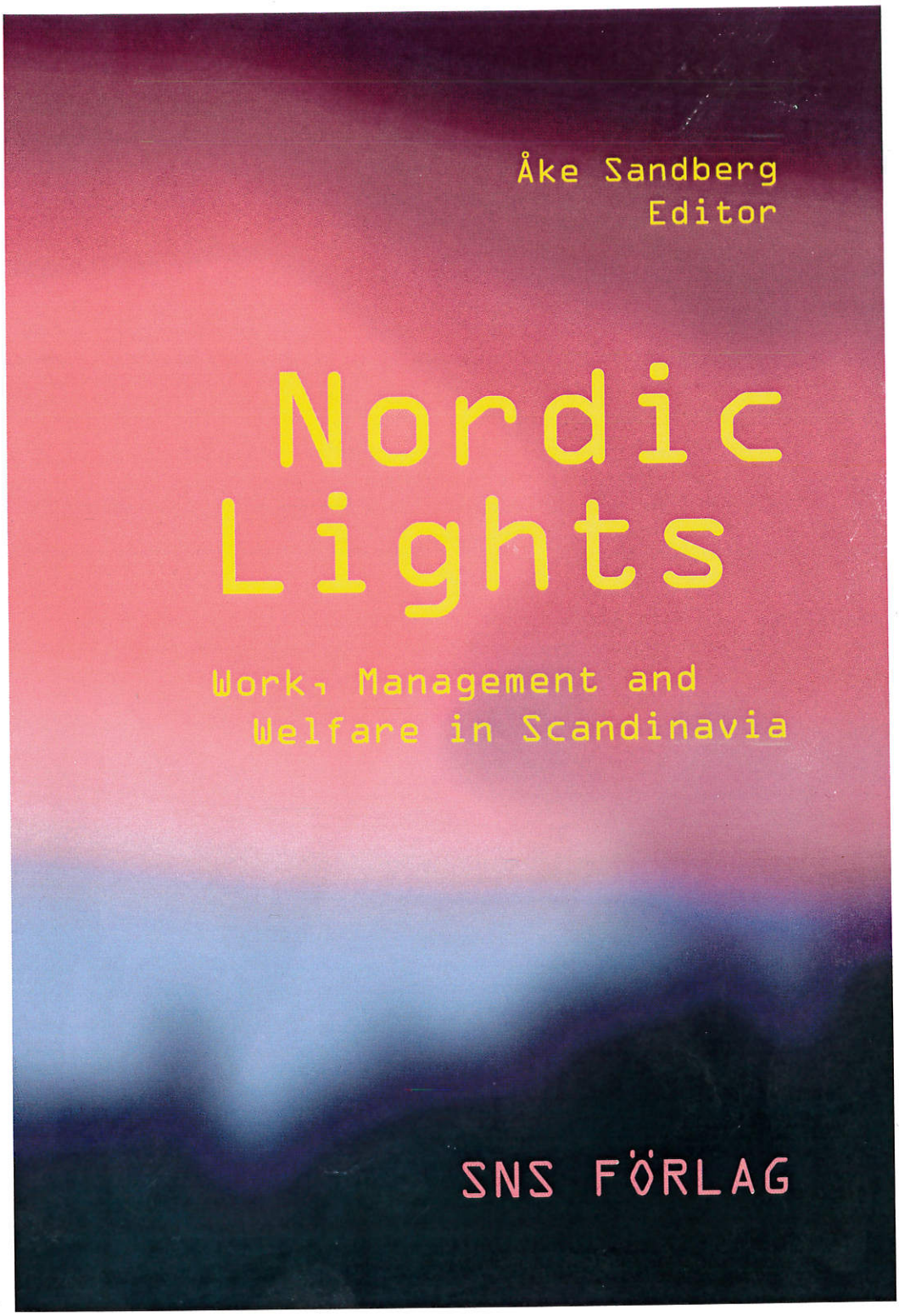
Nordic Lights

Book Reviews until autumn 2015



Nordic Lights: A British Perspective

Work, employment and society
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Åke Sandberg (ed.)
Nordic Lights: Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia
Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2013, 393KR hbk, (ISBN: 9789186949372), 512 pp.

Reviewed by Stephen Ackroyd, *Lancaster University, UK*

Against the background of de-industrialization and social problems in post-war Britain, Sweden became a potent symbol of success for many in the UK. In this Scandinavian country, effective cooperation between both labour and capital had been achieved as long ago as the early 1930s and industry was being rationalized in an orderly way. Where global competition was fierce, such as in shipbuilding, activity was phased out, but there was nonetheless a continuing emphasis on sustained industrial investment. That such a demographically small country could continue to produce high quality cars, trucks and ships and aircraft, while also having a comprehensive system of social welfare and few strikes, was impressive. Sweden might not be socialist, we thought, but surely it was a model that demonstrated that co-operative industrial development was possible.

Fast forward thirty years from the end of the 1980s and much has changed. But just how much? *Nordic Lights* is a self-assessment by colleagues mainly based in Sweden as to the extent of change in their own country and of the 'Scandinavian model' more comprehensively understood. The book has 19 chapters assessing different aspects of change, presenting a thorough and, for the most part, empirically grounded assessment, by people experts in their field. Movitz and Sandberg ably set out the structure of the book in Chapters 1 and 2, by describing the elements of what they call the 'productive welfare system'. Although they consider some other points of view, the 'productive welfare system' is taken to be central to the Nordic model throughout the book. There is more than a small degree of consensus among contributing authors in this collection that, although under challenge, the Nordic lights are still there and they are still – in some aspects – spectacular.

There are many indications within the book that the system is under challenge. Yet it is also possible, as the book clearly demonstrates, to overstate the case for change. In Chapter 2, Bjorkman argues for the influence of professional services firms (such as Deloitte or PWC) on management thinking in Scandinavia, which, he avers, continues to be dominated by American ideas and yet indigenous ideas and behaviour obviously continue to be influential in practice. In Chapter 19, the final essay in the volume, Jonsson shows that Swedish academic schools of thought are vigorous and therefore, more

fashionable managerial ideas have limited impact in this context. Eriksson and Karlsson (Chapter 12) argue inter alia that there has been only quite limited take up of flexible employment contracts in Swedish organizations. In practice, indigenous management and labour practices are resilient. The modernization of the economy, characterized by the development of new industries, such as information technology (Chapter 16) and digital media services (Chapter 17) have not been inhibited, despite the resilience of older forms of organization. Evidence does point, however, to reduced participation in boards by unions (Chapter 14) and a decline in union densities (Chapter 18), but this does not appear to contradict the centrality of both participative decision making in company boards and active unions as key features of Swedish business.

Clearly there has been much change in Sweden and the question of how significant it is is brought into better focus by this enquiry. Despite the diversity of their content and with many qualifications, a consistent picture begins to emerge from these chapters. First, the Swedish economy is still recognizably an industrial one. Second, union membership and the participation of unions in public affairs remains high. Third, the welfare system might be somewhat differently administered in the contemporary context, but it is still an effective agency for redistribution and overall inequality is much narrower throughout Scandinavia than it is elsewhere. Although, as mentioned, strategic withdrawal from industrial sectors that are facing overwhelming global competition continues to occur in a relatively orderly way, on the other hand, there is a great deal of Swedish engineering and automotive manufacturing that continues. This puts the hand-wringing over the fate of Volvo car manufacture at Uddevalla, in this book (Chapters 5 and 6) and elsewhere, in a more appropriate perspective. Large-scale car production is not profitable today unless labour is extremely cheap, production is subsidized and a firm's markets are conducive. Thus, the idea that Volvo pundits wish to defend – that manufacturing of standardized vehicles by small teams of skilled workers is viable – is probably true, but beside the point. Lacking a significant home market and having only a niche position in European and American markets, it is not surprising that the Volvo and Saab car businesses had a problematic future – whatever production methods were used. On the other hand, Volvo and Scania trucks and buses (which are not mass-produced) remain highly profitable. Indeed, there is hardly a municipal bus fleet in Europe that is not largely made up of Swedish vehicles and sales are increasing worldwide also. Despite this, it remains regrettable that so much of Swedish manufacturing is of armaments and weapons systems.

This fine book deserves to be widely studied. However, at various points the narrative could have done with supplementation in the shape of more discussion of general trends of employment and investment, broken down by sectors for the economy as a whole. Clearly too, structural analysis of the balance of power between the classes would have been valuable. One suspects that the loss of a monopoly of political power by organized labour is not the only fact of importance here. The small size and relative isolation of the owning class, together with the large size of the professional groups are also key social facts supporting the continuation of industrial activities. There are few signs that one group is exercising their economic power selfishly and placing their own advantages far above the interest of the community as a whole, as has happened in Britain and elsewhere.

