

## 22. What is the dual task?

Syndicalist unions have a task of a dual nature. It can also be formulated as fulfilling a dual function in class struggle. We are here talking about class struggle in the short and long term.

In the *short* term, the struggle is about enforcing reforms or daily demands: better wages, reduced stress, shorter working hours, stronger employment protection, better working environment, an end to sexual harassment and racism, strengthened freedom of expression, protection of privacy, better work-life balance, etc. All union demands, conflicts and negotiations have a common purpose: that the workforce should seize more and more power over the workplace.

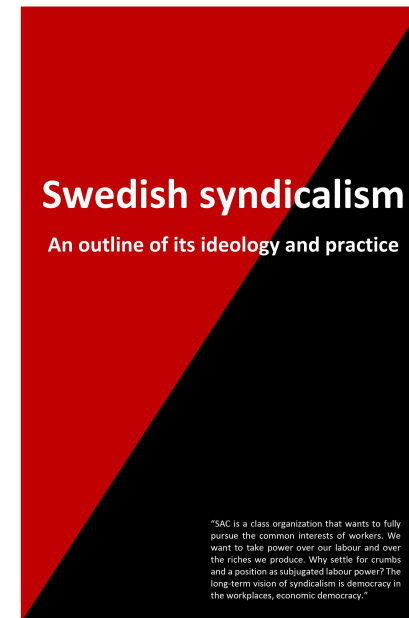
In the *long* run, syndicalist unions are tools for a complete democratization of workplaces. Everyone affected by decisions made, must also have the right to influence those decisions. This requires that the working population takes control of the means of production and establishes new administrative bodies. Those who do the work should manage the workplaces — in the interests of all members of society and within the framework of the ecosystem. SAC believes that the only legitimate management is the management that the workers have elected, that follows directives from the shop floor and that can be recalled immediately from below.

SAC uses the Swedish term *driftsektion* (in English: operating section) because the long-term vision is to take over and operate production. The base democracy and federalism that is practiced within the union today gives a clue as to how the economy can be managed in the future. The North American

## Swedish syndicalism

An outline of its ideology and practice

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sensus unions risk losing members to the section, which can spur more militancy. If representatives of the consensus unions nevertheless take the side of management, the section can recruit more co-workers and become even stronger.

A syndicalist section creates win-win situations for all employees. Even very small sections can drive consensus unions and management in a positive direction. The basis is good relations on the shop floor so that syndicalists enjoy trust by many co-workers.

When you have gained momentum in organizing inside the workplace, you can consider cooperation with external groups who may want to support a union campaign and have something to gain from a union victory themselves. Some examples are that healthcare employees can collaborate with patients, employees in the education industry can collaborate with parent groups, employees in commerce can collaborate with consumers, and so on.

The most ambitious approach is what North American unions call *whole worker organizing*. This means that they look for alliances with all conceivable groups and networks (formal and informal) that may be interested in contributing to a union success. Thus, the union is building broad alliances in civil society. This way of working is a continuation of a long tradition that the political scientist Mats Dahlkvist has given the Swedish label *rörelsesocialism* (in English: movement socialism).

When you and your co-workers start a section, build cross-union community and develop leadership, you have continuous support from your Local. It is an exciting and educational process, but it can also be difficult and frustrating. You will not receive any patent solutions. You will instead learn as you try and experiment. But we are many who want to give advice and support. So, your project is our joint project.

## 21. What can small operating sections achieve?

As soon as there are three syndicalists in a workplace, it is meaningful to start a section. This requires the syndicalists to work on two tracks at the same time: building the section and promoting cohesion among more and more employees, regardless of union affiliation.

When syndicalists organize at a workplace, all employees become winners. The section can advance the position of employees by influencing the management directly or indirectly. A *direct* impact is achieved when syndicalists, together with colleagues in other unions, raise common demands and put pressure on management.

An *indirect* impact is achieved when the section pushes other unions in front of it. Such an impact often takes place in a kind of triangle drama at the workplace. In many Swedish workplaces, there are not just two parties (union and employer) but three. These are *the staff* on the shop floor and *the management* at the top together with representatives of *consensus-seeking unions*. The latter, consensus unions, are the unions within LO, TCO and Saco (with the exception of some militant branches). Between these parties, a triangular drama often takes place. The consensus unions dampen the staff's demands and militancy and makes it easier for management to implement its plans.

When a section begins to pursue collective interests of the staff, it gives both the consensus unions and management a new incentive to meet the staff's demands. Otherwise, the con-

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When union tycoons of LO cannot convince workers to choose their union over SAC, they usually claim that syndicalists are “splitters”. This accusation casts a shimmer of ridicule over LO. As early as 1922, the LO congress made a decision to break all SAC strikes. LO workers who have nevertheless participated in SAC strikes have been denied compensation from LO strike funds. Sometimes LO members have been expelled because of their solidarity.

Syndicalists work for the cohesion of all employees, regardless of whether the staff belong to one or many unions. The best starting point for achieving cohesion is to organize from below, inside the workplace, rather than a union bureaucracy imposing a line on employees from above or the outside.

## 20. Is the biggest union = the best union?

In Swedish workplaces, there are often several established unions. When a syndicalist section is started, it is often the smallest union at the workplace. An often-repeated myth is that the largest union is always the strongest union. To believe that a large number of members or a high union density always reflects real strength is to engage in numerical mysticism. A large union can be an empty shell or a dead bureaucracy.

Employees don't become strong by being many in a membership register. You become strong by being many co-workers who stick together and act together. The best trade union is therefore the organization that promotes cohesion and collective action. That is an organization based on democracy, solidarity and independence. Then the members have the union behind them and the decision-making power in their hands. The syndicalist section is a such union.

Employees don't become strong by being many in a union register, especially not if the power in the union is concentrated in the hands of representatives and these representatives cultivate a close consensus with the employer. Then the union usually stands as a bureaucratic brake pad in front of the employees, rather than as support behind them. The union may have recruited a majority of the staff, but the bureaucracy still counteracts joint action. Then the strength is illusory. The beautiful union statistics become a facade and the employer will easily call the bluff.

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their colleagues are actively fought on by paid officials and union representatives.

The repressive powers vary between different unions in Sweden. One method is to stifle the financial resources of local units. The default is not to open the central strike funds for strikes initiated by the member base. Another method is to slander individual members. Within LO, it can be extra painful for those who are not loyal to the Social Democratic Party.

It also happens that paid officials negotiate redundancies and buyouts of militant members. Further measures are that national union boards remove local union boards or close entire job branches, start new branches and appoint boards that are loyal to the national board. The authoritarian leadership is a systemic flaw that is built into LO, TCO and Saco. Replacing representatives will only make a marginal difference.

Members of SAC have the union with them instead of against them. As wage earners, it is enough to have two opponents: the employers and their allies in politics. We do not need a third opponent to enrich our lives.

## 19. What characterizes the leadership of other trade unions?

In most Swedish unions, authoritarian and destructive leadership is a solid phenomenon. The unions are characterized by top-down government and centralism. Unions try to sell the illusion that representatives can perform miracles in the workplace through individual service or bargaining above the head of employees. When the illusion breaks, the bitterness weighs heavy.

According to the common bylaws for all unions within LO, decisions on industrial action must lie with the central union boards at national level. This has been the case since the LO congress of 1941. Members are rarely allowed to vote on new nationwide collective agreements and vote results are only advisory. Thus, the union boards at national level have the right to ignore voting results.

In some cases, Swedish unions stage strikes and blockades. The national union boards usually direct members like chess pieces. Conflicts are seldom well-prepared or well-conducted. Sometimes it is nothing more than a sad ritual, almost a rigged match. In SAC, it is the member collective that calls itself to go on strike (through the union democracy).

As soon as grassroots in LO, TCO and Saco try to play a leading role, they are usually treated as a threat by the union bureaucracy. Members who become active locally, demand more democracy within the union and try to act collectively with

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skill is to be a good educator who conveys knowledge to others.

A lack of a clear and positive leadership means having unwilling, passive or anonymous leaders. Then the union will stop or move backward. In the worst case, one leaves space for authoritarian and destructive leaders to take control.

Positive leaders are good listeners and organizers, not political agitators or chief ideologues. This applies to both formal and informal leaders. The task of individual leaders is not to push through their personal opinions in every issue. The leaders of a section should promote discussions about collective interests against the employer side, so that a collective line of action can be pursued.



## 18. What characterizes syndicalist leadership?

A common misunderstanding is that direct democratic unions do not have any leaders. Our sections have both formal leaders (elected representatives) and informal leaders (grassroots with a lot of influence). The task of the elected representatives is above all to lead the implementation of decisions made by the member base. Members at the grassroots level can become informal leaders by being a driving force or having extensive knowledge and long experience.

In theory, informal leaders may be avoided if all members are equally active and have equal knowledge in all matters. In practice, that is not realistic. Therefore, the union needs to maintain norms of positive leadership. The same norms also guide formal leaders.

Positive leaders promote the members' activity and influence in the union. A cornerstone is to promote *transparency*, that is everyone's overview of the union business. For a feminist organization like SAC, it is important that women are given a place as leaders and thereby give the union a face. Female role models inspire more women to participate in union activities.

Through the section, you and your co-workers can grow as leaders. Positive leaders promote a sense of union community where everyone feels welcome. Leaders encourage more members to play a leading role as well. The ideal is that all members lead the section as a joint project, even if they are responsible for different parts of section activities. A valuable leadership

In 2021, a member meeting in the Umeå Local of SAC decided to publish this book. **Rasmus Hästbacka** is the author of the text. Hästbacka is a lawyer. The afterword is written by **Niklas Averstad Ryd** and **Jonas Hammarbäck**. Averstad Ryd is a primary school teacher and Hammarbäck is a care worker. The translation into English is done by **Tobias Hübinette** and **Nicklas Hållén**. Hübinette is an Associate Professor and Lecturer in intercultural studies. Hållén is an Associate Professor and Lecturer in English literature. The original title of the book in Swedish is *Vad vill syndikalismen? En ideologisk grundskiss*.

More articles by the author in Anarchist Library [here](#).

## Summary of the book

Syndicalism is an international trade union movement. In Sweden, syndicalism is represented primarily by the *Central Organization of Workers in Sweden* (abbreviated as SAC – in Swedish *Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation*). SAC organizes employees in all industries and excludes only the bosses. SAC was founded in 1910. This book presents SAC's ideology, the ideas that guide trade union practice. The ideology does not contain any definitive truths and should be seen as a starting point for further discussions.

The book consists of four parts. Part 1 presents guidelines for successful organizing at the workplace. In Part 2, the trade union is contrasted with parliamentary parties and other political organizations. Here we explain why the trade union is superior as a class struggle organization. Part 3 provides general advice for recruiting and activating members. In Part 4, labour struggle through unions is related to the long-term vision of syndicalism to democratize the workplaces and build an equal society. By organizing in unions, the broad masses of the people can seize power over their lives and communities.

The book does not touch on the details of trade union work. These are instead treated in SAC's organizer courses and in study groups that are open to all members. At the end of the book, a proposed plan for study groups can be found.

SAC is not a trade union in the narrow sense: an association for only one craft or one industry. SAC is an organization for all workers as a social class. It is a class organization with a dual function. SAC is a tool in the struggle for daily demands *and* for fundamentally changing society as a whole. In labour

In this way, cooperation becomes smooth and the more cumbersome decision-making processes can be limited.

In concrete union terms, federalism means that members can wage labour struggles that are locally rooted, mobile and adaptable to local conditions. A collective of employees can strike directly at the employer's weak points, at the right time and in coordination with other collectives, without bureaucratic detours.

A common misconception of direct democratic unions is that everyone interferes in all decisions all the time. Federalism instead means that the right to decide is limited to those concerned. Local issues are dealt with locally, regional issues are dealt with regionally, and so on. Federalism is dynamic, not carved in stone. Through new decisions, issues can be transferred from local units to regional and nationwide units or returned to local units. In the same way, base democracy is dynamic too. The mandate of elected representatives can be extended, limited or recalled.

The federalism of SAC means that there is not just *one* supreme decision-making body but *several*. In local affairs in the workplace, the section's annual meeting is the highest decision-making body. A section exercises local self-determination within the framework of joint decisions made by its industrial branch, the Local and SAC. In nationwide affairs for the entire membership, the congress of SAC is the highest decision-making body. Congress decisions sets the framework for all parts of SAC.

The base democracy and federalism of SAC offer a practical school of democracy, with the long-term vision of taking over the operation of all workplaces.

struggles, syndicalists strive for the widest possible solidarity across organizational boundaries.

## 17. What is federalism?

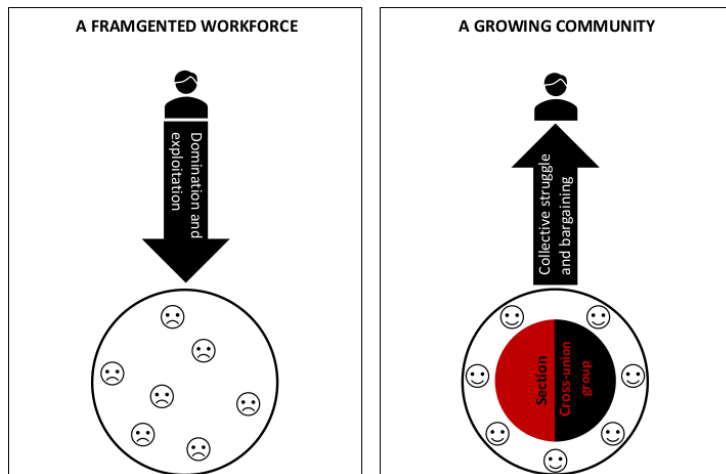
The democracy of an individual section has its counterpart in SAC as a whole. Above, we have described base democracy as a combination of direct and representative democracy (see question 13). Federalism is a synthesis of decentralism and centralism. All parts of SAC are permeated by base democracy and federalism.

It has been stated above that SAC has a double structure. SAC has a structure along industrial lines where the smallest units are workplace sections and a geographical structure where the Local (LS) is the basic unit. On the one hand, the sections form federations in the form of industrial branches, which in turn form nationwide industrial federations. On the other hand, a Local that is fully developed, constitutes a federation of all local industrial branches. All Locals then form regional federations (districts) and the nationwide federation SAC.

Each federation respects the self-determination of its local units, while the local unit respects the co-determination of the federation. Thus, federalism combines self-governance in local matters with joint governance in common matters. No one may act contrary to a federation's joint decisions, neither direct democratic decisions nor decisions made by elected representatives.

Through the federalist structure of SAC, members can to a large extent cooperate *horizontally* between local units. This means that members do not necessarily have to delegate decision-making *vertically* to a regional or nationwide body.

employees except bosses. SAC is a nationwide class organization and each Local (LS) is a local class organization. Thus, our Locals and SAC are not *fackförbund* in the LO sense. Read more about the dual task (see question 22) and read about the idea of the class organization in Part 2 of the book.



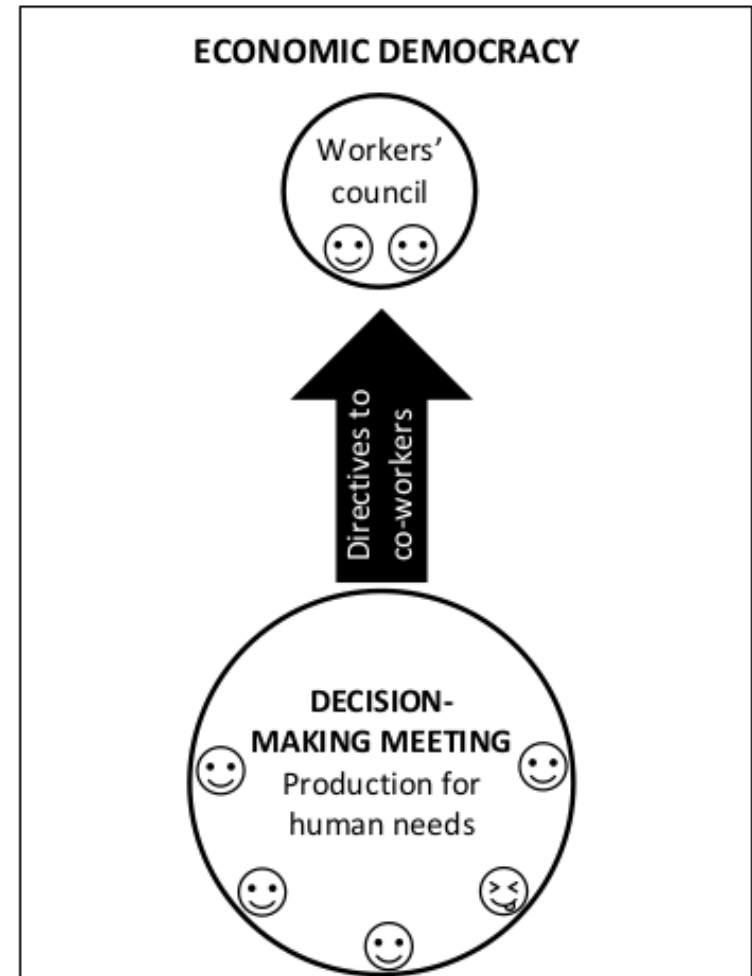
structure of a branch is adapted to the current circumstances, locally and in the industry in question.

Sections and branches in all industries in an area cooperate through the Local (LS). The Local is a platform for solidarity across industries. Several nearby Locals collaborate through regional districts. All Locals also collaborate through SAC. When there are enough branches in an industry, a nationwide *federation* is formed (for example a federation of education). Several sections within a corporate group can also benefit from forming a union cooperation body that encompasses the corporate group.

SAC advocates industrial unionism, not craft unionism. In Sweden, it is primarily the Saco unions that divide the workforce into different craft unions. This makes it harder to raise common demands against the employer side. Industrial unionism is about uniting the entire workforce at all workplaces within a particular industry. This does not preclude different crafts from raising their specific issues, but industrial organization makes it possible to assert common interests as well.

Two old Swedish terms for industrial organization are “industriell organisering” and “industriförbunds-principen”. Nowadays, people instead use the term *branschorganisering* since the Swedish word “industri” is associated with manufacturing industry in big factories, not associated with a line of business in general. Another synonym for industrial organization is “varuprincipen” (in English: the commodity-principle). This principle means that all occupations within a line of business that delivers a certain type of good (or service) should be organized within the same union.

SAC’s industrial federations have a counterpart in LO which are called *fackförbund* in Swedish. Syndicalist sections and industrial branches have counterparts in LO’s *fackklubbar* and *avdelningar* (in English: job branches and industrial branches) A crucial difference is that SAC’s industrial bodies have a dual task and are part of a class organization for all



## Key terms in Swedish syndicalism

**Arbetsplatsorganisering (APO)** *Workplace organizing.* The process by which co-workers develop and use their collective strength in a systematic way.

**Branschfederation** *Industrial federation.* A nationwide association of all industrial branches within an industry. Corresponds to national trade unions within LO (in Swedish: fackförbund). However, syndicalist industrial entities (section, industrial branch and federation), are open to all occupations in an industry, both blue-collar and white-collar workers (except bosses).

**Branschsyndikat** *Industrial branch.* A local association of all sections in an industry. Corresponds to industrial branches of LO unions (in Swedish: avdelning).

**Direkt aktion** *Direct action.* Action without representatives carried out by the workers concerned themselves. Expressed in another way, the term encompasses collective pressure exerted by the staff.

**Driftsektion (DS)** *Operating section.* A local union in a workplace for all employees except the bosses. Corresponds to a local job branch of LO unions (in Swedish: fackklubb). Swedish syndicalists often use the shorter term section.

**Facklig organisatör (FO)** *Union organizer.* General term for organizers at all levels within SAC. Central organizers train and support LS organizers, who in turn support workplace organizers.

## 16. How does the operating section cooperate with other parts of SAC?

A common misconception is that trade unions are either centralized and strong or decentralized and weak. In fact, both centralism and too far-reaching decentralism weaken a union. Centralism inhibits and destroys the members' labour struggles. A too far-reaching decentralism makes cooperation and joint decisions difficult.

Syndicalism practices a synthesis or mixture of decentralism and centralism. It is called *federalism*. Federalism enables self-determination in local affairs, but also cooperation and joint decisions in regional and nationwide affairs.

The section is self-determining but should not be isolated. A section has everything to gain from collaborating with other parts of SAC. It is vital to collaborate on for example education and exchange of experience, agitation and recruitment. This lays the basis for cooperation around bigger campaigns, labour struggles and collective bargaining.

Several sections in the same industry (for example the education industry) may form an *industrial branch* in the local area (for example an industrial branch of education). The Swedish word for industrial branch is, as mentioned, *syndikat*. The branch is a cooperative body of sections. The branch is an industrial forum and a tool for organizing more workplaces and act together towards the employer side. The branch is just like the section a flexible and handy organizational form. The

When the time is right, departments become more formal units with decision making meetings, written minutes and their own elected representatives. Former representatives/contact persons with simple tasks are given more demanding assignments. Each department can then solve problems for its specific staff category through, for example, collective bargaining and small-scale industrial action. At the same time, representatives from all departments come together in the overall section board to pursue common interests.

In a large-scale union that feels anonymous, no sense of community exists. Therefore, smaller departments are needed. The department is a personal forum of members. A member may be familiar with all the fellow union members in the department, but not with several hundred or a thousand members in a large section. Each department and the section as a whole also need to be represented by familiar faces, fellow workers who enjoy the trust of the entire membership collective.

**Lokal samorganisation (LS)** *Local*. An association of all individual members in an area. Encompasses all sections and industrial branches. LS is a local class organization.

**LS-organisatör** *LS organizer*. A person elected at LS level who trains and supports workplace organizers. Can be a member of the LS board or a special organizing committee.

