

Syndicalism in Sweden: A Hundred Years of the SAC

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Origins and Overview

In 1898, Landsorganisationen (LO), Sweden's biggest trade union confederation, was founded by members of the Social Democratic Party. The relations between LO and the Swedish Social Democrats remain very strong to this day.

In 1909, LO entered its first major confrontation with Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen (Swedish Employers' Association, SAF). The reasons were lockouts and salary cuts, which the employers attempted to justify as necessary means during a time of economic recession. From August 4 to November 13, 1909, the so-called *Storstrejken* (Great Strike) effectively put a halt to industrial production and service industries in the country.¹

When the Great Strike ended, none of LO's demands were met and thousands of workers had lost their jobs. Many among LO's rank and file accused the leadership of organizing the strike half-heartedly and not putting enough pressure on the employers. LO lost almost half of its membership. It was in this historical context that Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation (the Central Organization of Sweden's Workers, SAC) was founded in 1910 as a radical union alternative.

The SAC's founding congress took place in Stockholm in June 1910. A photograph from the event shows thirty-six men and one woman assembled. Apart from delegates sent by various unions, the participants included members of the socialist press and representatives of *Ungsocialisterna* (the Young Socialists), a radical wing with anarchist tendencies that had left the Social Democratic Party in 1908. The Young Socialists and the SAC were closely connected and laid the foundation for organized anarchism and syndicalism in Sweden.

The SAC was founded as a syndicalist organization. Guiding examples were the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in the United States in 1905. The main organizational unit of the SAC is the *Lokal Samorganisation* (LS), roughly a “local federation.” A single LS unites all workers in a municipality and is comparable to the traditional *bourse du travail*: an independently organized group of workers determining their own workplace struggles and means. Many LSs—some of which had already formed before the official foundation of the SAC—had a radical outlook and favored direct action over negotiation. At the end of 1910, the SAC counted twenty-one of them.

The SAC’s name is somewhat misleading. Far from being a centralized organization, the SAC mainly functions as an administrative umbrella for the LSs, which maintain a very high level of autonomy. Federalism has always been a key principle of the organization.² While the SAC’s founding documents include explicit commitments to “socialist principles” and the “fight against capitalism,” and while many individual SAC members throughout history identified as “libertarian socialists” or “anarchists,” the organization itself never adhered to any particular political worldview and has always been open to all workers, regardless of political conviction or affiliation.

History

Most of the SAC’s early members came from the stonemasonry, forestry, mining, and construction industries. In 1911 a LS formed in Kiruna, a small mining town far north of the Arctic Circle, representing the single biggest LS in the country.

The SAC grew rapidly and had more than thirty thousand members in the 1920s. Membership peaked in 1924, when thirty-seven thousand workers were registered as LS members. Throughout the 1920s, Sweden reputedly had the most labor conflicts of all European countries.

In 1922, the journal *Arbetaren* (The Worker) was founded, which serves as the organization’s main publication to this day. Until 1958 it was published as a daily, since then as a weekly journal. In 1922, the SAC also joined the newly founded anarcho-syndicalist International Workers’ Association (IWA).

In the mid-1930s, the SAC still had around thirty-five thousand members. Considering that there also existed a rival syndicalist organization at the time, *Syndikalistiska Arbetarfederationen* (Syndicalist Workers’ Federation, SAF), an SAC offshoot that also boasted several

thousand members; this was the pinnacle of syndicalist organizing in Sweden. The SAF was founded in 1928 by P.J. Welinder, a Swedish-born IWW veteran who had returned to the country of his birth. Welinder saw the SAC as too compromising. He advocated confrontational tactics and opposed all collective bargaining agreements, professional administrators, and even strike funds: strikes needed to be militant and deal strong blows to the employers, rather than ending in drawn-out conflicts demoralizing the workers. When Welinder died in 1934, the SAF lost its driving force. In 1938, the remaining members rejoined the SAC.

