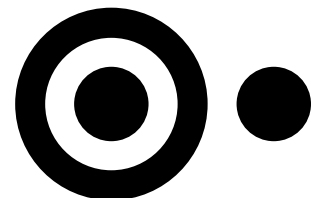


# Striking Silences

## Surveying the Archival Gap of Wildcat Action in the Records of a Local Trade Union Archive

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## List of Abbreviations

AD	The Swedish Labour Court Arbetsdomstolen
ARAB	The Swedish Labour Movement's Archive and Library Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek
LO	The Swedish Trade Union Confederation Landsorganisationen
MBL	Co-Determination in the Workplace Act Medbestämmandelagen
SAV	The Swedish State Employer Office Statens arbetsgivarverk
SEKO	The Swedish Union for Service and Communications Employees Service- och Kommunikationsfacket
SF	The Swedish Union for State Employees Statsanställdas förbund
SJ	The Swedish State Railway Statens järnvägar
ST-Lok	The Swedish Union of Civil Servants, Train drivers' section Statstjänstemannaförbundets lokmannasektion
SEKO106	Shortened reference to the archive of SEKO Local 106
SF1301	Shortened reference to the archive of SF Local 1301

## Introduction

### The Activist Archivist, Community Archives and Labour Records

One of the main concerns in North American literature on labour archives is the dispersal and lack of records. While significant archives of the labour movement's political and economic wings do exist, important records of the life of workers and their organizations have been lost forever. The debate in archival science concerning these “gaps” (to quote Jessica Wagner Webster<sup>1</sup>) is closely interconnected with discussions surrounding “active archiving” (where historian Howard Zinn's “Secrecy, Archives and the Public Interest” and F Gerald Ham's “The Archival Edge” stand out as the classic programmatic texts<sup>2</sup>) and the use of proactive methods such as oral history in an attempt to remedy the situation.<sup>3</sup>

In his article “The New Archives for American Labor: From Attic to Digital Shop Floor”, Ben Blake relates a comment by Leo Gerard, the United Steelworkers of America's president, made during a visit to the Penn State Labor Archives. Speaking of the layoffs of 42 000 steelworkers, Gerard notes that while he is sympathetic to the archive effort “those men deserve my undivided attention and our union's total financial backing”.<sup>4</sup> While the framing of the problem is a bit heavy handed in its rhetorical either-or, it reflects real, sometimes conflicting priorities.

The AFL-CIO solution for preserving historical records has, at least since the late 1950s, been to rely on predominantly academic institutions for preserving its history<sup>5</sup>. In Sweden, the situation is somewhat different. Here, the Swedish Labour Movement's Archive and Library was founded in 1902, a few months after a general strike for universal suffrage.<sup>6</sup> Complemented by a number of local labour and popular movement archives, large portions of the organizational records of the political, trade union and cooperative wings of the labour movement have been preserved and are available for professional and amateur researchers.

The Swedish model for housing labour archives is based on independent archival institutions, in the last instance guaranteed by labour as owner. This organic connection between record creators and archives ties into the North American archival literature concerning “community archives” as a way for archives to work as a resource for stories concerning not the rich or powerful, not the state, but those of minorities, working people, everyday life. Wakimoto, Bruce and Partridge makes the case that the practices surrounding community archives are “activist in their very nature. These

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1 Wagner Webster 2016, p 255.

2 Zinn 1977, Ham 1975.

3 Wagner Webster 2016, Swain 2003 whose articles give an overview of the literature on the subject.

4 Blake 2007, p 131.

5 Blake 2007, pp 139–140.

6 Grass & Larsson 2002, p 4.

archives can be seen as the convergence of activism and archival work which leads to the need to re-open questions like: what constitutes an archival collection, what is the mission of the archivist, and how can the profession include communities in the heart of their work?”<sup>7</sup>

This re-framing of archival practice is heavily dependent on a situation where archival institutions are either state agencies, or part of the system of higher education, but the “convergence” the authors mention is relevant outside of the specific context in which it is identified, and points out the vital connection between archival institutions specific *raison d'être* and the records they will focus on collecting and preserving. The authors note that community archives “are a way for communities to maintain their own records and memory as well as a way to combat the inevitable silences and gaps in other archives and repositories due to the lack of collecting certain groups' records”<sup>8</sup>.

