

# Feminism and Unionism in Sweden

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The many-sided debates within contemporary Western feminism tend to focus in the first instance on the social origins of women's subordination, exclusion, and marginalization. These debates gain their significance from the political problematic that they are at least tacitly addressing: what sort of reforms would deliver full citizenship to women—their substantive inclusion on an equal footing in political, social, economic, and industrial processes? But too often participants in the debates do not pose this question of political practice explicitly and sharply. The resurgent women's movement in Sweden, as the heir to a paradoxical reformist development over more than three decades, is a welcome exception. During this period, a supposedly "woman-friendly" Social Democratic government has pursued second-wave feminist lines of reform, and on many indexes women in Sweden are now the least marginalized in the world, yet the gender system remains intact and demonstrates a remarkable capacity to renew itself in a society that has become a byword for modern and democratic progress. Sweden's new "third-wave" feminism thus has a vital tale to tell about how conventional approaches to reform fail women and what women themselves have to do to develop lines of political activism and reform that more accurately target the mainsprings of gender power.

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We would like to thank Christina Bergqvist, Frank Castles, Yvonne Hirdman, Jill Roe, Ylva Waldemarson, Cecilia Åse, and the editorial board of *Politics and Society* for their very useful comments on the first draft of this article. We take sole responsibility for our interpretations and any remaining errors the piece may contain.

The reformist paradox in question reveals itself in the current status of women in Sweden. Since the most recent national election in September 1994, they have occupied 42 percent of the seats in the unicameral parliament and half the ministerial posts in the Social Democratic government. Comprehensive welfare services in “the woman-friendly welfare state” provide women with both a labor market that they dominate and care for dependents to replace their unpaid domestic services, at least to the extent necessary to free them for paid work. Paid parental leave, which can be apportioned between the parents of newborn children as they see fit, reinforces women’s standing on the labor market. Their participation rate in the paid workforce is only marginally below men’s (81 against 85 percent), their hourly wage rates are 90 percent of the male rate in the private sector and 84 percent in the public sector, and their unemployment rate compares favorably with the male rate (5 and 8 percent, respectively).<sup>1</sup> In both the blue- and white-collar sectors, Swedish women are in the internationally unique position of being more unionized than men: 87.1 percent of women in the former and 86.3 percent in the latter are unionized, as against male rates of 84.0 and 79.8 percent, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

In most Western countries, circumstances like these would appear almost utopian. But other indexes tell a more familiar story of enduring subordination. For instance, women’s average income in Sweden is just 66.1 percent of men’s—a function among other things of poorer career development, undervaluation of the skill component in women’s occupations, interruption of employment, (often involuntary) part-time status, and an earnings-related supplementary pension system that complements the flat-rate universal aged pension. Thirty-six percent of women retirees are entirely dependent on the latter, as opposed to just 4 percent of retired men. And present trends on the labor market are entrenching this inequality. Around a quarter of women workers under twenty-five years of age worked part-time in 1990; now around half do so. In the blue-collar sector as a whole, 53 percent of women (as opposed to 9 percent of men) work part-time. Women have been particularly subject to casualization of work, which frequently leaves them with “permanent temporary status.” The Swedish labor market’s pronounced and intractable gender segregation, which high-profile equal pay and anti-discrimination measures hardly address, facilitates this and many other manifestations of inequality. Forty-one percent of women employees work in occupations that are 90 to 100 percent female, and another 35 percent work in ones that are 60 to 90 percent female.<sup>3</sup>

For reasons like these, gender relations—which had tended in the past to be subsumed under class conflict—have never been so visible or hotly contested in Sweden. The local reflection of the international shift to the right has prompted an equal and opposite reaction in the strong resurgence of the women’s movement in its many manifestations during the nineties. Feminist academics and publicists have demonstrated an astonishing capacity, by their mere presence, to drive the

normally cool, detached, and self-assuredly liberal intellectual elites in Swedish academia and mass media to histrionically intolerant and intellectually insupportable vituperation. The delicately balanced proportional representation system labors under a growing gender factor in voting patterns and the lingering threat of a women's party forming. Down in the many layers of the union movement—to a great extent the bedrock of this highly employed, highly unionized society molded by decades of Social Democratic tutelage—the discontents of gender accumulate. Gender relations are seldom discussed in the absence of the word *crisis*.

The new women's movement problematizes the toothlessness of the long-standing official approach to pursuing gender equality through gender-neutral reforms. In spite of the hopes of second-wave feminists, gender inequality and subordination have survived the massive influx of women into the paid workforce and welfare-state development from the sixties, as well as the welter of anti-discrimination legislation and labor market agreements on wage equalization and equal employment opportunity. Just how gendered inequality has escaped the reformist net, the mutations it has adopted, and the institutions that have sheltered it are the stuff of gender conflict in Sweden today. This critique of Swedish reformism now necessarily includes its ideological capitulation to major elements of internationally ascendant economic rationalism and its associated neo-managerialism, both of which militate for a sharp deterioration in the status of women. The present upsurge of gender conflict yields important insights into the preconditions and processes of the effective emancipation for women through a new emphasis on women's own collective action within established institutional settings and a new approach to reform based on an explicit gender perspective. The new feminism, equipped with much more targeted organizational resources and analytical tools, has announced its presence in Swedish political and organizational life.<sup>4</sup> The resurgent women's movement in Sweden certainly follows the international feminist trend in the nineties of focusing on union, electoral, and cultural politics,<sup>5</sup> but its location in a well-established reformist polity yields unique insights into the more subtly recalcitrant and self-renewing obstacles to gender equality.

#### THE SWEDISH GENDER MODEL IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Following the Norwegian precedent, the Swedish government in 1985 set up what would be an important five-year public inquiry into the distribution of power in Swedish society. In her seminal contribution to the inquiry, Yvonne Hirdman provided a theorization of "the gender system" that has become by common consent the starting point for feminist analysis of gender inequality in that country. The gender system refers to "the system and the process which constitutes social organization, which orders the sexes into he and she, an ordering which underpins

all other social arrangements and which has given rise to a superstructure of visible as well as invisible artifacts with strong normative and identity-shaping effects.” This system has two supporting “logics”—first, the segregation of the sexes, and second, the male norm, that is, the male defines the normal, general case, while the female stands for the different (and even deviant) one.<sup>6</sup>

There are two critical emphases here. The first points to the dynamism of the gender system, to its institutional mobility so to speak, an emphasis to be read in the context of Carole Pateman’s insistence on the characteristic modernity of reconstructions of men’s power over women since the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> This is a theme that contemporary Swedish feminism takes to heart. This modernist conceptualization of the gender system is an antidote to the strong underlying assumption of Swedish reformism that the subordination of women rests on a mere survival of antediluvian practice and prejudice, which “progress,” rationality, and information campaigns will finally dispel. The second emphasis in Hirdman’s concept is on the constitutive role that the gender system plays in social arrangements as a whole. Gender power is generic and thus not simply one of a number of injustices that can be dealt with pragmatically, with a little dexterous institutional engineering.

Indeed, a characteristic aspect of the Swedish reformist tradition that Swedish feminists have drawn a bead on in recent years is precisely its privileging of instrumental rationality, the very ethos of modernity. This critique has been especially developed by Anna Jónasdóttir, who has argued that Western anti-feminism since early modern times has only partially relied on arguments about women’s “natural” subservience to men. In fact, the more important lineage, which she traces back to Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, among others, effectively dismisses the argument based on women’s presumed natural inferiority and instead justifies the exclusion of women from the “public” sphere of economy and politics on quite other grounds: namely, that “women’s sexuality and love were seen by ‘the great revolutionary thinkers’ to constitute a useful natural resource, and hence should obviously be exploited.”<sup>8</sup> Women’s utility was best realized through their confinement to “the little world” of domesticity. Nonetheless, since the dawn of industrialization, poorer women who for the time being were not fully engaged in domestic life (such as the young and unmarried ones) gravitated into manufacturing, where their utility consisted in providing industry with an especially cheap and supposedly docile subproletariat. Closer to our own time, however, in a new age of mass industrial production in the postwar long boom, their marginal utility in the domestic sphere declined at the same time as the local supply of male wage labor proved inadequate for expanding industries. The time was then ripe for an instrumentally rational reworking of all women’s lives to make them available en masse on the labor market.

