Nordic Management-Labour Relations and Internationalization

Converging and Diverging Tendencies

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Nordic Labour Market Cooperation

is regulated via separate agreements and conventions. The Nordic Council of Ministers (the Ministers of Labour) draws up the political guidelines for cooperation in this area, which also covers general working conditions, legal aspects of industrial relations and the migration of workers in the Nordic region. The Nordic Council of Ministers is assisted by the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Labour Market and Working Environment Policy. The secretariat of the Council of Ministers is located in Copenhagen.

The Nordic Council of Ministers

was established in 1971. It submits proposals on cooperation between the governments of the five Nordic countries to the Nordic Council, implements the Council's recommendations and reports on results, while directing the work carried out in the targeted areas. The Prime Ministers of the five Nordic countries assume overall responsibility for the cooperation measures, which are co-ordinated by the ministers for cooperation and the Nordic Cooperation committee. The composition of the Council of Ministers varies, depending on the nature of the issue to be treated.

The Nordic Council

was formed in 1952 to promote cooperation between the parliaments and governments of Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Finland joined in 1955. At the sessions held by the Council, representatives from the Faroe Islands and Greenland form part of the Danish delegation, while Åland is represented on the Finnish delegation. The Council consists of 87 elected members – all of whom are members of parliament. The Nordic Council takes initiatives, acts in a consultative capacity and monitors cooperation measures. The Council operates via its institutions: the Plenary Assembly, the Presidium and standing committees.

8. From Centralized Self-regulation to Organized Decentralization: Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in Sweden 1940–2002

Annette Thörnquist

8.1. Introduction

In November 2001, the Swedish government initiated a tripartite dialogue between the State and the main labour market parties with the purpose to encourage better health in working life. This was part of a comprehensive governmental 11-point programme presented in the autumn Budget Bill, including measures for better work environment and more clearly defined responsibilities for the employers (Näringsdepartementet 2001). The aim of these talks, which were concluded in December 2002, was both to initiate a broad co-operation on the prevention of work-related bad health and to make measures for rehabilitation of workers already on sick-leave. The background was the dramatic increase in long-term sickness absence since the late 1990s. The governmental reform programme included other means as well: for example, a reinforcement of the Labour Inspectorate, grants for the training of regional safety representatives and considerable grants for trials to reduce incidence of poor health in the public sector, which had the highest rate of work absence due to illness. According to the government, better health and safety in working life were crucial for future economic growth, employment and welfare. This was not only because of the huge public expenditures on sickness benefits, but also due to an increasing shortage of labour in many trades, partly as a result of the rapidly rising rate of long-term sick-leave, even among younger employees (SOU 2002, no. 5; *Dagens Nyheter* 13 November, 2001, 16 April, 2002; Nilsson 134-44).

The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to discuss the causes of or the solutions to the multifaceted problem of work-related bad health. Instead, it focuses the pattern of interaction between the labour market parties, and between them and the State, when it comes to handling issues related to the work environment. Occupational health and safety (OHS) was one of the main items in the 'Swedish model' for co-operative industrial relations during the model's heydays in the decades of great industrial progress after World War II. Yet, in the

decades of great industrial progress after World War II. Yet, in the last decades when the classical Swedish model for industrial relations has been successively dismantled, so has the traditional model for treating OHS. Hence, this chapter analyses the change in OHS from a historical perspective up to the tripartite talks in 2002 within the wider context of changing industrial relations in general.

The Swedish and international scholarly debate concerning the move towards decentralization of industrial relations in the 1980s and 1990s has mainly dealt with deregulated wage formation, which of course is the most conspicuous effect (Traxler 1995; Pontusson and Swensson 1996; Thörnqvist 1999; Kjellberg 1998, 2000; Traxler et al. 2001; Elvander 2002). However, in a discussion of the general changes of the industrial relations system, it is also important to take into account the long-term development of other sides of working life, such as the work environment. An important reason why OHS has been rather neglected in the industrial relations discourse is that the issue has often been regarded as a special case, as a neutral item on the bipartite or tripartite agenda on which all involved parties shared the same interests. In this chapter, however, OHS is considered an integrated part of the industrial relations system, and thus also to a certain extent a question of differing attitudes, ideologies and interests.

To sum up, although OHS and wage setting have been covered by agreements of different character, and accordingly the handling of the issues mainly have been kept apart in practice, it is interesting to compare the long-term developments in these fields. The focus in this chapter is on the development of the peak-level bipartite and tripartite co-operation in the area of OHS in the privately-owned sector of the economy, and the associated development of the governmental OHS policy. OHS in the public sector have developed along similar lines. Yet, since the preconditions for the labour market parties' organizing and co-operation have partly been different, as have their relation to the government, this sector deserves a separate study and is therefore left out of this chapter's limited space.

8.2. From Centralized Self-regulation towards Reinforced State-regulation

The classical Swedish model of industrial relations has been characterized as a system of 'centralized self-regulation'. This refers to a system of central agreements concluded between strong and well-organized parties at confederate, national level, in combination with an active union presence and organized labour-management arrangements at workplace level. Moreover, the system implied the preference of self-regulation over state regulation (Kjellberg 1998; 2000). Another fundamental element of the Swedish industrial relations model was the main labour market parties' corporate representation on government authorities' boards and commissions. For example, they were represented on the Labour Market Board (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen AMS) established in 1948, and on the

National Board of Occupational Safety and Health (Arbetskyddsstyrelsen) that was set up in 1949, and from the mid-1950s onwards on the regional advisory councils within the Labour Inspectorate. Like the Swedish bargaining model, the system of tripartite co-operation had deep historical roots, instituted even before the introduction of the universal and equal right to vote in 1921 (Rothstein 1992: 98; see also Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 145). From about 1940 to 1980, the Swedish system of industrial relations moved from centralized self-regulation towards reinforced State regulation. The development in the field of OHS provides a good example.

Central agreements on co-operation (*samarbetsavtal*) and associated joint councils at the national level were cornerstones in the Swedish model of centralized self-regulation. The peak-level OHS agreement was the first of these co-operative arrangements that followed in the wake of the 1938 Saltsjöbaden General Agreement between the Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF) and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). In the same year they commissioned a joint committee to plan the organization of industrial safety at local level. The concrete background was the increasing problem of industrial accidents that emerged during the inter-war period of rapid mechanisation and rationalisation. The work of the committee resulted in a central agreement in 1942 concerning the local organisation of OHS. At the same time the Joint Industrial Safety Council (Arbetskyddsnämnden) was established as a central body for co-operation, information and propaganda between the LO and the SAF.²⁴ The Council received a secretariat and started to work in practice in 1945. After some hesitation from the SAF, the parties agreed that the managing director should represent the LO, since that would increase the Council's creditability among the workers. Erik Thörnberg, union secretary at the Metal Workers' Union (Metall) was appointed managing director. Thörnberg stayed at the post until 1972, when Ingvar Söderström from the LO, succeeded him. Söderström on his part was the head of the Council until 1999. Hence, the leadership of the Joint Industrial Safety Council has been exceptionally stable, and accordingly the trade union movement had a (visible role in the organization (minutes from the Joint Industrial Safety Council, 9 May 1945; Ekström 1992: 8-10; interviews with Ingvar Söderström 2 May 2002 and Gideon Gerhardsson 15 November 2002).

