TRADE UNIONS AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN EUROPE

Country Study Norway

Jonas Bals
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HISTORY OF MODERN RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN NORWAY

In Norway, the history of modern right-wing populism goes back to the founding of the "Anders Lange's Party for a Strong Reduction in Taxes, Duties and Public Interventions", or ALP for short, in 1973. The party's founder, Anders Lange, had roots in circles of right-wing and semi-fascist activists even before the Second World War. He had been a leading figure in the Fatherland League (Fedrelandslaget, 1925–1940), which was extremely hostile to the labour movement, and actively opposed strikes and collective bargaining. In 1977, the party changed its name to the Progressive Party (Fremskrittspartiet, FrP). It has retained its founder's scepticism and hostility to the 'socialist' labour movement, based on a pro-market, neo-liberal critique of collective bargaining institutions in the line of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

In the 1970s and 80s, the right-wing nationalist, liberalist, and populist forces can be described more as a stone in the shoe for the Norwegian trade union movement, than a serious challenger. They had little influence on politics and society, but during the 1980s and 1990s, they gradually managed to shift the public debate. Even though electoral success came late, the party quickly succeeded in reframing the "metapolitical" space. Public debate shifted from topics such as social inequality, redistribution of wealth, and the inclusion of newly arrived immigrants, to lower taxes and a reduction of the welfare state, and contributed actively in creating fear and suspicion towards citizens with a different skin colour, ethnicity, or religion.

As the Norwegian tax protest and anti-immigration party gained traction, and learned how to play the racism card in election times, they grew to become a more real problem for those who shared the trade union movement's ideas and values. By mobilizing working-class voters, to whom the traditional conservative parties never had particularly good access, they made it easier for established right-wing parties to win a majority, and correspondingly more difficult for the left.

TRENDS IN THE ELECTORATE

From a support of five percentage points in the 1973 general election, they reached a peak in 2009, when almost 23 per cent of the electorate voted for them. At the last general election in 2021, they achieved a support of 11.6 per cent. Even though a large part of their following can be found in groups "above" or at least outside the labour movement, these numbers are roughly reflected among the members of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (Landsorganisasjonen i Norge, LO). After more than a decade with results ranging between 0.7 and 3.8 per cent, their

breakthrough election in 1989 gave them almost 10 per cent among unionized workers. As the party gained a foothold in the working class, the party gradually made a partial transition to become a broader "welfare populist", or more correctly, a "petrol populist" party. With huge revenues from the state-run oil industry (which the party wanted to privatize) and the sovereign wealth fund, the party could combine ambitions for better care for the elderly with their liberalist critique of taxes and the welfare state. By insisting that Norwegians could be a better welfare state if it were to have fewer migrants, the party found a powerful cocktail. In 2009, the party's best general election ever, almost 1 in 4 LO members voted for the party. Internal polling has shown a quite stable trend for the last 7–8 years, with roughly 10 per cent of the members voting the Progress Party (Internal polls).

The party has a few contenders even further to the right, but apart from a few municipalities in the "Bible Belt" (southern and western regions of Norway, an area that has long since grown into a stronghold for the party, partly based on the same evangelical foundations as American, Brazilian, and other far right movements), these contenders have never gained an electoral foothold.

In 2014, the Progress Party entered into a coalition government with the traditional conservative party (Høyre). Eventually, this collaboration also included the extreme liberalist (traditionally more social liberal) Liberal Party (Venstre), and, after much internal rife, the Christian-Democratic Christian People's Party (Krf). All four parties lost heavily in the 2021 election, and since then, Norway has been governed by a two-party minority government, based on the Labour Party (social democrats) and the Centre Party (farmer's party). The latter gained many former voters from the Progress Party in the election, which it has since lost again, mostly based on a "populist/periphery" agenda, bolstered by what many voters saw as a betrayal of the Progress Party's longstanding claim to be fighting for 'ordinary people'.

The bourgeois governments of 2014–2021 followed the same pattern that most other right-wing governments have followed in other countries: They prioritized large tax cuts for the richest, a gradual reduction of the welfare state, and pursued a restrictive immigration policy. Their immigration and integration minister, current party leader Sylvi Listhaug, introduced few initiatives when it came to integration, but very many when it came to restrictions on migration and on migrants' rights. On the metapolitical level, the Progress Party continued its aggressive take on all matters concerning immigration in general and Islam in particular. The party leader at the time, Siv Jensen, insisted that her rhetoric about the "stealth Islamization" of Norway was appropriate, and her heir, Sylvi Listhaug, has pulled the party in an even more "national conservative" direction, so far without much success.

