

## Summary

The last two decades have seen a growing interest in life at work as a field of research. Previous yearbooks have touched upon historical research into work-life as a theme, but not until now has it been treated as a theme in its own right. Both in Sweden and in Norway the Research Councils designated research into life at work a special field of priority in the 1980s, and in Sweden, the Committee for Historical Research into Life at Work introduced an extensive programme of research strategy in 1990 (cf. *Historisk tidsskrift* 1990, nr. 4). At the Nordic level, three conferences were held on the subject, the first one in August 1985 in Kungälv, Sweden, the second in Voss (Bergen), Norway in October 1986, and the third in Holmsund in Northern Sweden in June 1991. The papers delivered at these conferences are published in reports.

At the first conference mainly Swedish and Norwegian scholars participated and, therefore, attempts were made to involve scholars from Denmark, Finland, and Iceland more directly in the subsequent ones. In addition to problems of theory and method the conferences have taken up a number of central issues, e.g. work process and conditions at the work sites, co-determination issues, labour market developments, and the power relations between state, capital, and labour. Attempts were made to shed light on the way in which the processes of industrialisation in the different countries interact with and influence the social relations of manufacturing and other types of industry. Furthermore, attempts were made to identify special features of the structure of life at work in the Nordic countries. In order to strengthen a multi-disciplinary interest in work-life research, attempts have been made to have as many disciplines as possible represented: Anthropology, philosophy, history, the history of ideas, law, sociology, political science, and economics.

Even though historical work-life research, which has developed over a wide front since the late 1970s, has also made much progress in Denmark, we are, nevertheless, only beginning to open up an extensive field where much needs doing. However, it seems quite clear that whatever progress has been made, has only been achieved through inter-disciplinary cooperation including the setting up and testing new theories and methods and involving new types of source material in the analysis. Consequently it seems only natural to include a broad spectrum of disciplines among the contributions to the present yearbook on work-life.

The yearbook opens with a historiographical survey of the various re-



search fields under which work-life has been examined. In their survey article, Marianne Rostgaard and Anette Eklund Hansen define research into work-life as the line of research which taking its point of departure in work and the social relations at the places of work – deals with changes in working processes, changes in work organisation, and with the responses of workers to these changes.

Marianne Rostgaard and Anette Eklund Hansen subdivide the existing research in the history of work-life into four categories: Analyses of the history of the labour movement including the many anniversary papers of recent years; research into working-class culture; research into the role of women and gender together with industrial and technological history, including the many analyses of specific trades. With the shift of interest away from the history of the labour movement towards the living conditions of the working class, which began in the late 1970s, everyday-life, and thus work-life, increasingly became the centre of attention. These studies have contributed to elucidating the way in which developments in life at work have crucially influenced the changes in the policies, strategies, and ideology of the labour movement. In their criticism of the research made into working-class culture, Rostgaard and Eklund stress the problem of how to explain change. Whereas historians have taken a special interest in culture as a part and parcel of a process of change, cultural researchers have mainly focused on connections and totalities rather than on the contradictions and conflicts which generate changes.

The Swedish anthropologist Birgitta Skarin Frykman represents the working-class cultural point of view, and in her article about »Arbetarliv« (Working-class life) she applies the cultural perspective to work life. Her point of departure is the position that culture is a totality. On this basis she stresses the necessity of a *humanistic workers cultural* research aimed at comprehending working-class existence from a »working-class perspective«, based on a perception of the worker as a human and cultural being, and not just as labour. For this reason she disagrees with the limiting view taken by historical work-life research which only sees work as »wage labour«. She advocates the extension of the concept of work so as to encompass the entire complex of strategies, including wage labour and the labour movement, by which means workers of both sexes have striven to make a living. All the strategies employed for providing a living used by all the members of a family must be considered, i.e. a look must be taken at the contribution made by women and children to the upkeep



of the family and, very importantly, a look at the unpaid, but in terms of family upkeep indispensable, work carried out by women in and around the household.

Brigitta Skarin Frykman argues that *the provision of a livelihood* is a more useful point of departure for the study of working-class culture than wage labour. This approach would, for instance, go a long way towards softening the unfortunate distinction between work and care: as a job of providing a living for ones family, male wage labour is an expression of care, just as female care work is exactly that – work seen from the point of view of the woman doing it. This holistic perspective of working existence is reflected by several of the following articles in the yearbook.