Book review symposium

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Reviewed by Ann Bergman, *Karlstad Business School, Karlstad University, Sweden*

Social scientists often refer to research questions as 'concerns'. I find the term appropriate, particularly when looking at contemporary working life. Even if things are improving in some respects, the number of concerns remains overwhelming. Consequently, there are calls for scholars to use their knowledge to do something about them, i.e. to get out of the ivory tower. On the other hand, research pursued for normative goals is criticized for not being compatible with a value-neutral standpoint. In some cases, the contested fact/value border is transcended and the two important dimensions unite – science and society.

An example of this unification is the voluminous anthology *Nordic Lights*, in which Åke Sandberg and 24 other authors combine empirically grounded and theoretically well founded studies of work with a normative discussion of possible ways to 'combine welfare, equality and good work with competitive companies and economic development' (p. 11). *Nordic Lights* is of great value to anyone interested in tracing and understanding the various manifestations of a neo-liberal economy and its consequences in and beyond Scandinavia. Although Scandinavia remains surrounded by an egalitarian aura, it has deteriorated in this respect, as described in *Nordic Lights*, which addresses the challenges, tensions and pressures to follow market forces.

Although the book has a steady focus on Scandinavian (mainly Swedish) working life circumstances, it relates the findings to a broader Anglo-Saxon context. Its overall purpose is 'to investigate work and management, not only from a managerial perspective [...] but also from a worker and union perspective' and by relating work and management to the welfare state (p. 11).Throughout the book, an immanent critique emerges concerning managerial ideas that have an American origin and a neo-liberal twist. Sandberg explains that the book assumes a critical perspective rooted in a Scandinavian tradition, in which the democratization of working life, the labour market model and socio-technical work organization has played a crucial role. His own perspective is based in labour process theory and the book is framed in accordance with this tradition. Even if this perspective is evident throughout the book, not all of the chapters are written from this theoretical standpoint.

The book consists, besides an extensive introduction, of five thematic parts covering the Nordic model and its challenges. Some examples of the rich and various content are: globalization, market competition and labour relations; trends in organization and management; working conditions in relation to work intensification, demands of flexibility and skills; gender and management; and what is new and what is old in Swedish working life. The chapters are insightful and I believe the book will have an impact on the debate within the traditions of labour process and management and organization.

Although the book is comprehensive, there is a vital aspect that needs to be considered in order to understand what is going on in contemporary Nordic working life. As the book raises questions about how to combine good work, welfare and equality with economic development, an empirically and analytically important piece is missing: gender.

Among other things, the book is about what is old and what is new and what can be identified as important mechanisms for change in working life. Critical to this conversation is women's entry into the labour market and men's increasing responsibility for unpaid work, since this must be regarded as a significant change. However, there are two chapters on gender and management that address changing trends in terms of the proportion of women in management, as well as the general perception of gender and of management in Sweden. While gender and management within the private sector is undoubtedly an important field of study, it is too narrow in relation to the scope of the book. The work carried out in the still fairly large and heavily female-dominated public sector is noticeably absent. This sector is interesting in many ways in relation to the purpose of the book. Apart from being female-dominated and experiencing poor working conditions, the sector has a high proportion of women in managerial positions and is a giant laboratory for testing out neo-liberal management ideas.

Another area of relevance due to increasing female labour market participation is the unions. In Sweden, a larger proportion of women are union members than men, both among white and blue collar workers. Here is a potential mechanism for changes in as-yet undetermined directions. Will the strategies and interests of the unions adapt to traditional concerns that are historically formulated by men or will there be questions recognizing concerns based on women's experiences and interests as well? A third absent subject is the relation between production and reproduction, which is a recognized concern for individuals as well as for the welfare state.

As stated at the start of this review, there is an underlying emancipatory thesis in the book, driven by a motive to discuss alternative ways of organizing work. I believe that the interesting analysis and conclusions made could have been developed by seeing transformed gender relations as a causal force in society and, accordingly, an important historical condition for change. The impact of gender is manifested in various ways and is, to a large extent, a consequence of the early women's movement and later feminism. Although feminism remains partly a separatist force in society, mainstreaming has meant that it is also well integrated into political bodies, organizations and movements. The changes we witness in today's working life have consequences for gender, but this is not all; the causality also works in the other direction and it is essential to begin to account for the ways in which working life patterns are likely to change as a result of changed gender relations.

Book review symposium

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Reviewed by Gerhard Bosch, *University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany*

One of the key building blocks of the Nordic social model was the humanization of work. This included not only extensive regulations on health and safety in the workplace but also an increase in employees' scope for action: monotonous work was reduced, job content enriched and hierarchies partially dismantled by devolving greater autonomy and decision-making power to work groups and granting comprehensive rights of codetermination to the trade unions. Between 1960 and 1990, the Nordic countries, particularly Norway and Sweden, were regarded throughout the world as a unique laboratory, in which firms, working in close cooperation with trade unions and with substantial state support, were developing alternatives to the hierarchical management systems that had originated for the most part in the USA. The replacement of the assembly line by semi-autonomous work groups with production cycle times of several hours in the two Volvo plants in Kalmar and Udevalla in the 1970s and 1980s – i.e. just when North American and continental European automotive companies were aligning themselves with the Japanese lean production model with short cycle times of 60 seconds maximum – was heralded as the death knell for Taylorism. When Volvo got into economic difficulties at the beginning of the 1990s, however, it was precisely these two showcase plants that were shut down.

Was that the end of Nordic exceptionalism and are there any traces of it left today? This is the question investigated in this volume edited by Åke Sandberg. Its 19 chapters, spread over around 500 pages and written for the most part by Swedish experts but with contributions from Norway and Denmark, shed light on various aspects of the Nordic production model. According to Movitz and Sandberg, its most important characteristics (p. 53) are:

1) openness to change and innovation,
2) participation and union influence,
3) informality, consensus and open dialogue,
4) autonomous work groups, and
5) value-based and visionary management.

Bruhn, Kjellberg and Sandberg show how demanding the production model is because of its embeddedness in the Nordic social model. The influence of the trade unions and the high degree of consensus are linked to very high union density, which is maintained primarily by the trade unions' responsibility for unemployment insurance. The trade unions' openness to technical change is strengthened by an active labour market policy and a solidaristic wages policy, which eases the transition to new jobs. The dismantling of hierarchies and the informality of relations are reinforced by an egalitarian income distribution and only small differences in status between groups and individuals. In Sweden, the conservative governments of recent years have not actually openly attacked the Swedish social model but have, nevertheless, undermined it by privatizing many public services, abolishing tax deductibility for trade union dues and weakening trade union influence on the unemployment insurance scheme. These measures have been further compounded by structural change and increased individualization within society. The 'blue-collar' trade union umbrella organization LO (Swedish Trade Union Confederation), which is linked to the Swedish Social Democratic Party and within whose ranks the Swedish model was developed, has lost ground to the two politically unaffiliated 'white-collar' unions. The focus of trade union activity has shifted from shaping work organization and job design to supporting members in getting the jobs offered in the market. This shift of focus does not appear to be an accident. In 2007, the conservative government disbanded the *Arbetslivscentrum* (The Swedish Centre for Working Life), which had provided the creative inspiration for the further development of the Swedish production model. As Björkmann impressively describes, Swedish consulting firms have gradually been taken over by US companies and alternative management approaches have now been marginalized in Sweden. Nevertheless, most Swedish managers even today view the close cooperation with the trade unions on boards of directors in a very positive light, which constitutes a key difference between them and their counterparts in the English-speaking world (Movitz/Levionson).

Two chapters (Boglind and Blomquist/Engström/Jonsson/Medbo) are concerned with work organization in the automotive industry, particularly at Volvo. They show, on the one hand, that the closure of the Volvo factories at Uddevalla and Kalmar had more to do with a shrinking order book and the concentration of production in Gothenburg than with the deliberate ending of a failed experiment. On the other hand, they point out that the efficiency potential of Volvo's semi-autonomous mode of work organization was never fully exploited. Use of such a system requires a high level of expertise, which is in ever diminishing supply today, so that the firm now adheres to globally accepted approaches to production. This shift was accelerated by the repeated changes of ownership and, above all, the takeover by Ford.

This move away from 'home-grown' Nordic management approaches to integration into the international mainstream is confirmed in further chapters in the book by case studies in various industries as well as in thematic chapters on the organization of health and safety or gender in management, for example. Of particular note in this regard is Hall's chapter on the role of the new public management systems in the Swedish public sector. Sweden has disbanded several of its national planning bodies, such as the National Board of Health and the National School Board, and has transferred planning and implementation to local authority level. At the same time, many services, including some in

care and education, have been privatized. This fragmentation was intended in part to avoid conflicts. The former social democratic finance minister Feldt wrote in his memoirs that he was tired of disputes with the teaching unions and had therefore devolved responsibility to the local authorities. As a result of this fragmentation of responsibilities, politicians have ultimately lost influence over the public sector. There is a lack of coordinated evaluation and further development of service quality. The PISA results for Sweden have also deteriorated as a result.

