GOTHENBURG STUDIES IN ECONOMIC HISTORY 12

Ports, dock workers and labour market conflicts

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation consists of an introduction and four research papers that connect with two broad research fields: economic growth and labour market conflicts. In the introduction I provide a theoretical framework and I elaborate on the methods and material used in the papers.

In Paper 1, I investigate the topic of inter-industry propensity to strike. Earlier research has suggested that some groups of workers have struck more than others. One such group is dock workers—known within labour history and industrial relations for their militancy across time and space. But as shown in the paper, there is no empirical evidence for the particular strike-proneness of dockers up to WWII. Port strikes seem to have been not so much a quantitative as a qualitative phenomenon: the position of dockers in the distribution chain gave them the potential to disrupt society to a degree far exceeding most other occupational groups.

In Paper 2, co-author Christer Thörnqvist and I study the 1909 Swedish General Strike. The strike was not powerful enough, and the trade unions and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO, met a crushing defeat. Our focus is the functioning of the transportation system—and the ports in particular—an aspect of vital outcome for the strike, but one which is underdeveloped in previous research. We make the argument that LO did little or nothing to support the strikers in the ports, and that export could continue with the assistance of strike-breakers. One of the factors explaining LO's disinterest in port affairs was its overall strategy to respect the laws of the state; at the time it was a crime to even try to force someone to strike, or in any way prevent someone from working.

In Paper 3, I examine technology and productivity in the pre-container Port of Gothenburg. I argue that technological change was gradual for a long period of time and that the forklift and pallet—adopted in the late 1940s—were responsible for setting off a series of changes. The productivity figures I present strongly indicate growth up to WWII—an empirical finding that contrasts with results from other ports. In the postwar years productivity continued to grow, but at a faster rate compared to the prewar years. The pattern of productivity offers tentative support for the contention that the impact of the forklift was revolutionary.

In Paper 4, I discuss the transformation of the Swedish labour market in the first half of the twentieth century: from high to low levels of conflict activity. I critically evaluate the power resources hypothesis, saying that the seizing of governmental power by social democrats in the 1930s gave the working class opportunity to shift focus: from costly strikes within the industrial sphere to less costly redistributive policies within the political sphere. As an alternative explanation I emphasize intra-labour tensions. Communism, syndicalism and social democracy showed diverse attitudes towards industrial militancy, and the relative strength of the three ideologies affected conflict activity accordingly.

KEYWORDS: port technology, port productivity, Port of Gothenburg, dock workers, inter-industry propensity to strike, isolated mass hypothesis, strikes and lockouts, disruptive potential, workplace bargaining power, positional power, the 1909 General Strike in Sweden, Swedish labour market conflicts, power resources hypothesis, ideology.

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My name is the only one on the cover. And yet I would have had much less to show if not for the efforts and assistance of numerous people.

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Three of the papers in the dissertation have been previously published: "Strikingly Indifferent: The Myth of Militancy on the Docks Prior to World War II" in *Labor History*, vol. 54 (3), pp. 271-285, 2013; "Docks and Defeat: The 1909 General Strike in Sweden and the Role of Port Labour" (co-authored with Christer Thörnqvist) in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, vol. 34, pp. 1-27, 2013; and "Technology and Productivity in the Port of Gothenburg, c. 1850-1965" in *International Journal of Maritime History*, vol. 26 (2), pp. 265-287, 2014. I would like to thank the journals and publishers for their kind permission to republish the articles. An earlier version of the fourth paper, "From Peak to Trough: Swedish Strikes and Lockouts in the First Half of the Twentieth Century", is currently being reviewed by *Workers of the World: International*

Journal on Strikes and Social Conflict. The journal nevertheless kindly allowed me to publish the paper in my dissertation.

Agnes and Elsa keep on reminding me that there is more important stuff going on than, for instance, being rejected by a journal. Like when you learn novel things; like when you show me new ways. As you know from experience, I can be most tedious and grouchy. It has very little to do with the dissertation and I am confident that both of you will continue to rebel against such behaviour. Elsa och Agnes, ska jag berätta en hemlighet? Jojo, jag vet att ni vet. Men ändå!

Gothenburg, November 2014
Jesper Hamark

Content

Introduction

1. Setting the scene

This dissertation is mainly set within the realms of economic history and industrial relations. It contains four papers that connect with two broad academic research fields: economic growth and labour market conflicts. One of the papers confronts the issue of technology and productivity in pre-container ports: did something happen on the docks even before the box changed the world? Ports are key nodes, and any disruption in the flow of goods passing through them could have huge costs. Against that background I discuss the outcome of the 1909 Swedish General Strike, as well as dock work as a particularly strike-prone occupation on a global scale. Finally, I illuminate a different and more general aspect of labour market conflicts: the long-term transformation from wide-ranging militancy to quiescence in the model country of Sweden.

1.1 Economic growth, technology and productivity

Economic growth could technically be ascribed either to increased use of inputs, such as labour power, machinery and land, or to more efficient use of these inputs. Research in economic history shows that the accelerated growth rates that have been seen ever since the Industrial Revolution can be attributed mainly to enhanced efficiency, or in other words, increased productivity (Maddison 2001: 27, 2007: 304-307). Scholars have also tried to identify epoch-making technologies that could account for the growth: Robert Gordon in terms of 'great inventions'; Lennart Schön and other Swedish researchers in terms of 'development blocks' (Gordon 2000; Schön 2007; see also e.g. Dahmén 1988).

While figures aggregated at national levels are clearly of interest, economists and economic historians have also tried to estimate productivity growth in different sectors over time (Baumol, Batey Blackman and Wolff 1989). Transportation is one such sector. The impact of transportation costs on trade has been debated with respect to the Atlantic economies after 1820—according to some the beginning of globalization (O'Rourke and Williamson 2002; cf. Persson 2004)—as well as to the rise of containerization in recent decades (Levinson 2006; Hummels 2007). Yet the immense overall growth in the industrialized world is inconceivable without a certain level of productivity in transportation.

Transportation includes ports. But we do not know much about technology and its bearing on productivity in pre-container ports. In *Technology and Productivity in the Port of Gothenburg c. 1850-1965*, I discuss the timing and impact of the introduction of new technology. While great debates about technological leaps in history—real or putative—may never be settled, any possible settlement at minimum requires estimates of productivity growth. The same is true for the port microcosm: a debate about technologies on the docks will be more enlightening if it relates to changes in productivity; after all, it seems pointless to call this or that innovation 'important' or 'path-breaking', if it has no correlation in enhanced productivity. And so I combine my story about technological development with calculations of productivity.

1.2 Distribution of income between labour and capital

Who reaps the benefits of accelerated growth rates and compounded increases in value added—labour or capital? The distribution of income between labour and capital—frequently denoted the functional income distribution—was until the late twentieth century often regarded by statisticians and economists as more or less constant in the long run (for a review, see Bengtsson 2013: 15-16). Of course, renegades have always existed, and from the 1990s onwards they have become more numerous. With the recent and rapid diffusion of the research of Thomas Piketty (2013) and associates, functional income distribution now seems more non-constant than ever.

Neoclassical economists treat the distribution of income as a technical relationship: each factor of production is rewarded according to its marginal productivity. Other schools of thought (including notably post-Keynesians, Sraffians and Marxians) hold that the distribution of income is socially determined, a result of an ongoing struggle between labour and capital. One of the most obvious expressions of this struggle is overt labour market conflicts, which is the theme of the three remaining papers.

There is a complex reciprocal relationship between, on one hand, the balance of power—or bargaining power—of the classes and, on the other, labour market conflicts. Also, conflicts themselves are complex: they can be well planned as well as spontaneous; action can be initiated by executive boards, by the rank and file, or by non-organized workers or companies. Strikes and lockouts are often fought with the aim of shifting the current distribution of wages and profits, but motives and grievances are multidimensional and not always possible to express in money terms (Hyman 1972: ch. 5).

1.3 Labour market conflicts

Labour market conflicts are a subject of study for researchers in industrial relations as well as in economics, sociology and social- and labour history. Hardly surprising, there are several overlaps to economic history, such as the strand tying strikes to 'long waves' of economic development (Kelly 1997). Also, Swedish economic historians have thoroughly investigated concrete work processes and the managerial efforts to control these processes (for a review, see Edgren and Olsson 1991: 12-16; Karlsson 1998: ch. 4); indispensable research from an industrial relations perspective.

1.3.1 Labour governments, collective bargaining and ideology

In 1960 Arthur Ross and Paul Hartman wrote *Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict*. The book was a step forward in industrial relations research (Shalev 1980: 27): not only did the authors use cross-country comparison, but the book also contained valuable theoretical insights. Despite the fact that Ross and Hartman's hypothesis of *the withering away of the strike* became 'a laughing stock' (Shalev 1978a: 3), and that the authors arranged the data in a way that fitted their conclusion about the vanishing of strikes (Ingham 1974: 11-13; Thörnqvist 1994: 29-31), several of their arguments were passed on to later scholars.

Of special interest here, Ross and Hartman (1960: 68) suggested that a trade union movement with close ties to a workers' party with parliamentary influence 'is perhaps the greatest deterrent to the use of the strike'. The idea that strong enough labour movements shift from industrial to political/parliamentary action has echoed, and the most consistent proponent has been Walter Korpi in collaboration with Michael Shalev (Korpi and Shalev 1979, 1980. See also Shorter and Tilly 1974: 328; Hibbs 1978: 154, 165; Mikkelsen 1992: 411.). Sweden is renowned for its peaceful industrial relations in the post-WWII years. But in the first three decades of the twentieth century Sweden was struck by extensive labour and employer militancy. In *From Peak to Trough: Swedish Strikes and Lockouts in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* I examine if the Ross-Hartman-Korpi argument can explain the long-term shift.

There is a different tradition, also discussed by Ross and Hartman (1960: 67-68), that potentially could offer an alternative explanation for the Swedish development. The design of collective bargaining and other formal and informal labour market regulations have deep impact on the level of industrial strife—this is the promise of institutionalism. As Robert Dubin (1954: 44) put it in the 1950s:

> Collective bargaining is the great social invention that has institutionalized industrial conflict. In much the same way as the electoral process and majority rule have institutionalized political conflict in a democracy, collective bargaining has created a stable means for resolving industrial conflict.

Without sharing Dubin's normative enthusiasm about peaceful labour market relations, Hugh Clegg later argued that most of the cross-country variance in strikes (and several other labour-market-related variables) could indeed be explained by differences in collective bargaining (Clegg 1976; especially ch. 6). Differences exist in several dimensions: extent (the proportion of the employees covered), level (plant/district/nation), depth (the involvement of local unions in the administration of agreements) and scope (the number of aspects of employment covered) (Clegg 1976: 8-9).

Sweden was one of six countries in Clegg's study, but his time frame was the third quarter of the twentieth century, and his approach has yet to be implemented in a historical study of earlier Swedish conflict pattern(s). True, economic historian Christer Lundh (2002, 2008) has analyzed the long-term development of the Swedish labour market from an institutionalist perspective. He has a much broader focus than conflicts alone, such as wage setting and the structural transformation of the economy. And whereas Lundh argues that periods of labour market conflicts indicate deficiencies in the institutional arrangements, and that the 1928 Collective Agreement Act as well as the 1938 Saltsjöbaden Basic Agreement reduced these deficiencies (Lundh 2002: 106-107, 123), there is as yet no comprehensive argument along the lines of Clegg.[1] I do not dismiss the role of institutions such as collective bargaining, although I believe their impact on the transformation discussed here is limited.

