

## **'The strongest bridge between the Nordic peoples'** **Scandinavian archives and collections**

The Scandinavian collaboration between workers' organisations, usually called 'workers' Scandinavianism', played an important part in the formation of the social democratic and trade union organisations in the Nordic countries. Intra-Scandinavian organisations do occur, among stonemasons, saddlers and upholsterers, for example, but the main form of collaboration was between the various national political and trade union organisations partly in Scandinavian associations and partly through regular or occasional Nordic meetings and conferences. This cooperation may be characterised as regional internationalism, structured in organisational terms as a network of collaboration between international and various regional and national organisations. Workers' Scandinavianism – or really workers' Nordicism – has changed over time as the Social Democrats acquired an increasing dominance as the ruling party in the Scandinavian countries and the trade union movement became a powerful lobby. It has also been a part in international co-operation on various levels. As early as 1934, Per Albin Hansson, the Swedish Prime minister, was pointing out in a speech that 'Interest is increasingly focusing on current political issues – national, Scandinavian, international. Workers' Scandinavianism is thus being diluted, while still retaining its own working methods. It is increasingly linked to the general aspiration toward intra-Scandinavian understanding and now has the basis for playing a leading part in the collaboration of the Scandinavian states both in its special concerns and in outward representation in international politics'.

### ***Nine Nordic archives***

Nine Nordic archives are kept at ARAB, as well as a number of collections. Half of these archives originate from associations of Nordic trade unions, headed by the very extensive fonds of Nordens fackliga samorganisation NFS [Council of Nordic Trades Unions]. Besides these, there are two co-ordination committees for the social democratic and the trade union labour movement. There are two archival problems associated with these Nordic archives, as with other international ones. In the first place these fonds constitute subdivisions, namely those from the time the secretariat was located in Sweden. The organisations' secretariats used to rotate between the Nordic capitals but there were also permanent secretariats as, for example, that of NFS in Stockholm. Also, under

the statutes, the practice in the event of dissolution was for the material to remain with the organisation whence the secretary came. It is not always simple to trace the other parts of the fonds in other Nordic labour movement archives or at the organisations.

The second problem is that work for the various Nordic organisations is dealt with within the Swedish organisation, for example a trade union. The specific secretariat was placed quite close to the organisation's activities. An unequivocal distinction was not always drawn between the Nordic association's records and those of the Swedish organisation, for example, the Swedish trade union's correspondence with the Nordic one. It is not certain that attention was always paid to this during arrangement work or indeed that it was possible to differentiate between the different records or separate out the Nordic ones. Therefore, and to obtain supplementary information generally, it is necessary to consult trade unions' archives whenever Nordic material appears in the archival descriptions kept at ARAB. Examples of such are those from Svenska gruvindustriarbetareförbundet [Swedish Mining Industry Federation], Lantarbetareförbundet [Farm Workers' Union], Transportarbetareförbundet [Transport Workers' Union] and Handelsanställdas förbund [Commercial Employees' Union]. The same is true for political and other organisations.

The Nordic trade union secretariats had the task of providing each other and each other's members with mutual support and with co-ordinating common interests and demands. The support related both to individual members working in the Nordic countries and affiliated organisation in the event of industrial disputes and in other contexts. Their main duties involved mutual information about and general discussion of trade union and other relevant issues (pay, terms of employment, job content, working environment, economic co-operation in Scandinavia, multi-national companies, etc.), joint projects and courses together with joint pressure in national, Nordic and international contexts. They also to a certain extent took on co-ordinating the approach to international organisations and promoted international amalgamations in their own organisations. This is illustrated in the four fonds from Nordic trade union internationals.