According to these largely sceptical chapters, the initial question of whether there are still any traces left of the Nordic production model becomes even more pressing. It is only in the introductory chapters by Movitz/Sandberg and Bruhn/Kjellberg/Sandberg that the question is explicitly answered; in the other chapters, readers have rather to engage in a process of deduction. The answer can be summarized as follows. Yes, there is still a specifically Nordic model of trust-based cooperation in the workplace, with flat hierarchies, strong trade union influence and a high degree of informality as a result of short social distances. However, the era of the major experiments with original forms of work organization is now past. Alternative paradigms have lost influence or been politically marginalized. Instead, internationally accepted management approaches have been adapted to the particular conditions found in the Scandinavian countries and in this way have acquired their particularity.

The book provides an excellent overview of the Nordic production model and the changes that have gradually taken place over the last 30 years. It is, however, regrettable that there are no chapters on the links between the production and welfare model, which are at present probably the main sources of political support of the Nordic models. All foreign observers are immediately struck by the family-friendly working hours, with little overtime and with rights to part-time working and parental leave. Many of the demands for flexibility that firms have to deal with come from their employees. At the same time, the Scandinavian countries have the highest employment rates in the EU for older workers, including the less skilled, which points to the existence of working and employment conditions suited to older workers. I am also missing a chapter on the threat, posed by the EU freedom to provide services with posted workers in other member states, to collective bargaining, which till now functioned well in the Nordic countries. The Swedish Government recently outlawed strikes against foreign firms in support of demands that go beyond the legislative minima.

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Book review symposium

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Response to reviewers by Åke Sandberg, *Stockholm University, Sweden*

In *Nordic Lights: Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia* we wanted to describe and analyse what have varyingly been called the Nordic/Scandinavian/Swedish models. Our focus is on Sweden but we also introduce experiences from its Scandinavian neighbours Denmark and Norway. As the reviewers have rightly noted, we regard the models as complex wholes and not only discuss the macro level but also the micro level with its specific forms of management and work organization. We are grateful to the reviewers for their thorough summaries and comments.

The Scandinavian experiences are, of course, not models to copy but to learn from. Whereas the cooperative relations on the labour market developed over decades in a historical process, thereby making them harder to mimic by design, parts of the welfare system may perhaps more easily be applied elsewhere. While *work-life balance* is a common theme among observers of welfare in Scandinavia, Scandinavians themselves also talk about *working life* which has the connotation of having a life at work, a 'good work'. What does it look like, that combination of welfare, equality, good work and competitive companies?

The reviewers point to several important aspects that would be worth covering in more depth. The growing importance of women and gender in work (especially in the public sector) and in unions should have its own treatment; and so should the role of welfare (not least parental) for the successful development of production. We see 'productive welfare' as a lynchpin of the Scandinavian models, but more could be said about trends of employment and investment in various sectors, differentiating the decline of industrial production (Volvo trucks constituting a notable exception) from urban service sector growth.

Changes in the fundamental balance of power between labour and capital are related to globalization. For example, EU companies' freedom to provide services in other member states through posted workers pitches Scandinavian traditions of regulation by collective agreements against legal regulation of minimum wages. The broader themes of migrant workers as well as the growth of far-right populism would also merit further treatment.

Looking at the workplace and firm levels, it is probably true that we hardly see any large-scale experiments with new forms of work organization that feature autonomy and co-determination as in the well known Volvo Uddevalla plant. Since the 1990s, under the pressure of neoliberal policies, high unemployment and global competition, unions have talked less about co-determination and the design of 'good jobs' and more about their members finding any job. Radical alternatives in a single country are often difficult to upscale and we have seen an adaptation to mainstream global production concepts, probably also reflecting that the autonomous group-based organization gave too much power to the workers to secure managerial control of the labour process. However, the substance of Scandinavian trust-based cooperation in workplaces and the labour market, as well as dialogue-oriented management, seems to have survived, although international trends and USA-owned consultants have privileged more expertise-based, hierarchical and formalized forms of management. Ford putting its clear mark on Volvo is a case in point, though the mark of China remains yet to be seen.

The labour market model codified by LO economists Rehn and Meidner is a fundamental part of the Swedish model. It is based on the solidaristic principle of 'equal pay for equal work', thereby crowding out non-productive companies and supporting economic restructuring. At the same time, it emphasizes retraining for new jobs (rather than supporting old jobs) and is linked to a universal and generous welfare system including unemployment insurance, bipartite outplacement programmes, sick leave, parental leave, etc. Some of these benefits were reduced by earlier governments but may be restored under the red-green alliance that was voted into government in 2014. While strong and well organized labour market actors have been central to the Swedish model, their balance has shifted in favour of capital through global economic pressures as well as home-made politics. However, with unemployment and insecure employment on the rise, union membership seems to be rising again, especially among the young.

If I were to summarize in a few lines what has changed in the Swedish model during the past decade or so, I would say that:

- At the micro level, experiments with radically alternative forms of semi-autonomous *work groups* have faded while participatory and dialogue-oriented forms of *management* seem to prevail;
- On the *labour market* and in the economy, the system of active labour market policies, proactive lifelong learning and training and generous unemployment benefits has been weakened, as have Keynesian strategies of infrastructure investment, at the same time as pressures to accept different types of job have grown;
- Labour market actors' autonomy from the state still prevails, although the non-existence of legal minimum wages leads to challenges in regulating posted workers' wages. Non-EU labour market immigration might also come under stricter legal regulation in the future;
- Budgetary cuts in the Work Environment Authority (AV) and the drastic closing of the Arbetslivsinstitutet (NIWL) have resulted in fewer inspections and controls and less critical, applied knowledge about work and organization;
- *Welfare* benefits have been reduced for the unemployed and the sick. The replacement ratio of 80 per cent of the salary (the original aim) only applies to a shrinking

part of the workforce, thereby alienating part of the middle classes from supporting the high taxes that make the system possible;

- Income taxes, although still relatively high, have been reduced through higher deductibility options for those in employment (but not for the sick, the unemployed and the retired). While income inequalities are still moderate, they are the fastest growing within the OECD;
- The conservative party, the second largest party after the social democrats, changed its name to the 'New Moderates' and shifted from an explicit strategy of drastic cuts in taxes and welfare to endorsing the welfare state while reducing benefits (in practice, though, it cut taxes even more than the 'old moderates' had proposed).
- Formal corporatism with open tripartite cooperation has been abandoned with the exit of the employer side and has been replaced by more informal, in part secret, ways of influencing political decision making. These shifts have opened a whole new, and as of yet unregulated, labour market for politicians turning private lobbyists in, for instance, privatized health and education. Compared to the former tripartite arrangements, the labour movement in this new informal system is much weaker, with fewer financial resources and less media access than the capital side.

Some of these transformations form a backdrop to a political and ideological crisis within social democracy in Scandinavia and beyond, mainly reacting to and adapting to right-wing austerity policies that served a country like Sweden well during the crisis of the 1990s but are counter-productive today. There are, however, signs of a more expansive financial policy, a restoration of welfare and labour market regulation and even hints at a possible new start for working life research.

Book review: Ake Sandberg (ed.), *Nordic Lights: Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia*

Michael Quinlan

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Book review

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Ake Sandberg (ed.), *Nordic Lights: Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia*. SNS Forlag: Stockholm, 2013; 512 pp. (Available through Bokus or Adlibris RRP AUD70.35, e-book AUD38.66).

Reviewed by: Michael Quinlan, *University of New South Wales, Australia*

This book deals with a subject that should be of wide interest. In the second half of the 20th century and especially the 1970s and 1980s, the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden and Norway) were seen as a beacon for social progressives – a group of countries where the cruel and inefficient edges if not the heart of capitalism had been tempered. A strong organised and strategically minded union movement and long period of Social Democrat/Labour government had been able to establish an accord with capital interests that moderated industrial relations and established a comprehensive welfare state supported by a progressive taxation regime. The Scandinavian approach (and all three countries have heavily influenced each other) was marked by a strong push for democracy at work and development of a philosophical and policy agenda on the work environment and work quality. To the union movement in a number of other countries (including Australia) as well as to political reformers, this seemed an attractive option especially from the early 1970s onward as neoliberalism began to emerge and the oil shock marked a shift in the 'balance' between capital and labour including increasingly combative employer tactics against unions. The labour movement in Australia with its long history of greater state intervention (compared to the United States and the United Kingdom) was particularly attracted to the notion of a centralised accord between capital and labour associated with redistributive social policies. Labour movement delegations visited Scandinavia, and the Swedish model in particular was promoted.

For a time, it seemed Scandinavia would itself escape the worst ravages of neoliberalism that swept across the Anglo countries (the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). However, from the 1990s, precarious work arrangements were becoming more apparent in these countries, although to its credit the central union movement (the Landsorganisation (LO)) in Sweden did not make the catastrophic blunder of embracing/accepting decentralised bargaining as did the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) under Bill Kelty's leadership (with predictably adverse consequences for many workers, especially women and other vulnerable groups). In Sweden, the election of a neoliberal government saw the abolition of the country's widely respected National Work Life Institution – a government-funded research organisation on working and living conditions that, among other things, had begun to document

the adverse effects of the shift to 'flexible' work regimes. One thing neoliberalism doesn't need or want is evidence-driven policy. Significant parts of the social protection network (such as the labour inspectorate) also experienced significant budget cuts. These cuts have continued as time has gone on – the progressive emasculation strategy is a much cleverer way of dismantling the welfare state. Union membership – which was exceptionally high by international standards and continued to grow when union density in the Anglo countries and elsewhere had begun to decline sharply – has begun to fall. These changes are mirrored to a greater or lesser degree in Denmark (which relied less on state regulation) and Norway, prompting the establishment of a body to defend the welfare state in the latter.