This lack of success can be explained in many ways, one of them being that Norway has in fact become the multicultural society the Progress Party warned against – and people, in general, seem to be used to it and even enjoy it. This presupposes, however, a successful policy for integration and against social dumping. Even if many Norwegians still consider integration policies to be imperfect and with room for improvement, there has been a significant shift in the population's view on migration. Polls show that while 40 per cent of adult Norwegians thought that the immigrants' way of life did not fit in Norway, and that foreign customs were a threat to Norwegian culture back in 1993, the number in 2021 is 15 per cent. While 25 percent could not/would not take a position on the question in 1993, this group is now reduced to 11 per cent. Even more dramatically: The proportion of Norwegians who believe that immigrants contribute to greater cultural diversity has increased from 35 per cent to 73 per cent; from just over a third to almost three quarters. Moreover, in 1993, about half of adult Norwegians believed that it was an important social task to limit immigration. In 2021, less than 20 per cent thought the same. The proportion who believe we must stretch ourselves as far as possible to accept more refugees in Norway has increased from 16 to 45 per cent, meanwhile the proportion who believe we cannot afford to help refugees has decreased from 25 to 7 per cent (Norsk Monitor 2022, Hellevik/Hellevik 2017).

ATTACK ON THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT?

For the trade union movement, the most direct expression of the political shift in 2014 came with an early attack on the country's workers' protection law. Contrary to all the promises that had been made to the voters from the conservative party, and despite a historically large mobilization from all the main union federations in Norway, the law was liberalized by the labour secretary from the Progress Party, Robert Eriksson. Employers were given a general access to hire people temporarily, and curbs on temporary work agencies were removed.

When the bill was proposed, it was met with a national, half-day general strike, involving approximately 1.5 million workers from all the main union confedera-

tions. Coordinated action like this is quite rare in Norway, where all other confederations insist on being apolitical and do not have formal ties to political parties or an explicit political platform. LO and the Labour Party still have a formal relationship, and the LO has an explicit democratic socialist platform. Some confederations are apolitical due to their narrow focus on their professions, while others are averse because they historically organized workers who are sceptical of the "red" LO. The coordinated action was made possible due to the severity of the attack. Although their protest did not have a direct impact on the legislative process, the Norwegian trade union movement concluded that the mobilization was important for the years that followed: The demonstration of strength helped to prevent new attacks, at least of the same severity.

In sheer membership numbers, LO the country's largest union confederation. It has managed to hold its own through the eight years of conservative-liberal governments. In absolute numbers, the organization has even gained increased support, and is now approaching one million members. In relative terms, however, the tendency has long been one of slight decline, both in relation to other trade union federations, which mainly have highly educated and publicly employed members, and in relation to the country's strong population growth, fuelled by labour immigration from the EU.

In 2008–2009, the degree of organization fell below 50 per cent for the first time in many decades. From a total figure of 57 per cent at the beginning of the 1990s, Norway has hovered around 50 percent since the turn of the millennium. There are, however, huge industry-specific differences. In the public sector, around 80 per cent of employees are organized, while the proportion in the private sector is 38 per cent (2017 figures). The level is lowest within accommodation and catering and sales and operation of real estate (18 per cent). A large part of this decline is linked to labour immigration to Norway.

TIME FOR A NEW PEOPLE'S FRONT?

In a time of rising living costs, war in Europe, and a growing mistrust about whether politicians are able to do something about the issues that voters are most worried about, it is an open question how the balance of power between the political blocs will develop in the future. As Norway has largely been spared from the serious late effects of the debt crisis in 2008–2009, and has had a right-wing populist party that has been clearly committed to democratic and parliamentary rules and customs, the country has so far been spared from the worrying developments we see in many other countries. There, the battle is no longer just a battle against right-wing populism, but against a radicalized right-wing which is increasingly willing to curb democracy, or abandon it altogether.