Skandinaviska läderindustriarbetareunionen [Scandinavian Leatherworkers' Federation] was founded in March 1921 after earlier attempts had failed. Foremost on the agenda was mutual support for the unemployed as well as travel subsidies. The first question was remitted to the

unions in the respective countries for decision because the differences in treatment were too great to arrive at a practical set of regulations. All approved members would receive travel subsidies but this would not include transfers to unions in other country. The particular circumstances were a major stumbling block, in particular, if 'there was danger of open conflict' or 'there was mass unemployment'. The objective was to include the Finnish organisations in the federation and this was successful. There was, moreover, an extension toward becoming a joint body of all shoe and leatherworkers' organisations taking place with the make-up of the trade union international as a model. In discussion of the subject in November 1935 the view was that such a body 'would command greater respect'. Problem-free it was not as the debate shows and the name issue, with the principles of the trade association or industry union as the background, was also discussed - shoe and leather or just leather. Under its new statutes of 1936, the new organisation took the name Nordiska läderindustriarbetareunionen [Nordic Leather Industry Workers' Federation].

With the Nazi's seizure of power in Germany and that country's subsequent expansion, new issues took centre

stage. In November 1935 news arrived that the chairman of the German Shoe Workers' Union and one-time secretary of the Shoe- and Leatherworkers' International, Josef Simon, held in Dachau concentration camp since May 1933, had been released but immediately re-detained. He was 'baade legemlig og økonomisk brudt sammen' [bodily and financially broken]. A collection was initiated. Sending an 'expert' to Germany in order to get better information was considered, but there were doubts as to whether 'this would achieve anything to the advantage of the detainee'. A statement was issued protesting at his inhumane treatment and demanding his release. Another consideration was 'that the Nazi regime in Germany might not be that firmly rooted amongst the majority of the population if it considers itself threatened by sick old men of 70'. Josef Simon was released and came to Sweden via Denmark. The federation supported him along with other deserving refugees from the German-speaking countries and the neighbouring Scandinavian countries through a refugee fund.

Nordiska beklädnadsarbetareförbundet [Nordic Leather Industry Workers' Federation] closed down in 1972. That year a joint organisation for textile-, garment-, shoe- and

leather industry workers, Nordiska beklädnadsarbetareunionen, [Nordic Garment Workers' Federation] was founded on an international model with the subtitle *Textil, konfektion, läder* [Textile, Garment, Leather].<sup>2</sup> Its secretariat was located in Sweden. The Federation's fonds contains minutes, rules, accounts, reports, correspondence and printed matter describing activities up to 1988. There are also tape-recordings from the annual conferences of 1979, 1984 and 1985.

Nordiska fabriksarbetarefederationen [Nordic Factory Workers, Federation], founded in 1901 as Skandinaviska ömsesidighetskommittén [Scandinavian Committee for Mutuality], was known from 1953-1961 as Nordiska grov- och fabriksarbetarefederationen [Nordic General and Factory Workers Federation].<sup>3</sup> Their fonds consists mainly of minutes with appendices (inter alia, statutes, reports and financial accounts) from 1893-1969 and correspondence, also relating to courses, conferences and seminars, from 1909-1973.

Otherwise, there are some collections relating to the Nordic trade union internationals (Builders and Woodworkers, Transport Workers, Foundrymen, Saddlers and Upholsterers) containing administrative printed matter, mainly printed congress and conference minutes and annual reports. There are members' news-sheets and other periodicals in ARAB's library. Contacts with these Nordic trade union internationals, as well as with organisations that do not have fonds and collections at ARAB, appear from the trade unions' archives all of which are at ARAB except those of the Swedish Metal Industry, Building Industry and Municipal Workers' Unions.

One interesting small record is that of De skandinaviska huvudstädernas regleringsfond [Scandinavian Capital Cities Regulation Fund], founded in Helsinki in 1929. This Nordic organisation was founded by regional offices of the associations of bricklayers in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo and Helsinki with the aim of settling questions about membership fees for bricklayers working in neighbouring Nordic countries and of offering one another support, for example in industrial disputes. The rather sporadic material extends up to 1951.

