at the LO headquarters.

It's you and the other 399 elected representatives of one and a half million members.

At this time it's you who are the leadership of the largest national trade union organisation.

This is a congress for those who elected you.

For those who are not here.

A congress for those sitting in the check out at the Coop and Ica.

For those who wipe snotty noses at preschool.

For those who make cars, drive lorries or fry hamburgers.

A congress for the men and women, young and old, born here or in another country,  
who grab their lunch boxes every morning and go off to work.

This is a congress for the workers of Sweden.

LO members of Sweden.

A congress for all those who continue to build the country.

It is their Sweden we come from.

And it is their Sweden we go back to tomorrow when we go our separate ways.

Today, there are those who say that some issues are too difficult to be settled by so-called ordinary people,  
and should therefore be left to the experts.

That is a crazy argument.

And it is just so wrong.

For there is a great deal of commitment in our country today.

The LO's members want to be part of the decision-making process.

They are both knowledgeable and wise.

This applies not least to young people.

That is why the work of the youth trade unionists is so important.

All you young representatives at this congress have demonstrated that. You are very good role models!

Stand proud!

Yes, that is how we should look at our members.

Not as those who should listen to us.

Who we should lead.

Instead of them we should listen to.

And who should lead us.

The basis of trade union work is always the individual member.

The LO members in Sweden can be described in many ways.

Often it is a dreary description, a story about all the problems that exist.

And that story is of course true. And important.

It's easy to list the injustices we must do something about.

They do exist and there are many of them.

But there is in actual fact another story about Sweden in 2016 that is equally true.

It reads as follows:

This year 51 000 more people go to work than in 2015.

Youth unemployment is the lowest it's been in 15 years.

Long-term unemployment is lower than in most other EU countries.

I can go on.

Sweden is now the EU's most competitive economy.

The employment rate is at a record level of 81.2 per cent, the highest in the whole of the EU.

During the first quarter this year we saw an increase in our GDP of over 4%, more than both Germany's and the UK's.

Last year, for example, Volvo hired over 2 000 new metalworkers.

They built 503 000 cars. Over half a million! It's a record!

The forest industry has researched new and exciting products, replacing water-thirsty cotton with climate-friendly materials.

2016 is on track to be the first year in a long time, when more jobs are moving to Sweden than from Sweden!

The skills, professionalism, knowledge and purchasing power of Swedish workers, makes companies want to come here!

But there's not much notice taken of this in the political debate.

The fact that the right-wing editorials and politicians are sulking is in itself not surprising.

I can understand that.

What's happening now is of course in such total contrast to the right wing's eight lost years.

But we too are sometimes a little too prone to depression.

Finding it a little too hard to see what we have nevertheless achieved.

And above all, what we can achieve. With trade union and political work.

Four years ago, I stood at this rostrum as the newly elected President of the LO.

I talked then about mass unemployment and the collapse of the social security system.

About how the large tax cuts undermined the Swedish model.

Four years can pass quickly, and I have begun to notice that the years pass more and more quickly the older you get.

But it can also feel like a long time.

And don't you agree that it feels like a long time since we were here last time?

Because a lot has happened!

Last time we met Sweden was ruled by Reinfeldt, Björklund, Löf and Hägglund.

And I remember that in my speech, I said that one of our main goals was to replace them.

And we did! Together we did just that!

We knocked on doors and handed out leaflets.

Organised meetings and fixed breakfasts.

Discussed politics with colleagues and neighbours.

And, not least, we made 225 000 phone calls to LO members!

We proved that change is possible. That it can be done.

Because it's not rocket science. It's about having the will,

It's about union and political willpower.

It is possible to change society, not just in Sweden!

When I as a young metalworker joined the union there was an iron curtain down the middle of Europe. Behind it our friends risked prison if they tried to form unions.

In Latin America military dictatorships were in power.

And in South Africa, Nelson Mandela was still a prisoner on Robben Island.

Today the communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe are gone,  
democratically elected governments are in power in most of Latin America  
and apartheid is history.

There have never before been so many countries with free trade unions as there is today.

I think it's good to keep that perspective in mind sometimes when things feel tough.

For we must remember that our trade union and political work can change the world.  
And has indeed done just that!

That is why the right-wing think tanks and economic powers dislike us so much.

They know that the trade union idea poses a threat to their power.

That we provide an alternative to a societal model built on divisions.