This instrumental reworking of women’s lives took a particularly abrupt and explicit form in Sweden at the beginning of the 1960s, when Swedish industry

underwent unparalleled expansion. The earlier Social Democratic ideal of the semiprofessionalized housewife in her separate sphere of social utility<sup>9</sup> was hastily replaced in a series of state reforms and central agreements between the peak blue-collar union organization (LO) and the employers' federation (SAF) by a brand new family ideal now featuring two wage-earning parents of equal status and overlapping "roles" both at home and at work. The continuity of the instrumentally rational view of women is clear in historian Ylva Waldemarson's wry summary of how the great reform wave of the time came about:

Once upon a time in the land of Sweden, in a particular historical conjuncture, the interests of the political and economic powers coincided. The labor movement and industry could unite around a policy of economic growth. This policy came to mean that the women of the land, both the single ones and the mothers of small children, were needed to a hitherto unheard of extent on the labor market. Of course, there had been women in paid work before. Some of them, but far from all, were members of an organization called LO. Here they had fought hard and long for a greater say for women and for equal pay for men and women—usually in vain. In the same way they had been told that the question who should look after their children while they worked had nothing to do with unionism. But then one day the Affluence Fairy waved her wand over the land of Sweden, and in the twinkling of an eye women became a scarce resource on the labor market. And lo! in the very next instant they could discuss equal pay and women's issues, and it was not long before both the state and LO were heard ringing out in chorus: Child-care for all! And that is the end of the tale of how the boom years and the Swedish model created an historic possibility for Swedish women to build a life of equality for themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Those sociologists and union activists—outriders of second-wave feminism—who in 1962 produced the landmark Swedish-Norwegian study *Women's Lives and Work*<sup>11</sup> announced a firm resolve to seize this opportunity. The ultimate solution to "the woman question" that Marx, Engels, and Bebel had foreshadowed—women's emancipatory absorption into the industrial workforce—appeared to be at hand. But a quite different, instrumentally rational agenda was already well established: the use of female labor as a subproletariat.

The precedent that actually followed for women's entry into Swedish industry goes back at least to the interwar period when, as Ulla Wikander has noted, "there emerges a crass view, enshrined in economics, of cheap, available and expendable female youth," and she notes the survival of this tradition now in the 1990s,<sup>12</sup> a matter we will return to below. When Gunhild Kyle published the first significant study of women's actual experience on the labor market after their great influx in the sixties and seventies, she summed this experience up in its title: *Female Guest Worker in Male Society*.<sup>13</sup> The new female labor force in Sweden was pushed into precisely the subproletarian status of migrant labor elsewhere. The two logics of the gender system could scarcely have been clearer in the pronounced segregation of women workers in jobs that were characterized by low pay, insecurity, part-time status, monotony, lack of job satisfaction and career path, inconvenient hours, and poor occupational health and safety. Above all, women's jobs carried low status according to the social definition of skill based on the male norm.<sup>14</sup>

When a commemorative volume marking the thirty years since *Women's Life and Work* was published in 1992, one contributor quoted at length the latter's findings on the extreme segregation and low status of women workers at the dawn of the sixties. She then noted dryly that the only observable change since it was written has been the subsequent disappearance of some of the job categories it mentions.<sup>15</sup> Empirical support for this insight is not hard to find. We have already noted the startling income gap between Swedish women and men and the continuing trends on the labor market that are perpetuating it.

The inequities of gender in the workplace itself are every bit as glaring. For instance, an aspect of work life that catches the eye of Sweden's diligent statisticians is "the scale of unfreedom" at work, an important indicator of the quality of work life. Among women municipal and private sector workers, 64 percent and 58 percent, respectively, suffer from great to extreme lack of choice of working hours and leave, as against 51 percent and 52 percent for men. Only 68 percent of women workers can leave their work station for five minutes without permission or replacement, compared to 91 percent of men. Similar relationships exist between women and men when the degree of discretion in how they carry out their work tasks is compared: women suffer far more from "very to extremely controlled" work situations. Their statistics for repetitious and unvaried physical movements, frequent heavy lifting, monotonous work, symptoms of repetitive strain injury, long-term motor disability, and early retirement (including on medical grounds) all compare unfavorably with their male counterparts.<sup>16</sup> An aspect of "the feminization of the working class," which the beginning of women's public sector employment in Sweden at the turn of the century foreshadowed, is women overtaking uninviting tasks that men are only too anxious to shed. As the metalworkers union put it in a frank heading in its *Solidarity Work Policy for Enriched Work*, its major survey of working conditions and program for work life reform of 1989: "the worse the job the more numerous the women."<sup>17</sup> And still beyond statistical measurement is the widespread violation of women's personal integrity in the form of sexual harassment, which is only now receiving half-hearted authoritative attention.<sup>18</sup>

What is highly conspicuous in this picture of women's work life, as Annika Baude<sup>19</sup> among many other researchers of women's work life has demonstrated, is the fact that gender remains a generative organizing principle in Swedish work life and labor market functioning, and thus a fundamental factor in the life chances they so unevenly distribute. In most Western countries, this situation could be taken as self-evident, even banal. But in Sweden, the decades of high-profile gender equality reform and its partial achievements in some areas (such as female labor market participation and female/male wage rate equalization) have induced a profound complacency toward the survival of the gender system as a whole. Influential intellectual circles, which remain uninformed by or hostile to femi-

nism, assume that the rhetoric of gender equality has been realized in practice. They thus perpetuate a gender-blind discourse of rationality and progress with a distinctly social-democratic ring.<sup>20</sup> Feminist research has for some years arguably been the jewel in the crown of Sweden's impressive work life research effort, but this does not stop the latter's mainstream contributors living in a genderless universe.

Maud Eduards has captured this extraordinary coincidence—of a tradition of gender equality reform with the persistent reproduction of gross multidimensional gender inequity—in her concept of “the Swedish gender model” based on “productivity, pragmatism and paternalism.” “This means an emphasis on growth and an effective use of human and natural resources; co-operation and broad-based political solutions rather than confrontation; and an authoritative and interventionist state based on a male norm.” What this model of reform produces, and what the women's movement is rebelling against now, is “an instrumental, measure-oriented, partially woman-friendly politics which nevertheless lacks a sex/gender-political analysis, and which is thus arbitrary.”<sup>21</sup> Rather than the pursuit of women's rights, it has been a peculiar conception of rational economic management that has driven reforms like LO's and SAF's historic agreement on equal pay for women and men in 1960.<sup>22</sup> The wider Swedish reformist tradition, as represented by both policy makers at all levels and the mainstream researchers into work life, fundamentally serves this conception of economic rationality, not the cause of gender equality. For this reason, its support of the latter is precisely, in Eduards's word, “arbitrary.” The point here is not to deny the real gains toward autonomy that women in Sweden have won through their internationally unique access to paid employment. Women's groups were highly conscious of these gains in the lead up to the October 1994 referendum on whether the country should join the European Union, for instance; in most member countries, women's equal access to paid work is hardly a common assumption.<sup>23</sup> The point is rather that the widely held expectation, traditionally espoused by socialists and second-wave feminists alike, that the labor market per se would prove to be the royal road to gender equality, has been bitterly frustrated. All too often women have entered employment only to find themselves trapped in a double subordination, in the workplace as well as the home. Far from being confined to the domestic sphere, the gender system followed women into their new workplaces. Being systemic rather than institutional, it can and does take root in any institutional setting.<sup>24</sup> An instrumentally rational tradition of gender-neutral reform proved compatible with both the continuation of the interwar “crass view” of female labor power in postwar industrial society and with the woman-hostile economic rationalism and neo-managerialism of the eighties and nineties. The burning questions in this mutation of the gender system are, What role did the union movement play in its construction, and What role can it be induced to play in its transcendence?

