From peak to trough: Swedish strikes and lockouts in the first half of the twentieth century

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ABSTRACT

Sweden is renowned for its peaceful industrial relations during the post-WWII years. But in the first three decades of the twentieth century Sweden was struck by extensive labour and employer militancy. The internationally established explanation for this transformation from peak to trough is the seizing of governmental power by the social democrats in the 1930s. Instead I claim that the development of, and the shifting balance of power between, the major working class ideologies—communism, syndicalism and social democracy—was an important factor in the decline of industrial strife.

KEYWORDS

strikes, lockouts, labour ideology, power resources hypothesis, left opposition within the labour movement

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The Swedish labour market went through a remarkable transition in the first half of the last century: from wide-ranging militancy to quiescence. My suggestion is that the relative strengths of the three main ideologies within the labour movement—communism, syndicalism and social democracy—had an impact on the long-term decline in industrial strife. This idea is tested by examining quantitative conflict data in relation to intra-labour power balance. Whenever suitable, I make a distinction between strikes and lockouts.[2]

I do not disregard other explanations; the phenomenon of work stoppages is too complex to be explained by any one factor. But then again, why favour ideology? There are countless international studies both on strikes and on the labour movement's ideological evolution. But they hardly ever meet and I believe our understanding would improve if they did.

True, considerable attention has been given to the impact of left-wing governance and welfare distribution on strikes.[3] But first, the results of these studies are anything but clear-cut[4] and second, their focus on labour's access to parliamentary power tends to obscure the fact that "labour" does not form an ideological entity.[5]

My hypothesis is that ideology makes a difference whether "labour" reaches the political echelons or not. If reformism dominates the labour movement, conflicts will be fewer than if ideologies endorsing revolution do so. My argument questions the most influential interpretation[6] of the transformation

[2] On the common procedure *not* to separate strikes and lockouts, see VAN DER VELDEN, Sjaak. "Lockouts in the Netherlands: Why Statistics on Labour Disputes Must Discriminate Between Strikes and Lockouts, and Why New Statistics Need to Be Compiled". *Historical Social Research*. n.31, 2006, pp. 341-62.

[3] HIBBS, Douglas A. Jr. "On the Political Economy of Long-Run Trends in Strike Activity". *British Journal of Political Science*. Vol.8, n.2, 1978, pp. 153-75; KORPI, Walter and SHALEV, Michael. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". *British Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 30, n.2, 1979, pp. 164-87; KORPI, Walter and SHALEV, Michael. "Strikes, Power, and Politics in the Western Nations, 1900-1976". *Political Power and Social Theory*. n.1, 1980, pp. 301-34; ROSS, Arthur. M. and HARTMAN, Paul T. *Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict*. New York: Wiley, 1960.

[4] EDWARDS, P. K. "The Political Economy of Industrial Conflict: Britain and the United States". *Economic and Industrial Democracy*. n.4, 1983, pp. 464-465.

[5] For an elaboration on the ideological tensions within the Swedish labour movement, see OLSEN, Gregg M. *The Struggle for Economic Democracy in Sweden*. Aldershot: Avebury, 1992, ch. 4.

[6] SWENSON, Peter A. "Solidaritet mellan klasserna Storlockouten och Saltsjöbadsandan". In LUNDH, Christer, ed. *Nya perspektiv på Saltsjöbadsavtalet*. Stockholm: SNS förlag, 2009, p. 42. See also e.g. BERGHOLM, Tapio and JONKER-HOFFRÉN, Paul. "Farewell to Communist Strike Hypothesis?: The Diversity of Striking in Finland between 1971-1990". In DO PAÇO, António Simões, VARELA, Raquel and VAN DER VELDEN, Sjaak, eds. *Strikes and Social Conflicts: Towards a Global History*. 2nd ed. Lisbon: International

of the Swedish labour market—a hypothesis derived from the power resources theory.

> [The] hypothesis is that to the extent that the working class […] is able to achieve strong and stable control over the executive, the conflicts of interest between labor and capital will increasingly be fought out in the political arena and industrial conflict will decline.[7]

According to power resources theorists Walter Korpi and Michael Shalev such a shift occurred in Sweden in the mid-1930s.

I propose that lockouts lost their sting in the second half of the 1920s, because of the shifting power balance between the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, LO, and the Swedish Employers' Confederation, SAF. That said, ideology was by no means marginal for the development of lockouts—which were used to target the left opposition within the labour movement. Again my proposal is incompatible with the power resources hypothesis, PRH, which claims that lockouts ended in the mid-1930s when capital was confronted with a left-wing government.

Why Sweden? Korpi and Shalev have given it special attention, offering this motivation:

> Since Sweden is sometimes considered to be a "prototype of modern society", [it] should be of wider relevance. Moreover, because the level of industrial conflict in Sweden has dramatically changed over the years, Sweden can be regarded as something of a strategic research site for the study of factors influencing the level of industrial strife.[8]

There is another, related reason: the PRH "is largely based upon an interpretation of the long-term evolution of industrial conflict in Sweden".[9] In this respect Sweden constitutes a "strategic research site" not only for strikes and lockouts as such, but also for the PRH.

Association Strikes and Social Conflict, 2012, p. 403; EDWARDS, P.K. "The Political Economy of Industrial Conflict: Britain and the United States". Op. Cit., p. 463; FRANZOSI, Roberto. "One Hundred Years of Strike Statistics: Methodological and Theoretical Issues in Quantitative Strike Research". *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*. Vol. 42, n.3, 1989, p. 355; FULCHER, James. *Labour Movements, Employers, and the State: Conflict and Co-operation in Britain and Sweden.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 144-46; HUMPHRIES, Craig. "Explaining Cross-National Variation in Levels of Strike Activity". *Comparative Politics*. n.22, 1990, pp. 167-84.

[7] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Power, and Politics in the Western Nations, 1900-1976". Op. Cit., p. 308.

[8] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". *Op. Cit.*, p. 166.

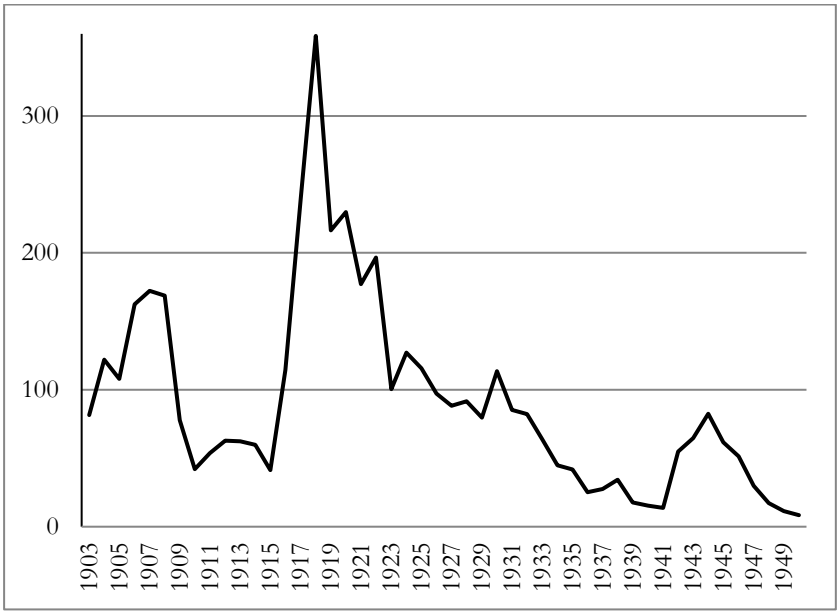
[9] *Ibid*., p. 171.

Since I am interested in the long-run development of conflicts, I start at the earliest date possible: 1903. This was the year when the Swedish authorities started to collect data—data which earlier studies have found to be, first and last, of good quality.[10] After 1955 the quality deteriorates,[11] but for the purpose of the present study there is no need to continue after 1950—by that time the Swedish labour market was well into quiescence.

Stoppages of work in Sweden 1903-1950: the empirical facts

There are several ways of measuring strikes and lockouts, but no universal agreement on which is preferable.[12] I present the three most common measurements: frequency, involvement and volume, all given in relation to the number of employees.[13]

FIGURE 1 Relative frequency: stoppages of work per million employees. Sweden, 1903-1950



[10] See e.g. MIKKELSEN, Flemming. *Arbejdskonflikter i Skandinavien 1848-1980*. Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1992, p. 441.
[11] THÖRNQVIST, Christer. *Arbetarna lämnar fabriken: Strejkrörelser i Sverige under efterkrigstiden, deras bakgrund, förlopp och följder*. Göteborg: Historiska inst., 1994, p. 91
[12] See e.g. VAN DER VELDEN. "Lockouts in the Netherlands: Why Statistics on Labour Disputes Must Discriminate Between Strikes and Lockouts, and Why New Statistics Need to Be Compiled". Op. Cit.
[13] Often the number of *non-agricultural* employees is used to standardize conflict activity, for a discussion see HAMARK, Jesper. *Ports, Dock Workers and Labour Market Conflicts*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2014, p. 41.