**Organisationsplan** *Organization plan*. SAC's Organization plan provides a preliminary target image. It's an image of what the organization might look like when SAC (once again) has achieved a strong position in one or more industries, based on many sections. The plan also contains guidelines for building such an organization. The plan is not intended to be mechanically implemented. Sections, industrial branches, federations, etc. are built when the need arises in workplaces. The plan should help all parts of SAC to cooperate in the struggle for both daily demands and a new society.

**Registermetoden** *The register method*. An alternative to strikes, collective agreements and the idea of general strike as a path to economic democracy. Practiced by Swedish syndicalists from the late 1910s to the early 1950s. Syndicalists kept records of available work and dictated the price and conditions for doing the work. The method included struggle inside the workplaces, union-run employment services and collective deals without industrial peace obligations. LO unions also used the register method.

**Råd Council**. A body for workers' self-management. Workers' councils are elected by general meetings at workplaces. The long-term vision of syndicalist sections is to establish councils. This can be achieved, for example, in such a way that the section's member meeting becomes a general meeting for all workers and the section board becomes a workers' council. Read more in Part 4 of the book.

**Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation (SAC)** *Central Organization of Workers in Sweden*. The sum of all Locals (LS)

plus central bodies for cooperation and joint decisions. SAC is a nationwide class organization.

**Tvärfacklig grupp** *Cross-union group*. A group of co-workers who meet regularly, regardless of union affiliation, for the purpose of discussing and pursuing common interests. Can be supported by trade unions or function as independent cooperation between colleagues.

## 15. What are departments?

An operating section that encompasses several workplaces or a large workplace can form smaller departments. This is stated in the basic bylaws for all sections. A department is just like the larger section a forum and tool for acting together.

A department brings together a work team, a craft or another naturally defined group of employees. An example of a situation where colleagues may find it natural to form a department is when colleagues already meet in daily tasks at work. Another situation may be that people in a craft are scattered and do not meet but have a need to start meeting around a craft interest.

The department becomes the members' meeting point in the immediate environment. Each department has a workplace representative, a contact person (in Swedish: *arbetsplatsombud*). The representative maintains personal contact with the department's members and is a link to the overall section board. Representatives can move from simple tasks to more demanding assignments.

The role of the department evolves gradually. A reasonable starting point may be that the members have regular lunch meetings and recruit co-workers within the area of their department. They can handle notice boards and folder stands, welcome new members and lead study groups. The department establishes the union presence in everyday life. It is based on the members' self-organization. It cannot be administered by the section board. Then it will be an empty shell or an inhibiting bureaucracy.



build collective strength. You cannot build a movement by constant fire brigade calls in individual cases. But when a member raises a case, it can be a good opportunity to start organizing.

## Introduction

Syndicalism is a trade union movement with a distinct ideological compass. The ideology has emerged from practice at the shop floor and new ideas are continuously being tested in practice. SAC's ideology offers union active employees an overall guideline. By the term ideology, this book refers to three things: (1) a critical perspective on the labour market and on class society of today, (2) guidelines for successful organizing and (3) a long-term vision of democracy in the workplaces and an equal society.

The best expression of SAC's ideology is the members' self-organization in their workplaces. At the same time, the ideology needs to be articulated and spread to wider circles. That is why this book has been written. The book is suitable for both individual studying and study groups.

The book consists of four parts. Part 1 presents guidelines for local organizing. The focus is on workplace sections and cross-union cooperation between colleagues. Here we also touch on cooperation through industrial branches, Locals (LS) and other forums. Part 2 describes the idea of the class organization. The trade union is contrasted with parliamentary parties and other political organizations. Here we explain why the union is superior as a class struggle organization. Part 3 provides general advice for recruiting co-workers and for activating members in the section. In Part 4, the daily trade union activity is related to the long-term vision of syndicalism.

The book does not touch on the details of union work. These are instead treated in SAC's organizer courses and in study groups. To be a syndicalist is to participate in a learning pro-

cess. Knowledge builds self-confidence and inspires respect at work. We educate each other and the union schooling is never finished. You are welcome to contribute with your skills in our education programmes!

Syndicalism has a long history. Thus, its terminology partly consists of archaeological findings. This book is written in an updated and everyday language. This means that some terms, which many syndicalists hold dear, are abandoned. In the book, we comment on several outdated terms and suggest contemporary synonyms. The purpose is to make it easier for you to introduce the trade union to your co-workers. The book presents certain special concepts that are, after all, important in trade union work.

Sources and reading tips are listed at the end of the book. The book leans, on the one hand, on the syndicalist tradition as it is conveyed through older syndicalist books and documents. On the other hand, the book mirrors struggle on the labour market of today. Knowledge of the tradition facilitates union renewal while ignorance means that old mistakes are repeated and the wheel must be reinvented.

A contemporary source that is important for the book is recurring re-ignitions of rank-and-file activity within SAC. In the 1980s, union *reorganizing* became a buzzword for such re-ignitions. In the early 2000s, another re-ignition took off. These waves of re-ignitions have left their mark on SAC's education programmes and governing documents, which are referenced to in the book. The book finally draws on new experiences from militant unions in other countries.

The book is primarily a starting point for organizing and further discussions. A critical reading is not only welcome but prescribed. Syndicalists who want to meet for discussions on the internet can log in to SAC's forum via the website ([www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)). Articles about this book published on the internet will be collected on our local website ([www.sac.se/LS/Umeå](http://www.sac.se/LS/Umeå)).

cases, negotiation is a quick and easy way to defend rights, but this is not something you can count on.

For the reasons just mentioned, client service usually yields meagre results. Client service also has a strong tendency to exhaust negotiators.

There is no substitute for the collective strength at the workplace. External activists and negotiators can be an important complement, but nothing more. The key people for building collective strength are the workplace organizers i.e. members who organize at their own workplaces.

When members lack sections at their workplaces, client service at the level of our Locals easily arises. Therefore, the Locals of SAC promote collective self-organization rather than service in individual cases. Locals promote the formation of sections, cross-union groups and *industrial branches*. A branch is an association of all sections within a specific industry in the area (read more about industrial branches under questions 16–17 below). The Swedish word for industrial branch is *syndikat*.

There is a risk that client service arises and dominates also in industrial branches. This is the case if the branch negotiates for members who lack workplace sections. Therefore, the primary task of the industrial branch is to organize workplace by workplace and form sections, not to negotiate. This is stated in the basic bylaws for all industrial branches.

In a section that encompasses a large workplace or several workplaces, there is also the risk that client service will dominate. Those sections are strongly recommended to form smaller subdivisions or *departments* within their area of activity. The Swedish word for such a department is *avdelning*. In a department you engage in union activity with your closest colleagues.

Trade unions can hardly avoid client service altogether, but the emphasis should be on workplace organizing; that is the core of union business. Client service is an emergency solution, available when urgent problems arise and there is no time to

## 14. Why is client service a trap?

SAC's Union program of 2006 highlights a trap that many unions step into: that client service dominates the union. This means that the union mainly delivers service in individual cases. The service consists of negotiations and sometimes actions outside the workplace. When a union neglects to organize, the client service usually takes over. The concept of organizing was highlighted above (see question 7).

Client service usually renders meagre results for the served member, even though the people who provide service make a great effort. The reason is that client service neither uses nor develops the collective strength at the workplace. In the absence of collective strength, the primary method becomes defensive *legalism*. This means trying to assert rights according to laws and collective agreements, rather than pushing the position forward. That is also the path which employers and the state try to push militant unions onto.

Legalism is a flawed method for both offensive and defensive purposes. It is entirely possible for employers to have a lousy workplace policy and still follow laws and collective agreements, for example to use understaffing and day labourers. In such situations, legalism is no counterweight.

Even when employers break rules and employees *are* right according to law, it can be difficult to *assert* the same rights. Employees can be regarded as troublemakers and become harassed. If you sue the employer in the Labour Court (*Arbetsdomstolen* in Swedish), the outcome is often a lottery. In some

## Part 1. Guidelines for local organizing

# 1. What is syndicalism?

Syndicalism is an international trade union movement. The word syndicalism comes from the French word *syndicat* which means a trade union. The French term *syndicalisme*, directly translated, thus means trade union movement (or trade union activity). But syndicalism is not just any union movement. There are certain guidelines that define the movement. To get a good grasp of what syndicalism is, you should of course read this book in its entirety. However, here is a short summary.

The purpose of syndicalism is to organize employees in all industries for immediate improvement of working conditions. In this book, the word *employee* refers to all wage earners except bosses. Syndicalist trade unions include both workers in the narrow sense (i.e. blue-collar workers) and white-collar workers. The syndicalist unions are based on member democracy, solidarity and independence from all religious and political organizations.

The democratic guiding star of syndicalism is that everyone who is affected by a decision should have the right to influence that decision. The long-term vision is to democratize the workplaces and thereby build an equal society. Within today's trade unions, syndicalists practice what is known as *base democracy* and *federalism*. That is the basis for member-run trade unions. By building member-run unions, employees can develop the collective strength and competence to introduce staff-run workplaces in all industries.

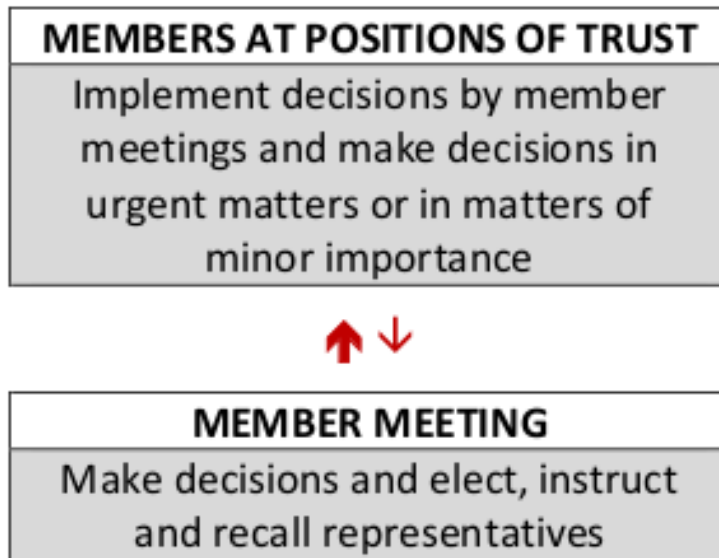
You can read more about base democracy and federalism below (see questions 13, 16 and 17). The project to organize for daily demands *and* a long-term vision, syndicalists usually call

In sections, the crucial power belongs to a number of member meetings per year. The annual meeting is the most significant meeting. Here, among other things, a plan for the coming year and a budget are decided upon. At the annual meeting, representatives are elected to the section board and various committees. If the member base deems it appropriate, the board may be mandated to appoint committees. Representatives can also be elected at regular member meetings. The elected representatives are accountable to and can be recalled immediately by the member meeting.

The main rule at the member meetings is that decisions are made by an absolute majority, i.e. a proposal wins if it receives more than 50 percent of the votes cast. The chairman of the meeting asks the participants to say YES to approve a certain proposal or YES to reject it. The chairman assesses whether approval outweighs rejection or the other way around. If someone requests a vote count, all individual votes are counted instead.

If the section is to organize a strike or other industrial action, the action should be based on a qualified majority decision or preferably full unanimity/consensus. Decisions on industrial action must be made by a large majority at a well-attended meeting. Once the decision has been made, it is binding for all members.

Industrial conflict requires strong unity. A collective action should not be organized if only a small majority of the members have voted in favour of it.



*the dual task.* Read more about the dual task and the vision (see question 22 and Part 4 of the book).

In Sweden, syndicalism is represented primarily by the *Central Organization of Workers in Sweden*, which is abbreviated as SAC (*Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation* in Swedish). SAC was founded in 1910. SAC stands in sharp contrast with the dominant Swedish trade unions of LO, TCO and Saco. They are in their turn characterized by top-down government, centralism, tycoon rule and loyalty to the employer side. LO and to some extent TCO are also hampered by loyalty to the Social Democratic Party. TCO and even more so Saco are furthermore characterized by craft egoism.

The magnitude of syndicalist currents has always been significantly greater than the membership of SAC itself. Syndicalism means independent labour struggle. As soon as employees agree and unite against the management and act to increase their influence, one can speak of a syndicalist tendency. In that sense, syndicalism is simply common sense and a natural approach to organizing.

## 2. What barriers does SAC have against tycoons?

All Swedish trade unions speak beautifully about democracy, but almost all are at the same time characterized by tycoon rule. Tycoon rule means that unions are governed by representatives and paid officials (in Swedish the latter are called *ombudsmän*) who do not share the everyday life of members at the workplace. It is a separate social stratum that has other interests than the member base. Tycoon rule means that those concerned do not make the decisions. Therefore, decision-makers are not affected by the consequences of their own decisions.

SAC has many barriers to tycoon rule. The most important barriers are: formal democracy according to our union bylaws, the fact that the union activity is built and governed by non-paid members, rules and routines for rotation at all positions of trust (i.e. elected boards, committees etc.) and norms for positive leadership.

SAC is based on non-paid activity and commitment. To a limited extent, members are elected to remunerated positions of trust, full-time or part-time. Their main task is however to promote the non-paid activity and commitment. All paid members receive the same compensation at a worker wage level. Parachute agreements do not exist. Remunerated persons do not have the authority to make the crucial decisions within SAC. They instead implement decisions made by non-paid members. Remuneration lasts for a limited period, after which the members return to their ordinary wage labour.

## 13. How is an operating section governed?

A common misconception is that trade unions must be governed either by representative democracy or by direct democracy. Syndicalism combines both forms of government. We call it *base democracy*.

At the section's base level, the rank-and-file level, direct democratic decisions are made through member meetings or the ballot box. Members are elected to positions of trust at a representative level. They implement decisions, coordinate activities and make decisions in urgent matters or in matters of minor importance. Their mandate can be specified in directives from the base. The figure below summarizes how base democracy works. The thinner arrow illustrates that elected representatives not only implement decisions but also make certain decisions.

Every step in the union's work – formulating demands, choosing methods of struggle and concluding agreements – is always decided at the base level, unless a limited decision-making power has been explicitly delegated to elected representatives. The rank-and-file thus sets a strict framework for its representatives.

ble. The ambition is to become the real majority union in every workplace and, as the process advances, also the formal majority. At the same time, SAC always strives for cooperation with employees who belong to other unions.

You do not create a “consciousness” worthy of the name by isolating yourself in small groups that require adherence to strict doctrines. We workers grow in skills and insight through broad union struggles, discussions and studies. The trade union movement needs to once again become an open school and workshop for the whole working class.

Rotation is crucial on both non-paid and paid positions of trust. Rotation requires a well-thought-out handover of assignments so that the knowledge of resigning persons is transferred to new elected representatives. Rotation is also promoted by the general union education programmes. Read more about syndicalist leadership below (see question 18).

### 3. What is class struggle?

The syndicalist movement has emerged from class struggle. The syndicalist ideology contains important lessons from that struggle. The class struggle is a struggle over how the riches we produce should be used and how the power over our lives and communities should be exercised.

The central arena for class struggle is the workplaces. Roughly simplified, the conflict of interests consists in management gaining from commanding a minimum workforce to toil to the maximum for minimal wages, while the interest of employees is the opposite. The workforce benefits from offering resistance, pushing its positions forward and increasing its influence. The class struggle is an always on-going power struggle.

The conflict of interests at the workplaces is built into the hierarchical relationship between workforce and management. This hierarchy is based on the fact that we who do the work do not control the means of production. The term *means of production* refers to resources used in the production of goods and services. It encompasses everything from fixed and real assets (such as land, buildings, machinery and vehicles) to financial and immaterial assets (such as patents and trademarks).

To support ourselves, we have to sell our labour power to private or public employers. In the private sector, the means of production are controlled by the capital-owning class and its representatives. In the public sector, the means of production are controlled by the political and bureaucratic classes and their subordinate bosses. Public employers can also have a special position by holding a monopoly on or owning the exclusive

### 12. What is a *formal* majority and a *real* majority union?

Most syndicalist sections start as a minority union in the workplace. But syndicalists always form a majority with other colleagues against the management.

A newly started section strives to become what Swedish syndicalists call the *real* or *substantial* majority union. This means that the section is the union that has the most impact on the workplace (even if it has not recruited a majority of the staff). The real majority union pursues a line in concrete union issues which has the support of the staff and preferably also mobilizes the whole collective for action.

In the longer term, the section's goal is to also become the *formal* majority i.e. the union that recruits all or most employees. At the same time, SAC members continue to act together with employees of other unions and with non-unionised colleagues.

When SAC was formed in 1910, the French syndicalist union CGT was an important role model. But SAC deviated from the leaders of CGT on a crucial point. SAC wanted to organize a majority of workers while the leaders of CGT only aimed for those who they regarded as a "conscious minority" within the working class. The rest were arrogantly and elitistly called "the indifferent crowd" by CGT leaders.

Not until a situation of social transformation was imminent, the CGT leaders believed that the majority could become "conscious" and then be recruited. This notion was and is alien to SAC. SAC wants to become a majority union as soon as possi-



you do not understand it. You and the colleagues who want to bring about a change are wise to reflect on the composition of the staff and how management directs the labour process. You will then find ways to strengthen cohesion and methods to increase your influence. Knowledge is power and unity is strength. These expressions are clichés that may sound worn but they are still true. See also an example of mapping the workplace in the book's Appendix 1 (the plan for a study group).

While the workplace is an arena for conflicts with the employer, the trade union is a platform for cooperation. In a broad union, internal conflicts can hardly be avoided but minimized.

The motto of syndicalism is to always focus on conflicts with the counterparty, and not to get caught up in conflicts within the workforce or inside the union. SAC's motto is *to put job conflict before internal conflict*. This is a precondition for building union community. The purpose of unions stands and falls with the ability to cooperate internally and handle conflicts with the counterparties.

rights to certain sectors. The class struggle is usually summarized as a conflict between labour and capital.

This crude class analysis can be refined depending on what you want to investigate. With the help of different concepts, different governing strata can be identified (one can for example speak of a privileged intelligentsia, technocrats, political castes, military elite groups and a coordinator class). The essential point is that the population is forced to sell its labour power to a class of bosses or owners and thus submit to the buyers' domination and exploitation. The purpose of SAC is to participate in the class struggle with emphasis on the workplaces.

## 4. What are Locals (LS) and operating sections (DS)?

SAC is an association of *Locals* (abbreviated *LS* — *lokal samorganisation* in Swedish). The task of the Local is to co-organize union activities in all industries in a certain area. You become a member of the Local that encompasses your place of work. If you do not have a job, you can belong to the Local at your place of residence. SAC also organizes the unemployed, students, pensioners and self-employed (i.e. entrepreneurs without employees).

The Locals of SAC encourage members to organize *operating sections*. An operating section is a local union for all occupations in a certain workplace except bosses. The operating section is both a forum and tool. It is a forum in which co-workers can agree on what needs to change in the workplace and a tool for enforcing that change. The Swedish word for operating section is *driftsektion* (abbreviated: *DS*). The term *operating* refers to the vision that employees should take over and operate the workplace themselves. We often use the shorter term *section*.

Sections are similar to local job branches (in Swedish: *fackklubbar*) within LO, TCO and Saco. A crucial difference is that syndicalist sections have a dual task and are part of a class organization for all employees except bosses. See question 22 below regarding the dual task. We elaborate on the idea of the class organization in Part 2 of the book.

A section can be formed if there are at least three members at a certain workplace. The members hold a constituent meeting, adopt bylaws for the section and elect a board. SAC

## 11. How is union community built?

Union community does not arise just because you start a formal section. Community is cultivated and organized. It is not enough for employees to have an insight or awareness of common interests towards management. A strong sense of “We workers” is needed, a cohesion that is nurtured and developed. Co-workers need good relations among themselves and trust in each other, as opposed to management demanding loyalty and obedience.

The workforce is usually more or less divided and fragmented. Employees can be divided along the lines of different occupations, forms of employment, gender, ethnicity, different groups of friends, generations, etc. This division needs to be overcome. That is one of the crucial reasons why SAC is a feminist and anti-racist union.

The union community is destroyed if colleagues push each other down. A community of men that excludes female colleagues is not a union community. A racist jargon at work cannot be accepted. A workplace where homosexuals and transgender people do not feel welcome is not a union community.

You and your co-workers cultivate community, for example, when you help each other in daily tasks, support each other in relation to management, establish norms for a culture of solidarity, resolve internal conflicts independently of bosses and arrange social activities outside working hours.

An important part of organizing is to analyse and map the workplace. It is almost impossible to change the situation if

society. However, the very word “sabotage” is far too vague and completely outdated. The alternative is to use more descriptive terms such as slowdowns, work-to-rule, take the tools out on solidarity strike, etc.

It sometimes happens that employers dig up old union writings about “sabotage” in order to tarnish the union’s reputation. Bosses then accuse the representatives of advocating “sabotage” and play on the term’s connotations to assassinations and even terrorism. The bosses recite words out of context and in bad faith. The union solution is again to be clear in the communication. Always let slander blow back on the slanderer.

At many workplaces, employees are not ready to exercise collective pressure for the simple reason that there is not a strong enough sense of community. The first step for syndicalists is then to build that community.

has basic bylaws for all sections that can be supplemented and adapted to the local situation. A section can include one workplace or several connected workplaces. The scope of the section is defined by the section itself. The section’s counterparty can also be one or more employers. It all depends on how the production of goods or services in question is structured.

In legal terms, the section is a non-profit and non-governmental organization. It is a legal person who has the right to collective bargaining, stage industrial action and enter into agreements. A modern synonym for industrial action is collective action. According to SAC’s bylaws, the section practices self-determination in local affairs and direct democracy. The section itself thus decides whether to stage strikes, blockades or other forms of industrial action. This principle is called *local right to industrial action*. Within LO, TCO and Saco, it is the central boards at national level that command members to strike. In SAC however, it is the members that take the union out on strike. It can also be described as the member collective calling itself to go on strike (through the union democracy).