There were also central agreements on co-operation on apprentice training (1944), on works councils (1946) and on time-and-motion studies (1948). Apart from the agreement on works councils, separate central bodies were established for co-operation on these issues as well (Johansson 1989). The central agreements consisted mainly of recommendations. An important exception, though, was that a ban on harassment of safety representatives should be inaugurated in binding collective agreements. In 1946 the parties in about 4,000 companies rep-

²⁴ The chairman of the Council, on the other hand, has traditionally been a SAF delegate.

representing more than 400,000 workers had adopted the principles in the OHS agreement (Lundh and Gunnarsson 1987: 73-6; Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 138-48).

The main idea behind the central arrangements on co-operation, initiated mainly by the employers, was a mutual interest in solving labour market problems voluntarily instead of through legislation. Concerning OHS, the LO would have preferred stricter collective agreements at industry level. Therefore, the LO and the Social Democratic Party (SAP) continued to pursue the issue also as a political question, and in the 1949 Workers' Protection Act (*Arbetarskyddslagen*) the main regulations on local work safety laid down in the central agreement were codified, including the principle of co-operation. In this way, safety representatives and joint safety committees were made mandatory in workplaces (*SFS* 1949, no. 1-4). The central OHS agreement aimed to create the same safety procedures in all companies. The agreement was revised and extended several times. In 1967, for example, an agreement concerning OHS services and a statement on training in OHS issues were included. During the following decades these fields of activities were greatly expanded and received separate agreements (Lundh and Gunnarsson 1987: 105-08; Hydén 1990: 206-10; Gerhardsson 1990).

The Joint Industrial Safety Council launched safety campaigns, conferences, and issued study material concerning OHS that was designed to provide a basic training for safety representatives and foremen, but also for managers and others involved in local safety organizations. The main pedagogical model used was the 'study circle', a non-hierarchical form of adult education that traditionally was used by many Swedish associations for promotion of voluntary adult education in a lot of areas. Thus, an important prerequisite for the successful development of mass-training in OHS were the Council's close co-operation with these organizations, especially with the Workers' Educational Association (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund ABF*) and its associated publishing house the Correspondence School (*Brevskolan*), which was owned by the LO, the Social Democratic Party and the Swedish Co-operative Association (*Kooperativa Förbundet* (annual reports of the Joint Industrial Safety Council 1942-1960). Thus, training in OHS became integrated in the well-established national and local infra-structure of this traditionally strong popular movement. This integration significantly reinforced the system of centralized self-regulation in the field of OHS.

In 1976, a new and binding work environment agreement was concluded, preceded by a central agreement on training in 1974, which granted the safety representatives and the foremen the right to study during paid working time. These agreements also covered the Federation of Salaried Employees (*PTK*) that represented an increasing category of employees. In 1978, the PTK entered the Joint Industrial Safety Council as a second party representing the employees. Hence, these agreements meant further reinforcement of the system of centralized self-regulation, but simultaneously state regulation was considerably extended and

reinforced through a vast revision of the Workers' Protection Act in 1973 and the new Work Environment Act in 1977, and also by other labour market legislation introduced in the 1970s (Hydén 1990; Tucker 1994; Martin 1995). The extensive labour legislation and the dismantling of the 1938 Saltsjöbaden Agreement by the 1976 Co-determination Act, led to the dismantling of the classical Swedish model of self-regulation. On the other hand, the new laws were semi-dispositive, framework laws, which among other things meant that they should be supplemented by agreements. In the 1970s and 1980s the labour market parties' participation on the governmental boards and in commissions of the OHS agencies and other working life agencies increased significantly as well. For example, the parties were involved in the exercise of public authority through their representation on the regional boards of the Labour Inspectorate and on the National Board for Occupational Safety and Health (Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 159-67; Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen 1999: 24-5; Johansson 2000; Elvander 2002).²⁵

The background to the reinforced State regulation of the labour market was several alarming reports from the LO in the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s on its members' discontent with their work environment. About 80 per cent of the asked LO members claimed that they in various ways and to various degrees suffered from work environmental problems, such as loud noise, chemical health risks, ergonomic problems, problems with cold, draught or heat and stress (for an overview see LO 1996: 15-18). Another important factor was the vast labour unrest that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a reaction to rapid technical development, rationalisation and structural transformation. Particularly the growing left-wing political movements regarded the 'Saltsjöbaden spirit', i.e. the policy of co-operation between labour and capital, as responsible for the social problems caused by the blind faith in large-scale, industrial development. In 1969-70, a three months long wildcat miners' strike occurred in the State-owned company LKAB in the ore-fields in northern Sweden. The strike was to a large extent provoked by dissatisfaction with the physical and the psycho-social environment. In the following years – like in many other countries as well – a broad and radical public opinion demanded improvements in the work environment (cf. Dwyer 1991: 78-80; Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 155-67).

According to Svante Nycander (2002) the key actor in the extended labour legislation in Sweden in the 1970s was not the LO, as has generally been argued in the scholarly debate, but the Social Democratic Party, supported by the Liberal Party (*Folkpartiet*) (Elvander 2002; cf. Nordfors 1985; Johansson and Magnusson 1998). The labour market reforms of the 1970s, especially the laws on job

²⁵ Through the revision of the Workers' Protection Act in 1973 the regional advisory councils of the Labour Inspectorate were reorganized into deciding-making boards authorized to issue injunctions and prohibitions, and through the 1977 Work Environment Act the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health received the right to issue provisions that were legislatively binding to comply with.

security and co-determination, and the plans put forward by the LO to establish so-called wage-earners' investment funds, lead to a political and ideological mobilization within the SAF. This was encouraged by the bourgeois government, which, after more than 40 years of Social Democratic governance, came to office in 1976 and remained till 1982 (Johansson 2000: chapter 4). In the late 1970s and the early 1980s the political climate changed and the negotiations became tougher. Yet there was a fair degree of political agreement on the new Work Environment Act that was passed in 1977. The previous working life reforms in the 1970s – especially the vast revision of the Workers' Protection Act in 1973 – extended tripartite co-operation, and the public opinion on these issues all paved the way for the new Work Environment Act (Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 165-67).