So now we say to all those who want to wreck the Swedish model, lower our wages and erode our collective agreements,

We say it out loud, once and for all:

Forget it!

For there are more of us than there are of you!

For we have the future on our side!

Another Sweden and another world is possible!

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Yes, friends, a trade union struggle at home is not enough if we are to succeed. Especially today, it is clear that no trade union matters are exclusively national.

That is why our fight for a social protocol in the EU, a fair TTIP agreement and fair conditions for those working at international sporting events is so important.

International solidarity is as old as the labour movement itself.

When our young union movement was forced out on strike in 1909 our strike funds received contributions from trade unions all over the world.

Some of these contributions came from Rhodesia, what is now called Zimbabwe. There, miners gathered money for their striking friends far up in the northern hemisphere.

Today, through Union to Union, we support the free trade union movement in Zimbabwe.

And here at the congress we are now collecting money for them, via the Palme Center.

Money that will go towards a bus in which they will be able to travel around and recruit new members.

On Monday the Board decided to contribute 250 000 Swedish crowns to start off the collection.

One of our fellow trade unionists from Zimbabwe, Mr Gideon Shoko, is with us here today.

He knows, and we know that we can never fight this battle alone.

Not without the community of fellow trade unionists in other countries.

The feeling that we belong to a global international political movement is a powerful one.

We are not an island. We do not live secluded. We are interdependent.

That is what international solidarity is all about.

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For all who work at Volvo, Ericsson, Astra or other large export companies globalisation is not just a word. It's harsh reality.

Remember the 80s and the 90s? How concerned we were that the jobs would move?

That we would be competed out of the market by low-wage countries?

Since then, a billion people have got their first jobs in developing countries.

More and more of them have reasonable wages.

Today, they are our new fellow trade unionists. But they are also at the same time Sweden's new customers.

They also want to buy Swedish products and services!

There are two ways to respond to globalisation.

Either you shut your eyes and pretend it doesn't exist.

Get bogged down in conservative opposition to the EU or nationalist protectionism.

Or you realise that the world is different today.

And you develop a strategy to meet it.

Personally, I am convinced that the Swedish trade union movement has chosen the right way forward.

Together, we have reached two key conclusions.

Firstly; we will not compete in the world market with lower wages, lower environmental standards and undermined trade union rights. We will invest in knowledge and quality.

The explanation is simple. The low-wage approach means giving up equity without winning anything.

Because we do not want to compete in terms of pay with Bulgaria and Malaysia. Or in the economic free zones in China.

That is why the Social Democrat-led government's investment in knowledge and education is so important.

Investing in knowledge and lifelong learning is part of an ideological project to lift Sweden into the future knowledge society.

If we don't do this, we'll pay a high price:

growing gaps between the classes, poorer welfare and loss of competitiveness.

The second conclusion is that we must strengthen our union work in the international arena.

It's now 168 years ago since Karl Marx wrote his classic words: "Proletarians of all countries - unite".

But those who have been best at doing so are our counterparts.

For a long time now big business has been working regardless of national borders.

We must do likewise!

And for that reason, we will continue to work for a social Europe.

And for that reason, we will lift the minimum levels of trade union rights.

And for that reason, we will ensure that Sweden ratifies the ILO Forced Labour Convention!

We must prevent companies from playing countries against each other in a constant downward spiral.

With lower production costs by keeping workers' wages down.

We say: by all means open borders and free movement, but first decent working conditions!

Let us not forget that despite everything, we have been pretty successful.

Some days after the election, I proposed to Stefan Löfven that he and I should invite the Social Democrats and the LO in Germany and Austria to a joint meeting.

On December 13, Lucia, we met at Bommersvik.

There, we signed an agreement to ensure that the EU has a social protocol.

Consequently, today the labour movement in countries with a total of 130 million inhabitants is behind that demand. Instead of the labour movement in one country of ten million inhabitants.

And do you know what? Now there are more who to be a part of our cooperation for a social protocol!

Our demand is simple:

Workers' rights should not be subordinated to the freedom of movement.

On the contrary, they should take precedence.

The Laval decision must be reversed!

And in Sweden, Swedish collective agreements apply!

Nothing else will do!

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Congress participants,

Our times are in many ways intimidating.

In the United States a vulgar right-wing populist is now a presidential candidate.

In Russia, Putin is acting more and more like an authoritarian nationalist leader.