The connection between strikes and ideology was given a lot of attention by early Marxists, including Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin and Antonio Gramsci. Their interest was in the subjective prerequisite for socialism, perceived as the revolutionary class consciousness of the workers (Kelly 1988). Several factors were thought to affect workers' penchant for socialism, one of which was strikes. After the revolutions in the Western World were put on hold, the interest faded. Yet a related question has attracted the attention of some researchers, namely the influence of ideology on strikes (Knowles 1952; Ross and Hartman

1 I therefore chose not to argue with the institutionalist approach in *From Peak to Trough.* An entirely different account of the long-term development of Swedish conflicts is given by political scientist Bo Rothstein (2005: ch. 8). According to Rothstein, Swedish industrial relations shifted from a prevailing attitude of mistrust to one of trust in the 1930s, after Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson managed to establish 'a *credible commitment* to the impartiality of political institutions' (2005: 188; emphasis in original).

1960; Hibbs 1976; Bergholm and Jonker-Hoffrén 2012. For Swedish studies, see Olsson 1980 and Stråth 1982.). This perspective is, however, somewhat of a Cinderella. Roberto Franzosi's *The Puzzle of Strikes* provides an illustration: Franzosi gives credit to the complexity of industrial strife and yet, when he summarizes different theories on strikes, there is one aspect missing: ideology (Franzosi 1995: 7-12). In *From Peak to Trough* I elaborate on the explanatory power of ideology.

1.3.2 The big clash

The general strike, and its means and ends had already been discussed by the First International. It continued to be a theme within the labour movement in the twentieth century, and the person most associated with the debate is Rosa Luxemburg (1928; see also Kelly 1988). In the 1920s and 1930s—when sufficient empirical material had been gathered—the study of general strikes also found its way into academic research (Crook 1931). Recent years of austerity in Southern Europe have led to an increased frequency of general strikes and their study (Hamann, Johnston and Kelly 2013; Rüdig and Karyotis 2014). One of the largest labour market conflicts in European history is the 1909 Swedish General Strike. From time to time over the course of a century the strike has caused heated debate. 'The narrative [of the 1909 General Strike] has been rewritten to be a part [of] and give explanations in ongoing history writing stamped by the ruling values of its time.' (Johansson 2011) But the debate has mostly gone on outside academic circles; within them there has been only one major occurrence: Bernt Schiller's (1967) dissertation *Storstrejken 1909*.

The record of early general strikes was poor: workers lost with few exceptions (Crook 1931). In *Docks and Defeat: The 1909 General Strike in Sweden and the Role of Port Labour* Christer Thörnqvist and I discuss the outcome of the Swedish strike, in the light of what happened in the ports—the sorest spot in distribution, where work had to be maintained even in the case of a conflict. Despite the fact that two valuable dissertations have dealt with strikebreaking in that time (Flink 1978; Tidman 1998), the ports during the General Strike have not been investigated. A conceivable explanation for the disinterest is the view of Swedish historiography: the 1908 Amalthea bomb[2] put an end to the use of strikebreakers from abroad (see e.g. Tidman 1998: 21, 244; Flink 1978: 63). But, as we show in the paper, foreign strikebreaking was in fact very much alive during the General Strike.

2 One English strikebreaker was killed and more than twenty others were injured in the port of Malmö in 1908, when a bomb exploded on the ship *Amalthea* housing the strikebreakers.

1.3.3 Between industries

Who strikes the most? Historical and social researchers have long been interested in identifying the most strike-prone industrial sectors (Bordogna and Cella 2002: 599). K. G. J. C. Knowles's (1952) and Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel's (1954) studies are early examples. Recent research has suggested a so-called tertiarization of industrial conflict in the Western World, meaning that strikes in the service sector have grown in relation to strikes in manufacturing (Bordogna and Cella 2002; Hale 2010). Alongside tertiarization there has also been a tendency towards feminization, but it is yet to be determined if the shift towards female-dominated services is due to increased militancy in the service sector, or a result of the decline in manufacturing (Dribbusch and Vandaele 2007: 371).

By far the most debated explanation for differences in strike propensity between industries is Kerr and Siegel's (1954) *the location of the worker in society hypothesis*, commonly known as *the isolated mass hypothesis*. Kerr and Siegel is my starting point in *Strikingly Indifferent: The Myth of Militancy on the Docks prior to World War II*.

1.4 Two remarks

Subject-related links between the papers in this dissertation do exist. Yet the reader will look in vain for a single major argument, neatly running from the first to the last page. The dissertation contains four diverse papers; diversified by topic, design, method and theoretical grounding. In this case, to argue that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts would be to risk the label of empty posturing. I would say that, on balance, the parts are as good as it gets.

I critically brace myself against earlier research. In varying degrees I disagree with Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, Anders Björklund, and Walter Korpi and Michael Shalev. These writers have all done pioneering work. They have offered *grand stories* and anyone who dares to do so can easily be called into question. Even if my objections have relevance, the parts of their work I criticize are still valuable.

2. Summary of the four papers

2.1 Strikingly Indifferent: The Myth of Militancy on the Docks prior to World War II

Empirical evidence has suggested that some groups of workers have gone on strike more often than others. Dock workers are supposed to be among the most militant, across time and space. I raise one main question: is there any evidence that dock workers worldwide up to WWII showed a special preference for going on strike?

Kerr and Siegel (1954) concluded that dockers together with seamen and miners were the most strike-prone groups. This conclusion has been quoted again and again, ever since. I argue that this is unwarranted: proper read, Kerr and Siegel's own figures do not support it. My review of more recent literature on strike-inclination reveals there are but a few indications that dockers struck more often than other workers. The indications are case studies and nothing that gives credit to the picture of a strike-prone worker, independent of time and space.

I suggest that apart from the reliance on Kerr and Siegel—and I believe uncalled-for inference from extraordinary strike records on the British docks in the post-war era—there is a specific reason for the long-lived rumour of strike-proneness: the dock workers' ability to inflict great damage. Their strategic location within distribution has given them much attention, from the media and from public inquiries all over the world. The quality of port strikes has been mixed up with the quantity of port strikes.

2.2 Docks and Defeat: The 1909 General Strike in Sweden and the Role of Port Labour

The 1909 Swedish showdown ended victoriously for the organized employers. But how come? Bernt Schiller (1967) argued that the liberals' attitude towards the strike was important; equally so was the decision by the railway workers not to participate in the strike. Schiller (1964) also showed that exports continued during the strike. An obvious object of industrial action is to damage the opponents' finances, and the fact that exports continued reveals that the effectiveness of the strike was limited.

Co-author Christer Thörnqvist and I focus on the last point, the continuance of exports from the ports. We raise three main questions. First, how was it possible to export goods? Second, why did LO proclaim a general strike, but not pay more attention to resistance in the ports? And third, how did the development in the ports fit into the overall strike strategy?

On average about 10 per cent of the dock labour force worked during the strike. Yet the volume of goods passing through the ports was around 50 per cent of a typical month. The single most important factor for the continuation of port business seems to be that seamen acted as strikebreakers on the docks. Even though we cannot quantify the magnitude of strikebreaking, primary sources demonstrate that seamen played an important role in keeping business going in the ports.

Both the labour movement and the employers' associations knew the strategic importance of ports. Yet LO did little or nothing to encourage resistance in the ports. There are several reasons. First, there were frosty relations between LO and the dockers' union. Second, LO wrongly argued that there were hardly any goods to transport anyway. Third, physically stopping strikebreaking in the ports (or elsewhere) was associated with great danger. The year before, in 1908, two workers had been sentenced to death after detonating a bomb on a ship housing English strikebreakers. In addition, for events short of terrorism there was the notorious *Åkarpslagen*, which stated that it was a crime to even *try* to force someone to strike, or in any way prevent someone from working.

LO's original plan was that the strike should be so powerful that the government would have to intervene to protect social order and public functions, and in so doing enforce 'acceptable peace arrangements'. At the same time, the strike should not seriously jeopardize basic functions in society so as to damage LO's public support, and, strategically even more important, turn the liberals in Parliament against the quest for an acceptable agreement. Such an equation—to hit, but still not to hurt—was problematic from the start, and as neither the government intervened nor a parliamentary majority pressed for intervention, the strategy was a failure.

The strategy of forcing government intervention and consequently respecting the laws of the state, helps to explain LO's disinterest in port affairs. Even moral support for combatting strikebreaking could have violated the *Åkarpslagen*.

2.3 Technology and Productivity in the Port of Gothenburg c. 1850-1965

Earlier research has suggested the sequence *hook—crane—forklift—container* as a useful way of categorizing technological development in the handling of general cargo. While different technologies lived side by side, there were definite historical breaks at which new innovations forced a series of subsequent innovations (Björklund 1986).

With this categorization as a point of departure, I trace the timing of innovation in the Port of Gothenburg. It turns out that the crane came to dominate earlier and the forklift later than previously suggested. With respect to the

historical breakthroughs, I conclude that the forklift in combination with the pallet radically changed the port structure as well as the type of work done—in contrast to the narrative that says that little or nothing happened in the ports prior to containerization. The introduction of the crane did not spark a chain of further changes; its impact was gradual rather than radical.

The latter part of the paper is about labour productivity. I discuss earlier attempts to assess productivity and I proceed by developing alternatives. The resulting estimations correspond to what we know about the historical development of the port's technology—and to the changes in labour productivity we would expect from it: modest growth prior to WWII followed by increased and subsequently accelerated growth after the war. Considering that earlier studies have found negative growth in other pre-container ports, *any* positive growth rate is worth noting. Again, the results contrast the view that only containerization mattered.

2.4 From Peak to Trough: Swedish Strikes and Lockouts in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

The most widespread narrative on the evolution of the Swedish labour market conflict pattern is associated with the power resources hypothesis. The seizing of governmental power by social democracy in the 1930s gave the working class the opportunity to shift away from costly strikes within the industrial sphere to less costly redistributive policies within the political sphere (Korpi and Shalev 1979, 1980). But the timing of conflicts does not support this hypothesis. Governmental stability is presumed necessary for the shift to occur, but when the Social Democratic Party won their second-in-a-row election in 1936 there is little decline left to explain.

I argue that intra-labour ideological crossroads were an important factor (but certainly not the only one) in the decline of industrial strife. The three main branches of the labour movement—communism, syndicalism and social democracy—showed diverse attitudes towards industrial militancy, and the conflict records within their respective domains display different development.

By the end of the 1910s, strikes led by the syndicalist confederation, SAC, constituted a large proportion of total strikes. In the 1920s SAC strikes fell sharply in absolute as well as in relative terms. The fall can be attributed to a twin change in ideology and strategy. In just a few years leading Swedish syndicalists went from advocating strikes to preferring the gradual expropriation of companies, a method of struggle that corresponded to the view that socialism could only be achieved by an evolutionary path.