8.3. From 'Safety Pays' to 'Better Work Environment' (BAM)

Over the decades the governmental OHS policy has changed, as has the policy pursued by the labour market parties. Along with the change, the area of OHS has been continuously redefined and widened. The different profiles of the Joint Industrial Safety Council's major campaigns and training programmes illustrates this development well. OHS in Sweden was for a long time focused on industrial accidents, even in the second half of the 20th century. Accidents still caused a lot of problems, even though the rate of accidents that caused disability or death decreased. As accidents caused serious disruptions in production, leading to high insurance costs and high labour turnover, employers could see clear economic advantages in the prevention of accidents. In addition, workplace accidents could to a comparatively large extent be reduced through organizational changes and disciplinary measures. Hence, for many employers, at least in larger firms, it became obvious that 'Safety Pays' (*Arbetarskydd lönar sig*). This was the name of the Joint Industrial Safety Council's first big campaign and correspondence course that started in 1954 as a basic education project for safety representatives, foremen and other involved in local safety organizations.

The prevention of occupational diseases, on the other hand, usually required more radical and costly investments. Also, as workers exposed to unhealthy work environment often get diseased years later, the question of responsibility could be rather complicated. Hence, the problem of work-related diseases was and still is an issue generally both more complex and fraught with conflict than occupational injuries, for the labour market parties as well as for the government or the parliament. The breakthrough for a wider interest in occupational diseases came in the 1960s, along with rising public demand for a better work environment and, more generally, on environmental issues.

Since the inter-war period, Swedish OHS policy was influenced by the American Safety Movement, which emerged in the USA in the early 20th century

as a Tayloristic safety management strategy focused on the problem with accidents (Sund 1994). This strategy implied that workers' own ability and willingness to avoid accidents were crucial for achieving safety at work. Another influence was international research on the 'human factor' as the cause of accidents, particularly the theory of 'accident birds', i.e. that a small number of workers caused a great number of accidents (Hagbergh 1960). Thus, for a long time OHS focused on the creation of 'safe persons', rather than 'safe places' (cf. Gallagher 1997).

The Joint Industrial Safety Council's second big campaign and study material came in 1958, under the name 'Why does it happen?' (*Varför händer det?*). The campaign was influenced by industrial psychology and reflected a more analytical approach to the causes of accidents (Hagbergh 1960; Arbetarskyddsnämnden 1982: 33-35). Although issues related to workers' comfort and well-being figured in the Joint Industrial Safety Council's activities in the 1950s, local work on safety still focused on the problem with accidents. Nevertheless, unions concerned with occupational diseases, such as silicosis, had for a long time tried to put the problem on the agenda. In the 1950s the general shortage of labour made also employers more aware of the increasing problem with occupational diseases (Thörnquist 2001). In addition, the National Institute of Public Health, with a special department for occupational medicine and occupational hygiene, now contributed to a development of these disciplines, which had lagged behind in Sweden compared to several other earlier industrialized countries (Gerhardsson 1992). For the LO, the 1961 congress became a turning-point by broadening the definition of the field of workers' protection. The congress stated that the trade union movement should pay much more attention to technological developments and health risks related to rapid technological change and rationalization. After the congress, the LO employed a medical expert who among other things was engaged in the major surveys in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the members' experiences of work environment hazards. In addition, the LO and the SAF revised the central OHS agreement in 1967 from this broad perspective (Ekström 1992: 72; Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 155-56).

Due to the alarming reports from the LO investigations in the late 1960s on its members' and safety representatives' views of hazardous work environment, the LO and the Social Democratic Party presented a joint work environment programme. Fundamental to the programme was the principle that the work environment should get more adapted to workers' conditions and needs. Ergonomics, climate and social issues now received more attention. By that the programme marked a reorientation of the OHS policy towards a policy that in the first place aimed at the creation of 'safe places'. In all its essentials this programme was codified in the comprehensive revision of the Workers' Protection Act in 1973. This reorientation was also clearly reflected in the Joint Industrial Safety Council's new broad campaign and correspondence course 'Better Work Environment'

(*Bättre Arbetsmiljö, BAM*) that started in 1974. The rapid technical and organizational changes in working life increased public awareness of work environmental problems, and the implementation of the new work environment reforms required a significant increase in information and mass education on OHS. This became the main task for the Joint Industrial Safety Council in co-operation with the associations for adult education. The BAM spread throughout the whole labour market, including the growing public sector, where the parties had established joint arenas for OHS co-operation and associated issues in the 1960s and 1970s. The BAM was perhaps the greatest adult education project that ever had been carried out in Sweden. It shaped a common labour market consciousness on OHS. The study material BAM, as well as the democratic pedagogical model for its implementation, (the 'study circle'), also attracted great international attention.²⁶ According to Ingvar Söderström, the members within the Federation of Salaried Employees (PTK) helped to instigate the socio-psychological issues that were later included in the BAM (Ekström 1992: 71-75; Ocsarsson 1997: 27-32). The preparation and implementation of the vast mass-training programme BAM was made possible by considerable grants from the State's Work Environment Fund (*Arbetsmiljöfonden*) that had been established in 1972 and was financed by payroll taxes. Its purpose was to fund research, training and development in the OHS area as well as in working life in general (Oscarsson 1997).

Hence, along with the broadening of the concept of work environment and the enlargement of the field covered by OHS, there was a move towards increased state regulation of these issues. In this process, as has been shown, centralized bipartite co-operation was also reinforced, and corporate co-operation between the labour market parties and the state on work environment issues increased at all levels in society. As will be stressed below, the most important SAF affiliates became more and more critical to all centralized and corporative arrangements over the 1980s.

8.4. Towards Organized Decentralization

Let us in this section once again return to the general changes in the Swedish industrial relations system during the post-war period. In what way has this system changed and what has been the prime mover in this development? In the early 1950s the SAF and the LO begun to co-ordinate and centralize collective wage bargaining and already in the mid-1950s this practice was well established. The initiative came from the SAF. During the inflation boom due to the Korean War, the main interest was to curb wage-price spirals. Furthermore, centralization of wage bargaining reduced the risk for labour unrest, particularly important at a

²⁶ In co-operation with ILO, BAM has been translated into almost 40 languages, and it has been adapted to the various economic structures in the countries concerned.

time of great demand for labour. For the LO, the centralized negotiation system made it easier to pursue the so-called 'solidaristic wage policy', aimed at leveling out the wage gaps between workers in different trades, and this policy also helped to speed up the process of rationalization and create better pre-conditions for general real wage increases. Accordingly, during the decades of great economic progress both parties gained from the system of centralized agreements (Kjellberg 2000: 182-84; Thörnqvist 1999; Elvander 2002).