### ***Council of Nordic Trade Unions***

The most extensive and richly endowed fonds is that of Nordens fackliga samorganisation NFS [Council of Nordic Trade Unions]. NFS was founded in 1972 and today consists of the Trade Union Confederations of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), the white-collar organisations and those for people in academic professions. It is more than a labour movement organisation but rather a general one of wage earners. Material about the earlier co-operation of Nordic trade union confederations is to be found mainly in the

archive of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) but there is also a fragment in ARAB's collection Trade Union Confederation Nordic Co-operation. The records delivered so far by NFS run to 384 volumes including documents up to 1987. They are arranged chronologically but systematically by year according to an archival plan and from 1977 onwards a systematised dossier plan, revised in 1979 (archived in volumes 1, 84 and 158). The fonds are therefore structured but entry is made harder by a chronological arrangement with recurrent subject headings. For example, it is not possible to obtain immediate access to all the minutes (presidium, council, chairman's meetings) or annual reports or to documents and periodicals published by NFS. The latter, with the exception of *Facklig bulletin* [Trade Union Bulletin] 1973-1976, are not in the archives. On the other hand, *NFS Information*, *NFS-Bladet* [NFS Leaflets] and *NFS-Tema* [NFS Topics] are available in ARAB's library.

The task of NFS is, according to its statutes, to 'promote the interests of trade union organisations in a wide sense'. Its primary objectives are 'security of employment and income' and 'improved working conditions' but also to 'increase its influence on social progress'. The reason for the more permanent co-operation between the Nordic wage earners organisations was 'a growing trade union interest in international affairs' and 'the intensified economic and political integration of Western Europe', according to a presentation by NFS in 1979. There was a need 'to co-ordinate the behaviour of the member organisations by means of an international trade union plan', mainly with regard to *Fria fackföreningsinternationalen* [Free Trade Union International FTUI] and *Europeiska fackliga samorganisationen* [European Trade Union Association ETUA]. There was also a wish to 'seek to influence the official co-operative bodies at the Nordic level'. There were also attempts to co-ordinate activities with the Nordic Trade Union Internationals to avoid 'duplication of work'. Consultation and the mutual exchange of information were the basic premises.

NFS activities are reflected in the archives, which reveal a broad network of contacts both within and outside the Nordic countries. From the point of view of contacts with member organisations (through circulars, correspondence and meetings), these appear to be with Nordic trade union internationals. A few examples of these are *Hotell och restaurang* [Hotel and Restaurant], *Metall* [Metal], *Byggnads och trä* [Building and Woodworking], *Jordbruk och trädgård* [Agriculture and Horticulture], *Fabriks* [Factory], *Transport* [Transport] and *Postmannna* [Postal Workers]. The same contacts were upheld with the equivalent white-collar organisations (for example *Nordiska bankmannauionen* [Nordic Bank Workers' Federation] and *Nordiske funktionærssammenslutning* [Nordic Office Workers' Federation]). Other Nordic labour movement associations were natural partners for co-operation,

for instance SAMAK, Arbetarrörelsens nordiska samarbetskommitté [Joint committee of the Nordic Social Democratic Labour Movement], or the Nordic Workers Educational Association's secretariats. From the point of view of international trade unionism, NFS was linked on the one hand with FTUI and ETUA, and on the other with the OECD's trade union advisory committee (TUAC).

The whole field of European co-operation is of special interest (EFTA, EC, economy, democratisation of the economy, employment, migration, women, youth, consumers, regional politics, etc.).<sup>4</sup> The self-evident area of activity was the Nordic countries with its intra-Nordic labour market and the international co-operation between the Nordic states. The Nordic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Industrial Fund, the Nordic Investment Bank, the Scandinavian Council for Applied Research (Nordforsk) and the Nordic Cultural Fund are some of the co-operating bodies with which NFS had contact and from which it has material in the archives. Labour market policies, employment, industrial democracy, working conditions, workers lives, social renewal of working life, social policy, national insurance, education, computer issues as well as tourism and leisure are some of the subjects in which the NFS was involved in the region. One vehicle for this was the committees and working parties such as the NFS working conditions committee, economic-political working party, incomes policy working party, economic policy reference group, group union working party, the equal opportunities contact group, multi-national committee.