In many of the increasingly fewer and weaker democracies, we should understand that the fight is no longer a fight against mere "populism", but a fight to push back fascist forces on a right-wing populist track. Such a push back must take place through a combination of political confrontation, development of crisis programmes against unemployment and poverty, and a strong commitment to defending the rights of sexual, religious, ethnic, and other minorities. The challenge is beginning to resemble the one faced by the labour movement 100 years ago, when Benito Mussolini's "managed democracy" in Italy developed into a fascist dictatorship after the defeat of the organized working class, and where the trade union movement, leftist parties, and democratically minded bourgeois parties spent many years — too many years, as it turned out — establishing an anti-fascist popular front in response.

I believe that establishing such democratic defence mechanisms was, and will continue to be, a process that must take place both from the bottom up and from the top down. The prerequisites for making it happen will vary from country to country, and much of it will naturally revolve around the ability of political parties to build coalitions and design a crisis policy that gains support from the voters. In this text, which takes as its starting point the role of the trade union movement, I will, however, primarily concentrate on what I believe is the main task for all trade unionists, at a time when identity politics from the right threatens to weaken the possibilities of creating a unity between workers from different countries and backgrounds.

This means I will focus on strict unionizing strategies, leaving out much of the labour movement's broader struggle against antidemocratic right-wing forces. Before I do that, let me mention that many local unions and union federations are involved in antiracist and antifascist activities, ranging from courses and classes on Utøya (where 69 people, many of them kids, were murdered by a fascist terrorist in 2011), to blockades and demonstrations against far-right organizations such as "Stop the Islamization of Norway" (SIAN). While finishing this article, I participated in a successful blockade in the city of Bergen, where a public meeting set up by "anti-Islamists" in 2020 ended in a violent confrontation. Leaning on that experience, local unions managed to start a dialogue with the police,

and in 2021 and 2022, were allowed to book the surrounding public space for a counter demonstration. Blocking the sight of the Quran burning and hate mongering speakers with union banners, maintaining public order with shop stewards dressed in yellow vests, and drowning the speeches with noise and slogans, the local city authorities and unions provided other trade unionists and antifascists with a model that could combine confrontational and peaceful tactics against provocateurs and preachers of hatred. Two days later, the success was followed up with a somewhat different strategy in the city of Haugesund, where a big outdoor concert was set up in a different part of the city, leaving the anti-Islamists to speak to a completely deserted town square.

Returning to the question of trade union strategies to create unity between workers from different countries and backgrounds, I will focus on a dimension of right-wing mobilization that is rarely mentioned when speaking about right-wing populism and extremism. Although the brunt of these forms for traditionalist and authoritarian identity politics is primarily aimed at sexual minorities, the women's movement, and immigrants from non-European countries, it has also drawn a great deal of strength from the competitive situation that has arisen in "borderless" labour markets. It has been formulated in the form of hatred and suspicion towards "the Polish plumber" (France), "Eastern Europeans" in general (Great Britain), or "Latinos" in the USA, to name just a few examples. Both "legal" and irregular migration has served as a basis for mobilization for many far-right parties, and made it possible for them to reach out to groups that are not primarily motivated by xenophobia or racism, but that have suffered economic incapacitation, and ended up in a working life they no longer experience as safe and good.

In the wake of Brexit and the election of Trump in 2016, even liberal and conservative commentators noted how close the connections were between skewed power relations and large economic differences in the labour market on the one hand, and the growth in right-wing political extremism on the other. In the US, the leading country in terms of the phenomenon of "working poor", and probably the western country where the danger of fascist mobilization is greatest today, wages' share of the GNP is at its lowest level since the Second World War. The American "median man" has not had a real wage increase for almost 50 years. Professor Ragnar Nymoen at the University of Oslo has pointed out that this development in purchasing power is not due to liberalized product markets or international trade, which much of the debate about globalization and its "losers" has been about, but is primarily due to the Americans' (lack of) system for labour market regulation.

As I see it, this raises at least two questions which we should try to find answers to. Partly because they are important to answer in themselves, but also because they can contain a partial answer to a much larger question; namely what is needed for us to be able to restore faith in democracy, push back fascism, and thereby also secure the future of a system based on democracy in the widest sense, both in society and at work.

1) What political regulations should trade unions demand and fight for, which can create greater unity between workers across national backgrounds, languages, and other differences?

2) What should the trade union movement itself do to create this unity?