However, in the early 1980s the employers association in the engineering industry (VI) began to call in question the centralized negotiation system, regarding it as less beneficial to industries exposed to international competition. The rising wage level, and the difficulties with controlling inflation within the framework of the central agreements, strengthened this conviction. In 1983, on the background of major labour unrest, the engineering employers and their counterpart, the Swedish Metal Workers' Union (Metall) settled an industry level agreement without awaiting the outcome of confederate level. A main reason was that both associations saw increased sectoral wage differentials as necessary in a time of rapid internationalization and radical changes in the organization of work. The engineering industry agreement was supposed to set the norm for the whole labour market. In the 1980s the SAF little by little changed its strategy on wage negotiations, following the international move towards decentralized labour relations. Some structural changes within the association contributed to this move. The SAF had become more heterogeneous, since many new employers within the private-owned service industries had been affiliated; thus the proportion of small companies had increased. The growing public sector, and the fact that salaried employees and civil servants had become increasingly important actors on the labour market also complicated the centralized negotiation system (Kjellberg 2000: 184-89).

In 1990, the SAF finally abandoned centralized wage bargaining and closed down its department for wage negotiations. According to Christer Thörnqvist (1999), the main rationale for the SAF's new and more aggressive policy was not the changes in the organization of work, such as the new concept of flexible production (cf. Pontusson and Swensson 1996), but ideological considerations. As mentioned, the labour market reforms in the 1970s, and the subsequent plans of the LO to establish so-called 'wage-earners' investment funds', had led to a political and ideological mobilization within the SAF (Thörnqvist 1999). In the early 1990s the growing international crisis led to increased unemployment and a greater supply of labour. For this reason, as well, the centralized wage negotiations no longer attracted employers (see also Johansson and Magnusson 1998: 339-41).

Franz Traxler (1995) describes the decentralization of collective bargaining in countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Austria – where the main labour market parties traditionally have had a strong position – as 'organized

decentralization', initiated and forced through mainly by strong employers' associations. 'Organized' in this case refers to the fact that these countries retained some important features of the old system, unlike the UK, USA and New Zealand, countries which, in the words of Traxler, instead experienced 'disorganized decentralization'. According to Thörnqvist (1999: 82), trade unions still have much to gain from maintaining the framework of the old system in countries; therefore unions in countries that have undergone 'organized decentralisation' are better off than in countries with 'disorganized decentralization'.

In the 1990s, the Swedish government took several initiatives to co-ordinate wage negotiations, in order to stabilize wages and prices Anders Kjellberg (1998: 89-115, 2000: 189-98) characterizes these stabilization drives as 'state regulated centralization'. The first initiative was the so-called 'Rehnberg Agreements' (*Rehnbergsavtalen*) in 1991-1992, which comprised the whole labour market. The 'Industry Agreement' (*Industriavtalet*), concluded in 1997 and revised in 1999, was another highly important attempt to co-ordinate wage formation. The agreement was settled between eight trade unions and twelve employers' associations in the manufacturing sector and has been regarded as a revitalization of the traditional system of 'centralized self-regulation'. The agreement consists of two parts: first, procedures for wage negotiations; and second, a general policy document on industrial development concerning competition, skills and competence, research and development, taxes and energy policy. The initiative came from the trade unions in the engineering industry. In 1992 the blue- and white-collar unions in engineering had jointly established the Wage Bargaining Council (*Förhandlingsrådet*) to curb the employers' plan to completely decentralize bargaining. However, in the late 1990s, centralization was to some extent also in the employers' interest, since it promoted stable prices and wages, and impeded industrial conflicts without government intervention or imposition of regulating income policy. Other institutions connected to the Industry Agreement included an industrial committee, consisting of four independent economists, an economic council and 5-10 independent chairmen, who should assist at the negotiations to avoid conflicts (Kjellberg 2000: 196). In association with the Industrial Agreement the parties established a new 'unofficial' mediation institute to encourage such self-regulation. (Kjellberg: 2000: 189-98; Elvander 2002).

8.5. Corresponding Developments in OHS

Industrial relations in the field of OHS has taken the same direction in recent decades as industrial relations at large: from 'centralized self-regulation' towards 'organized decentralization'. Even in this area the initiative to decentralize came from the SAF. In the early 1990s, the SAF not only abandoned central wage bargaining but also annulled the central work environment agreements, including the arrangements on OHS services and training. The SAF also withdrew from the

corporative representation in government OHS agencies. Ever since the 1970s, actually, employers had claimed the existing centralized and corporate OHS relations to be ineffective and directed by the LO and the Social Democratic Party. An important purpose of the SAF's withdrawal from the governmental boards and commissions was thus to undermine the power of the trade union movement (LO) and indirectly also the Social Democratic Party. The exceptions were the Labour Court and the Pension Insurance Funds (*AP-fonderna*). The SAF's new, offensive strategy in the 1990s has been to influence the government directly, by exerting an impact on the political agenda (cf. Kjellberg 1998: 94; Johansson 2000: 207, 220-21).

Furthermore, in 1993 the OHS services lost its government grant that had covered about one third of its costs. In practice this meant that the OHS services got privatized and scaled down. In 1989 the OHS services covered almost 80 per cent of all Swedish employees. The corresponding rate in 2000 was only about 50 per cent (Gerhardsson 1990; Remaeus and Westerholm 2000: 70-72). In addition, grants to the regional safety delegates for supporting small companies with no or weak safety organizations, were greatly reduced over the same period – despite the large and increasing proportion of small companies the 1990s (Frick 1996). Moreover, the Labour Inspectorate, which had been reinforced through the 1991 Work Environment Act, was reorganized and scaled down again in 1995 as a result of the general downsizing within the public sector. In addition, since the early 1990s, the strategy of surveillance was changed: now the inspectors should focus on the workplaces with the heaviest problems (Arbets-skyddsstyrelsen 1999: 33-40; Remaeus and Westerholm 2000: 66). Hence, the dissolution of the central work environment agreements was followed by a downsizing of the Swedish public welfare system in this area, started by the bourgeois government in 1991, but continued by the Social Democratic Party when it came back into office in 1994. This also contributed to the general decentralization of industrial relations in the area of OHS.

Similar to developments within wage bargaining, the central work environment agreements, including OHS training and OHS services, have been replaced by arrangements at industry level in the 1990s. Here too, the employers' policy is to decentralize as much as possible to the local level. All sectors are not covered by these agreements and their contents vary from sector to sector, and the exact meaning must be specified at the local level. Åke Lindh, negotiator at the Department for Work Environment at Metall, has characterized them as 'undressed Christmas-trees'. According to Lindh, the employers are very reluctant to agree to work environment agreements at the industry level, claiming, among other things, that there is no conflict between the parties involved at this level. Yet Metall has concluded work environment agreements for the largest sectors involved: the engineering industry, the iron works, the forges and Samhall, which is a group of companies within different trades employing handicapped people.