## LO, WOMEN, AND THE SWEDISH GENDER MODEL

A common weakness in studies of “the Swedish model” is the tendency to treat the peak blue-collar union organization, LO, as “a black box”—to see it as one unified collective actor with an unambiguous role in Sweden’s socioeconomic development and power structure. LO, to say the least of it, has played a contradictory role in the development of the Swedish gender model, and the contradictions have to be traced to the organization’s internal dislocations and to the external constraints operating on it from time to time at its different levels of institutional presence. What has also changed over time has been the analytical resources available to it, not least in the gathering strength and developing paradigm of women’s research. As a first approximation, one can break down “LO’s” contribution to the development of the Swedish gender model into the parts played by three often poorly articulated entities within it—its in-house researchers and program writers, its central leadership and negotiators, and the dense structures of its constituent unions.<sup>25</sup>

Since the Second World War, LO has gradually built up a formidable research capacity. This has allowed it to formulate policy with increasing independence from its political affiliate, the Social Democratic Party (SAP), which, in the absence of its own policy-making resources, has come to rely increasingly on orthodox expertise in the state bureaucracies and academic establishment. Anglo-American economics and positivist conceptions of social science mold this orthodox expertise in Sweden and account for its right-wing predilections. Neither of these sources of the labor movement’s programmatic thinking, then, is “value free,” and they have contributed to an increasingly bifurcated ideological perspective. At the same time as the SAP has retreated first into social liberalism, and thence into thrall to the international economic-liberal revivalism of the past two decades, LO—at least on the programmatic level—has evolved in a democratic-socialist direction. Hence, relations between these two giants of “Organization-Sweden” have deteriorated markedly over the past twenty years, and they have been punctuated by flashpoints that the mass media have dubbed “the Wars of the Roses” after their red rose logos.<sup>26</sup>

LO’s program writers have developed an increasingly sophisticated, postliberal concept of democracy<sup>27</sup> based on inclusive and equal socioeconomic citizenship. This concept includes gender equality at work as in social relations in general. The affinity between democratic-socialist perspectives and feminist demands has proved important in allowing the latter to be pursued in the union movement as recognizable democratic issues without the polarization of union organizations on gender lines. In other words, LO’s long-term ideological development has made even a third-wave feminist agenda at least discursively available.

LO’s report and program writers have shared the perspectives of *Women’s Life and Work* and have since then not shrunk from the remorseless exposé of how



thoroughly the hopes there enunciated have been dashed, in work and pay relationships and other work life inequities and in the persistently skewed distribution of unpaid labor between women and men in the care of dependents and in the maintenance of the household. In report after report, especially after the intensification of concern over gender inequity in the mid-seventies, they have not only disclosed the dispiriting realities of women's lives but moralized about the male rank and file's continuing failure to pull its weight in the home to facilitate women's participation in union affairs, and they have hectored powerholders to treat gender issues more seriously.<sup>28</sup>

The first brake on the effectiveness of the program writers' ideological effort has been the considerable distance between them, on one hand, and the central leadership and negotiators of LO, on the other. To borrow terms from power theory, the latter are immersed in an endless round of power plays—negotiations with employers, the white-collar union peak organization (TCO) and government at various levels, and with representatives of LO's own constituent unions. The power LO leaders wield is episodic, "eventful," whereas gender power is uneventful—uneventfully constant and ubiquitous. The company LO leaders keep in their eventful lives also tends to reinforce instrumental rationality and with it the "crass view" of female labor and of women as such. They thus perpetuate "the Swedish gender model." Poignantly enough, the immediate past chairmen of both LO and TCO—those two great institutional advocates of gender equality—have been more or less forced into ignominious resignations, partly on the grounds of grossly sexist insult and practice, respectively. The use LO leaders make of their program writers' products is often purely ceremonial and limited to solemn occasions, above all party, LO and union congresses, or as a fig leaf of decency when their gender politics come under public scrutiny.

The second brake on progress—and the most formidable one—is the institutional inertia at the local and regional levels in LO's constituent unions, which have acted as semi-impermeable membranes separating women unionists from positions of influence. Here, the woman activist and aspirant to a delegate or leadership position typically faces a compact array of obstacles thrown up by an entrenched male organizational culture. These obstacles range from forbiddingly large meetings, turgid and esoteric meeting procedures and jargon, inconvenient meeting times and places, and extravagant uses of delegates' time to male selective deafness, outright sexism, and harassment.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time as the unions' gendered organizational culture throws up such formidable obstacles to female participation, the lack of male participation in domestic work adds a major dimension to the problem, as LO's researchers point out. Apart from its moral offense, the exploitative domestic division of labor enervates union mobilization by severely hampering the activism of the female half of the LO membership. Women unionists themselves constantly allude to it as the major barrier to their taking a more active role in union affairs.<sup>30</sup> *Justice*, a

major in-house research report written for the 1996 LO congress, estimates the female contribution to household maintenance at two-thirds, which is close to Baxter and Western's even more recent estimate of 70 percent.<sup>31</sup> These aggregate data no doubt understate the problem in households with children. Time-use studies reveal how, in households with children newborn to six years of age, women spend on average 6.42 hours a day on unpaid work as against men's 3.42 hours, and in those households with children of seven to seventeen years old, women spend 4.35 hours daily on unpaid work to men's 2.51 hours.<sup>32</sup> Would-be women activists thus tend to remain too pinned down in an exploitative division of labor in the home to fight with and through their unions for justice in their paid work.

These factors have led to the drastic underrepresentation of women in virtually all union positions, not least in those where meaningful influence is wielded, including those involved in negotiating centrally and locally with employers and in union representation on bipartite and tripartite bodies concerned with policy formulation and social administration. In the early nineties, women, who accounted for 46 percent of LO's membership, made up 26 percent of LO congress delegates, 25 percent of its general council (*Representantskapet*), and just 13 percent (two out of fifteen) of the executive (*Landssekretariatet*). In TCO—where women are 59 percent of the membership—they constituted 42 percent of congress delegates, 34 percent of the general council, and 21 percent of the executive. Clearly, women's underrepresentation varies directly with the relative power of the representative body in question. As late as 1983, the first woman joined the LO executive, and in 1989, the first woman went onto the executive of the metalworkers union, which has the third largest female membership of LO's constituent unions. (But it should be noted that no woman has ever sat on either the council or the executive of SAF.) At the end of the eighties, only 65 of LO's 525 representatives on tripartite policy-making bodies and 26 of its 598 delegates on bipartite labor market bodies were women.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, given that women account for nearly half of LO's membership of over two million, this body must be seen as "a women's organization of some significance," as Ylva Waldemarson notes with some bemusement.<sup>34</sup> Nearly one in four of the entire female population of Sweden is a paid-up member! It is on the basis of incongruities like this one that the new women's movement has been able to make women's underrepresentation in Organization-Sweden a critical issue of public life since the latter eighties. Union organizations have attracted particular odium in the process.

The first serious shot across LO's bows on the issue was fired by the historian Gunnar Qvist as early as 1974. He noted that women's representation had actually declined in the years leading up to his study and that LO in this respect took its place "among our most conservative institutions." He also made the important link between women's underrepresentation and the fact that "the LO leadership

completely lacks initiative on concrete questions to do with women's wages and working conditions."<sup>35</sup> "The Swedish model" itself has turned on joint employer-union regulation of the labor market in the absence of state involvement, and for women to be effectively excluded from these bipartite negotiations represents a massive political handicap.