SAC membership numbers dwindled during World War II, when Sweden was governed by a broad coalition—excluding only the Communist Party—and operating under emergency wartime laws. Workplace organizing became difficult and many SAC members were persecuted for protesting the politics of appeasement that characterized Sweden's relationship to Nazi Germany until 1942–43. Some syndicalists, including the chief editor of *Arbetaren*, Birger Svahn, received prison sentences or were sent to labor camps. The labor camps had been established for drafted radicals whom the government wanted to keep separated from the regular troops.

Despite the difficult circumstances and the significant decrease in membership, the SAC played an important role during the war, as it was one of the few oppositional forces in the country. *Arbetaren* was the most confiscated Swedish journal during World War II. Although never completely banned, many of its issues were seized by the authorities on the day of publication.

After the end of the war, the SAC was weakened but still functioning. Since almost all of Europe's syndicalist organizations had been crushed or forced into exile, the SAC took on a leading role in international syndicalist organizing. As of 1938, the IWA's secretariat had moved to Stockholm, where it remained until 1953.

The relationship between the SAC and the IWA became increasingly strained, however, during the 1950s. When moderates, such as the German-born Helmut Rüdiger, who had come to Sweden after the defeat of the republicans in the Spanish Civil War, gained more and more influence in the organization, the SAC was accused of "reformism." For the circle around Rüdiger, the survival of the SAC depended on providing a viable alternative to the social-democratic LO rather than on stubbornly clinging to anarcho-syndicalist principles that needed revision in the light of a modernizing workforce and the postwar economic boom. While the merits that the SAC had won in its opposition to Nazi

Germany had given the organization moral credit, it was not necessarily regarded as a still relevant labor organization.

The most controversial aspect of the SAC's so-called *nyorientering* (new orientation) was the establishment of a government-supported unemployment fund. For many of the IWA's member organizations this contradicted the values that the IWA had been founded upon, and the ideological rift between the SAC and the IWA became more and more apparent. In addition, members of the Spanish CNT, historically the strongest organization within the IWA, were unhappy with the SAC's role in the conflict between the underground CNT activists in Spain and the CNT factions in French exile—a sensitive issue for all syndicalists in the 1950s. All of these tensions came to a boil at the 1958 IWA congress in Toulouse, France, after which the SAC and the IWA parted ways. The relationship between the SAC and the IWA remains complicated to this day, although much of the old bitterness has disappeared and individual IWA member organizations have reestablished contact with the SAC.

During the 1960s, the SAC was finally able to reverse the trend of continuously losing members. For the first time in decades, membership numbers increased. Nonetheless, there was still a sense of stagnancy and a lack of ideological orientation. After the turbulent developments of the 1940s and 1950s, the organization struggled to define a new identity. This changed with the political developments of the late 1960s, when young radicals saw the SAC as a useful tool for broad leftist organizing. A trend started that continued until the early 2000s: LS activities moved more and more from workplace organizing to general political issues, including nuclear energy, environmentalism, feminism, and the queer movement. In 2001, many LSs were strongly involved in the protests against the European Union summit in Gothenburg, which brought some of the heaviest street fighting and police violence that Sweden had seen in decades.

Antifascism also became a focus of the 1990s. Sweden was haunted by the violence of armed extreme right-wing groups. After the Stockholm LS member Björn Söderberg successfully protested the inclusion of a right-wing extremist in the shop council of his workplace, he was shot dead outside his home on October 12, 1999. Söderberg's death was the zenith of extreme right-wing militancy and spurred mass demonstrations across the country. It also triggered a broad effort to clamp down on right-wing extremism, supported by all political parties and the media. Although the campaign was fairly successful, right-wing extremism remains a serious concern. In 2008, two SAC members and

their two-year-old daughter barely escaped an arson attack on their third-story apartment in Stockholm. They managed to escape over the balcony with the help of their neighbors.

Söderberg is honored at a yearly event at the La Mano monument in Stockholm, erected in 1977 in commemoration of the Swedish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. The SAC also awards a yearly *Civilkuragepriset* (Civil Courage Prize) in Söderberg's memory.