### Trade Union Archives, Wildcat Action and the Train Drivers' Strike of 1989

The gaps of the American debate would seem to be filled in the Swedish context, with dedicated archival institutions for labour archives. But when taking a closer look at actual trade union archives and records in Sweden, we find that the gaps reappear in specific areas of working class history and experience. The organizational records have stories to tell, but often about formal preoccupations of union and party officials at a somewhat disconnect from the rank-and-file membership. This is especially true with regard to industrial action initiated and organized by workers outside of, and sometimes in open opposition to, the formal organizations of the labour movement.

To measure the distance between archive and event, this essay will examine a specific event at a specific workplace: The national wildcat strike of Swedish train drivers in the late summer of 1989. As a railway worker myself, it is safe to say that the experience of the strike was a defining moment for many Swedish train drivers. Outside of union structures, they planned and organized a three day strike that brought Sweden to a standstill and won important concessions during an era when state employed workers' rights were under attack. Many longtime train drivers still wax nostalgic about the strike if given the chance. So: A defining moment for a large workers' collective. And one that had consequences beyond the workplaces involved: The strike made headlines, central Swedish industries were affected and the Social Democratic government of the time had to react to the demands of the strikers.

A television news report from 21<sup>st</sup> of August, the first day of the strike, has been preserved and made available online by the train driver Torolf Jansson. The report features an interview with one

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7 Wakimoto, Bruce & Partridge 2013, p 296.

8 Wakimoto, Bruce & Partridge 2013, p 297.

of the leaders of the strike in Stockholm, AS, who outlines the two demands of the strikers: A wage increase to 13 000 SEK and an end to government plans to raise the pension age for train drivers. While most of the train traffic was brought to a standstill, the few trains that did operate were manned by driving instructors and the elected trade union officers who according to labour laws could not participate in the strike.<sup>9</sup>

### Purpose and Research Questions

The years 1989–1990 mark the passing of an era of wildcat action in Sweden. During the years 1969–1990, annual working days lost to illegal strikes regularly numbered above 10 000. Since then, wildcat strikes have become very rare, with annual working days lost only reaching the thousands in four instances according to statistics from the Swedish National Mediation Office.<sup>10</sup> Research on wildcat strikes in the era immediately preceding this dramatic drop might provide important clues as to why the Swedish labour force has largely abandoned illegal industrial action as a complement to legal union action.

This essay will outline the gap between the formal trade union structure and informal workplace struggle in terms of the labour archive and the records it contains and doesn't contain. It does not try to provide a history of the strike. It is simply a survey of what kinds of information a researcher of wildcat action might hope to find in local union records. The concrete facts of the strike are of less concern to us here than the *types of facts* and the *kinds of records* in which they might be found.

My hypothesis is that the gap surrounding the strike will be determined by two factors; First and foremost the Swedish labour legislation, specifically the *Medbestämmandelagen* (MBL) that threatens unions with legal action if they initiate or support industrial action while a collective bargaining deal is in effect.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, and partly determined by the first factor, the way that wildcat action tends to be initiated outside formal union structures by rank-and-file members, often in a way that is hard to reconcile with union procedures.

The legal demands on and the formal procedures of the local union during wildcat industrial action will be the main tools with which we survey the gap, mark its edges, and look for clues as to where we might look should we wish to fill it. The purpose of this essay is to survey what traces the strike has left in the records of a local train drivers' union. Hopefully, this will give us an idea both of what kind of records a labour historian can expect to find when researching Swedish wildcat strikes, as well as identify the “gaps” an active acquisition programme or collection policy might help to fill if we wish labour archives to give a fuller account of working class experience.

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9 ABC-nyheterna 1989.

10 Medlingsinstitutet 2019.

11 *Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act* 1996.

The questions I will attempt to answer are:

What kind of records produced by local 1301 have been preserved in its archive?

What categories of information about the train drivers' strike of 1989 can be found in the archives of SF Local 1301? And, more specifically:

Does the MBL and union procedures determine the kind of records about the strike to be found in the archive?

### Source Material

The source material used has been the records of SF local 1301, the majority union of Stockholm's train drivers. I have investigated the year of the strike as well as the two years immediately preceding and following the strike (1987–1991). Individual names have been reduced to initials, with exceptions made for what can be considered public figures.