One bargaining areas in which Metall negotiate, but which is not covered by such agreements is automobiles and trucks (*Bil och traktor*), including car repair shops. The firms in this trade are often small with great work environmental problems, especially muscle-skeletal injuries and chemical hazards, such as isocyanides. Many workplaces lack local safety representatives as well. In the traditionally hazardous mining industry, where the workers are also affiliated to Metall, there exists no work environment agreement, but there is a permanent bipartite body working with OHS issues. Hence, OHS are still prioritised issues, and the parties have a silent agreement to stick to the main principles in the old central agreement. Within Metall, however, as in many other trade unions in the private as well as in the public sector the coverage of local work environment agreements is weak (interview with Åke Lindh 3 June, 2002).

As with wage bargaining, however, there has been trade union resistance against a too far-reaching decentralization; the trade unions have begun to coordinate the work environment agreements at the industrial level. Thus, in wake of the 'Industry Agreement' Metall co-ordinates negotiations on both wages and work environment with other LO affiliated unions in manufacturing as well as with the Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers (*Civilingenjörssförbundet, CF*) and the Swedish Association for Salaried Employees in Industry (*Svenska Industritjänstemannaförbundet, SIF*). Hence, the aim is also to integrate OHS in other bargaining issues (ibid).

8.6. New Ways of Implementing OHS

In the 1980s and 1990s the increasing internationalization of the Swedish economy contributed to the adoption of new strategies for implementing OHS. Moreover, this development has been related to the general decentralization of industrial relations. Despite the offensive governmental work environment policy in the 1970s and the increasing public awareness concerning work environment issues, work injuries still caused great problems in the 1980s. In particular, diseases due to ergonomic factors increased, and not least women were afflicted. New technology and new forms of work organization developed rapidly. The latter part of the 1970s and the early 1980s has been regarded as a time when the rewards of work environment reforms were reaped. At the same time, however, the Swedish economy underwent a structural crisis. A wave of shut downs occurred in some fundamental industries, such as the textile industry, ship building and the iron and steel industry, and in the year 1980 large-scale industrial conflict broke out covering almost all sectors of the Swedish economy. In addition, the change in the political climate made co-operation between the parties difficult. Despite the successful mass-training projects, the implementation of the reforms lagged behind in small firms. The big campaign 'the Good Work' (*Det goda arbetet*), launched by Metall in the mid-1980s, applied a holistic perspective on

matters related to the organization of work, work environment, co-operation, job security and gender equality (LO 1991). Yet, it was often difficult to integrate OHS in other labour-management issues and in the organization of production; therefore this process became a driving force for the adaptation of new international management strategies for the implementation of OHS.

Since the mid-1980s there has been a trend in advanced industrial countries to handle work environmental issues through OHS management, among other things to better integrate OHS in production. Major disasters, such as those at the oil rig Alexander Kielland and on the Piper Alpha rig in the North Sea, as well as the growing nuclear power industry, contributed to an increasing rising interest in risk analysis and systematic safety management (Frick and Wren 2000; Walters and Langa Jensen 2000). Historically voluntary safety management originates in the so-called Safety Movement, but it has also been influenced by modern management strategies for quality control and for the safeguarding of the external environment. Like the ideology of decentralization, the concept of safety management is rooted in an 'American model' for organizing industrial relations. Since the late 1980s, however, there is an ongoing international trend to make OHS management mandatory. In 1989 EU issued a general directive (EEC 1989/391) to harmonize the implementation of OHS management within the associated countries. An important purpose was also to guarantee workers' independent participation in OHS.

In the second half of the 1980s, industries such as electronics and the pharmaceutical industry developed rapidly in Sweden. The economy became increasingly internationalized and business conditions improved considerably. However, as in the upward economic trend ten years later, the social costs for work injuries and long-term sick absence increased dramatically. The cost increase in the late 1980s was also partly an effect of an extension of the concept 'work-related disease' in the 1977 Industrial Injury Insurance Act. For these reasons the Social Democratic Party established the major governmental Work Environment Commission (*Arbetsmiljökommisionen*) in 1988. The outcome was a major revision of OHS legislation, in the 1991 Work Environment Act. The new legislation emphasized employers' responsibility for the work environment and the rights of employees to have a say on their working conditions, social as well as physical and organizational. The main change, however, was the regulation of 'internal control' that obliged employers to systematically plan, organize, implement and follow up OHS management. By this legislation and the subsequent provisions on internal control issued by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in 1992 and 1996, Sweden complied with the main regulations in the EU directive (SOU 1990 no. 49; AFS 1991 no. 6; AFS 1996 no. 6; Nilsson 2003, 53-6).

The Swedish reforms were influenced by the successful Norwegian experience of safety management at oilrigs, termed 'internal control'. After the Alexan-

der Kielland oilrig disaster in the North Sea in 1980, Norwegian offshore companies voluntarily established safety management measures, leading to considerable improvements in the work environment. In 1992 legislation made internal control mandatory for onshore occupations as well. Compared to the Swedish reform, Norwegian legislation on internal control is more comprehensive and covers other fields, such as the Pollution Control Act, The Fire and Explosion Prevention Acts and Electrical Installations and Electrical Equipment Act (Gaupset, 2000; Lindoe and Hansen 2000).

While it is difficult to compare the implementation of these reforms in different countries the Norwegian reform has been comparatively successfully implemented, especially within the private sector. However, in both countries, the implementation of internal control has been problematic in small companies that often have great work environmental problems. Such companies often lack safety representatives and cannot afford expensive courses, conferences and consultants. In the larger firms, international competition may be a driving force for the implementation of internal control, since management of the work environment, as well as the management of quality control and the external environment, tends to give competitive advantages on international markets. Yet, in Sweden, there has sometime been a tardy work to introduce the reform also in these firms. The introduction of internal control has been comparatively successful in the public sector, around 60 per cent has implemented the reform, compared to less than 30 per cent in the private sector (Arbetsmiljöverket, Rapport 2001, no. 12: 5-7, 56). This might have to do with the fact that the traditional Swedish way of handling OHS has not as deep roots in the public as in the private-owned sector; therefore the social partners in the public sector may have been more open-minded.