Overall, these changes follow a similar path to that experienced by countries like Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. While not of the same order of magnitude, as yet, they have nonetheless proved damaging. For example, evidence shows precarious work is as hazardous to health in these countries as elsewhere in Europe, North America and Australasia and even relatively comprehensive labour standards regimes are being increasingly bypassed or evaded.

Ake Sandberg (originally employed by the now defunct National Institute for Working Life or NIWL) in Sweden has brought together a group of experts to write papers that examine what the changes just described have meant for work, management and welfare in the Scandinavian countries. Like all good edited books, the project has been some time in gestation, and the chapters address thematic issues as well covering the three countries. The book is divided into six sections dealing with the Scandinavian model of work life (including how distinctive is it and what changes are occurring); changes to management and work organisation in auto-manufacturing (focusing on the well-known Volvo model); work and management practices in Denmark and Norway; gender in management; a series of chapters on changes to work organisation both generally and with regard to specific industries including the service and public sector; and a final section (a single chapter actually) reviewing Swedish research on organisation and management. As the outline of the structure indicates, the primary focus is on management and its connections to work and welfare, although not all chapters take this approach (e.g. one deals with the challenge of changes to work to Swedish unions).

It is impossible to provide even a short summary of the 19 chapters that make up the book. Instead, I will make a few general observations. First, given what I have already said about the context, this book has particular value. The chapters are generally well researched and well written with a clear focus. This book has a clear theme, and there is little or no fact-grubbing of the type that bedevils many comparative books. At the same time, a number of chapters contain concise historical and contextual observations that a reader unfamiliar with Scandinavia will find both interesting and valuable. Kampf and Nielsen's chapter on management of the working environment is especially good in this regard as is Koch's chapter on the introduction of US management concepts into Sweden. There is also a nice balance between general/thematic pieces and chapters examining a theme or issue in a particular industry or specific sector (not just manufacturing but also the service sector like the media). Taken as a whole, the book provides invaluable explanation and critique of the Scandinavian model, and its current circumstances.

Second, for the reader who has no interest in Scandinavia, there are chapters that focus on topics arguably central to studies of management and changing patterns of work. These include Bjorkman's chapter on management as a fashion industry – would that we had more of this sort of work to prick much of the silliness that passes for serious discourse on management (including leadership theories). The chapters on challenges to unions/resistance to the new world of work (Bruhn et al. and Skorstad) and gender and management (Blomquist and Wahl) should also appeal to a wider audience. The same applies to Allvin and Aronsson's chapter on flexibility, boundarylessness, strategies and work and Hall's chapter on the new public management (NPM).

The final chapter of the book, where Jonsson examines Swedish research on organisations and management, is also worthy of a wide readership because it raises questions that management and work researchers should address in other countries. This includes the problem of not asking what research might be of most value in a particular country or context; the need to look beyond the glib application of overseas (generally United States and to a lesser extent United Kingdom) concepts to the local setting; and not choosing topics/methods simply because they are easier/accepted. Management and organisation researchers should be asking themselves does their research actually address key issues affecting how organisations are structured and work is undertaken and its consequences. Or is it merely a reflection of currently fashionable discourses within business schools that reflect and reinforce dominant ideological views or orthodoxies in the business community rather than subjecting them to critical examination? Are business schools simply training and research factories for manufacturing consent? We also need to ask critical questions about why some areas of research and disciplines (management and human resource management (HRM)) became ascendant while others (notably industrial relations and economic history) have gone into decline. Does this reflect new knowledge or rather a shift that both reflects and reinforces changes in the world of work (and regulation/policy) away from Keynesianism and collective worker representation? I am not suggesting Jonsson raises all these issues, but chapters like this are valuable in sparking reflections within the broad field of management, organisation and work.

Third, in my view, too many edited books are lazy collations marked by substantial variations in the quality of contributions, significant unaddressed inconsistencies in approach and a lack of conceptual coherence. This book does not fall into that category. The overall standard of the chapters is high, and there is consistency in the way all address the central themes of the book. One would have liked more material on Norway and Denmark (which do differ from Sweden) though the chapters that deal with these countries, including thematic chapters, are excellent. The title *Nordic Lights* might also elicit a quibble as the Nordic countries are not identical to Scandinavia (most notably the former includes Finland). On balance, however, the editor has worked hard to bring this book together with few of the flaws that afflict other edited books.

Sandberg and the contributors have produced an excellent book that deserves to be widely read.

Nordic Lights – Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia

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The distinctive features of the Scandinavian "social model" and « industrial democracy » have been admired, envied or criticized the world over because of their « human face », which reconciled innovation, competitiveness and performance in manufacturing and services with smooth industrial and organisational transitions in the labour market and at the workplace, thanks to a collaborative (or, rather corporative) labour relations system, characterized by high membership in trade unions and employers' organisation, social dialogue and extensive collective bargaining, underpinned by government-supported and widespread access to education, vocational and continued training, health services and welfare systems.

This model has come under strain over the past two decades in the wake of severe economic downturns in the mid-1990s, the technology bubble, the rapid spread of globalization and deregulation, the spread of foreign ownership and private management styles in both the private and public sectors, and the recent global financial and economic crisis. The social-democratic governments of earlier decades were replaced by conservative coalitions, while parts of the public sector were privatized, notably in education and elderly care, while « new public management » approaches were introduced in the public services. In the private sector, business process reengineering and lean production methods have changed the management approaches to the quality of work environment and to labour-management relations, provoking workers' and unions' resistance. The social fabric started being eroded by attacks on union rights, employer-promoted individualisation of pay that encouraged a shift among workers towards short-term interests and a greater focus on materialistic expectations from union membership. As large industrial companies declined, were restructured or changed ownership, jobs shifted to smaller service companies, adversely affecting wage levels, job quality, employment security and union influence.

While the welfare state is still strong in Sweden, the conservative government coalitions introduced drastic tax cuts, slashed sickness and unemployment benefits, liberalized restrictions on precarious and short-term jobs, closed the National Institute for Working Life (NIWL) –the harbinger of research and dissemination on improvements in work organisation and environment–, reduced the budget of the Work Environment Authority and lowered allowances for education, notably for training for trade union representatives. The author note that, while these austerity measures may have been necessary to improve incentives to work, their massive character increased inequalities and weakened trade unions to an extent that might endanger the Swedish social model of the labour market, highlighted above.

The book tries to capture the theoretical and practical dimensions of these changes of management styles in both private sector workplaces and the public sector, against the backdrop of similar developments and trends internationally, assessing their impact on the Scandinavian social and management models and practices. It raises the basic question that underpins the 19 chapters of the book, namely, under what historical and social conditions and with what strategies could it be possible to reconcile welfare, equality, good jobs and continued improvement of work environment with competitive companies and economic growth.

This very dense and comprehensive volume tries to answer this basic question by analysing the characteristics and ideologies that underpinned the Scandinavian

welfare and solidarity model and the way they were adapted to the new rules of the game imposed by deregulation, globalization, new forms of management, weakening of the trade unions and of collective bargaining, and growing individualisation, which affect jobs, work content, conditions of work and work environment. These challenges highlight the crucial role of employees, groups and unions to in promoting long-term productivity, welfare and sustainable development.

The book consists of six parts. Part I looks at the contested Scandinavian welfare and solidarity models that were associated with innovation-based workplace reform, that have gradually been replaced in the 1980s and 1990s by foreign management styles, « imported » mainly from the US. This transition highlights the need for trade unions to develop strategies to protect the « losers » in the labour market by developing new arenas and networks, including training, that could attract both winners and losers and strengthen interaction between local and central union levels. A special attention is paid to the challenges that the new world of work faced by Swedish unions.

Part II analyses the Swedish automotive sector, describing the transformation of Volvo from its successful leadership and corporate culture model, based on dialogue, participation and shared goal-orientation,- to a top-down, hierarchical and functional management, following its acquisition by Ford Motor Company. The authors argue that the Swedish car industry will lose its competitive advantage of cooperative industrial relations and highly skilled and motivated blue-collar workers if it merely adopts the global and lean production systems (N.B. With short hindsight it is sad to note how correct this foresight proved to be ... HSA).