Around 2000, an increasing number of SAC members vocally bemoaned the shift from workplace struggles to broader leftist agendas. They began campaigning for a return to the organization's roots, to workplace organizing and class struggle. At the 2002 congress, according resolutions were passed concerning both the organization's activities and its organizational structure. In terms of the former, no one challenged the interrelatedness of forms of oppression and the necessity to incorporate analyses of, for example, male dominance into workplace struggles, yet there was a strong demand to focus on campaigns that were directly workplace-related. In terms of the organizational structure, the administrative body was to be made more dynamic: the number of employed ombudsmen was to be cut and a rotation system enforced for the remaining administrators, which include the general secretary, the treasurer, and the chief editor of *Arbetaren*.

Some of the changes were met by resistance within the organization. Numerous debates and conflicts followed. However, rather than weakening the SAC, they helped identify and lay out a new direction for the SAC. Today, most of the strongest tensions have been overcome. SAC membership, which had dropped to about 5,500, is slightly on the rise again, a feat that very few current syndicalist organizations can claim. The makeup of the membership is also changing, with an increasing number of women and young people involved. About fifty LSs are currently active, spread out over the entire country. The biggest is the Stockholm LS with about one thousand members.

Organizational Structure

There are two central aspects to the organizational structure of the SAC, geography and branch.

Geographically, the LSs of the same region are united in districts, which often share a common infrastructure, provide mutual support, organize regional campaigns, and send delegates to nationwide meetings.

On the branch level, the smallest unit is the shop branch, which unites all SAC members at a specific workplace, regardless of trade. For

example, the SAC branch at Stockholm University includes lecturers as well as cleaners. A union branch unites several shop branches that work in the same industry. For example, the Gothenburg Social and Health Services Union Branch unites shop branches from hospitals, homes for the elderly, welfare centers, and so on. Finally, a nationwide federation unites all union branches of the same industry.

The central body of the SAC serves predominantly administrative purposes. Most duties are handled by a seven-member Arbetsutskott (Executive Committee, AU) which meets biweekly. The AU members are elected at the SAC congress, to which each LS sends one delegate plus additional delegates for every one hundred members.³

Although some significant changes have occurred in the last century, the foundations of the SAC's organizational structure—LS, AU, CK, and congress—have essentially been the same since its founding.

The Challenges Ahead

Jan Abrahamsson drives maintenance trains for the Stockholm metro system and belongs to the new generation of SAC organizers. He joined the SAC in 2001, was a board member of the Stockholm LS from 2007 to 2011, and has been an AU member since the 2009 congress.

Abrahamsson welcomes the changes within the organization. When I meet him on a snowy Stockholm winter day, he insists that the SAC is in a better condition than it has been in many years. At the same time, he does not deny that in order to make the SAC a serious alternative to LO, much remains to be done. The SAC has many obvious advantages over LO: it is more democratic, it allows for much more worker independence and a wider variety of means, and it does not need to consider party interests. Yet, in order to grow in a service-oriented society, the SAC must prove that it also can achieve more for its members. Abrahamsson matter-of-factly concedes, "If workers can get the same out of active organizing or of simply paying a membership fee, many will choose to simply pay the fee."

Abrahamsson believes that the way forward must encompass three main aspects. First, self-determination must be strengthened as a value among the workforce. The SAC can contribute to this in terms of education and agitation. Second, the SAC's ability to intervene in workplace struggles needs to be improved. This implies ongoing restructuring within the organization. LS members need to know how to act fast and on their own initiative. Abrahamsson sees this as an ongoing process, in which the first important steps have been taken. Third, the public

image of the SAC needs to be altered. Sometimes, SAC members enter public debate with a fierce rhetoric that is not necessarily supported by the level of organizing within the union. Abrahamsson calls this being “hard on the outside and soft on the inside.” He wishes for the exact opposite: “Soft on the outside and really committed on the inside!”