Generally for the Swedish labour market goes that there is a lack of knowledge among employers as well as among safety representatives, foremen and managers on how internal control should be implemented (Arbetsmiljöverket 2001: 46; *Dagens Nyheter* 13 Nov. 2001; Nilsson 2003: 57-60). In 2001, the Work Environment Authority (the former National Board of Occupational Safety and Health) decided to change the name 'internal control' to 'systematic work environment management' (*systematiskt arbetsmiljöarbete*). By underlining 'management' and 'work' instead of 'control' the idea was to more clearly emphasize the employers' responsibility for the work environment, and OHS should be integrated in all stages of the production process (AFS 2001, no. 1). One of the governments' main purposes with the tripartite talks in 2002 was to encourage OHS activities at workplace level for a successful implementation of the regulation of systematic work environment management (interview with Kenth Pettersson, 8 March 2002).

Frick (2000, 2002) argues that the reform on internal control marked a paradigmatic shift in Swedish work environment policy, since the State now interfered in *how* employers should organize the implementation of the legislation. Up

till that time the law had prescribed *who* was responsible for the work environment and *what* should be done, but not in what way. This change can even be regarded as an interference in the employers' prerogative of control of the process of production.

To talk of a paradigmatic shift in this context might be a bit exaggerating. It is true that the law and provisions prescribed a detailed system of safety management, and in this meaning it was indeed an important structural change. The reform also gave employers more freedom of action. The reform entailed a re-regulation of the system of governmental work environment control that meant a decentralization of responsibility for the control of the concrete working conditions to the employers. As in many other Northern European countries, the Swedish regulations in this field have become less detailed, moving from specification standards to performance standards. Rather than regulating technical conditions in detail, OHS inspectors were to ensure that there exists a *system* for OHS management in the companies in accordance with the provisions of internal control. Given that there exists a documented system for internal control in the way the regulations on internal control entailed, employers are still free to decide how these goals should be achieved in practice, i.e. to achieve the protective performance required. In this way, the regulations should not impede technological development. At the same time, the Swedish labour inspectors' traditional advisory role at the workplaces has decreased (cf. Remaeus and Westerholm 2000: 65). In addition, and highly interesting in the context of this chapter, the implementation of internal control implied an increased adaptation of the OSH agreements at firm level, which corresponded well with the employers' general interests in a decentralisation of labour relations.

8.7. The Development of a Joint Industrial Safety Council in the 1980s and 1990s

The Joint Industrial Safety Council has survived as a remnant of the classical Saltsjöbaden arrangement, despite the fact that the central work environment agreements and the tripartite arrangements in this area were discontinued in the early 1990s. How then did the Council develop in the 1980s and 1990s given the general changes in the system of industrial relations?

Even before the central OHS agreements, including OHS service and training, were discontinued the Council declared that existing agreements should be more adapted to the various conditions and needs at industry and local level, thus increasing their creditability. Furthermore, informational and training materials should be more clearly specified to different industries and target groups. After the SAF had cancelled the central work environment agreements for good, the SAF, the LO and the PTK issued a declaration of principle stating that the Joint Industrial Safety Council should continue its work. In a new policy Statement the

Council emphasized that OHS, in accordance with the internal control reform, should be systematically integrated in the production process and more linked to the development of productivity, knowledge and skills in individual companies. This also presupposed decentralization and more flexible regulations in the agreements. Moreover, the relationship between a good work environment and profitability was strongly underlined (Söderström cited in Ekström 1992: 74-75; Arbetskyddsnämnden 1990, 1993). In many ways the programme was in line with the policy pursued by SAF (cf. Lars-Gunnar Albåge cited in Ekström 1992: 45). Yet the Council never advocated termination of the central agreements.

No doubt the absence of central OHS agreements involved major changes for the work of the Joint Industrial Safety Council, especially the agreement on training, which had granted the safety representatives 40 hours annually for OHS studies. The era of huge mass-training projects in co-operation with the adult educational associations was over. Further, the deep economic crisis and mass unemployment made the labour market parties prioritise other issues over OHS. In addition the Work Environment Fund was dissolved in 1995 and the Joint Industrial Council and the adult educational associations lost most government grants for training projects. What had been the solid financial basis for the elaboration and implementation of the mass-training projects was thus removed. After that the study material provided was to be financed by those who ordered it, i.e. mainly the local labour market parties.²⁷ Already in the 1980s, the Council began to offer more specified and company-based courses and conferences, and this trend continued in the 1990s. Companies could order courses individually tailored to their business area and organizational structure. External experts were also increasingly engaged in the Council's activities. Another trend in the 1990s was that managers at the intermediate level began to demand that training in OHS should be related to common interest regarding work organization and leadership (interviews with Henrik Lindahl, 6 Dec. 2001 and with Ingvar Söderström, 6 Mar. 2002). In many respects the implementation of OHS has developed along the same lines as company programmes for quality control, competence and diversity.

Yet a new version of 'Better Work Environment', BAM, was launched in 1997 and designed to be applicable to all employed in a workplace. It was still based on the idea of the study circle, but the social partners at the workplaces were free to jointly decide how it should be implemented (annual reports of the Joint Industrial Safety Council 1997-2001; interview with Ingvar Söderström, 6 Mar. 2002).

²⁷ The AFA Insurance (Arbetsmarknadens Försäkringsaktiebolag), a fund administrating insurance based on collective agreements contributes to the financing of some of the Joint Industrial Safety Council's/Prevent's projects (annual reports of the Joint Industrial Safety Council/Prevent 1995-2001). Owned jointly by the LO, the PTK and the SAF (and its successor), AFA is actually a remnant of the classic Swedish model as well, and AFA has co-operated with the Joint Industrial Safety Council since the late 1970s.

Hence, in the 1990s the close contacts between the Joint Industrial Safety Council and the adult educational associations decreased dramatically and training in OHS was decentralized. Traditional industrial trade unions, such as Metall, still organize training activities through ABF; however, today only some 4,000 people are engaged in OHS training activities organized by ABF, in comparison with around 24,000 in the 1980s (interview with Olof Sand, 5 Mar. 2003).

An important structural labour market change over the last few decades is the increase of salaried employees, relatively as well as in absolute figures. In January 2000 the Council therefore changed its name to *Prevent: Management and Labour Improving the Work Environment* in order to adapt better to the fact that white-collar workers within the organization not readily identified themselves as 'workers', which the first element *Arbetar-* in the old name, the compound word *Arbetarskyddsnämnden* stated (interview with Ingvar Söderström 6 March 2002). Furthermore, since 1999 the strong personal link between the managing director and the labour movement no longer exists. The current director, Henrik Lindahl, had worked for a long time at the secretariat in a senior administrative post but he had no previous career in the labour movement. In this sense his appointment was a break with tradition (*Arbetarskyddsnämnden* 1999; ANS årsberättelse 1999).