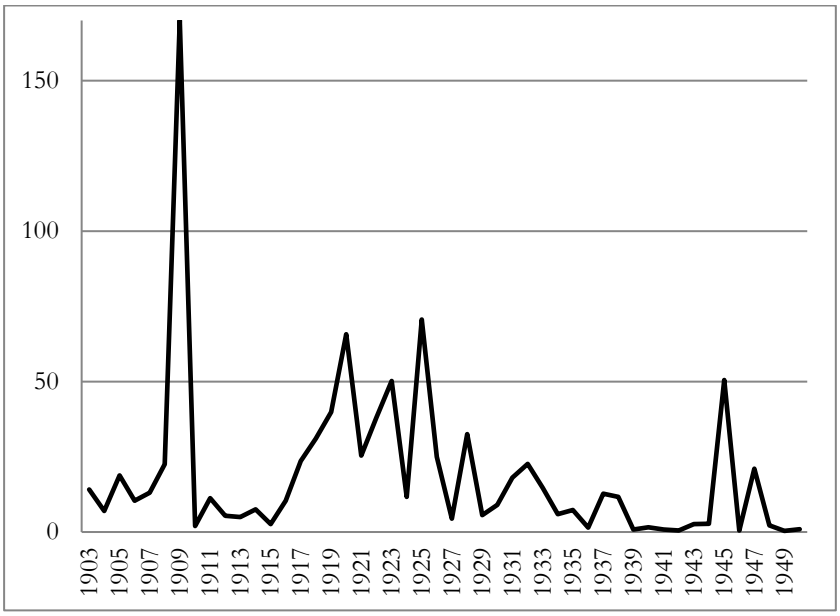
Sources: KOMMERSKOLLEGIUM. *Arbetsinställelser…* series E:1-E:4; SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…* 1911-1938*; STATISTICS SWEDEN. *Statistical Yearbook of Sweden*, 1939-1950*; http:/historicalstatistics.org/, edited by Rodney Edvinsson.

* Refer to year of data, not year of publication.

The frequency of stoppages increases in the beginning of the period, but drops after the workers' crushing defeat in the 1909 General Strike (Figure 1).[14] During WWI, the number of stoppages explodes and reaches an all-time high in 1918. From that time on the trend falls.

FIGURE 2 Relative involvement: workers involved in stoppages of work per thousand employees. Sweden, 1903-1950

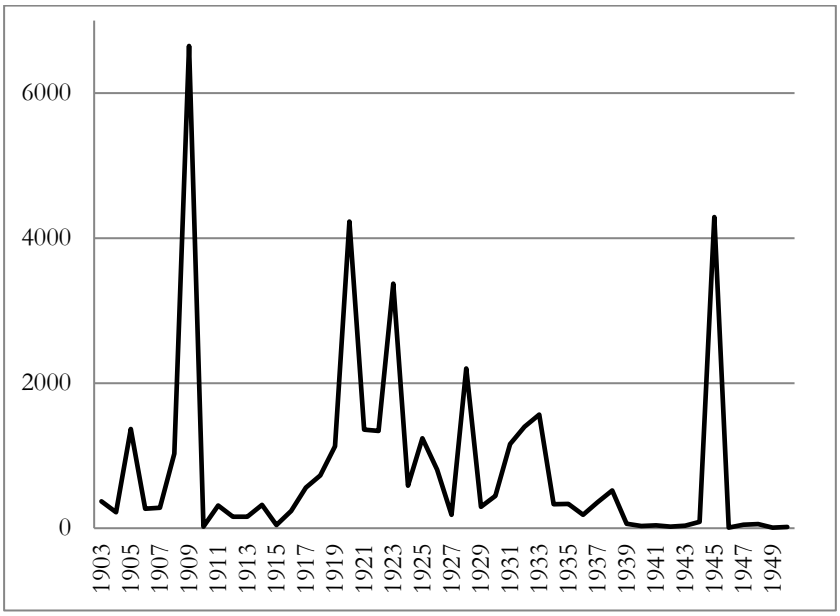
[14] HAMARK, Jesper and THÖRNQVIST, Christer. "Docks and Defeat: The 1909 General Strike in Sweden and the Role of Port Labour". *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*. n.34, 2013.



Sources: see Figure 1.

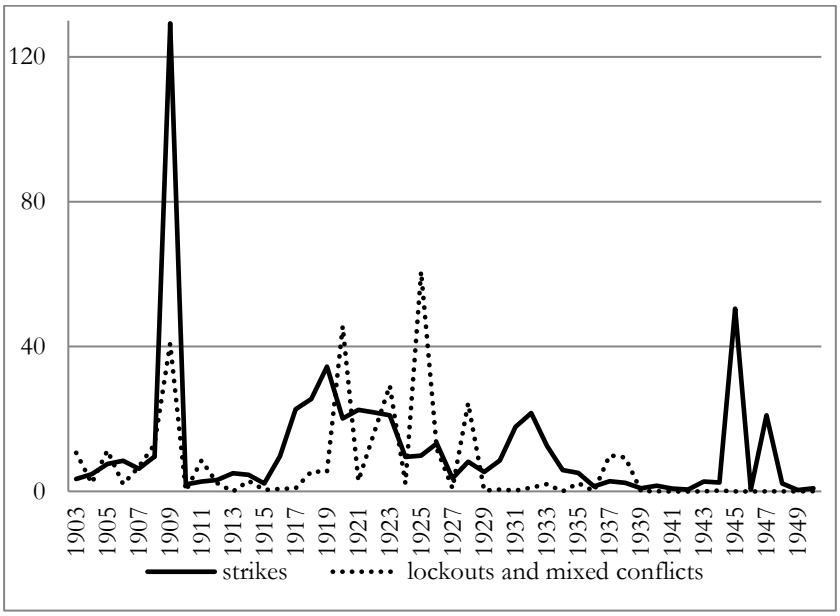
Involvement (Figure 2) and volume (Figure 3) in 1909 by far surpasses every other year. During WWI there are increases with new, post-General Strike records in 1920 and 1925. From these years onwards the trends demonstrate a decline. (The upsurge in 1945 is due to a single strike in engineering, discussed below.)

FIGURE 3 Relative volume: days lost in stoppages of work per thousand employees. Sweden, 1903-1950



Sources: see Figure 1.

FIGURE 4 Relative involvement: workers involved in strikes and lockouts/mixed conflicts per thousand employees. Sweden, 1903-1950



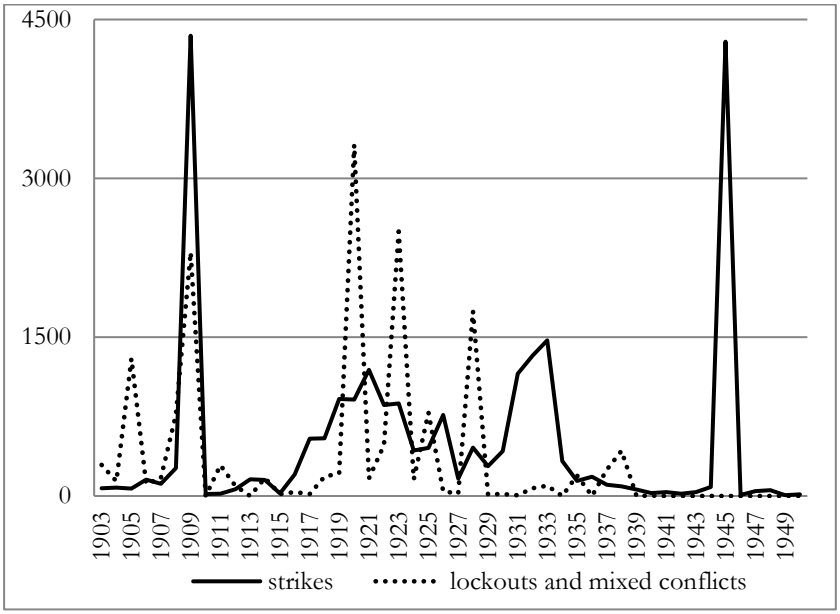
Sources: see Figure 1.

Note: "Mixed" refer to conflicts involving both a strike and a lockout or to situations where the parties perceive the character differently.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 show that lockouts together with mixed conflicts constitute an important share of total stoppages in the 1900s and the 1920s[15]—but also that major lockouts vanish by the end of the 1920s. Strike volume on the other hand reaches post-General Strike record level in the early 1930s.

The high activity during and immediately after WWI was an international phenomenon.[16] Sweden was ahead of the cycle, probably because it did not take an active part in the war, and hence there was less pressure on Swedish labour to act "in the interest of the nation".