On top of this there is a special involvement in the third world through the working party for the co-ordination of aid to developing countries. Contacts with and interest in various European, African, Asian and Latin American countries are reflected in the fonds as well as in official material such as ambassadorial reports. Solidarity and relief actions were initiated and co-ordinated. Let us in particular mention a region where many Swedish organisations made a contribution, namely South Africa. There was in addition a special South Africa group working within the NFS. These activities are represented in the fonds by periodicals such as *Sechamba, Official Organ of the African National Congress South Africa*, and *Phambili, Bulletin published by the African National Congress (South Africa)*. Another country for which solidarity work was done was Chile. There were contacts with the Chilean Trade Union Confederation in exile in Paris and one step was co-ordinating help for imprisoned trade unionists in Chile.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Political and trade union co-operation***

Interesting and characteristic of Scandinavia are Kommittén för skandinaviska arbetarrörelsens samarbete [Co-ordination Committee for the Scandinavian Labour

Movement], and its successor SAMAK, the cooperation agency for political, i.e. the social democratic, and the trade union labour movement.<sup>6</sup> This co-operation which began in 1886 through Scandinavian workers congresses – before there were nationwide labour organisations in Sweden and Norway – was, by a resolution of the Labour Congress of 1912, to be intensified by means of an 'executive body', a co-ordination committee. Skandinaviska samarbetskommittén [Scandinavian Co-ordination Committee] existed between 1913 and 1920. In the end, 'it simply disappeared' as a consequence of the Norwegian Social Democratic Party's move to the left during the last year of the First World War and affiliation to the Communist International in 1919. The Co-ordination Committee was made up of a social democratic and a trade union representative from each of the Scandinavian countries. Its management and secretariat were at first located in Sweden but from September 1915 onwards in Denmark. On 20 October 1917 its management was transferred to Norway but effectively ceased to function because of the circumstances within the party there.

The small fonds from the Scandinavian Co-ordination Committee are partly comprised of material from the period of the Swedish secretariat, and partly correspondence up to 1920. There are interesting documents relating to the Scandinavian peace meetings in Meraker/Storlien, Fredrikshald and Arvika in June-July 1914, in other words before and unconnected with the outbreak of war<sup>7</sup>, and others on the conference of social democrats from the neutral countries held on 17-18 January 1915 in Copenhagen.<sup>8</sup> Because of the First World War the Co-ordination Committee, which was supposed to engage in practical Scandinavian labour politics, ended up being involved mainly in the peace efforts of the neutral social democrats. There is additional material at ARAB in the archives of Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti SAP [Social Democratic Party of Sweden], the LO, Hjalmar Branting and in the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee collection.<sup>9</sup> The final act of this phase of Scandinavian cooperation was again a labour congress, in Copenhagen. The interrelated topics of industrial democracy and nationalisation were discussed at this congress. Through the democratisation of industry, 'an imperative requirement for justice', and nationalisation, 'a social organisation of industry with planned use of labour, raw materials, energy and tools in the interests of workers and consumers'. Also 'the bureaucratic, capitalistic modes of operation were abolished and 'fully rational production in accordance with social needs' attained as was the object.<sup>10</sup>