"WORKERS IN ALL COUNTRIES, COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER!"?

A DANISH STORY (AND A SWEDISH PROVERB)

When I lived in Denmark in the early 2000s, I got to know the union activist and concrete worker Jakob Mathiassen. He has since written several reports for the Danish union federation 3F about the effort to organize foreign colleagues on the Metro City project in Copenhagen, where he worked construction work. A couple of years ago, he published the book *Dreams and dust. Why the labour movement must be global like globalization* (Mathiassen 2019). It opens with a story from a work place blockade he participated in in 2008, aimed at a Polish company on a construction site in central Copenhagen. It is a story that contains many of the trade union movement's strategic dilemmas in a nutshell, and that tells us a great deal about what is at stake.

The story started with the Polish main contractor Gitek refusing to sign a collective agreement with the Danish trade unions. Like many times before and since, the local unions responded by setting up a blockade against the building project, refusing to let labour power and materials enter the site. The company managed to carry on, however, as they had all the non-organized labour they needed and were able to smuggle in materials. In his book, Mathiassen describes the weeks that followed as "a siege, like a medieval army around a castle". The financial crisis had hit the construction industry hard just weeks before, and there was high unemployment in the construction trades. The conflict was therefore no longer about abstract di-

mensions such as free movement or globalisation, but about who should be able to support their family by working in the country.

Mathiassen himself had a job as a concrete worker on another project, but he knew that it could have been him who was unemployed outside the gate. That is why he spent several days of his summer vacation on blockade duty together with his unemployed fellow workers. One day, as he was standing guard at one of the back entrances to the construction site, things were about to go wrong. Four Polish workers came out and prepared to bring in materials. The blockade guards had orders from the union to avoid physical confrontations, but they tried to put as much psychological pressure on the workers as possible. "We didn't physically touch them, but we breathed in and slowly got closer and closer to them," he writes. "It was clear that the Poles felt pressured, so at least that part of the plan worked out well".

"I went closer to one of them, a middle-aged man. He looked like a family man, but the look in his eyes convinced me that he was a family man with his back against the wall. Just as I got very close to him, he pulled a hammer out of his jacket and showed it to me rather discreetly. We couldn't talk about what that hammer was intended to be used for, but for me, the message was clear. He said, "I'm ready to use this!" and the adrenaline started flowing into the blood."

Mathiassen got scared, and went to a box with empty bottles and filled up his pockets. He was joined by a couple of younger colleagues, and the older mason they were together with, struggled to calm the situation. The delivery of the materials never arrived, and the situation cooled down. But it was close.

"I have since thought about this situation many times", writes Mathiassen in the book. "I was and am a socialist, and I did not perceive the Polish family man with the hammer as my enemy. I saw him as a colleague who had been forced to leave his family to find work. Yet on that day, we faced each other with weapons in our hands! How many times in the history of the world has this story played out? How many times have we faced each other with weapons, unable to talk together about the causes of our conflicts, our common enemies, our hopes for the future?"

WHEN RIGHT-WING NATIONALISM HAS THE ANSWERS THAT WE LACK

In his book, Mathiassen points out how dangerous it is that right-wing nationalism increasingly responds to real challenges for many working people. This is something new, which the labour movement must take seriously. Right-wing nationalism's programme of defending "one people, one culture, one nation" against threats from the outside, was for many decades aimed at the labour movement itself, which was portrayed as "internationalist", "Jewish", "cultural Marxist" or attacked with other racist conspiracy theories. The labour movement, with its traveling agitators, striking trade unions, its socialism, social democracy or Bolshevism; that was the right-wing nationalist's primary enemy. And they stood adamantly opposed to the working class' demands for higher wages and political rights.

The working class' support for these forces, with some local exceptions in countries such as Hungary, was correspondingly low. But since several globalization processes accelerated after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this has changed. More and more, what the right-wing nationalists perceive as a threat to "ordinary people", and what actually threatens the working class, actually corresponds. Mathiassen mentions three examples:

- Immigration: Although most working people are not very concerned with monoculturalism, they may experience pressure towards pay and working conditions, changed living environments, overall insecurity, and, in many places, they can link this, not without reason, to immigration.