FIGURE 5 Relative volume: days lost in strikes and lockouts/mixed conflicts per thousand employees. Sweden, 1903-1950



Sources: see Figure 1.

[15] The number of lockouts is but a tiny part of total stoppages, and therefore frequency of stoppages is of little use to separate.
[16] HIBBS. "On the Political Economy of Long-Run Trends in Strike Activity". Op. Cit.

TABLE 1 Workers involved per conflict, averages. Sweden, 1903-1950

Character	Workers involved
strike	147
lockout	1 074
mixed conflict	569

Sources: KOMMERSKOLLEGIUM. *Arbetsinställelser…* series E:1-E:4. Op. Cit.; SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…* 1911-1938. Op. Cit.; STATISTICS SWEDEN. *Statistical Yearbook of Sweden*, 1939-1950. Op. Cit.

In accordance with theoretical expectations, Table 1 shows that on average a lot more workers were involved in lockouts than in strikes.

Industrial strife and ideology

A few researchers have studied the influence of ideology on strike activity.[17] Nonetheless, this perspective is somewhat of a Cinderella. Roberto Franzosi's thoughtful *The Puzzle of Strikes* provides an illustration: Franzosi gives credit to the complexity of industrial strife and yet, when he summarizes different theories on strikes, there is one aspect missing: ideology.[18]

What is the rationale for arguing that ideology affects strike records? After all, except for times of deep political crisis, workers do not strike with the aim of replacing the current socio-economic system. Most of the time striking is

[17] BERGHOLM and JONKER-HOFFRÉN. "Farewell to Communist Strike Hypothesis?: The Diversity of Striking in Finland between 1971-1990". Op. Cit.; HIBBS, Douglas A. Jr. "Industrial Conflict in Advanced Industrial Societies". *The American Political Science Review*. Vol. 70, 1976, pp. 1033-58; KNOWLES, K. G. J. C. *Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict with Special Reference to British Experience between 1911 and 1947*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952, ch. 2, section 1; ROSS and HARTMAN. *Changing Patterns of Industrial* Conflict. Op. Cit., pp. 66-67. For Swedish studies, see OLSSON, Tom. *Pappersmassestrejken 1932: En studie av facklig ledning och opposition*. Lund: Arkiv, 1980; STRÅTH, Bo. *Varvsarbetare i två varvsstäder: En historisk studie av verkstadsklubbarna vid varven i Göteborg och Malmö*. Göteborg: Sv. Varv, 1982.

[18] FRANZOSI, Roberto. *The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in Postwar Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 7-12.

a costly last resort to achieve a more decent life here and now. The rationale is the following:

Grievances can be assumed to be present at every workplace, but only rarely are they transformed into collective action. In the words of Douglas Hibbs, "Communist parties [are] important agencies for the mobilization of latent discontent and the crystallization of labour-capital cleavages [and they] will have a systematic impact on strike activity."[19] The communists' goal is to bury capitalism. It requires massive mobilization. For communists, battles *within* the system provide opportunities to mobilize and to politicize, with the objective to transform them into battles *against* the system.[20]

Strikes and intra-labour movement ideologies: Syndicalism

The reformist-dominated LO, founded in 1898, was challenged in 1910 by the syndicalist confederation SAC. SAC practiced decentralization and direct democracy, and it declared itself to be a militant organization of class struggle.[21] The imperative struggle was about property, not about politics, and must therefore be conducted in the industrial sphere—where strikes were held to be the main means. And yet the individual strikes in themselves had little value. Their *raison d'être* was to provide training before the final showdown: the *general* strike, which would pave the way for a social revolution.

For each work stoppage in 1917-1927, authorities noted whether workers were unionized and, if so, in which union(s). This means that SAC strikes can be related to total strikes. I have chosen to compare frequency and involvement in the first and the last three-year periods.[22] In 1917-1919, the number of SAC strikes amounted to one-fourth of all strikes. Strike frequency fell throughout the 1920s and Table 2 reveals that SAC strikes fell even faster: its share shrank to 17% in 1925-1927. SAC's portion of worker involvement also fell, from one-fifth to one-tenth.

[19] HIBBS. "Industrial Conflict in Advanced Industrial Societies". Op. Cit., p. 1053. True, Hibbs was taking about European communist parties in the 1950s and 1960s—at that time "no longer revolutionary in the traditional Marxist sense". Hibbs' reasoning will have no less relevance when communists were revolutionaries, as in inter-war Sweden.

[20] The same strategy is used by other revolutionary groups (whether labeled communist or not), including Swedish syndicalists up to the early 1920s.

[21] PERSSON, Lennart K. *Syndikalismen i Sverige 1903-1922.* Stockholm: Federativ, 1975, pp. 159-60, 170-71; PERSSON, Lennart K. "Revolutionary Syndicalism in Sweden before the Second World War". In VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel and THORPE, Wayne, eds. *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective*. Worchester: Scolar Press, 1990, pp. 87-92.

[22] Volume is left out because of deficiencies in the individual stoppages of work reports.

TABLE 2 Syndicalist (SAC) strikes. Sweden 1917-1927

Period	Frequency of strikes		Workers involved in strikes		SAC's share of total strike	
	SAC	Total	SAC	Total	Frequency	Involvement
1917-1919	373	1,540	31,100	165,400	24%	19%
1925-1927	96	566	4,900	56,100	17%	9%

Sources: SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…* 1911-1938. *Op. Cit.* 1917-1919, 1925-1927.

Note: Strikes where SAC was involved jointly with other unions are counted as SAC strikes.

SAC's contribution to total strike activity can be related to its organizational size.

TABLE 3 SAC and LO membership. Sweden 1917-1927

Period	Members, yearly averages		
	SAC	LO	Relation SAC/LO
1917-1919	19,800	222,300	8.9%
1925-1927	35,100	412,700	8.5%

Sources: KJELLBERG, Anders. *Facklig organisering i tolv länder*. Lund: Arkiv, 1983, p. 269; PERSSON, Lennart K. "Revolutionary Syndicalism in Sweden before the Second World War". In VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel and THORPE, Wayne, eds. *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective*. Worchester: Scholar Press, 1990, p.85.

The number of SAC members in 1917-1919 was 9% of that of LO. During the 1920s, SAC's membership increased and in relation to LO, SAC only marginally lost ground. Thus we cannot attribute the drop in absolute and relative syndicalist strike activity to a fall in the organizational strength of SAC.

The decline is better understood as an ideological makeover, which started slowly in 1918 and continued until 1922. Based on international experience of rebellions against capitalism, SAC leaders now claimed that the social revolution, still *revolutionary in character*, must be *evolutionary in form*. Lennart K. Persson has summarized the new deal:

> Socialism could not be realized with a stroke of the pen. It evolved as the result of an organic process from below. […] Workers' power could only grow if geared to gaining an ever-increasing control over (and workers' participation in) industry. Step by step, this struggle would finally lead to the complete takeover of production and distribution, thus to the elimination of all capitalist elements.[23]

With this revised ideology it was logical that conflict strategy changed.[24] Now the disadvantages of strikes were stressed, for instance that most of them were lost even in the case of victory, since forgone wages were not compensated for by pay increases. Instead syndicalist frontrunners promoted another means of struggle: *the register*.[25] It was the syndicalist alternative to collective agreements and shorthand for SAC's aim to gradually take control of workplaces, raising wages, distributing work and limiting competition among its members. Of especial strategic importance was increasing industrial control, which was seen as a partial expropriation of capital and the way towards complete expropriation. Evolution replaced revolution and the register was preferred to striking.

The emphasis of the negative aspects of strikes by prominent syndicalists went so far that in the early 1920s SAC was criticized by the communists for being *opponents* of strikes.[26] Opponents or not, the decline in SAC strikes fit well with its new ideological/strategic vision.

[23] PERSSON. "Revolutionary Syndicalism in Sweden before the Second World War". Op. Cit., p. 89.
[24] PERSSON. *Syndikalismen i Sverige 1903*-1922. Op. Cit., pp. 204-6, 254, 258-65.
[25] A related English concept is "encroaching control".
[26] PERSSON. *Syndikalismen i Sverige 1903-1922*. Op. Cit., p. 254.

Power resources

Before continuing with the other two branches of labour, it is time for an interlude: the dominant explanation for the long-run conflict decline. The power resources theory, PRT, holds that in the sphere of production, power resources[27] are varying yet unequally distributed in favour of capitalists.[28] The control of capital is challenged by the workers' main resources: industrial and political organization. It is presumed that the greater the level of unionization and the greater the electoral strength of the left, the greater are the power resources of the working class. Also assumed important is the connection between the union and the political left wing. The PRT suggests that the variance in the balance of strength between labour and capital affects a range of social outcomes, such as welfare policy and unemployment level.

