

SiN NEWS

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SPECIAL ISSUE



AGNETE + ANN - INTERVIEW INSIDE

SWEDEN & SPAIN

1989

NEWS & interviews with Militants of RANK & FILE TRADE UNIONS

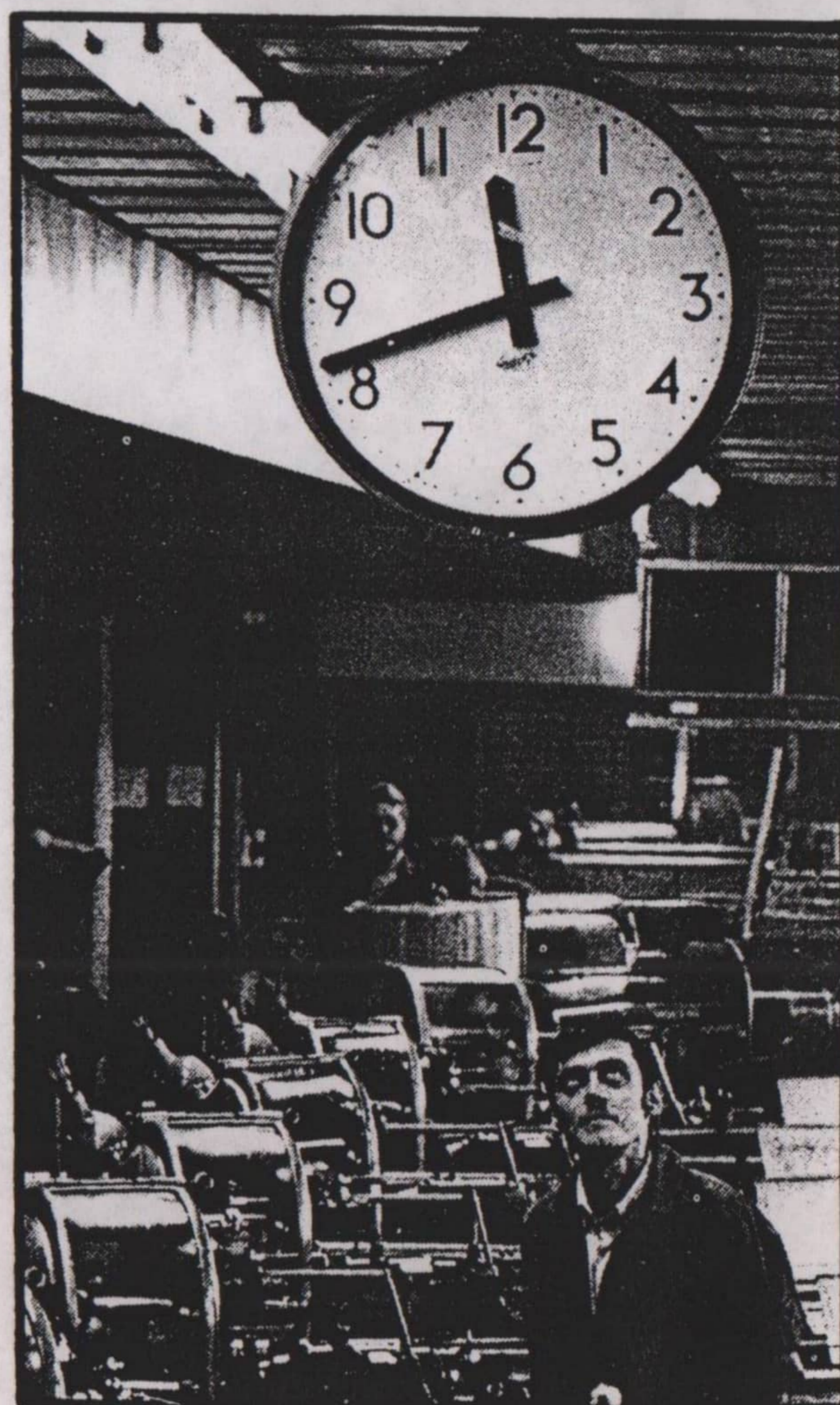


ILLUSTRATION FROM 'SAC KONTAKT'
PAPER OF SWEDEN'S
RANK + FILE TRADE UNION

SINEWS No. 12

SPANISH INFO, NETWORK, 6a, THE DRIVE, ROUNDHAY, LEEDS, ENGLAND, LS8 1LF.

No Frontiers!

This issue of Sinews, the biggest to date, includes 12 pages of interviews held with members of the Swedish trade union SAC, as well as a 2 page introduction to the Dutch union OVB. Hopefully further information about the SAC will also be included in future issues of Sinews. Number 13 will probably reach you in the early spring. Please note the change of address. Mail sent to the old address will be forwarded.

'Land & Liberty' Co-operative.

The following is a slightly condensed version of a communique received from members of the Andalucian agricultural day labourers union, the SOC, from the village of El Coronil, near Seville. (See Sinews no.5 for background information.)

The co-operative 'Tierra y Libertad' have bought a farm, 'La Laguna' in the 'El Bosque' district [directly north of Gibraltar, roughly on a line joining Malaga and Seville], using a subsidy from the Andalucian Labour Council of 27 million pts. (£140,000). Almost all the subsidy was used in buying the land, which consists of 65 hectares of arable and woodland, bordering the 'Los Hurones' reservoir. It has been agreed that no individual in the co-operative can ever claim rights to any part of this land.

The land has been abandoned since 1983 except for some sheep and goats, the living quarters are in a bad state of repair, and there is no electricity, no drinking water, irrigation or machinery. The present forest is neglected and needed immediate work doing to it to prevent the risk of fire, but there are vast areas where re-forestation is possible.

An orchard of olive trees on the site has been repaired and pruned by 15 volunteers from El Coronil, Montellano and Villamartin, but it will take another two years to get back into full production. In December thirty day-labourers will begin the planting of 500 fruit trees and other trees which are indigenous to the region.

Three families will soon move on to the co-operative to begin ploughing and grazing sheep with the help of volunteers. At first they will have to live in the nearby village of El Bosque until we raise the finance to construct new living quarters. A team of technicians from the University of Cordoba and the Paco Natera Foundation has been formed to advise us.

Obviously if this project is to succeed we will need a lot of solidarity from other people, and many of our friends from other countries have already visited us on the farm. We need to generally repair the farm and buildings and buy essential machinery (a tractor, plough and trailer), but we also plan to install solar power generators and dig a new well.

This is not simply an economic project, as we intend to work with respect for nature and avoid the profit motives which cause people to produce for the sake of it without conserving natural resources or considering the natural equilibrium. Moreover, in this project people are central and values such as solidarity, comradeship and generosity are of the utmost importance.

We appeal to all who believe in this utopia.

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An article in the dock workers' paper 'La Estiba' for November 1988 gives further details: We see this project as part of our general struggle against the agricultural policies of the EEC which are polluting our lands and rivers to produce more goods which are then destroyed to maintain high prices, and which have evicted thousands of workers from the land as part of this process. It will demonstrate the alternative ways in which the land can be used without degrading nature and using chemical poisons.

The co-op will also serve to develop the movement's militants, with literacy classes and classes in technical and political/union matters, as well as demonstrating new kinds of human relationships in which people are no longer considered as goods to be bought and sold.

The area around the farm has one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe (60% of the active population and virtually 100% youth unemployment). Although it is only 100 km to the Costa del Sol, this has done nothing to assist the development of agriculture in the area, although it has given us an extra problem of drug abuse and delinquency in young people who get temporary work there. Our aim is an alternative economic strategy in which the day-workers are the active agents in the area's economic and social life.

General Strike.