- Supranational agreements: The labour movement has always seen it as an essential task to create peace, predictability, and stability, but many free trade agreements in recent decades have been more concerned with ensuring free flow of capital than establishing labour standards and free trade unions, even restricting the nation states' manoeuvring space to protect itself from the most destructive consequences.

- The right-wing nationalists have no qualms about putting national considerations before all other considerations, and can express an unreserved nationalist defence against the working classes of other countries. This can create a new political alliance, as we have witnessed in many countries in recent years.

Free mobility in Europe can be a seed for growth, prosperity, and solidarity across borders. But it requires political control and strong trade unions, so that there is also a fair mobility. As long as we don't have that, the slogan will not be "Workers in all countries, unite", but rather "Workers in all countries, compete with each other".

The trade unions' main task is precisely to overcome this competitive situation, and to turn competitors into colleagues and union comrades. The process of organizing workers is in its most basic form an attempt to make them agree on what the Swedish trade union movement calls the "trade union promise": "We promise and guarantee that we will never, under any circumstances, work under worse conditions or on lower wages than what we have now promised each other. We promise each other this in the deep understanding that if we all keep this promise the employer must meet our demands."

But as the cliché so wisely says: It's easier said than done. So, what do we do?

NORWEGIAN EXPERIENCES, PAST AND PRESENT

I started working in the construction industry in Oslo as a painter's apprentice in the mid-1990s, and some years after completing my education, I was hired as a full-time organizer in my trade union, Oslo Bygningsarbeiderforening. My task there in the years between 2007 and 2012 was, together with colleagues from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Bosnia, to organize colleagues who came to Oslo from Central and Eastern Europe. Eventually, the task expanded to organizing workers from the whole world, including from Ukraine, Russia, the Caucasus, Middle East, Latin America and Africa.

When the first Polish and Baltic migrant workers started arriving on our construction sites in 2004–2005, our union had a board resolution that said we should be a union not for Norwegian workers, but for workers in Norway. From day one, we tried to turn this slogan into something more than an empty resolution.

For the labour movement, the issue of free movement has been debated since its infancy. When a printer in Kristiania (the name of Oslo until 1924) dismissed his employees in 1873 and tried to import strikebreakers from Denmark, the newly established trade union — Norway's oldest surviving trade union — managed to prevent it by contacting organized Danish colleagues. On the basis of such experiences, the typographer and later Labour Party leader, Christian Holtermann Knudsen, stated twelve years later that "if this association of trade unions is to be able to achieve anything, it must break the narrow borders of nationality, it must become international". The labour movement was built up as an international organisation with national sub-divisions, and as it gained social power, its leaders often actively intervened to break down the nation-state boundaries.

Today's common European labour market was gradually shaped in the decades that followed the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Union in 1951. The Nordic countries' common labour market was in many ways a model for this development. However, it is important to emphasize that Nordic integration was conditioned by a Keynesian, planned economy approach to employment, education and re-education policies, a prerequisite that is completely lacking in today's common European labour market.

With the EU enlargements to the east in 2004 and 2007, Norway became part of a labour market 100 times the size of our own. Since then, Norway has become one of the European countries that has received most migrant workers from Eastern and Central Europe. According to the research report *Labour migration: What do we know about the consequences for Norwegian working life, society and the economy?* (Fafo report 2016: 2), this not only constitutes one of the largest migration flows to Norway ever; it has also "represented a supply-side shock in parts of Norwegian working life that lack a historical counterpart".

In the report, researcher Jon Horgen Friberg points out that increased labour migration has changed the organisation and functioning of working life, in the form of increased flexibility and a strengthened negotiating position for employers. Labour migration has "influenced wages, productivity and skills development in the Norwegian labour market", with uneven distribution of both costs and benefits for the various domestic employee groups. Immigrant workers are over-represented in the lower wage bracket, without any signs of "rapid economic assimilation", and the long-term consequences of labour immigration for the economy and the welfare state are uncertain. Much of this is linked to a lack of language skills, a deregulated working life with zero percent contracts and temporary contracts, and weak incentives to organize.

Another report written by researchers from the same research institute, based on interviews with Polish labour immigrants to Norway, sums up the *laissez faire* attitude to this immigration well in the report's telling title: *The immigrants who had to fend for themselves* (Fafo report 2013: 31).