A particular problem facing the SAC in recent years is a growing urban-rural divide. While the restructuring of the SAC has led to a new wave of activism in Sweden’s three major cities, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö, this is not necessarily the case in small towns and rural areas. In many ways, the trend merely reflects the general urbanization of Swedish society and the concentration of young activists in the urban centers. With respect to the LSs this means that changes in process implemented in Stockholm, Gothenburg, or Malmö cannot necessarily be replicated in the smaller LSs. However, there are also structural challenges. The smaller and more isolated LSs have bigger difficulties adapting to recent shifts, for example, the disappearance of the district ombudsmen. These problems need to be addressed in order to prevent the SAC from turning into a primarily urban organization—a development that would contradict its very roots in the forestry and mining industries.

Abrahamsson stresses another aspect vital to the organization’s future: internationalism. A key value of classical syndicalism and the workers’ movement in general, internationalism takes on new urgency in a world of increasing labor migration, international trade treaties, and neoliberal corporate rule.

The SAC has taken some steps in that direction. Still excluded from the IWA, SAC delegates have in recent years participated in meetings of the Red and Black Coordination, an informal alliance of non-IWA-affiliated syndicalist organizations, including the Spanish *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT), the French *Confédération Nationale du Travail* affiliated with the *Fédération Anarchiste* (CNT-F), the UK branch of the *Industrial Workers of the World* (IWW), the Greek Union of *Libertarian Syndicalists* (ESE), the *Polish Workers’ Initiative* (IP), and the non-IWA-affiliated current of the *Italian Unione Sindiciale Italiana* (USI). In September 2011, a Red and Black Coordination conference with the title “Undocumented Workers and the Criminalization of Trade Unions” was organized in Malmö.

The SAC’s internationalist efforts are not only evident in networking attempts with syndicalist organizations, however. They are also expressed in a variety of campaigns, reflecting Abrahamsson’s demand

that internationalism needs to serve as a “practical weapon.” Two of the most prominent SAC campaigns of recent years have been directly related to this: the organization of undocumented workers and the campaign Rättvis vinhandel, “Fair Wine Trade.”

SAC Campaigns and Activities

The Organization of Undocumented Workers

The organization of undocumented workers began with the founding of the Papperslösasgruppen (Group of the Undocumented) by members of Stockholm’s LS in 2004. The internationalist aspect of the effort is evident: undocumented workers in Sweden are migrant laborers without work permits. Fittingly, the Stockholm LS invited Decio Machado Flores, a Spanish CGT comrade with a long experience of organizing undocumented workers, to the founding meeting.

Although undocumented workers in Sweden come from a broad range of countries, the vast majority of those organizing in the SAC originate from Latin America. There are two main reasons for this. First, radical Latin American organizing in Sweden dates back to the 1970s, when many political refugees escaping the military dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina arrived in the country. To this day, some SAC publications have a Spanish-language section. Second, most of the current Latin American immigrants to Sweden are not political refugees but people looking for more economic prosperity. Few of them are threatened with imprisonment, torture, and murder, or with famine and starvation in the case of being deported. This means that they are more willing to take risks in workplace struggles than refugees from Africa, Asia, or the Middle East, who often try to avoid deportation at all costs.

Lotta Holmberg is a veteran in working with migrants and refugees and a founding member of the Group of the Undocumented. When I visit her in one of the working-class suburbs of southern Stockholm, she still gets excited about the founding meeting, which was held in the building of Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (Workers’ Education Association, ABF). One hundred people came, at least half of whom were undocumented workers, despite the threat of police and migration officers infiltrating the event. Many of the Latin Americans present were experienced organizers and took initiative right away, which delighted the meeting planners. According to Holmberg, the idea had never been to organize *for* undocumented workers, but to provide an infrastructure that would allow them to organize themselves. Soon,

one LS in the greater Stockholm region consisted almost exclusively of undocumented workers.