In contrast to the syndicalists, the communists worked inside the reformist-dominated unions. After 1925, the communists' influence on conflict volume was huge: several times they succeeded in getting a majority in favour of striking or continued striking, in direct confrontation with the social democratic union leadership. In the 1930s communism lost ground.

If we subtract non-LO-approved conflicts, there is a manifest fall in activity from as early as 1923, measured by volume. Gradually, during the 1920s, the leaders of LO and its affiliations came to see productivity improvements rather than industrial militancy as a way of increasing the living standard of workers. Another factor explaining the LO leadership's increasingly reluctant attitude to strikes could be a revised version of the power resources hypothesis. From 1920 to 1926 Sweden had several short-lived governments; for most of the period these were social democratic. Perhaps even at this stage the feeling was growing that the parliamentary future belonged to social democrats. If so, there is a definite logic that *reformist* union leaders thought about shifting attention from industry to politics.

Furthermore, the paper finds evidence that the level of lockouts was affected by the shifting balance of power between the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Swedish Employers' Confederation, even though here too ideology played a part. Major sympathy lockouts ended in 1928, at a time when LO had the numerical strength and the financial resources to withstand much longer conflicts than before. True, SAF continued to make use of the large-scale lockout as a *threat* in the 1930s, but by then LO was no longer the real target. Instead the targets were high wages in 'sheltered' industries and the left opposition within the labour movement.

3. Theoretical perspective

3.1 Conflict of interests

Three papers deal with various aspects of strikes and lockouts. My general point of departure is that the interests of labour and capital are in conflict. Such a notion obviously contrasts with the neoclassical view that members of a society governed by markets are rewarded in proportion to their marginal contributions, harmoniously delivering both efficiency and fairness.

Labour power is bought and sold in the marketplace. One side wants to buy cheap, the other sell dear[3]—a formidable basis for conflict and, some would say, the most fundamental (see e.g. Korpi 1970: 16). But the workplace also constitutes such a basis. As argued by Richard Edwards (1979: 12; emphasis and gender-biased language in original):

> Workers must provide labor power […] but they need not necessarily provide *labor*, much less the amount that the capitalist desires to extract from their labor power they have sold. […] For the capitalist it is true *without limit* that the more work he can wring out of the labor power he has purchased, the more goods will be produced; and they will be produced without any increased wage costs. It is this discrepancy between what the capitalist can buy in the market and what he needs for production that makes it imperative for him to control the labor process and the workers' activities.

Edwards' view could be compared with Armen Alchian and Harold Demsetz's famous discussion on the firm. 'The firm', the economists explained, 'has no power of fiat, no authority, no disciplinary action any different in the slightest degree from ordinary market contracting between any two people' (1972: 777). I believe that Edwards captures existing capitalism better than Alchian and Demsetz (they, in turn, better capture the neoclassical version of perfectly functioning markets, given a set of restrictive assumptions).

That said, labour and capital also share common interests (Hyman 1972; Traxler 1995). This is perhaps most clearly seen at firm level. Under reasonable competitive conditions some minimum level of profit is needed—otherwise the firm will go out of business and the workers will lose their jobs. 'In everyday life', Richard Hyman has claimed, 'it is the narrow yet immediate area of common interest which is the most easily perceived' (1972: 103). In turn, this

3 True, this applies to markets in general. But the labour market is not just any market, see Solow (1990) for a neoclassical account (albeit one that deviates from orthodoxy) and Fine (1997) for a Marxian account.

perception partly explains why overt conflict is not more prominent in spite of the fact that interests clash both within the firm and in the market.

3.2 Bargaining power

Conflicting interests and mutual dependency force labour and capital into a bargaining relationship, the outcome of which varies over time and space (Korpi and Shalev 1980). I start from the basis that in capitalist countries capital is the stronger party because 'the realization of all material interest in society is conditional on profitable accumulation, which is the core class interest of capital' (Traxler 1995: 25. See also Offe and Wiesenthal 1980; Korpi and Shalev 1980; Olsen 1991). In the sphere of production managerial prerogatives prevail (with varying degrees of retrenchment) but outside production, capital also dominates. In the labour market the individual worker has to take the job for the going wage rate or—depending on historical circumstances—either starve or significantly reduce her/his standard of living (cf. Marshall 1920 [1890]: 567). Such is not the choice of the individual capitalist. What is more, as argued by Offe and Wiesenthal (1980: 74-75), while one unit of money capital can be added to another unit to create an 'integrated total', 'workers cannot "merge", at best they can associate'.

The importance of the capacity to associate is stressed by the power resources theory, formulated by Walter Korpi (1978; 1983).[4] The workers' main asset, their main *power resource*, is organization—in unions and in political parties. Whereas I discuss the power resources theory in *From Peak to Trough*, my writings are primarily stimulated by Eric Olin Wright and others. While Wright's approach acknowledges the importance of organization, it also includes the structural position of workers and it opens up, as it were, the black box of workplaces.

Wright makes a distinction between two different kinds of workers' power: associational and structural. Associational power includes most importantly unions and political parties. Structural power, on the other hand, could be divided into two subtypes. First, the power that 'results directly from tight labor markets', and second, the power that 'results simply from the location of workers within the economic system' (Wright 2000: 962). These subtypes correspond to Giovanni Arrighi's (1982) concepts of marketplace bargaining power and workplace bargaining power, for which he offers the following distinction:

4 Korpi's research has stimulated an international debate about the relations between classes and welfare states (see e.g. Swenson 2004; Korpi 2006; Iversen and Stephens 2008), but the debate is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

> The first refers to the bargaining power of workers when they are selling their labor power individually or collectively ... the second refers to the "bargaining power" of workers when they are expending their labor within the course of the capitalist labor process... (Arrighi 1982: 82)

The importance of associational power, mostly measured as union density and left-wing voting, is emphasized by numerous researchers. Korpi and Shalev (1979, 1980; see also Korpi 1978) are two of them, and their hypothesis that Swedish workers' high associational power made it possible for the labour movement to switch battlefield—from industry to politics—is critically discussed in *From Peak to Trough*.

In *Docks and Defeat*, Christer Thörnqvist and I focus on the ports and the dockers during the 1909 Swedish General Strike. Within the framework of Wright, Arrighi, Beverly Silver (2003) and Luca Perrone (1984)[5] we discuss three elements: (i) ports as key nodes, since dock workers could cause great damage; (ii) substitutability, since it was essential whether striking dockers could be replaced by other workers or not; and (iii), two different aspects of union strength. First, the union participation rate, which is generally negatively correlated with strikebreaking within the occupational group on strike. Second, the degree of unity/disunity within the trade union movement, since any split would obviously weaken the strikers.

In *Strikingly Indifferent* I ask if there is any evidence that dock workers worldwide up to WWII showed a special preference for going on strike. My answer is basically no. Apart from the reliance on poor data, I believe the basis for what I call the myth of militancy is the strong workplace bargaining power of dockers. The dockers' ability to inflict great damage has caused port conflicts to receive much more attention than the average labour market conflict. In turn, this attention has been interpreted as if port strikes were a quantitative phenomenon.

3.3 Perceptions about conflict of interests

The bargaining power perspective also plays a part in *From Peak to Trough*. Aside from examining Korpi and Shalev's hypothesis, I discuss associational power as an important explanation for the decline in lockouts. But generally my focus in this paper is about how the conflict of interests is *perceived*. While

5 We use Perrone's terms positional power or disruptive potential rather than Arrighi's workplace bargaining power, but all terms are more or less interchangeable (disruptive potential might be looked upon as the operational definition of the other two), and our choice was based on shortening the text as far as possible.

any left-winger or dedicated unionist would take it as an article of faith that a conflict of interests exist between labour and capital, they do not agree upon the character of the conflict. Some would argue that the relation is antagonistic, other that it is more benign. Such perceptions belong, of course, to the realms of ideology.

I claim that given certain levels of disruptive potential, union density, substitutability, unemployment, etc., perceptions about class conflicts matter. Put another way: the same balance of power between labour and capital is likely to produce different outcomes, depending on which ideology is dominant.

For social democracy, with its view of class conflict as relatively benign, it was reasonable to make compromises. Yes, there was a conflict of interests but not necessarily a zero-sum game. For instance, both parties benefitted from productivity improvements (given some minimum strength of the labour movement). It was logical that social democracy tried to shift away from onslaughts in the industrial arena to redistributive polices within the parliamentary system.

The revolutionaries—syndicalists (until the early 1920s) and communists—saw it in a different light. The conflict of interests was clearly malign, so the goal of the revolutionaries was to get away from capitalism; the sooner the better. Their many differences aside, syndicalists and communists shared the common belief that only massive mobilization could wreck the system.

Grievances can be assumed to be present at every workplace, but only rarely do they transform into collective action such as strikes. The revolutionaries tried to bridge this gap and they were—to borrow Douglas Hibbs' (1976: 1053) judgment on post-war, European communists—'important agencies for the mobilization of latent discontent and the crystallization of labor-capital cleavages'. Strikes provided opportunities to mobilize and to politicize, with the objective to transform battles *within* the system into battles *against* the system.

I look into different ideologies within the labour movement only. But the employers were no monolith either. Historically there was a tension between patriarchal and liberal capitalists; the former faction did not accept that their workers were 'ruled by socialist unions' (see e.g. Casparsson 1951: 215-219). In Sweden, however, this tension was mainly resolved at the beginning of twentieth century, in the first years of my period of study. One of the last battles concerning the right to organize in unions (*föreningsrättsstriderna*) was fought at the Mackmyra sulphite mill in 1906. In an attempt to break down organized workers, the company locked out and evicted the workers from their provided housing. But despite the fact that Mackmyra was a member of SAF, the company did not receive financial assistance. By then SAF had drawn the conclusion that unions had come to stay. Collective agreements and the right to

organize were *de facto* accepted by SAF in 1905, and now it refused to support Mackmyra in a cause already lost (Casparsson 1951: 215-223; Schiller 1967: 27-28; Hall 2005: 153-156).[6]

What is more, ideology does not matter in the same profound way as for the labour movement: within the capitalist camp there is no disagreement about which socio-economic system is preferable. There are individual exceptions—such as the Swedish 'Red Banker', Olof Aschberg (1877-1960)—but the *Capitalists For Socialism* movement is yet to be seen.

Class conflict matters and so does the perception of these conflicts.

Addressing the Human Relation School, Korpi (1970: 15, my translation) once made the bantering comment that strikes are 'often assumed to be caused by more or less malicious and alien elements […] communists, foreigners, and other troublemakers. [They have] penetrated the system and [they] disrupt the basic harmony.' I do not entirely share Korpi's ironic disbelief: malicious elements—like communists, foreigners, and other troublemakers—seem to have been important in the history of Swedish strikes and lockouts.

3.4 Skills, subordination and job control on the docks

One of the factors affecting bargaining power is occupational skills. The less professional skills required for a given job, the greater the substitutability.[7] And the greater the substitutability, the lesser the bargaining power of workers. But what is meant by 'skilled' work? Too often the word 'skills' is used without being properly defined[8], but Anna Green (2000: 570) takes the issue more seriously and with allusion to Paul Thompson (1983: xiv) she offers a definition of skilled work containing three integral components.

