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TIDEN

TRADE UNIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE NORDIC MODEL — ORGANISATION AND RECRUITMENT

SUMMARY

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– organisation and recruitment

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This report forms part of a larger project about the Nordic model. The project is initiated by Samak, the cooperation committee of the Nordic labour movement, comprising workers' parties and trade union confederations in the Nordic region. In addition to this report on trade union organisation, the project includes a report on the political framework of the Nordic labour market and a concluding section on the future of the Nordic model.

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About the report:

The Nordic region enjoys a higher level of trade union organisation than the rest of the world. In the European continent, Belgium is the only country outside of the Nordic region where over 50% of employees are affiliated to a trade union. Nevertheless, levels of trade union organisation have fallen in the Nordics too. This report is primarily focused on examining how to maintain, and hopefully increase, the current level of trade union organisation. The report provides suggestions on how to effectively retain and reinforce the influence of trade unions, and thereby bolster the Nordic model.

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Summary

The level of trade union organisation in the Nordic region needs to rise, that is, the proportion of employees affiliated to trade unions must be higher. Increasing the level of union organisation with the sections of the trade union movement with close links to the workers' movements is of particular concern, although raising the level in general is of course desirable. A higher level of trade union organisation contributes to the strength of the Nordic model, and can also be seen as a consequence of the model itself. In other words, the causal links can work both ways. Equally, a weaker level of organisation could both undermine the Nordic model and indicate that the model has become weaker. With this in mind, a high level of trade union organisation coupled with strong trade unions is essential not only for employees in the Nordic region, but for Nordic society as a whole.

A higher level of union organisation is associated with a greater number of employers affiliated to trade unions. This is a necessary, albeit insufficient condition for securing trade union influence. Other key factors include affiliation to collective bargaining agreements, opportunities for trade union mobilisation and interaction between trade union movements and other workers' movements. In this regard, recruitment of members and the ability of trade unions to retain the members it already has falls under the spotlight, albeit in an even broader context. Recruitment of trade union members is seen as a means of reinforcing union organisation, retaining and extending trade union influence and thereby underpinning the Nordic model.

Old and new Challenges

Crisis awareness

The trade union density has declined in the Nordic countries (with Iceland as an exception). The decline has been particularly vast within LO affiliates (known as SAK in Finland). In the rest of Europe, the decline has been even greater. The trade union density is under threat. Trade unions that currently are growing or maintaining members must be aware of the emerging global trend. There is a need to pay attention to and address the severity of a declining trade union density.

Higher levels of trade union density – one component within a comprehensive trade union strategy

Efforts to increase the trade union density must be one component within a comprehensive trade union strategy. Other components, such as signing collective bargaining agreements, strengthening trade union trainings, and advancing positions for workers should also be included in the strategy.

Use trade union values, membership benefits and professional identification to recruit trade union members

The ability of trade unions to recruit members is contingent on three components: a support of trade union values, a membership that is economically beneficial to the employee, and the trade union's ability to strengthen its members' professional identity. Depending on the profession and the trade union, the strength of each component varies.

More resources and greater status for work on labor organizing.

- Trade unions should focus further on labor organizing – it is crucial that leaders within the trade unions motivate why this is necessary.
- Organizers need support and guidance through coaching and trainings.
- Involve negotiating ombudsmen in new efforts and coordinate with local shop stewards.
- The management team within trade unions must articulate that working to increase membership numbers is of high priority.

Professionalization of recruitment campaigns

- Campaigns and methods should be evaluated and fine-tuned to become more successful.
- There is a need for meetings between shop stewards and potential members. The most effective recruitment method is face-to-face.

Successful trade unions with high levels of trade union density have a responsibility to support trade unions facing challenges

There is a need for a better exchange of best practices between the Nordic countries on recruitment and organizing methods.

Keeping members is equally important as recruiting new ones

Long-term strategies, clear multi-level goals, reviewing and simplifying administrative tasks and routines, help efforts to keep members.

Trade union efforts to reduce precarious work

The trade union density is lower amongst employees with precarious work, such as contract workers. It is in the interest of trade unions to limit the growing number of precarious work.

Lower and more equal fees for unemployment benefits

The link between unemployment benefits and trade union membership has become weaker in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. This has contributed to a lower trade union density. It is imperative that governments advocate for subsidies that equalize fees for unemployment benefits as well as subsidies that helps even out fees between professions (so that the fee does not increase for workers in professions facing high levels of unemployment).

Tax deductions for the trade union membership fee

In order to better the conditions for trade union organizing, one concrete action would be to amend the law and introduce more comprehensive tax cuts for the trade union membership fee.

Increase exchanges of organizing and recruitment experiences between Nordic trade unions

There is a need to increase the exchange of ideas regarding methods for organizing and recruitment strategies within various trade unions. There is also a need to exchange ideas regarding organizing and recruitment within the Nordic countries.

Examples of measures within the Nordic trade union movement.