When labour is strong enough to win governmental power, it can shift the focus of class struggle: *industrial exchange* between the classes is replaced by *political exchange*. With stable, left wing governments able to dictate worker-friendly policies, costly strikes lose in attractiveness. Political power could be used to "redistribute the result of production [and] the level of employment could be raised, reducing the spectre of unemployment".[29] Consequently, countries experiencing stable, left-wing governments and strong unions have seen a long-term downturn in the level of industrial strife, as opposed to countries where these conditions have not prevailed.[30] This is the specific PRH, derived from the theory.

Note that for political exchange to take place, two prerequisites are necessary. First, labour's power within politics must be secure. Only with *stable* left-wing governments, could unions be expected to deliver peace in the labour market. (*Temporary* left-wing governance is assumed to increase the level of conflict, since workers will take the opportunity to put maximum pressure on friendly, but short-lived governments.) Second, there must be substantial coordination between the political and the union branch of the labour

[27] Defined as "the ability of actors to reward and punish other actors". KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Power, and Politics in the Western Nations, 1900-1976". Op. Cit., p. 305.
[28] Ibid.
[29] KORPI, Walter. *The Democratic Class Struggle*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 47.
[30] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". Op. Cit., pp. 180-84. For similar arguments, see HIBBS. "On the Political Economy of Long-Run Trends in Strike Activity". Op. Cit., pp. 154, 165; MIKKELSEN. *Arbejdskonflikter i Skandinavien 1848*-1980. Op. Cit., p. 411; ROSS and HARTMAN. *Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict*. Op. Cit., pp. 68, 112; SHORTER, Edward and TILLY, Charles. *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 328.

movement, and the unions must have authority enough to discipline their members.[31]

The power resources hypothesis and the end of Swedish labour market conflicts

According to Korpi and Shalev a sharp drop in the level of labour market conflicts in Sweden occurred in the mid-1930s, a few years after the Social Democratic Party, SAP, came into office.[32] Over two decades ago their empirical claim was briefly questioned by James Fulcher who pointed out that "strike frequency had been declining steadily since the early 1920s" and that "worker-days-lost had been in decline as well".[33] The critique could be made more comprehensive. First, Korpi and Shalev might argue that neither of the measurements discussed by Fulcher is the most appropriate, since they themselves are mainly interested in workers involved.[34] Second, even though Fulcher speaks of "strikes", he is really talking about *stoppages*. A sharper critique distinguishes between strikes and lockouts. Third, there is an ambiguity in the writings of Korpi and Shalev that has not yet received attention: was the labour movement *stable* in political power in 1932 or only in 1936, when the social democrats won their second-in-a-row election? Let us start with the ambiguity:

Sweden had had social democrats in governance before, but the "government which came to power in 1932 enjoyed", state Korpi and Shalev, "much stronger electoral backing".[35] This forms the basis for their idea that the 1932 government was a stable one (recall: stability is required for the switch from the industrial to the political arena to take place): "It appears that in these years, the feeling was growing that this time the Social Democrats had come to stay in a governing position."[36] Of course, in retrospect one might claim that the SAP government of 1932 was stable, since today we know for a fact

[31] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". Op. Cit., pp. 179-80.
[32] *Ibid*., pp. 168, 171. See also KORPI, Walter. *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 96, 98, 393-94n; KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Power, and Politics in the Western Nations, 1900-1976". Op. Cit., pp. 320-21.
[33] FULCHER. *Labour Movements, Employers, and the State: Conflict and Co-operation in Britain and Sweden*. Op. Cit., pp. 145-46.
[34] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". Op. Cit., pp. 176, 186n.
[35] Ibid., p. 171.
[36] Ibid., p. 172. Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson's biographer, Anders Isaksson, makes a different judgment, that the predominant feeling after the 1932 election was that the new government would be rather short-lived. See ISAKSSON, Anders. *Per Albin, 4: Landsfadern*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2000, p. 236.

that the social democrats won elections for an additional 40 years. It is not very convincing, though.

It appears as if Korpi and Shalev themselves found their line of reasoning disturbing. A year after their 1979 article, they wrote that "prior to 1936 political exchange was not yet a realistic alternative to strike activity for the labour movement"[37], and according to Shalev it was "the decisive political victory of the Social Democrats in 1936 [that] opened up a new 'conflict strategy' for the Swedish working class".[38]

It should also be noted that the statement about the "much stronger electoral backing" of the 1932 government is debatable in itself. When SAP formed the government after the 1924 election, the party had 104 seats out of 230 in the Second Chamber—incidentally the same relation prevailed after the 1932 election. Neither in 1924 nor in 1932 did the combined seats of social democrats and communists—who could be expected to at least passively support a social democratic government—suffice to reach a majority in the Second Chamber.[39] Without doubt Korpi and Shalev's later, "1936 version" makes much more theoretical sense and I will brace myself against that one.[40]

Consider first the lockouts. According to Korpi "the well-organized Swedish employers had frequently resorted to lockouts […] up to the middle of the 1930s. With a Social Democratic government, lockouts became difficult to use successfully, and have tended to disappear".[41] But the last lockouts of magnitude launched during our period were in 1928, when 49,000 workers were locked out (53,000 if we also include workers in mixed conflicts).[42] Between 1929 and 1936, on average 125 (sic) workers a year were locked out. The PRH does not do any better if we instead look at volume. In 1928

[37] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Power, and Politics in the Western Nations, 1900-1976". Op. Cit., p. 322. Consequently, in a regression with left-wing cabinet seats on workers involvement, the independent variable left-wing cabinet seats is set to zero for all years before 1936. See also SHALEV, Michael. "Industrial Relations Theory and the Comparative Study of Industrial Relations and Industrial Conflict". *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol. 18, n.1, 1980, p. 31.
[38] Ibid., p. 31.
[39] STATISTISKA CENTRALBYRÅN. *Rikdagsmannavalen åren 1929-1932*. Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1933, p. 67.
[40] Empirically their initial, theoretically weaker "1932 version" performs better, though still rather poorly.
[41] KORPI. *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden*. Op. Cit., p. 96.
[42] SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…* 1911-1938. Op. Cit., p.17.

there were 3.6 million lockout-days whereas in the following years, 1929-1936, there were 47,000 of them—in total.[43]

The strike trend also speaks against Korpi and Shalev. Figure 1 reveals that the strike frequency[44] trend declines throughout the period, and it is hard to detect any trend break in the mid-1930s. If anything, there is a break after 1923 when the rate of decrease in the number of strikes per million employees becomes slower. Focusing instead on decrease calculated as a percentage, things at first look better for Korpi and Shalev. From this perspective, frequency fell faster in the mid-1930s than in almost any other period.[45] Yet, it should be of little comfort to the PRH. From its peak in 1918, frequency fell by nearly nine-tenths until 1935.[46] The fact that frequency, expressed as a percentage, decreased even more on an annual basis after 1935 is not important, since the great share of the total decline is timed in a way Korpi and Shalev cannot explain. Also, neither of the other activity measurements offers the PRH any relief. By the time SAP won their second election in 1936, the relative strike volume was just over a quarter of the yearly average for 1920-1935, and relative strike involvement was lower than in any previous year.[47]

Strikes and intra-labour movement ideologies: Communism

The socialist labour movement split in 1917. The strong oppositional minority within SAP had become organizationally cornered, and it formed a new party in 1921 relabelled the Communist Party of Sweden, SKP, when it also became a section of the Comintern. Unlike the syndicalists, SKP worked inside the LO-affiliated unions. The specific union tactics changed a few times in response to shifts in the policy of Comintern, but the Swedish communists were constantly criticizing the LO leadership for being soft on capital; they perpetually argued in favour of a more militant union policy, and their strategic goal was always to win hegemony within LO.