LO was again singled out as a recalcitrant by the public inquiry into women's representation in Swedish organizational life in 1987.<sup>36</sup> The inquiry recommended that, unless such organizations steeply increased female representation, mandatory gender quotas should be legislated. Many organizations, including LO, have taken the threat seriously, as a follow-up inquiry in 1993 by two feminist political scientists has suggested, but the remaining underrepresentation is too significant for the threat to be lifted.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time as the Social Democratic union movement effectively marginalized women from union activism, it militated against women's separate organizations—another matter that the new feminism came to contest as a central issue, as we shall see. LO in particular elevated to the status of holy writ three traditional principles that were hostile to the women's movement. First, in the words of Swedish social democracy's founding father, Hjalmar Branting, "class comes before sex" (*klass kommer före kön*), and the sex of the class' representatives is supposedly irrelevant.<sup>38</sup> The Swedish Social Democratic labor movement as a whole has always outlawed any separate caucusing as divisive factionalism, and its leaders repeatedly cited Branting's aphorism to prevent women in particular from organizing within it. By implication, the struggle for gender equality was subsumed in the labor movement's struggle for equality across the board. Second, LO itself was the most effective vehicle for women's aspirations for gender equality. Third, women in LO had more interests in common with the male membership, their "class brothers," than they had with other groups of women.<sup>39</sup> Until fairly recently, of course, these were orthodox assumptions in socialist movements internationally. They played their part in perpetuating the Western tradition of excluding women—especially "women as women," mobilizing around the predicaments they shared as women—from public life and influence.<sup>40</sup>

#### THEMES IN THE RESURGENCE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Over the past decade, women's groups in Sweden have sought to both strengthen the reforms associated with second-wave feminism and also to move beyond them. Even these reforms were hardly unproblematic given the protocols of the Swedish model. The original Gender Equality Act was passed by a "bourgeois" (that is, nonsocialist) government in 1979 against the opposition of both LO and SAF, who viewed it as a trespass on their joint regulation of the labor market.<sup>41</sup> In their view, such reforms ought to be "negotiated," not legislated, and

as a concession to this view, the provisions of the act could be superseded if the “labor-market partners” entered into their own formal agreement in the area (which they subsequently did).

However, this relatively anodyne legislation was considerably strengthened in 1992, again during a bourgeois interregnum in which the Liberal Party under Bengt Westerberg’s leadership was going out of its way to bolster its pro-woman credentials. Under the new act, collective agreements cannot displace its provisions, and all employers of ten or more employees—including union branches and head offices!—have to file with the Gender Equality Ombudsman’s office annual plans detailing measures to be taken to facilitate employees’ need to integrate work and parenthood, to overcome gender segregation, and to eliminate gender disadvantage in promotion, training, and pay. The act also requires employers to account the following year for implementation of the plans and to evaluate their impact.

In accordance with the political culture of Scandinavia, in which legislation has strong normative force, these sorts of provisions enjoy considerable attitudinal impact. Union organizations now demonstrate unprecedented enthusiasm for gender equality programs that, as polls have demonstrated, enjoy a marked popularity among the rank and file—something LO’s program writers have seized upon. A survey of LO’s membership in 1993 revealed that 95 percent of men and 94 percent of women regarded equality between men and women as an important union issue, with around 75 percent of both male and female respondents ranking it as “very important.” Eighty-one percent of men and 89 percent of women considered women’s wages to be too low in relation to men’s.<sup>42</sup> This last finding should be seen in the context of the partial breakdown of centralized wage bargaining in the wake of SAF’s “farewell to corporatism,” which formed part of its strategy to deregulate the labor market and to reassert managerial prerogatives over wage setting as a lever into organizational change in the workplace. There is a widespread conviction in the union movement that all wage inequalities will thereby tend to grow again, particularly those based on gender.

As we have indicated, the Social Democrats’ turn to the right in the 1980s, their public sector austerities in their crisis package of 1990, and the return to bourgeois government in 1991 all constituted threats to women’s autonomy, employment prospects, living standards, and life chances, especially through the erosion of welfare services and jobs. The intimate connection between the welfare state and women’s aspirations to personal autonomy through paid work provides the new women’s movement with another of its central themes. The decline of women’s representation in parliament after the 1991 election from 37.5 percent to 33.5 percent and the new government’s establishment of a desultory “carer’s benefit” to be paid to people (read women) who stayed home to look after children and other dependents<sup>43</sup> underscored the threat, which provided the impetus for what

was at first women's mobilization in defense of existing gains. But the movement quickly moved beyond a defensive posture.

Women's networks achieved a new salience. *Stödstrumporna* ("the Support Stockings"—a play on *rödstrumporna*, "the red stockings") and the more left-leaning *Nätstrumporna* ("the Net Stockings") in particular rekindled the flame of the socialist-feminist Group 8 of the 1970s. The former talked seriously in early 1992 of launching a women's party as both an alternative and a threat to the established parties in order to highlight unaddressed women's issues. Under the slogan "The whole wage and half the power!" it emphasized women's lower wages and underrepresentation in positions of power. Potential support for a women's party appeared significant. Opinion polls found that up to a third of voters of both sexes (and a high percentage of younger women) would have considered voting for it. Although a national women's party has not in fact emerged, a poll taken before the 1994 election found that 40 percent of respondents would consider voting for it were it to materialize.<sup>44</sup> The major reason for the party not materializing was the hasty response of the major established parties (except the Conservatives) in adopting a raft of woman-friendly positions and introducing "layered" electoral lists that strictly alternated female and male candidates. This mechanism ensured that the party in question would return to parliament equal numbers of women and men for each electoral district. At the same time, the Social Democrats promised to fill half the ministerial posts with women if they were returned to government. The use of layered lists led to the steep rise in women's representation in the 1994 election, and all parties are now committed to their equal representation after the September 1998 election.<sup>45</sup>

Women's networks have sprung up at all levels of social practice,<sup>46</sup> not least—as we shall see—in the union movement. For the women's movement, they represent a traditional form of mobilization, but in the present situation, they have had two specific *raison d'être*: boosting women's representation in conventional socioeconomic organizations and, more generally, constituting forms of separate collective action for "women as women." As such, the networks challenge the institutions of the Swedish gender model, not least the union movement's taboo against women's separate organizations. They also militate against the passive, client status that the older reforms imposed on women.<sup>47</sup> But the challenge is more than an institutional one; it involves a break with the old gender-neutral approach to reform in favor of a gender perspective. As Maud Eduards has argued, the crucial importance of women's collective action lies in its "breaking the rules of the game" by "naming the problem," which is precisely the subordination of women within male-dominated institutions that enshrine the male norm. Conventional political institutions deny women political agency at the same time as they rule out a procedurally legitimate vocabulary in which to express their individual experience of subordination as well as their collective resistance. Women's

collective action thus fosters women's identity at the same time as it equips them with a vital power resource, not least in tackling gender segregation and women's exclusion from power and status in organizational life.<sup>48</sup>

The research on women's work life mentioned above reflects these new emphases in women's politics. The former has broadened out from the older focus on sex roles, women's own supposedly self-defeating "labor market behavior" and other "obstacles" to equality—as Yvonne Hirdman has recently pointed out—to embrace "a problematic whose kernel is the subordination of women and how the researcher relates to it." This problematic encompasses "the gender logic of organizations," including male work culture—in short, "how work creates gender." This approach mounts a self-conscious challenge to the whole tradition of instrumental rationality in the form of gender-blind work life research, as well as to its usually egregious application to new areas such as the caring services of the welfare state. "Power" and "subordination" are key terms in its analysis of work life.<sup>49</sup>

#### FEMINISM AND UNIONISM— NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

Historically, the reformist legitimacy of the Social Democratic labor movement—including its second-wave feminism—and the mystique it cultivated around rationality and progress successfully obfuscated the relationship between the Swedish gender model and women's continuing subordination. According to social democracy's worldview, all aspects of women's subordination were so many relics of premodern institutions and attitudes, which enlightened rational "progress" would automatically eradicate in their entirety. It was only in the late eighties that the progressivist mystique began to crumble. It is then we see a growing nervousness in the leadership of the labor movement about women workers' disaffection in two closely associated roles—as unionists and as traditional Social Democratic voters.