Spain's first General strike since the Civil War occurred on December 14th and was a definite success, with all sources agreed that about 8 million people, ie 90% of all salaried workers, stopped work in a peaceful protest which only resulted in 40 arrests from some minor confrontations. The Prime Minister, Phillippe Gonzales, acknowledged that the strike had been a heavy blow to his government and immediately asked to meet the two main unions involved (UGT and CC00), together with the head of the employers' federation. As a gesture of conciliation the government agreed to drop their YOPS-like youth employment scheme. Although this was the unions' main grievance they still decided to boycott the meeting until the government made concessions on their other demands, ie, increased entitlement to unemployment pay (at present only about 25% are eligible); compensation for civil servants and pensioners who's pay has not kept up with inflation; alignment of the minimum pension with the minimum salary; collective bargaining rights for state employees.

This strike is another expression of the growing alienation between the 'socialist' party in government, the PSOE, and the 'socialist' trade union, UGT. Comparisons have been drawn with the 'Winter of Discontent' in Britain in 1979, with the head of the UGT, Nicolas Redondo, comparing the PSOE's senior organiser to Goebbels and demanding the resignation of the Economic Minister, Carlos Solchaga. The union has also decided to draw up its own estimates of what inflation will be for use in negotiations as those of the government have been shown to be consistently too low. Although Spain's growth rate, 5.2%, is the fastest in Europe and its unemployment level is falling, it is still the higher than any other European country. Inflation is currently running at 5%, average wage rises have been 4%

C.N.T. Michelin.

The following articles are condensed from issue no.4 of '¡Despertad!' (Awake!), published in October '88 by the CNT section at Michelin in Vitoria.

EDITORIAL:

As Everyone knows, we are about to begin negotiations for a new agreement in Michelin, and it is clear that recent agreements have lost us much of what we had previously gained. We, the workers, are the only ones who can put a stop to this, and CNT has various proposals to assist in this process, but they boil down to putting the workers themselves back in the driving seat.

Many workers have had false illusions about the Works Committees in the past but most now see that it has turned into another bureaucracy, especially given the majority position of the reformist unions (UGT and CCOD) and the 4 year gap between elections.

No-one at Michelin, or at least not at Vitoria, believes that the Works Committee is a unifying organisation within the workforce. In fact the workers have often had to confront the Committee in fighting for what would benefit them. We all remember the campaign stall put up at the door of the factory in January '87 to demand effective work for all and against the companies plans for 'flexibility'. The Committee's response...? To get those involved disqualified.

Many workers say that the CNT is politically committed to confrontations with the Committee. Yes, it's true. As an autonomous union we can not tolerate events such as those mentioned above, where silence in the name of a false 'workers unity' would mean complicity with their activities. The problem is not, and has never been, about who has a majority on the Committee. The problem revolves around the fact that this executive body does not concern itself with the workers' opinions or seek their involvement, so whoever is on it, it will be against the workers' interests. (*)

Not so long ago, when the workers of Michelin were united and authentically involved in what happen in their name, then workers unity was a reality and we achieved a lot. CNT is committed to regaining this unity - workers' unity not unity through the committee. To achieve this we need an agreement with the other union branches which sets out our demands in the medium and short term; a new agreement by which they abandon their isolation and control in favour of workers' participation and the ability of ordinary workers to make decisions.

CNT has taken the initiative in constantly confronting an employer who is every day more aggressive and sophisticated. The responsibility is now with the workers, unionised or not, because it is the future of us all which is at stake.

(*) As far as I can see, this sentence only makes sense in the context of the rest of this article and others in the same issue (eg the one which follows) if it is taken to mean 'whoever is on it under these conditions....' M.P.

Unity in Action.

Basic Points For Unity Between The Different Unions At Michelin;

UNION ACTIVITY;

United action by the different unions must be based on the goal of giving the ability to make decisions back to the workers themselves, and should not compromise the autonomy of each union.

The Committee should evolve into a body which simply co-ordinates the different union branches in the factory.

We should promote the general assembly of all workers as the place where decisions are made.

Elections to the committee should be held every 2 years [instead of the present 4 year period.]

All unions must agree to be bound by the minimum demands set at assemblies and return to the assembly for further instructions if these need to be modified during negotiations.

No agreement must be signed which lasts for more than 1 year or without consulting the workers in assembly.

Union negotiators should be guaranteed full security and any problems should be resolved by those individuals or collectives affected.

OUR DEMANDS; [or 'And what would you like for Christmas, little boy?']

At Work;

No loss of jobs; a 35 hour week without week-end working or loss of salaries; retirement at 55 on full pay; the abolition of overtime; a relief contract [ie temporary replacement?] for any member of the workforce lost due to accidents; temporary contracts to be limited to such situations or similar (eg military service); automatic re-admission in the case of arbitrary dismissal; job security for anyone who is detained by the police; **Union control over investments and the introduction of new technology.** [Emphasis in the original.]

Salaries;

The return of lost purchasing power; A more equal distribution of salaries; full compensation from the first day of any absence due to illness or accident; a bonus for all those working shifts.

Working Conditions;

No more speed-ups; opposition to the Industrial Plan to increase productivity; improvements in health and the general environment; no work during week-ends or holidays; night time work to be reduced to the minimum necessary; an end to 'flexibility' in terms of work or geographically.

Union Rights;

The right of all union branches at the factory to receive information about the enterprise; all representative union branches should have full rights in all negotiations; aspects of the enterprise which have social consequences or effect job security should be covered by negotiations; the right of veto by the workers' representatives of managerial proposals.

Union branch of CNT at Michelin.

Oveja Negra (Black Sheep) :

EXTRACTS FROM THE CNT-U'S PAPER FOR THE BASQUE COUNTRY (EUSKADI),

No. 26 - March '88.

A NEW LOCAL; The CNT-U in Vitoria has put out an appeal for money so that it can move from its present offices, which are overcrowded. 'A British Group' donated 10,000 pts. Does anybody know who that was?

A NEW LIST OF ADDRESSES; The Association Isaac Puente has produced a second edition of its original guide. This one covers the whole world (284 addresses in Spain, 37 in Britain, etc) and costs 200 pts.

No. 27/28 - May '88.

UNIFICATION; CNT-U Euskadi, at this union plenum of 27.2.88., issues the following statement:

Despite the 'Congress of Unification' and the incorporation of specific branches of the CNT-AIT into our organisation following on from this, we do not consider that there has been a definitive re-unification of all anarcho-syndicalist given the continued existence of two separate organisations. In this context we re-affirm our well known position, which is that we wish to develop towards a single CNT.

We do not believe that the question of whether or not to participate in the elections to the Works Committees is sufficient cause for the division between our two organisations. The real division is between a 'purism' which leads to isolation from the majority of workers, and the temptation of being drawn down the road to reformism. If we do not resolve this division we will be committing an error of historic dimensions, so, though we do not possess any magic formulas, we will suggest the following steps:

a) There must be an end to all hostile acts and statements from both sides, b) We do not believe that it is possible to make the exclusion of certain groups or individuals a precondition for this process of re-unification, c) We should begin a regular exchange of publications and information about our activities and attitudes, d) Joint actions in the workplace and on demonstrations. If we can work with other organisations, surely we can work with each other, e) These day-to-day contacts could lead towards a genuine congress of unification which should be built up from contacts between ordinary members at the base of our two organisations.

Although this statement originates with the CNT-U's section for Euskadi, we feel sure that it is also an expression of the feelings of many other comrades in both organisations.

