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Swedish trade union stays Libertarian

Kieran Casey

1996

IMAGINE A TRADE UNION satisfying its members so much that they voted to increase dues, spend more on their ‘revolutionary’ newspaper and cut the number of paid officials. That’s what happened in Sweden last year.

The anarchist-influenced SAC trade union has rejected attempts to play down the union’s libertarian socialist politics. Kieran Casey, the SAC’s international secretary, explained

“an internal crisis arose when due to economic constraints the union decided to lower the number of ‘ombudsmen’¹ while continuing to support our weekly paper ‘Arbetaren’ (The Worker). It was also necessary to increase union dues which had remained still for the past few years. The following referendum resulted in a small majority voting for a relatively high increase.”

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Retrieved on 7th December 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 48 – Summer 1996.

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¹ These are full-time experts in labour law and negotiation procedures whose services can be called on by local union branches

Members who wanted to cut back on overtly political activities and concentrate on more conventional trade union work split away but only took 15 of the 120 local branches with them. About 1,400 members resigned. While this was happening five new SAC branches were set up, and these had recruited a few hundred new members by the end of 1995.

“Otherwise the SAC has enjoyed a steady, if slow, increase in members, mainly in large towns, with young people dominating. The ratio between men and women is about 60/40 and the gap is diminishing. This is a healthy sign and a source for optimism.

“To finish off let us remember on this anniversary of Joe Hill’s execution, his focus on the word ‘organise’. We organise ourselves not only in the struggle to change this rotten system of wage slavery but also to gain experience and learn how to build a future society based on self-management and mutual aid” said Casey.