### The Gap as Concept and Metaphor

The gap metaphor brings to mind a “full archive”, one capable of reflecting the whole of society. That this was a vision of the activist archivists of the 1970s is clear from Ham's demand that the archivist should “hold up a mirror to mankind”.<sup>12</sup> This imaginary totality, the archive-where-nothing-is-lost, is of course just that – a fantasy or general direction. It is a metaphor employed in the context of a perceived lack, and should probably not be taken verbatim. Even so, it might be useful to try to specify what an archival gap actually entails.

Working in the context of Apartheid and post-Apartheid South African state archives, Verne Harris proposes a concept that might be more apt, that of the *archival sliver*. “The archival record is but a sliver of social memory. It is also but a sliver of the documentary record.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than framing the active archivist approach around a potential whole, he starts out from the necessarily fragmentary and incomplete nature of any archive, framed by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its reliance on oral history to tell histories that had been thoroughly purged from state records by those who wished the crimes of Apartheid forgotten. Harris argues that “in any country, the documentary record provides just a sliver of a window into the event. Even if archivists in a particular country were to preserve every record generated throughout the land, they would still have only a sliver of a window into that country's experience”.<sup>14</sup> He polemizes against

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12 Ham 1975, p 13.

13 Harris 2002, p 64.

14 Harris 2002, pp 64-65.



the mirror metaphor, saying that “the assumption that there is “a reality” capable of reflection in records is debatable from a number of perspectives.”<sup>15</sup>

The concept of the “gap” employed here should thus not be considered to imply that there are specific, already determined holes in any given archive or group of archives waiting to be filled by the would-be activist archivist. The particular “gap” in question is, rather, one rising out of an interest in a specific phenomena, the wildcat action, and the way a particular kind of archive can and cannot provide us with information about said phenomena, given the processes and interests that have formed the archive and the records it contains. It is not to be considered an inherent lack in the *archive* but rather a gap between a specific line of inquiry and the material consulted.

Zinn, Ham et al. attempted to critically engage with the archivist as a simple custodian, as an apolitical caretaker, and turn her into someone reflecting on her own position as well as the function(s) of the archive in society.<sup>16</sup> This “activist” approach focused a lot of its attention on collecting records and archives pertaining to previously disregarded groups and areas of society. But in some ways, this “social turn” is strangely asocial, in that it at least seemingly disregard the material determinations of archives and creators. A police archive is not “unrepresentative” because it lacks an inclusive collection policy, but rather because it is a product of a function of state with very specific tasks. As Marx pointed out in his critique of Proudhon: “The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist.”<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, archivists should be prepared for the fact, desirable or not, that the police department will give you archives filled with police records.

The preoccupation with the archivist as actor, as curator of future histories, and the ethical-political demands this position brings with it is still very much in vogue. Cook and Schwartz, taking a cue from Judith Butler, speak of the relation between archival theory and practice in these terms: “[T]he practice of archives is the ritualized implementation of theory, the acting out of the script that archivists have set for themselves.” But they go on to bracket “theory” and in its place put a script “formed by the ‘social magic’ of now-unquestioned, ‘naturalized’ norms.”<sup>18</sup> For Cook and Schwartz, it would seem, the archivist gives us the police record, but only as long as *police norms* are allowed to feed us lines.

I would venture to say that a critique of archive theory and practice divorced from the latter's material foundations is always in danger of reducing itself to either an ethical stance or a metaphysics. If the archivist is an actor, it is surely in a supporting capacity. Questions of under-

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15 Harris 2002, p 65.

16 Zinn 1977, pp 17-18.

17 Marx (1847) 1936, p 92.

18 Cook & Schwartz 2002, p 173.

representation and under-documentation are not in the last instance questions of collection policies, but reflect the society and the specific circumstances in which an archival institution or an individual archive is created and maintained.

To summarize: It is important to recognize that a gap is not a simple contingent absence, such as would be the case if a series of records were lost in a fire or flood, but rather a function of the encounter between a line of inquiry on the one hand, and on the other hand the collection policies of archival institutions and the records produced by the creators whose archives the archival institutions house and care for. Therefore, these “organically determined” gaps are not to be conceived of as (un)conscious omissions, but rather as consequences of the specific purposes of archival institutions and archive creators. If one wants to understand such gaps, it follows that one needs to understand the conditions under which creators produce their records.