The effort to organize undocumented workers dates back to syndicalism's earliest days, with the movement's opposition to the exclusive focus on the skilled workforce in union organizing. It was considered important to protect—and, when necessary, even to establish—the rights of temporary and migrant workers and to “organize the unorganizable.” Today, this translates into efforts at organizing the precarious workforce, a task in which syndicalist principles have a clear edge over mainstream union policies. Undocumented migrant workers are currently the most precarious of Europe's workforce.

The magnitude of this challenge for mainstream unions became apparent in the reactions that met the Group of the Undocumented. LO, as well as representatives of political organizations, including Vänsterpartiet (Left Party), accused the Stockholm LS members of validating a black labor market and undercutting wages. The criticism seems problematic on multiple levels: First, it is based on a notion of protectionism that should have no place in progressive politics. Second, what are the alternatives? As Holmberg succinctly states, “If you are afraid of undocumented workers undercutting wages, there are only two options: either you organize them or you deport them.” Third, the accusations simply aren't true. Organizing undocumented workers helps stabilize wages, at least if this is a clear objective.

In the case of the SAC, a method was revived that had been used several times in its history, first in 1913: the *registermetod* (register method). Historically, the register method was used as an alternative to collective bargaining agreements. The SAC would decide on a minimum wage in a certain trade or industry. Employers who did not accept the wage were picketed and made the target of public campaigns. The same principle is used today to ensure a fair wage for undocumented workers—not least because in their case collective bargaining agreements are not an option.⁴

Despite these points of contention, most SAC members agree that the register method has proven an effective tool in strengthening the rights of undocumented workers. Apart from the labor conflicts it has helped to win, it has also made the plight of undocumented workers public. Three struggles in Stockholm were particularly important in this process. They all concerned the service industry, where many migrant workers suffer meager wages, long working hours, and a hostile work environment. At the same time, the service industry is highly

vulnerable to public campaigns as these directly affect customers and, therefore, business.

In 2007, the popular Indian-Pakistani restaurant Lilla Karachi in central Stockholm owed thousands of Swedish crowns in wages to one of their undocumented workers, an SAC member. When negotiations with the owner brought no results, the restaurant was picketed. SAC members and sympathizers, at times more than one hundred, tirelessly held banners and handed out flyers. After seven weeks, the money was paid.

The Lilla Karachi case was a breakthrough for the SAC. After this success, it often sufficed for SAC members to threaten similar campaigns in order to settle conflicts. Very often, business owners would simply comply with their demands. Not in all cases, however. At the luxury restaurant Josefina in Stockholm's posh Djurgården district, nine SAC members complained about poor working conditions and outstanding wages in 2008. The owner refused to negotiate, and Josefina was picketed. When the restaurant closed for the winter, the conflict had not yet been resolved. After Josefina reopened in the spring of 2009, thousands of participants in the SAC's May 1 rally vowed to resume the campaign. With that, the owner agreed to pay the demanded compensation of roughly US\$30,000.

The longest of the three struggles concerned the restaurant, hotel, and entertainment complex Berns in central Stockholm. This struggle also received most media attention. The conflict began in 2007, when the SAC demanded the payment of outstanding wages to seven cleaners at the Berns complex. Initially, one day of picketing sufficed for Berns to comply. After that, however, the conflict escalated over the relationship between Berns and the employment agency it had used to hire the cleaners. Berns was accused of illegal agreements with the agency and eventually of trying to blacklist all syndicalists.

A popular nightlife spot, Berns was picketed on Fridays and Saturdays from evening until the early morning hours, weekend after weekend. More than once, the police tried to disperse the picketers. Many were arrested. Eventually, a "security zone" was installed around Berns, which only a limited number of SAC activists were allowed to enter at a time. Meanwhile, Berns owner Yvonne Sörensen Björud hired bodyguards and closed the premises on May 1, fearing violent syndicalist attacks. The SAC activists resorted to more creative means. Garbage bags filled with crumpled Berns advertisements, ripped from walls around town were dumped outside the main entrance. Artists

canceled shows at Berns and a number of events changed venues out of solidarity with the SAC campaign, among them a one-week conference about Swedish archives after employees of the Arbetarrörelsens arkiv (Swedish Workers' Archive) threatened to boycott the event.