STATUTES OF THE CNT-U; Many comrades say that the statutes which were passed at our tenth congress were a step in the direction of reformism, but were they? In fact, they are far more anarchistic than those which we had before the congress. The statutes now declare that the CNT-U is anarcho-syndicalist, that no-one who is affiliated to any political party can hold office in the organisation, that we are autonomous (the idea of a committee to 'refine' our structures having been rejected), etc. The main cause of these concerns is actually an annexe which alludes to the powers of the General Secretary. Although I am totally against this annexe, it's worth pointing out that the same powers existed within the body of the constitution we adopted in 1985. What has changed since then is that these powers are being made use of by those of a reformist inclination. Though we must wait till the next congress to get rid of this annexe, the simple solution to the problem would be for the General Secretary to stop using the powers which it gives him. - Secretary for Organisation, Vitoria.

No. 29 - September '88.

THE NEW LOCAL: Work is going on at the moment on the installation of electricity and plumbing, which we hope will be finished by the end of this month. It still remains to provide the furnishings (either that or sit on the floor), and as we only have our own resources to look to, we will mention once again our appeal for finance, in the hope that you will be able to 'come up with the pasta'.

No. 30 - October '88.

POSTAL WORKERS: The union of postal workers in Euskadi is trying to organise a strike against the management's offer of a 4% wage increase and the creeping privatisation of the postal service.

UNIFICATION: As members of the CNT-U in Alcoy (Alicante), we read your public declaration in favour of a re-unification of the CNT with great pleasure. It is our belief that there is a 'silent clamour' in favour of these proposals amongst many members of both CNT which is ready to erupt at the first opportunity. For this reason we have decided to call a national conference of militants from both CNT (and also of those who have left our organisations). The agenda will be very simple and fraternal, hopefully leading to a clarification of the possibilities for dialogue between us, and a genuine Congress of Unification at some later date.

In this way we can begin to walk on 'the good road' and leave behind the uncertain paths of yesterday.

Salome Molto & Conrado Lizcno, August 1988.

Car Workers On The Move.

Following on from the CNT-U's victory in the elections to the Works Committee SEAT's "Zona Franca" factory near Barcelona (See Sinews no. 11), other car workers may be about to go down the same road.

SEAT, which is owned by Volkswagon, is the biggest car manufacturer in Spain, and has 4 main factories. Zona Franca, with a workforce of 16,600, is the largest and is also considered a pivotal centre for Spanish trade unionism, as it has a record of militancy and 60% of workers are affiliated. Obviously therefore the CNT-U's achievements in organising a referendum which forced the resignation of the reformist Works Committee at Zona Franca - after which there were new elections and the number of their delegates increased from 5 to 17, making them the largest union on the Committee - was bound to have repercussions. Another SEAT factory (Martorell, which employs 300 workers) has also had to hold new elections following the resignation of the members of UGT on its Committee. The result of these elections - which were held on September 30th - will be in the next Sinews. So far there is no significant news from the company's two other factories: Prat de Llobregat, near Barcelona, which employs 2,500, and Pamplona with 3,000 workers.

Workers at the FASA-Renault factory in Palencia (about 150 miles north of Madrid) are in the middle of a struggle similar to that at Zona Franca, and though they started organising to demand the resignation of the present Committee before those in SEAT, their struggle has gained new momentum following on from what happened there. To date the CNT has collected 800 signatures on its petition, ie, a third of the workforce, but management is refusing to allow a proper referendum to be organised during work hours. On July 12th, fifteen members of the CNT occupied the company offices to protest against this attitude and also against the plans for restructuring which would lead to massive job losses.

Dockers' Unity Cracking?

Information extracted from 'La Estiba'

Nos.35-41; March to November 1988.

As explained in Sinews no.10, the latest national agreement between the dockers' union (Co-ordinadora or C-0) and the government - which was reached after a bitter struggle against privatisation - involved the introduction of 8 'Sociedades Estatales', or State Councils (SC) with whom there would be local bargaining covering the different regions in Spain. It looks as if this has started to have the predictable effects on the unity of the dockers' organisation, though my impressions have only been formed by reading La Estiba and may have to be revised after I next get to speak directly to some of the dockers involved.

Relationships between the dockers and the different SC seem to vary a lot from one port to another. The dockers in Barcelona more or less got what they wanted in local negotiations when, following a threat to strike on the 8th of August, the management agreed to give them an 8% wage rise over 2 years and instituted proper negotiating procedures. At the other extreme, SESTIBA, the SC for the Canary Islands, which includes the port of Las Palmas, began a lock out of registered dockers on the 4th of October and have since been working with scabs.

Las Palmas is one of Spain's busiest ports with each of the 913 dockers there doing an average of 222 shifts in 1987. As the maximum possible number of shifts is only 225 this means that the workforce is working to 99% of its full capacity. According to the agreement signed on February 5th, 1988, any port which is working above 85% capacity should take on more registered dockers. In fact, the Port Authorities said that they intended to introduce 200 compulsory redundancies on the same day that the SC was finally to be constituted (ie October 1st), using as their justification a part of the agreement which says that all dockers over 55 must retire on full pay. Few dockers have any complaints about retiring after a life of hard physical work, but they object to the fact that unemployed people are not being trained to take over their jobs, or even to increase the workforce so that it is working at 85% capacity. The employers say that they will increase the number of workers to this level... eventually.

The dockers called an indefinite strike of 'alternative hours' on the 1st of October and SESTIBA responded with a lock-out on the 4th. On the 7th the two parties met at the Docks Offices for negotiations. With no conclusion having been reached by midnight the employers' side declared the meeting closed and when the 7 dockers involved objected to the abruptness of this move the police were called. Six wagons full of machine-gun totting police arrived on the scene and burst into the room... As one officer of the law summed up the situation; 'What, just this lot?' Negotiations continued at a later date despite this farcical attitude, but SESTIBA has said that if an agreement has not been reached by November 12 then it will impose its own conditions. On October 16th a demonstration in Las Palmas was broken up by police with several dockers being hurt or arrested.

A General Assembly of C-0, held in Valencia on November 17th & 18th, decided to boycott all ships using scab labour in Las Palmas. (This was extended to also cover Palma de Mallorca on the 21st - see below.)

Following assemblies at each port, an indefinite national strike of alternative hours was called on November 4th, against the lack of co-operation from the government and employers in implementing the February agreement. Problems have included, for example, a blatant favouritism towards members of the PSOE when hiring new dockers in the port of Bilbao, the demand for 211 compulsory redundancies out of a workforce of only 700 in Tenerife and the use of 40 to 60 men from INEM (Spain's MSC) in the port of Palma de Mallorca where they work as day-labourers and are formally dismissed each evening.

However, the assembly in Barcelona decided that - as it had reached a satisfactory agreement with its SC for the implementation of the February agreement - it would not be appropriate for them to join this strike. This was accepted by the C-O, but when the dockers at Huelva, a port to the east of Cadiz, decided they weren't going to join the strike if it was not total, the General Assembly took this to mean that they no longer wished to consider themselves part of the C-O. As I haven't yet had direct contact with any of those involved I will avoid passing comment on who might be at fault in all this, as it might turn out to not be as serious as it seems.

FURTHER POINTS:

The Mixed Commission to oversee the implementation of the February agreement has been set up, and consists of 4 delegates from ANESCO (The employers' organisation), 4 from the State Councils, 5 from CO-ordinadora and 1 each from UGT, CCOO and ELA-STV (The Basque union.)

The 6 dockers arrested in Valencia during the struggle against Contenemar (see Sinews no.10) were tried in October. Despite a prosecution call for sentences totalling 7 years, they only received suspended sentences of between 6 months and 1 year.