## Research Overview

A provisional survey of relevant English speaking articles on the subjects of oral history, labour archives and active acquisition has provided the theoretical framework used for the essay. The literature on the subjects is extensive, spanning from the 1970s to the contemporary debates in archival theory, and I have limited myself to articles with a significant overlap between my areas of interest.

In Wagner Webster’s survey of (the sparse) literature by archivists on oral history, the author points out that the relative paucity of academic results doesn't necessarily reflect the overall situation of oral history. Outside of the academy, she points at “a long tradition [...] of oral histories being conducted not by academic historians, archivists, or trained oral history specialists, but rather by family historians, genealogists, public historians, activists, and community members.”<sup>19</sup> Wagner Webster points out that the purpose for these oral histories have not been to produce academic literature, but for other reasons altogether; Collecting experiences in print, etc.<sup>20</sup>

The archival lack surrounding wildcat actions and everyday struggle have certainly been noticed by Swedish labour historians and activists. Some might frame the gap as an ideological one, as part of the narrative of Social Democratic social peace.<sup>21</sup> Some as a consequence of trade union

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19 Wagner Webster 2016, p 274.

20 Wagner Webster 2016, especially the concluding pp 274–276.

21 Strikes and rank-and-file militancy have been a popular subject matter for Swedish historians, both inside and outside of academia. An early and comprehensive attempt to chart this “other labour movement” is Brutus Östling’s *Den "andra" arbetarrörelsen och reformismens framväxt* (“The ‘other’ labour movement and the emergence of reformism”) from 1980, where the author attempts to give an other perspective on the early labour movement following the example of Karl-Heinz Roth’s *Die “andere Arbeiterbewegung und die Entwicklung der kapitalistischen Repression von 1880 bis zur Gegenwart: ein Beitrag zum Neuverständnis der Klassengeschichte in Deutschland* a few years earlier. Östling and Roth frames rank-and-file militancy within a larger historical narrative of competing tendencies within the labour movement, and attempt to provide a corrective to a one-sided narrative

structures and the largely undocumented nature of work place struggle. The best example of this latter strand of thinking during the last decades might be the “Folkrörelse på arbetsplatsen” (“People’s movement in the workplace”) line of books edited by Frances Tuuloskorpi.<sup>22</sup>

In the sixties, a wave of wildcat strikes erupted on the Swedish labour market. The most prominent was probably the Norrbotten Ore Fields strike. In his 2018 dissertation *The Great Miners’ Strike in the Norrbotten Ore Fields: An Oral History*, oral historian Robert Nilsson Mohammadi notes that the strike “has been a centre of debates and reflections on society, culture and history in Sweden.”<sup>23</sup> The dissertation investigates various texts written about the strike, but the main portion is dedicated to the collecting of stories by strikers. While not concerned with archival issues, it is the most ambitious attempt within academia to survey, reflect on and document a Swedish wildcat strike to date (or at least since the 1970s) and necessary reading for anyone investigating the phenomena in a Swedish context.

### Method and Methodology

The method employed has been a *qualitative content analysis*. The first step has been to identify records with information pertaining to the strike and the strikers' demands, as well as to the prehistory of the strike and its repercussions. The second step has been to formulate a series of categories that lets us identify what the records does and does not tell us about the strike.

In my categorization, I have not been concerned with the particulars of the strike. Rather, I have tried to identify *kinds of information*, and how they relate to local 1301 as an organization. If gaps are to be considered, as I propose, not in terms of representation or as omissions but rather as consequences of the record creators’ normal functioning, the identification of categories turns into a question of identifying what information is produced as a result of the organization’s everyday business.

Since the categories employed are determined by the hypothesis that the distance between records and strike will be a function of organizational and legal constraints, the analytical model should be further qualified as an example of what Hsieh & Shannon call a “directed content analysis”, or “deductive category application” – i. e., a content analysis where the categories used are informed and given direction by already formulated theoretical considerations.<sup>24</sup>

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of Social Democracy as a natural outcome of the early labour movement’s evolution. See Östling 1980, Roth 1977.