In SAC, workers are treated as adults, and that is rare on the Swedish labour market. In most unions, the role of members is limited to handing over power to representatives and paid officials. Ever since 1910, SAC has rejected that kind of management as a form of guardianship. When SAC was formed in 1910, a manifesto was issued criticizing the LO leadership for being “inclined to regard the workers as a collection of stupid children, who, however, are endowed with a phenomenal ability to choose good and excellent leaders”.

The workplace operating section is a flexible and handy organizational form. Its structure is adapted to local circumstances and to the section’s current phase of development. No template is suitable for all situations. Syndicalist sections show a great variety as far as organizational models go. The essential point is that the section promotes the ability of employees to

stick together and act together. The structure of sections should promote the struggle you want to wage.

## 10. What is “sabotage” in a trade union sense?

The early labour movement (starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) often spoke of “sabotage” in a trade union sense. If the term direct action can be misunderstood, the word “sabotage” causes even worse misunderstandings. According to modern Swedish criminal law, sabotage is an act that endangers the health or safety of several persons. The early labour movement used the word in an essentially different way. The trade unionist “sabotage” was a general label for various alternatives and complements to strikes.

Some examples of such alternatives are slowdowns (i.e. to slow down the pace of work), so called work-to-rule (exceptional obedience to regulations at work, again to slow down the pace) or to inform consumers as whistle-blowers if for example the company’s products are of bad quality.

Another example of “sabotage” in the unionist sense is the method good service. This means that employees provide consumers with such a good service that the rest of the work is delayed. Another example is to take the tools out on solidarity strike. This method is a protection against strike breaking. This could mean, for example, that striking transport workers leave their vehicles standing and take the keys with them. In today’s digitalized society, this method can mean making it impossible for strike breakers to log in to office computers or to access factory robots.

The purpose of unionist “sabotage” is usually to defend the health and safety of workers, consumers or other members of

*force* instead of direct action. It is about using the power we possess as producers of goods and services.

The Union program of SAC, adopted in 2006, emphasizes that the labour struggle must be *proactive*, not just reactive. The struggle becomes vulnerable if it only consists of reactions to employer attacks. Employees should instead take the initiative and preferably be one step ahead of the counterpart. SAC's Tactical statement of 2009 emphasizes that the choice of methods should be creative and adapted to the current situation. The strength of unions requires that tactics change when needed. Predictable unions become vulnerable if the employer side learns how to trump a certain tactic that is repeated over and over again.

In general, it can be said that successful labour conflicts take the form of planned escalation. North American unions use the term *escalating organizing campaigns*. The workforce then proceeds from simple and relatively soft methods of pressure to more demanding and effective pressure. As a complement to the actions of employees, it is recommended to set up a media strategy, partly to put pressure on the employer at the current workplace, and partly to attract more employees to join future campaigns.

## 5. Who can be recruited and organized?

For those who are the only syndicalists at their workplace, the question arises: should I recruit colleagues and start a section first or start engaging with concrete union issues and form a section later? Is it best to do both at the same time? There is no general truth here. Whatever you do, the basis is to discuss the work situation with colleagues. It is important to find concrete union issues to pursue together.

You can start by examining the interest in forming a section. Is the interest weak? Start by gathering colleagues to cross-union meetings, i.e. meetings for employees regardless of union affiliation. Such meetings are of course also open to colleagues who do not belong to any union. Try to make a dispute demand and win against the employer. Demands that may seem modest are often a good start, such as free work shoes, a new coffee machine or greater influence over the scheduling. Choose methods of influence that many employees are willing to use. Get help from your Local of SAC and win the trust of your co-workers. This will probably open new opportunities for recruiting members.

Regardless of whether a section is formed or not, it is highly recommended that you develop the cross-union meetings into a stable group that grows. Both sections and cross-union groups can get help from your Local. Support can be coordinated by the board of your Local or a special organizing committee. See also the advice on how to get

started at work in the book's Appendix 1 (the plan for a study group).

According to the basic bylaws for all Locals of SAC, you can recruit all colleagues except the bosses. Exactly where the line between employees and employer should be drawn can be discussed, but drawing a line is natural for a serious trade union. Before a section is formed, it is important that this line is clarified. The section is fully independent of any religious and political organizations. Therefore, the section can welcome all employees as members regardless of their religious beliefs and regardless of how they may vote in parliamentary elections. The crucial point is that the union is not used as a platform for religious activities or party politics.

A syndicalist is first and foremost a good co-worker. SAC expects all members to act in solidarity at work. At the same time, SAC does not require everyone to hold the same set of views and opinions. A prosperous section is characterized by a breadth of views and open-minded discussions. Syndicalism rejects dogmatic thinking and sectarianism. Trade union solidarity should not be confused with charity. Charity is a one-sided action in a hierarchical relationship. Solidarity is about a common struggle for common interests. It is about mutual aid for mutual benefit. All employees simply benefit from supporting each other. Compassion and a passion for justice are of course a part of union solidarity, but a strong solidarity is rooted in common class interests.

In SAC's basic book *Syndikalismen* it is emphasized that SAC is an open union that does not exclude workers due to "non-syndicalist" views (see the 1984 or 1996 editions written by Sven Lagerström). All members should have read SAC's Declaration of principles but are not expected to swear allegiance to every point and syllable. Every member must respect that SAC has a long-term vision of a new society, but not everyone must be a convinced supporter of this vision.

## 9. What is direct action?

A central concept of syndicalism is direct action. Direct action means action without representatives. It covers all methods that we employees develop in our unmediated struggle. Some examples of direct action are to produce petitions, boycott the company party, arrange Christmas dinners without the bosses, criticize management in a workplace union paper or stage sit-in strikes. Such methods become relevant when the staff has urgent demands but the management is not receptive to arguments and facts.

Direct action means that we do not hand over our affairs to union representatives, politicians or courts. If we lose control and do not use our collective strength, we always risk losing the labour struggle itself.

The term direct action is sometimes mistaken to mean impulsive or ill-considered action. On the contrary, all direct actions should be carefully thought out and be well prepared. Direct action is action without representatives conducted by the concerned workers themselves. Unfortunately, the term is sometimes used in the sense of one group falsely claiming to fight on behalf of another group. This means that political groups outside the workforce take action that the workers have not requested. Such actions are, of course, both arrogant and destructive. That is not the direct action of syndicalism.

Direct action is struggle by the concerned workers themselves, supplemented (if necessary) with solidarity actions approved by the workers. To avoid misunderstandings, it is usually best to use the expression *collective pressure by the work-*

and subordinated, as well as solid tools for breaking these patterns — both within the union and at the workplace.

Read more about the importance of a feminist perspective for a trade union community, for the leadership in sections and for the recruitment of members (see questions 11, 18 and 41). See also Part 4 of the book (question 47).

Even if the section recruits broadly, there are of course limits to what behaviours can be accepted. Everyone who is recruited should therefore be informed about the section's basic values. All members must follow the union's democratic decisions, act in solidarity at the workplace and respect the union's independence from religious and political organizations.

Subscribing to these values — democracy, solidarity and independence — is what all members of SAC have in common. It is the lowest common denominator. The basic values are there for two reasons: on the one hand, the section must be able to recruit as many employees as possible, and on the other hand, the section and SAC as a whole need to unite and act for common goals. Common struggle in the workplaces requires certain common values. To comply with these values is to respect the basic bylaws for all Locals of SAC.

## 6. What can you do through an operating section?

Once you and some co-workers have become members of a Local of SAC, it is recommended to form a section. Through the section, you have the best opportunities to unite the workforce and create a better workplace for everyone. This requires that you create a sense of trade union community, a safe starting point to improve conditions. The fellow members in your Local will assist with education, forums for exchanging experiences, production of agitation material and other initiatives that facilitate your organizing efforts.

Through the section, you and the fellow members of the section raise union demands and put collective pressure on the employer to enforce demands. You raise issues that you think can unite the workforce. You use methods that involve many co-workers or at least have a broad support. You choose the battles that the staff has the best chance of winning. The union is behind your section and the decision-making power is in your hands.

In the event of a strike or other labour conflicts that results in a loss of wages, union members receive economic support. Each Local of SAC has a local conflict fund that is supplemented by SAC's joint conflict fund. The economic support does not cover the loss of wages to one hundred percent. Support is there to help you and your co-workers carry out a successful labour conflict. If you so wish, your struggle can also be supported in other ways, for example through a media strategy

struggle. The intention is to broaden the struggle, include more categories of workers and support self-organization especially among those who suffer the worst positions and conditions.

As early as the 1920s, the syndicalist Elise Ottesen-Jensen emphasized that the labour movement cannot realize the liberation of humanity until unions change their internal male domination. We are unfortunately not there yet. Expressing a feminist goal at a union congress is one thing. To strive for gender equality in practice, both inside the union and on the workplace, is another matter.

SAC's Gender power inquiry (in Swedish *Könsmaktsutredningen*) which was presented in 2010 emphasizes that an internal *homosociality* must be counteracted. The term refers to men associating with men primarily and promoting each other and excluding and ignoring women (consciously or unconsciously). A necessary counterweight to homosociality is that union democracy follows clear formal structures. The feminist perspective also needs to be included in union education programmes to break the traditional macho culture of trade unions in general.

Feminism becomes a part of the class struggle when the perspective is integrated into workplace organizing. When the perspective is present on a section level, the union becomes stronger and better at advancing the positions of all employees. The formation of more sections is in itself an element that facilitates women's participation in the union. In syndicalist sections, union activity is conducted mainly at work during working hours. That is advantageous for everyone who is attributed and bears heavy responsibility for family and household, the unpaid reproductive work.

However, more workplace organizing does not automatically produce gender equality. The feminist perspective needs to be presented already at introductory meetings for new members. Workers' solidarity under the banner of SAC, presupposes concrete knowledge of how women are discriminated against



## 8. Why is SAC a feminist trade union?

Syndicalism has emerged from the working class. A class perspective is therefore fundamental. Over time, SAC and other currents of the labour movement have been enriched with feminist perspectives.

SAC was the first union in Sweden to call itself a feminist union. This happened at the SAC congress of 1994. The feminist perspective was expressed there as an insight and a goal by the way of additions to SAC's Declaration of principles. The insight concerns the fact that women as a group are subordinated and discriminated against in society. People with non-binary identities are also punished for deviations from a gender norm. The goal of SAC is to achieve equality between the sexes with a focus on the labour market and our union.

As the term equality has traditionally ignored women, the concept of gender equality is used to shed light on the power relationship between the sexes. The Swedish word for equality is *jämlikhet*. A new term, *jämställdhet*, has been coined for gender equality.

The Union program of SAC, adopted in 2006, emphasizes that the class struggle must be permeated by an understanding of structural injustices affecting women as well as ethnic and sexual minorities. In SAC's Declaration of principles, adopted in 2009, it is emphasized that discriminated and severely exploited categories of workers must be given a significant influence in the class struggle. These governing documents express a development of the aspirations for equality in the class

and public rallies. But that question is determined by members of the section and no one else.

Members of a section have several alternatives for action at work. They can act formally through the section or informally but with the support of the section. The latter is also called extra-union mobilization. The section can initiate official cooperation with other unions. In that case you must be sure that the other unions are on the side of employees and follow directives from the shop floor. We always seek cooperation with our colleagues, but not with union representatives who ruin cooperation.

In order to build collective strength, it is important to work on two tracks at the same time: both develop the section and create cross-union cohesion among colleagues. These two tracks are mutually reinforcing each other. If no official cooperation is initiated between trade unions, the cooperation between colleagues can be developed anyhow.

An example of how syndicalists improve the working conditions of all employees is a creative notice of action that was declared within Stockholm's commuter trains. The employer was reluctant to provide staff with warm winter uniforms. The bigger unions within LO and TCO got nowhere in negotiations. The syndicalists therefore announced that they would use extremely ugly uniforms that they had designed themselves, with a photo attached to the notice. The employer then gave the entire staff new uniforms.

Another example is the syndicalists at Eco Global, a subcontractor to Volvo Trucks in the city of Umeå. The employer agreed with the local job branch of LO on wage reductions of several thousand Swedish kronor a month. In response, the syndicalists initiated a collective slowdown (i.e. reduction of the pace of work). The old system of remuneration was thereafter reintroduced.

A successful section conducts collective struggle for collective deals. It can be described as establishing a floor for wages

and working conditions. It can also be described as a barrier against underbidding competition and increased exploitation. Underbidding competition is also called social dumping.

Older syndicalist texts advocate “constant struggle” at the workplace. That should not be interpreted as constant industrial actions. It is about continuous organizing. After a completed negotiation, labour conflict or a lengthy organizing campaign, it is good to maintain a *plateau*. That is a period when you evaluate the results, analyse the situation and gather strength for the next effort.

When it comes to the Swedish labour market, the collective agreement is the most common type of collective deal but not the only possible type. The collective agreement has a certain definition and certain legal effects according to the Swedish Co-determination Act (abbreviated as MBL – *medbestämmandelagen* in Swedish). You and your colleagues can learn more about collective agreements and alternatives to collective agreements through SAC’s courses. You may also familiarize yourself with labour law, including rules that can be used by health and safety representatives (in Swedish: *skyddsombud*). Legal knowledge is important for every section, but union strength is built primarily by organizing.

All three dimensions are equally important. If you rush directly to struggle and bargaining, there is a risk that only a few employees will confront management. It usually gives quite meagre results. The people at the front also risk being left without the staff’s support if the management responds with retaliation. The people then become dependent on external support from union negotiators and activists. External support does not have the same weight as support from co-workers. You therefore need to build a union movement inside the workplace.

However, a movement without formal structures easily becomes short-lived. When the movement ebbs out, it suffers from memory loss and the wheel must be reinvented. A stable organization is a learning organization with a growing bank of experience. However, a formal section without movement and collective struggle becomes an empty shell or a dead bureaucracy. Once all three dimensions are in place, the section’s influence and membership can grow.

The first step in organizing does not have to be the start-up of a section. You can start by uniting with your co-workers and act in other ways. But as soon as a good opportunity arises, it is highly recommended to form a section.

The section can choose to hold its meetings for members only or have meetings that are open to other colleagues as well. At the section’s decision-making meetings, only members have the right to vote, but the meeting may decide that non-members can attend and also make proposals. If the section chooses closed meetings, it is important that members also promote discussions for all employees who want to change the workplace. This can take the form of, for example, cross-union lunches every week, an on-line forum or cross-union workshops after work where common strategies are drawn up.

If the staff benefits from both a section and a cross-union group, then of course you strive to develop both groups. See also Appendix 2 of this book for an illustration of the section’s role in the workforce.

## 7. What is organizing?

The dominant Swedish unions within LO, TCO and Saco usually talk about organizing in a very narrow sense. They mean recruiting members and administrating a trade union. Recruitment and administration are certainly vital for any union, but still hopelessly insufficient.

There are different definitions of the term organizing that overlap. Organizing is about developing and using the collective strength in a systematic way. The strength rests on the fact that the employer side is dependent on our labour power. The strength grows as we become better at uniting and acting together.

Organizing is a social process and an important competence for organizers is simply social competence. Both self-respect and respect for co-workers are a cornerstone here. Syndicalists emphasize that the workers concerned are the driving force. That is why we often talk about *self-organization*. Very few people are born organizers. To organize is a skill that you can learn.

Workplace organizing can be divided into three dimensions: (1) we build a formal section, (2) we develop a movement and (3) we mobilize around collective struggle and bargaining. Successful bargaining is the final step in a successful organizing process.

The formal dimension of organizing is about writing well-thought-out bylaws and plans, adopting a budget and using meeting techniques that are both democratic and effective. A formalized union makes it possible for members on the shop floor to elect, control and (if necessary) remove leaders. A for-

Formal organization	Movement	Struggle & bargaining	→	Employer
Section and cross-union group	Community and participation	Pressure and MBL bargaining or other forms of confrontation		

mal section can also meet the employer side as an official union party and enter into binding agreements.

The movement dimension of unions is about participation and a sense of community. The movement is built up before a collective action or negotiation takes place and is further developed thereafter. The movement should be larger than the syndicalist section and mobilize more than its members, preferably the entire staff.

We are building a formal section to give the movement stability and bridge the ups and downs of union activity. The movement can also be formalized by a cross-union group agreeing on rules for its activities. A cross-union group can be supported by trade unions or function as independent collaboration between colleagues.

Negotiations can be conducted through formal collective bargaining based on MBL and requested by the section. An informal way of confronting management can take the form of employees that support each other at staff meetings. Another way of making demands is to hold cross-union meetings that elect representatives to meet the management.

The most well-known methods of labour struggle are strikes and blockades. Strike means work stoppage. A workplace is closed down due to a large number of strikers or by key employees stopping their work. A blockade means that you refuse to perform certain parts of the labour process or refuse to deliver products and new labour power to a certain workplace. However, labour struggles are nowadays rarely conducted through strikes and blockades (this is at least the contemporary situation on the Swedish labour market). There is no reason to romanticize that kind of open industrial conflict. It is instead the concrete results that count.

Union struggles include all the methods we develop to defend and advance our positions. The larger the toolbox the better. It is usually better to plan several methods in a *compound*

*strategy* than to prepare only one single method. Read more about methods below (see questions 9 and 10).

The three dimensions of organizing are summarized in the figure.

## 55. How can producers take over production?

Historical experience shows that the takeover can be carried out in many different ways. One way is that employees simply take over the operation through their operating section. Another way is that several unions merge into base level bodies and councils for all workers. Another variant is that employees find that trade unions have become bureaucratic brake pads and therefore establish new bodies of self-management.

The fundamental ideas of syndicalism have passed the test over time. Organizing through base democratic unions offers a path to socialism in freedom. In the SAC Declaration of principles of 1922, the fundamental ideas are contrasted with “state socialism” as follows:

Syndicalism claims *“that the political parties or the legislature are incapable of carrying out the socialist reorganization of society either through political democracy or through party dictatorship or otherwise, but that this task, which is primarily an economic task, must be carried out by the economic organizations of the working masses.”*

The same document expresses the idea that the double structure of unions (industry-wise and geographically) should “displace, overcome and replace” the ruling bodies of capitalism and the state. One hundred years later, we can conclude that the “state socialist” paths have led to parties managing and preserving class society or to the parties introducing new class societies.

union IWW express this aspiration in the following way in the Preamble to its constitution:

“By organizing industrially, we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

In short, syndicalism strives for *economic democracy*. We also use the expression *workers’ self-management*. As is well known, the word democracy means rule by the people, and we believe that the people really should rule. Economic democracy is the core of SAC’s long-term vision, but the vision is bigger than this (read further in Part 4 of the book).

In today’s workplaces, economic dictatorship prevails, even if the political system is formally democratic. Employees are obliged to obey a class of bosses or owners which they have not voted for and furthermore do not have the right to control or recall. This is not a worthy situation for adult people. In addition, bosses and business owners enrich themselves on the working population.

The hierarchy in workplaces is a basis for class society as a whole. The individual workplace is a class society in miniature. The prevailing class society is a capitalist society. It is characterized by the fact that most of production is owned by private capitalists. The goal of capitalists is to maximize profits and their power (or at least to maintain their power). Production, the surrounding society and politics are subordinated to their goal of profit maximization.

The early labour movement described the dictatorship and exploitation in the workplace as *wage slavery* and *employer rule*. We syndicalists hold fast to this critique even though the wordings can be updated.

The dictatorship in the workplace is the central component of capitalism. Capitalism rests on the productive and creative activity of the working class. At the same time, it is our creative capacity that can bring forth a new social order. Economic democracy would make it possible to produce for human needs, instead of profit for the few. Economic democracy lays

the foundation for an equal society, a classless society. That would mean a fundamental transformation of society.

Class struggle is an inevitable consequence of a boss and owner class having a monopoly on the means of production. The conflict between labour and capital cannot be abolished within the framework of capitalism. It is through the offensive struggles for daily demands that we approach the long-term vision. A future transformation of society is the ultimate consequence of class struggle.

A prerequisite for fulfilling the dual task is to put emphasis on self-organization and collective struggle. If a trade union is dominated by client service and defensive legalism, then it is important to make new investments in organizing. Client service was discussed above (see question 14).

Client service is in itself a trap if it becomes dominant. It could lead the union stepping into two additional traps. One trap is that the union representatives move up, above the workforce and are *integrated* with the employer side. The second trap is that organizers are *marginalized*. They then end up outside the workforce and lack influence. The solution is to work within the collective of employees and mobilize co-workers in struggle and bargaining. See the illustration of the two traps in Appendix 2 of the book.

A necessary prerequisite for fulfilling the dual task is to build strong local trade unions. But it is not enough to form sections, job branches and cross-union groups that are isolated from each other. The local organizations need to cooperate through a larger class organization. Part 2 of the book presents the idea of the class organization.

The Spanish Revolution is, of course, not a template for all times and places. An obvious flaw in the revolution was that women were still treated as second-class citizens (although women also experienced progress). It would be absurd to try to establish a general template. It would also be absurd at present to make a detailed plan for a specific region in the distant future. Individual authors can provide detailed proposals if they so wish. But in the end, only practice can show what is actually possible and desirable.

Syndicalism offers visionary sketches and practical experiments. Unlike many utopian dreams (or nightmares), syndicalism has never tried to carve a final destination in stone. Organizing through unions, however, points in the direction of employees' taking over production.

## 54. Which institutions are possible?

Syndicalists are not content with utopian dreaming. Our ideas are based on a long tradition of practical experiments. The tradition can be traced to the so-called Paris Commune of 1871 and even further back.

The dual task of syndicalism entails the ambition to sow the seeds of a classless and equal society in the present society. The trade union democracy we are developing today reflects the forms of management we want to see in the future. In this way, organizing along industrial lines indicates how production can be managed by workers' bodies at base level and their elected councils. Trade union structures in corporate groups and along international production chains also provide clues for the future. In the same way, geographical organization in Locals, districts and SAC gives an indication of how federations of municipalities can be structured.