Rojo y Negro (Red and Black)

EXTRACTS FROM THE NATIONAL PAPER OF THE CNT-U (Nos.2-6, Feb. to Oct. '88)

HOSPITAL WORKERS at the Civil Hospital in Malaga are fighting a proposal to close their hospital despite massive recent investments in the building and transfer the workers and equipment to another (the University Hospital) which has stood empty since it was built in 1982. The move is involved in the complexities of electioneering politics, with the whole package being sold as 'the opening of a new hospital', but it is also an attempt to undermine the superior conditions enjoyed by workers at the Civil Hospital (where the CNT-U has a strong presence) and the employers have threatened to impose a new agreement if negotiations do not go smoothly.

TWO SOLDIERS have died each week on average in the last 5 years while doing their military service and their suicide rate is 3 times that of civilians.

TEMPORARY WORKERS made up 98% of all new jobs created in the region of Navarra (Northern Spain) during 1987.

THE CNT-AIT's branch at Llorilleux Lefranc (a chemical factory in Badaladona, near Barcelona) has voted unanimously to transfer to the CNT-U, as has the branch at EMT-SAM in Malaga (10.2.88) who are renowned for their militant attitudes. The CNT-AIT recently won a legal appeal in the Basque Country which will allow them to have delegates on Committees without standing for elections. [Funny, I thought they weren't interested,...]

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STOP PRESS: (from La Estiba no.42, Dec. '88.)

Dockers Under Attack.

Teneriffe; Sackings, Scabs & Non-Rotation...

On December 2nd 1988, the RS for Teneriffe (on the Balearic Islands, south east of Barcelona) imposed a new set of working practices which are a direct attack on the conditions which the C-O has fought to achieve.

The system of rotation by which the 703 dockers in Teneriffe work has been unilaterally suspended until November 11th, 1989. From now on the RS will suspend on full pay any men who it does not need, rather than rotating the jobs which are available between the whole workforce. Accordingly, on December the 2nd, the dockers on the 7 o'clock shift were told that they were now unemployed and would have to claim dole (which the employers then top up to their full wage.)

This new system contradicts the very essence of what the C-O stands for, and is an obvious attempt to undermine the high level of solidarity which exists amongst Spain's dockers. As a result, an open assembly of all workers decided to take action. They were already on a strike of alternative hours, which was declared on the 14th of October in response to the employers' refusal to implement the conditions of the February agreement. On December 4th (with the exception of 8 men who decided to scab) the dockers began an all-out strike, and the administration has brought in more scabs from outside.

The RS is insisting that the dockers sign a new 'Employment Plan' which will reduce the workforce by between 17 and 45% and double the number of 'fijos' (or, non-rotated 'regulars'). As far as I understand it, the concept of 'fijos' was introduced to cover highly skilled workers, such as crane drivers, who's work it was not possible to rotate, but the bosses are obviously out to exploit this loop hole.

Las Palmas; Conflict Continues.

On December 5th the lock-out in Las Palmas was lifted, partly as a result of pressure from an organisation of dockers' wives and daughters, though the RS for the Canary Islands (SESTIBA) has said that it will impose it again if there are further 'irregularities'. On the 24th of November there was a demonstration of 10,000 people organised by CANC (the Confederation of Autonomous Canary Island Nationalists) and the next day SESTIBA walked out of joint negotiations with the C-O. As far as I know, the strike of alternate hours still continues.

Palma de Mallorca;

On November 21st the RS for the Balleric islands terminated the contracts of the 52 dockers who were to work the first shift, and has said that from now on the port will only work with 'fijos'. This completely contradicts the February agreement which said that the number of fijos would not exceed a third of the workforce. The port is now being worked by those who were already 'fijos' (without the C-O's objection?) and by scabs.

Solidarity...? Obviously the dockers in Barcelona are carrying out the national decision to boycott any cargos loaded by scabs in other ports, but it seems strange that they have apparently allowed themselves to be placated by a good agreement in their port which the other ports are having to try and achieve as best they can without them. As I'm going over there soon there will be more on this in the next Sinews - out early Spring (?).

THE SAC: SWEDEN'S RANK AND FILE TRADE UNION.

The following 6 page interview was held on June the 14th, 1988, in Stockholm, with Martin Nilsson, the Editor of the SAC's internal monthly magazine 'SAC Kontakt,' Martin, who is 30 years old, has held this position since October '87, having previously worked as a print worker for 10 years. He was a member of the SAC's national committee from 1983-86 (being general secretary for one year in 1986) and this gave him an opportunity to visit the many different branches of the SAC throughout Sweden,

Q: What do the initials 'SAC' stand for?

A: "Swedish Workers' Central Organisation", a name which reflect our desire to unite Sweden's workers, rather than negotiating hundreds of different contracts for different workers in different branches of the same industry, which is what the L.O. (the reformist union) is always doing.

Q: So, tell me something about the SAC's history.

A: Certain members of Sweeden's Social Democratic trade union, the L.O., were impressed by the achievements of the CGT, a syndicalist union in France, and eventually left the LO to form the SAC in 1910. They had hoped that many more LO members would join them following the very clear betrayal of a big strike by that union's leadership in the year before. In fact it was not until the 1920s that the SAC became a mass organisation, mainly because this was a period of intense class conflict and the SAC was the only form of organisation where workers could decide for themselves when to strike, etc. In other words, an organisation willing to engage in class struggle.

During the Second World War strong syndicalist unions in Germany, Spain, Italy, Argentina and Mexico were all smashed by the fascists, leaving only the Swedish union intact, Sweden remained 'neutral' during the War, and in fact the SAC has a strong anti-militarist tradition, though this is not the same as being pacifists, for example, some SAC members went to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

After the war Sweden was prosperous because of it's neutrality, and the idea of class struggle was largely dropped by the SAC in favour of concepts like 'the people'. This 'modernisation' of ideas was led by so-called anarchists. This development was opposed by the Syndicalist League who saw themselves as opposing the growth of a sort of political party, although they themselves were over-reacting by opposing all forms of anarchism. During this period SAC basically turned into a smaller version of the LO - an insurance office which some people only joined because the membership fee was smaller than LO's in certain towns.

When the upheavals of '68/'69 happened no-one saw SAC as an alternative to reformism, but eventually the SAC was influenced by this cultural change and by a relative drop in living standards during the '70's. People were looking for a genuinely democratic union which was controlled by its members, had an awareness of Ecological matters and was willing to fight the bosses for better conditions. As a result, since the 70's, the SAC has been changing back into what it had once been and this development is still going on,, probably will always be going on. Even so, the SAC still contains a lot of people who don't know much about where the organisation stands and are very unaware.

Of the present 15,000 paid-up members there are around 2 or 3,000 activists, so although the total membership has dropped slightly, the number of active members and those under 40 has probably gone up a bit. Sweden has a total population of 8 million of which 1 million are immigrants, half of those Finnish.

Q: I've been told that there were various important changes at recent congresses.

A: Yes but the congresses are not where you change the organisation, you have to do that on a day-to-day basis. The congress is just where you see how well you've been working in between congresses. One milestone was in '75 and '79 when the declaration of principles returned to the original revolutionary format that was dropped in the '50s. Also there has been a constant turn over of delegates elected to run the union from day-to-day, that's one thing that is carried out at these congresses.

Q: What sort of people make up the SAC?

A: We have a lot of young people, whereas the LO is spending a fortune on adverts to try and attract young people into its organisation. One reason for this is that young people find it easier to join the SAC because we are willing to accept them even if they only have a summer job. Mainly though, the SAC is a more dynamic organisation than the LO. Many of the SAC's present activists joined about 15 years ago when they were in their early 20's, but this 'new wave' is also constantly expanding as more young people join the organisation each year.