In 1931 Thorvald Stauning, chairman of the Danish Social Democratic Party and Danish Prime Minister, initiated the re-establishment of a co-ordination committee. On 10 August 1932, the Labour Movement Scandinavian Co-ordination Committee (known as SAMAK since 1985) was established. The Committee is still active. The fonds

cover the years 1931 to 1991. They contain mainly minutes and other material from committee meetings, generally two per year; labour congresses in 1965, 1973, 1979, 1982, 1986 (the Centenary Congress) and 1990, conferences such as *Europa och framtiden* [Europe and the Future] in 1985, other meetings and reports from the various countries. There is also material from the working parties on foreign and security policy, research, local democracy and the public sector as well as the Swedish-Finnish industrial policy working party, an economic-political contact group and an Öresund group. The minutes of the Nordic Co-ordination Committee from 1931-1946 have been published.<sup>11</sup> These reports on activities

in Nordic countries and other appendices have, however, unfortunately been omitted. Consequently to study this period it is necessary to consult not just the fonds for the period but also the fonds of the SAP and LO as well as personal archives, for example those of Gustav Möller or Claes-Erik Ohdner. The Co-ordination Committee played – and continues to play – an important role as a political/trade union co-operation body and as a point of contact for party and LO chairmen and other prominent figures in social democratic and trade union organisations. Policies on fascism, the war, aid for neighbouring countries, positions regarding the internationals, League of Nations and UN, Nordic security policy, Nordic eco-

## NOTES

1. Speech in Copenhagen in December 1934

Arbeterskandinavismen [Workers' Scandinavianism], in Per Albin Hansson: *Demokrati. Tal och uppsatser* [Democracy. Speeches and Essays]. Stockholm 1935, p. 174f.

2. Karl-Erik Persson: *Nordiska beklädnadsarbetareunioner. 1897-1993*. [Nordic Leather Workers' Association. 1897-1993] Stockholm 1995.

3. Sten Sjöberg: *Arbetsmän i nordisk samverkan. Skandinaviska ömsesidighetskommittén 1901-1951* [The Working man in Nordic Collaboration. Scandinavian Committee for Mutuality 1901-1951]. Stockholm 1951.

4. See also Klaus Misgeld: *Den fackliga europavägen. LO, det internationella samarbetet och Europas enande 1945-1991* [The European path of trade unionism. Trade Union Confederation, international cooperation and the unification of Europe]. Stockholm 1997.

5. See also Lucy Viedma on Chile, in this book.

6. Martin Grass: *Arbeterskandinavism 1912-1920. Kommittén för skandinaviska arbetarrörelsens samarbete, några aspekter* [Workers' Scandinavianism 1912-1920. Co-ordination Committee for the Scandinavian Labour Movement, some aspects], in *Årbog for arbejderbevægelsens historie* [Labour Movement History Yearbook], vol. 4, 1974, pp. 55-88; Grass: *Från arbetarkongress till samarbetskommittén. Om Skandinaviska samarbetskommitténs bildande* [From Labour Congress to Co-operation Committee. On the foundation of the Scandinavian Co-operation Committee], in *Arbetshistoria*, no. 42, 1987, pp. 5-11; Kersti Blidberg: *Splittrad gemenskap. Kontakter och samarbete inom nordisk socialdemokratisk arbetarrörelse 1931-1945* [A Splintered community. Contacts and cooperation within the Scandinavian Social Democratic Labour Movement 1931-1945]. Stockholm 1984; Blidberg: *Just good friends. Nordic Social Democracy and security policy 1945-50*. Oslo 1987; Klaus Misgeld: *As the iron curtain descended. The Coordination committee of the Scandinavian labour movement*

and the Socialist International between Potsdam and Geneva (1945-1955), in *Scandinavian Journal of History* no. 1, 1988, pp. 49-63; see also Misgeld in note 4.

7. Martin Grass: '... den starkaste brygga mellan Nordens folk för fredligt arbete...'. *De skandinaviska arbetar- och fredsmötena sommaren 1914* [... the strongest bridge between the Scandinavian peoples for peace work...]. The Scandinavian Labour and peace meetings of the summer of 1914], in *Arbejderhistorie* 1988, pp. 77-105.

8. On the conference and peace work after the outbreak of war Martin Grass: *Friedensaktivität und Neutralität. Die skandinavische Sozialdemokratie und die neutrale Zusammenarbeit im Krieg, August 1914 bis Februar 1917* [Peace activity and neutrality. Scandinavian Social Democracy and neutral collaboration during the war, August 1914 to February 1917]. Bonn-Bad Godesberg 1975.