The LO leadership began to take a more serious approach to women's work life issues and underrepresentation in union affairs. In 1990, LO's researchers produced yet another graphic account of women's work life and exclusion from union organizations.<sup>50</sup> What was remarkably new this time was the report's title—*Klass och kön (Class and Sex)*—a pointed symbolic abandonment of the ancient Brantingian lore that "class comes before sex." Gender was now to enjoy the same fundamental dignity as class in union perspectives. At the same time, a number of LO women activists formed a small network, *Tjejligan* ("the women's gang"), to highlight women's issues both in the union movement and in the social-democratic campaign leading up to the 1991 elections. At first they met with the usual objections from male comrades against women's separate organization, objections the women rebutted with the argument that, so long as they were not using LO funds, their activities were none of its business.

But *Klass och kön*'s sequel was to be even more breathtaking: the LO congress the following year approved Tjejligan's establishment as an entirely independent women's network, but with financial support from head office and administrative back-up at central, district, and section level throughout its organization.<sup>51</sup> Head office's financial contribution came to cover, apart from administrative support, a SEK 12 million grant to establish an upbeat glossy journal, *Clara*, now sold at newsstands throughout the country. The congress took this decision as a "gift" to the beleaguered SAP in the midst of the electoral campaign. The LO leadership wanted the network, which quickly established itself in each LO district, to resecure women's loyalty to the party. Whether they actually expected or intended the network to outlive its original short-term purpose is unclear. But undoubtedly its subsequent development has beggared any expectations they might have entertained.

Tjejligan today is really a network of networks with a contact woman in each of LO's seventeen districts and 248 sections and with a contact at LO headquarters responsible for its overall cohesion. It has a membership of around 14,000, of whom 20 percent are not actually LO members. Its meeting style is particularly informal—and often downright festive—and it attracts media attention when its members bathe in fountains (often wearing its T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase *Klass och kön*), hand out condoms, and throw spectacular parties where young women and those with little union experience can meet veterans of the movement. To say the least, its style presents a startling contrast to established union organizational culture. It has managed to popularize its slogan (of Stödstrumporna provenance), "Half the power and the whole wage!" throughout the wider women's and union movements. The aim of its work now is to mount pressure on LO and its affiliates to pursue the union movement's commitment to gender equality seriously, to support women running for union and political office, and to provide those who gain positions with an ongoing frame of reference, including continuous contact with the female rank and file. In short, Tjejligan seeks not only to increase women's representation in the unions but also to see that women in office can work effectively for women's interests.<sup>52</sup>

Women's networking is an infinitely replicable device and, apart from Tjejligan, networks now exist in many affiliated union headquarters and regional organizations. There is now even an interparty women's network in parliament and at least one linking those in positions in the present Social Democratic government to their counterparts in the union movement. Networks have been adopted as a standard support device in work life reform aimed at breaking down gender segregation and women's exclusion from well-paid, responsible positions and career paths.

LO itself has now commended to its affiliates a number of goals in regard to the representation of women, including mechanisms to see to it that women are elected as delegates to congresses and to LO's general council in proportion to

their share of each union's membership and that only women be appointed to vacant positions in union offices unless a special case can be made out for the employment of a man. The latter rule applies at LO headquarters, which also requires all papers and proposals for consideration by the executive to be accompanied by an analysis of their impact on gender relations.<sup>53</sup>

The other showpiece of women's unionism in Sweden is the municipal workers union, *Kommunal (Svenska Kommunalarbetsförbundet)*.<sup>54</sup> It has been LO's—and the country's—biggest union for a considerable time; it has attained a 93 percent level of union membership, which stands at 665,000, 81 percent of whom are women. In fact, it houses roughly half of LO's women members. Among other categories of workers, it organizes those in the highly women-dominated welfare services—home care, child care, aged and invalid care, medical care, and hospitals. These women have been among the worst paid and most subject to the other abuses of the gendered labor market and of neo-managerialist rationalization, such as casualization, enforced part-time status, unaddressed occupational health and safety hazards, and organizational disempowerment. The union itself straddles the intersection of the welfare state's two vital functions for women actually or potentially in the workforce—its provision of both employment and of the services necessary to free women for work outside the household.

Up to the latter eighties, male domination of this union was especially incongruous: 80 percent of union positions were held by men, despite an 80 percent female membership! But in 1989, a nurse's aide from provincial Uddevalla, Lillemor Arvidsson, was elected chairwoman of the union. She also joined the LO executive (only the second woman to do so, and the first as leader of a union) as well as the SAP executive. She resigned spectacularly from the latter post the following year in protest against the Social Democratic government's crisis package—the only union leader to protest vigorously against its pay freeze and strike ban.<sup>55</sup> She became a media favorite for her unstudied manner, plain speech, and unswerving commitment to “class and sex” with scant inhibition from her Social Democratic affiliation. Women also gained a majority on the union executive and began to rapidly reverse the gender ratios at all levels in the union's structure. Of the thirteen leadership and delegate categories in it, women have constituted a majority in eight since 1993.<sup>56</sup> *Kommunal* experiments with new meeting formats to encourage women's activism, using smaller meetings based on personal acquaintances in workplace collectivities and more informal procedures and language. In another break with tradition (and widespread prejudice) in the union movement, the union explicitly identifies with the feminist cause in its gender equality program.<sup>57</sup>

The thrust of *Kommunal*'s campaigns exemplifies the reorientation in the women's movement toward an explicit gender perspective. In wage policy, it made much of the fact that in 1993, the average wage in all of the ten commonest male occupations in its area exceeded their ten female counterparts. In the 1994



wage round, it managed to push LO to negotiate for the first time a special 1 percent supplement on women's wages, rather than simply relying on the traditional supplementation of low wages in general. (LO agreed to a more substantial supplement to women's wages in 1995, but internal cohesion between LO unions broke down over other aspects of its bargaining stance, which in the upshot meant that LO could not coordinate the wage round.) Kommunal has also initiated or participated in a number of work evaluation projects aimed at increasing the status of and rewards to female occupations, especially in association with the Worklife Fund's ALFA-Q program, which has targeted female occupations for upgrading and reorganization on the basis of an explicit gender perspective.<sup>58</sup> These efforts precisely contest the social definition of skill based on the male norm, whereby the skill component in male occupations is highlighted while the skill component in female occupations is tacitly denied or devalued as a natural talent and an extension of women's "normal" household role.

But it is in the area of work life reform that Kommunal has seized its most important initiative and overtaken the metalworkers as the political cutting edge of the union movement. Here it has not only been able to improve women's work lives but also mount a defense of the welfare state on the ground, as it were, against the army of traditional rationalizers in the guise of neo-managerialist private consultants that began to invade it in the wake of the austerity measures. The stock-in-trade of the latter includes commercialization and contracting out of services, corporatization of municipal functional departments, and fragmentation and even Taylorization of welfare work. These measures drastically worsen working conditions and terms of employment. They also subvert the quality and availability of the services themselves while putting them beyond public scrutiny, democratic accountability, and grassroots civic interaction.

Kommunal had a head start in meeting this aspect of the swing to the right. From the mid-eighties, it had been involved in a number of projects to upgrade job content while achieving financial savings in the welfare sector, and in the late eighties and early nineties, it ran successful large-scale training and reorganization programs to equip its rank and file with the skills and procedures necessary to take charge—with some backup from head office personnel—of the reorganization of their own jobs. The point of this reform effort was to preempt the rationalizers by achieving the required efficiencies in ways that actually upgraded job content as well as the autonomy of the working collective, often in consultation with the users of the services.