In many ways the Joint Industrial Safety Council/Prevent has adapted its policy and activities to the general trend towards decentralized industrial relations and in some respects even advocated this trend, albeit within the framework of central OHS agreements. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the rapid development towards decentralization – reflected by the drop in mass-training projects and the development of more business-based models of education in OHS – has accelerated, not only because the withdrawal of the government funding, but also due to the overall weakening of union power.

8.8. The Future of the Swedish Model of OHS

What will then happen to the Swedish way of dealing with OHS in the future? As regards tripartite co-operation, the labour market parties' representation on the boards of governmental work environment agencies has not been re-established. Since the 1990s, the practice is that the parties are represented through advisory councils on the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health, and the Labour Market Board, AMS. They can give their views on the items on the agenda and be consulted before decisions are made. This is however far from the strong influence the labour market parties, especially the trade union movement, had on governmental boards and commissions in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The boards consist of individuals from the government and from different sectors and groups in society, for example the trade union movement and the business world,

but the unions and the employers' associations do not nominate them (Arbets-
skyddsstyrelsen 1999: 39; Kjellberg 1998: 94).

Concerning bipartite co-operation, the most obvious changes have been the abandoning of centralized work environment agreements in the private sector, and the privatization of the system of OHS services. For the LO, the discontinuance of centralized agreements and the dismantling of the tripartite arrangements meant that the department of work environment was greatly downsized. At the same time, the economic crisis and the problem of mass-unemployment overshadowed other labour market problems. Consequently, less support was given to OHS at the local level as well. At the LO congress in 1996 there was a reaction against this development and the congress became the start of a renewed activity in OHS, albeit with reduced resources. During the second part of the 1990s, there has also been a general rise in union commitment to work with environmental issues at industry level (LO 1996, 2000; interviews with Ingvar Söderström 24 Apr. 2002 and 2 May 2002 and with Carina Nilsson 11 Jun. 2002). Today, however, there are no indications of a reorganization of the central work environment agreements, simply due to employers' dislike of such arrangements. Even if employers are reluctant to make agreements also at industrial level, the parties' increasing co-ordination of wage agreements in the second half of the 1990s might also influence further co-ordination of the work environment agreements. As mentioned, some unions already co-ordinate their negotiations on work environment issues. This might revitalize the system of 'centralized self-regulation'. Moreover, in the final report from the tripartite talks in 2002, it was suggested that the 2004 bargaining rounds should include the item of better health in working life and that such steps should be evaluated in the 2006 bargaining rounds (*Dagens Nyheter* 17 Dec. 2002; *Ett arbetsliv för alla*, 2003).

The demand for revitalization was also urged by a 53 days long strike among electricians in the summer of 2003. The strike was a protest against the high work pace in the construction sector, why the Electricians' Union demanded 25 per cent wage increase for work under a high pressure during a period of 24 hours or more. Such a demand would have been unrealistic within the old centralised bargaining system, and it exemplifies that decentralisation may be negative also for the employers, since it tends to lead to demand for compensation and thus inflation. Therefore, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise forced the LO to find out another solution, why the LO proclaimed that the work environment should be prioritized in the industry-wide bargaining rounds in 2004 (*Arbetaren* 2003 no. 26).

Another initiative to centralized solutions of OHS problems worth mentioned, although it failed, was the fact that the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise invited the trade unions at the confederate level to discuss a health insurance system based on collective agreements for the first three months of a full-time sick leave. The background was discontent with the government's policy concerning

the costs for the vast sick-leave. The LO agreed to such a dialogue, given that the PTK would participate as well. In return, however, the LO, want to discuss the future organisation of the OHS services, rehabilitation and training. According to the press, the LO counts on an inclusion of the OHS service in the collective agreements (*LO-tidningen* 5 Sep. 2003; *Tidningen Arbetarskydd*, 2003 no. 9). As it turned out, however, the PTK refused, mainly because OHS problems are to be discussed in the coming bargaining round. Thus the issue was removed from the agenda.

How, then, will management-labour co-operation develop at workplace level, which is the most important arena for the implementation of OHS? The institutional and legislative framework, the provisions on internal control and other regulations still promote the principles of the classic Swedish model of bipartite co-operation. Swedish employees have the legal right to participate in internal control and are required to do so (AFS 1992 no. 6, 1996 no. 6). Co-operation between the parties is also underwritten in the work environment agreements at industry level, as well as in the still existing central agreements between the parties in the public sector (including other related issues as well). In addition, the law prescribes that the local safety representatives and the unions should monitor the implementation of the reform of internal control.

The problem is rather how co-operation could be carried out in the context of the great structural changes in working life that have occurred in recent decades and the associated change in labour market power relations. The use of short-term employment contracts, scaled down organizations, outsourcing, agency work and flexible working hours have made union activities at workplace level more difficult. Likewise, the move towards more individualized labour relations make employees less willing to complain about deficiencies in their work environment (Aronsson and Gustafsson 1999). A survey conducted by the LO in 1996 showed that about 30 per cent of the LO members considered themselves to be suffering from work-related injuries, mainly diseases, but only 58 per cent of them had reported their problems. This was also due to the fact that the burden of proof of the employees concerning work-related illness increased through a revision of the occupational injury insurance legislation in 1993 (LO 1996: 60-73). New LO studies indicate that these problems are still highly present, despite a growing commitment of many unions to address them. In addition, according to the LO, the ill-health in working life is a class related problem as well, since LO members are more afflicted by work injuries and musculoskeletal diseases than are salaried employees (LO 2000; LO 2002; Nilsson 2003; *Dagens Nyheter* 16 Apr. 2003).

A general decline in union activities in the 1990s, in particular within the private-owned sector of the service industries, has also weakened co-operation between the parties on industrial safety. Swedish trade union density is still among the highest in the world – about 80 per cent) – but since the late 1980s the level

has been more fluctuating. A new trend in the 1990s was also that more employees affiliated directly to the unemployment funds, without first applying for membership in a union, which had been the standard procedure for almost a century (Kjellberg 2001: chapter 4 and 8). In the beginning of 2000 a report from the Work Environment Authority showed that almost four out of five work sites with five or more employees lacked local safety representatives. One year later the situation had improved a little, though, and over the past two years, the number of safety representatives has increased considerable (*Arbetarskydd* 2000 no. 5; *Arbetarskydd* 2001 no. 12, 2003 no. 4). Yet if the long-term trend decline in union activities at workplace level continues, unions may lose the initiative and the power to set the agenda and thus to define the real meaning of 'good work environment'. It should also be kept in mind that local union commitment has always been crucial for the success of the development of OHS in Sweden. Decentralization of industrial relations in OHS, as well as decentralization of the system for control of the implementation of the work environment act, has made it even more urgent to reinforce union commitment at workplace level.