Traditionally the SAC was very strong in the Construction industry, in Mining and Forestry. Some of the jobs which a lot of our members used to do, like log floating, stone quarrying and railway construction, are now almost non-existent. On the other hand, there is something of a building boom in Stockholm, and in some other big cities as well, because of the number of people moving here from northern towns where the traditional industries have been closed down. This is one reason why it's been possible to get rid of casual labour in the building trade - now all building workers are going to be registered as such, like dockers, and would get paid even if there was no work for them, though at the moment there is no shortage of building work.

The major growth area for the SAC is one in which it does not have a strong tradition, in Public Employees, such as hospital workers, social workers, clerks, etc. There is also a functioning federation of Transport workers.

Forestry has always been an important industry for us, especially in the 'mid North' [ie, North-West of Stockholm,] where you can find whole villages which belong to the SAC. Sometimes it's only because of tradition, but some of them are very radical. There is even one, called Storuman, where the 4 local policemen are in the SAC. One especially, who was supposed to be policing a recent demo against Nuclear Power, had to take 15 minutes leave of duty and cover his uniform with an overcoat because he was one of the guest speakers! Obviously these are exceptional policemen, and they are still very controversial withing the SAC. Even so, any worker is eligible to join the SAC - even police or the military.

Q: Perhaps you could tell me something about how the SAC is organised.

A: The main principle is that every local branch, or L.S., is autonomous as regards their own affairs and works with the others on equal terms. For national decisions you have congresses and referendum between congresses for the election of new positions. We also have a central committee, made up by delegates directly elected on a local basis, and this meets twice a year normally. There is also the executive committee, elected by the congress, which meets, more or less, every week.

Q: Does this involve any electioneering? Is there any limit on how much someone can do to promote themselves?

A: That's never been a problem, usually it's just a question a few column inches in SAC Kontakt with the count being done at the local offices, if anyone went out electioneering in the style of an American presidential campaign they would just make themselves look stupid.

Q: You also have the option of a ballot before strikes?

A: Yes, that would be a workplace ballot, and we use postal ballots for the election of national positions, although local elections are done at local meetings. Obviously the activists who turn up to meetings tend to be more left wing, but we believe that all the members have a right to decide, especially as some have difficulties getting to meetings because of family responsibilities, etc.

Another point is that we don't have any members paying by direct debit from their wages. They have at least got to make the effort to send their dues in by post and turn up now and then so they can get their book stamped up to date.

Q: Has the SAC organised any significant strikes recently?

A: That's a problem because a lot of SAC members are isolated individuals in different workplaces. Perhaps as many as half of the SAC's membership are members of the union for ideological reasons, although a lot of people do use it mainly as a union, for legal advice, negotiation of specific grievances, etc.

In '75 there was a big illegal strike of Forestry workers who wanted to get rid of their productivity deals. The SAC was the only organisation supporting the strike and only SAC members got strike pay.

Q: What happened with that strike?

A: It was fairly successful, but since then they've been trying to get it back. Not the workers... er... perhaps some of the young ones in the south, but...

Q: The bosses?

A: Yeah, the enemy. Although in the north there is more resistance, partly because there is more SAC influence up there, partly because it is a closer community so the young workers react strongly against the older people being worked so hard.

Q: Any struggles amongst those who work as functionaries - social workers, hospital staff, that sort of thing?

A: Not much to date, though they are now trying to get an agreement with the city in Stockholm which is a bit different to what people are used to, in as much as it allows the workforce to go on strike even if their agreement with management has not formally expired. Normally the organisation would get an enormous fine for an 'illegal' strike. For this reason we are possibly moving away from having fixed agreements which prevent you from striking.

Q: So that the workers strength day-to-day is what decides issues, rather than a formal agreement?

A: Yes,

Q: What sort of struggles are going on around health,

A: There is a big push from the government for the privatisation of health, the wages for hospital workers are low and we have some problems with waiting lists,

Q: What about the general standard of living for workers in Sweeden?

A: The official unemployment statistic is only about 2%, even though Swedish women find it a lot easier to get a job than those in other European countries - so compared to the rest of Europe we are well off. Even so Sweeden was 2nd in the international wages list until recently and now it's down to 12th. A few years ago the unemployment went up to around 4% which caused a bit of a panic but since then it has been going down, although of course there is a lot of hidden unemployment and funny schemes to take people off the figures. In fact, the workers in Sweeden have given back quite a lot in the last 10 years,

Q: What about the SAC's publications,

A: We have a weekly paper 'Arbetaren' (The worker) which sells about 5,000 copies each issue, 90% of these go to subscribers, but it can also be bought in kiosks throughout the country - about 500 kiosks take it and sell on average one copy each a week. Only about 1,500 (10%) of the SAC's members subscribe to Arbetaren, though of course a lot of people read it at the local offices, etc. The rest go to sympathisers who read the paper because they can trust it and because it isn't a megaphone for the SAC. A lot of Sweden's most famous left wing writers began their careers in the pages of Arbetaren,

The paper is more-or-less independent of the SAC - we elect the chief editor at the congresses, but that's about all the influence the union has - although the central committee can intervene in an emergency. All 5 members of the editorial board are now members of the SAC, whereas a couple of years ago there was only one SAC member. However the people working on the presses which produce the paper are in fact almost all members of the LO's printing union, mainly because it is traditionally a closed shop in that industry. Not surprisingly the SAC is considered to be about the best employer in the Swedish print industry and we have some of the country's most modern printing presses,

Arbetaren is actually produced elsewhere, but we use that printing press to produce 'SAC Kontakt'. That's our monthly paper for members of the union which I edit and which gets sent out to everyone automatically by post,

Q: How does all this get organised?

A: The SAC has an enterprise called 'federatives' which is made up of 4 parts, the print shop, Arbetaren, a small publishing house, and some parts of the seven storey office block in which we are sitting at the moment which we rent out commercially as offices. These assets have all been built up during the uninterrupted history of the organisation from members subscriptions, and the profits which we make from them go to fund the publication of Arbetaren,

Generally there are now less people employed as editors, distributors, etc, though the last congress decided to have an International Secretary again, which is something we haven't had for a few years. We also have a general secretary and a cashier who work full time, as well as 3 office staff who work part time. In Gavle, northern Sweden, we also have a small office with two employees. As well as this there are about 45 people employed in 'federatives'.

Around the country we have 8 'Ombudsmen', or professional negotiators, where until recently we had 13. They are also supposed to educate people to carry out their own negotiations as well as helping them with advice and guidance.

Q: And do they do that?

A: Some are very good at that, . . . I won't say any more. (laughs). Almost all the local organisations (LS) are run by unpaid volunteer labour although some employ outside accountants or whatever and maybe have a full time receptionists so that people can get in touch with the union at all times - for example, to sort out their unemployment benefits.

Q: How does the autonomy of the LS work out in practice?

A: The main thing is that there is no central organisation which can tell the LS what to do in their own matters, or prevent people getting money out of the SAC's strike fund. Once the LS has decided to go on strike then the members will automatically get strike pay.

Of the membership fee one part goes towards the government's unemployment insurance scheme, one part goes to the central organisation and the third part goes to the local organisation. It's up to the LS to decide how much this local fee should be.

One disadvantage of this system is that some locals think you get more members if you have a low fee, but that just means they can't afford to put out any propaganda. As a result, even if people are fed up with the LO and looking for an alternative they never find out what the SAC is really all about. You see, someone can work a whole lifetime for the LO and still never get any influence over decisions. For example in a referendum of LO forestry workers during the '60s the members all voted 'no' to the proposition, but the leadership still went ahead with it. A lot of these people would be more interested in the SAC if it made more of an effort to reach out to them.

There have been some villages where the new, younger members have had to set up alternative sections of the SAC, by saying that it is for a different part of the town or whatever, simply because the older members are so conservative. On the other hand you can also come across traditional SAC villages where the people read a lot and are always talking and discussing matters.