The bourgeois press wrote about “mafia methods” and “extortion.” A prominent consultant, Lars-Olof Pettersson, and a well-known journalist, Willy Silberstein, even published a book entitled *Syndikalisternas nya ansikte* (The Syndicalists' New Face) comparing the SAC's methods to those of “biker gangs.” Meanwhile, conservative politicians made a point of frequenting Berns on the weekend. They had already scheduled their lunch meetings at Lilla Karachi and Josefina when those establishments were picketed, earning them the unflattering moniker “support eaters.” Berns claims that it has lost up to US\$700,000 in revenue due to the SAC's protests.

The conflict is ongoing after more than five years. It has caused debate even among sympathetic union activists. Some wondered whether Berns was being unfairly targeted. The main villains, so the argument went, were the employment agencies, after all. They were the main profiteers off the undocumented workers' vulnerability. However, apart from the fact that employers are often perfectly aware of the employment agencies' practices, there is a simple reason why employment agencies are hard to target: many of them lack a physical presence. As Ruben Tastas Duque, a driving force behind reviving the register method, stated in a December 2010 interview with the labor law journal *Lag & Avtal*: “Many small employment agencies have no office. It is not meaningful to picket a house in some suburb. No one would take notice.”

The struggles by undocumented workers in Stockholm have left a significant mark on the SAC as a whole. In 2008, a Papperslösa kommitté (Committee for Undocumented Workers) was established by Gothenburg's LS. In 2009, the first undocumented worker was elected as an AU member. Moreover, the struggles and the public attention they received have attracted new SAC members and reenergized many long-time syndicalists who had not been particularly active in years.

However, significantly, the resurgence of direct action is not limited to Stockholm. In 2005–2006, several picket lines were organized in Malmö, where picketers were often attacked by the police with batons and pepper spray. On December 1, 2006, a picket line at the sushi restaurant Izakaya Koi, whose owner had been accused of abusing and firing a member of Malmö's LS, led to legal charges against twenty-six protesters for criminal conversion and for disobeying police orders.

The accused had allegedly blocked all entrances to the restaurant. On November 2008, twenty-five of the “Malmö 26” were declared guilty and sentenced to thousands of crowns in fines.

The organizing of undocumented workers has not only won cases for migrant laborers and given a boost to the SAC as an organization, but it has also had an impact on union organizing of undocumented workers in general. Most significantly, the early hostile reactions from LO changed as soon as the Stockholm LSs Group of the Undocumented earned public sympathy as well as attention. In 2008, LO, together with a number of smaller trade union federations, established the Fackligt center för papperslösa (Union Center for Undocumented Workers). Lotta Holmberg is convinced that the Group of the Undocumented influenced the decision to open the center. She sees this as an example of how syndicalist organizations can still have an impact on general union and labor politics even when they appear to be marginalized.

Fair Wine Trade

The organizing of undocumented workers has not been the only encouraging development within the SAC in recent years. Another inspiring initiative, not least with respect to internationalism, is the campaign Rättvis vinhandel (Fair Wine Trade).

In Sweden, the government retains a monopoly on the sale of beverages with an alcohol content of more than 3.5 percent. All wine imports are handled by the state-run company Systembolaget. Systembolaget's selection includes a broad range of Chilean, Argentinean, and South African wines. Labor conditions for vineyard workers in these countries remain poor. Therefore, the SAC Shop Branch of Systembolaget Employees (Driftsektion för Systembolaganställda, DFSA) initiated the Fair Wine Trade campaign at the end of 2010. Aims of the campaign are to establish cooperation between the DFSA and various trade unions organizing vineyard workers in Chile, Argentina, and South Africa; to change vineyard labor conditions; and to put pressure on Systembolaget and other wine monopoly holders in the Nordic countries to actively support these efforts. (Finland, Norway, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland have regulations similar to Sweden.)