Another problem is that OHS management originates in an American tradition rather than in the Swedish model of self-regulation. In the reform on internal control the law-maker has, purposely or not, tried to intermesh these different traditions. This mix of traditions and strategies, related to different systems of industrial relations, seems to have complicated co-operation between the parties, in particular in the private sector.

8.9. Concluding Remarks

As this chapter has shown, the developments of OHS has followed the general trend in industrial relations in the post-war period, that is, the shift from 'centralized self-regulation' to 'organized decentralization'. Which actor or actors has then gained from this development?

It was the SAF that abandoned centralized agreements, about wages as well as regarding the work environment in the early 1990s. Concerning the SAF's decision to quit centralized wage negotiations, the immediate cause was obvious in a time of increasing labour supply. Christer Thörnqvist has however underlined the ideological rationales behind the decision. It is reasonable to suppose that the main rationale underlying SAF's decision to abandon centralized work environment agreements, including those concerning OHS services and training, was also ideological. It is obvious that this decision was related to the decentralization of wage agreements. In addition, the discontinuing of the central work environment agreements accompanied the SAF's withdrawal from the corporate co-operation in the government agencies, a fact that strengthens this conclusion. As mentioned, the main motive for the SAF's withdrawal from the governmental boards therefore seems to have been that the SAF wanted to undermine political

cooperation between the trade union movement and the Social Democratic Government on decision-making bodies.

For the unions, on the other hand, the central work environment agreements and the corporate representation in the government agencies were of great value, both real and symbolic and consequently, the dismantling of the corporate system was a setback for the whole trade union movement (interviews with Leif Kjellstrand 24 Apr. 2002, with Ingvar Söderström 2 May, 2002, and with Carina Nilsson 11 Jun. 2002).

A widespread opinion among the LO affiliated unions is that the cancellation of the central agreements concerning OHS services has strongly contributed to the growing problem with ill health in working life. Similarly, the lack of knowledge about work environmental issues is regarded as a consequence of the discontinuing of the central agreement on education in OHS (interviews with Henrik Lindahl 6 Dec. 2001, with Ingvar Söderström 2 May 2002, with Åke Lindh 3 May 2002 and with Carina Nilsson 11 Jun. 2002). In the revision of the Work Environment Act in 1999 and the subsequent revision of the provision of Internal Control/Systematic Work Environment Management the writing on this point has been adjusted to fulfil the EU directives concerning OHS, which means that the regulations are more imperative. However, this does still not mean that they are legislatively mandatory, which the LO advocates (AFS 2001:1). Today almost 30 per cent of the LO members lack of have insufficient OHS services, and this has also contributed to the LOs attempts to revitalize the centralised dialogue on OHS. In the past two years the LO and the ABF have made great efforts to encourage the study activities in general at the workplaces, and the State has also given grants for this purpose. Thus participation in the study activities has increased from about 10,000 to some 24,000 people. Although these efforts have not been specified to OHS training, it may have an effect on this field as well (interview with Olof Sand 5 Sep. 2003).

Given this background, one might argue that the tripartite talks carried out in 2002 were an attempt to restore centralized tripartite co-operation on work environment issues. Moreover, according to the final report, the tripartite talks aim to encourage bipartite co-operation by suggesting an integration of the work environment issues in the bargaining rounds at industry level. However, it should be kept in mind that the tripartite talks were initiated by the government. Despite the governmental involvement in the bargaining rounds in 1990, which lead to the successful co-operation codified in the Rhenberg Agreements, the labour market parties still guard the principle of self-regulation. They would not readily accept any shift towards centralization if they considered it to be against their interests, no matter if the government urged for it. This is in itself a vital residual feature of the classical Swedish model. Also, this initiative failed due to disunity between the parties, like other attempts in the late 1990s to carry out tripartite talks on job security had done.

In mid-December 2002, shortly before the end of the tripartite talks, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises decided to no longer take part in the co-operation. According to the Confederation, the main reason was that the prime interest for both the government and the unions was to increase the employer's economic responsibility for long-term sick-leave, which the Confederation regarded mainly as a vast abuse of the health insurance system (*Dagens Nyheter* 12 Dec. 2002). Thus the pattern of the early 1990s reappeared. Once again the employers' confederation abandoned tripartite cooperation, partly due to the possibilities implied in this system for a political cooperation between the Social Democratic government and the trade unions. In this case, however, the LO, as well as TCO, feared that an extended economic responsibility for the firms would only hit back at the employees (*Dagens Nyheter* 28 Jan. 2003). Despite this disunity, the government passed legislation in July 2003, stating that the companies should pay also the third week of an employee's full time sick-leave, on top of the two weeks that they already were obliged to pay for (*Dagens Nyheter* 11 Jun. 2003).

This chapter has argued that studies of the development of OHS can broaden the perspective in the scholarly discourse on the general changes in industrial relations, in this case the move towards decentralization. Having this broader perspective might better explain the long-term development of OHS as well. In the international debate on the international convergence versus divergence of industrial relations systems, Franz Traxler, Sabine Blaschke and Bernhard Kittel (2001) argues that in countries with a long corporatist tradition, such as Sweden, the system of industrial relations has developed towards what they label 'lean corporatism', rather than towards 'neo-liberalism', i.e. completely decentralized bargaining.²⁸ With regard to the different characteristics of the agreements on wage formation and on other terms of employment such as the work environment, this term may also be useful to characterize the current Swedish OHS model. In many ways there has been an adaptation to market discipline and a clear move towards decentralization in this field. At the same time, both labour and capital, and the state, still have clear interests in organized labour relations.

As the initiative of the tripartite talks for better health in working life showed, there is a tendency towards a 'neo-corporative co-ordination' of the state's and the labour market parties handling of work environment problems. However, there is also a tendency towards a revitalization of centralized self-regulation in this field, mainly through coordination of the OHS agreements at the industrial level. The main rationale behind this move has been the great economic and social costs of long-term sick-leave, which the unions mainly regard to be a conse-

²⁸ 'Lean corporatism' is defined in the following way: 'market forces are so inserted into labour relations that their actors' sensitivity to monetary signals ... increases: all forms of coordinated bargaining strongly respond to monetary policy, in stark contrast to uncoordinated bargaining'. Moreover, lean corporatism creates a network-style labour market governance (Traxler et al. 2001: 300-01).

quence of decentralization, privatization and downsizing in the OHS system in the 1990s, including training and company health service.

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- Åke Lindh, work environment secretary at Metall, Stockholm, 3 June 2002.
- Carina Nilsson, investigator at the Dept. of Work Environment, LO, 11 June, 2002.
- Kenth Pettersson, general director for the Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket), Stockholm, 8 March 2002.
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