Throughout Europe, xenophobia and racism are on the rise.

And in our country a party that was formed by former Nazis is now the third largest in our parliament.

Over 40 years ago, in 1972, the Danish Social Democratic Prime Minister Jens Otto Kragh lost the national election.

The winner was one of post war's first right-wing populists, Moogens Glistrup.

Kragh called the historic loss "voters' revenge".

He pointed to the labour movement's inability to capture and understand the mood of the times.

His advice was:

Do not chase after the populists and their voters by adapting your politics to them.

Listen instead to the questions people are asking.

Identify the underlying problems people are experiencing, the ones the populists are exploiting.

And solve these problems.

So what are the issues of our time?

What is it that is worrying people in Sweden today?

What are the problems we need to solve?

First and foremost, it's about jobs.

As it has always been for us.

Full employment was the labour movement's most important task 100 years ago.

It is the most important task of this congress.

And it is going to be our most important task in the next 100 years.

It really goes without saying.

Work forms the foundation of our common welfare.

It is the foundation of our growth

and therefore of our ability to create a fair society.

Every human being is a resource, and every hour worked is an asset.

Every human being has the right to use the working capacity they have.

Every human being has the right to earn a living and to contribute to the workplace based on their capacity and conditions.

For us in the trade union, unemployment is also of special significance.

It is all about power in the labour market.

When there is a shortage of jobs workers are forced to accept the jobs available, on the terms the employer offers.

Employers' power is strengthened; our demands face tougher resistance, many are forced to remain silent and accept.

With the spread of unemployment, misery increased on the Swedish labour market.

With unemployment piecework has returned, with text message jobs, insecure part-time and black market employed asylum seekers toiling for slave wages, in abysmal working conditions.

With their failed jobs policies the right wing pushed back wage earners and increased inequality.

But we must also be self-critical.

Even when the labour movement was in power, people were rejected in the labour market.

We did not reach the goal of full employment.

During the four years that have passed, we have carried out one of the largest trade union investigative projects ever.

It has resulted in the congress report we are now to decide upon; full employment and fair wages.

Together we can now ensure that it becomes a reality.

We must once and for all do away with the ideas that have characterised political and economic thinking since the crisis of the 1990s.

We must leave neo-liberalism behind us.

For unemployment is not combated by spending cuts and tax cuts.

Unemployment is combated by investments, by education and by active labour market policies.

The labour movement already knew this 100 years ago.

It is time to take that knowledge into the future!

The fight for full employment requires more politics, not less.

It's when politics capitulate that people sit silently at the kitchen table because their jobs have disappeared.

So don't believe those who say that we can't afford to invest, that economic policy should be managed by the Riksbank alone, that labour market policy measures are in the way of market and that tax cuts are enough.

We now see how the whole economic policy debate has changed, both in Sweden and worldwide.

The other week even the International Monetary Fund, the IMF, declared that neoliberalism doesn't work.

In the EU there is growing criticism of austerity.

More and more people realise that it only worsened the crisis.

And here in Sweden, we now have a government that is investing in jobs,

in welfare, and in the infrastructure and education.

At long last the ceiling on unemployment benefits has been raised.

Because there is a difference between 680 crowns and 910 crowns a day.

That makes more than 5 000 Swedish crowns per month.

And in the spring budget, ten billion crowns have been earmarked for welfare. Every year!

At last, more can be employed in childcare!

At last, staffing can increase in elderly care!

At last, healthcare can hire new nursing assistants ó for better wages!

And some say there's no difference in the politics!

The goal we set in our Congress report of at least an 85 per cent employment rate is actually on its way to becoming a reality.

Something no one thought possible just a few years ago.

No one except those of us in the trade union movement.

And as usual, we were right!

Other politics are possible!

Full employment is possible!

Nothing else will do!

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Now moving on.

The four years to come before the next Congress will be about greater equality.

Let me start with a quote:

“The LO has a duty to protect the interests of workers.”

“The task is based on the fundamental vision of the equal value and rights of all people.”

This is taken from our statutes.

It is on these two sentences the whole of our movement is based.

It is on these indisputable words that all the discussions we have had these days depend.

Everything we have voted on, all the discussions we have had

about risk capital and export promotion,

validation and employment margins,

innovations and start ups,

It’s all about this.

It’s about people’s equal worth and rights.

The main ideological divide between the right and the left is exactly here.