Syndicalists have also put their visions into action, especially in the large-scale Spanish Revolution of 1936. Several million workers took over the management of workplaces, neighbourhoods, villages and entire cities. It is a source of inspiration for future experiments.

In Spain, the self-management died of external attacks, but it did not collapse due to its internal functioning. The revolution was crushed by all the totalitarian and liberal governments of the world that had an opportunity to influence the outcome. The Spanish left-wing government also attacked the self-management of working people.

## Part 2. The idea of the class organization

## 23. What is a class organization?

Syndicalism is an international trade union movement. Syndicalism emphasizes the economic and social interests that unite us workers, rather than the religious, political and national affiliations that divide us. We organize ourselves in a union because we have a common interest in improving everyday life for everyone. We do not organize and come together because we have the same opinion on every issue. Union organizing has the potential to unite workers in every workplace, within and across industries.

Common to all workers is a subordinate position in the production of goods and services. We are employees, not bosses or employers. This makes us the largest and potentially strongest social class. The interests of all workers are essentially the same. Therefore, SAC is a class organization for all, not a political organization for this or that set of opinions.

What characterizes political organizations? Of course, they show a great variety, from parties to extra-parliamentary groups. But political organizations have a typical characteristic: they recruit people who all adhere to a certain package of opinions (regardless of which social class they belong to). SAC, on the other hand, welcomes anyone with a subordinate position in production. SAC does not require everyone to accept certain opinions. The important thing is to act in solidarity at work and in the union.

SAC is an interest organization for sellers of labour power. All employees except the bosses are welcome. SAC also wel-

the working class is an international project. Solidarity cannot stop at national borders. These borders are largely drawn through wars of states in the interest of the ruling classes. Nor can the working class accept the limits set by supranational structures such as the EU. Syndicalism seeks economic democracy and federalism on a global scale.



## 53. What is the difference between socialization and nationalization?

In a socialized production, the publicly owned companies and the wealth produced would in practice become property of the people. Science, technological development, education and the mass media would also serve the people to a much greater extent than in current class societies. These resources and creative enterprises would no longer be tools in the hands of the ruling classes because these classes would be dissolved or removed.

In a nationalized or state-owned production, people certainly refer to public property as “the people’s property”. However, these are empty phrases when the people lack control over the property. Without a functioning democracy and worker’s self-management, the people’s property is a legal fiction, a “state socialist” illusion. In a top-down managed state economy, the political and bureaucratic classes control the property and lives of the working class.

A major challenge in every economy is the so-called *allocation problem*: how should the resources be distributed and how should different parts of the economy be coordinated? Syndicalists have advocated decentralized planned economy, socialist market economy and various combinations of plan and market. SAC has no reason to swear its loyalty to a specific model.

The vision of syndicalism can be summed up as economic democracy and a federalist social order. The emancipation of

comes those in the working class who are not wage earners (unemployed, people on sick leave, pensioners, etc.). Each Local (LS) of SAC strives to unite the working class locally.

The primary guiding star of syndicalism is class solidarity. This does not mean that all workers must belong to the same trade union. What is needed is a common organization or alliance between workers in different organizations. This is emphasized in the bylaws for all Locals of SAC. Class solidarity requires that a feminist and anti-racist perspective is integrated into workplace organizing. Otherwise it will primarily be a solidarity between male workers of a certain ethnicity. This was addressed in Part 1 of the book (questions 8, 11 and 18). See also questions 41 and 47.

Even though SAC welcomes workers in general, organizing requires prioritizing. Some workplaces have a greater potential than others. Our human and financial resources are limited. If one tried to recruit, organize and fight everywhere at the same time, it would probably not yield success anywhere.

At the level of our Locals, to prioritize might mean for example targeting a specific industry in the organizing efforts for a period of time. An industrial branch can invest in one workplace at a time. A section can focus on a specific occupation or department within the company and so on.

Syndicalist organizers are looking for organizing opportunities. These arise when syndicalists meet with other members but also when reaching out to non-members. Meetings can be arranged both in workplaces and other social contexts where a prioritized group resides. The purpose of targeted initiatives is to promote self-organization in larger and larger parts of the working class.

## 24. Why is the union superior as a class struggle organization?

The focus of a trade union is on the workplace. Here lies great potential. Our daily work is the foundation of the production of goods and services and it literally builds our society. Through union organizing, we can develop the power to change our living conditions and the direction in which society should move. The individual worker may be a cog in the machinery, but as a collective we can stop its wheels and dictate new conditions for social development. Here an incredible power resides if we only learn to use it together.

Political organizations are not built for workplace struggles. They are basically useless for this purpose. This applies to both parliamentary “labour parties” and extra-parliamentary left-wing groupings. Left-wing organizations repel employees who don’t identify as leftists, employees who don’t see themselves as part of the left. Such organizations can also be open to bosses and employers and be led by people in the political establishment.

“Take heed! Do not antagonize these people, who produce everything and who need only to stand still to become terrifying.”

**Honoré Gabriel Riqueti de Mirabeau (1749–1791), politician during the French Revolution**

that all citizens have the right to influence. This is socialized production as opposed to nationalized or state-owned production.

As a synonym for federations of local communities, syndicalists also use the term federations of *municipalities* (in Swedish: federationer av *kommuner*). Here it should be noted that the idea is not to transfer power from central state bodies to currently existing municipal bodies. The idea is to build a popular democracy from below that dissolves concentrations of power in both the business world and the state.

Since political organizations are not built for workplace struggles, they are ill-equipped to use the means of power that the working class possesses in its capacity as producer of goods and services.

## 52. Which institutions are desirable in the future?

The syndicalist vision entails societies based on base democracy and federalism. The democratic guiding star is that everyone who is affected by a decision should have the right to influence it. The terms base democracy and federalism were explained in Part 1 of the book (see questions 13, 16 and 17).

Syndicalists have reflected on a number of possible institutions. The reasoning revolves around local assemblies or general meetings (in Swedish: *lokala stormöten*). Such meetings should be held in workplaces, city districts and villages. A common term for general meetings in workplaces is workers' assemblies. A term for meetings in city districts and villages is popular assemblies. Meetings should take place at the base level and elect some form of workers' councils, consumers' councils and citizens' councils.

The reasoning runs further. The bodies at base level and their elected councils should form industry-wide and geographical federations, from small-scale local federations to regional federations and large-scale international federations. Delegates in workers' councils must work in the companies over which they make decisions. In the same way, delegates in consumers' and citizens' councils must be rooted in the local communities they represent.

In a federalist social order (as outlined here), economic democracy means that federations of local communities own the companies and that federations of workers manage them — for the benefit of consumers and within a framework

## 25. When did the idea arise?

The idea of a class organization is fundamental to syndicalism. It has arisen in a large number of countries. The most well-known expression (among the oldest examples) is the International Workingmen's Association. This organization was founded in 1864 and became known as the *First International*. The first class organization in the United States, the Knights of Labor, was formed in 1869.

One of the prominent figures of the First International, Michail Bakunin, emphasized the open nature of the class organization: "the International does not ask any new member if he is of a religious or atheistic turn of mind. She does not ask if he belongs to this or that or no political party. She simply says: Are you a worker?"

The class organization brings workers together in struggle in their capacity as producers. The common interests unite workers or at least have great potential to unite workers. Multiplying through division into political factions is not the idea of the class organization.

A common misconception is that syndicalism was invented in France and then exported to the rest of the world. Syndicalism has been created by workers on all continents. However, the French CGT has become one of the most well-known syndicalist organizations. When the CGT was formed in 1895, the independence of the class organization was emphasized. The so-called Charter of Amiens (adopted in 1906) stated that CGT organizes workers "outside every political school". The workers must come together "whatever their opinions or their political and philosophical inclinations may be". The CGT emphasized

from the ruling classes, who would never have consented to them voluntarily."

**Rudolf Rocker (1873–1958), syndicalist and historian**

The term state can be defined in different ways. Syndicalists usually point to the extreme concentration of power as a defining feature of modern nation-states. One can then choose to describe the long-term vision of syndicalism as a "stateless society" or as a society with a fundamentally "new state". However, both these options are unsatisfactory.

To talk about a "new state" can be perceived as advocating continued or even worse concentrations of power, for example an alleged "workers' state" of the Soviet kind. To talk about a "stateless society" says almost nothing about what kind of society it is. It could, for example, be a situation of chaos, lawlessness and mafia rule. The early labour movement raised the slogan "abolish the state". Although the vision is still reasonable, the wording is outdated. One must therefore ask what kind of institutions syndicalism proposes in positive terms.

## 51. What happens with the state in the syndicalist vision?

Economic democracy means that the concentration of economic power is dissolved, both in capitalist companies and in the public sector. The long-term vision of syndicalism is to dissolve the concentration of political power in the state as well. Power should be transferred down to the people. Parliamentary democracy is a historic step forward, but not the end of history. The system can and should be transcended.

Syndicalism defends parliamentarism against totalitarian tendencies. An ever-present totalitarian force is the economic dictatorship of capitalist corporations. At the same time, syndicalism wants to develop democracy. After all, the meaning of the word democracy is rule by the people, not top-down rule or minority rule. Democracy advances when the broad masses of people conquer power over their everyday lives and communities. This means challenging the holders of power in both the business world and the state.

“Political rights do not originate in parliaments; they are, rather, forced on parliaments from without. (...) The peoples owe all the political rights and privileges which we enjoy today in greater or lesser measure, not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength. (...) Great mass movements among the people and whole revolutions have been necessary to wrest these rights

that the “combined organizations should not, as trade union groups, involve themselves with parties and sects”.

The basic bylaws for the Locals of SAC are not as strict as the Charter of Amiens. Our bylaws do not prohibit all contact with parties. That is a matter for each Local to decide, based on local circumstances, whether cooperation on certain issues for a limited time is favourable or not. However, the bylaws are very clear that Locals cannot demand their members to support a party.

One of SAC’s many sister unions is the Spanish CNT. This organization has always been influenced by anarchist ideas, so much so that CNT labels itself anarcho-syndicalist. But CNT too emphasizes that it is a class organization. The anarchists in Spain have separate political organizations. The requirement for becoming a member of CNT is that you are a worker and respect the democratic structure of the organization.

Another matter is that CNT’s choice of label appears to be detrimental to its ambition to attract workers in general. CNT describes itself as an anarcho-syndicalist organization but underlines that it is not an anarchist union. Anarchists often form so-called *affinity groups* – small groups of friends or close anarchist comrades who hold roughly the same views. This is no basis for class organizing and that is not the intention either. Therefore, anarchists are in addition often active in syndicalist unions and other popular movements.

Unfortunately, the CNT has had a hard time living up to its ambition as a broad class organization. It has turned certain tactical positions into dogma, which has led to a split into two organizations: the CNT and the more pragmatic anarcho-syndicalist trade union CGT. The North American union IWW bears neither the syndicalist nor the anarcho-syndicalist label. But IWW too is a class organization and a sister union to SAC.

**John Dewey (1859–1952), classical liberal and educator**

## **26. What is meant by the double structure of SAC?**

SAC's nature as a class organization finds its expression in the double structure. The organization rests on two legs: an industrial leg and a geographical leg. On the one hand, all workplace sections in the same industry in one area form an industrial branch. Several sections within the same corporate group can also form a union inside that group. All industrial branches in a single industry form a nationwide federation. On the other hand, a Local brings together employees in all industries in the area. All Locals form regional districts and are united through SAC.

Why does SAC have a double structure? In order for a trade union to challenge the buyers of labour power, the organization must match the way in which production is organized. SAC's ambition is to match the fact that the economy is divided into different industries, corporate groups and workplaces. SAC also wants to create bonds of solidarity between workers across these divisions.

Collective struggle for collective deals establishes a floor for wages and working conditions. A floor that sets a high standard in one workplace helps employees in the rest of the industry to achieve the same standard. When the standard is raised in an entire industry, it helps workers in other industries do the same. Correspondingly, an employer's attempt to cut back on benefits and wages in one individual workplace is an attack on all employees in that industry and, by extension, an attack on the entire working class. Underbidding competition and in-

In all societies, wealth is a product of the labour of the population. The enormous wealth that a small capitalist class has now amassed is therefore to be regarded as stolen property. The combination of community-owned companies and worker-owned companies would mean that wealth is returned to its creators, the population. This must of course be done without compensation to the capital owners. You do not reward the thieves after the stolen goods have been returned.

What would it mean, in concrete terms, that society owns the means of production? The goal of syndicalism, as already stated, is not nationalization under a political dictatorship or under the current parliamentary state. To answer this question, one must raise the question what the syndicalist vision would mean for the future of the state.

## 50. What happens to ownership in the syndicalist vision?

If all employees are to take over production, if everyone is to run the economy in democratic forms, then who should own the means of production? The answer of syndicalism is: all in common, primarily society as a whole. Why? The reason is simple. It is not only producers who have a legitimate interest in influencing production. The consumers or those who use the goods and services also should have a say. Likewise, other citizens (or members of society) should influence the framework for production.

In addition to companies owned by society, some companies can be owned collectively by those who work in them. This includes producer cooperatives and family companies where only family members work. Such groups own only the means of production with which they work themselves. They do not buy labour power that they exploit and control. The same applies to self-employed individuals who don't employ others. Syndicalists support a combination of community-owned companies and worker-owned companies.

“In order to restore democracy, one thing and one thing only is essential. The people will rule when they have power, and they will have power in the degree they own and control the land, the banks, the producing and distributing agencies of the nation.”

creased exploitation makes for a downward spiral. Class solidarity makes for an upward spiral.

The image below illustrates the double structure at the *local* level in relation to the employer side. The example is of the healthcare industry. In the image, there are three sections (Swedish abbreviation: DS) that cooperate through an industrial branch (in Swedish: syndikat). The members in the front have the union behind them. The Local (LS) is a platform for solidarity across industrial boundaries. Not visible in the image, is that the industrial branch preferably also cooperates with other industrial branches in the healthcare industry through a *nationwide* federation. The three employers (AG) belong to an association.



worker's self-management. It has sometimes been described as a general lockout of the capitalist class.

At an early stage, SAC abandoned the idea of general strike as the primary means of power. This shift found its expression in the 1922 Declaration of principles. SAC developed another idea. The idea was to use a certain method of labour struggle, in Swedish the so-called *registermetod* (in English: the register method), and develop the method into a strategy for gradual takeover of the economy. The idea has been described as *evolutionary syndicalism* or a *gradualist notion revolution*.

The SAC of today doesn't point out a primary leverage. We describe the way forward in general terms. The road to democracy is an independent class movement with its basis in the workplaces. It is by offensive struggle for daily demands that we move towards the vision. We are aiming for a series of phases in the workplaces that, in total, lead to democracy. A tool for thinking forward can be found in the book's Appendix 1 (the plan for a study group).



## 49. Why is only the working class capable of introducing economic democracy?

Only we who do the work can take over production and create the democratic bodies needed there. Either we conquer our workplaces or we don't. Our longing for freedom and equality, our growing competence and collective strength decide the matter. The First International expressed this insight in a famous phrase: "the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves".

The First International emphasized that "the economic emancipation of the working class is the great goal under which every political movement must be subordinate as a means." Are political organizations useful as a means? Does the working class need parties or other political organizations in addition to the economic fighting organizations? Syndicalists hold a variety of views. The individual SAC member is free to get involved in political groups that conduct studies, opinion formation, parliamentary politics, etc. The condition is, as previously stated, that members don't hinder workplace organizing.

The road to economic democracy is basically an economic struggle. We move the frontline forward when we develop the means of power we have as producers. Earlier in history, syndicalists have sought to elevate a primary means of power to transcend class society, a leverage above others. One such leverage was the idea of a definitive general strike that turns into

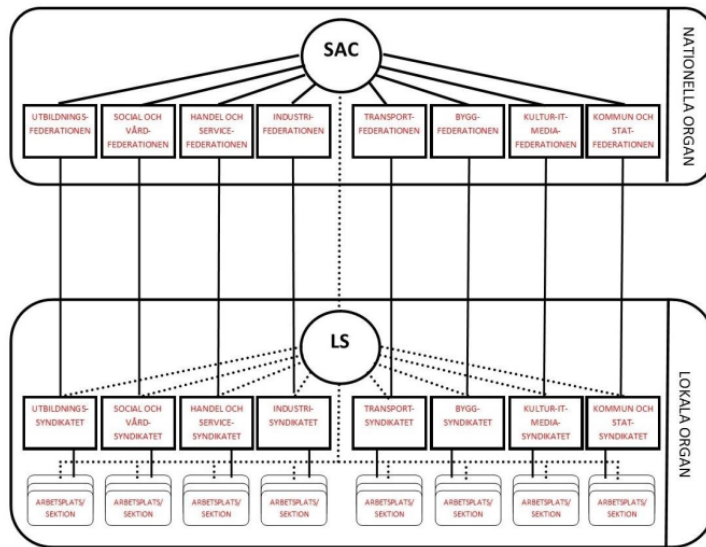
The double structure of SAC is intended to multiply solidarity and strength in the workplaces. The purpose is to limit exploitation and block underbidding competition in larger and larger parts of the labour market. This ambition is bolstered by the fact that we syndicalists promote cross-union cooperation in the workplaces and areas where we live our daily lives.

SAC's membership has undergone an industrial and geographical transformation. This is described in SAC's Union program, adopted in 2006. Until the 1970s, SAC had a strong foothold with industrial federations in the construction, mining and forestry industries. SAC's center of gravity has shifted from rural areas to cities and new industries. The membership has also gone from consisting almost exclusively of men to a growing proportion of women.

At present there are no industrial federations within SAC, but new sections and industrial branches lay the basis for future federations. SAC's current Organization plan was adopted in 2009 (with amendments in 2015). The plan aims at building federations along the following eight industrial lines: education, healthcare, commerce and services, manufacturing industry, transport, construction, culture/IT/media and municipal/government employees. The figure below summarizes the guidelines for industrial organization.

sitions of power — against workers who demand more influence in the public sector.

When there is strong pressure from the shop floors, both capitalists and the state can give in to demands for economic democracy. In rare cases, politicians even take initiatives to facilitate such democratization. But even in such a situation, the leaders of the state cannot introduce economic democracy. The “state socialist” notion that politics can save us through orders from above is superstition. It is to attribute to the state a creative capacity that it doesn’t have. It is to mystify the state.



## 48. Why are the state and political parties incapable of creating economic democracy?

Economic democracy is a project in the interest of the entire working class. Both workers in the narrow sense (i.e. blue-collar workers) and white-collar workers have everything to gain from a democratic transformation. In this sense, socialism is a class issue. It is a vision that is realized through class struggle. At the point of production of goods and services we can develop the ability and power to take over the management of our workplaces. No “labour governments” or political organizations outside parliaments can do it for us. We can do it through our economic fighting organizations, that is, through our trade unions.

If the state apparatus is run by left-wing politicians, then the struggle for economic democracy must probably be waged in conflict with such a left. All states have a strong tendency to fight the workers’ aspirations for influence. Many “labour governments” around the world have pushed back on worker demands for economic democracy. The methods range from legislation and repression to prisons and outright massacres.

It is not surprising that state policy favours the class that owns the corporations. Nor should it come as a surprise that red politicians and high-level bureaucrats defend their own po-

Sometimes the double structure of SAC is confused with the Social Democratic combination of political party and trade union, (S) and LO. This means mistaking our Locals, districts and SAC for being a political organization in contrast to a trade union organization (sections, industrial branches and federations). In actual fact, the whole organization is a trade union organization. The purpose of SAC is to participate in the class struggle with emphasis on the workplaces.

Another misconception is to regard the sections as bodies for only the short-term day-to-day struggle and our Locals as bodies for the long-term vision (economic democracy). In fact, the sections stand in the frontline of both tasks. The Swedish term for section is *driftsektion* (in English: operating section) because the vision is for all employees to take over the operation of workplaces. The role of our Locals is to support the sections, both in the short and long term. When an industrial branch is formed in a specific industry, the branch fulfils this role in that industry. The Local will co-organize industrial branches, which in turn coordinate the sections.

## 27. Is SAC a left-wing organization?

The historical attempts to build strong class organizations have been thwarted by battles between political factions in the workplace. Swedish unions have seen a century-long interference from Social Democratic and Communist parties as well as extra-parliamentary left-wing organizations. On the European continent trade unions have also been divided by religious conflicts.

Due to the collapse of “state socialism” (in both the East and West), new opportunities have opened up as regards building strong class organizations. But after a century of political factional strife, the very idea of a class organization has been forgotten. New attempts at class organizing must therefore dispel a number of misunderstandings.

A common mistake is to view all trade unions as political left-wing projects. Is SAC a left-wing organization? The short answer is no. The right-left scale is primarily a parliamentary scale while the trade union is an extra-parliamentary organization. The condition for becoming a member of SAC is not that you identify with the left or hold a set of leftist opinions.

SAC, of course, do organize workers who regard themselves as part of the left. There is, of course, an extra-parliamentary left. But it is misleading to describe SAC as a left-wing organization since SAC also accept as members workers who vote on centre-right parties and do not label themselves left-wing. It is also the case that SAC excludes all left-wing persons who are bosses or employers. Such is the *Central organization of*

## 47. What is libertarian socialism?

Soviet “state socialism” is lost to history. But the current “state socialism” of the Western world is also incompatible with democracy in the workplace. In parliamentary welfare states, high-level bureaucrats and their subordinate bosses control the workers in public production of goods and services.

Socialism excludes all bureaucratic classes that enrich themselves on our labour, classes that we have not elected and cannot control or recall. That is why syndicalists speak of *libertarian* socialism as opposed to *authoritarian* “socialism”. One can also capture the core of the vision with the expressions *economic democracy* or *workers’ self-management*.

Economic democracy is a necessary precondition for a classless society, but not a sufficient precondition for an equal society. An equal society means that the social hierarchies based on gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and functional variation are also abolished. It would bring equality in all types of work — including reproductive work in families and households.