This despite the fact that the experiences from the first wave of immigration in the 1970s, with labour immigration from, among other places, Pakistan, were quite unambiguous. Many of those who came then were relegated to miserable and undignified living conditions, and many were exploited as cheap labour in industries with weak worker collectives, such as in the hotel and restaurant industry. After a few

years of extremely hard work and poor living conditions, many ended up as permanently disabled people. The result was an early exit from the labour market.

WHEN EXIT IS THE ONLY WAY

In today's common European labour market, it has become easier for employers to opt out of both the collective agreements with the trade union movement, and the obligations towards the individual employee, by which they were previously bound. The territorially defined, collective solutions that, among other things, characterized the Nordic working life and social model can be abandoned, without the company even having to leave the geographical territory. In an initial phase, such exit strategies can be chosen by those employers who wish to do so. If enough employers do it and over a long enough time, however, the "choice" appears increasingly like a forced situation: Those who do not choose a full or partial exit from such collective obligations, do not survive the competition.

For the trade union movement, the new reality also presents new challenges. As early as in the beginning of the 1970s, the social scientist Aud Korbøl undertook an extensive field study among Pakistani migrant workers. There she described a disinterested and mainly passive trade union movement. Combined with a changeable and unpredictable immigration policy — LO itself was in favour of an immigration freeze, which created many legal uncertainties — many migrant workers ended up living in constant uncertainty and fear.

In her thesis, Korbøl gives precise descriptions of the alienation and powerlessness many foreign workers felt. Korbøl also described many of the obstacles that had to be overcome in order to create a common level of understanding between Norwegian and "foreign" workers. One example was the gap she described between the collective and long-term interests that characterized the work of the traditional trade union movement, and the short-term, "personal and acute" ones that characterized (and continues to characterize) many immigrants' everyday lives (Korbøl 2018).

Korbøl also predicted issues few, if any, saw at the time, such as tendencies towards parallel societies and social control in immigrant communities. Drawing on the close and personal contact she had with many of her informants — she ended up being more or less a representative for many of the workers — she discussed the tension between the two main strategies the immigrants had to choose between: Segregation (isolation and ostracism from the larger society, but also security in one's own identity and close community), and integration (participation in the larger society, but loss of one's own identity and alienation).

Many of these issues would resurface again when Norway became a recipient country for large groups of European migrant workers. The basis for this was laid when Norway became part of the common European market when it entered into the EEA Agreement in 1994. The EEA Agreement led to a strong concern on the part of the trade union movement that workers from low-income countries such as Spain and Portugal would put Norwegian working standards under pressure.

Ahead of the EEA Agreement's entry into force, LO made a draft of a law designed to protect and generalize the collective agreements' minimum provisions, and make it possible for the trade union movement to block employers who violated the agreements' provisions on, among other things, the minimum wage. The law was passed with a narrow majority in the parliament, and against the votes of the right-wing parties. The clearest criticism came from the Progress Party, which argued that such a law would destroy what was best about the entire EU project. One of the party's parliamentarians said that "if workers from other EEA countries [...] can help to push the cost level in Norway down by working for a slightly lower salary, I see it exclusively as an advantage".

Portuguese and Spanish workers never arrived to Norway in big numbers, and it was only with the EU's expansion to the east in 2004 that the law was put into use for the first time. There was a natural reason for this: In the first five years between 2004 and 2009, more than 150,000 work permits were granted to workers from the new EU countries. From having been a dormant law, the law on general application of collective agreements became an important tool, indeed *the most important tool* for protecting acquired rights, by granting migrant workers access to them. In the following years, there were constantly new demands by the LO for collective agreements that had to be made generally applicable. The petitions, which had to be documented, contained significant amounts of documentation on underpayment, discrimination, and indecent treatment of foreign workers. The brunt of this documentation was brought in with the help of the foreign workers themselves.

Generalization of the collective agreements became important for several reasons. The most important thing was that by raising the collective agreements' minimum wage to law, a common perception of what was the "wage floor" was obtained; a "Swedish prom-

ise" could be made, even with non-organized workers. The reason was simple: Although some migrant workers were willing to work for lower wages, it surprisingly turned out that they were also willing to work for twice as much. And although many employers tried to continue the art of underpayment, many workers used the Norwegian trade unions to demand the wages we told them they were entitled to.