We are convinced that it is possible to build a society where everyone has a job,

where all pupils are engaged and inquisitive at school

and where all people, regardless of background have the power to shape their lives.

Our opponents believe that this is just a dream.

A malicious pipe dream that hinders development and market forces.

In the right wing’s dreams of the future some people must be sacrificed along the way.

Everybody can’t get equal pay, that would threaten the economy.

Everybody can't get good unemployment insurance, because then they won't make an effort!

All pupils can't succeed at school, some of us aren't talented enough.

And it's not the end of the world, they say.

For even if only a few succeed their wealth will trickle down.

Also to those who have not been as successful.

This theory has many fine and complicated names among neoliberal economists.

But the American economist John Kenneth Galbraith gave it a better name:

“Horseshit” theory.

The theory is that if the horses get a lot of hay they won't have the energy to digest all the grain.

So they'll pass them out at the other end, down onto the ground.

And so that will leave grain for the sparrows.

Simple isn't it?

The theory may work.

For horses and sparrows.

But as a theory for society, it has two failings:

It leads to increased class differences.

And it doesn't work at all.

Have you thought about the fact that the right wing and the employers rarely talk about equality?

They have stolen many of our concepts but not the word “equality”.

They can use the word “fairness”.

It can mean basically anything depending on the starting point.

A right-wing politician can, for example, say that greater wage differentials are fair.

But he can't say that they create equality.

The right wing has always seen life as a race and society as a racetrack.

Certainly, everyone shall get to stand on the same starting line.

But then the race itself - and life - will take its course.

Someone is going to reach the finishing line before everyone else. And some won't finish at all.

What, they say? Everyone got the same start?

But for us, life is not a race  
and society is not a race track.

An equal start in life is naturally the foundation of equality.

But the right wing's perspective on equality stops there.

We don't think that's good enough.

Because in every generation there are people who need a second and a third chance to reach their goals.

Therefore, not only the start but also the result of the 'race' must become more equal. Using trade union and political means.

This is what our trade union equality work is all about.

This is what we will be discussing over the next four years.

We'll sharpen our arguments, increase our knowledge and strengthen our organisation.

Because we will increase equality in Sweden.

If you read old congress speeches you can see that as we used to say that Sweden was the most equal country in the world.

But we can't say that anymore.

Because today it's no longer the case.

All the other Nordic countries, as well as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belgium and Austria, have smaller income gaps than we have.

In Sweden, the economic gaps have increased more than in any other OECD country, both in terms of income and wealth.

A trend that has been on-going for several decades.

Capital income has become both larger and more concentrated.

The richest are getting richer.

At the same time poverty has increased.

Among other things, due to the erosion of our social insurance schemes and our pensions.

Do you know that if you travel an hour on the underground here in Stockholm, between Mörby and Sundbyberg, you will witness a six year difference in life expectancy?

That's as much as the difference between Sweden and Albania.

If you take the tram in Gothenburg from Långedrag to Bergsjön, the difference in life expectancy is nine years.

And it's the same if you travel from the wealthy Stockholm suburb of Danderyd up to Pajala.

It's as great as the difference between Sweden and Egypt.

Inequality has many dimensions.

It's about class, it's about gender, and it is about ethnicity.

Often all three factors are in place at the same time.

Women are systematically subordinated to men in the labour market.

Last spring, we presented our annual Equality Barometer.

There, we showed that in 2014, women's earnings were three quarters of those of men.

The actual wage for women in LO professions is on average 17 860 Swedish crowns before tax.

That is 73 per cent of working men's actual monthly salary of 24 460 Swedish crowns.

The lowest wages are to be found among women in predominantly female occupations.

The actual monthly salary for women working in retail and hotel and restaurant is just below 16 000. Before tax!

Women are not low paid in Sweden,  
friends, they are wrongly paid.

And when we take into account both class and gender, we get a clear picture of the dramatic gaps between different professions in Sweden today.

Men in white-collar occupations, have an average of 21 800 Swedish crowns more in actual monthly salary than women in workers' occupations, that is more than twice as much!

Of course we cannot accept this!

The pay gap between women and men is one of our greatest sources of shame!

We are a feminist organisation!

So this must be one of our very top priorities.

Valuing the work of women less than that of men is not just out of date  
It's primeval! It should be a topic for archaeologists!

The gap between men's and women's wages must be closed!  
This must be one of our main goals, today and for the foreseeable future.

