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SAC in Sweden and revolutionary unionism

Ciaran Casey

1995

CHRISTMAS saw many emigrants return for the holidays. One was Ciaran Casey who went to Sweden twenty years ago and is currently International Secretary of his union, the Central Organisation of Swedish Workers (SAC). This union describes itself as syndicalist and libertarian socialist. Workers Solidarity spoke to Ciaran and learnt

- There are 13,000 members spread across many industries, with concentrations in the post office, public transport, local authorities, childcare and education. While job losses have weakened the traditional SAC bases in forestry and construction they have been recruiting increasingly among public sector workers and from the refugee and immigrant communities.
- Super wages and bureaucratic control have no place in their union. The five full-time national officers must stand for election every four years and are encouraged not to serve more than two terms. The eleven ‘ombudspersons’ are the skilled negotiators who can be

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Retrieved on 24th November 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 44 – Spring 1995.

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called on by local union branches. They have to run for election every five years. All staff receive the same wage, whether general secretary or telephonist. That wage is the average industrial wage. Officials, unlike in other unions, cannot be elected delegates to SAC congress or any other decision making body.

- All branches and sections decide themselves on internal matters, it is the membership in a workplace which decides whether to accept or reject an agreement or go on strike. The national executive only has a say if the local branch (which retains a portion of members' subscriptions) needs extra cash. In that case the executive will decide if SAC can afford to give more help.
- SAC members pay higher subscriptions than members of other unions. Part of this money goes to build contacts with militant unions in the third world. At present they are talking to free trade unionists and libertarian socialists in Nepal, China, Indonesia and Bangladesh (where they are assisting trade unionists campaigning against child labour).
- SAC members and branches have taken on concrete solidarity actions including assisting the emerging free trade unions in Eastern Europe and running aid convoys to the mining town of Tuzla in Bosnia.
- SAC is also active in the struggles against racism, for protection of the environment, and calls for a 6 hour day as an answer to unemployment. It not only fights for higher pay and better working conditions today, but also declares for a libertarian/anarchist revolution that will put the working class in control and end both inequality and authoritarianism.