9. Otherwise see in particular Socialdemokratisk Forbund [Social Democratic Federation] archive in Arbejderbevægelsens bibliotek og arkiv [Labour Movement Library and Archives] in Copenhagen.

10. C.f. *De nordiska arbetarkongresserna under 100 år. Arbetarrörelsens framväxt och utveckling i de nordiska länderna* [A hundred years of Scandinavian Labour Congresses. Growth and development of the Labour Movement in the Scandinavian Countries]. Stockholm 1986.

11. *Samråd i kristid. Protokoll från den Nordiska arbetarrörelsens samarbetskommitté 1932-1946* [Consultation at a time of crisis. Minutes of the Scandinavian Labour Movement Cooperation Committee]. Ed: Krister Wahlbäck/Kersti Blidberg. Stockholm 1986.

12. On Europe see Misgeld above note 4.

conomic co-operation, Europe<sup>12</sup> and other current Nordic and international issues were dealt with at committee and working party meetings. Interesting comparative material was acquired from reports from the countries on activities or special subjects.

### *An extensive picture of co-operation*

The archives and collections from the Nordic Trade Union Internationals and the NFS together with the Co-ordination Committee's archives and the collection from the Scandinavian/Nordic labour congresses present an exten-

sive picture of the Scandinavian region, the Nordic countries' labour movements and the situation in those countries from 1886 until the 1990s. Mainly through reports from affiliated organisations and the issues discussed on which light is shed from the viewpoint of the various national organisations, we are given the opportunity of a comparative overview whose profundity may be enhanced by material and information in the archives of national organisations. We obtain a glimpse of the continuity of, and changes in, worker's Scandinavianism. The change also consists of the world outside the Nordic countries playing an ever-greater part as a consequence of the current Europeanisation and globalisation process.

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## LIST OF ARCHIVES AND COLLECTIONS

Fackliga landsorganisationernas nordiska samarbete [Collaboration of Nordic Trade Union Confederations] (collection) - 1 volume  
Co-ordination Committee for the Scandinavian Labour Movement - 1 volume  
Council of Nordic Trade Unions - 384 volumes  
Scandinavian Labour congresses [collection] - 3 volumes  
Scandinavian Garment Workers' Federation - 18 volumes  
Scandinavian Builders' and Woodworkers' Federation [collection] - 2 volumes  
Scandinavian Factory Workers' Federation - 22 volumes  
Scandinavian Leatherworkers' Federation - 7 volumes  
Scandinavian Transport Workers' Federation [collection] - 1 volume  
NORSAM - 1 volume  
SAMAK - 51 volumes  
The center for Scandinavian Workers - 2 volumes  
Scandinavian former secretariat [collection] - 1 volume  
Scandinavian Capital Cities Regulation Fund - 4 volumes  
Scandinavian Leather Workers' Foundation - < 1 volume  
Scandinavian Saddlers' and Upholsterers' Federation [collection] - 1 volume  
Scandinavian Woodworkers' Secretariat [collection] - 2 volumes

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Misgeld, Klaus: *As the iron curtain descended. The coordination committee of the Scandinavian Labour Movement and the Socialist international between Potsdam and Geneva (1945-1955)*, in *Scandinavian Journal of History* no. 1, 1988, pp. 49-63  
Misgeld, Klaus: *Den fackliga europavägen. LO, det internationella samarbetet och Europas enande 1945-1991*. Stockholm 1997. *De nordiska arbetarekongresserna under 100 år. Arbetarrörelsens framväxt och utveckling i de nordiska länderna*. Stockholm 1986  
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Sjöberg, Sten: *Arbetsmän i nordisk samverkan. Skandinaviska ömsesidighetskommittén 1901-1951*. Stockholm 1951

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