We will ensure that it will be so,

Not only for the sake of the women  
But also for the sake of the man.

Because everyone benefits from an equal society.  
That's trade union feminism friends!

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Equality is also about ethnicity.

In recent years, an old poison has started to spread in our society again.  
Like an old virus we thought was extinct but which has returned to plague us again:

Racism.

The totally sick idea that people should be divided according to the colour of their  
skin and their ethnic background.

We in the trade union are not without experience of fighting racism.  
It was we who took the fight against the Nazis in the 30s.  
And we have the strength to do it again.

Our trade union anti-racism is based on the oath already taken by the first trade unions.

I think you know it by heart:

öWe swear to never, ever, under any circumstances, work under worse conditions or for lower wages than we have now promised each other.

We promise each other this in the profound insight that if we all keep this promise then the employer must meet our demands.ö

This oath applies to all of us, all over the world.

It is even mounted on a plaque in Chicago.

In Haymarket Square, where our May Day celebrations were born.

You don't believe me? Ask Tobias Baudin!

He was there last year and nailed it up himself! On the first of May.

The union oath is an oath of solidarity.

An attack against one of us is an attack on all of us.

No one can be excluded.

Every time someone is outside the community,  
every time someone is discriminated against,  
every time we allow workers to be set against workers  
- Then we are betraying the union oath.

Therefore, the fight against racism and xenophobia is a core trade union issue.

For me, anti-racism is an idea of a society in which different people, cultures and ideas are discussed and ventilated.

And in which all our differences together contribute to a good home for us all.

You can call it multiculturalism.

You can call it co-existence.

You can call it a realisation that it is possible to live together.

It's not about some future paradise. It's about the here and now.

We can be different, we can think and feel differently.

But if we show respect and refrain from collective guilt  
we can prevent hatreds such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia,  
Afrophia and Romaphobia.

Our vision of the future then becomes a social mosaic full of people with different  
religions, languages and cultures.

I am convinced that Sweden will be both richer and more exciting thanks to this  
diversity.

In such a Sweden experience of another country's language and culture will be a  
merit.

Not a burden.

This is how it should be in school and at work.

This is how it should be in the trade unions.

But it's not,  
at least not always.

Why can't pupils who speak Persian get grades in their home language?

- to be able to show as evidence of additional knowledge.

Why it is not seen to be an obvious merit when recruiting new employees in elderly  
care and schools that the person speaks either Finnish or Serbo-Croatian?

And why is the fact that the LO is Sweden's largest immigrant organisation  
not reflected in those who are union representatives?

Antiracism is about the human freedom to be who one is,  
as long as it does not infringe on someone else's freedom.

And, last but not least, that no one receives worse treatment in the workplace or earns a lower wage because they come from another country.

Therefore, our answer to those who demand lower wages for our newly arrived friends is clear and self-evident:

Forget it!

So let us here and now, at the LO's 28th Congress, promise each other this:

We will never, ever, under any circumstances, sign a collective agreement providing lower pay or worse conditions for someone from another country.

In Sweden, equal pay for equal work!

Nothing else will do!

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Equality is not about everyone being the same.

It is about everyone's right to be who they are.

Let me tell you about Anders. An LO member I met a few years ago.

It was at my first Pride Festival as President of the LO.

“You are the President of the LO aren't you?” he said to me.

Yes, I replied, and wondered what was coming next.

“Well, I want to thank the trade union,” he said. And he told me that he had been on a course with his union, the Swedish Transport Workers Union. The course was about Everyone can do something.

There they had talked about the union pledge. That in the union, no one will be left out.

“On that course, I realised that I counted just as much as everyone else,” said Anders.

“So then and there I decided to come out as gay at my workplace. And my colleagues took it well,” he said. “They had had their suspicions.”

A moment later I saw Anders again, in the Pride parade, wearing a pink wig. He danced his way forward.

Time passed. A year later I was back at the Pride festival. Then I suddenly saw a very attractive-looking woman come walking towards me, in high heels and with a great hairstyle.

There was something familiar about her. Suddenly I remember.

Is it not you Anders, I said? We met a year ago?  
Yes, replied the woman. But now my name is Marie Claudette!

Friends,

Every person is unique. We are alike and different.  
But we all have the same value. In the trade union, in society, in politics.  
Anders and Marie Claudette. Me and you.