Unfortunately, the term libertarian socialism has a vague meaning for a wider public. The term can also cause misunderstandings associated with the word socialism without adjectives. On the other hand, economic democracy can also appear vague. Regardless of the choice of words, the long-term vision of syndicalism needs to be concretized (see questions 50–55 below). But this is seldom necessary in everyday union organizing.

porters of the authoritarian factory model advocated by Frederick Taylor and practiced by Ford. The Soviet Union also developed an advanced form of state surveillance and terror. In Eastern Europe, a feudal and partly capitalist class society was replaced by a new class society.

If economic democracy were to be introduced, the question arises as to how the wealth produced should be distributed. Should distribution be handled according to need? Should one be rewarded for extra effort and sacrifice? Should everyone have a basic income? SAC has no reason to swear allegiance to a single principle. The important point is to determine distribution in democratic forms. Thus, principles can be voted on that a majority of the population perceives as fair.

Establishing economic democracy will have a huge impact on the climate and ecosystems. The SAC Declaration of principles, adopted in 2009, states: "Where capitalism is allowed to ravage freely, violence and destruction follow in its footsteps, as does ruthless exploitation of natural resources that threaten the human environment and living conditions worldwide." Economic democracy is a rescue operation for the ecosystems.

*workers in Sweden.* The organization is open to all workers and independent of the political left.

Our union is a force against the left when the left holds political power and act as public employer. We also challenge union representatives in left-wing clothing who sides with the employer side. We are also a force against the political right and centre when these camps hold political power and act as public employers. SAC is simply a union for all workers.

In the conflict between labour and capital, SAC organizes labour. Our union cannot be placed on a parliamentary right-left scale. SAC is at the bottom of a class scale, a vertical scale if you will. We organize ourselves down here, in the base of class society, against the rulers at the top.

The political establishment, from right to left, usually agree that the working population must be subjugated under the guardianship of one class or the other. Workers must submit to capitalists and business leaders or to public bureaucrats and their subordinate bosses. Leaders of the Swedish Social Democratic Party usually describe the trade union movement as a "left-wing force against the right". This reflects a view on unions as a supporting body for the leaders' own power aspirations.

Syndicalists insist on the need to build independent class organizations. Such organizations challenge both employers and politicians and improve the living conditions of all workers.

## 28. Does the left own a patent on economic democracy?

SAC's long-term vision is economic democracy. In Sweden today, the vision is often associated with the political left, but economic democracy is not something that the left own a patent on.

Large parts of the political left have traditionally been opposed to economic democracy, namely Social Democratic and Communist parties of an authoritarian type. Leaders of such parties have opposed worker-controlled companies. Instead, they have advocated that the economy should be controlled by bureaucrats (under "state socialism") or by capitalists (under welfare capitalism) or by trade union bureaucrats (according to authoritarian variants of wage earners funds). Among party grassroots, there have of course been opposition to the leaders' attitude.

From time to time during the history of the labour movement, economic democracy has appealed to broad sections of the population. In the United States, for example, the vision has been advocated by outspoken socialists as well as liberals and conservatives, by ardent atheists and deeply religious workers. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slogans against wage slavery were raised by both liberals in the New York Times and conservatives in the Republican Party

In Spain today, to name another example, many Catholics keep the vision of economic democracy alive through trade union organizing and the related phenomenon of producer co-operatives. This is done with reference to the Christian faith.

## 46. Does syndicalism promote socialism?

SAC is a class organization that wants to fully pursue the common interests of workers. We want to take power over our labour and over the riches we produce. Why settle for crumbs and a position as subjugated labour power? The long-term vision of syndicalism is democracy in the workplaces, economic democracy. The vision has already been touched on in Part 1 of the book (see question 22).

Economic democracy is the classic core of socialism. All consistent democrats reject dictatorship in the workplace and thus take a stand for socialism. However, the word socialism has become almost impossible to use. It has been pasted on extremely authoritarian societies. A warning example is the Soviet Union, where the state exercised both political and economic dictatorship. The Soviet Union called itself both "democratic" and "socialist", but it was the exact opposite of democracy and socialism.

In the Soviet Union, a political and bureaucratic class replaced the private capitalists. The state-owned enterprises were not the enterprises of the people or the workers other than on paper. Authoritarian principles that characterize capitalist corporations were applied to society as a whole. That is why syndicalists have sometimes referred to the Soviet Union as state capitalism.

The Soviet Union can also be described as a variant of Henry Ford's factory on an unusually large scale. The leaders of the Russian Bolshevik Party, Lenin and Trotsky, were staunch sup-

## Part 4. Economic democracy and federalism

However, there is no reason to isolate economic democracy in a religious or left-wing political camp. We syndicalists want to make the vision popular again.

Economic democracy is a project that has the potential to once again inspire and mobilize broad masses. The simple reason is that the project is in the interest of the whole working class.

Economic democracy means nothing less than employees seizing the power currently held by employers. Those who defend *dictatorship* in the workplace usually label economic democracy as “extremism” or an “extreme position”. But if one views democracy as perfectly reasonable, then the conclusion is, on the contrary, that those who advocate dictatorship are the extremists.

When we syndicalists demonstrate that we take democracy seriously, it is not always met with appreciation by employers and bigwigs in other unions. A standard method of counteracting syndicalists who organize at work is to claim that SAC is not even a trade union but a “political” or “extremist” left-wing organization. It’s an understandable tactic. There are ample opportunities to attract employees to a free fighting union, but it is difficult to recruit many members if SAC is mistaken for a political group only for those who identify as left-wing.

## 29. How are parties harmful to the trade union movement?

Political parties are harmful to trade union activity when they try to control it. In Sweden, the LO unions have a long tradition of acting as a supporting body and election machine for the Social Democratic Party, a state-supporting party. It is devastating to allow vote pandering and party bickering into the union. It is equally devastating for a trade union to have loyalty ties to a party, a state and a public employer.

When the leaders of the Social Democratic Party talk about supporting “the unions”, this means cooperating with the union bureaucracies that work against the union grassroots, rather than supporting the grassroots who build the movement.

When parties to the left of the Social Democrats talk about “radicalizing” the LO unions, it often means people with radical opinions getting appointed to local union boards, rather than building a movement from the shop floor. This is not only pointless but can be harmful. If the collective of employees elect a supposed “opposition” of “union innovators” as representatives, who then use the union for vote pandering and party propaganda, then the collective can lose all its motivation.

In the section, you can count on progress being followed by setbacks. A won position can always be lost. But your knowledge and ability to organize can actually increase almost indefinitely. If you evaluate the section’s efforts and experiments, then the failures too will develop your ability to organize; this lays the basis for greater progress. You can turn adversity into success as your pool of experience grows.

For syndicalists who often change jobs, starting a section may seem like a wasted investment. But each new experience of building sections makes it easier to plant sections in more workplaces. Those who start a section will hand over a valuable union to fellow members

for further development.

If a section becomes isolated from organizing drives at other workplaces, there is a risk of stagnation. We build industrial branches and meet in Locals and districts to inspire and help each other.

All sections benefit from documenting and exchanging experiences. When it is well known that the positions are pushed forward at a workplace, the chances of successful organizing increase at other workplaces too.

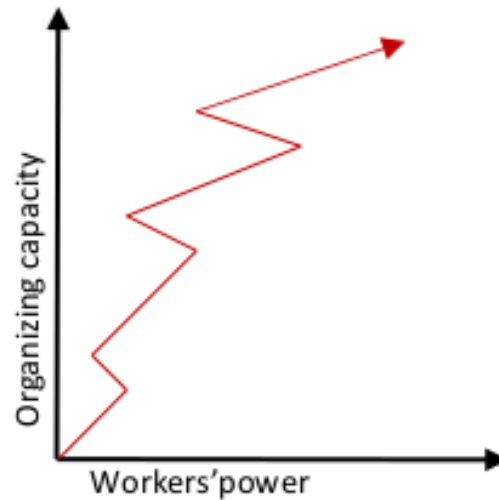
If a section chooses not to use media strategies in an ongoing labour struggle, it is still of great value to the entire SAC if the section announces its victory after the conflict.



### AN IDEAL DEVELOPMENT



### CLOSER TO REALITY



## 30. Can party promoters be SAC members?

Political organizations do best not to interfere in union organizing. All workers who identify with the left or the Social Democrats are of course welcome to join SAC, provided that they distinguish between union organizing and political organizing. The bylaws for all Locals of SAC emphasize this:

*“As the syndicalist movement as such principally refuse to engage in political party activities, the Local as an organization stand outside every political party. On the other hand, the Local does not have the right to prevent or prohibit a member from supporting or participating in political party activities outside the framework of the Local, unless it is of such a nature that it is contrary to the interests of the workers or is otherwise incompatible with the tasks of the Local.”*

Our union wants to be as inclusive as possible. But we cannot accept that a member uses our Locals or the workplaces as an arena for politics if the member thereby harms our union or the unity of the workforce in relation to employers. This of course applies to politics in general – from left to right – that harm union organizing. An example from the right wing is when members of the Swedish party Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) harass Muslims at work, and therefore cannot be members of our union.

### 31. When is extra-parliamentary politics problematic?

The trade union is an organization of and for workers — as opposed to a politics that is imposed on workers from outside or that divides the collective from within. It is perhaps obvious that party politics is harmful in the workplace. But it is important to understand that extra-parliamentary politics is problematic too, namely when the politics is *rigid*.

Union organizing grows from below, among us who work inside the workplaces. Parties as well as many extra-parliamentary political groups approach the workplaces from above or from the outside, with established policy programs. Their primary goal is for workers to believe, think and vote “the right way”. Workers’ own assessments, needs and competence become secondary. This kind of politics is arrogant and destructive. In short, the politics is rigid.

When a political line is imposed on a trade union, the worst outcome is a divided and resigned workforce. It does not matter if the policy is imposed by “labour parties”, centre-right parties, extra-parliamentary left-wing groups or other political currents. Another variant of rigid politics is when members of a union push their most dearly held issues through, regardless of whether it unites or divides employees. This way of conducting politics is also destructive.

Syndicalism stresses that union demands and methods must be shaped by the employees themselves in accordance with

### 45. What is a realistic development in the workplace?

The purpose of organizing is to strengthen the cohesion and influence of the workforce. An ideal development is a constant increase in workers’ power. But this is hardly realistic because the employer side will sooner or later try to divide the employees and regain lost power.

Be patient! Starting and developing a section is worth the effort. In fact, any shitty job can suddenly become fun or at least bearable when you get started. When you and your co-workers organize, you can stand up for your dignity, improve living conditions and, in the long run, change society. Your project is our joint project.

how they perceive their common interests and assess the tactics. Syndicalists discuss these common interests with their colleagues. The important thing is the process to reach a collective line of action, not some pre-established opinion programs. Either we gather around concrete union demands or we get nowhere.

Obviously, syndicalists *agitate*. This means we try to influence values and views in the workplace. We discuss and argue in order to push the general attitudes in the direction we consider desirable. But everyone must be prepared to reconcile different views. Everyone must respect the democratic majority decisions made by the collective concerned.

The starting point in a workplace can be a variety of needs, wishes and opinions. When these converge into collective action, that's what it means to organize — regardless of political and religious differences. That is independent class struggle. You can learn more about the steps that can be taken at work to develop a collective line of action in the book's Appendix 1 (the plan for a study group).

## 32. How does syndicalism relate to parliamentary politics?

SAC is an extra-parliamentary organization. This means that SAC does not interfere in how members vote in parliamentary elections. The extra-parliamentary stance should be distinguished from an anti-parliamentary strategy. The latter means discouraging people from participating in elections. SAC neither advocates nor advises against voting.

SAC is an extra-parliamentary organization, but not indifferent to parliamentary politics. Politics affects all workers, which is why we should also influence politics through trade union organizing.

The parliaments can be described as large bargaining table, where politics is shaped by the extra-parliamentary means of power held by the capital-owning class. The capitalist class exercise great bargaining power rooted in ownership, investments and lending. All societies depend on their investments. Therefore, capitalists can largely dictate the economic, social and political conditions for starting and expanding production. They can also decide to shut down or relocate production if the profit expectations are not met.

The class that own and control the economy also has a dominant influence over the state. The classical liberal and educator John Dewey (1859–1952) put it this way: “politics is the shadow cast on society by big business.” Of course, not all governments are identical, but the framework for policy making is ultimately

## 44. Which falsehoods are often spread about SAC?

You can count on representatives of the employer and other unions spreading incorrect images of SAC. You will probably hear that syndicalist sections have no right to collective bargaining. This war of words is part of the organizing process. Just take it easy! Simple falsehoods show that the sender lacks arguments. Just repeat: *see section 10 of the Swedish Co-determination Act (Medbestämmandelagen, MBL)*.

If there is a union that has recruited a majority of the staff, its tycoons may claim that they stand for “unity” while SAC is a “splitter”. The syndicalist answer is to promote, in word and deed, a cross-union community that includes more and more employees.

You will probably hear that SAC is not even a trade union but a “left-wing political” organization. Just repeat: *we are a union for all employees, not a political group only for leftists. We exclude bosses from membership, including those bosses who are left-wing.*

You may hear that syndicalists are “extremists”. Such is usually the response to taking democracy seriously. Syndicalists really want the people to rule. We take democracy extremely seriously — in the trade union, at work, in society — that is absolutely true. But syndicalism is really just common sense, because what is more natural than those affected by decisions also having the right to influence decisions? No sensible person is against democracy.

## 43. What kind of recruitment is successful?

The best recruitment is union activity and the personal conversation at work. Concrete examples of syndicalists transforming workplaces will make people take our ambition to change society seriously. Experience shows, however, that successful union action is not enough for a union to grow. On the contrary, the union can shrink while winning labour conflicts and negotiations. Therefore, the SAC membership needs to be “sold in”. This is conducted in the best way when union members step out of the comfort zone and speak for their union among colleagues.

The written material is important in recruitment and open meetings for interested colleagues as well. Language and jargon are crucial. Make sure to use everyday and inclusive language in all written material! Leave outdated and charged concepts in the museum of syndicalism but highlight the ideas themselves in an updated language. Avoid all odd expressions if there is no time and space to explain them.

Experiences from trade unions in Sweden and many other countries show that the personal conversation is absolutely crucial for successful recruitment. Agitation between four eyes is the key. Get help from fellow members in your Local of SAC to formulate answers to the most frequent questions from your colleagues.

dictated by the capitalists. Therefore, the best way for the population to influence politics is to challenge capital directly where it is formed, that is, in the workplaces. Inside corporations and the public sector, employees can build a popular counterforce.

tion. The better the communication, the better the chances of training and mobilizing the staff.

### 33. How can the working class influence political power?

A strong pressure from the shop floors can change politics to the advantage of the working class. This has occurred many times throughout history. The trade union movement is a decisive factor behind the development of tyrannical states into liberal and parliamentary states, characterized by the rule of law, and later on into welfare states as well.

In a pamphlet from 1939, the syndicalist Anders Ek describes welfare reforms as the capitalists' "insurance premiums" against socialism, as a response to rebellious workers (you can read about the term socialism in Part 4 of the book). The simple dynamic is that due to the threat from the working class the ruling classes have given up a small part of their power and wealth, in order not to lose everything.

"The costs that capitalism pays in the form of taxes to the state, due to the reforms, are simply 'insurance premiums' against socialism."

**Anders Ek (1891–1964), syndicalist and author**

The statutory rights that we enjoy in today's labour market is the result of collective battles that were first won in the workplaces and then left their mark in legislation. This includes, for example, a 40-hour working week, employment protection,

## 42. Why recruit “passive” members?

In the section, all members are important, from the most active to the least active. So-called passive members have chosen to be active in issues other than union issues. Passive members are an asset, not a burden. Active members may view passive members as a burden if the section has a skewed focus on client service. Sections should prioritize organizing and collective action over individual service. See Part 1 of the book regarding the trap of client service (question 14).

In the section, the proportion of active members can be expected to have its ups and downs. A consistently high proportion is less likely. Passive members can become active members. In any case, they contribute to union activity through their membership fee.

Money is the most important resource of sections next to the knowledge and non-paid commitment of members. Non-paid work also costs money: room rents, travel costs, workplace magazines, compensation for lost earnings when attending union courses, etc. The section can also benefit from paying organizers to pursue specific projects. If a section is not interested in strengthening its financial resources, then the level of ambition is probably unnecessarily low.

The more members the section has (both active and passive) the better. A large number of members makes it easier to communicate with the entire workforce through the section’s outward information material and internal member informa-

paid holidays, the right to organize in unions and bargain collectively. The collective strength in the workplaces is also the guarantee that our rights are upheld. When our strength is undermined, employers move their positions forward and shape legislation against the interests of the working class.

The struggle between labour and capital permeates state bodies and supranational regulatory bodies. Conflicts within the political establishment sometimes open up new opportunities for trade union influence. One example is the labour law reforms of the 1970s in Sweden. At the time, the Social Democratic Party tried to use legislation as a weapon against independent unions outside LO, TCO and Saco, against SAC amongst others. According to one of the proposals for a new co-determination act, the right to bargain would be significantly limited for SAC. At that time, two parties (Folkpartiet and Centerpartiet) opposed the proposal, due to major lobbying efforts from SAC.

“Laws and government may be considered (...) as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor”

**Adam Smith (1723–1790), philosopher and economist**

The overall purpose of trade union organizing is to shift the relations of power between labour and capital in favour of labour. This has a democratizing effect on the workplaces, on the political system and the social order as a whole.

However, syndicalism stresses that the state apparatus primarily is a state for the capitalists, not the workers. It is also a state of politicians and high-level bureaucrats, not a state of the people. As long as power in society is concentrated at the top

of the business world, state and supranational bodies, it simply means that the power of the broad masses of the people is severely limited.

In our workplaces, the state basically acts as the protector of employers. The state maintains the capitalist control over companies — ultimately through the monopoly on violence. In the public sector, the state of course maintains the bosses' control over employees as well. In short, it is a class state that enacts class laws. The courts function as class courts when they maintain the superior position of employers. That is why we should all organize in unions for a complete democratization and equal society.

## 41. Why recruit and activate?

A union with a growing membership has a future. A shrinking union does not have it in the long run. The knowledge and non-paid commitment of members are the most important resources of a union. Recruitment therefore needs to go hand in hand with educating and activating more members. A well-functioning section holds introductory meetings for new members and offers additional courses.

The section also benefits from conducting what syndicalists call *the second recruitment* or *internal recruitment*. It is about continuously informing members about union courses and conferences and encourage fellow members to apply for elected positions. A feminist trade union prioritises women in internal recruitment in order to achieve gender balance. Part 1 of the book also touched on the importance of women leaders to inspire more women to get involved in union work (see question 18).

The responsibility for internal recruitment may lie with a nomination committee or other elected representatives. Experience shows that personal contacts and tips are more important than mailings and advertisements in the member magazine. Union education and internal recruitment encourage more members to make use of their membership and stay in the union. However, a certain outflow of members is inevitable. Outward recruitment is needed for the inflow of members to be higher than the outflow.



section and at the same time strengthen the cohesion between employees regardless of union affiliation. A general advice is to be open to cooperation with other unions, but clear on the conditions: that the unions are directed by the staff on the shop floor.

Concrete union issues are always more important than promoting the section. But a section can be profiled and attract more members when the section pursues the issues. A responsive section reconciles a variety of wills among employees into a coherent line. This will become a popular message which can mobilize the workforce for joint action.

## **34. Why is international organizing needed?**

Workers in all countries have common interests against the capitalists, their state apparatuses and supranational bodies. Exploitation and underbidding competition in the labour market is a global phenomenon. Poor wages and working conditions in one country undermine the conditions in other countries. Workers therefore need to work together across national borders to defend and advance their positions. The actual need for cooperation varies greatly between different industries, but the need intensifies and includes more and more industries as the economy goes through globalization processes.

At the central level, many unions have amicable contacts across national borders. So does SAC. But the international coordination of struggle in the workplaces is often underdeveloped. Here we will only mention three different avenues that deserve to be explored. One is to organize within transnational corporate groups, i.e. to build some form of international unions or networks within a corporate group. Another avenue is industry-wide organization that encompasses companies in the Nordic countries, Europe and other continents.

A third avenue is to organize along international production chains. This means cross-industry organizing from raw material sources to end product and sales. The most relevant avenue varies between different parts of the economy. Each category of employees must examine and test what is feasible based on their situation.

## 35. What is meant by economic fighting organizations?

Syndicalists have always described the trade union movement as an *economic* movement and the trade union as an *economic* fighting organization. It is an economic organization in the sense that its base lies at the point of production and that members use their power as producers. A classic document for syndicalism is the so-called London Declaration, adopted in 1913 by trade unions from fifteen countries. The document comments on the economic fighting organizations as follows:

*“The congress concludes that these organisations only can become successful in their struggle when they cease to be divided by political and religious ideologies, and declare that the struggle is an economic struggle, which means that their goals cannot be attained by ceding their struggle to a government, but only through the workers’ use of direct action, trusting the strength of their economic organisations.”*

Being an economic organization, SAC stands in stark contrast to the political activities run by states and parties and also by many extra-parliamentary organizations (anarchist associations, Marxist associations, autonomous left-wing associations, etc.). The base of the economic organization lies, as stated, at

## 40. What is agitation?

A union in the workplace is not built by itself. It is built by members who agitate. We agitate to recruit members, strengthen cohesion among employees and set the workforce in motion. To agitate means we try to influence values and views in the workplace. We discuss and argue in order to push the general attitudes in the direction we consider desirable

To agitate does not mean standing on the coffee table and giving a fiery speech. Agitation is primarily about talking to co-workers about current issues in the workplace that concern you all. As is well known, half the conversation is about listening. See Appendix 1 of the book (the plan for a study group) about initiating forward-looking conversations rather than just complaining and calling for union representatives to solve problems.