- craft (through formal training or apprenticeship)
- knowledgeable practices
- job control

With reference to ports in general prior to WWII, Green (2000: 570) states that 'dock work entailed both knowledgeable practices and an element of control on the job. But dock workers were not required to learn a set of craft skills through

6 Yet the period immediately following the 1909 General Strike was a reminder of older times (Hadenius 1976: 27).

7 See *Strikingly Indifferent and Docks and Defeat.* Klas Åmark (1986) has stressed the link between skills and substitutability, although I was not generous enough to credit him in the papers.

8 With the diffusion of *HISCLASS* (Leeuwen and Maas 2011), this is likely to improve.

a term of formal training or apprenticeship.' During the post-war era formal training also reached the docks. In 1949 a school for the vocational training of dock workers was founded in Rotterdam. It was a 'worldwide innovation' that attracted much attention from officials abroad (Nijhof 2000: 419). Among the officials were people from the port of Gothenburg (Axelson 1991: 103). In the 1950s, the Swedish Shipowners' Association argued that increasing mechanization required that dockers were properly educated, and in 1960 Gothenburg dockers-to-be were sent on a three-week course with mixed theoretical and practical lessons (Björklund 1984: 109-111).

From a bargaining power perspective, a few things can be said about the second and third components. Knowledgeable practices can be exemplified by the carrying of heavy sacks on the back, which required strength as well as technique. A docker may have had the strength when he (or, occasionally, she) started working on the docks, but the technique had to be acquired over time. Then again, in the short run, such skills far from immunized dockers from the spectre of substitutability. Think about the use of strikebreakers during a conflict. The stand-ins may not have been able to do a very *good* job from the health and safety perspective or in terms of goods handled per working hour (as suggested by both labour and employer testimonies), but they were nonetheless able to do the job. In general, it was harder for a random strikebreaker to operate an expensive machine in a factory. Put another way: the threshold for a newcomer to do *any* work was lower on the docks than in many other occupations.

Job control, I believe, is more usefully looked upon as the combined effect of the nature of work, the struggle between labour and management, and skills—rather than as a component of skills. Let us look closer at job control:

The study of work processes, and of managerial efforts to control these processes, has played an important role in Swedish economic history research. The influence of Taylorism as well as Harry Braverman's (1974) 'degradation thesis' has been a central theme in this field (Edgren and Olsson 1991: 12-16; Karlsson 1998: ch. 4). The studies have often given concrete descriptions of the work process at firm level, along with equally comprehensive accounts of the worker-management interplay (Ekdahl 1983; Magnusson 1987; Johansson 1988; Johansson 1990). Björklund (1984) also aligned himself with Braverman, deskilling and control in his study on the Port of Gothenburg.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, casualism and sub-contracting had been replaced by long-term and direct employment of labour in most industries in the advanced capitalist countries (Davies 2000: 609, 611). The industrial workers had, in Karl Marx' (1976 [1887]: 1019-1025) words, already

witnessed the shift from *formal* to *real subsumption*, that is, industrial capitalists had taken the leap from juridical ownership towards also controlling the actual work process.[9] This was not the case on the docks. Well into the twentieth century, Sam Davies writes, 'dock labour has generally been employed under conditions more characteristic of a pre-industrial economy than of a "Fordist" one. [Only] containers brought […] far greater potential for managerial control over the labour process' (Davies 2000: 609, 619).

Real subordination should be looked upon as a continuum. Neither management nor workers ever have complete control over the work process. Some degree of real subordination also existed on the docks, but there was a profound difference between dock work and industrial production: the achievable level of standardization and the ability to monitor.

By definition, sub-contracting lessened the direct influence of employers over employment relations, and the widespread use of casual hiring only increased the distance between employers and employees (Davies 2000: 612-614). But casualism and sub-contracting aside, there were intrinsic features of dock work that made it hard to standardize and monitor.

> The process of loading and unloading ships was a particularly complex and difficult task, and one not amenable to standardisation of work-practices, not to observation and supervision by management. Cargoes often varied in size, shape and weight, and had to be stowed quickly, safely, sometimes in a specific order for unloading at successive ports, and in a way that maximised the available space in the hold. (Davies 2000: 616)

Within continuous-flow production, foremen did not need to direct sequence or pacing of work—the conveyer belt did. In 1914 there was one foreman for each 58 workers in Henry Ford's automobile plants (Edwards 1979: 119). Port employers could only dream of such a ratio. On the Gothenburg docks there was one foreman for each 14 dockers in 1913 (Socialstyrelsen 1916: 38) and yet the effectiveness of supervision was but a fraction of Ford's.

According to the wisdom of Fredrick Taylor, work gangs were no good for productivity. Instead each labourer should be given a separate individual task, since it made work more transparent and hence eased managerial supervision. But this individualization was not possible to achieve in the ports, 'where men had to work as a team to move the cargo' (Green 2000: 564).

But whereas the influence of employers and their foremen on the work process was limited, they nevertheless had a strong disciplinary weapon: the threat of

9 See Ekdahl 1983: 182-184 for an application of Marx' concepts.

denying future employment (Green 2000: 565). There was a continuous struggle in ports all over the world over the employment process, in which the dockers tried to gain influence. This was the reason the Swedish Transport Workers' Union refused the 1906 December Compromise, in which LO recognized employers' exclusive right to hire and fire, and to manage and distribute work, while SAF formally recognized workers' right to join unions (see *Docks and Defeat*). In the ports, overcrowded by people looking for a few hours of work, it was always possible for employers to set aside union members, not by firing them but, more subtly, by not hiring them.

4. Methods, materials and procedures

Strikingly Indifferent

The most ambitious way to decide whether dockers were more strike prone than other workers or not, would be to perform a cross-country, quantitative analysis based on a sample representative of the world as a whole. But such an approach is beyond the reach of any individual paper or even of any individual researcher. A rigorous analysis of dockers' strike-proneness requires reference points, such as workers in general or a score of other occupational groups. That is, it requires little less than cross-country, full-scale inter-industry comparisons of strike rates.

I chose a much simpler approach: examining existing evidence. I start by re-evaluating the findings of Kerr and Siegel's '50s-article, and I follow up with a review of later scholarly work on inter-industry propensity to strike. I have not drawn a sample, instead I have read all English language papers, articles and books I have found on the subject.

Strikingly Indifferent is basically a critique of other scholars' unwarranted generalizations. It is only fair to admit that my main point—that there is very little evidence for any particular propensity to strike among dockers up to WWII—is not aimed at telling us anything about striking on the docks in the post-war years.

Docks and Defeat

Our most imperative academic source is the work of Schiller (1964, 1967). The so-called Huss inquiry (Huss 1910a, 1910b, 1912) is another valuable source, published in close conjunction to the strike by the Department of Labour Statistics at the National Board of Trade (*Kommerskollegii afdelning för arbetsstatistik*). The third volume contains rich material on strike participation at different levels of aggregation. It was published three years after the strike, but is based on a survey sent out in October 1909 to companies involved in the conflict. The survey's most essential questions concerned the number of workers working at different times *during* the conflict, using as a benchmark the number of workers working *before* the conflict. The formula the companies received contained several control questions which increased the quality (for a longer discussion on the methods used and an assessment of the statistical inquiry's strengths and weaknesses, see Huss 1912: 7-23).

The joint reading of Schiller (1964) and Huss (1912) led us to examine the ports more closely, since their findings in combination created a paradox: exports continued despite the fact that the people who would normally handle

the export goods were on strike. In order to resolve the paradox we went to the archives.

The primary sources of the Huss inquiry, i.e. the companies' formula answers, are to be found at the National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) in Stockholm. First, we were able to verify the figures concerning the dockers given in the Huss inquiry. Second, we checked whether dockers continued to work to a greater extent in the major export ports (since the level of aggregation did not allow us to draw conclusions directly from the published material). Third, we found evidence that people other than dockers kept the ports going. In the archive of SAF at the Centre for Business History (*Centrum för Näringslivshistoria*) in Stockholm, we found additional information about the character of strikebreaking on the docks.

The primary sources of the Huss inquiry regarding Gothenburg are missing from the National Archives. For this reason, and because the city had the country's largest port, we needed other sources. The private archive of the Swedish Shipowners' Association in Western Sweden (*Sveriges Redareförening, Västra kretsen*) offered an assessment of the strike in the Port of Gothenburg from the employers' perspective. The Region Västra Götaland and City of Gothenburg Archives (*Region- och Stadsarkivet med folkrörelsernas arkiv*) enabled us to study local union minutes as well as the Gothenburg Harbour Board's port traffic statistics.

The archive studies concerning the strike in the ports were supplemented by the reading of contemporary newspapers.

To find out about strategic strike discussions within the trade union movement we studied the minutes from the executive council of LO and the general council of LO (private archive at *Landsorganisationen* in Stockholm), as well as the minutes from Transport's national board (at the Labour Movement Archives and Library [*Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek*] in Stockholm). Further, we read *Svaret*, the daily strike paper produced by LO. In some cases useful information was to be found in trade union and employer association biographies.

Although we make a few remarks of general character in the paper, we should not forget that the strike is very much a one-time event. Any comparison with today's general strikes in Europe risks being trivial at best.

Technology and Productivity

The world does not consist of homogenous steel or standardized coal that varies from one time period to another only in volumes and never in quality. Although the average citizen probably finds heterogeneity comforting, economic historians may not: it makes essentials such as the calculations of GDP and

productivity hard to achieve with accuracy. The real world not only imposes difficult choices on researchers concerning methods, it also forces them to rely on more or less restrictive assumptions, and worse yet, sometimes on little more than guesswork.[10]

When trying to estimate aggregate labour productivity in the pre-container Port of Gothenburg, I encounter the same principal problem that any historian with interest in change in aggregates does. 'The index-number problem arises', Norwegian national accounts expert Ragnar Frisch (1936: 1) explained some 80 years ago, 'whenever we want a quantitative expression for a *complex* that is made up of individual measurements for which no common *physical* unit exists.'

Ports are of course less complex than the entire economy. For one thing, the national accounts have to find a joint measure for goods and services. Dock work on the other hand is about moving goods, and there is no problem finding a quantitative expression for these goods, however complex they may be. In a physical world, common physical units always exist: matter has mass, density, energy, volume, and—where gravity operates—weight. This means that we can measure the goods passing through the ports in, let us say, weight. But the fact that we *can* measure a bundle of goods in weight, is not to say that we should. And I think we should not: the complexity varies profoundly between handling one ton of coal and an equivalent weight of general cargo.

Productivity is, in the broadest sense, a ratio of output to input. Since my study is about *labour* productivity (for reasons outlined in the paper), I am looking for a ratio of output to input of labour. How should labour be measured? I have used data from the Gothenburg Port Labour Employers' Office (*Göteborgs hamnarbetskontor*) on annual working hours. Generally, working hours is preferable to number of workers and this is especially true in ports, where work was often casual and where the hours worked could vary greatly between individual dockers. Note, however, that the available material does not allow me to weight the working hours. Sometimes one hour by a highly paid worker is counted as proportionally more than one hour by a low-paid worker, a method based on the assumption that wage differentials reflect different levels of education or 'quality' of workers.

