

## Summary

In December 1990 the Society for the Study of Labour History celebrated its 20th anniversary and we now publish the 20th issue of the Yearbook for Labour History. The Society was founded in a period characterized by intensely growing interest in labour history which, until then, had scarcely found its way to the traditional historical journals, let alone larger history books. Thus, there was a great demand for journals in which students might read about labour history and, eventually, publish their own works. The Society filled up a vacuum for professional and lay historians alike. During the 1970s other historical and social science journals adopted labour history, but, in the cold 1980s, the theme yielded to new fashions on the academic firmament. By now, the Society is the sole publisher of journals and books about labour history, and it seems more important than ever to continue this activity.

A closer look at the articles published in the yearbooks during the last 20 years clearly reveals the changes which labour history has undergone since 1970. The original approach was limited to the ideological and political development of the labour movement. Gradually, the interest moved towards the study of the working class, its social conditions and cultural expressions. In this process the studies tended to become more and more inspired by theories and methodologies developed in the social sciences and cultural studies.

In the early years, the chronological interest had been concentrated about the formative period of the labour movement. A few years ago, however, the various boards of the Society agreed upon a collective effort to give high priority to labour history after 1945, the immediate result of which were two seminars about »Consciousness and Politics after 1945« and »Class, Gender, Everyday Life, and Politics in the 1960s«. Furthermore, in the yearbook of 1989 we asked the question: »What Happened to the Working Class?« We made an attempt at explaining the political right-wing tendencies in the 1980s by examining the changes in class structure and social life. This year's theme follows up by focussing upon »The Trade Union Movement after 1945«, describing the imminent break-up of the movement.

The aim of the editors has been to point to some of the directions at which the labour movement seem to heading in the 1990s. Like most European trade union movements the Danish trade unions find themselves caught between traditions that are being outdated at an increasingly



rapid speed and the demand for reconsideration of both politico-economic targets and internal structures. New wage-owner groups have been knocking on the doors for many years, and the attitudes towards the State power (not to mention supra-national institutions).

In accordance with the decision last year we publish in this yearbook articles about a theme apart from the main theme. They are concentrated on various aspects of political exile and anti-fascist struggle in Denmark in the 1930s. The contributions represent some of the papers presented at the conference *Hitler-Exiles in Scandinavia* which in October 1989 was arranged in Copenhagen by the Labour Movement Archives in Scandinavia in collaboration with the Institute for Contemporary History, University of Copenhagen, the Institute for Danish and Foreign Languages, University-Center in Roskilde and the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

The aim of the conference was to present and discuss common and different tendencies the exile-policy, everyday life of the immigrants, and political and cultural aspects of exiles' situation. Moreover, the source-material and archive-situation was debated. The aim of comparison was only partly met, but the conference became a starting point for a future inter-Nordic research-project. A comprehensive report in German from the conference is in press. Nevertheless, we have decided to make the papers concerning Denmark accessible to a wider public in order to promote further research into the history of political immigration.

The section about the trade-union movement opens with a comprehensive survey by Steen Scheuer treating the questions of structure, membership, and the system of collective agreements in the labour market. Based upon the analysis of the trade-union structure since 1945, he asks what will happen in the future, and how can the structure be adapted to the main tasks of the trade unions, especially in connection with the negotiations about collective agreements? For decades the LO (TUC) have debated the structure of the trade union movement without visible results. Nevertheless, the average size of the national unions has increased considerably, at the same time as a great number of smaller unions, especially white-collar unions have emerged as a challenge to the monopoly of the LO in representing the interests of the labour force. This decentralization on the level of organizations during the 1950s and 60s seems to have furthered centralization at the level of collective agreements, placing the power of decision at the toplevel of the LO-hierarchy. This situation has changed in the 1980s where most of the biannual



rounds of negotiations have characterized by decentralization, placing great power in the hands of very few large national unions, f.i. the Metal Workers.

»White-collar Employees between Rank and Class« is the title of Ken Schoop's article about one of the most rapidly growing groups on the post-war labour market, taking the Teknisk Landsforbund as an example. He sets out to describe the technological, economic, and social almost revolutionary changes as part of the historical background for the problem that have confronted the technicians. Schoop points to the fact that the working and wage condition of these groups to an ever greater degree have come to resemble those of the traditional working class. The Teknisk Landsforbund now act as an ordinary trade union, but have, as yet, not joined the LO. Frictions between the various national unions have found a provisional solution through special agreements with f.i. the Metalworkers' union, The National Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees, and the Electricians' union.