In June 2011, a vineyard workers' conference was held in Santiago de Chile with delegates from the DFSA, the South African grassroots farmworkers union Sikhula Sonke, the Argentinean Unión Socialista de los Trabajadores, several unions organized in the Chilean Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas (ANAMURI), and

representatives of Systembolaget and other Nordic wine monopoly holders. According to Emil Boss, a DFSA member who had just returned from a trip to South Africa when I spoke to him, much had been achieved during the campaign's first year: labor conditions were improving at fifty vineyards; regular cooperation between the unions involved in the campaign had been established; Systembolaget began to sell Fair Trade wines at all their shops; and, finally, the company released an ethical code for wine production on January 1, 2012. However, vineyard workers were not included in formulating the ethical code and there were no provisions for including them in supervising its implementation. Emil Boss argues that ethical codes remaining under exclusive company control tend to change only the most visible parts of the labor process, namely the labor environment. They do not necessarily affect wages and insurance packages; they do not necessarily strengthen the role of unions, workplace democracy, and workers' rights; and they do not necessarily provide sufficient protection from discrimination at the workplace. As a result, the Fair Wine Trade campaign continues to demand a much stronger integration of unions in transforming the conditions for vineyard workers.

The Fair Wine Trade campaign holds much future potential, not least because DFSA, as one of the SAC's most successful shop branches, has several years of experience in challenging Systembolaget's employment policies and labor conditions.

DSTS: Organizing Underground

Another SAC shop branch that has proven the ongoing effectiveness of syndicalist organizing is Driftsektionen Stockholms Tunnelbana och Spårvägar (the Shop Branch for Stockholm's Metro and Rail Services, DSTS). Founded in 2003, DSTS has grown steadily and is today a significant factor in workers' rights struggles in the Stockholm metro and railway system. It is perhaps no coincidence that DSTS is one of the most active SAC shop branches. There is a long history of radical organizing among railway workers in Sweden—they were the first to employ the register method in 1913. Today, of the ten thousand people working in the Stockholm subway and along the local railway lines, many are migrants and students working part-time. Thus, there is a relatively high potential for radical sentiments, further fueled by the inherently democratic aspect of providing transport for hundreds of thousands of citizens, which translates easily into demanding democratic workers' rights. In addition, local transport services have become a focal point of

resistance to privatization since their operation began to be contracted to corporations in the 1990s. Today, Stockholm's metro is operated by the Hong Kong-based MTR Corporation, while many services of the local railway lines have been contracted to ISS Trafficare.

DSTS first drew attention by calling for wildcat strikes in October 2005 after the general secretary of the LO transport and communications branch, Per Johansson, was dismissed by Connex (Veolia), the metro operator at the time. Since 2005, several strikes have been organized by DSTS, the latest in January 2011. Demands have ranged from a healthier working environment (a number of subway workers have to work in mold-infested locations) to more reasonable work schedules. In addition, DSTS has supported numerous workers in labor conflicts related to work accidents and punitive transfers.

As DSTS approaches its ten-year anniversary, it is for many an encouraging example of workers' self-organization remaining possible and effective, not simply as a one-off campaign, but as a continuous means of improving labor conditions and defending workers' rights.

Around the Country

Although many of the SAC's most acknowledged recent campaigns have been centered in Stockholm—where most of what's acknowledged in Sweden is centered—activities have gone far beyond the city's confines. The following are recent examples of SAC campaigns outside the capital:

In 2010, the SAC shop branch at the University Hospital in Lund, affiliated with Malmö's LS, organized strikes of hospital personnel demanding better labor conditions for the hospitals' cleaners, who are employed through the multinational facility service company ISS.

In March 2011, Malmö's LS launched a picketing campaign against Assistansia AB, Sweden's biggest employment agency for personal care assistants. Assistansia AB was accused of providing poor training, neglecting workplace safety, and obstructing union organizing. There were solidarity actions all over the country, which gathered broad popular support. Assistansia AB complained about a "defamation campaign." Rather than making any concessions, the company changed its name to Humana at the end of 2011.