Part III looks at the impact of new management approaches on the workforce, labour relations and work environment in Scandinavia. It starts with two case studies highlighting differing approaches and outcomes of the introduction of new management concepts in manufacturing and construction in Denmark, a country remarkably little affected by neoliberalism (with only few instances of direct attacks on union positions and no retrenchment of the public sector), but not spared by rising hostility towards migrants, even in the period of prosperity and labour shortages. When "lean management" was introduced (around 1990), construction was dominated by few large contractors and consulting engineers. It focused on reducing waste and improving scheduling and planning, with management initiating an ambitious training programme for its building project managers and foremen (carpenters, electricians, plumbers, etc.), who meet weekly and jointly agree on work plans. From the start, the unions viewed "lean construction" as being in the interest of their members, upgrading their skills and empowering them in the execution of work, improving coordination, which produced higher wages and fewer occupational accidents, while not affecting employment levels. The segment of big construction firms thus presents a special case of corporatism, where unions cooperate on an ongoing basis with employers' associations and with the state, which developed agendas for the development of the sector as a whole. However, "lean management" profited less to rank-and-file workers, while the increased use of East European migrant workers brought about casualisation of employment, downward pressures on pay and working conditions, increasing incidence of moonlighting and polarisation of the workforce. At industry level, it led to the fragmentation of companies, a rapid growth of small single-trade contractors and one-person companies, challenging the integrative values of the Scandinavian welfare models. This contrasts with the experience in manufacturing, given its different struc-

ture and relation with the global economy, where the main new management tool was an imported IT software package (ERP - Enterprise Resource Planning systems) that supported restructuring of the larger Danish corporations towards global manufacturing and outsourcing, emphasizing centralisation, delimiting the support for production teamwork, leaving little room for the local union and employees to influence the adaption or implementation of the system. Unlike the construction sector, there are no state initiatives or intervention in the area of labour market regulation or industrial policies. Turning to the experience of organisational change in Norwegian manufacturing, the authors conclude that new forms of flexible and lean organisation shifted power towards management and dissolved collective solidarity. The frequent group and individual interaction between superiors and subordinates favoured the position of management, weakening collective resistance at the expense of co-responsibility for organisational changes. This section of concludes with a thorough reflection about the basic shift in handling work environment in Scandinavia, from being an experimental laboratory of ideas concerning workplace democracy and participation in the 1970s , towards a purely human resources management issue (« HR-ification ») since the 1990s, seen as a management concern to be solved within the enterprise, on par with quality control of production, rather than a forum for social conflict resolution through democratic negotiation and cooperation. This systemic approach tends to lead to more focus on the system and less on the actors. The authors wonder how well this change is suited to deal with the future problems of working life in post-industrial and deregulated societies. They acknowledge that the new system can cope with problems that can be quantified and for which solutions are known, such as accidents, smoke, noise and dirt, but not for more complex problems such as monotonous, repetitive work and stress. Such problems may be increasingly regarded as a matter for the individual, a question of personality and of self-regulation.

Part IV reviews the differing approaches to the study of gender, work and management, noting that theoretical studies of work organisation tend to emphasise the continued subordination of women, while empirical investigation shows a more positive outcomes.

Part V considers various aspects of modern management and work in Sweden, including the flexibility and boundary less work in IT and media sectors. It includes an analysis of the relationship between new forms of management and flexible firms and outcomes in terms of productivity and job quality, refuting the rhetoric that in the prevalent model of flexible firms working conditions are better. The authors find, *inter alia*, that very few places are flexible and their proportion is not growing; their work environment is not systematically better, though functional flexibility does improve work environment via higher control. The diffusion of modern management is not widespread, it is most common in mechanical engineering, and it has a definite but only weak correlation with productivity and opportunity for employee development. A distinct chapter deals with flexibility and how deregulation in time, space, organisation and employment status shifts responsibility for where and when to work, leading some individuals to work harder and stretch working time by taking work home and even working while being sick... Other issues examined include the interactive media production and changes in union influence via employee company board representation in Sweden. Interestingly, the authors find that Swedish CEOs welcome employee board representation, especially as a means of reducing conflict, legitimising management decisions and implementing difficult changes. Union representatives

also view positively such participation, but there are strong indications that their actual influence is decreasing.

Part VI concludes with an overview of management research in business schools or university departments in Sweden. They combine theoretical and empirical research by twenty-five academics, providing useful insights into how to address the challenges of growing pressures of "lean management" and globalization, growing stress at work and weakening union role and membership.

Hedva Sarfati
Former Director, ILO Industrial Relations Department, Labour market and welfare reforms consultant, ISSA.

Les avocates, les avocats et la conciliation travail-famille

Par Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay et Elena Mascova, Montréal : Les éditions du remue-ménage, 2013, 175 pages.
ISBN : 978-2-89091-459-9.

En 1995, le Barreau du Québec signait une *Déclaration de principe sur la conciliation travail-famille*, afin de soutenir les avocates et les avocats dans l'atteinte d'un équilibre entre leurs responsabilités familiales et professionnelles. Dès lors, la conciliation travail-famille devenait un enjeu collectif pour la profession.

Dans cet ouvrage, Tremblay et Mascova ont pour objectif principal d'accéder au vécu des avocates et des avocats afin de contribuer à cette vaste réflexion menée par le Barreau du Québec sur la conciliation travail-famille. Plus précisément, les auteures s'intéressent à la question sous l'angle de la profession et visent à comprendre comment cette conciliation est structurée par les contraintes et les règles de la culture professionnelle, c'est-à-dire par l'éthos professionnel. Elles cherchent également à décortiquer l'influence de facteurs pouvant agir sur les articulations temporelles dans l'environnement familial. Finalement, elles visent à évaluer l'évolution de l'éthos professionnel au regard des valeurs ayant cours dans la société. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, les résultats d'entrevues semi-dirigées, menées auprès de 46 avocates et avocats de divers milieux, sont présentés dans cet ouvrage qui comprend quatre chapitres.

S'appuyant principalement sur les données issues d'un sondage mené par le Barreau du Québec en 2008, le chapitre 1 dresse un portrait de la profession juridique. Il y est d'abord constaté que la parité s'avère être pratiquement atteinte, 48,4% des membres du Barreau étant des femmes. Cependant, cette féminisation de la profession n'enraye pas toutes les disparités liées au genre. Les avocates éprouvent, en effet, plus de difficultés à s'établir dans la profession, à accéder à un statut d'associé et elles ont généralement une rémunération moins élevée que celle de leurs confrères masculins. Ces disparités découleraient notamment de l'éthos de la profession, c'est-à-dire des normes et de la culture professionnelle qui déterminent les critères de réussite. Le dévouement total y est valorisé, notamment en termes d'engagement et d'heures travaillées.

Après avoir dressé ce portrait de la profession, les résultats de l'étude sur la conciliation travail-famille sont présentés dans les trois chapitres suivants. À cet égard, les auteures débutent en présentant les parcours professionnels des 46 avocates et avocats étudiés, et ce, afin de mieux comprendre la construction des différences observées au préalable entre les hommes et les femmes. Les entretiens révèlent que les trajectoires diffèrent en fonction du genre, puisque les femmes, davantage que les hommes, tentent de concilier le calendrier productif et reproductif. En somme, leur carrière dépend fortement du calendrier reproductif et la conciliation entre les activités familiales et professionnelles semble toujours être l'apanage des femmes.

En réalité, lorsque le désir d'avoir des enfants se manifeste chez les avocates, une remise en question du modèle d'investisse-

Ian Hampson:
Sandberg, Åke (ed) (2013) Nordic Lights: Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia, Sweden: SNS Forlag; pp. 511
ISBN 978-91-86949-37-2

Interest in matters Scandinavian appears again to be on the rise in Australia (eg Scott, 2014; Higgins and Dow, 2013). This book, edited by one of Sweden's most prominent researchers in the field, is thus timely. It examines the extent to which Scandinavian working life has differed, and still does differ, from other countries, and why. It explores Scandinavia's, and in particular Sweden's, role as exemplar of progressive social reform, work quality, industrial and even economic democracy. It contains penetrating and informative discussions of the fate of the 'Swedish Model', which as Scott (2014) recently reminds us, influenced Australian left/union activists from the 70s and into the Accord period (1983-1996). The contest between the 'Swedish Model' on the one hand, and neo-liberal ideology and American management evangelism on the other, and the hold these forces took over Swedish policy and politics from the 1980s, is a major underpinning theme of this book.

Sandberg's edited collection displays the advantages of this mode of presentation – that experts in particular areas expound on their areas of expertise, producing informative and detailed contributions. Sandberg and co-author Movitz thus provide a strong introductory chapter, which imposes thematic unity on a very large body of information by defining the book's structure in 5 parts. Part 1 is a wide-ranging discussion of the above questions, and of the new challenges facing unions. Part 2 updates the reader on the latest developments regarding the iconic Volvo experiments in work organization. Part 3 discusses 'flexicurity' in Denmark and related themes in Norway, and the shift from 'safety work' to 'safety management' and the latter's 'HR-ification' in Scandinavia. Part 4 discusses gender and 'new' management. Part 5 examines the implementation of new forms of management in Sweden. Part 6, unusually composed of only one chapter, discusses Swedish research into the world of work, and the various schools into which it became divided. There is no index, and no chapter that summarises and concludes the book as a whole.