1. Working systematically with young people. The Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions has devised a broad strategy for working with young people, systemically contacting former student members who have entered the labour market. In each region there is a youth secretary within the union tasked with planning activities in schools and liaising with young people in schools, apprentices and young employees.
2. Increasing members where there are collective bargaining agreements and using 'super-recruiters'. The Norwegian Union of Commerce and Office Employees (HK) has devised a new strategy for recruitment. This includes recruitment activities at workplaces where there are collective bargaining agreements and systematically using 'super-recruiters'. In order to recruit members at large shopping centres, the Norwegian Union of Commerce and Office Employees worked alongside other unions, partly by opening shared trade union office premises.
3. Planning, measurability and a systematic approach. The industrial union in Finland has fine tuned its strategy on recruitment and organisation, with planning, measurability and a systematic approach the three foundations of this approach. Building up local operations at workplaces and identifying suitable local leaders is a key part of the strategy.

4. Advertising and digital marketing. In Sweden, the trade union Unionen has significantly increased its membership and is now the largest trade union in the Nordic region. The union has pursued a systematic strategy of advertising and digital marketing in order to recruit new members. Making it easy to become a member has been another key factor.
5. Recruitment linked to local trade union requirements. The Danish trade union 3F operates systematic trade union recruitment campaigns associated with specific demands at local workplaces. The union is currently running a campaign – ‘Clean respect’ – which aims to recruit more cleaners at hospitals. For 3F, organisation and recruitment is not an isolated event, but part of an overarching strategy which seeks to increase trade union influence in workplaces.
6. Information on trade unions for migrant workers. SAK/FFC in Finland (the equivalent to LO in Norway, Sweden and Denmark) has run a project for migrant workers in Finland, with employees coming mainly from Estonia and Russia. The project is aimed at providing basic information on trade union rights and has contributed to strengthening organisation. During a certain period, a trade union centre was set up in Tallinn in order to provide information for employees planning to travel to Finland to work.
7. Improving the status of trade union representatives engaged with organisation and recruitment. The Commercial Employees’ Union in Sweden has set up a dedicated members development council within the organisation, which contains representatives from all departments. One of the reasons for this was to create a professional structure for recruitment of members and organisation. There are currently dedicated staff with responsibility for

recruiting members. Moreover, the union systematically monitors changes and trends in relation to membership statistics in different parts of the country, as well as the impact of different membership recruitment campaigns.

8. Local trade union activist group which visits small workplaces. The Swedish Union for Service and Communications Employees in Stockholm has formed a so-called activist group, which pays visits to small workplaces with little or no members. Its objective is to recruit trade union members and develop new, local trade union structures.
9. Trade union management teams must justify and clarify new organisational initiatives. The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union has reached the conclusion that it must devote considerable time and resources to recruitment and organisation. The alternative is that organisational work may be perceived as a supplementary activity. At the same time, unions embarking on more organisational activities may often experience tension among more established sections of the organisation, who are accustomed to working in a certain way. With this in mind, it is essential trade union management teams clearly justify and explain the move towards greater organisation.
10. The internet forums which answer questions on the trade union. The Finnish Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors (JHL) has begun to devote extensive human resources towards recruitment and organisation. Some of the trade union information is conveyed via digital channels. The union has started up dedicated online forums where employees can get answers to trade union related questions.
11. Meeting employees who are interested in trade unions outside

the workplace. The Finnish Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors (JHL), based in Helsinki, is running an extensive project which aims to bolster trade union activities among private care providers. This mainly involves visits to workplaces, and convening employees with an interest in trade unions at locations outside the workplace, such as cafés or lunch restaurants.

12. Members are to have a 'positive experience' when interacting with the union. The National Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees (HK) in Denmark has examined and analysed the attitudes of different members groups in relation to trade union work. A key conclusion was the importance of ensuring members have a 'positive experience' during interaction with the union. Members who have a 'negative experience' run a far greater risk of leaving the organisation. In order to reinforce trust between members and trade union representatives, HK has charted where and at what times meetings between the union and local members take place. The aim is to develop these meetings in order to ensure the benefits for individual members are even greater.
13. Identifying suitable local trade union representatives who can lead organisational work. The National Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees (HK) department in Copenhagen has been developing and improving methods for organisation and recruitment over a long period. A core area of the programme is to identify people who can become effective local representatives at workplaces where the union is carrying out organisational campaigns. The first stage involves holding meetings at workplaces to discuss the changes employers would like to see. It is also important to foster trusting relationships between trade union representatives and employees who are interested in union organisation and building up a local trade union structure.

14. Recruitment starts as early as vocational training. The Danish Union of Public Employees (FOA) is heavily involved in vocational education for a range of occupational groups who are active in publicly financed social care. While undergoing training, those who take up student membership in FOA can enjoy a discount on course literature. The involvement of the trade union in vocational training has been a key factor of successful recruitment.