In part, this was a rearguard action in that the successive austerity measures have pared off around 100,000 jobs in the welfare sector. But the union intervention staunched what would otherwise have been a yet more serious hemorrhage in terms of both jobs and services and a drastic degradation of job content and service quality under neo-managerialist auspices. On the other hand, Kommunal, now through its in-house consultancy Komanco, has cornered the market in

consultancies to local government and has developed and deployed its institutional capacity to diffuse important aspects of work life reform—use of autonomous work teams, skill development, and democratic “bottom-up” approaches to job redesign that empower the workforce.<sup>59</sup> The overwhelming majority of the beneficiaries of this enterprise have been women as workers in and users of welfare services.

In 1995, Kommunal set up a Social Policy Research Department with twenty-one analysts to represent its membership purely in its guise as welfare users. At the same time, it adopted the long-term goal of having part-time status abolished in its sector: the worker is to enjoy the right to cut down work hours in favor of family responsibilities without thereby losing full-time status or the right to return to a full working week when she or he decides to do so.

In both blue- and white-collar unions with significant female membership, women (often with active male cooperation) are pursuing qualitatively higher levels of representation and, with it, a more directed gender-political program aimed at breaking down segregation and the male norm in work organization. Lillemor Arvidsson and other prominent women in the union movement have provided influential role models for women activists. Their success in overcoming women’s exclusion from the salient positions in the unions paves the way for more gender-conscious bargaining strategies, work evaluation mechanisms, and job reorganization, all of which contribute to the transformation of work life for the women these leaders represent.

Feminist analysts of the union movement now concede that its relationship to its female constituency appears to be shifting fundamentally, both in terms of its gender representation and of its policy orientation.<sup>60</sup> As it approaches its centenary in 1998, LO in particular is beginning to look and sound more like the “women’s organization of some significance” that its million-strong female membership suggests it ought to be. The feminization of Swedish unionism in much more than membership statistics has important implications for the development of work life and national politics.

#### A NEW SWEDISH MODEL?

Swedish feminists, as we have already noted, often employ Carole Pateman’s revision of the constitutive social-contract myth in modern Western political theory. In her own use of it, Yvonne Hirdman emphasizes that etymologically, “contract” means simply a pulling together of two or more entities, without the liberal overlay whereby contract supposedly implies voluntary agreement between autonomous parties of equal power and status for their mutual benefit.<sup>61</sup> In Sweden, “the gender contract” is said to be in crisis or, more precisely, as Ylva Waldemarson expresses it, in the process of rescission and renegotiation.<sup>62</sup> Yvonne Hirdman’s analysis suggests why gender relations reached this crisis point in the

nineties. So long as the “logic” of gender segregation held, male dominance rested securely on the social assumptions of everyday arrangements, but as soon as this segregation began to erode, women’s subordination lost its banal self-evidentness, its legitimacy. Subordination started to appear as the anomaly it is and attracted women’s organized resistance.<sup>63</sup>

In yet another analytic specification of this process, Joan Acker suggests that the crisis concerns the realignment of the two discourses of reform that have underpinned the postwar development of Swedish welfare capitalism—a politically and institutionally dominant one about “economy, growth, productivity, paid work and class” and a subordinate one about “women, children, the family and the caring services of the welfare state.”<sup>64</sup> To her specification of the second discourse we would add democratic norms, including equal socioeconomic and industrial citizenship. In normative terms, the dominance of the first discourse meant the priority of instrumental rationality over ethical aspirations such as inclusive socioeconomic citizenship and personal autonomy and integrity.<sup>65</sup> The swing to the right in Swedish political life from the 1980s threatened to suppress the second discourse altogether and the project of an inclusive citizenship with it. The resurgence of the women’s movement in the 1990s and its successful intervention into the very union organizations that once so crucially expressed the conventional ranking of these two discourses now places the latter on a precarious equal footing in political institutions that can lay any claim to progressive politics. The two arenas in which a new relationship between these discourses will need to be cemented are work life and national politics.

As both a prime site of women’s subordination today and the key to their potential socioeconomic equality, work life and its reform remains a critical area for the women’s movement. It faces a major obstacle in the perpetuation of the first discourse’s priority in the gender-neutral model of work life reform still common in some unions and ascendant among professional work life researchers. The metalworkers’ important manifesto for an enriched work life cited earlier<sup>66</sup> exemplifies the problem: having quite correctly pointed out the fundamental gender inequities of modern industrial work, it ignores the problem of gender altogether in its reform agenda and its vision of a new “solidaristic work policy” based on constant reskilling, variety in work tasks, and individual career development in the new team-based, “flexible” working environment. As Rianne Mahon has argued, there are progressive possibilities that could be realized in the transformations of work organization today, but they will not be realized if the major actors on the labor market ignore the social inequities already present in the workplace. The most fundamental of these inequities is gender, and the danger is that men and the male norm will shape the new “flexible” and “solidaristic” workplace as assuredly as they did the older Taylorist manufacturing process, unless the gender-blind approach is abandoned. It is domestically nonparticipating

men who fill the bill precisely as “flexible” workers who can juggle their working hours without notice.<sup>67</sup> As prominent Swedish work life analysts and their French and German colleagues battle to produce a humane European alternative to “lean production” with all its messianic Japanolatry,<sup>68</sup> this intellectual and ethical deficit has yet to be addressed, let alone overcome. Some current formulations and applications of the union movement’s approach to “post-Fordist” work life renewal, such as the metalworkers’ one, make major concessions to neo-managerialism and its regressive gender politics.

The dominance of the first discourse of reform based on instrumental rationality is even more evident in nonunion work life research, caught as it is between a union movement with democratic aspirations and a conservative academic establishment whose lack of democratic traditions constantly surfaces in dogged resistance to women’s research in particular. Thus, while Swedish work life research is not as enmired in exclusive concern with instrumental rationality as the disciplines of industrial relations and management are in the English-speaking countries, gender-blind analysis that ignores constitutive power relationships present in the workplace itself still passes for state-of-the-art research, as we saw earlier.

In the arena of national politics, the women’s movement has to find its way in the midst of what appears to be a turning point in Swedish politics. The Social Democratic Party’s long-term ideological self-effacement has arguably reached a point where it can no longer sustain its historic role as the political expression of a number of congruent popular movements, from the traditional ones starting with the union movement itself to postwar ones like the women’s movement. The end of the collective affiliation of union organizations and other signs of the latter’s need to disentangle themselves from Social Democratic identification point in this direction. The party is thereby likely to forfeit its status as “the natural party of government” and will have to content itself with the role of a middle-sized centrist electoral machine with copyright over the first discourse of reform only. Some of its central ideologues appear to see this change as inevitable or even desirable. The present government signaled as much by signing a sweeping agreement for a new, austere economic policy (including a sharp reduction in employment benefits from 80 to 75 percent of previous earnings) with the Centre Party—even though there was a “socialist” majority in parliament that would have supported a more progressive savings package—on the eve of May Day 1995. Spectacularly maladroit as this maneuver was, it merely exemplified the party leadership’s corresponding desire to distance itself from LO.<sup>69</sup> The deal with the Centre Party led to an unprecedented defection by union organizations and individual supporters from the traditional SAP May Day demonstrations: this time, Lillemor Arvidsson was not alone when she branded the government’s action “a betrayal.”<sup>70</sup> But the Social Democrats have gone on to routinize their dependence on the Centre Party’s support for key initiatives.