In his article, Keld Dalsgaard Larsen surveys a number of approaches to life at the place of work on the basis of various groups of sources including memoirs and physical objects. According to Dalsgaard Larsen, memoirs are often the best – and only – sources to shed light on life at work when it comes to work processes, organisation of work, camaraderie, power structures, feelings of solidarity between the workers and the undertaking, etc. He states that memoirs are not »just subjective sources«, but source of a more general truth value. Indeed, when it comes to the description of a working process, memoirs come close to being »an 'objective' source«, is his assertion. Dalsgaard Larsen is critical of the trend noticeable in recent research to attach importance to the »total history« of the worker (the life situation in its entirety) because this trend has frequently overlooked important aspects of »life at the place of work«.

The point of departure taken by Dalsgaard Larsen is his critical attitude to Georg Nørregaards standard work »Arbejdsforhold indenfor dansk håndværk og industri« (1943) (Working Conditions in Danish Trade and Industry). Despite the fact that the work does examine a large number of themes related to »working conditions«, the conditions existing at the places of work are only dealt with superficially, and the working processes themselves are not examined at all. In other words, this research has dealt with working terms and conditions and not with life at work.

In her article on »Bryggeriarbejderliv« (Life of Brewery Workers), Margaret Nielsen stresses the importance of perceiving life at work as part and parcel of the complete life situation of workers. Unlike Dalsgaard Larsen she thinks that the paucity of source material is a major problem in researching the history of life at work. As far as she can see salvation lies in the »rich memoir material« full of descriptions of work



processes, work experiences, and work changes. She stresses that from the memoirs we get information for which there are no other sources, because – for one thing – they reproduce workers' perception of themselves. All this she illustrates by means of two accounts of the life of brewery workers in Århus during the first decade of this century, the autobiography of a women worker and a biography of a male brewery worker (a driver).

In their article on the mill community and life of the workers of Brede around 1900, the anthropologists Lykke Lafarque Pedersen and Niels Jul Nielsen analyse a very special workingclass community. It is the isolated mill community with its very good preconditions for a thoroughly systematised organisation of the entire mill community, complete paternalism, a system in which the mill owner involved himself in the lives of his workers with the interest of a benevolent father. The mill community constituted a »community within the community« with everyone belonging to the same extended family. The mill-owner exerted the authority of the patriarch, but also felt responsible for the wellbeing of his subordinates. He literally followed his workers with 'solicitude' from the cradle to the grave. The workers reciprocated this life-long protection with marked loyalty to their employer. However, on the other hand this paternalistic system also implied a curtailment of freedom and a sense of tutelage under the employer's supervision, his right to inflict corporal punishment and other sanctions. Finally, the concept of 'the loyal worker' is discussed.

It is characteristic of the »Projekt Arbejdslivets Historie i Vejle« (The History of Life at Work in Vejle Project) which Bente Munk and Poul Porskjær Poulsen describe that it was not originally conceived as the »history of a place of work« or the »history of an organisation«, but was intended to shed light on »the entire coherent life of the worker«: in his home, at the pub, in the soccer club, in the neighbourhood, etc. In their article, Munk and Poulsen tell us about the collection efforts which were going on under the auspices of the Town Archives of Vejle from 1987 to 1991, and they survey the activities and products engendered by the project. One of the cornerstones of the project was a collection of interviews, and linked to this a study circle was established in the course of the project. Here elderly workers invited about 25 of their workmates to give interviews about their places of work. 1989 saw the opening of the exhibition »Bomuldsbyen. Textilarbejder i Vejle gennem 100 år«, (Cotton Town. 100 Years of a Textile Worker's Life in Vejle), and in this connec-



tion the Archive published the book »Bomuldsbyen« (Cotton Town). A part-project was dedicated to the working-class neighbourhoods of the town, Vestbyen, (Western Town), and a film was made about the Vestbyen. The book »Arbejdernes kulturhistorie i Vejle« (the Cultural History of Workers in Vejle) and the exhibition »Arbejdsliv i Vejle« (Work-Life in Vejle) constituted the completion of the project. They both testify to the strong efforts made to include every-day life and life in the family in the picture.

