

Summary

What happened to the Working Class?

Socialism is in trouble. Whether in Eastern Europe, China or anywhere else in the world socialist regimes are crumbling. Comparatively small popular movements directed against the existing regimes have suddenly grown formidably. Within weeks and days they have proved able to overturn structures which formerly seemed as unshakeable as solid Stalinist concrete.

The alternatives, however, appear rather vague. Apart from obvious demands for elementary human rights only few seem able to formulate more coherent visions of the kind of society which shall replace the fossilized systems. Certainly, some groups are seeking inspiration in the Scandinavian Socialdemocratic welfare states, praising the mixture of political pluralism, social security systems, and the balanced relationship between state and civil society in our countries.

Paradoxically, this happens at a point of time when the Scandinavian Socialdemocratic parties are ridden by crises, both in respect of popular support and in terms of alternatives to the neo-capitalist development in the Western World. Most Socialdemocrats vaguely realize the classical strategy for welfare neither holds the answer for the 90s nor the appeal to the voters.

Why is that so? The main theme of this Yearbook is the Danish working class and labour movement after 1945. We attempt to give some answers to the present crisis of the Left. The title indicates that, in our opinion, the basic explanations must be searched for in the revolutionary changes in the class structure and social relations from the mid 50s.

Nevertheless, Jens Hoff in his article about the structural development of the working class questions the assumptions about a direct causality between class structure and political development. To a much larger degree than earlier the future of the workers' parties will be determined on the political scene and it greatly depends on their ability to formulate the political agenda. – Jens Hoff discusses the various strategies for class analysis and the hypotheses about the connection between class fragmentation and political shift to the right within the working class.

It seems as if only the change of geographical center of gravity from the East to the West has had any political significance. In Jutland's new-

ly industrialized areas first generation workers are exposed to a considerable "petit-bourgeois cross pressure" and tend to support right wing programmes and parties to a much higher degree than the traditional strata. A second consequence of the geographical shift has been an enormous increase in the proportion of workers who own their houses. They are also inclined to support the Right.

The Socialist People's Party until now have based its policy upon a strict marxist class analysis. Erik Christensen, in his article "SF and the Future of the Labour movement" suggest that, confronted with the development of the 1980's and the challenges of the 90's this class theory will prove inadequate. If, however, SF rejects its former dogmas it will, necessarily, entail a revision of the party's strategy as a whole. Until now, it has been the aim to obtain a "workers' majority" together with the Socialdemocrats. SF, instead, ought to adopt a red-green strategy of its own brand, based on an alliance between some working class strata and the new social movements.

Considerations upon the importance of the class structural changes also dominates Tage Bilds reflections on the historical and present-day relationship between the Socialdemocratic party and the trade union movement. In the article "The Change of a Model for Cooperation" he stresses that the traditionally very close collaboration is growing increasingly complicated, most visibly in periods with Socialdemocratic governments. Two facts may account for this fact: first the extension of the Socialdemocratic base to a broad spectre of social strata, and second the division among the membership of the trade union movement in terms of party-adherence. In spite of an explosive growth in membership numbers, the TUC/LO seems become politically weakened. At the same time some of the national unions are beginning to act like political parties, adopting for instance programmes over a wide spectre of political issues.

For many years sociologists and socialists have discussed the impact of the transition from industrial mass-production to automatized production. Would it lead to greater harmony between workers and employers or would it rather induce the workers to demands of control over the production-process, or even produce some kind of anti capitalist consciousness. That is one of the main themes in Herman Knudsen's article "In Search of the New Working Class". Time after time reality has contradicted all easy theories about the connections between technological innovations and working class consciousness. For very good reasons Herman Knudsen warns us against any deterministic interpretations in

this respect. The development of political attitudes and consciousness has proved highly unpredictable.

Until recently all wage-labourers have agreed upon the demand for reduction of the working hours. Setting all other differences aside, the workers have rallied behind this demand ever since the beginnings of the international labour movement. Leisure time should compensate for the compulsion of wage labour. The demand has been supported by technological development, which allowed for reduction in working hours without reduction of the output of production. To day, however, all research demonstrates the paradox that new technology and reduced working time result in more hurry and stress for the families. Karin Borg shows this very clearly in her article "New Times". Earlier unemployment used to prevent any reduction of working time. This is no longer so. The trade unions demand a more even distribution of the work time and the employers yield to the demand on the condition that working hours become more flexible. New contents in the work tasks tend to lead to a strong identification with the jobs. In the future we may find a generation of workers who do not experience their leisure time as a positive contrast to work.

How, then, do the working class families spend their leisure time and how does the relationship between work and leisure influence the internal function within the families? Ena Hvidberg presents the result of a research project about family-life in a Copenhagen suburb in the article "Working Class Culture – Wage-labourer Way of Life-Middle Class Style of Life". Through interviews with families all rooted in traditional working class environments she tries to map out their way of life after they have moved to better houses and experienced a considerable increase of their material standards of living. The pattern of every-day life and culture has become extremely complex, mixing old values with (petit-) bourgeois norms. On this background it has become highly difficult to draw any certain conclusions about the attitudes towards political issues. This fact has proved to be one of the major problems for the labour movement in the last two decades and is certainly going to be the most serious challenge in the 1990's.

Beginning with this Yearbook, the editors have decided to reserve about one third of the pages for articles which have no direct connection with the main theme. This allows us to publish the results of Anne Løkkes research into "Dangerous Working Class Children" in Copenhagen 1906

to 1920. In 1905 all parties in Parliament agreed about the first act about children. As a consequence new Children's Boards were established empowered with the authority to remove children from their families, if necessary by force. The new Boards were meant to supplement private philanthropy and in practice their activities were directed against families from the lower strata of the working class who were unable to take of their children in a way which met the norms of the (petit)bourgeois governors.

Edward P. Thompson's "The Making of the English Working Class" is probably one of the most important historical texts published after 1945. Since it first appeared in 1963 it has represented a strong challenge and inspiration for all labour historians. Especially his concept of class as a relationship, not a structure or "thing" and of consciousness as a cultural as much as an economic creation has exerted a tremendous impact upon labour history writing. In many ways it achieved a status as the model for the "New Left" of the 60's with its rejection of petrified marxist concepts but nevertheless loyalty towards basic marxist theories.

Thompson's book, too, has been the object of constant controversy. In this Yearbook we publish Joan W. Scott's "Women in The Making of the English Working Class" in which she points towards a less noticed problem in Thompson's text: his treatment of women and their role in the Making of the Working Class. Rereading "The Making" Joan Scott is struck not by the absence of women in the narrative but by the "awkward way in which they figure there". Thus, the book has had the double function of being a precondition for a socialist-feminist history interpretation and at the same time representing a tradition which the women had to reckon it out with in the proces of formulating their history. Exemplified by recent feminist historical writing Joan Scott maintains both the necessecity and the possibility of uniting the dimensions of class and gender in labour history writing. Thus, she indicates a research-strategy which must find its way into the future research of working class and labour history.

The Editors