In the spring of 2011, teachers belonging to the Gothenburg LS went on strike at the women's youth detention center, Björnbacken, in Gothenburg, after the state department in charge of youth detention centers introduced new teaching schedules limiting both teachers' free time and course preparation. The teachers argued that the latter would

inevitably impact the quality of their classes. The strike was the first at a state-run institution in Sweden in decades. Circumstances were stacked against the teachers: they could not cause a loss of profits and there was limited parental and social support for the students. Klas Rönnbäck, chairman of the Union Branch for Teachers and Pedagogues affiliated with Gothenburg's LS, stated in an interview with *Arbetaren* on September 1, 2011, that the strike proved that detention at Björnbacken was more important than schooling. Nonetheless, the strike was not without consequences. After several weeks, a compromise was reached that included revisions to the teachers' new schedules.

Publishing

Arbetaren still appears once a week with a print run of about 3,500 copies. The SAC members' journal, *Syndikalisten*, appears once monthly, and some local LSs maintain their own newsletters and journals, such as *Organisera*, published by Stockholm's LS. The SAC has also been running the publishing house *Federativ* since 1922. It remains the most important Swedish-language source for texts on syndicalism and anarchism.

Education

The SAC administration and various LSs regularly organize courses and workshops, including introductory meetings for new members, conferences on how to found an LS, study circles on general workplace organizing, and classes in everything from labor negotiating to how to effectively use social media.

A number of LSs also organize regular lectures and panel discussions. In December 2011, South African scholar Lucien van der Walt presented his book *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, coauthored with Michael Schmidt, in Stockholm and at the Joe Hill House in Gävle. In February 2011, the Stockholm LS organized a one-day event exploring the relationship between syndicalism and anarchism on the occasion of the Kronstadt uprising's ninety-year anniversary.

Infrastructure

Both the SAC headquarters at Sveavägen in central Stockholm and local LS offices remain important meeting places for a wide variety of people. The SAC's generous sharing of its infrastructure and resources with underfunded groups of the extraparliamentary left confirms the organization's ongoing importance in broader social movements.

In Gävle, the LS office is located at the Joe Hill House, the childhood home of the famed IWW singer and poet who was born Joel Hägglund in Gävle on October 7, 1879. The Joe Hill House, located in the picturesque old town of Gävle, about 150 miles north of Stockholm, serves as a museum, café, and events center.

Syndikalistiska Ungdomsförbundet

Syndikalistiska ungdomsförbundet (Sweden's Syndicalist Youth Federation, SUF) was founded in 1993. It is entirely independent from the SAC, but the organizations work closely together and membership overlaps. The SUF has about twenty-five chapters across the country and publishes the journal *Direkt Aktion* four times a year. Recently, it has been very active in precarious labor issues. It is also involved in broader leftist struggles such as squatting, antifascism, and sexual politics.

From 1930 to 1955, the SAC had its own youth organization, Sveriges syndikalistiska ungdomsförbund, also abbreviated SUF. It disbanded during the 1950s restructuring of the SAC.

Into the Future

The SAC is often hailed as the only organization founded on anarcho-syndicalist principles that can claim uninterrupted activity for more than a hundred years. This is no small feat. Although membership numbers have significantly dropped since the 1930s, they remain high enough for the SAC to remain a factor in Swedish labor politics. It remains a well-established and well-known organization without comparison in Central and Northern Europe.

As mentioned above, membership numbers have experienced a slight rise in recent years. The SAC's May 1 rallies across the country gather several thousand sympathizers annually, up to five thousand in Stockholm alone. The high-publicity campaigns in recent years have further contributed to syndicalism's being far from a mere footnote to Swedish history.

In September 2012, the SAC's thirtieth congress will be held in Gävle. The theme is "For the SAC's Second Century." The main challenges are the continuation of the internal reorganizing process, the urban-rural divide, and the extension of international collaboration. The congress will be an important step in determining the future of the organization. Hopefully, the SAC will continue to stand strong against the neoliberal threat.