In Chapter 2, Movitz and Sandberg, in examining the extent to which Swedish worklife is distinctive, use the concepts of the 'Swedish Model' and 'Swedish management style'. The former concept refers to Swedish industrial relations and political institutions – strong welfare, strong trade unions; 'joint' labour market regulation by the 'industrial partners'; politically incumbent social democratic parties underpinned by ideals of equality and participation. Neo-liberals have partially 'modernised' the 'Swedish Model', and argued that Swedish success occurred in spite of, not due to, its characteristics. Swedish management has generally cooperated with trade unions, and has even lead workplace innovations, notably the socio-technical experiments incubated in Norway. In the mid 1970s, labour shortages and 'solidaristic' wages policy required workplace improvement to attract and retain workers. The Social Democrats enacted the Co Determination Act in 1976, having established the Swedish Work Environment Fund in 1972 (to which employers had to contribute

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to fund progressive research) – and established the *Arbetslivcentrum* (Centre for Working Life) – later known as the National Institute for Working Life (NIWL).

This provided the institutional setting for progressive worklife research and workplace innovations, the most internationally recognized of which are the Volvo experiments. The Uddevalla car assembly firm was known for building cars without assembly lines, with long job cycles and enhanced worker learning and participation. Two informative chapters in part 2 examine the fate of these initiatives, detailing the cultural changes within Volvo, and the latter's eventual sale (along with Saab) to Chinese car-makers. This left the field clear for 'lean' images of work organization.

Part 4 contains two chapters which examine the 'new' management's gender aspects. Although the subordination of women in management remains a problem, there are positive developments including a shift in research focus from studying 'women as managers' to 'management as gendered'. Part 5 engages 'optimistic' renditions of changes to work, beginning with an empirical examination of the alleged shift to 'flexibility'. It asks a familiar question for those researching 'new' management – 'Why are the statements so popular when they are obviously false'? (p. 380). Chapters in this section in one way or another engage with the question of what is 'really' happening on a number of fronts, like 'work environment' and 'safety'; 'new economy' rhetoric (especially in the journalism sector); work-life balance, and 'boundless' or 'boundaryless' work.

Since the contest over work is also a contest over the *representation* of work, research plays an important part. In Sweden the lines between 'progressive' worklife research and activism were sometimes blurred (p. 14), so that sometimes researchers and trade unionists together pursued particular research and workplace reform agendas. An alternative approach, which soon emerged, was to value research for its contribution to substantive social goals, such as 'good work'. This kind of approach is perhaps equidistant from the positivistic scientism that characterizes much business school research; from the 'endless relativism' of postmodernism; from the empirical indifference of management faddism; and from explicitly serving a managerialist agenda. Swedish management research has enjoyed an enviably free access to real organisational processes and cooperative management. It has addressed practical problems, sometimes creating a need for more detailed description than the formulaic articles in scientific journals have room for. It follows that 'important findings are reported in books' (p. 500).

This one is a case in point. It will reward the engagement of general readers and specialists alike – the latter with a wealth of new findings and insights. The authors make a convincing case that the Nordic Lights are still shining.

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DN. Debatt

Globaliseringen.

”Den nordiska modellen kan stå emot omvärlden”

Globalt tryck. Den nordiska modellen är fortfarande ett fullt möjligt samhällssystem. Men nedmonteringen, som inleddes av Socialdemokraterna och fullföljs av de borgerliga partierna, kan bromsas om bara viljan finns. Globaliseringen styr inte allt - den ger alternativ, skriver professor emeritus **Åke Sandberg**.

Förra veckan i Almedalen var den nordiska modellen inte i fokus som för ett år sedan. Arbetslöshet bland unga och invandrare, otrygga jobb, försämrad sjukkassa och a-kassa, och pressande jobb gör att modellen börjar rämna. Regeringen har svårt att hålla fast vid den glättiga framgångsbilden, samtidigt som oppositionen inte har samlat sig till kritik och konkreta alternativ som innebär att ta konflikt om världsbild och vart vi är på väg.

Den svenska modellen har varit omdiskuterad, åtminstone sedan Marquis Childs bästsäljare ”Sweden: The middle way”, från 1936. Senast, efter brittiska The Economists devota hyllning tidigare i år, följde reportage i internationell press om ”modellens modernisering”.

Economist har skrivit om Sverige i en jämn ström. Temat har varit detsamma: Nedgången beror på för stor välfärd och höga skatter; framgången skulle bli större om man avreglerade ännu lite mer. I dag är tesen att flexicurity nog är bra, men det borde vara mer flex och mindre security.

I den modell som de nordiska länderna i stort valt sammanlänkas ekonomisk framgång med tillit till det gemensamma, trygghet i omvandlingen och utbildning för nya kvalificerade jobb. Det vi kan kalla produktiv rättvisa, menar skribenten.

Foto: Henrik Montgomery/Scanpix

Från min franska horisont denna månad ser jag Sverige uppmärksammas positivt och då inte bara Zlatan och PSG utan också miljö och ekonomi. Men konservativa Le Figaro lyfter fram att ”moderniseringen” lett till den snabbast ökande ojämlikheten i OECD, och till det slags bilbränder i Husby man brukat rapportera om från Paris och Marseilles förorter.

L'Express grundare Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber skrev 1968, mitt i studentrevolten, i Le defi americain framsynt om Sverige, att det unika inte är delarna, utan helheten, att ekonomi och välfärd hänger samman på ett intelligent sätt. Ekonomipristagaren Joseph Stiglitz menar likaså att man inte måste välja mellan ekonomisk utveckling och jämlikhet. De nordiska länderna ligger på topp i internationella rankningar, i såväl välfärd och miljö som i konkurrenskraft och innovation. I The Economists sammanvägda rankning placeras fyra nordiska länder i täten, med Sverige först.

I den svenska modellen sammanlänkas ekonomisk framgång med tillit till det gemensamma, trygghet i omvandlingen och utbildning för nya kvalificerade jobb. Det vi kan kalla produktiv rättvisa.

Förra året i Almedalen hölls en handfull seminarier om Sverige utifrån skriften The Nordic Way, som regeringen presenterat vid World Economic Forum. Men de som de senaste tjugo åren förändrat modellen verkar inte se det Servan-Schreiber framhöll för snart femtio år sedan, den intelligenta helheten.

Socialdemokraterna inledde med kanske angelägna nedskärningar som skärpts under den borgerliga alliansen med fortsatta nedskärningar och omfattande privatisering av både produktion och konsumtion. Konsekvenserna är sjunkande kvalitet i utbildning och vård, olikvärdighet, försummad infrastruktur och för små resurser, för stora skattesänkningar.

Förändringarna äventyrar nu helheten – den produktiva rättvisan. Hur länge kommer man att tillåtas tala om den svenska modellen som vore den densamma, samtidigt som grunden rivs? Någon som säger: ”Kejsaren är naken!”?

I dag krävs konkreta reformer, höjda skatter och en omreglering av nyskapade marknader där vinstdrift släppts vind för våg. Den politiska oppositionen har inte formulerat tydlig kritik och finansierade alternativ av rädsla, verkar det, för att blottlägga konfliktlinjer och för att skrämma den konsumerande medelklassen, men utan tilltro till de breda lager, inklusive den tänkande och engagerade medelklassen, som önskar leva i ett anständigt samhälle.

För att få brett gehör för förändring krävs en alternativ samhällssyn som förstås av många. Det är ett långsiktigt projekt av forskning, analys och kommunikation. I den rådande världsbilden definieras alternativen alltid som fel. Skattehöjning – oansvarigt. Inga reformer – vad vill ni?

Regeringen vill gärna tolka den svenska modellen som det naturgivna, faktiskt existerande samhället, framsprunget genom en lång historia med grund i medeltidens självägande bönder och kultur av samarbete.

Man refererar gärna till Berggrens och Trägårdhs stimulerande bok ”Är svensken människa?” och framhåller ”statsindividualismen”, att individers autonomi är möjlig genom statens politik. Det synsättet tonar ned 1900-talets kamp för den moderna svenska välfärdskapitalismen som förts i fackliga och politiska folkrörelseformer och format individer som inte bara är autonoma utan också delar en gemenskap, känner tillit och tar ansvar för det allmänna. Därför vill vi hellre tala om en solidarisk individualism, tillsammans med den produktiva rättvisan en grundbult i den svenska modellen. Båda hotas av dagens regeringspolitik.

”Den svenska modellen” finns inte bara på samhällsnivån utan märks i och samspelar med företagsledning och arbetsorganisation. Trygghet i omställning och vid sjukdom samt inflytande i arbetet gör att människor är beredda att ta risker och engagera sig i förändring på arbetsplatserna. Hög sysselsättningsnivå gör, som Pehr G Gyllenhammar brukar framhålla, att företag måste erbjuda anständiga löner och arbetsvillkor. Det ger individuell och facklig styrka som minskar risken för en så slimmad organisation att utslagning grasserar. Innovationer drivs fram, som bidrar till goda och produktiva jobb. Regeringens nedrustning av arbetslivsforskningen har skingrat kunskapsunderlaget för sådant nytänkande som var ett svenskt signum.