Q: What about anti-militarism?

A: Yes, that's a long tradition, a part of the organisation, so we're against the military as well as the state, though we don't have a strict line on whether people should refuse their military service or not. Within SAC there is a fund for people who refuse military or 'social' service. About 800 - 1,000 Swedes are presently in jail for refusing to be part of the military or do low paid work for the state - that can just be something like cleaning railway stations. The nominal term is 4 months though everyone except narcotics gets half that, then they are released on parole for 2 years.

Q: How do you break your parole,

A: Something similar, like being on an illegal demonstration, It's a bit much really, for example you get less time if you beat your wife. The government wants to keep the number in jail down so it made 'social service' easier, but then it increased the jail sentence from 1 month to four. At that point the numbers went down overnight to about 200, but now it has been creeping back to around a thousand.

Q: What option did you take?

A: I spent the time in jail.

Q: So what's a Swedish jail like?

A: They're not as liberal as they used to be... but fairly OK. Most of the people I was with were there on driving offences, other 'political' prisoners, people who'd thumped policemen... they were the most fun.

Q: What is the relationship between the SAC and the government in terms of the unemployment insurance system - given that the SAC is involved in a government financed system? How does this fit in with Swedish society in general?

A: In this respect the government looks on us as 'good guys', and unfortunately that fits in very well with Swedish society. However, the parliament has now just decided that the state is going to pay all the benefits, rather than the unions making a small contribution.

Q: Finally, some people have an image of the SAC as a reformist union, what would you say to these people?

A: Well, it's not as bad as they think... but it is true that it's easier to be revolutionary in words, as we are, than in actions. The SAC is very different from one place to another, but there are indeed a lot of people who are working hard, both for the social revolution and for the SAC. I believe in us.

A Personal postscript:

As Martin says, the SAC - like any mass organisation - is obviously not all of a kind, however, all the people I met during my ten day stay in Sweden struck me as genuine radicals, and I was also impressed by the large number of women who are involved in the organisation. Apparently, about half of the SAC's activists are women, and they seem to hold an even larger proportion of the organisation's executive positions.

The position of women in the SAC and Sweden in general, will hopefully be a large part of my next report following a return visit in August.

	Year	Members	Full time %	Pension %	Const %	Forest %	Func %
1910 - 700							
1916 - 9,300							
1920 - 32,300							
1938 - 30,550	1965	21,680	87	12	49	28	2
1944 - 21,900	1970	23,840	82	13	56	22	2
1958 - 16,700	1975	18,980	71	27	44	22	4
1974 - 20,000	1980	17,760	67	31	30	20	14
1982 - 17,090	1985	15,530	62	34	25	18	19
1986 - 15,330*	1986	15,330	62	35	22	17	19

*(The number of activists has apparently increased in last 10 years.)

Stockholm	- 1,100	- Capital, Administration and Building
Goteborg	- 770	- Sweeden's equivelant to Glasgow,
Alvdalen	- 740	- Forestry,
Uppsala	- 510	- Colleges,
Farila	- 390	- Forrestry,
Kiruna	- 320	- Minning,
Malmo	- 160	- Southernmost city,
Helsinborg	- 40	- Crossing to Denmark,

There are several cities less important than Malmo where SAC has more than 200 members.

WOMEN MEMBERS OF THE S.A.C.

ELISABET FRYKERGARD, 34, (Secretary at national offices of SAC in Stockholm.) Interviewed on 19.8.88.

MP: How do you feel about the situation of women in the SAC? Do you feel that you are well represented?

EF: Well, in one way we are, because earlier - in the '50s, there weren't many women in the organisation, but now there are more of us, I think the way we organise, with power staying in the hands of the ordinary members, is more the way that women like to work, so that encourages women to join. For example, in the central executive there are 4 men and 3 women, which is good compared to other organisations, especially the LO, [Sweden's majority, social democratic, reformist trade union.] Even when they organise the 'Svenska Kommunal Arbetar Forbundet' (Community care workers), which are almost all women, the LO's executives are still about 90% men.

MP: Is that typical throughout Swedish society.

EF: Yes, the higher you go the less women you see... except in the SAC, so it is easier for us. However we do have problems because the society we live in affects us. Women tend to let the men talk, so they talk, talk, talk. That is a problem... though I don't think the men would agree. They think they're very liberated, and in some ways they are - it's much easier to communicate - but at the meetings there are problems. The structures fit in with the way men behave and communicate, so women can only be equal if they adopt men's roles.

MP: Do the members of the executive work full time for the SAC?

EF: No they have their own jobs, they don't get paid by the SAC. It's a lot of work for them because they have to meet at least once a fortnight and then they go round the country a lot solving problems and meeting people.

MP: How do the women on the executive feel about their work?

EF: I think they feel positive about it.

MP: Do Swedish women still do certain kinds of work?

EF: Oh yes, usually the low paid work. If men earn about 85,000 SKr (£8,000) a year, the women get about 60,000 on average.

MP: Is that for doing the same work?

EF: Not really, it's normally because the work that women do is generally low paid, or if they are in the same profession as men - for example, working in a hospital - the men are more likely to get promoted into administration or research work, while the women stay in contact with people.

MP: I've heard that child care is very good in Sweden, but do women still find being a mother is a drawback in terms of their careers?

EF: Yes, I think so. Women tend to work less hours a week, say 30 instead of 40 hours a week, so that they can do the housework and all that as well. The younger men are getting better at sharing housework, but it's a slow process.

MP: But the childcare provisions are good, aren't they, so if couples wanted to use them more equally, would that be possible?

EF: Yes, it's just a question of conservative attitudes. That's why it's mainly women who file for divorce in Sweden - because they don't want the extra work - working for their bosses and for their husbands as well.

MP: Has the SAC organised any campaigns around women's issues?

EF: We used to have a women's committee, but we haven't got one now. I wasn't involved in that, so I don't know much about what they did. I don't know why they stopped, perhaps they got a bit isolated, and that made it easier for the men to say that we didn't need them. Personally, I think it was a good idea.

MP: What would you like to see the SAC doing around women's issues?

EF: We need to make contact with the women doing low paid, monotonous work - to organise them better. Some local organisations are better, such as Goteborg where there are a lot of active women. I noticed at the conference last year that the women from that city talked a lot, and talked well. It was very impressive. We're hoping to meet them soon, just as a group of women who meet informally in Stockholm.

MP: What's the education system like in Sweeden?

EF: There are a lot of women in higher education. At that level there are as many women as men, but it doesn't stay like that when it comes to technical or scientific jobs. Anyway, those average figures are not totally clear cut, because the nurse training collages are still almost all women and the technical collages are nearly all men.

MP: I've seen a few women round Stocknolm on building sites, wearing hard hats and that...

EF: The government has passed laws encouraging women to go into construction or technical industries, but at the actual workplace it is still very difficult. A lot of women think it's not worth getting an education in, say, engineering if you're going to find it really difficult to get a job... or when you do get a job you don't get promotion. You have to very tough to stand up to that, so instead most women go for traditional women's careers. Another point is that the childcare facilities don't really solve the problems of working class women. For one thing they are cutting back a bit now because of pressure from the right-wing parties against social spending. It's a trend in the eighties, there's even been some privatisation which means that only those with money can really get what they need. But anyway, middle class parents can always get the access to childcare, state or private, because they undersatand the system, they know where to get the information and they make phone calls, pull the right strings. Working class families tend to rely more on 'Day Mothers', women who are paid by the state to look after 5 or 6 children in their own homes. Generally, I don't think they're as good as kindergardens because the 'Day Mothers' don't need to be qualified or have any special arrangements.

MP: Of couse, a lot of people say there are no working class people in Sweeden...