When we advocated making the agreements generally applicable, many unionists were afraid we would hand over hard-earned rights for free. It was therefore emphasized that we were not just in favour of generalization, but that we wanted "generalization + organization." Consequently, huge resources were set aside for translations, production of information materials, free classes in Norwegian for new members, etc. In the Oslo Building Workers Union, the proportion of Polish members reached around 40 per cent after a few years, a figure that has remained stable over many years.

In this way, foreign and native workers have not only gained a common platform, or a common salary floor, but also very concrete experiences of standing in the same trade union. In union courses, workers from different backgrounds that had never spoken to each other in the meal breaks suddenly sat down as fellow workers around the same dinner table. I can hardly think of a better antidote to right-wing populist and, at worst, far-right fascist mobilization, than the images from these settings.

SOCIAL DUMPING IS BEST FOUND BY THOSE WHO ARE EXPOSED TO IT

After EU integration between East and West began in 2004, many lessons have been learned the hard way about the difficulties that arise when workers from countries with low labour standards, low wages, and often a rather strong scepticism towards trade unions, collective agreements, and anything resembling collective solutions or social welfare, meet a social model such as the Norwegian or Nordic.

In 2017, the Working Environment Institute STAMI determined that foreign workers are one and a half times more likely to die from work accidents than Norwegians. The study concluded that the main explanations are that foreign workers do more dangerous jobs than Norwegians, have a shorter career with each employer, and less stable employment. In addition, there are challenges related to language, according to the Fafo report *Norwegian competence among workers born abroad* (Fafo report 2020:27) leads to "exclusion and marginalization".

Many have also ended up with a very unstable and uncertain connection to Norwegian working life, and have been locked into a permanent shadow existence, where they rarely learn Norwegian, remain at the minimum wage level or below, and have constant uncertainty about whether they have a job to go to. Several studies have shown that temporary work agencies have been the most important recruitment route for many migrant workers, and analyses of register data show that temporary work agency jobs very rarely are a stepping stone to ordinary work.

Therefore, one of the most important political demands of the trade union movement in Norway in recent years has been to regulate, and preferably ban, the right to hire labour from temp agencies. At the time of writing, there is a proposed law which will, among other things, prohibit such letting within the construction industry in the area around Oslo, and regulate the industry very strictly in the rest of the country as well.

Both this requirement, and demands for, among other things, responsibility for wages in contractor chains, have been introduced after joint political mobilization by Norwegian and foreign-born workers. And there is still much to be done. A recent research report written by Johanne Stenseth Huseby at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), *Immigration and the Norwegian Labour Movement* (Huseby 2022), suggests, among other findings, that linguistic barriers continue to be an important explanation for lower union density among immigrant workers. Facilitating language training, more information for foreign workers about the trade union movement, and a greater commitment from the trade union movement to educate, agitate and organize migrant workers is needed.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR ORGANIZING MIGRANT WORKERS

I have tried to summarize some of our own experiences in the following ten "commandments", based on organizing work in the last decade. I conclude this article with them in the hope that they will inspire others to organize workers across national backgrounds — and thereby also beat right-wing populism and fascist forces back to where they belong — in the outer margins of civilized society.

1) They are not victims or strike-breakers, but potential union comrades.

2) You will not get anywhere without language and some knowledge about the culture.

3) Say welcome (and mean it!).

4) Do not start by asking and digging. Gain trust, then the information will come by itself.

5) Ask if they know what unions are, and explain the essentials.

6) We do not show up along with Labour Inspectors, tax officers, or the police. They do not show up the day after we have been visiting either.

7) Do not interpret scepticism as hostility, but as a natural and healthy defence mechanism.

8) We submit claims in agreement with the members, and talk things through until we have a common understanding, even if it takes time.

9) Many believe that unions are not for them, and have heard a lot negative things about us. So, do not think you can persuade them to join in five minutes.

10) Action speaks louder than words. Win victories, however small and insignificant at first.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonas Bals works as an advisor for the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO). He is a house painter by trade and has been active in the labour movement since the mid 1990's. In 2007, he completed a master's degree in history at Copenhagen University and published his first book. His latest book is *Strike! A History of Struggle, Solidarity and Sisterhood* (Res Publica 2021).

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e. V.
Godesberger Allee 149
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Dr Marc Meinardus | European Trade Union and Social Policy
marc.meinardus@fes.de

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