At the SSU Congress in August 2003, a month before her death, Anna Lindh summed up her ideology in a single sentence.

This is what she said:

“For me, both as a member of the SSU and today, the basic question is always that of equality of human dignity.”

Friends, it is that value that is attacked every time someone is oppressed.  
It is the value that is attacked every time someone is discriminated against.

And it was that value that was attacked in Orlando last weekend.

It is the same equality of human dignity that is the core of the union pledge they talked about on Marie Claudette’s course.

That you are worth as much, and have the same rights as others.

Whether you are male or female.

Whether your name is Karlsson or Mustafa. Or Marie Claudette.

Whether you are he, she or gender neutral.

Whether you are in a municipal workplace in Sweden  
or a gay club in Orlando.

This insight must be the foundation of the trade union movement.

We will never budge an inch from this.

For all people have equal value and equal rights!

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Congress participants,

Equality begins at school.

But is school a trade union issue, you might wonder?

Yes, of course it is a trade union issue. It is about the working class's children.  
And about future LO members.

School cannot be seen as a concern only for teachers, children and parents.  
School is a central social institution that concerns all citizens, the entire society.  
School is therefore so extremely important for LO's on-going work for increased equality.

It is often said that since the 90s, the Swedish school has undergone a freedom of choice revolution.

And choice is a good thing, isn't it? But what kind of freedom are we talking about?  
The freedom to choose a school, some would say.  
Certainly, but that is a narrow view. Freedom of choice is about much more than that.

The most important freedom of choice is the individual's freedom to shape their future and increase their choices throughout life.

The foundation of this freedom is laid in school. Therefore, school must be comparable and equal and compensate for the differences children carry with them from home, on the basis of, for instance, class.

If the school is marked by equality, then it should not make any difference who your parents are or what school you go to.

School should even out the differences between the children who have the worst and best backgrounds.

Under the Education Act, this is also the school's mission.

But it is no longer the case in Sweden.

Swedish schools do not fulfil their duties under the Education Act.

Do you think this sounds too dramatic? That I'm exaggerating?

Let me give you some facts:

According to the so-called PISA surveys, Sweden fell between 2000 and 2012 from a top ranking to the poorer half of the OECD countries, both in terms of equality and results.

In the latest PISA survey in 2012, this trend was reinforced.

According to the OECD there is a strong correlation between equality within the school system and the pupils' PISA results.

Striving for high levels of equality is therefore not incompatible with high academic achievement.

Instead, it is a prerequisite for high academic achievement.

The pupils' background is what has the greatest impact on school results in our country today.

Are your parents poor, have they immigrated to Sweden, did they drop out of school, are they living on social security?

Well, then the chances of success in school are much less than if your parents are healthy, wealthy and well educated.

It has also become common that pupils with similar backgrounds go to the same school. A trend that has been driven by the freedom to choose school, but above all by the increase in residential segregation.

The situation has been made worse by the fact that many municipalities do not allocate resources according to the pupils' different abilities and needs.

Despite the fact that they are required to do so under the Education Act.

Those most affected by this are middle and low performers.

It is their performance that has deteriorated the most.

They are often the children of parents with less education and lower incomes, living in areas with low average income, whose schools the more high-performing pupils' parents have simply rejected.

They are the LO members' children. They are our children.

The protracted crisis within Swedish schools also coincides with the neoliberal experiment that we exposed our schools to.

A couple of years ago there were only two countries in the world that allowed private companies to operate tax-funded schools as regular business enterprises, and pocket the profits from their business.

They were Sweden and Chile.

Recently Chile's social democratic President Michelle Bachelet changed this. Chile's schools shall no longer be regarded as just another product in a free market. So now, Sweden is alone in the world when it comes to accepting profit hunting in school.

Last week the newspaper Dagens Industri had the following headlines on its front page:

• This is how you invest in Swedish schools:

• 180 billion in the kitty.

• Ridiculously good price for Academedia.

Acadamedia is the private school company that is now going to be listed on the stock exchange.

Our vocational schools have been particularly hard hit by this marketing.

Take for example the venture capital owned JB Group.

Two years ago it went bankrupt.

Then there were 11 000 pupils in the company's 35 schools around the country, 8 000 were due to continue that autumn.

But they were suddenly without a school to go to.

And 1 700 employees lost their jobs.

Things went better for JB Group's CEO.