Amerikanska, och andra politiker brukar säga att globalisering och IT tvingar fram sociala nedskärningar och hård regim i arbetslivet. Men de skandinaviska länderna är utsatta för samma globala tryck, och de är ändå annorlunda. ”It's the economy, stupid”, var en fras som Bill Clintons kampanjledning myntade för att ange fokus. Men nordiska erfarenheter gör att man kan säga ”It's politics, stupid”. Världsekonomin styr inte allt – den ger utrymme för alternativ, även om utmaningarna från Asien och Latinamerika nu är stora.

De nordiska länderna har varit annorlunda länge och de kan förbli både mänskligt och ekonomiskt starka. De kan fortsätta att visa att otyglad marknadsliberalism och amerikanskt management inte är nödvändiga – att andra livs- och arbetsvärldar är möjliga.

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Två repliker på Sven Andréassons debattartikel om kommersialiseringen av alkohol (9/7).

”Förbud - bara slag i luften”
Mattias Grundström, Alkoholgranskningsman och expert i utredningen om alkoholreklam.

”Friheten har förändrat drickandet till det bättre”
Mattias Svensson, redaktör Magasinet Neo. *DN.se/debatt*

Åke Sandberg, civilekonom, sociolog, professor emeritus vid Stockholms universitet. Redaktör för boken ”Nordic Lights”. Work, management and welfare in Scandinavia (SNS förlag).

SvD KULTUR

Den svenska modellen segare än sitt rykte

Att "den svenska modellen" numera är ett minne blott tycks alla vara överens om – oenigheten gäller bara huruvida detta är av godo eller ondo. Men trots alla förändringar verkar kärnan i modellen kvarstå.

Har vi lämnat folkhemsidealet bakom oss? FOTO: BERTIL NORBERG /TT

6 juni 2014 kl 01:00, uppdaterad: 15 december 2014 kl 09:56

UNDER STRECKET

Den svenska modellen är ett omstritt begrepp. Men vare sig man i första hand uppfattar den som en särskild modell för arbetsmarknaden, där fack och arbetsgivare gör upp om löner och andra villkor, eller som en bredare socialpolitiskt modell som bygger på tanken om ett relativt jämnt fördelat välstånd, tycks alla – både till höger och vänster – vilja påstå att den svenska modellen numera är övergiven, för alltid död och begraven.

På högerkanten hävdar man att de relativa framgångar som den svenska ekonomin rönt sedan slutet av 90-talet aldrig hade kunnat åstadkommas om modellen varit intakt. Hur skulle vi ha kunnat bli bäst i klassen med världens högsta skatter och fackföreningar som kan diktera lagar på arbetsmarknaden? Nej, sanningen är förstås den att vi bytt modell, tänker man sig. Sverige är inte längre detsamma som på 90-talet. Vi har fått en fristående Riksbank med prioritet att bekämpa inflationen. Vi har öppnat upp vår offentliga sektor för privat konkurrens. Under samma tid har

även skatterna minskat påtagligt. På så sätt har vi bytt till en modell som förmått göra oss konkurrenskraftiga och till ett föredöme särskilt när det gäller privatiseringar.

Vänstern delar faktiskt ungefär samma uppfattning. Det är inte som förr, Sverige har blivit ett alltmer ojämlikt land, hävdar man. De stolta planerna på ett folkhem för alla har skrinlagts. I stället har Sverige blivit ett kallt land som styrs av det snöda vinstintresset. Att hålla nere inflationen har blivit viktigare än att skapa full sysselsättning. Välfärden har slumpats ut på entreprenad till skamlösa riskkapitalister med bankkonton i skatteparadisen.

Båda dessa bilder är förstås överdrivna och sanningen ligger kanske någonstans mitt emellan. Ändå förs ofta debatten i sådana svartvita termer. Men är den svenska modellen verkligen död och utbytt mot någonting annat?

Får man tro sociologen Åke Sandberg och en rad av hans kollegor som utkommit med ett diger antologi, "Nordic lights: Work, management and welfare in Scandinavia" (SNS) så är det i allt väsentligt så. Titeln anknyter till den berömde amerikanske ekonomen Mancur Olsons kritiska uppgörelse med den "gamla" svenska modellen i en bok från 1990 med titeln "How bright are the Nordic lights?". Precis när vi var på väg in i 90-talskrisen talade Olson om behovet av att avskaffa eller åtminstone nedmontera den svenska modellen. Att boken kom att inspirera Lindbeckkommissionen, som presenterade sina reformförslag 1993, är en underdrift.

Sandbergs antologi är viktig eftersom den tar upp en sida av den svenska modellen som numera sällan diskuteras: arbetslivet. Efter den närmast skandalöst brutala slakten av Arbetslivsinstitutet – där Sandberg var verksam – har det blivit tyst kring frågorna om ett gott arbete och ett humant arbetsliv. Men detta var under 70- och 80-talen ett huvudnummer i den då torgförda svenska modellen. Det var en tid då facket var starkt och det diskuterades intensivt kring hur medbestämmandet i arbetslivet skulle kunna utvecklas. Olika idéer om ekonomisk demokrati fördes fram, till exempel löntagarfonderna. Det dåvarande Metallfacket lanserade det internationellt uppmärksammade projektet "Det goda arbetet" år 1985. Försöksverksamhet med självstyrande grupper som alternativ till det löpande bandet infördes hos Volvo i Uddevalla och Kalmar.

30 år senare har mycket av detta gått i stå eller nedmonterats, enligt Sandberg. Han och hans medskribenter tolkar detta som ett bevis för att den svenska modellen till stora delar avskaffats. Enligt deras maktanalys är det fackets minskade inflytande som är orsaken till modellens förfall. I det försvagade fackets spår har välfärdstjänster sålts ut och nedskärningar i arbetslöshets- och sjukförsäkringssystemen kommit till stånd. De häcklar den nuvarande regeringen för att nedmontera den svenska modellen samtidigt som den låtsas fullfölja dess intentioner. Även Socialdemokraterna får sig en känga. Fredrik Movitz och Åke Sandberg menar att socialdemokratin hittills inte förmått presentera ett eget alternativ till regeringens i praktiken successiva nedläggning av modellen.

Flera av bidragen antyder att det mesta verkar ha gått i baklås sedan 90-talet. Torsten Björkman hävdar att Sverige sedan 70-talet stirrat sig blind på amerikanska styrnings- och produktionsideologier – lanserade av konsultföretag såsom McKinsey eller Boston Consulting Group – vilket i sin tur har lett till ett försämrat arbetsliv och mera stress. I en annan artikel menar Anders Bruhn, Anders Kjellberg och Åke Sandberg att facket i dag står inför så stora utmaningar att det är oklart om det kommer att kunna stå emot. Hoten kommer från ett minskat medlemsantal liksom från ett EU som ställer sig frågande till det svenska kollektivavtalssystemet. Facket har fått backa efter Lavaldomen, hävdar de. I längden kommer vi inte att kunna stävja effekterna av lönedumpningen.

För dem som stödjer den svenska modellen finns det alltså all anledning att vara dyster. Men frågan är om inte bokens författare är alltför dystopiska. Deras kritik av sakernas nutida tillstånd kan lätt förvandlas till nostalgi, att allt var bättre förr. För om det är något man bestämt kan säga: den svenska modellen, i den mån det existerar en sådan, har alltid varit föränderlig. Den har även i stort sett alltid varit positiv till ekonomisk tillväxt och teknologisk utveckling. Man får inte heller glömma bort att den solidariska lönepolitiken, som LO i hög grad hyllade, hjälpte till att skynda på en kraftig strukturomvandling av den svenska ekonomin. Den så kallade Rehn–Meidner-modellen hjälpte till att lägga ned olönsam industri och skapade en utflyttning från skogslänen vars omfattning ledde till att AMS – nutidens Arbetsförmedling – fick smeknamnet "Alla måste söderut". Det var sällan menat som en komplimang.

Tiden efter 90-talskrisen har onekligen lett till en rad djupgående förändringar av det slag som tecknas av Sandberg och hans medförfattare. Men är de så omfattande att man verkligen kan tala om ett regelrätt modellbyte? I sin bok "Kan landet lagom vara bäst?" (SNS) redovisar ekonomen Kurt Lundgren (även han med ett förflutet vid Arbetslivsinstitutet) sin tveksamhet beträffande detta. Han tar avstamp i omvärldens syn på Sverige. Utomlands delar man nämligen inte helt bilden av att Sverige totalt övergivit sin gamla modell. Tvärtom framhävs nästan alltid att Sverige fortfarande har en av världens starkaste fackföreningsrörelser, att kollektivavtalssystemet som i stort sett fortfarande är heltäckande och att systemet med en relativt sett hög välfärd som delas av de flesta och vilar på ett högt skatteuttag är nästan intakt. Därför blir också uppståndelsen stor när utländska medier kan rapportera om kravaller i våra storstäders förorter eller när det framgår att EU-medborgare bor i skjul i skogen.