LO and its affiliates, in holding to their democratic-socialist commitments—now in a closer relationship to the women’s movement—thus increasingly find themselves sharing the latter’s political homelessness. While it is highly unlikely that either of them will commit itself to a particular party (or take the formidable step of forming a new one) in the foreseeable future, both de facto contribute to the rapidly growing constituency of the (ex-communist) Left Party. Under the leadership of Gudrun Schyman, probably the shrewdest tactician and most competent publicist among Swedish party leaders today, this party is making significant inroads for the first time on the Social Democrats’ traditional electoral base. With around 15 percent electoral support at present, it is the third largest party in the country after the SAP and the Conservatives and larger than the formerly significant Liberal and Centre parties put together. Certainly the Left Party has a way to go before it can claim a firm and distinctive “postcommunist” profile, but its new feminist and unionist co-belligerents will no doubt contribute to that process. Seven years ago, Maud Eduards noted that it alone of the parties in parliament had abandoned “the gender neutral and idealistic ideology” of reform that the new women’s movement criticizes.<sup>71</sup>

In the meantime, the women’s movement itself is tending to generalize its opposition to “the right-wing wave” in a broad defense of the welfare state and an attempt to refashion it to make it adequate to its original promise of equal and inclusive socioeconomic citizenship. Out of the ashes of the old socialist feminism may well be arising, if not a feminist socialism, at least a feminist left social democracy that has set about unpicking the assumptions woven into the existing welfare state about the gender of the “normal” worker, on one hand, and of the “normal” carer and homemaker, on the other. Around this sort of politics, Joan Acker suggests, organized labor and women could form a coalition, one that “might produce a new Swedish Model, informed by feminist thinking, that will create a new standard for the rest of the world.”<sup>72</sup>

The basic elements of such a model have already been developed, thanks largely to a resurgent women’s movement. The critical question now is what institutional and electoral realignments could catalyze their effective combination in the future. The ideological self-effacement and electoral self-diminution of the SAP have probably gone too far for this party to undergo a renaissance that would allow it reemerge as the bearer of a new Swedish model of the type suggested. But a clearly identified electoral bearer there must be, one that does more than just fill the power vacuum that the Social Democrats leave behind. The Left Party has yet to achieve the vision and programmatic clarity to take on this role, and the union movement would have to overcome its ancient antagonism toward this traditional rival to social democracy if the Left Party were to lay claim to the mantle in question. Yet, this remains the best hope of a decisive revival of a progressive political hegemony in Sweden, one that would restore the country’s self-image as “a moral superpower.”

## NOTES

1. Nordic Council of Ministers, *Women and Men in the Nordic Countries* (Copenhagen: NORD 1994), 83, 92.
2. LO, *Förändringar av den fackliga organisationsgraden* (Stockholm: LO, 1994), Table 2.
3. Nordic Council of Ministers, *Women and Men in the Nordic Countries*, 88, 92-93; *LO granskar 2* (1995): 2.
4. Cf. Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform—Women in the Future Swedish Welfare State" (Sociology Dept, University of Oregon, stencil, 1994): 27.
5. Cf., for instance, Janna Brenner, "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: US Feminism Today," *New Left Review* 200 (1993): 101-59; Bianca Beccalli, "The New Women's Movement in Italy," *New Left Review* 204 (1994): 86-112.
6. Yvonne Hirdman, "Makt och kön," in Olof Petersson, ed., *Maktbegreppet* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1987): 197-98.
7. In particular, Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).
8. Anna Jónasdóttir, "Har kön någon betydelse för demokratin?" in Gertrud Åström and Yvonne Hirdman, eds., *Kontrakt i kris* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1992), 216. See, in general, Anna Jónasdóttir, *Why Women Are Oppressed* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
9. Yvonne Hirdman, "Social Engineering and the Woman Question—Sweden in the Thirties," in Wallace Clement and Rianne Mahon, eds., *Swedish Social Democracy: A Model in Transition* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1994).
10. Ylva Waldemarson, "LO och kvinnorna under efterkrigstiden—en paradoxal historia av vanmakt och möjligheter" (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of Worklife Research, stencil, 1995), 15.
11. Edmond Dahlström et al., *Kvinnors liv och arbete* (Stockholm: SNS, 1962).
12. Ulla Wikander, "Delat arbete, delad makt—Om kvinnors underordning i och genom arbetet," in Gertrud Åström and Yvonne Hirdman, eds., *Kontrakt i kris* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1992), 54.
13. Gunhild Kyle, *Gästarbetarska i manssamhället—Studier om industriarbetande kvinnors villkor i Sverige* (Stockholm: Liberförlag, 1979).
14. For an illuminating discussion of the gendered social definition of skill, see Jane Jenson, "The Talents of Women, the Skills of Men: Flexible Specialisation and Women," in Stephen Wood, ed., *The Transformation of Work?* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
15. Gunnel Forsberg, "Kvinnor och män i arbetslivet," in Joan Acker et al., eds., *Kvinnors och mäns liv och arbete* (Stockholm: SNS, 1992), 109.
16. LO, *Röster om facket och jobbet* (Stockholm: LO, 1994), Report no. 3: diagrams 10, 15, 17, and 18 and Table 5; Report no. 5: Table 5.
17. Svenska Metallindustriarbetareförbundet, *Solidarisk arbetspolitik för det goda arbetet* (Stockholm, Metall, 1989), 72. To put the point slightly differently, "wherever there are women, men can avoid the dreariest jobs"; Ulla Wikander, "Delat arbete, delad makt," 52. The tacit references to women's "guestworker" status are ubiquitous in the literature.
18. The Labor Court heard the first sexual harassment case in 1995 and found no specific legal provision against it: the union concerned had to rely on extending the ambit of older, nonspecific legal principles to establish that the offense existed at all. Amy Elman, "Debunking the Social Democrats and the Myth of Equality," *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 5 (1993): 513-22, points out that successive Social Democratic governments in Sweden have neglected measures against violations of women's physical integrity, a neglect that the women's movement is now giving considerable attention.

19. Annika Baude, "Den interna arbetsmarknaden i sju livsmedelsföretag—aktörerna och deras intressen," in Drude Dahlerup, ed., *Kön sorterar—Könsopdeling på arbejdspladsen* (Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd, 1989) and her *Kvinnans plats på jobbet* (Stockholm: SNS, 1992).

20. Among many examples, one could take Göran Brulin and Tommy Nilsson's two book-length manifestos for "a new Swedish model"—*Mot en ny svensk modell—Arbete och förhandlingsystem i förändring* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1991) and *Arbetets ekonomi—Om arbete och produktivitet i modern produktion* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1995)—that precisely focus on a supposed democratic renewal of work organization and union negotiating stances. They do so with barely a mention of gender as an issue in these areas, except for an epilogue to the second volume, which, written as it is by a woman shop-floor activist, brings up the very problems that the principal authors neglect.

21. Maud Eduards, "The Swedish Gender Model: Productivity, Pragmatism and Paternalism," *West European Politics* 14, no. 3 (1991): 169 and her "Against the Rules of the Game: On the Importance of Women's Collective Actions," in Eduards et al., eds., *Rethinking Change: Current Swedish Feminist Research* (Stockholm: HSNR, 1992), 97.

22. Gunnar Qvist, "Women and the Swedish Federation of Labor," in Norbet Soldon, ed., *The World of Women's Trade Unionism: Comparative Historical Essays* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985).

23. Lena Gonäs, "Kvinnors arbetsmarknad i det framtida Europa," in Joan Acker et al., eds., *Kvinnors och mäns liv och arbete* (Stockholm: SNS, 1992) provides a valuable discussion of the problems that European integration poses for Swedish women.

24. Yvonne Hirdman, "Genus—arbete. Introduktion till ett forskningsområde" (Stockholm: Swedish Institute for Worklife Research, stencil, 1995), 17.

25. Swedish blue-collar unions are organized on the industrial principle and have been constantly subject to rationalization and merger. At present, twenty-one unions make up LO, and in recent decades, the number of constituent unions has varied only insignificantly.