You can ask your colleagues if they belong to a union and mention your SAC membership. If they show interest, give your best arguments for starting a syndicalist section. Gather those who want to build a section for a meeting at work or after working hours. Ask fellow members in your Local to lend a hand.

A syndicalist is first and foremost a good co-worker. If you show commitment to common interests, you can recruit colleagues and build a strong section with them. It is worth repeating: the first step in organizing does not have to be setting up a section. Colleagues can of course raise issues together in other forms.

However, as soon as a good opportunity arises, it is recommended to start a section. Then it is important to build the

the point of production. SAC welcomes all employees as members, even though not everyone holds the same opinions or views. SAC is building a union community, not a political club or church.

SAC differs from parties in that the goal is not to seize political power in the state apparatus. The long-term vision is for all workers to seize economic power in the workplaces.

## **Part 3. Recruit and activate members**

## 36. Is SAC an “apolitical” organization?

There are two labels that create serious misunderstandings when imposed on syndicalist unions, an old label and a newer one. The old label is the word “apolitical”. The newer one is the word “political”. To set the matter straight, extra clarity is required when presenting SAC.

SAC is an independent trade union. In older syndicalist texts, the union is sometimes described as an “apolitical” or “non-political” organization. This means that the union is independent in relation to the state and parties and other political organizations. The point is also that the condition for becoming a union member is not that you vote for a certain political camp or adhere to a package of opinions. In short: it is an economic fighting organization.

However, the very label “apolitical” must be considered outdated. The label is often perceived as suggesting that syndicalist unions are not committed to social change. Considering this, it is better to describe SAC as an independent union.

SAC is a community-oriented and visionary union. The purpose is to build a popular counterforce in relation to both the business world and the state. But there is a crucial difference between SAC and most political organizations. SAC is a community-oriented union but not a platform for just any issue that is held dear by this or that group of members. The issues we do pursue are carefully selected. The issues need to benefit organizing in the workplaces (or at least must not counteract organizing).

cannot pursue. Members of SAC are free to pursue these issues through other branches of the labour movement or through other social movements (tenants’ associations, consumer associations, village associations, etc.).

## 39. In summary, what distinguishes SAC from political organizations?

The crucial differences between SAC and most political organizations are as follows. SAC is an interest organization for sellers of labour power. All employees except bosses are welcome. The condition for becoming a union member is not that you swallow a package of political opinions. Nor are you expected to vote in a particular way in parliamentary elections. We organize ourselves on the basis of our position in production. SAC also welcomes those parts of the working class who are not wage earners.

When labour struggle through unions is brought to its peak, the door to democracy in the workplace and equal societies opens. That is the long-term vision of syndicalism. The realization of the vision requires extensive class solidarity across national borders.

Every member of SAC does not have to be a convinced supporter of the syndicalist vision but must have read the SAC Declaration of principles and respect that it is the vision of the union. The requirement for membership is that you follow democratic decisions in the union, act in solidarity at work and respect the union's independence from all religious and political organizations.

The union is superior as a class struggle organization, but it is not a universal solution to all social problems. There are, of course, a number of issues that the union shouldn't or even

Syndicalists pursue both union core issues (wages and working conditions) and other social issues. Some classic social issues that Swedish syndicalists have pursued are the right to contraception, antimilitarism and the fight against so-called AK Labour (a government labour market measure, in Swedish: *AK-arbete*). Contemporary examples are defence of the unemployment insurance funds, general welfare and the right to strike.

In SAC, our local self-determination is the starting point for both union core issues and other social issues. How do you select social issues that benefit workplace organizing? A guiding star is to build from below, that the rank-and-file choose the issues and that both the demands raised and methods used are anchored in the workplaces. If it proves feasible to organize the workforce around a certain social issue in a workplace, then the issue can be raised at the level of the industrial branch and Local and be tested in more workplaces. Thereafter, it may be appropriate to pursue the issue throughout industries and districts and even by SAC as a whole.

Workplace organizing can be supplemented with demonstrations in the streets and other actions of support. If class struggle is conducted in arenas other than the workplaces (neighbourhoods, urban centres, village centres, etc.), it is important that this struggle too is built locally and benefits workplace organizing or at least does not counteract it.

If the choice of social issues were to begin at the other end, at the central level of SAC, there is a risk that it will become a politics from above that divides the membership. Thus, the door would be opened to precisely the kind of politicization of the trade union movement that syndicalism opposes. It would be to imitate the Social Democratic Party's control of the LO unions.

The task of union representatives is to support the line pursued by the member base, not to guess which line the members wish to see. We syndicalists are proud of the local self-

determination in our union. It is a platform for down-to-earth class struggle.

anarchism, Marxism, contemporary research and new social movements. We don't let political blinders limit our production of knowledge. Syndicalism is still a broad popular movement, not an exclusive club for Marxist or anarchist disciples.

the 1840s. When the French CGT was formed, inspiration was drawn from British syndicalism and vice versa.

Syndicalism has simply grown out of the working class internationally since our class is international. Influences across national borders are significant, but a single “birthplace” or “founding father” is nowhere to be found.

Another problem with pointing out “founding fathers” is that you ignore the female pioneers of the labour movement. Even before Bakunin and Marx came into the spotlight, working class women agitated against wage slavery and advocated economic democracy. One example is women in the US textile industry in the 1840s. These became known as *The Mill Girls of Lowell*. They saw economic democracy as a continuation of the American Revolution and the idea of a republic of free and equal people.

“When you sell your product, you retain your person. But when you sell your labour, you sell yourself, losing the rights of free men and becoming vassals of mammoth establishments of a monied aristocracy that threatens annihilation to anyone who questions their right to enslave and oppress.

Those who work in the mills ought to own them, not have the status of machines ruled by private despots who are entrenching monarchic principles on democratic soil as they drive downwards freedom and rights, civilization, health, morals and intellectuality in the new commercial feudalism.”

**Wage slavery according to *The Mill Girls of Lowell*, Massachusetts. Pioneers in the US trade union movement in the 1840s.**

Syndicalism has always been an inquisitive popular movement. It is a proletarian and intellectual movement. We draw influences from, for example, classical liberalism, guild socialism,

## 37. Is SAC a “political” organization?

Nowadays, syndicalist unions are rarely called “apolitical” organizations. Instead, it happens that they are labelled “political” organizations. This also creates misunderstandings.

SAC is a union that is politically independent. The aim is to unite workers as a class, not to unite the political left (or right or centre). Local units of SAC pursue common interests of workers, starting from the point of production. Union representatives within LO usually pursue the party line of the Social Democrats, regardless of whether the party line is supported by the workers or not. Representatives of TCO are usually loyal to the party line too. SAC does not pursue any line that is not rooted with the rank-and-file in the workplaces.

A common way to cause misunderstandings about the purpose of the class organization is to describe SAC as a “political” organization. Workers may support rivalling parties and political groups that cannot be united. The task of SAC is to unite workers independently of such groups. This is also exactly what syndicalists succeed in doing when we build a strong collective of co-workers

The labour struggles of SAC include carefully chosen social issues. SAC has a long-term vision of democracy in the workplaces and an equal society. However, there is no reason to label this the “politics” of SAC when one can talk about labour struggles, social issues and a long-term vision. SAC wants to fully pursue the common interests of workers, to push labour struggle to its peak. This is, in short, syndicalism.

It is certainly true that no one owns the word “politics”. You can choose to define the word in such a way that “everything is politics”. Then SAC and all other organizations can be said to be “political” organizations. But then there is also a risk of obscuring the idea of the class organization. If SAC is presented as a “political” organization, then our union is easily mistaken for being a party or a political faction among other factions. The union is suitably described as politically independent.

Feminism has popularized the expression “the personal is political”. The expression points to an important observation: that the private sphere and the unpaid reproductive work is an issue of general concern in our society. It is an arena of struggle against social hierarchies. As a feminist trade union, SAC agrees with the observation and welcomes such a struggle for equality, not least with regards to reproductive work.

A synonymous way of talking about the matter could be to say that the personal is a social issue of general concern. In any case, there is a connection between reproductive work and the labour market (between reproduction and production). Increased equality in reproductive work also promotes women’s conditions as employees. It also facilitates women’s participation in union organizing. SAC conducts feminist struggle through union organizing.

While the terms labour struggle and union struggle are quite unambiguous, the word “politics” can be interpreted in a variety of different and contradictory ways. If the labour struggles of SAC are presented as “politics”, then the word needs a clear definition, otherwise the idea and purpose of syndicalism risk being misunderstood. The simple alternative is, in short, to talk about *labour struggle*. A word for workers’ struggles in a broader sense is simply *class struggle*. Syndicalists conduct organizing from below rather than politics from above.

## 38. Is SAC an anarchist or a Marxist club?

A recurring misconception is that syndicalism was invented by some prophet or by a clique of socialist preachers (anarchists, Marxists or some other school of thought). In actual fact, syndicalism has emerged from the working class in a variety of countries.

Several attempts have been made to trace the “founding father” of syndicalism to one of the prominent figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the candidates, usually proposed, are the anarchists Michail Bakunin and Fernand Pelloutier and sometimes even Karl Marx. The search for a “founding father” rests on the prejudice that the working class cannot think for itself or create something independently.

The supposed “founding fathers” were, in fact, skilled samplers (to borrow a modern English term). They mingled with workers and put their organizational forms and ideas in print. These samplers also added new analyses and proposals, but syndicalism has never been loyal to any single author or agitator. We pick and choose. We do not worship authorities.

France has often been singled out as the “birthplace” of syndicalism. Focus is put on the French trade union CGT, which was formed in 1895. Sometimes the slightly bizarre French philosopher Georges Sorel has also been claimed to be the “father” of syndicalism. In any case, a full-fledged syndicalist movement already existed in Spain in the 1870s. Predecessors existed in the 1830s in England and in the United States in



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The hope for a future of economic democracy and equal societies lies in organizing through base democratic unions. This hope can be fulfilled if the working class overcomes the divisions that run along political, religious and national lines.

Economic democracy is not just an attractive vision to strive for. It is also a project to avoid the risks of social and ecological disasters. If a social order is approaching collapse, we need democratic popular movements that are ripe to take over. Otherwise, we risk authoritarian forces seizing state power: fascists, religious fanatics, bolsheviks, etc. The popular movements must be built. They do not arise by themselves.

Rasmus Hästbacka  
Swedish syndicalism  
An outline of its ideology and practice  
2021

Retrieved, october 25 from The Umeå Local of SAC  
A simple layout of a forthcoming book. It will be published in printed form, as an ebook and audio book, both in English and Swedish, by SAC's publishing house. A print-friendly PDF can already be downloaded here. The ebook and audio book will be available free of charge on the same site.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**

## 56. Is syndicalism radical or revolutionary?

To take a stand for economic democracy in a situation of employer dictatorship is to express a radical opinion. To build operating sections and cross-union cooperation that actually democratizes the workplaces is to develop a radical activity. Labelling oneself a “radical” or “democrat” is of little interest. The point is to build a trade union movement that changes workplaces and in the long run changes society as a whole.

Economic democracy on a broad front would mean a fundamental transformation of society. In that sense, the long-term vision of syndicalism is revolutionary. The Swedish word syndicalism is derived from the French term *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*. The whole term, directly translated, means revolutionary trade union movement.

However, it should be emphasized that trade unions are not really revolutionary. It is the global working class that has the potential to become revolutionary, to play a revolutionary role. The class is revolutionary when it has developed a capacity to carry out revolution. The workers are the actor. The union is the workers’ resource and tool.

“Power today resides in control of the means of production, exchange, publicity, transportation and communication. Whoever owns them rules the life of the country”

**John Dewey (1859–1952), classical liberal and educator**

The revolutionary potential of the working class is based on its strategic position in the production of goods and services. This position allows workers to develop the capacity to establish economic democracy. The workers are the only social class that can develop such a capacity and thus carry out a revolution worthy of the name. It is also the part of the population that has the most to gain from revolution.

The word revolution is unfortunately very loaded. It is associated with political revolutions imposed on the population through state power. This includes coups, terror and blood baths. Syndicalists have always strived for an economic and social revolution, a transformation from below.

It inevitably creates misunderstandings to describe syndicalism as revolutionary. The aspirations of SAC need to be described in a contemporary and more comprehensible language. A number of wordings have already been suggested in this book. Instead of revolution, one can speak of a social transformation, a democratic transformation or complete democratization. SAC can be described as a visionary union.

The word revolution is loaded for two more reasons. First, revolution is often perceived as the opposite of reforms in the sense that one must choose *either or*. Syndicalists have, of course, always advocated *both* reform *and* revolution. Small improvements in living conditions make greater progress possible.

Secondly, revolution is often interpreted as a social “turning of a pancake”, i.e. as one *single* and *rapid* social transformation. This excludes the scenario that democratization can proceed in several steps and at different speeds in different parts of the economy. Therefore, some syndicalists prefer to talk about social *evolution* rather than revolution.

It deserves to be repeated: it is *the working class* that can carry out a democratic transformation *through* its trade unions. No self-proclaimed revolutionaries can do it for the workers,

nor can SAC do it. However, SAC emphasizes that the best tools of the working class are unions of a syndicalist nature.

## 57. What is reformism, class collaboration and corporatism?

Syndicalists advocate reforms but criticize *reformism* in its actual practice. In the latter case, we refer to how the leadership of trade unions and “labour parties” manage the system they claim to be against. The leaders manage class society in agreement with employers and the state. A consensus is created above the head of the working class. Proponents call it “social responsibility” (in Swedish: *samhällsansvar*). We call it class collaboration.

Reformism and class collaboration hinder systemic change. A far-reaching reformism also hinders reforms within the capitalist system. In the worst case, reformist leaders administer a deterioration of working class living conditions and aggravate class society. Against reformism and class collaboration, syndicalists raise independent class struggle. Class struggle opens the door to new reforms. This is social responsibility worthy of the name. We syndicalists take responsibility for a better society.

“They [syndicalists] have revived the quest for liberty, which was growing somewhat dimmed under the regime of Parliamentary Socialism, and they have reminded men that what our modern society needs is not a little tinkering here and there, nor the kind of minor readjustments to which the existing holders of power may readily

consent, but a fundamental reconstruction, a sweeping away of all the sources of oppression, a liberation of men's constructive energies, and a wholly new way of conceiving and regulating production and economic relations. This merit is so great that, in view of it, all minor defects become insignificant."

**Bertrand Russel (1872–1970), philosopher, educator and Nobel laureate**

When the state merges with business leaders and trade unions, it is usually referred to as *corporatism*. The most extreme variant was the corporatism in Italian Fascism. There, trade unions were expected to submit to a political dictatorship and allow themselves to be led by the employers (and thus cease to be trade unions). Similar to the Soviet Union, the Fascist state applied authoritarian principles, which characterize capitalist corporations, to society as a whole. But private property was retained in Italy. The capital-owning class was not replaced by state bureaucrats.

Corporatism in parliamentary states combines political democracy with economic dictatorship. The trade unions are still intended to be a counterpart to political power and private business. However, union independence is jeopardized when union leaders seek a close consensus with the state and business world. This is the case with Swedish LO, TCO and Saco. That is why SAC emerged as a free fighting union just over a century ago. SAC is and remains a counterforce to corporatism and class collaboration.

The fact that syndicalists reject class collaboration does not mean (of course) that we reject all forms of cooperation between employees and employers. These parties cannot opt out of cooperation within the framework of class society. They have to cooperate to some extent, if only to produce wealth to quarrel about. Syndicalists are waging class struggle to

change the *conditions* for cooperation. That is the purpose in the short term. In the long run, we want to abolish the employers' domination and exploitation altogether.

What we oppose is top-down consensus, that unions seek consensus with employers above the heads of employees. Such strategies lead to union representatives being integrated with the employer side. This is a dead end and is usually followed by unions retreating (see the illustration of this trap in Appendix 2 of the book). Class struggle from the shop floor opens new paths forward.

## **58. What is the position of SAC on privatization, cooperatives and political decentralization?**

When syndicalists advocate community-owned companies, we are not urging the current state apparatus to seize all companies. SAC does not pursue a general line against (or for) privatizations. Nor does SAC operate any producer cooperative experiments within the framework of prevailing capitalism. Through our union, employees can increase their influence in all companies and in all tax-financed workplaces. There we can democratize the economy.

A complicated question, within current class society, is whether one should work for a formal decentralization of political power in certain cases, for example from the state to municipalities, or conversely for a centralization in certain cases. Such issues are not on the current agenda of SAC.

SAC emphasizes another shift in power. By organizing in the workplaces, we develop a counterforce in relation to the holders of power in both the public and private sectors. This is how popular power grows. This is real democracy built from the bottom up.



since 2001, arranging ideology seminars, initiating debates in *Syndikalisten* and *Arbetaren*, by participating in an on-line forum (administered by the Göteborgs Local of SAC and the bookstore Syndikalistiskt forum) and then on the email list *SAC-utveckling* together with more than 100 active syndicalists.

The first drafts of this book were presented on the mentioned email list in 2015. Responses to drafts were later obtained in SAC's online discussion forum. The email list has been terminated in favour of the discussion forum.

## 59. What exactly is a labour movement?

Syndicalism is an independent labour movement. There are many stakeholders who claim to represent some branch of the labour movement. These include representatives of bureaucracies in parties and trade unions, in the Swedish Hyresgästföreningen (an association of tenants) and Folkets hus (user-controlled communal houses), in the state apparatus and its municipalities. One might question whether they represent a labour movement, if the term labour movement means *labourers in movement* in workplaces or other arenas of class struggle.

Successful class struggle builds a larger and broader movement. This is how workers in all countries can conquer worthy living conditions. The movement opens up a historic opportunity to transcend capitalism and build equal societies around the world.

While we organize for daily demands, we need to strengthen the hope that another world is possible. The notion that there is no alternative to capitalism is the best friend of those in power because it creates an obedient population. Massive agitation for economic democracy and federalism is needed that appeals to broad masses of the people.

An inspiring vision makes it easier to choose appropriate strategies and evaluate whether we are moving forward or not. Visions of a better future can spur us on through union victories, setbacks and new attempts to organize. In the long run, we want to displace capitalism and all oppressive social hierar-

chies and put it all in museums where it belongs, next to the bronze axe and the spinning wheel. Our vision is nothing less than a world of free and equal people.

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Westbrook, Robert (1991). *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. The quotes from John Dewey in this book can be found in Westbrook's book on pages 442, 440 and 453.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins (1998). *The retreat from class: a new "true" socialism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso. The book provides a perspective on the strategic position of workers in production.

*Writings on the register method of Swedish trade unions and evolutionary syndicalism:*

- Falk, Kristian (1997). *Från registermetod till producentkooperation: ideologiska perspektiv inom svensk syndikalism 1922–1952*. Lic.avh. Stockholm Univ.: Ekonomisk-historiska institutionen.
- Falk, Kristian (2012). "Registret i retorik och realitet" i *Ett sekel av syndikalism. Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation 1910–2010*. Stockholm: Federativ, pages 181–190.
- Sjöö, Ingemar (2011). *Fackliga fribrytare. Episoder från hundra år av svensk syndikalism*. [2., uppdaterade uppl.] Stockholm: Federativ. See chapter VII.

## Other sources

As this book is an attempt to capture majority views among active syndicalists, the author has also read a large number of articles in *Syndikalist* and *Arbetaren* and furthermore SAC congressional minutes, especially from 2002 onwards, as well as SAC's educational material (see: [www.sac.se/user/login](http://www.sac.se/user/login)).

The author has also tried to act as a sampler of contemporary syndicalism by participating in SAC union conferences

- Pannekoek, Anton (2003). *Workers' councils. Introduction by Noam Chomsky*. Oakland: AK Press. The book can be found as a PDF file here: [libcom.org](http://libcom.org). Pannekoek was one of the foremost educators within council communism.
- Pateman, Carole. (1975). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press. The political scientist Pateman is inspired by syndicalism, guild socialism and the liberal John Stuart Mill.
- Persson, Lennart K. (1993). *Syndikalismen i Sverige 1903–1922*. [Ny utg.] Stockholm: Federativ. See in particular Chapter VIII.
- Rocker, Rudolf (1920). “The Soviet System or the Dictatorship of the Proletariat?” originally published in Yiddish in the journal *Fraye Arbayter Shdme*. In English here: [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org). About workers’ councils, how the idea arose in the First International and was passed on by, among others, syndicalists. The Russian term for council is “soviet” but the so-called Soviet Union was actually an anti-soviet union.
- Russell, Bertrand (2018). *Proposed roads to freedom. Reading Classics*. Franklin Classic Trade Press. Originally published in 1918. The quote on syndicalism in this book is taken from Russel’s book.
- Schechter, Darrow (1994). *Radical theories: paths beyond Marxism and social democracy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. A critique of authoritarian Marxism and Leninism. The book deals with syndicalism, anarchism, guild socialism, council communism, market socialism and green post-industrial socialism.
- Severin, Frans (1924). Excerpt from Severin’s book *Är syndikalismens statsfientlig?* in the anthology *Sabotage* (2006) which is edited by Rikard Warlenius. Stockholm: Federativ, pages 144–218. About syndicalism’s relation to modern nation-states.

## Appendices

# Appendix 1: Plan for a study group

## Purpose

Below is a proposed plan for a study group based on the contents of the book. A reasonable number of participants is at least three and a maximum about eight people in a typical study group. The participation has two purposes: to get a good grasp of the ideas of syndicalism and to help each other get started with workplace organizing. Participants can benefit from the study group in two different ways. One way is to attend meetings and prepare for upcoming organizing efforts. The other way is to test the methods immediately i.e. to alternate the meetings with practical experiments at your workplaces. Participants simply decide this among themselves.

## Meeting format

The plan includes four meetings. Each meeting has a theme that focuses on some aspect of workplace organizing. A set of questions are dealt with in free discussions or discussion rounds. Rounds mean that one person at a time may comment on a certain question. Below you find the prepared questions for each meeting. These questions link discussions to the participants' workplaces.