Marianne Rostgaard in her article »The Trade Union Movement and the Technological Development« examines the debates and attitudes towards rationalization in the after-war period, taking as an example the shoe-industry in the 1950s. Generally, the trade unions did not oppose rationalization, but they introduced a sharp distinction between »good« and »bad« way to carry them out. Also, they tried to connect rationalization with the demand for industrial democracy. With no great success. Thus the role of the trade unions in this matter remained limited to securing the largest possible share and the productionsurplus. For the workers rationalization became associated with monotonous work and destruction of their health. Welfare became a compensation for the damages inflicted by the technological development.

From the mid-sixties the number of public employees exploded, and the public sector is now the largest area of employment in the Danish labour market. Therefore negotiations for collective agreements in this field have become of major importance. Simultaneously, the organizations have changed from being purely professional into proper trade unions, and their membership have gone through a remarkable radicalization. Jesper Due and Jørgen Steen Madsen in their article with the paradoxical titel »Centralised Decentralisation« examine the development of the system of collective agreements in the public sphere during the last 25 years. As a whole, the system has been characterized by centralisation. Recently, however, the center of gravity has moved towards local agreements and flexible wage-systems.



The significance of local wage-agreements in the private labour market is stressed by Flemming Ibsen. He argues convincingly that among the skilled workers more than 40% of the total wage-increases have been obtained by local negotiations. This runs contrary to the general opinion of a very centralised system of wage-agreements. It leaves the trade unions with some advantages in periods with massive state intervention in the wage-formation, but, on the other hand, it tends to leave the weaker groups, the women and the unskilled workers behind. No doubt, the system stresses the demands for more internal solidarity within the trade union movement.

Poul Jensen is a former chairman of the local branch of the National Union of the General Workers in the small town of Holmegaard. In his article he, very vividly, describes the many facets of trade unions activities in the local community. Holmegaard used to be a distinctly rural community, with one big exception, the Glass Works of Holmegaard, where the major portion of the union's membership found their occupation. Poul Jensen describes the need for an gradual professionalisation of the trade union leadership and the growing influence of the union in local matters. The union have obtained a great say in local school politics and organised the pensionists. At the same time the union have been very active in educating their own people as shopstewards and safety-representatives.

»Foreign and Worker« is the title of Malene Friis' article in which she treat the policy towards labour immigrant from third world countries (i.e. countries outside the EEC, Scandinavia, and the USA). When, in the late 60s, the immigration began both state authorities, employers, and trade unions acted with scant ad hoc measures dictated by the opposite attitudes taken by the parties. When the international crisis began to be felt in Denmark, there was put an end to immigration, but not until 1983 did Parliament adopt measures which secure equal rights for the immigrants and their families. Almost all parties have shown ambivalence in the question of assimilation versus respect for the various national cultures to which the immigrants belong. In 1988 the LO set up a committee, the task of which was to secure the position of the immigrants on the labour market and their integration into the trade union activities. In the future, immigration-policy will certainly become a matter of increasing concern for the EEC-authorities.

Anette Borchorst has brought together the presidents of the National Union of Women Workers, Lillian Knudsen, and the Danish Women's



Association, Lene Pind in order to discuss the questions of trade union, working hours and women's alliances. One crucial problem and a question of constant disagreement among women has been part-time work. It appears as if a consensus is emerging thus clearing the road to future cross-party alliances on specific women's issues. Until now, male trade unionist have tended to give the highest priority to wage increase whereas women favor specific issues concerning working hours and family policy.

In the final article Jens Lind focus upon the future of the trade union movement. The long term external pressure have been immensely stronger during the hey-day of liberalistic and right wing politicoideological tendencies in the 1980s. Both the demands of the »free« markets forces for flexibility and the rapid technological changes constitute serious challenges to the labour movement. Some trades will become superfluous; others will only survive in case they accept new structures of organization and forms of policy-making. Jens Lind argues that, despite the liberalistic government politics the trade unions have by and large maintained their traditional political influence. Maybe, the role of the trade union movement has not changed so much as a superficial look might indicate.

In the 1990s the trade union movement will probably have to realize that the most formidable challenges lie in the restructured international community. We intend to dedicate our next yearbook to these problems.

*The Editors*