A port provides a transfer service (Talley 2009: 1). This service could be measured *directly*, either from the production side or from the income side. The production approach measures value added, which equals the difference between the value of the service provided and the value of non-labour inputs.

10 For an illustrative example, see Henwood's (2005: 43-44) discussion about the contribution from personal computers on the US GDP.

The income approach measures total income, which equals wages plus profits. In theory both approaches yield the same result, that is, value added equals wages plus profits. I have not been able to use these direct methods because of a lack of proper data; instead I have relied on indirect methods, as described in the paper.

To construct the time series I have used sources from public authorities and the centralized employer organization in the Port of Gothenburg. Working hours as well as prices for loading and unloading different kinds of cargo are taken from the board of the Port Labour Employers' Office of Gothenburg. (Working hours are given in the Employers' Office's annual reports, whereas I have collected prices from its non-registered archive at the Region Västra Götaland and City of Gothenburg Archives.) The value of imports and exports comes from the Statistical Yearbook of Gothenburg, and the corresponding physical units are given in the Gothenburg Harbour Board's (*Göteborgs hamnstyrelse*) annual reports.

To nail down the timing of introduction of different technologies, I have compared secondary literature with material from the Gothenburg Harbour Board, public inquiries, and the Port Labour Employers' Office of Gothenburg.

Technology and Productivity offers, I believe, quite a lot of generalizability. It is indeed a case study of Gothenburg, but this port was not unique: ports all over the industrial world introduced new technologies well before containerization (some of which are briefly discussed in the paper). While the timing of introduction differed, the techniques used on the large continental docks were often similar or even identical to those used in Gothenburg. Assuming that my productivity calculations for the Port of Gothenburg are trustworthy, it seems reasonable to assume that productivity improvements also occurred in other ports. Anyhow, I think that any absence of productivity growth must be explained, not just assumed.

The above does not imply that dock culture was also the same or even similar across ports. True, Raymond Charles Miller (1969: 304) once declared that ports seem to 'produce a universal dockworker subculture', but such notions have been convincingly refuted (Kimeldorf 1988; Turnbull, Morris and Sapsford 1996; Davies et al. 2000).

From Peak to Trough

Does the power resource hypothesis offer an answer to the transformation of the Swedish labour market? The question is answered in two steps. First, I create time series of strike and lockout activity, measured as frequency, involvement and volume (read more about the different aspects of conflict activity below). Second, I compare the time series with the statements of Korpi and Shalev.

Regarding my hypothesis of ideology affecting conflicts, the appropriate design is more complex. In the years 1917 to 1927, official statistics noted whether workers involved in a conflict were unionized and, if so, in which union(s). Thus it is possible to compare SAC with unions affiliated to LO. I combine a quantitative analysis with a discussion about ideological change in Swedish syndicalism. Assessing the influence of communism is harder, since official statistics did not discriminate between conflicts based on the workers' ideology. What would an appropriate design look like?

If we were to pick a random sample of workplaces and follow them over time, we could study under what premises conflicts materialize. Assume that we have information about conflicts as well as the relative strength of the different ideologies among workers at workplace level, and that we could control for other relevant variables: workforce characteristics such as age, years of experience, employment status, wage and income, education, marital status, number of children and union membership; firm characteristics including size and automation level; labour-capital characteristics such as depth and breadth of collective agreement, management culture, use of strikebreakers, and absolute and relative levels of wages and profits; and market conditions, most importantly, the level of competitive pressure. Then we could estimate, for instance, the likelihood for a strike to occur given workers' ideology.

Taking communism as an example, it should be traced at workplace level; operationalized by membership in a communist party, votes in the last elections and surveys on political opinions, or better yet: all three. Surveys are needed to control for the fact that political movements tend to change their world outlook as well as their concrete political standpoints over time, while at the same time often preserving their nominal ideology (for a discussion about the problem of determining the influence of ideology on strikes when the target—ideology—is moving, see Thörnqvist 1994: 103).

Suppose that we find a strong relationship between the share of communist votes in the workforce and the likelihood that a conflict occurs. In a cross-sectional investigation such a correlation says nothing about the direction of causality: it might well be that conflicts give more openings for communists to agitate, i.e. that causality runs from conflicts to ideology. The time dimension offers better opportunities to make causal inference in this respect, although there is of course always the possibility that a third variable (not accounted for) affects both ideology and conflicts.

In practice, this approach is not a realistic alternative; at least not within the time frame of my dissertation. True, I have access to conflict data of reasonable quality. But there exist no systematic data on workers' political opinions

at the appropriate level of aggregation, and only case studies of the individual workplaces *might* reveal it. (To a varying degree the same thing holds true for the control variables.) Such an investigation would be time-consuming to say the least, and yet there would be no guarantee that relevant data would ever be found.

I have chosen an entirely different approach: to test Klas Åmark's (1986: 138, 141) suggestion that the communists played an important role in the majority of the larger conflicts from the mid-1920s well into the crisis of the 1930s. I have measured conflict activity by volume[11] and extended the period to 1950. The design is simple: I have picked out the six largest conflicts—all with more than 1,000,000 days lost—and I have analyzed them with regard to the communists' sway over decisions to strike, decisions to keep on striking, and decisions to turn down settlements with the employers.[12] Since every conflict is preceded by a decision, this should give reason to comment more confidently on causality. To make qualitative judgments about the conflicts, I have read newspapers, political magazines, company biographies, union biographies, and academic works.

Aside from the fact that Åmark's suggestion ought to be taken seriously, there is another reason to focus on the very largest conflicts: a random sample simply would not do. Apart from the practical problems of random sampling raised above, the distribution of days lost per strike is highly skewed—very much like a distribution of wealth. There were slightly over 3,000 conflicts, resulting in approximately 34 million days lost, in Sweden between 1926 and 1950 (Socialstyrelsen 1926-1938; Statistics Sweden 1939-1950[13]). The top six largest conflicts, representing a share of the total population of 0.2 per cent, accounted for nearly two-thirds of total days lost. Random sampling would most likely leave out all the top six conflicts, whereas my approach—which might be looked upon as a kind of stratified sampling—ensures they are all included.

Are there weaknesses with this approach? Yes.

To focus on the largest conflicts is to lose sight of the typical. The typical was small. More than two-thirds of the conflicts resulted in less than 1,000 days lost (Socialstyrelsen 1928-1934). It might well be that local branches dominated by communists struck more often—and hence were involved in more typical strikes—than those where reformists had hegemony, but as argued above there

11 I prefer volume over involvement, see *From Peak to Trough.* In the Appendix I discuss whether my conclusions are affected by this choice or not.

12 For practical reasons the number of conflicts was not extended, see *From Peak to Trough.*

13 Both references refer to year of data.

is no easy way to test the idea. The question of whether or not ideology affected the likelihood of a strike occurring therefore remains unanswered.

What is more, I have no 'control group', no events of non-conflict. It is theoretically possible that communists at some workplaces or in some unions used their influence to *ban* conflict. The idea might seem strained, but two things should be noted. First, such a possibility cannot be revealed by looking only at conflicts. Second, there are examples in the history of communism that prohibit an outright dismissal of the idea. For instance, the Communist Party USA actively promoted maximal industrial production and effort during WWII (Phelps 2009: 38). At the time it was said that one could not tell the difference between a boss and a member of the communist party.

Let us consider the hypothesis that the Swedish Communist Party also opposed strikes at times. Under what circumstances is the hypothesis most likely to hold? (For a general discussion about 'critical cases', see Hancké 2009: 68.) Arguably in times of national gathering with little revolutionary sentiments, i.e, as in the case of the US during WWII. From 1941 to 1943 the party had its most 'patriotic' period: the communists supported the coalition government, they declared their willingness to participate in the nation's defence, and they approved the armaments programme (Hirdman 1974: 269). But I have not found any evidence that the communist party disapproved strikes even in these years (Kommunistiska fackklubbarna 1943; Nerman 1949; Hirdman 1974). Moreover, in September 1944 the Swedish communists showed that they were ready to face an immense battle in the engineering industry and when the strike materialized the following year it became the largest ever measured by absolute volume (over 100,000 metal workers laid down their tools from February to June). True, in the autumn of 1944 there was no longer any doubt that Germany would lose the war, but on the other hand Sweden's supply capacity was still a source of concern. It seems that the Swedish communists were 'pro-strike' (or at the very least not 'anti-strike') during my entire period of study. The US half-joke probably had little resonance in Sweden.

I study the concept of *strike and lockout activity*. This may be—and certainly has been—operationalized in many different ways. Yet there are three measurements that dominate empirical research (see e.g. Dribbusch and Vandaele 2007: 367), and I use them all.[14]

14 For the years from 1903 to 1950 the correlations between the different measurements of conflict activity are as follows: frequency and involvement = 0.32, frequency and volume = 0.25, and involvement and volume = 0.87. This is consistent with other studies, see e.g. Thörnqvist 1994: 37-38; Franzosi 1995: 6-7.

- Number of stoppages or stoppage frequency.
- Number of workers involved or simply involvement (sometimes breadth).
- Volume or working days lost (most often, just days lost).

Stoppage duration, or the length of a stoppage, is seldom used on its own,[15] but is nonetheless an integral part of volume. The volume or the days lost in a stoppage is calculated by the multiple of duration and number of workers involved (Lyddon 2007: 32).

Several authors have argued that the three measurements capture distinct social aspects. Some claim that strike-proneness is best measured by frequency (Skeels 1971: 524; Shalev 1978b: 323-324; Edwards 1983: 211). Others prefer involvement, or frequency *and* involvement (Edwards 1977: 553; Turnbull and Sapsford 2001: 232). On the other hand, Joseph Wallace and Michelle O'Sullivan (2006: 275) affirm that the number of workers involved rather indicates 'a degree of social mobilisation' (see also Franzosi 1989: 354). Days lost has been used as a proxy for strike-proneness in cross-country studies, starting with Kerr and Siegel (1954). Then again Paul Edwards (1977: 553) has claimed that days lost better captures the (economic) impact of strikes, which is also the most common view (see e.g. Turnbull and Sapsford 2001: 232; Wallace and O'Sullivan 2006: 287; although van der Velden 2003: 387-389 is an exception), but hardly the most theoretically solid. When Luca Perrone (1983) found an ingenious way to measure workers' positional power by using Leontief transaction matrices for Italian industries, his starting point was that the economy is differentiated and non-amorphous. This implies that a given number of days lost would have quite different economic impacts depending on which sector is affected. Quoting K.G.J.C. Knowles, Perrone (1983: 237) stated that

> accepting the number of man-days lost as an indicator of economic damages [is] like taking total bomb-tonnage dropped as an indicator of air-raid damage; irrespective of target or type of bomb.

The Swedish General Strike illuminates a related problem: a given number of days lost would have quite different economic impacts depending on the *timing* of the conflict. The General Strike and the lockouts preceding it occurred during a recession. It meant that real production losses were much less than would have been the case if the strike and the lockouts had been launched during a boom.

15 Ross and Hartman (1960) provide an exception.

My scepticism for using days lost as a measure of impact aside, I am pretty much agnostic about which measurement captures what social aspect. I believe that, for instance, strike-proneness is reasonably gauged by any of the three measurements.