After the bankruptcy, he bought a bottle of fine wine for 800 crowns and posted it on Facebook under the heading "Because I'm worth it".

Or take one of Sweden's leading independent school groups, the Thoren Group.

They operate 21 vocational schools throughout Sweden.

The Thor Group has received sharp criticism from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate and is now threatened with a 2.7 million Swedish crown penalty if they don't promptly fix the serious shortcomings.

The Thor Group's list of irregularities is long:

Quality work deficiencies as well as access to student health and school libraries.

At their vocational upper secondary school in Huddinge only one in four pupils achieved pass grades in all subjects.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate has also criticised the independent school Practical Sweden AB for quite some time, it is Sweden's largest player in the field of upper secondary apprenticeship education.

Two years ago the Swedish School Inspectorate condemned the whole group. One of the schools was closed with immediate effect.

Throughout the autumn penalty threats against the group's schools were widespread.

As many as 10 of the 35 surveyed schools were regarded as having such serious flaws that the state threatened them with fines.

The newspaper Byggnadsarbetaren (the Construction Worker) has examined independent upper secondary schools and reports about the devastating criticism from both pupils and staff:

Teachers without professional experience.

Inadequate training facilities.

Insufficient building materials.

Too few work placements.

One student tells the magazine how they recycled cans to raise money for electrical equipment. And how students without work placements spent their days playing on their mobiles.

“The owners just want to make money”, as one student put it.

Since 2011 the Swedish School Inspectorate has made a total of 119 decisions regarding financial penalties against schools. Independent schools are heavily over-represented.

One wonders: how long will it take before someone responsible will put an end to this madness?

Even the right wing parties' colleagues in the rest of the world have understood that school is not just any other product on the market.

Why can they not listen to their party friends in Denmark, Norway and Finland?

Not even Thatcher and Reagan were prepared to go as far as Sweden has done.

And it is not surprising that we are alone in this experiment.

For profit hunting in schools contributes to segregation and to lower quality.  
School companies want to make money by attracting the least demanding students.  
And by reducing the cost of staff, premises and equipment.

So we have the facts:

Knowledge gaps are growing. The level of knowledge is falling.

We know what that means for every single child who cannot make it at school.  
We know what it means for us as a society.

Children have to have more time with their teacher,  
Irrespective of whether they have fallen behind or want to run ahead.

If they need help with their homework their parents should not have to buy it.  
Help with homework should be given to everyone, not just to those who can pay.

Let us ensure that our children get as much as possible of that knowledge during the school day?

Every child must get help no matter where they live, because we will give the greatest support to the schools with the greatest challenges.

We need to invest in our schools and in education. We need to invest in our teachers.  
We need to invest in our children's after school activities.

Enhance learning throughout the school day.  
Create smaller classes and give teachers more time with each pupil.  
And let's put a stop to profit hunting!

There is no doubt that freedom of choice as it is designed today reinforces segregation and differences between schools.

We simply have to have the courage to review how the rules are designed.

Nor must it be ok for independent schools to establish themselves in a municipality simply because a venture capital company wants to do so.

Our elected representatives must be able to say no. We need a municipal veto.

None one can be bothered to say the truth!

We can't just stand by and watch how the children of the working class are betrayed by a school that doesn't even comply with the Education Act!

We need to clean up the Swedish school!

Clean up the swamp of market control, school vouchers and privatisation.

It's enough now!

It needs a conscious effort to raise the quality of knowledge and to ensure equality. It's urgent!

The boat is sinking! One investigation after another has been presented. But they're only discussing the varnish! It's the boat that needs fixing!

Friends, our Swedish School cannot be a neo-liberal experiment.

It is time to reverse the trend in our Swedish school!

Nothing else will do!

\* \* \*

Friends, congress participants,

Society and the world changes, new ideas and movements arise,  
and we must of course move with the times and with what is happening in our world.

But there is one thing that never changes.  
That has existed in all times,  
that applies today and that will apply into eternity:

If you want to improve your conditions,  
change your workplace and change the world  
- You have to organise yourself.

It was no coincidence that Joe Hill's last words were these:  
"Do not mourn, organise yourselves!"

It is absolutely crucial that we are successful in our organising ourselves  
if we are to succeed in all other areas.

We have to grow.  
There has to be more of us.

More organised.  
More to ensure that what we do together matters.