EF: (laughs) They must lead a very secluded life. In fact I'd say that it's a very segregated society. I recently moved to the north of Stockholm, and it's incredible. Big houses with enormous gardens, Mercedes in the drive and a boat in the water at the bottom of the garden. Of course you can live there and you don't see anything else. On the other hand you have high rise flats in the south of the city which are immigrant areas. I'd also say that the rich get off very lightly in terms of taxes. Their local taxes are a lot lower because they need less services. Also they can count any loans for houses, etc against taxes... and of course they have the best accountants. Also women pay more taxes than men, even though they earn less... presumably because they have less bank loans to write off against tax. Our pensions are also less than men's because you get a basic pension of about 30,000 Skr (£3,000) a year, plus your rent, but then additions to that depend on your employment history.

MP: You're an employee of the SAC aren't you.

EF: Yes, I've been working here now for two years.

MP: What kind of boss is the SAC?

EF: (laughs) Oh I don't feel like I have a boss. Technically Ingemar, the general secretary, is my boss, but really we work more like a team.

ANN IGHE, 19, (student), ex of SAC executive in Goteborg.
AGNETE BRETAN, 21, (ex-factory worker), presently on executive in G.

Interviewed in a squat in Haga district of G, on 30.8.88.

MP: Goteborg is famous for having an all female executive, and being a centre of matriarchal power within the SAC, (Laughter) What do you reckon?

AI: We were talking about that, and one woman said she wasn't very surprised that there are no men on the executive because it doesn't give you any power. You spend all your time doing paperwork, making coffee, making things work.

MP: Who do you make coffee for?

AI: For the meetings, and ourselves of course. That's just a little thing, it's more that you do all the organising without getting any power.

MP: How's that? How are you different to other executives?

AB: Well the executive doesn't put forward proposals. Some years ago, another executive did put forward the proposal that we should officially define ourselves as anarcho-syndicalist, which was accepted, but that's not usual. Obviously, we don't want the executive to have power, but perhaps the fact that hasn't is one reason why the men aren't so interested in getting on to it.

MP: So where are the descisions made?

IB: In the monthly open meetings. The executive just carries out those descisions.

MP: Are there a lot of women in Goteborg LS [Local Section] generally?

AI: Among the activists it's about equal in terms of men and women, but I really don't know. We've got about 800 members now and I haven't seen most of them.

MP: Do you find that having more women changes the nature of the meetings?

AB: I think that if you're a new woman member and you see there are a lot of women speaking at the meetings then it gives you confidence. Of course the ones who are familiar with the meetings do still find things easier, but I think we are more aware of that in Goteborg. Recently we've started splitting the meeting up into little groups as well sometimes.

AI: It's just that if there are 40 of you in a room, then sometimes it's no discussion because people just say the same things over and over again. So it's more democratic to split into small groups.

MP: Do you ever feel that you'd like to have some men on the executive? Last year you had a token man on the executive didn't you?

AB: (laughs) Well, it is better to have men and women on the executive. I don't particularly want it to be an all women executive, but it's just happened that way.

MP: Have you done any activities specifically for women?

AI: They had a women's committee in the 70's...

AB: A lot of people in our organisation think we are all equal now, so the discussion is not so... people take it for granted.

AI: In some ways, because there are a lot of women activists, we always get a women's angle on any subject that's being discussed.

MP: Yeah, but do you confront the problems of women in Swedish society in general... childcare, job descrimination, that sort of thing?

AI: Sometimes, on certain issues, but we don't have a party programme as such, so... There was a unofficial strike here last October of the women working at the state kindergarden. The Town Council wanted to give them more children to look after, so they went on strike for a couple of days. As the LO was opposed to that strike only the ones who were in the SAC got any strike pay.

MP: Did they win?

AI: It was more of a symbolic thing against the LO and the Town Council,

MP: Did people get a good impression of the SAC?

AI: I think so, because the LO had a big meeting to tell them "Look, you can't do this" and we were stood outside giving them leaflets saying "We pay our members, they can strike any time they want,"

AB: My sister works in the kindergardens and she said a lot of the main activists were SAC members,

MP: Did any of them leave the LO and join the SAC?

AI: We got quite a few new members that month, but I don't know specifically. Really a lot of our work is on the properganda level, because people simply don't know that we exist. There's a virtual media black out on news about SAC. For example, we had an exhibition at the Central Library last month and that was good. It was mainly women running that,...

MP: A lot of hard work, ...?

AI: (laughs) I suppose so,

AB: We're also hoping to go out to schools, like the LO do,

AI: It's not just a question of getting more and more members though. We have to get more activists - otherwise it just means more paperwork for the same activists,

MP: You also need to break into the are of trade union activities as well, don't you?

AI: Yes, though there are a lot of government employees joining now, and many of them are women,

MP: Are they organised effectively in Goteborg?

AI: No, they're not. Most of the people who were the driving force behind organising that sector were women, and they've all had children recently so, ...

AB: The education sector is about the only really good one, although the construction and transport ones do exist,

AI: Yeah, I got into the SAC because of the education sector, because it organises students as well as teachers and lecturers. You see, I started going down the syndicalist book shop when I was about 14, and it was good that I could join the union at that age,

AB: There are a lot of young people joining the SAC these days. If you look at the lists each month there are about 10 or 15 new members in Goteborg, and nearly all of them were born in the '60s. So in a few years time we should be quite strong, hopefully we'll have learned about union organising,

AI: One problem is that there are a lot of young activists who don't identify with their work. They're just working for a while to get money, so they don't want to stay and make a fight of it. I'm the same, ...

AB: You can't strike after one week,

AI: It's a pity, because the SAC is a trade union, it does function as a trade union, we do a lot of negotiations on an individual level - greivences and things like that - but in some parts it's mostly a political organisation. It's supposed to be that, as well as a trade union, but it could go too far in that direction. We've got the biggest Volvo factory in Sweeden here, but there are very few members of the workforce who are in the SAC. There are a few engineers, but almost no blue collar workers. There is a very active anarcho-syndicalist who's been there for 11 years, but he works through the opposition inside the LO because there's no power if you're one lone syndicalist. Also the LO makes it very difficult to be a SAC member if you're in that factory,

AI: Most of our workers are employed by the government, so if you're working with people it's not easy to go on strike because you know who is going to be the first to suffer. As a result the salaries are very low, and of course it's women's work.

MP: What can you do in that kind of situation?

AI: When I was working in a hospital we called in the Workers Protection Board because the conditions were so bad, but nothing really happened.

AB: I don't know if you heard about Lars Falkenberg, a SAC member who... what do you call someone who drives a train, .?

MP: A train driver.

AB: (laughs) OK, so he was a train driver who was supposed to drive a train full of weapons for Bofors in Karlskoga, (*) but he refused and instead sat in front of the train. There was a big fuss about it and it was in all the media, but they never mentioned that he was a member of the SAC. His LS supported him, but he got sacked in the end.

MP: Surely though a kindergarden strike would just mean that the parents had to stay at home. It wouldn't hurt the children.

AB: Well no, but it's also usually illegal. The union can be fined if the LO is the majority union and it doesn't want there to be a strike.

AI: You can get round it on a technicality - by calling the strike pay 'compensation', things like that - but just about anything effective that you want to do is illegal. You don't have any strike freedom because the LO tells you when to go on strike.

AB: The LO leaders just live off the employers. It's like a big club up there. You've probably got the same in England... except that you've got Arthur Scargill. (laughs)

MP: Yeah well, he's not perfect. Put it like that.

AI: No, I didn't think so really.

MP: Do you get involved in general women's issues such as abortion?

AI: Well, abortion is free here.

MP: So you've more or less got abortion on demand in Sweeden.