What everyone seems to agree upon is that each parameter of frequency, involvement and volume captures *some* aspect of activity. I think the researcher who chooses only one measurement ought to have a good motive. Counting volume, or some kind of more complex index that also includes frequency, involvement and duration, is not satisfactory since the figures cannot be readily interpreted (Korpi and Shalev 1979: 186n). Say, for instance, that volume increases, and that we would like to know why. To find out, we must—at the very least—disaggregate volume into its three components. Then, of course, we are back to where we started.

To account for demographic change I have related conflict activity to the number of employees. Several cross-country studies have preferred the number of non-agricultural employees[16] (Ingham 1974; Shorter and Tilly 1974: 331; Hibbs 1978; Korpi and Shalev 1979; all of which include Sweden), primarily on the grounds that strike activity in agriculture is generally low (see e.g. Hibbs 1978: 155).[17] If we accept this argument and hence use non-agricultural employment as the denominator, we should be consistent and use a measurement of *non-agricultural* conflict activity as the numerator. But in any case Shorter and Tilly (1974) and Korpi and Shalev (1979) do not: they use total conflict activity as the numerator.[18] From a practical perspective I am willing to defend them: in Sweden, between 1903 and 1938, the frequency of agricultural conflicts amounted to less than three per cent of total frequency (Kommerskollegium 1909a; 1909b; 1911a, 1911b; Socialstyrelsen 1911-1922, 1923-1938).[19] But from a principle perspective I believe my choice is better.

A longer discussion about the quality of strike data used is given in the Appendix to *From Peak to Trough*. I have chosen to present this separately,

16 Or, alternatively, employed (employees and self-employed).

17 Given that conflicts really do occur seldom in agriculture, it might be argued that time series on non-agricultural conflicts in relation to non-agricultural employees are more relevant, since the transfer of employment from agriculture to industry and services is accounted for. I started from this premise, but had to let go of the project: it turned out to be far too difficult to trace involvement and volume in non-agricultural conflicts if these conflicts also are separated into strikes and lockouts.

18 Ingham (1974) and Hibbs (1978) are not readily transparent on this point.

19 Of course, in individual years agriculture had a larger impact. For instance, in 1920 a not-insignificant 570,000 days were lost in 15 agricultural conflicts (Socialstyrelsen 1920).

since I believe it could be of interest to anyone occupied with labour market conflicts in Sweden up to WWII.

Finally, I believe in the logic of my argument: everything else being equal, a strong influence of revolutionaries in the labour movement should lead to higher conflict activity in the labour market. Yet, when it comes to strike research and claims of generalizability, experience shows that caution is very much in order. Seemingly logical or common-sense hypotheses on strike behaviour, based on a limited number of cases or a limited period of time, have been found not to hold when confronted with yet another case or with a prolonged time frame. Ross and Hartman's *the withering away of the strike*, is a particularly clear example. Sweden in the first half of the twentieth century is one case, but not just any case. In this period the labour market went through a remarkable transformation; something that has caught the interests of researchers in the past and is likely to do so again in the future.

5. Future research

Strikingly Indifferent

A widely held opinion is that dock work is a strike-prone occupation. My ambition has been to show that while this may be true, it is yet to be demonstrated for the period up to WWII.

More evidence is needed. Preliminary results from my own research regarding inter-industry propensity to strike in Sweden prior to WWII, suggest that dock workers' activity in quantitative terms was moderate. Yet they were involved in 'important' conflicts (as perceived by the authorities) to a degree far exceeding what would be expected—assuming that the probability of being involved in an important conflict is proportionate to each occupation's numerical strength (Hamark 2012). As argued in this dissertation, conflicts on the docks were of special societal interest because of the consequences for the economy as a whole, and therefore it should come as no surprise that Swedish authorities saw port conflicts as important.

What is more, some researchers have suggested that dock workers also had a special quality with regards to the labour movement, over which they had influence despite being severely outnumbered by other workers (see e.g. Miller 1969; Broeze 1991; van der Velden 2011). I believe the suggestion is worth elaborating, preferably in a cross-country setting (starting with a proper definition of 'influence' and by finding a way to tap into it). Based on the argument in *Docks and Defeat* I could imagine a causal chain: dockers, or any other group of workers with high disruptive potential—I think there is little special about dockers—gained influence because of their ability to hurt the employers and the state. Of course, the 'labour movement' is an abstraction. It is made up of thousands or millions of workers—united and divided across a multitude of dimensions, one of which is occupation. It seems reasonable to assume that the dominating occupations, with their specific culture, political ideas, etc., will affect the character of labour movements. For instance, regarding Sweden, Lars Olof Ekdahl and Hans-Eric Hjelm (1978) have argued that craft workers early on had sway over the trade union movement, and that the craft workers' ideas of the state as neutral in relationship to the classes, laid a foundation for trade union reformism.

Collective violence deserves more attention. At least in Swedish historiography, violence has taken a back seat; in the driving seat are Understanding and Compromise (Nyzell 2009: 10-11). Tapio Bergholm has argued that violence in port disputes is an expression of dockers' masculinity, and that ports during the casual era—especially Finnish ports—were characterized by a 'bachelor

culture' (Bergholm 1993, 1996; cf. Steel 2010). In *Strikingly Indifferent* I propose that the disruptive capacity of dockers may explain the violent port conflicts, but the two explanations are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, I believe that variations in both occupational culture and in the objective position of occupational groups in the production/distribution chain could be used to shed light on violent conflicts more generally, even outside the docks.

Docks and Defeat

Despite the fact that the 1909 Swedish General Strike was also an immense trial of strength in a European perspective, little academic work has been done on the strike the last 50 years. I suspect it has to do with Bernt Schiller's (1967) dissertation from the 1960s, which quickly became the standard reference on the General Strike. The breadth and depth of this dissertation probably had a restraining rather than stimulating effect on research: what more was there to say?

I believe the strike could be usefully put in an international context by examining more closely foreign strikebreaking. Such inspection has the potential of illuminating the actual workings of the Second International and the cooperation between the various national labour movements. What, if anything, did the British and the German labour movements do to prohibit their fellow-countrymen from going to Sweden? Was foreign strikebreaking the result of the prevailing balance of power between labour and capital on a European level, or was it rather a question of disinterest on the part of the labour movements? The answer could increase our understanding of the frictions within the Second International, frictions that ultimately led to the collapse of the association just a few years later.

Technology and Productivity

Even though I believe my productivity estimates are more solid than those based on weight of cargo, I readily acknowledge that they have weaknesses. If the paper were to stimulate the ongoing development of refined methods, I would be more than pleased.

I would naturally like to see other studies follow my design to such an extent that we could make useful comparisons of technology and productivity change between different ports. Comparative work has the potential to, for instance, elucidate the impact of crane technology. I believe an appropriate project would be to compare a European port with shore-based cranes to a US finger-pier port where ships used their own gear.

With a better understanding of productivity we could potentially present more qualified arguments about the interaction between port culture, class struggle and productivity. It has been suggested that dockers have been especially successful in preventing the introduction of new technologies (Miller 1969: 311). With actual figures on productivity, this suggestion could be formulated as a testable hypothesis: the bargaining power of dock workers is inversely related to the growth in productivity.

I also think that more accurate descriptions of port productivity have a wider relevance. Economic history research has suggested that there are break points with respect to economy-wide productivity: periods of fast growth are followed by periods of slow growth (Schön 2010). Could we find a similar pattern in ports, synchronized with overall productivity change?

From Peak to Trough

A comprehensive account of the long-term transition of Swedish labour market conflicts is yet to be written. On a general level I believe the transition could be usefully accounted for along the lines of Franzosi (1995), who brings quantitative methods and extensive reasoning together.

Judgments about the impact of ideology on conflict activity would benefit from cross-country studies. A natural comparison would be the Nordic countries, which have reasonably similar social, economic and political structures.

A more holistic view on labour market conflicts than that presented in this dissertation would permit an analysis of differences between female and male workers. Swedish work stoppages in the first half of the twentieth century were a gender-biased business: it was mostly men who went on strike, and it was primarily men who were targeted by lockouts. With the important exception of the textile sector[20] the female part of the labour force in manufacturing was small.[21] Instead, women worked in occupations or sectors in which organization, for different reasons, was notoriously difficult to achieve: the agricultural sector was loaded with patriarchal relationships; the female home workers—isolated by definition—did not even have to be dismissed in the case of disobedience, the factory only had to stop sending out work; the domestic workers were isolated *and* trapped in a patriarchal state of dependence. And, of course, all the women performing unpaid reproductive work at home were deprived of the very

20 As mentioned in *From Peak to Trough*, one of the largest industrial disputes in Sweden was a strike by the female-dominated Textile Workers' Union.

21 For a critical review of historical statistics regarding the female labour participation rate in Sweden, see Nyberg 1987.

possibility to strike.[22] Against this background we could ask, for instance: did women and men in similar occupations act in the same way; did women make use of other modes of resistance than strikes, such as turnover? There is not much previous research in the field (for a brief discussion on Sweden, as well as a review of existing international literature, see Fransson and Thörnqvist 2003).

A widely held opinion within the scientific community is that Sweden was for a long time a high-conflict country in a European or even a global perspective. For instance, Klas Åmark (1989: 62) has claimed that Sweden was the 'land of strikes' (*strejklandet framför andra*) from the 1890s to the mid-1930s (see also Korpi 2006: 188; Moene and Wallerstein 2006: 150; Johansson 2011). There are several cross-country studies of conflict rates prior to WWII, but they do not unambiguously show a particular Swedish militancy. First, two of them (Ingham 1974; Shorter and Tilly 1974) use frequency as one of their measurements, which is not suitable for international comparisons (Edwards 1983: 210-211; Wallace and O'Sullivan 2006: 275; Lyddon 2007: 28-29). Second, while Ross and Hartman (1960), Shorter and Tilly (1974) and Korpi and Shalev (1980) indicate that Sweden was comparably conflict-prone, Ingham (1974) and Therborn et al. (1979) do not. Third, neither of the studies discriminates between strikes and lockouts. I believe a useful starting point would be to critically review these earlier studies, followed by a cross-country study that separates, not brings together, strikes and lockouts. Such a study could make use of Peter Swenson's (2002) perspective, and analyse the strategic choices by various national capitals.

22 But if women seldom struck, they were no less a part of the ongoing struggle: behind most of the striking men there were women desperately trying to feed their families. Within a conflict framework, this female resourcefulness—the ability to produce something with minimal means—should be treated as a power resource of the working class.

6. Amendments

In *Docks and Defeat* Christer Thörnqvist and I succeeded in declaring dead the 'Amalthea man', Anton Nilsson, and one of his companions; presumably death occurred around 1910. This was quite an achievement on our part, not least considering that one of my colleagues met Nilsson in person in the 1980s. But in fact we wrote in several drafts to the journal (regarding the judicial aftermath to *Amalthea*) that: 'The two death sentences were however never executed.' In the published article, it is stated that the 'two death sentences were carried out' (p. 21[23]). We did not notice the radically changed meaning when we did the final proofreading. We have asked for, and been generously granted by the editor, an amendment in the forthcoming volume.