The influence of SKP grew during the 1920s and from 1926 onwards one could talk about an organized communist opposition.[48] SKP did not dominate any of the national unions, but it controlled one fifth of the local branches in

[43] *Ibid*.
[44] Strictly speaking *stoppages*, but see note 15.
[45] KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". Op. Cit., p. 167; confirmed by my calculations.
[46] SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…* 1911-1938. Op. Cit.
[47] Ibid.
[48] CASPARSSON, Ragnar. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948*. Stockholm: Tiden, 1951, p. 64; DE GEER, Hans. *Arbetsgivarna: SAF i tio decennier*. Stockholm: Svenska arbetsgivareföreningen, 1992, p. 84.

unions affiliated to LO. The leaders of LO were concerned: the reformist supremacy over the Swedish trade union movement appeared to be threatened.[49]

By the end of the 1920s, SAP and LO changed their policy vis-à-vis the communists: from one of ambivalence, to one of rejection. Anti-communism became a "comparative advantage" of the social democrats.[50] Communists were threatened by expulsion from LO and in the 1930s the threat was realized, when both individuals and local branches were banished. The new reformist policy struck a considerable blow to SKP, which was split in 1929.[51] Moreover, from 1933 onwards the unions affiliated to LO all became more centralized: decision-making was removed from the members (through referenda) and the local branches to the national boards.[52] Still being relatively strong at the branch level, but with little power on the national boards, the communists lost further influence.[53]

In what way did communism affect strike activity? It might well be that local branches dominated by communists struck more often than those where reformists had hegemony, but since the official statistics do not discriminate between conflicts based on the strikers' ideology, there is no easy way to test the idea. Klas Åmark has suggested that the communists played an important role in the majority of the *larger* conflicts from the mid-1920s well into the crisis of the 1930s.[54] "Larger" could imply involvement or—my choice—volume.[55]

[49] KENNERSTRÖM, Bernt. *Mellan två internationaler: Socialistiska Partiet 1929-37*. Lund: Arkiv för studier i arbetarrörelsens historia, 1974, pp. 20-21.
[50] SCHÜLLERQVIST Bengt. *Från kosackval till kohandel: SAP:s väg till makten 1928-33*. Stockholm: Tiden, 1992, ch. 6-8, and especially pp. 99 and 236n.
[51] As a result, Sweden had two nominal communist parties for a few years: one belonging to the Comintern and one trying to maneuver somewhere between reform and revolution—later relabeled the Socialist Party. Here, "communists" refer to both.
[52] ANDERSSON, Sten. "Kommunisternas 'makt' inom svensk politik och fackföreningsrörelse: En problematisering av ett spännande forskningsfält". In BLOMBERG Eva, HORGBY, Björn and KVARNSTRÖM, Lars, eds. *Makt och moral: En vänbok till och med Klas Åmark*. Linköping: Avd. för historia, Univ, 1998, p. 253; HADENIUS, Axel. *Facklig organisationsutveckling: En studie av Landsorganisationen i Sverige*. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren. 1976, pp. 125-126.
[53] ÅMARK, Klas. *Facklig makt och fackligt medlemskap: De svenska fackförbundens medlemsutveckling 1890-1940*. Lund: Arkiv förlag, 1986, p. 141.
[54] Ibid., pp. 138, 141.
[55] Volume is more convenient because it allows me to rely mostly on official statistics. For a discussion on the alternative use of involvement, see Hamark. *Ports, Dock Workers and Labour Market Conflicts.* Op. Cit., pp. 164-165.

TABLE 4 The largest work stoppages by absolute volume. Sweden 1926-1950

Trade	Year	Character	Days lost
engineering	1945	strike	c.11,000,000-13,500,000[56]
building	1933-34	strike[57]	3,130,000
paper pulp[58]	1928	lockout	2,700,000
textile	1931	strike	2,100,000
mining	1928	strike and lockout	1,500,000
paper pulp	1932	strike	1,400,000

Sources: CASPARSSON. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924*-1948. Op. Cit., pp. 97-100; SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…*1911-1938. Op.Cit.; STATISTICS SWEDEN. *Statistical Yearbook of Sweden*, 1939-1950. Op.Cit. My calculations.

Table 4 shows the largest conflicts from 1926 to 1950, from the first year of organized communist opposition well into the era of quiescence, in other words the period suggested by Åmark is extended. Arbitrarily I have included only conflicts with more than 1,000,000 days lost.[59]

[56] According to STATISTICS SWEDEN, p. 247, there were *in total* 11.3 million days lost in 1945, whereas a later public inquiry stated that 13.5 million days were lost in the engineering strike alone (SOU *1984:19*. *Arbetsmarknadsstriden II: en kartläggning av arbetsmarknadskonflikter i det moderna samhället*. Stockholm. 1984, pp. 35, 175—a source quoted by KJELLBERG, Anders. "Storkonflikten 1980 och andra stora arbetskonflikter i Sverige". *Arbetarhistoria*, 138-139, 2011, p. 34). Note that I have used the lower estimation in Figure 3 and 5.

[57] The building conflict contained also a lockout. However, SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…*1911-1938. Op.Cit. does not mention the lockout in its written report (pp. 138-43); probably because the lockout was very small in comparison to the strike (p. 16).

[58] The conflict started in paper pulp mills, but was spread through sympathy lockouts to paper- and sawmills.

[59] Apart from one million being a nice number, conflicts below the threshold are not only

Before discussing the individual conflicts, it is necessary to explain the method for assessing communist strength.[60] By the end of the 1920s, the communists had, according to a study by Lennart Gärdvall, their largest influence within paper pulp, mining, sawmilling, building and engineering,[61] that is, with the exception of the textile sector, all trades listed in the table are covered. Although intuitively not a poor indicator of communist influence on conflicts, for my purposes it is not sufficient. Rather, it must be made credible that the communists affected decisions to strike, decisions to keep on striking, and—more generally—decisions to turn down settlements with the employers.

In 1928, the last major inter-war lockout was imposed, targeting wages in paper pulp. The Conciliation Commission proposed two settlements, both of which were accepted by the negotiators of the Paper Industry Workers' Union, only to be outvoted twice by the members. A proposal to give the union's negotiators authorization to reach a deal "at the table" was also turned down in a referendum. The conflict continued until the union negotiators accepted (an improved) deal without asking the members. According to social democratic trade union historians Torvald Karlbom and Ragnar Casparsson, as well as SAF's magazine *Industria*, the referenda provides evidence for the decisive influence of the communists, organized around SKP's paper *Folkets Dagblad Politiken* which contained daily propaganda against the settlements. It is notable that the union members voted "no" despite the fact that the editor of LO's magazine *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, Sigfrid Hansson, made the issue of authorization into a vote of censure.[62]

According to Tom Olsson, the communists "acted as leaders" in 1928 but "were of only marginal importance" in the 1932 paper pulp conflict.[63] He

trickier to quantify with precision, but they are also more difficult to assess in terms of the ideological balance of power. Partly because there are no individual strike/lockout reports after 1927, partly because these smaller conflicts have attracted fewer researchers.

[60] For a longer elaboration, see Hamark. *Ports, Dock Workers and Labour Market Conflicts.* Op. Cit., pp. 36-39.

[61] GÄRDVALL, Lennart. "Facklig opposition: Om arbetarrörelsens fackliga och politiska splittring 1917-29". In ERIKSSON, Maj-Lis, ed. *Med eller mot strömmen?: En antologi om svenska folkrörelser*. Stockholm: Sober Förlags AB, 1980, p. 43.

[62] CASPARSSON. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948*. Op. Cit., pp. 95-102; KARLBOM, Torvald. *Pappersindustriarbetarnas fackliga organisationshistoria*. Stockholm: Tiden, 1945, pp. 239-47. On communist influence during the conflict, see also SWENSON Peter. A. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 96; SÖDERBERG, Tom. "Pappersmasseförbundets första halvsekel". In *Pappersmasseförbundet: 1907-1957*. Stockholm: PMF, 1957, pp. 83-86.

[63] OLSSON. *Pappersmassestrejken 1932: En studie av facklig ledning och opposition*. Op. Cit., p. 442.

backs the statement with an empirical study on the participation in May Day demonstrations by the union local branches: did the branches choose to join a communist demonstration or not, and did their choices change over the years?[64] Olsson works with a non-random sample of twenty-one branches, 1929-1936. Since we aim to reveal a shift between the two conflicts, it is more reasonable to compare 1929 and 1932. Between these years, and among the seventeen branches Olsson actually reports, *one* of the branches saw definite diminishing communist influence, and in addition one or two (depending on one's judgment) branches experienced a slight decrease. It does not strike me as evidence for any serious communist weakening. Moreover, the comparison somewhat overestimates the decrease, since Olsson chooses to start in 1929 (rather than in 1928) when the communists' prestige had grown in the preceding conflict (as noted by Olsson himself).

Communism within paper pulp does not seem to have been in too a bad shape in 1932. Out of fifteen members in the union's General Council, four were communists and five of the union's largest local branches had boards with a communist majority.[65] Of course this says little about changes over the preceding years, but it does not align easily with the thought that the communists were "marginalized".