Here we must work together.  
Because the Electrical Workers Union gets stronger when the Hotel and Restaurant  
Union grows.  
The Metal Workers Union gets stronger when the Commercial Employees Union  
grows.  
The Construction Workers Union gets stronger when the Musicians Union grows.

And so on. The connections look the same for all of us.

If we manage to encourage more to join us this will not only increase our ability to ensure that our members get higher real wages and better working conditions.

Our organisation will also be stronger.

And when our organisation is stronger then the individual members will also be stronger.

This will increase our power, not only against the employers, but also the power to influence the entire society, so that it benefits the LO's members.

We have to dare to give more young people the opportunity to take on positions of responsibility!  
And more foreign born people as well!

We must become better at giving them the training they need, helping them grow in their role.

We must strengthen the local trade union presence.  
Strengthen our local trade union training.

It's work that is already underway.  
But we can do more, we can be even better.

And it feels good to be able to say:  
In 2015, we increased our membership.

For the first time since 1993 we have more LO members.  
This is something to be proud of. We have turned the tide.

What is fantastic about trade unions is that we represent ourselves.

So we must also rise to this, and raise each other.

Through education and through organisation.

When as an 18-year-old I joined the Hammarstedts Brothers workshop in Vaxjo

I probably didn't know so much.

But at that time there were wise union leaders there.

That got me to go to meetings, to participate in workshops, to educate myself.

And, perhaps most importantly, that got me to start reading. Even fiction.

It is through union education that we can become a movement in our members' everyday lives.

The labour movement is a movement based on education.

I mentioned Gertrud Sigurdsen in my tribute on Friday. She passed away last year.

In one of her last interviews, she said this about her life:

“The labour movement has been my university.

What I have done has felt meaningful and important and it has given me strength.”

Friends, can we have a better goal in our trade union education?

\* \* \*

Our reformist trade union and political work can sometimes be frustrating.

We want so badly to do a lot as quickly as possible.

But that's not how trade union work functions. Revolutions have never been anything for us.

Real and lasting change takes time.

But it is the only road that leads us permanently forward.

We'll take it step by step. We set goals along the way.

Provisional utopias.

Or as Karin Boye put it:

öYes, there is goal and meaning in our path -  
but it's the way that is the labour's worth.

The best goal is a night-long rest,  
fire lit, and bread broken in hasteö.

õIn motionö is the name of the poem.

Yes, friends, finished, we will never be. Some tasks are eternal.

This is often misunderstood. We are called visionless.

But we don't need to have any predetermined utopian goals to move forward.

The image of the finished Utopia can be found in the dream worlds of neo-liberalism  
and communism.

Not in ours.

We are constantly building and moving on.

And now we will continue to build our Swedish model,  
with equality and full employment.

And we will do so in union-political cooperation between LO and the Social  
Democrats.

There are few things that annoy the right wing as much as this collaboration.

They don't know how it works.

They really have no idea what the labour movement is.

They have never understood that the trade union-political cooperation is linked together in practical work, with strong ideological and emotional ties.

The foundation of the trade union-political cooperation is not that we pay money to the party.

It's not about the government and the LO leadership having dinner together.

And it's not about joint debates in the newspapers.

It's about our one and a half million members.

Because we have an agreement between the trade union movement and the Social Democratic Party.

An agreement based on mutual ties and mutual trust.

An agreement we once signed in order to gain influence outside the workplace.

In the members' everyday lives.

An agreement with the only political force that has the ability and strength to implement a policy that is in the interest of our members.

And, friends, we intend to keep that agreement!

Because a strong trade union movement needs a strong social democratic workers' party.

A strong social democracy requires a strong trade union movement.

And it is only together, in union-political cooperation that we can now move forward in our societal change for democracy, work and justice.

\* \* \*

In recent years we have been subjected to an experiment.

We have seen class divisions grow and misery grow and spread in the labour market.

We are tired of this.

We are tired of rising inequality.

We are tired of the kind of freedom that can only benefit the venture capitalists,  
and we are tired of text message jobs and precarious employment.

So when we meet here again in four yearsøtime, we will have changed this.

In four yearsøtime, we will have reversed the trend in Swedish schools.

In four yearsøtime, Sweden will be a country in which the gap is narrowing  
and which is moving towards greater equality!

For now, we are moving on!

Or as Karin Boye concludes her poem:

öStrike camp, strike camp! The new day shows its light.  
Our great adventure has no end in sight!ö

Thank you!