At the first meeting, everyone introduces themselves. A study group leader is appointed no later than at this first meeting. The leader ensures that everyone is given space

Doyle interviews Chomsky. Available here: [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

Eriksson, Jan (red.) (1971). *Syndikalistisk syn på ekonomisk demokrati: en skiss*. Stockholm: Federativ. The book can be found as a PDF file here: [www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)

Gröndahl, Britta (red.) (2006). "En ny värld i våra hjärtan". *Här talar syndikalisterna*. Gävle: Federativ. The quote by Rudolf Rocker in this book can be found in Gröndahl's book in the section "Syndikalismens metoder" (The methods of syndicalism).

Hahnel, Robin (2012). *Of the people, by the people. The case for a participatory economy*. Oakland: Soapbox Press. A short and accessible presentation of participatory economy.

Hahnel, Robin (2021). *Democratic economic planning*. Abingdon: Routledge. The author addresses the problems of large-scale planning and long-term social investments.

Hedin, Bengt (1969). *Federalismen — i en socialistisk ekonomi*. Stockholm: Stockholm LS. A short pamphlet originally published in 1939 by Federativ. Available as a PDF file here: [www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)

Hästbacka, Rasmus (2020). "En annan värld är löjlig?" in *Arbetaren, online edition*:

[www.arbetaren.se/2020/07/08/en-annan-varld-ar-lojlig/](http://www.arbetaren.se/2020/07/08/en-annan-varld-ar-lojlig/)

Le Guin, Ursula K. (1994). *The dispossessed: an ambiguous Utopia*. New York: Harper Prism. A science fiction novel about attempts to build free and equal societies.

Lorenzo, César M. (1972). *Syndikalismen vid makten. Spansk anarkosyndikalism före, under och efter inbördeskriget 1936–39*. Stockholm: Federativ. A biased inquiry that can be read together with other polemical writings, for example the pamphlet by Friends of Durruti (1978), *Towards a fresh revolution*. As a PDF file here: [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

Lund, Arwid (2001). *Albert Jensen och revolutionen: syndikalismens revolutionära idéer 1900–1950*. Stockholm: Federativ.

## 4. Economic democracy and federalism

See SAC's website ([www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)) to read the 1922 Declaration of principles and the current documents. See also the interpretation of the 1922 Declaration of principles.

Ackelsberg, Martha A. (2005). *Free women of Spain: Anarchism and the struggle for the emancipation of women*. Oakland: AK Press. The book can be found as a PDF file here: [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

Albert, Michael (2004). *Parecon: livet efter kapitalismen*. Stockholm: Ordfront. The word "parecon" is an abbreviation of the English term "participatory economics". See also: [participatoryeconomy.org/](http://participatoryeconomy.org/)

Albert, Michael (2021). *No bosses: a new economy for a better world*. Washington: Zero Books.

Andersson, John (1952). *Internationalerna*. Stockholm: Federativ. The quote from the First International in this book, originally from a book by the feminist Flora Tristan (1803–1844), can be found in Andersson's book on page 5. See also Tristan's book below.

Castoriadis, Cornelius (1972). *Workers' councils and the economics of a self-managed society*. London: Solidarity Group. The book can be found as a PDF file here: [libcom.org/](http://libcom.org/)

Chomsky, Noam (1989). *What was Leninism?* An excerpt from a lecture, filmed in Wisconsin, USA: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). About anti-socialist "state socialism".

Doyle, Kevin & Chomsky, Noam (1995). "Anarchism, Marxism & hope for the future" in *Red & Black Revolution* issue 2.

to speak and that the set of questions is dealt with within a certain time frame. A reasonable time frame is one and a half hours per meeting. The leader's task is also to remind all participants of upcoming meetings (for example via cell phone messaging or by email).

It is always best to hold physical meetings, but meetings can also be arranged via the SAC online forum or a tool for video meetings ([www.sac.se/user/login](http://www.sac.se/user/login)). Contact fellow members in your Local (LS) of SAC to find a format that suits your group. At the meetings, one thing deserves to be repeated: there are no stupid questions!

### MEETING 1. *From division to unity at work*

#### Preparatory reading: the Key terms, Introduction and Part 1 of this book.

Initial questions: Has the text triggered new thoughts or questions? Is the text's picture of reality and advice reasonable?

The rest of the meeting is devoted to participants analysing their workplaces in order to start trade union conversations with co-workers.

1. A common obstacle to labour struggle is that the workforce is divided. In the worst case, employees quarrel with each other and are loyal to the management. What divisions exist at your workplace?
2. Many workplaces have a mix of good and bad conditions. What is the best and worst thing at your workplace? How is discontent within the workforce usually expressed?
3. Take a blank piece of paper and draw a map of your workplace. Mark out places where co-workers can talk to each

other without being interrupted by bosses. Which colleagues should you start talking to? That is, which colleagues want to change the workplace and not just complain or hope that trade union representatives will solve the problems? Write down the initials of these persons on the map.

4. Which times are best suited for union conversations? Do you need to meet after working hours? Do you need an internet forum? Try to arrange regular cross-union meetings that grow, i.e. meetings that more and more employees attend regardless of union affiliation. Feel free to invite informal leaders of the workplace, meaning employees who gets things done and are respected among colleagues. The harsh reality is that many employers put a lot of energy into identifying informal leaders to make them loyal to management. These colleagues are, on the contrary, needed in union organizing.
5. Start union conversations at work and tell us about it at the next study group meeting! Also reflect on whether you want to recruit colleagues and start a syndicalist section or start off by pursuing union issues and forming a section later. One possibility is to do both at the same time.

## **MEETING 2. *From union demands to methods***

**Preparatory reading: Part 2 and 3 of this book. Feel free to re-read about methods in part 1 (questions 9 and 10).**

Initial questions: Has the text triggered new thoughts or questions? Is the text's picture of reality and advice reasonable?

## **3. Recruit and activate members**

See the material in SAC's plan for study groups entitled "Bli en arbetsplatsorganisatör!" ("Become a workplace organizer!, Swedish abbreviation: APO-cirkeln). Retrieve this from your Local of SAC or by logging in to the SAC website ([www.sac.se/user/login](http://www.sac.se/user/login)).

Hill, Niklas & Sjöström Hederberg, Angeli (2014). *Medlemsmodellen: rekrytera, aktivera och behålla medlemmar*. 3. uppl. Stockholm: Trinambai.

Hästbacka, Rasmus (2021). "Att bygga fler LS inget självändamål" in *Arbetaren, online edition*:

[www.arbetaren.se](http://www.arbetaren.se)

Debate on the future of SAC with links to previous articles by Toivo Jokkala and Gabriel Kuhn.

Bewernitz, Torsten & Kuhn, Gabriel. "Syndicalism for the Twenty-First Century: From Unionism to Class-Struggle Militancy" on the website *Counterpunch*:

[www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org). Related to the debate on the future of SAC above.

Hästbacka, Rasmus (2021). "Greetings from Sweden: A dual-track syndicalism?" on the *ASR* website: [syndicalist.us](http://syndicalist.us).

Related to the debate above.

www.arbetaren.se. A review of Malm, Andreas (2020). *Corona, climate, chronic emergency: war communism in the twenty-first century*. Brooklyn: Verso Book.

Tuuloskorpi, Frances (2011). "Vi behöver inte upprop, vi behöver nedrop!" in *Brand issue 2/2011* and available here: [tidningenbrand.se/](http://tidningenbrand.se/). About conflicts between class organizing and the political left.

Wright, Erik Olin (2012). "Att förstå klass" in Wennerhag, Magnus m.fl. (red.) *Fronesis issue 40–41 Klass*. Stockholm: Fronesis. A leading Marxist sociologist and researcher writing on social class.

The rest of the meeting is devoted to finding a concrete trade union issue, a common concern, for your workplace plus appropriate methods to exercise influence.

1. As syndicalists, we focus on union core issues: working conditions, wages and influence at the workplace. Which issues engage you and your co-workers? In what issue are the chances of exercising influence the greatest in the short term? Which union demands can unite employees? The workplace is an arena for everything from feminist struggle to LGBTQ issues and antifascism. Which issues are pursued by other trade unions at your job? Are important issues ignored?
2. Which methods of influence can be appropriate, that is, which forms of pressure on management are both effective and likely that many employees want to take part in? What support do you need from your Local? Is there a social issue (in addition to the union core issues) around which the staff can be organized?
3. Is the staff (or part of the staff) ready to act together for a common demand? How can your collective action be organized? Do you have a cross-union group that can take the initiative? Can a syndicalist section do it? If a section is ready, how do you involve colleagues who are not members of the section? Can the section cooperate with other trade unions or is it better to act independently of them?

If you and your co-workers are ready to act collectively, tell us at the next study group meeting how it went! Or are you not ready? Continue the conversation at work and involve more colleagues. If it takes time to build a community and a readiness for action, be patient and keep striving for it.

### MEETING 3. *Results and conclusions from the workplaces*

**Preparation for the meeting:** write down your experiences of starting union conversations with your colleagues! If you have begun to organize through a cross-union group or a section, write it down! A few notes on a piece of paper will suffice. If you do not have such experience yet, then read about an example of a union struggle from other workplaces. See the reading tips in this book or ask the study group leader for reading tips!

The meeting is devoted to participants evaluating the organizing efforts at their own workplaces or learning from examples from other workplaces.

1. Do you have regular union conversations with your colleagues? Is there a growing cross-union group?
2. Have you found a common issue to pursue and suitable forms of pressure? Is there a section at the workplace or is there an interest in building a section?
3. Have you acted collectively? If so, what was the result? What did you do well? What can be done better in the future?
4. If you have not yet initiated workplace organizing or union conversations, tell us briefly about a labour struggle that you have read about! Highlight methods, results and lessons learned!

- Garneau, Marianne & Lee, MK (2020). "The leftwing deadbeat" on the website: *organizing.work*
- Hästbacka, Rasmus (2020). "Gör ekonomisk demokrati folkligt igen!" in *Arbetaren, online edition*: [www.arbetaren.se/2020/05/29/gor-ekonomisk-demokrati-folkligt-igen/](http://www.arbetaren.se/2020/05/29/gor-ekonomisk-demokrati-folkligt-igen/)
- Lagerström, Sven (1996). *Syndikalismen: en grundbok*. 3.uppl. Stockholm: Federativ.
- Lindberg, Ingemar & Neergard, Anders (red.) (2013). *Bortom horisonten: fackets vägval i globaliseringens tid*. Stockholm: Premiss. Contains both case studies and theoretical reflections.
- Lundh, Christer (2008). *Arbetsmarknadens karteller: nya perspektiv på det svenska kollektivavtalets historia*. Stockholm: Norstedts akademiska förlag. The author describes trade unions as a force against underbidding competition.
- Montgomery, David (1987). *The fall of the house of labor: the workplace, the state and American labor activism, 1865–1925*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press. The book illuminates, among other things, the popular support for economic democracy.
- Pack, Spencer J. (1991). *Capitalism as a moral system. Adam Smith's critique of the free market economy*. Aldershot: Edward Elgar. The quote by Adam Smith in this book can be found in Spencer's book on page 129.
- Price, Wayne (2015). "Murray Bookchin: Anarchism without the working class" on the website: [www.anarkismo.net](http://www.anarkismo.net). A critical examination of the eco-anarchist Bookchin.
- Price, Wayne (2018). "An anarchist view of the class theory of the state" on the website: [blackrosefed.org](http://blackrosefed.org)
- Svärd, Per-Anders (2020). "En grön Lenin?" in *Arbetaren, online edition*:



second paragraph of the article, which is available here: [dwardmac.pitzer.edu](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu)

Bantman, Constance & Berry, Dave (red.) (2010). *New perspectives on anarchism, labour and syndicalism. The individual, the national and the transnational*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. The book can be found as a PDF file here: [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

Bogdanska, Daria (2016). *Wage slaves*. Stockholm: Galago. A graphic novel.

Casparsson, Ragnar m.fl. (1923). *Vad är och vad vill syndikalismen?* Stockholm: Federativ. Three introductory texts that are still relevant. The book can be found as a PDF file here: [www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)

Chomsky, Noam (2017). *Requiem for the American Dream*. New York: Seven Stories Press. The quote from *The Mill Girls of Lowell* in this book can be found in Chomsky's book on page 121. Originally taken from their publication *Factory Tracts* in 1845.

Dahlgren, Edvin (2018). "Val 2018: Bygg facket och erövra städerna!" in *Arbetaren, online edition*: [www.arbetaren.se/2018/09/07/val-2018-bygg-facket-och-erovra-staderna/](http://www.arbetaren.se/2018/09/07/val-2018-bygg-facket-och-erovra-staderna/).

An essay about what has been called *rörelsesocialism* in Swedish (movement socialism), with a focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Dahlkvist, Mats (1999). "Den instängda demokratin. Rörelsesocialism och statsocialism i svensk arbetarrörelse" in *SOU* (1999:112), pages 7–68. This article is available here: [www.regeringen.se/](http://www.regeringen.se/)

Ek, Anders (2000). *Arbetarklassens kampproblem. Syndikalism – reformism*. Ny utg. Göteborg: Nisse Lätts minnesfond. The quote by Anders Ek in this book can be found in Ek's book on page 15.

Furuland, Lars (red.) (1999). *Arbetarförfattarna och syndikalismen*. Stockholm: Federativ.

## MEETING 4. *From daily demands to economic democracy*

**Preparatory reading: Part 4 of this book and the afterword. Feel free to re-read about the dual task (see question 22).**

Initial questions: Has the text triggered new thoughts or questions? Is the text's picture of reality and advice reasonable?

The rest of the meeting is devoted to the participants' organizing efforts, either on-going organizing or various initiatives that participants may take. At the meeting, we also raise our eyes to our long-term vision: to democratize the workplaces and thereby build a future equal society.

1. In which issues do you and your co-workers have little or no influence? In which issues, if any, do you have a great deal of influence? Workplace issues can be categorized as follows:

- Wages and terms of employment
- The pace and content of the work
- Personal development in the labour process
- Work environment (physical and social/organizational)
- Choice of technical equipment
- Management of the labour process and distribution of tasks
- New appointments and dismissals
- Investments and overall decisions about the business at large

2. Which steps can be taken to conquer more power? What is required for the workforce to succeed in enforcing collective demands? A stronger cross-union community? Better methods of influence? A larger section? More support from your Local?
3. When we build collective strength in the workplace, how can that strength be used to change society at large? Which social issues should a union movement prioritize? Which alliances can our trade union build with other actors in the class struggle?

## End of the study period

The study plan ends at the fourth meeting with an evaluation of the whole period. Everyone gives their opinions in a discussion round. The study leader writes a short report to the board of your Local, preferably together with a group photo. The leader gives the participants tips on upcoming courses. Information about available courses is obtained in the Local from those responsible for education matters. A fitting continuation of union education can be that everyone who has participated in the group registers for the same course.

### **Don't forget member meetings in your Local!**

The four themes (described above) are also suitable for regular member meetings in the Locals of SAC. They are suitable at least in those Locals where many members lack sections. A possible plan for one year is to deal with four themes at four meetings during spring and repeat the themes during autumn. New experiments at the workplaces mean that these themes are never exhausted.

Likewise, the set of questions (listed above) can be used at regular meetings. This of course presupposes that the prioritized item on the agenda is the participants' workplaces. Instead of everyone being expected to have read this book in ad-

## 2. The idea of the class organization

See the SAC website ([www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)) to read:

- Basic bylaws for all Locals (LS) of SAC
- SAC's Organization plan with industrial guidelines
- 1906 Charter of Amiens
- 1913 London Declaration

IWW Declaration of principles in the form of a Preamble to the IWW constitution (originally adopted in 1905). Available here: [iww.org/](http://iww.org/)

Ahrne, Göran, Stöber, Niels & Thaning, Max (2018). *Klasstrukturen i Sverige: Struktur, klass och inkomster. Kontinuitet och förändring 1985–2015*. Stockholm: Katalys. Can be found as a PDF file here: [e-arkiv.arbark.se](http://e-arkiv.arbark.se)

*Anarcosindicalismo: Basico* by CNT Sevilla. A pamphlet, translated into English by Jeff Stein and it can be found as a PDF file here: [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)

*Arbetarhistoria* [www.arbetarhistoria.se](http://www.arbetarhistoria.se)

Issue 14–15. Tema: Syndikalismen

Issue 87–88. Syndikalismen – historiska erfarenheter

Bakunin, Michail (1869). "The policy of the International", originally published in the paper *L'Égalité* in 1869. The quote from Bakunin in this book can be found in the

*Hamnarbetarförbundet 50 år*. A documentary project about the Swedish Dock Workers Union:

hamn.nu

Hästbacka, Rasmus (2021). "Sex myter om facklig kamp" in *Arbetaren, online edition*:

www.arbetaren.se

Lindblom, Julia (2021). *Amazon: bakom framgången*. [Stockholm]: Verbal.

Lynd, Staughton m.fl. (2015). *Solidarity unionism: rebuilding the labor movement from below*. 2. uppl. Oakland: PM Press.

Ottesen-Jensen, Elise (1980). *Arbetarrörelsen – männens eller mänsklighetens rörelse? Ett urval av Elise Ottesen-Jensens kvinnopolitiska artiklar i Arbetaren och Brand på 20-talet*.

Sahlström, Olle (2008). *I skuggan av en storhetstid*. Stockholm: Atlas. A book about the decline of European trade unions from movements to bureaucracies and new organizing initiatives.

Sjöö, Ingemar (2011). *Fackliga fribrytare. Episoder från hundra år av svensk syndikalism*. [2., uppdaterade uppl.] Stockholm: Federativ. The quote from French CGT in this book can be found in Sjöö's book on page 34.

Slaughter, Jane & Ancel, Judy (red.) (2005). *A troublemaker's handbook. How to fight back where you work and win!* Detroit: Labor Notes.

*Tillsammans: gemenskap och klasskamp på samhällsfabrikens golv. En antologi*. By the group Kämpa tillsammans! (2009). Lund: Pluribus.

Tuuloskorpi, Frances (red.) (2010). *Hopsnackat: folkrörelse på arbetsplatsen. D. 1 En antologi*. 2. uppl. Norsborg. As an ebook here: [folkrorselinjen.wordpress.com](http://folkrorselinjen.wordpress.com)

Wikander, Ulla (1997). *Delat arbete, delad makt: om kvinnors underordning i och genom arbetet. En historisk essä*. 7. uppl. Uppsala: Uppsala univ. Can be found as a PDF file here: [uu.diva-portal.org](http://uu.diva-portal.org)

vance, the meetings can begin with someone presenting the basic ideas.

Many Locals hold regular member meetings on weekday evenings. For members who do not have the opportunity to participate, it is important that Locals also set up study groups during weekends or during the day, in the form of physical meetings or via the internet. Use this book and modify the plan to the needs of the study group!

The four themes are less suitable for member meetings in large Locals with many industrial branches and sections. Then the primary role of Local meetings is to coordinate industrial branches, which in turn coordinate the sections. But for members who have not yet formed sections, the four themes are a good starting point for organizing.

## Appendix 2: Role of the workplace section

### An ideal situation at the workplace

- Akans anatomi (podcast) (2020). *Organisera, inte bara mobilisera*. Interview with the syndicalist Daria Bogdanska: soundcloud.com
- Bohlin, Rebecka (2005). *XX — Feministiska samtal, idéer och utbrott*. Federativs förlag. A collection of articles from *Arbetaren*.
- Bonk, Erik (2021). “Arbetsplatsorganisering” in *Syndikalisten, online edition*: syndikalisten.sac.se. A series of basic articles.
- Bonk, Erik & Hästbacka, Rasmus & Stendahl, Jenny (2021). “Ny strategi på galen arbetsmarknad” in *Arbetaren, online edition*: www.arbetaren.se
- A summary of SAC’s Strategic inquiry of 2020. In English below.
- Bonk, Erik & Hästbacka, Rasmus & Stendahl, Jenny (2021). “A syndicalist strategy for the Swedish labour market” on the website *Counterpunch*: www.counterpunch.org
- Bradbury, Alexandra & Brenner, Mark & Slaughter, Jane (2016). *Secrets of a successful organizer*. Detroit: Labor Notes. See also: www.labornotes.org/. The book will be published in Swedish by Federativ in the autumn of 2021.
- Broberg, Emil & Hästbacka, Rasmus (2021). “Fackliga myter om kollektivavtal skadar löntagarna” in *Arbetaren, online edition*: www.arbetaren.se
- Calleman, Catharina (2020). *Genusperspektiv på arbetsrätten: en annan historia*. 2. uppl. Uppsala: Iustus förlag.
- Class Power on Zero-hours [yellow edition]*. *New preface*. 2. uppl. London: AngryWorkers. A group of workers in London writing about their organizing while also doing it.
- Falk, Kristian & Hästbacka, Rasmus (2021). “Hitta alternativ till strejk” in *Arbetaren, online edition*: www.arbetaren.se. About destructive fixation on strikes.
- Fransson, Susanne (2020). “Hundra år av kvinnostrejker”. A video lecture: youtube.com

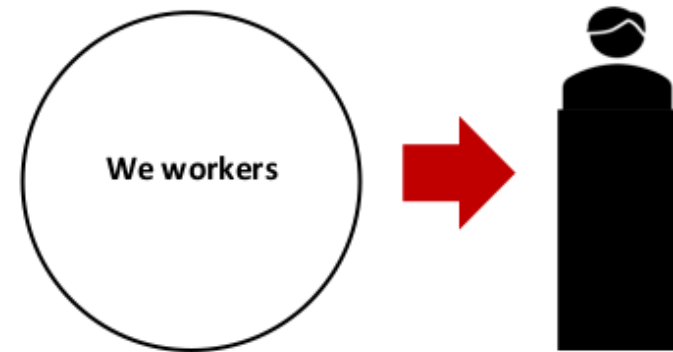
# 1. Guidelines for local organizing

See the SAC website ([www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)) to read:

- Basic bylaws for all operating sections
- SAC Union program of 2006
- SAC Tactical statement of 2009
- SAC Declaration of principles of 2009

Contact the SAC Secretariat to order these inquiries:

- *SAC:s Könsmaktsutredning* (Gender power inquiry). Completed in 2010 by Linda Magnusson, Viveca Nording, Ida Pettersson and Bea Rimmerfors. Record number 10-098.
- *Mobiliseringsutredningen* (Mobilization inquiry). About successful union organizing. Completed in 2018 by Frederick Batzler. Record number 18-065.
- *Strategiutredningen* (Strategic inquiry). An answer to the 2019 Swedish anti-strike law. Compiled in 2020 by the SAC Legal Committee. Record number 20-105. Available to members here: [www.sac.se/strategiutredningen](http://www.sac.se/strategiutredningen). The website also has video lectures, articles, a pocket guide, etc. based on the Strategic inquiry.