History repeated itself. As they had to do four years earlier, in 1932 the members had to consider two proposals by the Conciliation Commission and one on authorization for the union negotiators. Again all three were voted down.[66] A union ombudsman complained that "the conflict does not follow trade union but political lines", and another explained that the majority of the members listened to "the blandishments of the irresponsible" rather than to the board's advice.[67] The board blamed the results of the referenda on "the communists' furious agitation and considerable influence".[68] As in 1928, according to Karlbom and Casparsson, communism affected the outcome of the referenda.[69] Speaking at the time, the chairman of LO, Edvard Johansson, explained that the reports in *Folkets Dagblad Politiken* were the reason that the strike had been so drawn-out and difficult to solve, and Johansson's

[64] Ibid., pp. 115-31.
[65] KENNERSTRÖM. *Mellan två internationaler: Socialistiska Partiet 1929-37*. Op. Cit., p. 58.
[66] OLSSON. *Pappersmassestrejken 1932: En studie av facklig ledning och opposition*. Op. Cit., pp. 266, 316, 327.
[67] Ibid., p. 312; CASPARSSON. LO *under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948*. Op. Cit., p. 240. My translations.
[68] CASPARSSON. LO *under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948*. Op. Cit., p. 240. My translation. See also KARLBOM. *Pappersindustriarbetarnas fackliga organisationshistoria*. Op. Cit., pp. 278, 282.
[69] Ibid. The same judgment was made by an official inquiry, see SOU 1935: 8. Betänkande med förslag angående åtgärder mot statsfientlig verksamhet. Stockholm, 1935, p. 396.

successor, August Lindberg, claimed in retrospect that the communists played "a major role" in the 1932 strike.[70] The board of the Paper Industry Workers' Union had not been too keen on striking "but", Peter Swenson writes, "buckled under pressure from intense Communist agitation among the ranks of [the] members".[71]

According to Eva Blomberg, the Miners' Union gravitated towards communism in 1926/1927.[72] At the 1927 congress, the communists won a couple of important votes and strengthened their position on the new board. Björn Horgby claims that the congress was a battle between social democrats and challengers from SKP, and that the communists seized power.[73] While not flawed, the claim needs qualification. The congress was warmly reviewed in *Folkets Dagblad Politiken*.[74] Yet, no communist victory was declared and the newspaper did not comment upon the constitution of the new board, and neither did the social democratic newspapers.[75] It is possible that the full consequences of the shifting gravity were not evident at the time. But social democrats and communists may also have had their reasons not to speak too frankly about the congress. Social democracy was generally not inclined to admit any influence of SKP. This is particularly apparent in the balancing act of *Fackföreningsrörelsen*: on the one hand it devoted considerable space to criticize communism; on the other, it declared communism to be of marginal importance. SKP, in turn, was engaged in the United Front policy decreed by Comintern, and in line with this policy, it was logical to downplay the role of the party.[76]

The new board decided to enter into a "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" with the Soviet Miners' Union—a decision met by a storm of protests in bourgeois and social democratic press—and it went for a "battle-against-

[70] KENNERSTRÖM. Mellan två internationaler: Socialistiska Partiet 1929-37. Op. Cit., p. 64; SVENSKA METALLINDUSTRIARBETAREFÖRBUNDETS STYRELSE. *Kommunisternas uppträdande och ansvar belyst med stöd av stenografiska protokoll och andra dokument*. Stockholm: Tiden. 1945, pp. 77-78.
[71] SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., p 97.
[72] BLOMBERG, Eva. *Män i mörker: Arbetsgivare, reformister och syndikalister: Politik och identitet i svensk gruvindustri 1910-1940*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995, p. 157.
[73] HORGBY, Björn. *Kampen om facket: Den socialdemokratiska hegemonins förändringar*. Umeå: Boréa, 2012, pp. 48-49.
[74] *FDP*, 31 March 1927.
[75] *FDP*; *Ny Tid*; *Social-Demokraten*; all 30 March 1927.
[76] GÄRDVALL. "Facklig opposition: Om arbetarrörelsens fackliga och politiska splittring 1917-29". Op. Cit., pp. 33ff.

capital-agenda", based on the strike weapon.[77] Blomberg, who has studied the minutes, states that the board *wanted* a conflict, preferably in the form of a SAF lockout.[78] Such an offensive strategy required resources—which the Soviet counterpart had.

In 1927 the collective agreements within mining were terminated by workers and employers alike. Faced with irreconcilable demands, SAF locked out 4,000 workers, starting in early 1928. The union answered by declaring an industry-wide strike. It meant that an additional 8,000 workers[79] became involved in the conflict, which was not settled until late summer—basically on pre-existing terms. Financially, at least, the Treaty paid off: almost half of the vast strike pay came from the Soviet friend and co-op.[80]

SAC's summary of the showdown in *Arbetaren* was perhaps not too far off the mark when it claimed that the "communist board" of the Miners' Union had "wanted to show the Western World that it was conceivable—with Russian support—to win labour market battles in Western Europe".[81] *Arbetaren* was also correct when it claimed that the Swedish employers were equally inclined to show that the workers could *not* win with Soviet help.

The influence of Marxism within the unions always provoked SAF. The employers were prepared to resort to long and costly battles rather than offering concessions to workers inspired by communism—a fact which helps to explain why some battles became so voluminous.[82] As the leading industrialist Christian Storjohann declared at a SAF board meeting in 1928: the on-going paper pulp conflict was about "fighting the communists and the Soviet Union".[83]

Communism appears to have played a marginal role within the Textile Workers' Union.[84] On the other hand, when the union declared an industry-wide strike in early 1931, it had not been affiliated to LO for two decades. This might have given the union a higher degree of independence, and it

[77] HORGBY. *Kampen om facket: Den socialdemokratiska hegemonins förändringar*. Op. Cit., p. 49.
[78] BLOMBERG. *Män i mörker: Arbetsgivare, reformister och syndikalister: Politik och identitet i svensk gruvindustri 1910-1940*. Op. Cit., p. 157.
[79] SAC organized 2,000 miners, they too followed the declaration.
[80] CASPARSSON, Ragnar. *Gruvfolk: Svenska gruvindustriarbetareförbundet under fyra årtionden: En kort historik utarbetad på förbundets uppdrag*. Stockholm: Tiden, 1935, pp. 214-15.
[81] A*rbetaren*, 29 August 1928. My translation. See also CASPARSSON. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924*-1948. *Op. Cit.,* p. 214.
[82] Cf. ÅMARK, Klas. "T. Olsson: Pappersmassestrejken 1932" (review). *Arbetarhistoria*, 31-32, 1984, p. 115.
[83] SÖDERBERG. "Pappersmasseförbundets första halvsekel". Op. Cit., p. 84.
[84] HORGBY. *Kampen om facket: Den socialdemokratiska hegemonins förändringar*. Op. Cit., pp. 134-35, 146, 207.

seems plausible that it was less affected by social democratic ideology and strategy. Yet, the degree of independence should not be exaggerated. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* directed no criticism at the strike, which suggests that there was no serious split between LO and the Textile Workers' Union.[85]

Three LO-affiliated unions were involved in the building strike that started in April 1933, sparked by employers' demands for wage reductions. The three union boards proposed partial strikes targeting only organized builders, whereas the communists called for an industry-wide strike.[86] The prolonged conflict (it did not end until February 1934 when a displeased LO[87] more or less forced the unions to quit striking—see *The end of lockouts* below) was extended beyond organized builders and in that respect the communist line was victorious.

In August, a first settlement was presented by the Conciliation Commission, but was duly rejected in subsequent referenda.[88] SAF perceived the communists (and the syndicalists) as "prime instigators of the building conflict, especially in agitating for building craftsmen to vote against mediated contract proposals".[89] Another indicator of left-wing sway is that in Stockholm, where the communists had their stronghold among construction workers, union members voted "no" to a much larger degree than in the country as a whole.[90] Still, it is hard to find convincing evidence suggesting that the communists played a decisive role in the conflict. Most likely their influence made the conflict larger and somewhat more prolonged, but the bulk of work days would have been lost even without the "prime instigators".

In absolute volume, the strike launched by the Metal Workers' Union in 1945 is the largest in Swedish history. The communists succeeded in getting a majority behind offensive wage demands at Metal's contract conference in 1944, despite resistance from the board representatives as well as the LO leadership. In a subsequent referendum, more than 70% of the workers voted to strike, and the board found it politically impossible not to call it. After five months the strike was brought to an end, but only after the board had

[85] *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 1931: 91-92, 329-31.
[86] APITZSCH Hartmut. "Socialdemokrater och kommunister i byggbranschen". *Arkiv för studier i arbetarrörelsens historia*, 2, 1972, pp. 61-62.
[87] With regards to the building strike, LO showed, "nothing but chilly indifference, if not outright hostility". SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., p. 100.
[88] KUPFERBERG, Feiwel. "Byggstrejken 1933-34". *Arkiv för studier i arbetarrörelsens historia*. n.2, 1972, p. 49.
[89] SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., p. 108.
[90] APITZSCH. "Socialdemokrater och kommunister i byggbranschen". Op. Cit., p. 62.

overruled a referendum in which workers had decided to continue striking.[91] Pär-Erik Back, who has written a comprehensive account of the conflict, notes that the metal workers had experienced a dismal growth in real wages during the war and that they faced an employers' association endowed with "a minimum of psychological touch and a maximum of pertinacity". But the transformation of discontent into overt conflict became 'virtually inevitable', Back claims, only when the political machinery of the communist party was directed at engineering, by the end of the war.[92] Organized, disciplined—but also well represented amongst the rank-and-file—the communists acted as a catalyst.