26. See Winton Higgins, "Political Unionism and the Corporatist Thesis," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 6, no. 3 (1985): 349-81 and "Swedish Social Democracy and the New Democratic Socialism," in Diane Sainsbury, ed., *Democracy, State and Justice* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell, 1988).

27. See, in particular, LO, *80-rapporten* (Stockholm: LO, 1981).

28. For instance, LO, *Fackföreningsrörelsen och familjepolitik* (Stockholm: LO, 1976), *Jämställdhet och solidaritet* (Stockholm: LO, 1981), and *Klass och kön* (Stockholm: LO, 1990). Ylva Waldemarson, "Kontrakt under förhandling—LO, kvinnorna och makten," in Gertrud Åström and Yvonne Hirdman, eds., *Kontrakt i kris* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1992), provides a balanced account of how LO qua head office has entered the lists to try and effect better outcomes.

29. LO has published a particularly graphic account of these problems in Ann-Sofie Hermansson, *Arbetarrörelsen och feminismen* (Stockholm: LO, 1993). See also Annette Eriksson, "Kvinnor och jämställdhet—en intervjustudie av nio kvinnor på förbunds nivå inom facket" (Beteendevetenskaplig utredningslinje, Stockholm University, 1995); Gunilla Thorgren, "Facklig kvinnokamp," *Pockettidningen R* 24, no. 3-4 (1994): 121-28; and Jennifer Curtin, *Women and Trade Unions: A Comparative Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), chap. 8.

30. Jennifer Curtin, *Women and Trade Unions*, chap. 8.

31. *Rättvisa* (Stockholm: LO, 1996), 249; Janeen Baxter and Mark Western, "The Links between Paid and Unpaid Work: Australia and Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s" (Paper presented to the Reconfigurations of Class and Gender Conference, Australian

National University, Canberra, August 1997), 18. The latter also point out that men tend to decrease their unpaid work in the home if their hours of paid work go up, but women do not do so in these circumstances (p. 19).

32. Nordic Council of Ministers, *Women and Men in the Nordic Countries*, 71.

33. Christina Bergqvist, *Mäns makt och kvinnornas intressen* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsaliensis, 1994), 111, 128, 135, and Table 4.6; Ylva Waldemarson, "Kontrakt under förhandling," Table 3.

34. Ylva Waldemarson, "Kontrakt under förhandling," 105.

35. Gunnar Qvist, *Statistik och politik. Landsorganisationen och kvinnorna på arbetsmarknaden* (Stockholm: Prisma/LO, 1974), 126, 97.

36. *Varannan damernas. Slutbetänkande från utredningen om kvinnorepresentation* (Stockholm: Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet: SOU, 1987), chap. 3.

37. Maud Eduards and Gertrud Åström, *Många kände sig manade men få blevo kallade—en granskning av arbetet för ökad kvinnorepresentation* (Stockholm: Socialdepartementet, 1993). The Swedish experience of the threat and use of gender quotas lends strong support to Frigga Haug's argument for them as "feminist *Realpolitik*" in her "The Quota Demand and Feminist Politics," *New Left Review* 209 (1995): 136-45.

38. Quoted in Eva Karlsson, "De kvinnliga livsmedelsarbetarnas historia," in Annika Baude, ed., *Rapport om jämställdhet i sju livsmedelsföretag* (Stockholm: Arbetslivscentrum, 1981), 16.

39. Cf. Ylva Waldemarson, "Kontrakt under förhandling," 106. As Joan Acker points out in her "Two Discourses of Reform," 12, the political culture that these principles encapsulated heavily suppressed women's issues.

40. Maria Wendt Höjer and Cecilia Åse, *Politikens paradoxer—En introduktion till feministisk politisk teori* (Stockholm: Academia Adacta, 1995), chap. 3.

41. Maud Eduards, "The Swedish Gender Model," 172; Joan Acker, 1994, "Two Discourses of Reform," 11.

42. LO, *Röster omfacket och jobbet*, Report no. 2: diagram 33; Report no. 5: diagram 4.

43. As promised in their 1994 election campaign, the Social Democrats abolished this benefit on their return to government.

44. Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform," 27.

45. As Christina Bergqvist notes in "Women, Men and Political Representation in Sweden," in Beate Hoecker, ed., *Handbuch Politische Partizipation von Frauen in Europa* (Leverkusen: Leske & Budrich, forthcoming), Stödstrumporna has declined in relative importance as a victim of its own success. Two of its prominent members have become senior advisers to the government on gender equality issues.

46. Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform," 21.

47. Maud Eduards, "The Swedish Gender Model," 172.

48. Maud Eduards, "Against the Rules of the Game."

49. Yvonne Hirdman, "Genus—arbete." The quote comes from p. 5.

50. LO, *Klass och kön*.

51. The following account builds considerably on Malin Quick, "Tjejligan: LO-kvinnornas motståndsrörelse" (Statsvetenskaplig institutionen, University of Stockholm, stencil, 1994), as well as on interviews with LO officers.

52. Gunilla Thorgren, "Facklig kvinnokamp."

53. The incoming Social Democratic government has adopted the same procedure, requiring all policy committees and other policy makers to account for the implications of their proposals for gender relations: Directive 1994: 124.



54. For a more detailed study, see Winton Higgins, "The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union—A Study in the New Political Unionism," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 17, no. 2 (1996): 167-97.
55. Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform," 15. Lillemor Arvidsson resigned, ostensibly for health reasons, in December 1995 and has been replaced by Ylva Thörn.
56. Svenska Kommunalarbetareförbundet, *Kvinnor i Kommunal och deras villkor i arbetet och på fritiden* (Stockholm: Kommunal, 1994), diagram 9.
57. Svenska Kommunalarbetareförbundet, *Jämställdhet. Vår framtid* (Stockholm: Kommunal, 1994), 10.
58. Ann Boman, *Arbete i utveckling—på kvinnors vis: Slutrapport från Arbetslivsfondens ALFA-Q program* (Stockholm: Arbetslivsfonden, 1995), 8-21.
59. At the metalworkers' 1995 congress, some delegates criticized the leadership of that union for failing to replicate Kommunal's mode of intervention into work life reform.
60. Eg Christina Bergqvist, *Mäns makt och kvinnors intressen*, chap. 5; Ylva Waldemarson, "Kontrakt under förhandling," 124-27; and Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform," 28-29.
61. Yvonne Hirdman, Introduction to *Kontrakt i kris*, 10.
62. Ylva Waldemarson, "Kontrakt under förhandling," 119.
63. Yvonne Hirdman, *Genusystemet—teoretiska funderingar kring kvinnors sociala underordning* (Uppsala: Maktutredningens rapportserie no. 23, 1988).
64. Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform," 8. For an earlier version, see her "Reformer och kvinnor i den framtida välfärdsstaten," in Joan Acker et al., eds., *Kvinnors och mäns liv och arbete*.
65. Cf. Maud Eduards, "Against the Rules of the Game," 103.
66. Svenska Metallindustriarbetareförbundet, *Solidarisk arbetspolitik*.
67. Rianne Mahon, "From Solidaristic Wages to Solidaristic Work," in Wallace Clement and Rianne Mahon, eds., *Swedish Social Democracy—A Model in Transition* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1994), 299-300.
68. In particular, Christian Berggren, *Alternatives to Lean Production* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1992) and Åke Sandberg, ed., *Enriching Production: Perspectives on Volvo's Uddevalla Plant as an Alternative to Lean Production* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995).
69. As prominent author and industrial relations journalist Björn Elmbrant has shown in a feature article in *LO-tidningen* 30, no. 6 (October 1995), the Social Democratic government has since its election in September 1994 subjected LO leaders in particular to regular and pointed snubs.
70. *Dagens nyheter* 29.4.95.
71. Maud Eduards, "The Swedish Gender Model," 171.
72. Joan Acker, "Two Discourses of Reform," 29.