The closest we come to the actual work processes is in the article written by the folklorist Karsten Biering on three video programmes concerning brick and tile production and the history of brickworks. Initially Biering gives an account of the birth of the »Teglværksfilmen« (The Brickworks Film), which is a new edition of an old silent film shot at Petersminde Brickworks in southern Funen in the 1930s. Then Biering goes on to tell us about two other films produced at the Centre for the Study of Working-Class Culture of the Copenhagen University; the film was intended as a follow-up of the old history of the brickworks. The two films, »Sten på Sten«, (One Stone upon Another) and »Min filosofi har været ikke at have for meget gæld« (It's been my philosophy never to let my debts grow) was made in 1992 at the brickworks Carl Matzens teglværk in Egersund. The former is a video on brick production today, and in the second video Carl Matzen tells us the history of the brickworks from its foundation in 1750 and up till today. Between them the three videos show the development from the virtually manual manufacturing of bricks to the modern industrialised mode. At the same time they are an illustration of some of the ways in which we can tell the history of life at work.

How are museums to present the history of life at work? This question is raised by Annette Vasström of the Workers' Museum in her article on the efforts to preserve our industrial cultural heritage. She surveys a number of examples of how industrial museums in Europe and the USA have contributed to the maintenance of various industrial environments, how they have documented the efforts, and how they have made the history of work come alive. In this connection she expounds on a number of harbour site projects and briefly mentions Danish museums which collect and present information on the industrial culture. None of these, however, as its main objective tries to make life at work and the working conditions under industrialised modes of production into the central issue. At the end of her article she describes »The Museum Cen-



tre at the Dock Island« – a new museum concept, which not only aims at maintaining the historically unique Naval Shipyard, but also at illustrating life at work by means of a number of activities: Workshops at work, exhibitions, roleplaying, and high tech audio-visual shows.

In which ways did the industrial development impact on the work of skilled metal workers, and how did they perceive industrialisation? These are the main themes of Knud Knudsen's article on the trends in developments during the period from the 1890s to the time around World War II. As his point of departure Knud Knudsen takes the images which have evolved of the skilled metalworkers as the bearers of the conservative craft tradition in the trade union movement. He questions the tenability of seeing the skilled metalworker as the artisan who, full of pride in his trade, carried on the guild traditions of the old, pretrade-union craft. He answers his own question in the negative: There is no basis for believing that skilled metalworkers in particular represent a handed-down guild tradition or to suspect them of being the bearers of conservative attitudes in trade union issues. Knudsen also takes up the Braverman thesis on the degradation of work which does not seem to fit the engineering industry and the work carried out by metalworkers very well. There is no reason to see »the old days« as »a golden era« with more varied and skilled types of work. It is very difficult to maintain the concept of highly qualified skilled work which, as a result of industrialisation, declined into monotonous, trivial work. Nothing of what happened at the places where skilled metalworkers worked before W.W. I, seems unequivocally to point to a decline in the qualification required for their work.

To this day, metalwork is seen as an extremely »masculine« line of work. The division of labour between men and women has meant that certain trades have been perceived as trades for women and others as trades for men. Despite the fact that history has seen some examples of a trade changing its sex, it has proven exceedingly difficult to change the sex of a trade once it has been established. One problem is, of course, that the so-called women occupations frequently enjoy a lower status than the occupations in which men predominate.

In her article Lisbeth Jensen, who is a trade union consultant working in the field of equal treatment of men and women, tries to pinpoint the factors which connect sex and work. The division of labour conditional upon sex is not a result of free choices made by men and women, but in reality men and women have different opportunities and conditions in a labour market divided by sex. Lisbeth Jensen explains how sex identity



and people's perceptions of masculinity and femininity play an important role in the labour market. Some jobs are more characterised by sex than others, and in this connection the culture of the labour market, »the culture of the trade«, codetermines whether the worker feels at ease or alienated in a given trade or at a given place of work. In the opinion of the author, the difficulties in demolishing the division of labour by sex are very much due to our great need of a sex identity together with the continued close linkage between our work and our sex identity.

The fact that working life in itself has undergone a considerable internationalisation in the post-war period is a good reason for taking the international angle in research very seriously. Furthermore, the increased economic strength of countries in East and Southeast Asia has increased the need for research of a cultural comparative nature. Japan, for one, has developed new powerful industrialisation models, management methods and new ways of organising collective interests. Mette Visti's article on the organisation of work in the Japanese motor industry is based on an international research project under the auspices of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The project analysed and compared the organisation of work, technology, and the management-worker relationship in the motor industry. One of the objectives was to examine the way in which national and cultural aspects of the organisation of work influence competitiveness and the structure of industry internationally.