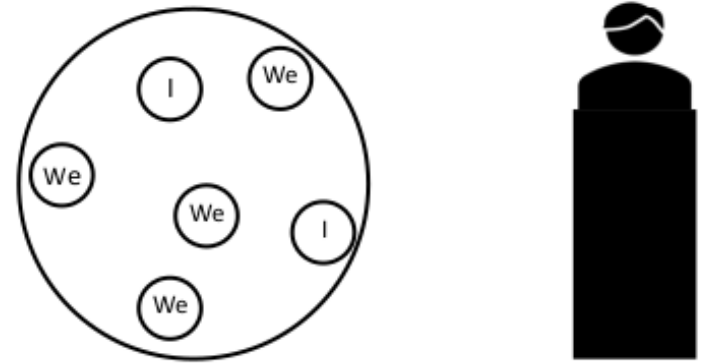
The whole workforce has a strong sense of “We” and act collectively towards the management.

## 1. A common starting point

At SAC's courses and conferences, you get the most up-to-date reading tips on concrete trade union work. The books and articles listed below should be seen as a Swedish smorgasbord to pick from. You don't have to consume the entire list to become a workplace organizer. Below are listed sources and reading tips related to each part of the book. They are available on the internet, at libraries, through the SAC publishing house Federativ and at the bookstore Syndikalistiskt forum. You can obtain SAC's governing documents from your Local (LS) or digitally on SAC's website ([www.sac.se](http://www.sac.se)). Quotes in this book that were originally formulated in Swedish have been translated into English. The sources from where the quotes are derived are accounted for below.

[syndikalisten.sac.se/](http://syndikalisten.sac.se/)  
[www.arbetaren.se](http://www.arbetaren.se)  
[www.federativsforlag.se](http://www.federativsforlag.se)  
[www.syndikalistisktforum.se](http://www.syndikalistisktforum.se)

## Sources and reading tips



A variety of “We” and “I” that do not raise demands together and in the worst case quarrel with each other.

2. An operating section is formed (Swedish abbreviation: DS)

## Our ideology

We want everything we have chosen to mention here to have an impact on our ideology. Not just on how we talk about things, how radical we want to be or whether or not we want to present ourselves as “one union among other”, but on a profound level. It is not just a question of form, but content.

*What do syndicalists want?*

It is up to us as a movement and as workers to answer this question. But in order to do so we have to revisit our ideological standpoints — many of which are discussed in this book — and review them in the light of a society *as it actually is*, and our goal of a life beyond capitalism.

At the same time we have to organize. We must try things out on a practical level, create spaces for interaction with others and mobilize more of the people we say we want to build a future society with — ordinary workers like you and me. A vital ideology can only emerge from a vital movement.

We must do all of this in full awareness that in this time of crisis, the climate crisis is the worst that the working class and humanity in general have ever faced. If we don't begin serious attempts to build a movement for a life beyond capitalism soon, there will probably be no opportunities to do so in the future.

**Niklas Averstad Ryd & Jonas Hammarbäck**  
**Commissioned by the member meeting of the Umeå**  
**Local, May 1 2021**



about what a union is, and how they think about the ideas of the Swedish labour movement, differs between groups.

*How can we best relay the experiences of the Swedish union movement and its relevance to groups where union organizing means something different?*

*How can we make the movement benefit from, integrate and transform through the experience and knowledge that exist within the working class of today?*

SAC aims to be a union for all workers. However, there are norms today that condition what people see as an “ordinary worker” and these norms do not match up with reality. The neutral is never really neutral.

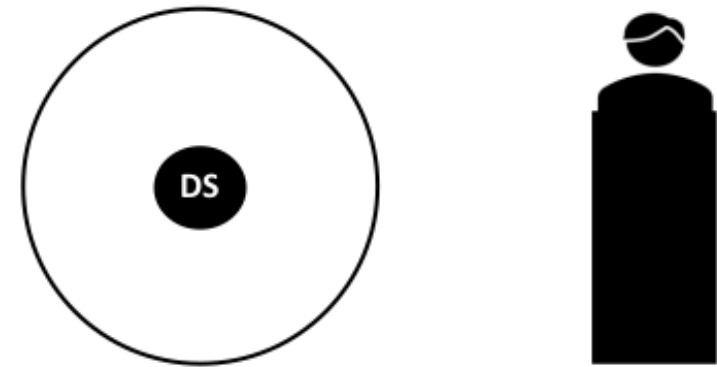
Privileged groups set the standards of what is seen as normal, apolitical and non-radical, and this determines what people see as radical and political work. This can become a problem, not just for our ability to attract workers. There is a risk that SAC attracts a privileged section of the working class instead of groups who have a greater need for and interest in syndicalist methods and our long-term goals.

*What ideas, behaviours and groups are seen as neutral and why?*

*How do we create a movement that mirrors who we actually are, where we are from and how we live and work?*

*How can we make ourselves available to more vulnerable groups of workers, who really have more in common with our methods and goals?*

*How should this affect the way we speak to people, our practical work, structures and how we use our resources?*



A “We syndicalists” arises, a community and commitment that encompass the whole section.

### 3. A movement is being built

Furthermore, we see significant changes in how work is organized, or in other words *the division and directing of labour*. The most conspicuous example is what is called the gig economy. The middle management and administrative levels have been done away with and replaced by digital platforms – left are the owners way over there, and the workers way down here. The workers perform low-paid and stressful work without job security and through an app that has the role of both middle management and a work tool. But this trend also has an impact on the rest of the labour market, and in particular low-security jobs.

Digital solutions, often adopted from the gig economy and staffing companies, are used to circumvent already weak labour laws. Younger and immigrant workers – particularly in traditional female-dominated sectors – are particularly vulnerable to these developments.

In later years we have seen successful examples of how gig workers in other countries have organized through syndicalist unions. Since the bureaucratic unions in Sweden have so far failed to face this situation with anything other than useless collective agreements that they always pull out when they want to give the go-ahead to things they are too weak or not particularly interested in doing something about, it is only a matter of time before workers choose to organize themselves in some other form. If we could make ourselves relevant in this, we could make a significant change.

*What do different sections of the working class see as the benefit of being a member of a syndicalist union?*

*What does syndicalism offer – and what is the likelihood that syndicalism will take root – in different groups, occupations and industries?*

Workers who know other nation's traditions of working class organizing also provide the movement with a better repository of experiences and knowledge. How people think

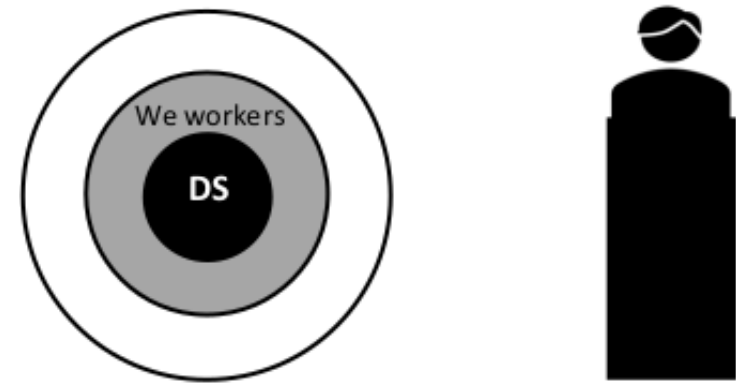
## Organizing

The working class too has transformed. The tendency to move production overseas has started to give way to a situation where it is workers from these countries that migrate. The global division of labour that has been in place for a long time is now present locally in the West. Migrant workers work in similar conditions here as they did in their countries of origin. Ethnicity has become an increasingly important factor on the labour market and the conditions of individual workers in the same workplace can differ immensely.

This is not really something new, however. The working class has never been as homogenous as some would have it. But the present situation gives rise to certain questions concerning syndicalist organizing and how we think about the working class.

Another stratification of the labour market is the generational. Security and conditions that were taken for granted among older generations are today unachievable for younger workers. It might be true that the calm on the labour market of the West was not achieved only by submissive trade unions, but partly because workers could actually expect concrete material improvements in their lives. If that's the case, then the present situation does not only pose a serious problem.

The lack of prospects for younger generations could lead to a general loss of loyalty to the system in general. This could of course become a double-edged sword, but it is not inconceivable that a movement such as syndicalism could channel this discontent.



A “We workers” is growing through a cross-union community which is larger than the section.

#### **4. 4. The section mobilizes the collective**

*right-scale? Is it possible to achieve this today and if so, how can it be done and is it even desirable?*

## Society outside the workplace

As in the arena of production, society in general has gone through changes. The syndicalist ideology must consider how developments outside the workplace will have an impact on organizing. Otherwise, there is a risk that we continue to do things based on assumptions about a world that no longer exists.

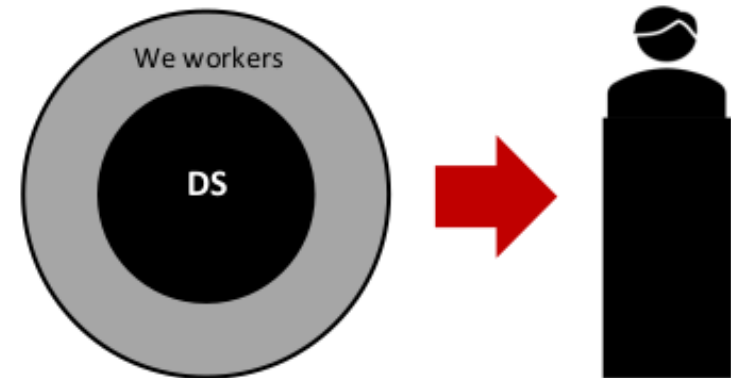
The future has never been as uncertain in the history of capitalism as it is today — on a personal, societal and planetary level. At the same time, we are all part of a system that is more individualised than any social system has been before. Many people feel conflicted by contradictory demands, mental health concerns and a general lack of focus, time and energy for collective projects.

*How do we build a movement that instead is able to approach this situation and offer community, meaning and collective joy?*

*What support structures do we need to meet these obstacles and what roles can the ideology of SAC play in this? What, for example, does it mean to say that our goal is “economic democracy” rather than for example “anarchy” “communism” or a “classless society”?*

Society is perhaps more polarised and politicized now than only 5–10 years ago, not just in social media but also in workplaces, between friends and in public discourse.

*Which effects does this have on our ambition to fight for a different society, without positioning ourselves on a political left/*



The section and the cross-union community continue to grow.  
Syndicalists and other workers act together.

## TWO TRAPS FOR UNION ORGANIZERS

### Trap 1. The organizers are integrated.

*How do we integrate it into a fighting labour movement and what role can, for example, the Locals of SAC play?*

*How do we deal with the fact that we as workers on one level are also dependent on a destructive production?*

*What experience is there from other attempts to build alternative structures?*

*Which initiatives can we support or even initiate and which parts of production are particularly important to change?*

*Which demands, in turn, does globalization place on the syndicalist structures and the idea of a “Swedish” SAC — a Central Organization of Workers in Sweden?*

*Do we need deeper international cooperation — perhaps even a plan for international mergers — and what could such a thing look like?*

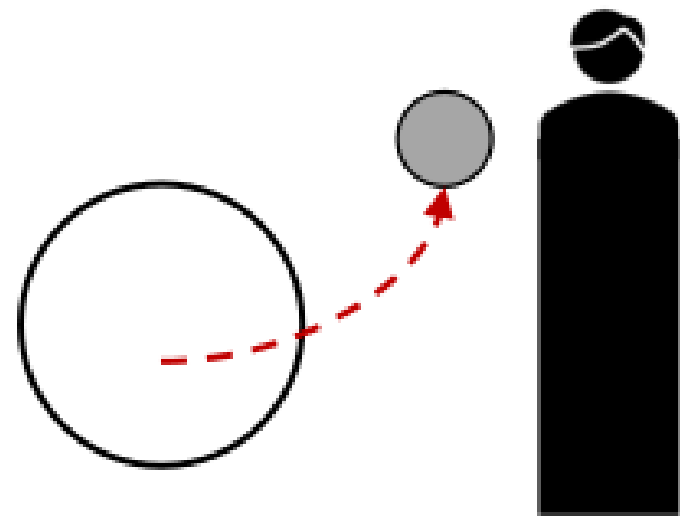
Another factor we need to consider is that a large part of the production today is not only unnecessary, but ecologically destructive. Unfortunately, it is not just about how it is governed and by whom, but about what it actually looks like. Infrastructure, warehousing, transport systems, machinery, land use — the entire chain from raw materials to production, loading and end product, is adapted to a certain mode of production with a certain industry standard.

All stages of production would need to be reviewed and probably also fundamentally changed as a whole.

In the same way that one can say that the factory roof has been stretched across the entire planet, one can say that each production chain — perhaps even production as a whole — has increasingly come to resemble a single large machine. It is difficult to get rid of a cog without replacing the entire machine. Here we as workers — unlike, for example, as “citizens” or “consumers” — have a unique position, by means of the power and influence we can exercise. But it places demands especially on an organization that aims to take over production from below.

We do not only need to have an idea of how we want to organize things “after the revolution” or demand “another production”. If we don’t think that capitalism have managed to deal with the ecological catastrophe in time, we must also consider investing at present in the construction of alternative systems that could be scaled up. We think it raises the following questions:

*What does the demand for climate transition mean for a syndicalist practice?*



As representatives, they end up above the collective in close consensus with the management. It easily happens if the workforce has bought the myth that “tough” or “skilled” negotiators are able to land big victories for employees. It is kind of like a football team sitting in the stands and expecting the coach to win the game. The extreme case of integration is that the trade union turns yellow, i.e. becomes loyal to the employer at the expense of the interests of the workforce.

### **Trap 2. The organizers are marginalized.**

## **Production**

*The production of goods, services and societal functions has changed. But how have we as a movement been able to adapt to it?*

An important change is what has been called globalization. What was previously produced by an industry, within a nation or region, is today spread across continents. One and the same factory roof can span the entire globe.

The relationship between one workplace and another in another country, but within the same company structure, is increasingly similar to that between two departments within the same building. It becomes difficult to win any demands at all in one workplace, without at the same time organizing the other. As organizers we face new challenges when the relationship “between colleagues” does not come as naturally.

The requirements on and efforts in international organizing are tougher, but so is the possible gain. If we succeed in organizing an entire industry globally, we will move further and further away from what has historically been the labour movement’s biggest obstacle: national borders and national belonging. We are also moving further and further away from the catastrophic idea of achieving socialism by taking power over the nation-state.

On the other hand, we need to think about how we create the conditions for becoming part of a new internationalism, without at the same time losing important principles such as self-determination and decentralization. Some questions that arise are:



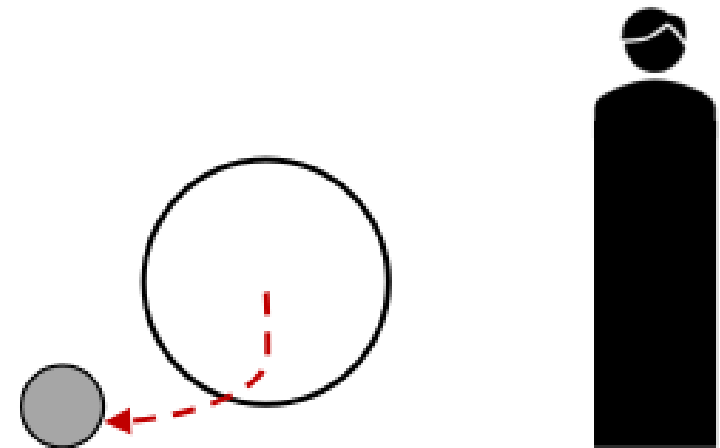
a living ideology, a living debate is needed, and this is where this book comes in.

The first draft appeared in 2015 on an email list with the aim of evaluating SAC's *union reorganization*. Union reorganization is a term used to describe a movement within SAC, away from a more politically coloured organization with a high degree of remunerated representatives and union officials, and towards a re-ignition among the grassroots and collective — rather than individual — action in the workplaces.

Rasmus Hästbacka wrote a proposal for a text and sent it out. He received a response, updated the text and sent it out again. In this way, the text emerged. It has since then been further developed after discussions at SAC's internal online forum, in a study group within the Umeå Local of SAC and it was the basis for a national ideology seminar arranged in 2021.

In other words, even if the text is written by one person, it is not created in a vacuum. This was taken into consideration when we in the Umeå Local chose to support the publication. That we did so does not mean that we stand behind everything that's in it, nor that we hope that it will form the basis for a new Declaration of principle or the like.

Rather, we see this basic sketch as a reasonably correct description of SAC's ideological heritage of today. But above all, it is our hope that the publication will speed up a much-needed debate, both within and outside the organization. We hope that the book, rather than saying the last word about the syndicalist ideology, will be the starting point for further discussions, both about the contents of the book and about how syndicalism can better respond to the current development of society. So, in order to start and open up for such a discussion right now, we want to end by raising some points that we think should be discussed.



Critical and oppositional voices end up outside the collective and lack influence. They become radicals in the stands who comment on the issues but do not take part in the game itself. It easily happens if radicals primarily strive for a sense of ideological “purity” and to hold the “right” opinions.

**Solution: *Mobilize!***

The class society also looks different — even if the principles for it remain.

Finally, syndicalism is a movement that deals with everyday struggle. Through daily demands and small and medium-sized conflicts, we are not just laying the foundation for another society. We improve the situation for us as workers *here and now*.

It is in relation to all of this that the syndicalist tradition of ideas — our ideology — fulfils a function. If we do not frequently evaluate our methods against our long-term goals, if we do not think about and try to understand how a self-managed society is possible based on the conditions of today, the ideology will soon become nothing more than an appendix. An ill-fitting and a little embarrassing costume that we only take out at special holidays.

A *living ideology*, on the other hand, can be one of the most important tools we have. It both helps us to understand where we are, why we encounter the obstacles we encounter, and what can be done to overcome them — but also why we stick to principles and organizational forms that in some situations may seem unnecessarily cumbersome (thus not saying that these do not need to be evaluated).

By constantly bringing our ideological principles and long-term goals to the fore, and by discussing them, we democratize a debate that can sometimes seem narrow and difficult. We reduce the risk of losing ourselves among daily demands and short-term victories and we avoid ending up as just another organization that has no imagination to ask for anything else than longer chains and larger cages. We also avoid developing into a reformist labour movement which, like an authoritarian one, ultimately only manages subordination in the name of the people. Syndicalism wants something else.

Finally, ideology is a tool for us to look beyond the capitalist ideology that surrounds us and not suffer from hopelessness in the face of a system that constantly floods us with the idea that this is the only possible way to live together. But to create

## Afterword on behalf of the Umeå Local

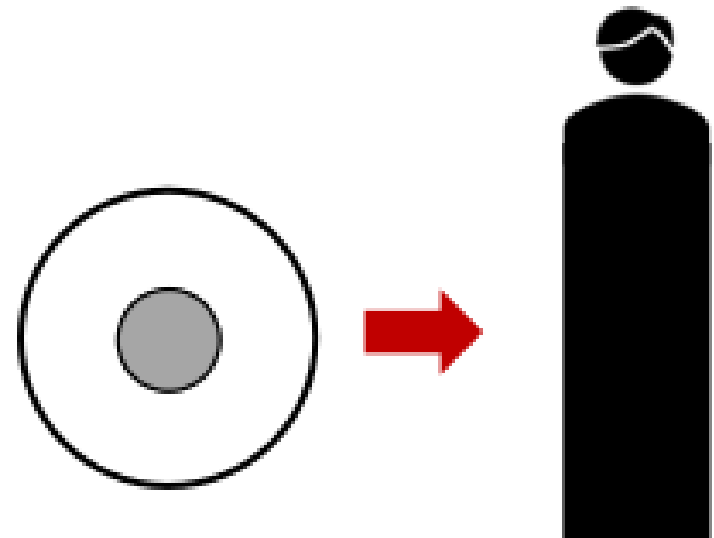
It is often said that syndicalism is primarily a movement and secondly an ideology. This means that it is primarily a tool for us in the working class. Through organizing, we unite around common interests and together we strengthen our ability to utilize the power that comes from our position in production. Without us and our work, there will not be much when it comes to goods and services in society. We are the ones building the world. That is our strength.

Syndicalism also has a pedagogical task. The struggle becomes a tool for us as workers to examine and understand our position in society. A collective, self-managed and democratic organization gives us the skills and the know-how we need to eventually take over production. Through the power over production, we create the conditions for a truly free and just society, that is, a society that we own and manage together.

But if syndicalism is *primarily a movement*, then why do we choose to publish a book about ideology?

During centuries of struggle, an enormous amount of experience has been accumulated. This has led to analyses, discussions and new practices, which in turn have led to new experiences.

Capitalism is also constantly changing. New ways of producing and organizing work have led to new opportunities and difficulties. We live differently, work differently and think of ourselves differently today than, for example, thirty years ago.



To avoid both integration and marginalization, it is important to work within the collective, develop the ability to mobilize and retain that ability.

## **Afterword**