My earlier proofreading of *Docks and Defeat* also leaves a lot to be desired in other respects: p. 4: 'One of the first to analyse' should read 'One of the first academics to analyse'; p. 10: 'and Branting; it would soon be apparent that this was a miscalculation.' should read 'and Branting. It would soon be apparent that the calculation was based on a misjudgment, for goods *were* transported by rail.'; p. 12: '20-25% of employees at work' should read '20-25% of employees were at work'; p. 14: In conjunction to our discussion about the primary sources of the Huss inquiry, there should have been be an additional reference to 'Kommerskollegium, Avdelning för arbetsstatistik 1903-1912. Riksarkivet, Stockholm.'; p. 14, note 60: 'Lands- och Regionarkivet, Göteborg.' should read 'Region- och stadsarkivet i Göteborg med Folkrörelsernas arkiv.'; p. 17, note 78: A new, first sentence should read: 'Swedish Shipowners' Association in Western Sweden (Private archive: Gothenburg)'; p. 18, note 79 '(Landsarkivet: Göteborg.)' should read '(Private archive: Gothenburg); p. 21: 'railway workers and seamen not striking' should read 'railway workers and seamen were not striking'; p. 25: 'transportation is the most factor.' should read 'transportation is the most important factor.'

The sentence 'First, how was export possible despite the dockworkers' strike?' (p. 2) is somewhat confusing. (Probably it is an adaption to British readers: there have been differences between the British TUC and the Swedish LO regarding the right to call strikes). I prefer our original writing: 'First, how was export possible despite that also the dockworkers were on strike?'

23 Page numbers refer to the journal's original pagination.

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Appendix A. Swedish statistics on work stoppages and the omitted political strikes

I am interested in the long-run shift from a high to a low level of work stoppages. The investigation stops in 1950; by that time we are, with some margin, into the era that made Sweden world famous for its peaceful labour market relations. For my purposes there is no need to continue the analysis beyond then.[1] To get to grips with what happened before this period of tranquillity, it is preferable to push the starting year as far back in time as possible. But the availability of high-class data sets limits. Only in 1903 data on work stoppages started to be collected in a systematic way, by the National Board of Trade, NBT (*Kommerskollegium*).[2] The statistics before 1903 are based on an investigation conducted by Axel Raphael around the turn of the last century, covering the years from 1859 to 1902. But as shown in earlier studies, Raphael's investigation suffers from several shortcomings.[3] Some authors have used data prior to 1903, to construct a single time series from the 1860/70s up to today.[4] Even though this is a tempting procedure for analysing long-term changes, I do not believe in it: the means of data gathering up to 1902 differs from the following period, and it is hardly valid to transform the two diverse series into a single series.[5]

Covering the period from 1903 to 1938, first the NBT and then the National Board of Health and Welfare, NBHW (*Socialstyrelsen*),[6] published an annual

1 There is nothing sacrosanct about 1950, it is a neat number but I could equally well have stopped in, say, 1948 or 1952, but for reasons explained below no later than 1955.

2 KOMMERSKOLLEGIUM. *Arbetsinställelser…* series E:1-E:4. The 1902 large-scale political strike for universal suffrage gave the final stimulus to better statistics.

3 ÅMARK, Klas. *Facklig makt och fackligt medlemskap: De svenska fackförbundens medlemsutveckling 1890-1940*. Lund: Arkiv förlag, 1986, p. 53; CEDERQVIST, Jane. *Arbetare i strejk: Studier rörande arbetarnas politiska mobilisering under industrialismens genombrott: Stockholm 1850-1909.* Stockholm: LiberFörlag, 1980, pp. 141-42; JOHANSSON, Ingemar. *Strejken som vapen: Fackföreningar och strejker i Norrköping 1870-1910.* Stockholm: Tiden förlag, 1982, pp. 28, 320. See also MIKKELSEN, Flemming. *Arbejdskonflikter i Skandinavien 1848-1980*. Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1992, pp. 435-38; THÖRNQVIST, Christer. *Arbetarna lämnar fabriken: Strejkrörelser i Sverige under efterkrigstiden, deras bakgrund, förlopp och följder*. Göteborg: Historiska inst., 1994, pp. 88-89.

4 KORPI, Walter. *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 94-95; KORPI, Walter and SHALEV, Michael. "Strikes, Industrial Relations and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies". *British Journal of Sociology,* 30 (2), 1979, p. 167; LUNDH, Christer. *Spelets regler: Institutioner och lönebildning på den svenska arbetsmarknaden 1850-2000*. Kristianstad: SNS Förlag, 2002, p. 122.

5 THÖRNQVIST *Op. Cit.*, p. 90.

6 SOCIALSTYRELSEN. *Arbetsinställelser…* 1911-1938. Refers to year of data, not year of publication.

booklet on work stoppages.[7] These authoritative bodies used the same methods of data collection, which included scanning larger, daily newspapers as well as publications by employer and union organizations. When the authorities discovered a conflict, they sent a questionnaire to the local labour market parties, to find out more details. The authorities also had representatives at different locations, whose quarterly reports were used as valuable sources.[8]

Up to 1927 the booklet included an appendix with individual reports on every conflict. With some slight variation over the years, a single report typically contained information about industry/occupation, geographical location, character (strike, lockout or mixed conflict), duration, and numbers of workers directly involved.[9] It further revealed whether the engaged parties were organized or not—and if they were, in which union(s) and association(s). Finally, the report made judgments on the matter of dispute as well as the result of the conflict.

From 1928 the appendices disappeared and from 1939 the annual booklet was replaced by a very brief account in the Statistical Yearbook of Sweden, under the supervision of the National Conciliator's Office, NCO (*Statens Förlikningsmannasinstitution*). The changes make it more difficult to perform various kinds of comparisons over time, but it does not invalidate the comparisons as such, since the increasingly scanty reports were not the result of changed methods of data collection. After 1955 the quality of data deteriorates, which also makes comparisons before and after this year problematic in principle.[10]

During my period of investigation, in theory every work stoppage should be accounted for—even if it just involves three people striking for half an hour. The Swedish authorities employed no minimum threshold, often used in other countries.[11] But naturally every single conflict is not captured. "Occasionally", the NBT admitted, minor stoppages of work might have been missed.[12] If

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7 The first NBT booklet was published in 1909. It covered the years 1903-1907 and was based on the earlier NBT series *Meddelanden*.

8 THÖRNQVIST *Op. Cit.*, p. 88.

9 Official statistics in some countries also include the number of workers unwilling to strike but unable to work as a result of the conflict. According to van der Velden it is more appropriate to use only workers directly involved if we are interested in strikes as a form of social protest. VAN DER VELDEN, Sjaak. "Strikes Behind the Dykes: Netherlands, 1965-2005". In VAN DER VELDEN, Sjaak, et al., eds. *Strikes Around the World, 1968-2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007, p. 299.

10 THÖRNQVIST *Op. Cit.*, pp. 90-91.

11 LYDDON, Dave. "Strike Statistics and the Problems of International Comparison". In VAN DER VELDEN, Sjaak, et al., eds. *Strikes Around the World, 1968-2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007, pp. 26-28.

12 KOMMERSKOLLEGIUM. Arbetsstatistik. E:1. A*rbetsinställelser under åren 1903-1907 jämte öfversikt af arbetsinställelser under åren 1859-1902 samt den s.k. politiska storstrejken år 1902*. Stockholm, 1909, p. 12.

anything, this was an underestimation of the incompleteness.[13] Further, as pointed out by Klas Åmark, small strikes were probably not equally distributed across industries, which means that any inter-industry comparison of conflict frequency must be treated cautiously.[14] Since my study deals with figures in aggregation, and since there is little reason to suspect that the magnitude of the problem with omitted strikes changes over time, this particular deficiency in the statistics should not be important.

Overall, earlier source-critical studies have found the Swedish conflict data to be of acceptable or good quality. For instance, Flemming Mikkelsen concludes that the statistics have "high reliability, gathered and processed by a very qualified department".[15] While I believe Mikkelsen is basically correct, I would like to draw attention to a flaw in processing by the department. Political strikes are excluded from official statistics in many countries.[16] But not so in Sweden, at least researchers—myself included—have thought so. As a case in point, Mikkelsen argues that the explosion of strikes in Sweden during WWI has to do with price increases and that it cannot be explained by political events (massive demonstrations in Sweden, the Russian revolution, etc.). Mikkelsen's argument is that out of slightly less than 1,200 strikes in 1917/18 only two were sparked by political motives.[17] I have not found any more political strikes than Mikkelsen did in the official statistics, and yet, his conclusion is uncalled for.

Absent from official statistics are the strikes during the *Hunger Riot* from April to June 1917. The movement started with a strike in a stone-cutting firm in the small town of Västervik. Swedish war profits soared while at the same nation-wide hunger became an increasingly acute problem. The stonecutters demanded increased bread rationing, a demand that immediately found sympathy among other workers in Västervik, who also stopped work. The strikers adopted *the Västervik Resolution*, which called for the state to abolish the speculation in and the export of foodstuff, and demanded that employers restore 1914 real wages and introduce an eight-hour working day.[18] In just a few days

13 THÖRNQVIST *Op. Cit.*, pp. 87-91.

14 ÅMARK *Op. Cit.*, p. 53. See also HAMARK, Jesper. "Strikingly Indifferent: Dockers' Militancy prior to World War II: An International Outlook and Evidence from Swedish Ports". Paper presented at the 9th European Social Science History Conference in Glasgow 2012.

15 MIKKELSEN *Op. Cit.*, p. 441. My translation. See also THÖRNQVIST *Op. Cit.*, p. 88-89; ÅMARK *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

16 LYDDON 2007 *Op. Cit.*, p. 33.

17 MIKKELSEN *Op. Cit.*, pp. 154-155. Cf. SOCIALSTYRELSEN *Op. Cit.* 1919, pp. 48-49.

18 NYSTRÖM, Hans. *Hungerupproret 1917.* Ludvika: Zelos, 1994, pp. 7-9; KLOCKARE, Sigurd. S*venska revolutionen 1917-1918*. Halmstad: Bokförlaget Prisma, 1967, pp. 28-35.

the Västervik occurrence echoed nationwide. Demonstrations, riots, plunders, military protests, forced requisitions, and strikes were means to acquire food, raise wages, and to exert pressure for political change. It is impossible to give a precise estimate of the strike activity during the Hunger Riot, but perhaps as many as 100-200 strikes and tens of thousands of strikers are missing from the statistics.[19] Certainly, not all of these strikes were political.[20] For instance, only a minority raised demands for a republic and the abolition of capitalism, but on the other hand a considerable number called for universal suffrage. All the same, the authorities seem to have treated them as a whole, and for some reason decided not to count them.