AI: Not more or less, we have - up to 12 weeks.

AB: As for divorce, you just do it - just go along and sign a piece of paper. That kind of moral question, about families and all that, is not really an issue here.

MP: What about contraception?

AI: That's totally free, you can buy condoms in lots of shops, though they're expensive. And you get the pill just by asking for it. I got it when I was 14 and I think that's wrong. Not for any moral reasons, but there isn't any debate about the side effects.

AB: If you go to the doctor they just write it out, and they say it's good... you'll never get pregnant.

AI: And some women don't ever get pregnant, even when they've stop taking them.

MP: Has there been any counter information.

AB: Very little. There was a magazine a few years ago which did some articles, and there is some information about alternative forms of contraception, but only certain kinds of people get to hear about that.

AI: Another issue, one we discussed with the women in Spain when we were there in June, was the problem of wife beating. They'd heard about all the advantages that we have here in Sweeden as women, but in fact there is one woman a week who gets killed by the man she's living with... and that's in a population of only 8 million.

MP: Sweedish men drink a lot at home, don't they?

(*) The scandle about Bafors supplying arms to India was on ITV, Sept '88.

AI: Yes, it's so expensive to go out, so they stay at home and get drunk. We recently reported one of the yuppies over the road for beating his wife up - we could see it all through the windows.

AB: We're a very safe society here in material terms, but people have lost something - they feel very isolated.

MP: What about the refuges for battered women?

AI: There's a network of emergency telephones all over the country now, even in very small towns, and that's good, but they don't get enough funding really.

AB: There's a women's house here in Goteborg, but that's about to close down, so we'll just have one institutionalised refuge in the city.

AI: There's a women's school as well, mainly for women immigrants, so that their men will allow them to integrate into Swedish society a bit more. It's quite interesting because almost all the teachers are in the SAC so they run it co-operatively. They rotate all the cleaning work, and the position of principle is rotated as well. It's a space where they can do some useful work in terms of expanding the women's horizons.

AB: Often things like that happen with a lot of involvement from SAC members, but nobody knows that the SAC is involved. So now we're trying to make that more obvious, declaring who we are when we do anything.

MP: What did you think of your recent visit to Spain?

AI: About 40 (?) of us went down, mainly from Goteborg and Stockholm, in a bus, for about 10 days (?). We went to Barcelona, Zaragoza and Vitoria, mainly, so each place was different. Obviously there were not many women in the meetings - one man who brought his girlfriend along got stared at as if you shouldn't bring women to meetings. They talked about the problems people had in getting to meetings if they had children, but they didn't actually stay at home to look after their children. They had to go to the meetings.

AB: When we talked to men about the problems of being in the CNT they mentioned the bosses, or laws, things like that, but when you asked a woman the first thing she said was 'Children.' We had a meeting in Barcelona with some woman from Mujeres Libres [the women's organisation within CNT] and they'd done a really good exhibition about women in the Civil War. They said that most women in Spain don't have paid work, so they don't get into a union, although a lot of the new CNT members are bank workers and nurses - that kind of thing - jobs where a lot of women work. We brought up the issue wherever we went, and in Vitoria they did seem to be aware that it was a problem.

AI: In Zaragoza there were probably more women members of the CNT.

MP: Yeah, I think Z is to Spain what Goteborg is to Sweeden - in terms of women's issues, ecology, anti-militarism and all that. The last time I was there they said to me that they tend to just work as women in the CNT, rather than through a seperate women's organisation.

AB: Of course you don't have to have a seperate women's organisation, the ideal is that you wouldn't need one, but sometimes a seperate organisation is a way to build up confidence at the start.

MP: Do you feel that you don't need a seperate women's committee in Goteborg because there are a lot of experienced women activists here?

AI: Personally, I think that what I have to do is to work as a woman in the organisation, with women and men.

AB: Yeah, we don't really meet that kind of attitude that I've heard women from other parts of the country do. It's not difficult to stand up as a woman and say something at a meeting, not at all, because for us it's so natural.

End of tape.

**THE OVB: HOLLAND'S
RANK AND FILE TRADE UNION.**

(2 pages)

In June '88, during a one day visit to Rotterdam, I was able to do a brief interview with the General Secretary of the OVB via a translator who only spoke Dutch and Spanish. The language barrier wasn't a problem, but given the briefness of my visit it was obviously not possible to get an in depth picture of what the OVB is like on the ground. In other words, this article can only serve as a brief introduction, which will hopefully inspire others to find out more.

The OVB does not accept the label 'syndicalist' because most of its members vote in elections and some of them are socialists, communists, christians even, as well as some 'self confessed' syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalist.

Nevertheless the OVB does observe the basic syndicalist principles of not being linked to any political party, not allowing members of the executive of any political party or religious organisation to sit on its executive, running the union with a minimum of paid officials (95% of the work is done by volunteers after work or on Saturdays) and trying to increase the control of the union by its ordinary members.

One expression of this control from the base is that if a simple majority of any workforce votes to go on strike then the OVB members amongst them will automatically get strike pay. No central body exists which can deny them this.

The OVB also has a decentralised structure in term of the different industrial groupings which make up its membership. Each of these is autonomous in terms of matters which only effect itself (at least in theory - see the end of page two). These industrial groups hold their own reunions every 2 years.

In order of importance these industrial unions are:

1. Fishing - 90% of all unionised Dutch fishermen are in the OVB.
2. Construction.
3. Transport - including a significant influence amongst the dockers in Rotterdam.
4. Metal.
5. Factories.
6. Government employees.
7. Commerce - including small shops.

Exact details of the OVB membership figures were not available because of fears that if this information got into the public domain it could be used to assist the bosses in calculating the union's assets and therefore its ability to fight a long strike, for example.

All dues are paid to the union local, with 27% of this money going to the industrial organisations. Generally speaking the local organisations, ie those which unite all the workers in a certain geographical area, are more important than the industrial ones (another tradition amongst syndicalist unions) with the most important centres being:

1. Den Haag.
2. Rotterdam.
3. Eindhoven.
4. Tilburg.
5. Groninger. (A northern city with a long history of struggle.)

The OVB began in 1948 and was founded from the EVC - a union dedicated to the unification of the working class - by those who objected to the Stalinists attempts to dissolve this union into the reformist unions. It also benefited from being given the funds of the NSV, an avowedly syndicalist union, when this eventually dissolved itself. The OVB has always had a history of anti-militarism, eg its links with the pacifist organisation BIVAC.

In 1987 a 13 week strike in the port of Rotterdam was largely influenced by the OVB and their proposal that there should be no forced redundancies and right to retire at 57 finally won the day.

During the British Miners' strike in '84/5 the OVB was the first international union to help the NUM and eventually gave a total contribution which amounted to 12 florins (about £4) for each of its members. As well as this they carry on supporting revolutionary unions in South Africa

Due to lack of time I was only able to get a second hand version of the disagreements which have taken place between the central executive of the OVB and the small number of anarcho-syndicalist members of the union... from a source sympathetic to the latter.

Both members of the IWA/AIT's Dutch section are in the government workers' section of the OVB in Amsterdam. It would seem that they have an influence which outweighs their numbers as, according to my source and following on from an historical article they wrote on the history of anarcho-syndicalism in the OVB, they were the reason why the central executive 'asked' their industrial section in the city to re-run its elections for officers. The latest news is that the same 'troublemakers' have been returned to office, so it remains to be seen how this will all work out.

Of course these allegations are so far unsubstantiated, though it is a fact that the members of the OVB's central committee have not been changed in years, which can't be a good sign.

On the other hand, it seems as if the OVB has the potential to be syndicalist in form if not in name, and they also have a good record of international solidarity work.

Further information is now required...