In summary: all the conflicts in Table 4 were in different ways played out by the side of, or in opposition to, the reformist trade union movement. Communists played an important role in four out of the six largest conflicts after 1925 (and a minor role in the building strike). The four conflicts amount to 48% of total volume in 1926 to 1950. If we confine ourselves to the period 1926 to 1935, the corresponding figure is 29%.

As a yardstick of communist influence, the figures are biased. *Downwards* because (1) the top conflicts are compared to total conflicts, whereas the appropriate comparison would have been to look at *all* conflicts with communist influence in relation to total conflicts; because (2) communists should probably be partly credited for the voluminous building strike. *Upwards* because work-days to some extent would have been lost even without successful left-wing propaganda (at least in the paper pulp conflicts). While the exact level could be debated, there seems indeed to have been a strong influence of communism on conflict activity.

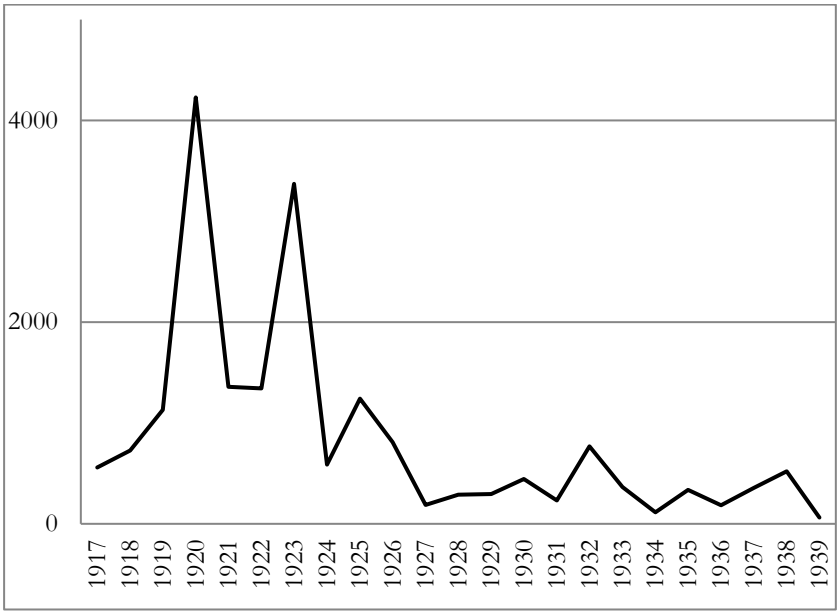
Strikes and intra-labour movement ideologies: Social Democracy

In contrast to Korpi and Shalev, I believe that "labour", i.e. the social democratic branch of labour, became interested in labour market peace long before conditions prevailed for political exchange. Social democrats had taken on a more positive view of tranquillity long before that.

[91] KJELLBERG. "Storkonflikten 1980 och andra stora arbetskonflikter i Sverige". Op. Cit., p. 34-35; KORPI. *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden*. Op. Cit., pp. 246-51.

[92] BACK, Pär-Erik. *Svenska Metallindustriarbetareförbundets historia 1940-1956: Band IV*. Quotations on p. 327. My translation. This work is one of only two major studies of the conflict. The deep communist influence is stressed also in the other study, see TRESLOW, Kjell. *Verkstadsstrejken 1945: En studie av arbetsmarknadens förhandlingssystem vid konflikt*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 1972, pp. 113-21.

FIGURE 6 Relative volume: days lost in stoppages of work per thousand employees. Sweden, 1917-1939. Excluding larger, non-LO-approved conflicts.[93]



Sources: see Figure 1 and Table 4.

Figure 6 is identical to Figure 3 with the difference that a shorter period is shown and that the conflicts listed in Table 4 have been subtracted. Thus Figure 6 gives a crude illustration of "LO-approved days lost". Notable is the downward shift after 1923 or, at the very latest, after 1925—a full decade before Korpi and Shalev's political exchange.

In 1928, the Labour Peace Conference was held. The right-wing government hosted the event, inviting representatives from both labour and capital. Two questions were at the centre of attention: the end of conflicts and rationalization within industry. SAF's summary of the conference was generally positive, since most of the speakers from the labour side "fearlessly declared their consensus line".[94] But the consensus line of LO was not a sudden whim. LO had, according to Anders L. Johansson, "already from the early 1920s touched on the idea that government, employers and trade union movement would take some form of shared responsibility for the

[93] The excluded conflicts are the ones listed in Table 4 (with the exception of the 1945 engineering strike, which falls outside the period shown here).
[94] JOHANSSON, Anders L. *Tillväxt och klass-samarbete: En studie av den svenska modellens uppkomst*. Stockholm: Tiden, 1989, p. 74. See also CASPARSSON. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948*. Op. Cit., pp. 140-52.

rationalization process".[95] In the 1910s, labour was generally hostile to Taylorism, but in the early 1920s this changed within the social democratic branch. For instance, in 1922, *Fackföreningsrörelsen* declared that Taylor himself was in fact in favour of workers, although Taylorism as actually implemented had had its flaws.[96]

Another factor explaining the LO leadership's increasingly reluctant attitude to strikes may be a revised version of the PRH. Between March 1920 and June 1926, Sweden had seven governments. Four of them were social democratic, possessing governance in 44 out of 75 months. Perhaps, to quote Korpi and Shalev's assessment of the 1930s, "the feeling was growing [that] the Social Democrats had come to stay in a governing position"? If so**,** I endorse the logic that *reformist* union leaders thought about shifting battlefields from industry to politics. Of course these governments proved to be non-stable. But at that time, who could tell?

The end of lockouts. Managerial strategy and intra-labour movement ideologies

The union movement grew rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century and in 1898 several national unions founded LO. Triggered by labour unity, the employers also organized. Just a few years after its establishment in 1902, SAF became a highly centralized, attacking organization: every lockout initiative from the member companies was to be approved by the board of directors, and sympathy lockouts were used as offensive weapons in wage negotiations. But the effectiveness of secondary action rested on a critical precondition.[97] Without a centralized union movement, there would be no body to punish effectively in the case of subversive behaviour; no one whose strike fund SAF could threaten to empty. SAF needed a strong LO, yet not too strong.

Lockouts had occurred already in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but with the birth of employers' associations they became much more forceful. The first major clash came in 1905 when a large strike by metal workers was answered with an even larger lockout. Even though the final

[95] JOHANSSON. *Tillväxt och klass-samarbete: En studie av den svenska modellens uppkomst*. Op. Cit., p. 54. My translation. See also OLSSON. *Pappersmassestrejken 1932: En studie av facklig ledning och opposition*. Op. Cit., pp. 43-44.
[96] JONSSON, Kjell. "Taylorismen och svensk arbetarrörelse 1913-1928". *Arkiv för studier i arbetarrörelsens historia*. n.19-20, 1981, p. 14. See also JOHANSSON. *Tillväxt och klass-samarbete: En studie av den svenska modellens uppkomst*. Op. Cit., p. 47.
[97] DE GEER. *Arbetsgivarna: SAF i tio decennier*. Op. Cit., p. 89. See also SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., pp. 78, 82.

agreement was a "resounding success for employers",[98] the full potential of the lockout was only to be shown the following year. Eight firms were hit by strikes, to varying degrees defying managerial prerogatives, and in response SAF threatened to shut down just about half of Sweden's manufacturing industry. It had immediate results: LO warded off the lockout by accepting the employers' right to manage, formalized in the *December Compromise* of 1906.[99] From that time on, the union tactic of "whipsawing employers, picking them off one at a time"[100] became dangerous: almost any strike could be answered by a full-scale lockout. According to statutes, the unions were obliged to pay out support to all members locked out—and when a certain share of members in an affiliated union were locked out, LO had to pay. The employer strategy threatened to empty the strike funds.

After the 1909 General Strike, the employers could, according to the SAF chairman Hjalmar von Sydow, have used the opportunity to crush LO "without difficulty".[101] Yet they did not. The alternative to LO was syndicalist unions—much less sensitive to lockouts, since they neither had a centralized fund, nor distributed strike or lockout support.[102] The effectiveness of the lockout saved LO.

Strike activity hit rock bottom in the first half of the 1910s and the employers made little use of the lockout: with workers already disciplined, there was no need. When strike activity began to climb, wartime pressure made it difficult for the employers to respond forcefully. The full-scale lockout returned after the war, with massive conflicts in 1920, 1923 and 1925. The last one was the largest since 1909, involving 100,000 workers. But despite the fact that business cycle conditions did not favour the workers, the conflict ended quickly and in a draw.[103] Something had changed.