A few additional examples show the systematic bias. In August 1927 15,000 Swedish workers struck in protest against the death sentences on the Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States. The occurrence is mentioned in the individual strike report but nevertheless not counted in the aggregate.[21] In a one-day strike in May 1928 against the Collective Agreement Act, 370,000 people stopped work.[22] But according to statistics, a total of only 18,000 workers were involved in strikes that year.[23] After the "Ådalen shootings" on 14 May 1931, when Swedish military forces killed five people participating in a rally against the use of strikebreakers, illegal[24] protest strikes followed, unevenly spread all over the country. We cannot know how many, because the authorities explicitly, without explanation, excluded them.[25] We do know, however, that immediately after the shootings a general strike broke out in the Ådalen district, and almost all factories were closed for eleven days. Two days after the shootings some 70,000 workers in different parts of the country went on strike, and a week later—on the day of the funeral—an unknown number of

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19 My rough guess is based on NYSTRÖM *Op. Cit.*; KLOCKARE *Op. Cit.*; and BÄCKSTRÖM, Knut. *Arbetarrörelsen i Sverige, Bok 2: Den politiska arbetarrörelsens sprängning och ett nytt revolutionärt arbetarpartis uppkomst.* Kungälv: Rabén & Sjögren, 1977, pp. 270ff. According to statistics there were 475 work stoppages involving 46,700 workers in 1917. See SOCIALSTYRELSEN *Op. Cit.* 1917, p. 3.

20 Of course, the political demands raised by the strikers cannot be understood in isolation from price increases and hunger.

21 SOCIALSTYRELSEN *Op. Cit.* 1927, pp. 14, 46-47. For two weeks strikes broke out at different workplaces and at different times. The typical strike duration was 24 hours.

22 HANSSON, Sigfrid. *Svenskt fackföreningsliv under fem decennier*. Stockholm: Tiden, 1932, p. 108. Among other things, the Act prohibited industrial action during the term of contract with the aim of altering the very same contract.

23 SOCIALSTYRELSEN *Op. Cit.* 1928, p. 16.

24 According to the Collective Agreement Act.

25 SOCIALSTYRELSEN *Op. Cit.* 1931, p. 11.

workers struck.[26] According to one estimate, 100,000 workers did not go to work at all,[27] while newspaper reports suggest that many groups of workers struck for part of the day.[28]

On the funeral day there was also a five-minute stoppage to honour the dead. It is the largest stoppage in Swedish history, measured by involvement. True, no systematic quantitative investigation of it has been made, but Roger Johansson's dissertation on Ådalen nonetheless supports such a conclusion. Johansson has studied the records of both LO and various unions affiliated with LO, and he concludes that "almost all the work was down in Sweden from 12 o'clock and five minutes ahead".[29] Newspapers from Stockholm and Gothenburg back his assessment[30] but it is possible that the same situation did not apply in rural areas. While it is not possible to give a precise figure of the total involvement, we can make an educated guess at the lower bound: based on the very conservative assumptions that no one stopped work in agriculture and that two thirds of the remaining employees did down their tools, more than one million employees stopped work.[31]

But this short stoppage should not be designated as a strike (and the authorities are therefore not to be blamed for not mentioning it). A few days after the shootings, a press release from LO was published in the labour newspapers: "The board of LO considers it appropriate that, by agreement with the management concerned, a five-minute break from work will take place, as far as possible, at 12 noon on 21 May."[32] Nowhere in the press release is the word "strike" used, and the headline in the social democratic newspaper *Ny Tid* was in accordance with its spirit: "Five-minute work-pause. Board of LO issues call to members.

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26 CASPARSSON, Ragnar. *LO under fem årtionden, Andra delen: 1924-1948.* Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1951, pp. 202-203; LAGER, Fritjof. *Ådalen 1931.* Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1969, pp. 65, 93; JOHANSSON Roger. *Kampen om historien: Ådalen 1931: sociala konflikter, historiemedvetande och historiebruk 1931-2000*. Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, 2001, pp. 104-107.

27 LAGER *Op. Cit.*, p. 84.

28 *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning,* 21 May 1931; *Ny Tid*, 21 May 1921; *Social-Demokraten,* 22 May 1931.

29 JOHANSSON 2001 *Op. Cit.*, p. 107. My translation. See also CASPARSSON *Op. Cit.*, p. 203.

30 *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, 21 May 1931; *Ny Tid*, 21 May 1921; *Social-Demokraten,* 22 May 1931.

31 Based on employee data from http://www.historicalstatistics.org/, a portal for historical statistics edited by Rodney Edvinsson. I am talking about "employees" because it was not only workers who stopped work; for instance, in Stockholm even the traffic police stopped work. *Social-Demokraten*, 22 May 1931.

32 See for instance *Social-Demokraten,* 19 May 1931. My translation.

The pause is in agreement with the companies."[33]

It is apparent that Figures 1-5 are partly distorted by the omission of political strikes and strikes occurring at "political times". While I have not recalculated the figures given by the NBT/NBHW/NCO – this would be a study in its own right – I will make a few comments with regard to the distortion.

A.1 Implications for the study

In 1917-1919, SAC strikes constituted almost one fourth of all strikes according to official statistics, measured by frequency (Table 2). Taking into consideration the influence of syndicalism during the Hunger Riot, it is reasonable to assume that if the strikes in this event had been included, SAC's portion of the total frequency would be more than one fourth. As a consequence the absolute and relative fall in SAC strikes between the two periods 1917-1919 and 1925-1927 (Table 2) would have been even more marked. Lennart K. Persson has studied SAC's own strike statistics and he estimates that the syndicalists' share of the total strike frequency was between one third and one half in 1917-1920.[34] At least a part of the explanation for the higher SAC portion given by Persson is probably that the Hunger Riot strikes are included. Also, inasmuch as Persson's estimation is correct, then the decline in SAC strike frequency in the 1920s becomes steeper still.[35]

Further, eyeball econometrics suggest that there is a break in the frequency of strikes after 1923, when the rate of decrease becomes slower (Figure 1). This impression would of course be even stronger if the Hunger Riot strikes had also been included.

Table 2 shows how SAC's share of total strike involvement fell in the 1920s. But had the Sacco-Vanzetti strikes—primarily organized by the syndicalists—been properly accounted for, there would have been no fall at all.[36] And yet this would hardly have invalidated the conclusion that the syndicalist makeover, completed around 1922, affected SAC's conflict records: the aim of the Sacco-Vanzetti strikes was neither about higher wages nor increased control over

33 *Ny Tid*, 19 May 1931. My translation.

34 PERSSON, Lennart K. S*yndikalismen i Sverige 1903-1922*. Stockholm: Federativ, 1975, pp. 265-69. The estimation rests on (i) the fact that the number of SAC strikes is much more prominent in SAC statistics than in official statistics, and (ii) the assumption that LO-affiliated unions were more able to report strikes to the authority than SAC.

35 Persson's study ends in 1922, which means that he does not give corresponding figures for the period 1925-1927. All the same, given that the extent of the fall is considerably higher with Person's figures, anything but an even more marked actual fall would be surprising.

36 Given that LO-strikes with high worker involvement were not omitted as well.

capitalist companies. Of course, it only underlines the fact that strikes must also be analyzed qualitatively.

Figure 2 and Figure 4 would have different shapes if the events of 1928 and 1931 had been included in the statistics. The 1928 political strike was so extensive that its relative involvement surpasses even the General Strike, and the wave of strikes in the aftermath of Ådalen involved hundreds of thousands of workers. Such showdowns are interesting in their own right, but I have a more specific reason for examining them: I conclude that communism was influential in the largest conflicts, where "large" is measured by volume (Table 4). The choice is not self-evident; it would also have been sensible to use involvement. The motive for choosing volume is that it allows me to rely on official statistics (with just one exception). Nonetheless, it is reasonable to ask whether the same conclusion about communism would also have been reached by focusing on involvement. A tentative answer may be given based on the events in 1928 and 1931.

Consider first Ådalen. If we take an accountant's point of view and try to work out the figures, we are immediately confronted with a problem: how many strikes were there? Could we treat all the stoppages following the shootings (apart from the five-minute pause) as a single Ådalen Strike? For sure, such a strike would qualify as one of the largest. While that kind of approach might work for a researcher with a broad historical perspective, it plainly will not do for a strike accountant—for whom the basic rule is: one decision to go on strike, one strike. From the accountant's perspective, it is not even clear how one should regard the events on the funeral day: was it a single strike or was it many strikes? What is more, we do not have any precise figure for the total number of strikers; neither for the period between the shootings and the funeral day, nor for the funeral day itself. This means that the fact that we know that the communists had a solid impact—especially in the Ådalen district—on strike rates and strike participation,[37] does not really matter.

37 JOHANSSON 2001 *Op. Cit.*, ch. 4-5; SOU 1935: 8. *Betänkande med förslag angående åtgärder mot statsfientlig verksamhet.* Stockholm, 1935, p. 396. For newspaper reports on the strong communist influence, or even "dictatorship", in Ådalen, see for instance *Nya Dagligt Allehanda,* 19 May 1931. Historian Bengt Schüllerqvist takes the opposite position, that the communists (and more precisely the party belonging to Comintern) played a minimal role in the Ådalen protest movement. But his judgment seems to be based on the conception—flawed, I believe—that the communists were crushed by the split in 1929, and that communism was not a real alternative in the early 1930s; there were only different versions of social democracy. See SCHÜLLERQVIST, Bengt. *Från kosackval till kohandel: SAP:s väg till makten 1928-33.* Stockholm: Tiden, 1992, ch. 9 and especially pp. 131, 149.

The number of workers involved in the 1928 protest strike against the Collective Agreement Act is greater than all but one of the officially recorded conflicts in Swedish history—the exception being the 1980 "Great Conflict" in which more than 700,000 employees either went on strike or were locked out. In the spring of 1928 there was a heated societal debate about the Collective Agreement Act.[38] The bill was yet to be passed by the *Riksdag,* and devotees and resisters alike strongly expressed their opinions. The political right wing was typically in favour of the bill, whereas the left wing and the working class were against it. At the time, LO clearly opposed the law but was not willing to take industrial action against it. SKP on the other hand argued in favour of a political strike. The communist party had two motives. First, it wanted to put pressure on the parliament to turn down the bill. Second, it wanted to reveal "the double-dealing" of the reformists.[39] The SKP leadership calculated that LO would not take any initiative for extra-parliamentary action; and as a result LO's opposition to the Act would, according to these calculations, be exposed as lip service.

But SKP was too successful. On a daily basis the board of LO received statements from local branches demanding a protest strike against the Act. Of course, many of the statements would have been sent to the board of LO even without communist agitation, but according to historian Sten Andersson it was SKP's strong stance, combined with the general perception of the working class, that finally forced an increasingly pressed LO to declare the demanded strike.[40] Ironically, the success of SKP's agitation led to a decision by LO that put SKP's chief matter of contention in the shade. At the same time, SKP was too weak to force a shift of balance in the parliament: a few days after the strike the *Riksdag* voted in favour of the bill. But despite the communists' double defeat: by 1928 SKP was strong enough to enforce the largest strike ever.

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38 ANDERSSON, Sten. Mellan Åkarp och Saltsjöbaden: En studie av arbetsfredsfrågan i minoritetsparlamentarismens Sverige 1923-1928. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990, ch. 6.

39 ANDERSSON *Op. Cit.*, p. 170.

40 ANDERSSON *Op. Cit.*, pp. 174-176. The trigger was, Andersson claims, that the chairman of SAP, Per Albin Hansson, gave LO his "permission". According to Casparsson, LO and SAP "finally found it necessary to capture the growing unrest", see CASPARSSON *Op. Cit.*, p. 118. My translation.

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