In her article Mette Visti discusses some of the explanations that have been made for the very high work intensity and discipline in the Japanese industry. According to Mette Visti, the success of the Japanese motor industry in the world market is attributable to the organisation of human work. A crucial factor is the fact that Japanese workers have a different work ethic from the one which predominates in the USA. Japanese diligence, commitment, and willingness to accept a very high labour intensity under strong group pressure have all been emphasised. To this must be added the willingness of Japanese workers to cooperate with management. The Japanese organisation of work which, unlike its western counterpart, is based on a high degree of motivation, has made it difficult for workers to define an independent policy to protect their interests as workers. In Japan organisations for the protection of independent working-class interests never saw the light of day, and instead workers identified with the companies for which they worked. Even the trade unions perceived the interests of the workers as coinciding with those of the companies. Mette Visti states that the influence of the Samurai cultu-



re, in which such virtues as self-discipline and diligence were central, may be a contributory reason for the feeling of loyalty shown by Japanese workers towards the company which employs them.

Since the late 1880s, the struggle for a shorter working day has been a central issue in the labour movement's struggle for better conditions. At the end of the 19th century the working day was often 12 to 14 hours, and there can be no doubt that the gradual reduction of working hours has had a major impact, not just on life at work, but also on life at home.

Paul Vitus Nielsen's article is a survey of the actions and negotiations which led to the introduction of the 8-hour-day in 1919. On this basis Nielsen makes an analysis of the subsequent battle about who was entitled to take the *credit* for the result: the Social Democratic organisations, the construction trades, or the left-wing trade union opposition? At the same time the article challenges the established history on the introduction of the 8-hour day. Nielsen stresses three different explanations found in the literature: Social Democratic historiography; the Søren Kolstrup explanation; and the post-Kolstrup historiography. Nielsen characterises the Social Democratic version as a »falsification of history«, and his explanation also differs from Kolstrup's in many respects. He mainly agrees with the post-Kolstrup historiography. He agrees with it in attributing a decisive role to the construction trades in the introduction of the 8-hour working day, but unlike them he claims that it is incorrect to categorise workers in construction as syndicalists. They were in favour of »direct action« by way of specific action to attain specific objectives. But this did not make them syndicalists. They employed syndicalist techniques severed from both syndicalist strategies, attitudes and utopian perceptions. It was pressure from the work sites – the many construction workers who were willing to take action, but who were not syndicalists – which made the Confederation of Danish Employers interested in resuming the negotiations on working hours with the Danish TUC. And the Social Democratic leadership acted as mediators of part of this pressure, but it was, Vitus Nielsen concludes, the construction workers who *took* the 8-hour day, the Confederation of Danish employers who *gave*, and the Danish TUC who *got* it.

In addition to work in a very wide sense of the word, worklife research also covers the parties to the labour market and their mutual relations and their relations to the government/state. It is this aspect which the sociologists Jesper Due, Jørgen Steen Madsen, Lars Kjerulf Petersen, and Carsten Strøby Jensen take up in their sociological and historical analy-



sis of the Danish system of collective organisations and bargaining. In their analysis they discuss what they call »The Danish Model«, which they perceive as a particularly pure example of the consensual type of co-operation between the social partners and the political system. On the basis of Clegg's and Sisson's theories on the establishment of collective agreements, they survey and discuss the genesis and history of the Danish collective bargaining system including recent developments, which they characterize as »centralised decentralisation«. Concurrently with a trend towards decentralisation of industrial relations from national, collective agreements to a situation where pay and working conditions are determined directly in the individual undertakings – things now move towards renewed centralisation of the organisational structure.

At the end of the last century many places of work were characterised by heavy drinking. One reaction to this state of affairs was the temperance movement. In the last article of the yearbook, Sidsel Eriksen discusses the relationship between the labour movement and the temperance movement. Her point of departure is the »Stege Conflict«, an industrial conflict in Stege in 1903, which ended when the employer who was the head of the local chapter of the Good Templars was threatened with expulsion from the lodge because he had tried to hire scabs and had offered them strong drink to entice them. The Stege Conflict came to mark the final break between the labour movement and the temperance movement as it meant that the informal mutual acceptance that existed between the Social Democratic Party and the majority of the members of the old temperance movement ceased. Following a Grand Lodge meeting in December 1903 the road was cleared for new, social democratic initiatives in the temperance field.

In this yearbook we have confined ourselves to one single main theme: life at work. In return we have tried to cover a number of those aspects which belong to this broad field of research: the organisation of the work process; the division of labour between men and women; the linkage between work life, politics and the state; industrial action; the organisations in the labour market and the collective bargaining system; the impact of everyday-culture on the behaviour of workers at work; and the presentation of life at work and the conditions of life at work.

*The Editors*

*Translated by Lena Flugger*