In 1909, the employers' associations were potentially able to lockout a number of workers corresponding to the total union membership. But the situation would gradually shift: the employers' associations continued to mainly organize companies within private-owned manufacturing, whereas LO increasingly became the representative of the entire working class. In 1930, SAF could lockout a number of workers matching only half the total

[98] SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., pp. 79-81.
[99] Ibid., pp. 80-81.
[100] Ibid., p. 74.
[101] Ibid., p. 84.
[102] PERSSON. *Syndikalismen i Sverige 1903-1922*. Op. Cit., p. 251.
[103] CASPARSSON. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948*. Op. Cit., pp. 26-41.

union membership.[104] It meant that large groups of workers could contribute to the strike fund even if SAF blasted off the largest possible lockout. von Sydow appreciated the problem in 1928 when he declared that LO had the financial resources to withstand much longer lockouts than before.[105] Hansson made the same analysis in LO's magazine.[106] The lockout had become less effective, and with only a few exceptions the use of it ended.

True, SAF *threatened* to use the lockout even after 1928, most importantly during the 1933-34 building strike. For the newly elected social democrats the strike was particularly unfortunate since it threatened the government's programme for economic recovery. LO was as pleased with the strike as the government, but had too little authority to put an end to it. In the winter of 1933-34 SAF decided to threaten LO with the largest lockout ever, embracing 200,000 workers. SAF speculated that the government would respond to the escalation with compulsory arbitration but if not, LO would be stuck paying out money to locked out workers in a conflict it did not believe in. SAF further calculated that LO would try to avoid both scenarios. In February 1934, LO succeeded in persuading its affiliated unions to retreat and to accept employers' demands for wage reductions.[107] As argued by Swenson, SAF and LO had a common interest in curbing workers in the building trades: both organizations were displeased with the relatively high wage level and both wanted to knock out syndicalism and communism. The SAF leaders calculated correctly: the lockout did not materialize; the mere threat gave LO an excuse to intervene.

Swenson argues that the lockout was as strong as ever in the 1930s.[108] But there is a world of difference between lockouts targeting LO and (the threat of) "friendly"—Swenson's own label—lockouts hitting the common enemy of SAF and LO.

My interpretation is that the balance of power between SAF and LO had shifted in favour of LO in the late 1920s. Therefore lockouts targeting LO ceased. Yet SAF continued to make use of, or rather threatened to make use of, "LO-friendly" lockouts with the aims of pressing down wages in "sheltered" industries such as building, and smashing the left opposition within the labour movement. Feiwel Kupferberg has stressed the

[104] ÅMARK. *Facklig makt och fackligt medlemskap: De svenska fackförbundens medlemsutveckling 1890-1940*. Op. Cit., pp. 125-26.
[105] Ibid.
[106] *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 1928, vol. 1, p. 291.
[107] SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., pp. 100, 107-9. See also KUPFERBERG. "Byggstrejken 1933-34". Op. Cit., p. 57.
[108] SWENSON. "Solidaritet mellan klasserna Storlockouten och Saltsjöbadsandan". Op. Cit., p. 43.

government's role in forcing peace upon the construction workers, and his conclusion is antithetical to the PRH: the lockout threat was successful *because* of the labour government, not despite of it.[109]

Conclusion

The most prevalent narrative on the transformation of Sweden from a high-conflict country to one of quiescence is associated with the power resources hypothesis: the seizure of governmental power by social democracy in the 1930s gave the working class the opportunity to shift from costly strikes within the industrial sphere to less costly redistributive policies within the political sphere. But the timing of conflicts does not favour the hypothesis. Governmental stability is presumed necessary for the shift to occur, but when SAP won their second-in-a-row election in 1936 there is little decline left to explain—visibly illustrated by the fact that the number of workers involved in strikes and lockouts reached an all-time-low that year. Stable reformist possession of parliamentary power may well have contributed to *keep* conflicts low. But we have to look elsewhere to find out why they became low in the first place.

A full account of the decline in Swedish militancy requires in-depth studies of a range of topics: development of collective agreements, labour law and work processes; gender division of labour; tensions between export and home market industries; impact of strike-breaking on workers' moral; structural change in the Swedish economy, etc. I have settled for a less ambitious task: to investigate the impact of workers' ideology and of managerial strategy on conflicts.

The development of lockouts was affected by the balance of power between SAF and LO. Major sympathy lockouts ended after 1928, at a time when LO had the numerical strength and the financial resources to handle much longer conflicts than before. True, SAF continued to make use of the large-scale lockout as a *threat* in the 1930s, but by then LO was no longer the real target. Instead the target was high wages in "sheltered" industries and the left opposition within the labour movement.

By the end of the 1910s, strikes led by the syndicalist confederation, SAC, constituted a large proportion of total strikes, measured both as frequency and

[109] KUPFERBERG. "Byggstrejken 1933-34". Op. Cit., p. 36. See also SWENSON. *Capitalists Against Markets: The Making of Labor Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden*. Op. Cit., p. 100. Cf. KORPI and SHALEV. "Strikes, Power, and Politics in the Western Nations, 1900-1976". Op. Cit., p. 321.

involvement. In the 1920s, SAC strikes fell sharply in absolute as well as in relative terms. The fall can be attributed to a twin change in ideology and strategy. In just a few years leading Swedish syndicalists went from advocating strikes to preferring gradual expropriation of the companies, a method of struggle that corresponded to the view that socialism could only be achieved by an evolutionary path.

In contrast to the syndicalists, the communists worked inside the reformist-dominated unions. After 1925, communist influence on conflict volume was huge: several times the communists succeeded in getting a majority in favour of striking or for continuing striking, in direct confrontation with the social democratic union leadership.[110] Without communism, Sweden would have a lesser reputation as a country of industrial militancy. A couple of years into the 1930s, the communists lost ground and major conflicts became less frequent. By the end of WWII, the communists gained a very temporary initiative within the union movement, an initiative which nonetheless resulted in the largest Swedish strike ever, measured by absolute volume. In addition, the duration of communist-influenced conflicts was partly a function of the employers', and foremost SAF's, reactions. For pedagogical reasons, workers must never be allowed to win such conflicts.

Most of the time, striking is a costly last resort to achieve a more decent life here and now. Why, then, should we expect revolutionaries to affect strike rates? Because, to the communists—and to the syndicalists until the early 1920s—battles *within* the system provided opportunities to mobilize and to politicize, with the objective to transform them into battles *against* the system. But the root causes of the conflicts are not to be found in the communists and their machinations, even though this is a pretty standard interpretation.[111] Agitators, communist or not, play their part, but as Knowles once remarked: "one cannot agitate successfully without widespread grievances".[112]

One of the causes of the communist twilight in 1930s was a general trend towards centralization within the LO-affiliated unions. Such centralization is sometimes described as part of an institutional solution to the strike "problem".[113] True, moving influence from the rank-and-file to the union leadership reduces strike frequency—given that the leadership has enough

[110] A finding consistent with GÄRDVALL. "Facklig opposition: Om arbetarrörelsens fackliga och politiska splittring 1917-29". Op. Cit.
[111] As in the case of the 1945 Metal strike, see KORPI. *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden.* Op. Cit., p. 246.
[112] KNOWLES. *Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict with Special Reference to British Experience between 1911 and* 1947. Op. *Cit*., p. xii.
[113] See e.g. ROSS and HARTMAN. *Changing Patterns of Industrial* Conflict. Op. Cit., pp. 67-68.

moral authority. But there is no inherent logic that centralization also reduces involvement or volume. In the Swedish case, where decision-making was relocated from *communist*-dominated local branches and union referenda (in which the communists won majority in several critical cases) to national boards dominated by *social democrats*, it meant less strike activity. The point is that the "institutional fix" cannot be isolated from the ideological balance.

Not only did syndicalism change its attitude towards conflicts, so did social democracy. If we subtract non-LO-approved conflicts, there is a manifest fall in the level of conflict even after 1923, measured by volume. In 1928 the Labour Peace Conference was held, at which representatives for SAF, LO and the government discussed how to end conflicts and how to rationalize industry. But even in the early 1920s, LO had had the idea that the three parties should take shared responsibility for the rationalization process. Taylorism was reassessed and step by step the leaders of the union confederation came to see productivity improvements rather than industrial militancy as the way to increase workers' living standards. Another factor explaining the trade union leadership's increasingly reluctant attitude towards strikes might be a revised version of Korpi and Shalev. From 1920 to 1926, Sweden had several short-lived governments; for most of the period these were social democratic. Perhaps even then the feeling was growing that the parliamentary future belonged to social democrats. If so, there is a definite logic that *reformist* union leaders thought about changing the locus of class conflict: from costly strikes within the industrial sphere to less costly redistributive policies within the political sphere.