Att Sverige fortsätter att vara ett annorlunda land har enligt Lundgren sin förklaring långt tillbaka i tiden. Det är en tradition som inte inleds med andra världskriget eller som helt kan monopoliseras av socialdemokratin och fackföreningsrörelsen, utan som faktiskt sträcker sig tillbaka till medeltiden och vår avsaknad av feodala strukturer. Trots att vi byggde en av världens starkaste demokratiska arbetarrörelser var motsättningarna mellan parterna relativt små i Sverige jämfört med i många andra länder. Över huvud taget spelar förstås demokrati och möjligheten till dialog mellan styrande och styrda en viktig roll för att

skapa en grund för det som i modern tid kommit att kallas den svenska modellen.

Lundgren menar vidare att arbetslivet fortfarande i hög grad bär prägel av en sådan modell. Visserligen innebar 90-talet en förskjutning från central nivå till förbundsnivå när det gällde arbetsmarknadens parter. Men fortsättningsvis avtalar vi kollektivt om löner och arbetsvillkor. Sett ur ett europeiskt perspektiv har det svenska löntagarkollektivet hållit ihop mycket väl för att sedan 90-talet skapa utrymme för en gradvis ökad reallön med behållen konkurrenskraft.

Lundgren trycker mycket på att det även inom näringsliv och offentlig verksamhet finns ett slags svensk organisations- och ledarskapsmodell som är mycket "plattare" än i de flesta andra länder. Vi har mindre av hierarkier och mer av öppen dialog. Han pekar även på det faktum att vi i en rad olika mätningar anses ha ett av världens bästa innovationsklimat. Trots att "landet lagom" har en så egalitär struktur – och höga skatter – skapar vi mängder av innovationer. I synnerhet har vi gott om sociala och politiska innovatörer, som uppfinner nya system för att förvalta vårt välfärdssystem.

Den förklaring som Lundgren framför allt för fram är att vi i Sverige har ett mycket väl fungerande utbildningssystem, och information låses inte inne i sega hierarkiska strukturer. Här återkommer betydelsen av möjligheten till dialog, den egalitära sociala strukturen och en någorlunda jämt fördelad välfärd. I regel finns det en tilltro mellan människor som skapar goda förutsättningar även för den ekonomiska utvecklingen. Tillsammans gör detta att Sverige i olika internationella mätningar av till exempel innovationsklimat får så goda resultat.

På det hela taget tror jag att Lundgren har rätt. Att stora förändringar har skett sedan 90-talet är oomtvistat. Men det är kanske inte i första hand för att vi avskaffat modellen som det gått så bra för oss i jämförelse med många andra – i minst lika hög grad kan man hävda att det beror på att vi trots allt behållit så mycket av modellen, inklusive ekonomisk tillväxt och goda statsfinanser. Trots att vi anpassat oss har vi lyckats behålla modellens kärna. Men frågan är förstås hur böjlig modellen är? Ännu finns det mycket kvar att värna om.

LARS MAGNUSSON är professor i ekonomisk historia vid Uppsala universitet.
understrecket@svd.se

News

Researchers: Employment has become more important than job content

Working life has been on the agenda during the Swedish general election campaign, and especially unemployment. More jobs are needed. Yet visions for the content of those jobs have not figured politically — an inconsistency highlighted by a group of researchers at a recent meeting in Stockholm.

Sep 10, 2014 | Text: Gunhild Wallin

"Those who award research grants no longer focus on the power structures and organisation of labour. Or like a group of working life researchers observed when we met the other day: 'everyone knows that if you want money, don't mention the word power and perhaps not even the organisation of work, in your application'," said Åke Sandberg, Professor Emeritus and editor of the book 'Nordic Light', as he opened the seminar 'Power and leadership in working life'.

The seminar was organised by the think tank Arena Idé and the Workers' Educational Association (ABF). Judging from the busy Olof Palme hall in ABF's central Stockholm headquarters, people are interested in discussing work in a deeper perspective. Around ten working life researchers threw light on the organisation of work, leadership trends, equality, "New public management" — an increasingly dominating management process within the welfare sector — flexibility as well as the challenges facing the Nordic model.

Unemployment has taken over

To illustrate how work development ambitions have changed over the decades, Åke Sandberg looked back in time. He started with the 1960s when the social partners worked together to develop a good work environment and productivity on a local level. In the 1970s trade unions were strong and there was talk about developing good jobs — having a nice time at work was no longer enough, there was a need to identify what made jobs good in terms of wages, opportunities for skills development and the importance of work organisation.

"Since then we have seen a weakening of the trade union side of things, and unions are no longer at the forefront of developing new ideas. Unemployment has taken over as the important issue," said Åke Sandberg.

Working life research has followed a similar development. The 1970s saw the growth of a strong research environment focusing on work and organisation. This was severely weakened with the closure of Sweden's National Institute for Working Life in 2007. Yet now Åke Sandberg sees increased interest both at home and abroad for working life research and for studying companies and work based on the jobs' content. He uses the Lisbon strategy as an example. Its first ten year strategy, published in the year 2000, aimed to make Europe more competitive and dynamic. It talked about 'More and better jobs'. A 2005 strategy review only talked about more jobs. The EU programme for 2020 talks about more jobs and better lives.

"Work organisation and issues surrounding power and influence in working life seem not to be priorities among those who finance working life research. Today's focus is more on social issues and to some extent on medicin and health. Employers and trade unions struggle to agree that applied research should study power and influence. Unemployment perhaps is easier to study," said Åke Sandberg.

Nordic model: praised and challenged

One of the seminar's major questions was how powerful the Nordic model still is, despite weakened trade unions, more non-secure jobs and benefits cuts. What is happening to people's trust in the public sector and to being able to feel safe even during times of change in working life? The Nordic model is indeed praised for its ability to offer safety during life's different phases, and for offering people the chance to change. But how much can the model's individual parts be eroded before it can no longer be talked about as being unchanged?

Åke Sandberg, who earlier this summer wrote an opinion piece for the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter called 'The Nordic model can face the world', says we should not forget that the Nordic countries top most world rankings, e.g. for equality, democracy in working life, environment, enterprise friendliness, IT and more. There has also been a certain reluctance to follow advice from certain international cheerleaders who say everything would be even better if only the Nordic countries cut taxes and red tape a bit more.

"But we haven't gone for that, and we should be proud over what we have and carry it forward. We have a model that works, it is standing up to pressure from the rest of the world but it is changing somewhat," said Åke Sandberg.

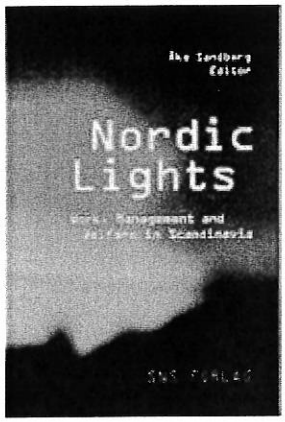
The Danish term 'flexicurity' is often used to express the combination of safety and flexibility. But what happens to security when the number of non-secure jobs increase in most countries and when focus is more on the individual that the collective mass? Annette Kamp, a researcher at the Roskilde University RUC and a co-author of 'The Nordic Light', sees the danger of trying to export 'flexicurity' as a trend. It is a concept which is dependent on the context in which it exists, she said.

"Flexicurity is about finding a balance between safety and flexibility, but that balance has been weakened in Denmark through an erosion of safety. Meanwhile the term is still being used as if nothing has happened. But you need to be able to see when the imbalance becomes so great that talking about flexicurity makes no sense anymore. This means we need to talk about differences. If we don't, we loose the measure of how the model works," she said.

So how bright does the Nordic light shine? Is the Nordic model still an ideal and something people can learn from? Does it reach, say, all the way 'down under', to Australia? Yes, says Australian researcher Russell Lansbury, who was visiting Sweden during the seminar.

"The light is still there, but it is shining a little less brightly than before. In a radio programme I was asked to name the three best things about Sweden. I answered knowledge, the dialogue between the social partners and — perhaps somewhat surprisingly — globalisation. Sweden has always been looking beyond its borders and chosen export over protecting its domestic marked. Today's weakness is the dialogue between the social partners. It's still there, but seems to have lost some of its strength and depth which helped created today's society," said Russell Lansbury.

Facts



'Nordic Lights. Work, Management and Welfare in Scandinavia' was published by the Centre for Business and Policy Studies (SNS) in 2013. The book's authors, 25 working life researchers from Sweden, Denmark and Norway, describe how working life has changed and ask whether the Nordic experience still shows a working life where welfare, knowledge, dialogue and equality is possible. The book also explores power, leadership and control of working life — what are the trends, threats and opportunities?

Read more about the book here

Listen to the entire seminar at ABF Play

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