22 The project attempts to collect stories of struggle and organizing from rank-and-file workers, and the fourth volume, *Om strejker* (“About strikes”), from 2015 includes a story about the train drivers’ strike by participant Leif Lindström from Borlänge.

23 Nilsson Mohammadi 2018, p 234.

24 Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p 1281.

## Empirical Findings

### An Overview of the Archives

For several decades, the train drivers of Stockholm shared a single employer, *Statens Järnvägar* (the Swedish State Railway). This was still true during the strike of 1989. Swedish train drivers have been organized in unions since at least the 1890s, with a Swedish section of the *Nordiska Lokomotivmannaförbundet* (Nordic Train Drivers' Union) being formed in 1895 under the name of *Sveriges Lokomotivförare- och Eldareförening* (Swedish Locomotive Drivers' and Stokers' Union). In 1907, the section became a national union under the name of *Sveriges Lokomotivmannaförbund* (Swedish Locomotive Drivers' Union).<sup>25</sup> They maintained a separate, trade based organization until 1941, when they joined *Svenska Järnvägsmannaförbundet* (Swedish Railway Men's Union), a national union that merged with other state employee unions to form the *Statsanställdas förbund* (SF) in 1970.<sup>26</sup> In response to a decade of neoliberal reform during which a sizable part of the membership, previously employed in the state sector, became employed in the private sector, SF changed its name to SEKO (*Swedish Union for Service and Communications Employees*) in 1995. At the beginning of 1989 SF local 1301 organized a 68 % majority of the 467 train drivers employed in Stockholm.<sup>27</sup>

An appendage to this schematic organizational history is the history of train driver skepticism to the principle of industrial unions. The attempts to defend or reinvent the organization of their union according to trade, or profession have been many. During the period of the strike, the white collar union *ST-Lok* was the organizational expression of this desire. The latest initiative in this vein is the minority union *SLFF*, an independent union formed partly as a result of the experiences of the strike of 1989.

The records of local 1301 are preserved at the Swedish Labour Movement's Archive and Library in Stockholm (ARAB). As a consequence of the deregulation of Swedish railways, the records are split into two archives. That of local 1301, and that of Seko Lokförarna SJ's klubb 106 (Hereafter referred to as "local 106"). While local 1301 organized all train drivers, its still active successor local 106 only organizes those drivers who still work in the state owned company *SJ* after the deregulation of the Swedish railway market.

While our investigation predates deregulation with a decade, some of the records of local 1301 were kept in the possession of local 106 until the middle 2000s. Apart from this splitting of the records on two creators, they have been kept together. A factor in this might be the continuous

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25 For the early trade union history of Swedish train drivers, see *Med ånga och elektricitet* (1933) pp 29–95.

26 Johansson 1995.

27 Årsmötesprotokoll 890223, ARAB, SF1301, vol. 2.

existence of an independent train drivers' local over the years. It has never been absorbed into one of those larger regional or even national union entities that have supplanted workplace organization in many Swedish unions.

From the period 1987–1991, the archives hold executive board daylists from 1989–90 and almost complete series of membership meeting minutes, executive board minutes and annual meeting minutes. The minutes are computer typed, and often include motivations for decisions and summaries of discussions. With several of the minutes, letters, written proposals and annual reports have been appended by the local's secretary. In more than one case, however, the appendices minutes refer to have been lost.

The archive of Local 1301 consists of two volumes. The first volume stretches from 1977 to 1992, but only the folder *Arbetsutskottets protokoll 1985–1992* covers the period of the strike. The second volume stretches from 1979 to 1989, and includes the executive board and membership meeting minutes from 1987–1989.

The archive of Local 106 consists of twenty one volumes, covering the years 1978 to 2008. The volumes with source material relevant for our investigation are *A1:1: Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor*, consisting of executive board minutes covering the years 1989-2001 and *A2:1: Mötesprotokoll med bilagor*, consisting of membership meeting minutes as well as annual meeting minutes covering the years 1989 to 2001.

If the minutes from the period are well preserved, the same cannot be said about the local's correspondence, or its newsletter to the membership. Neither of these potential sources of information have been preserved. The archives of local 1301 are in no way unique in this regard. Trade union archives lead a precarious existence at the best of times. As Nancy Stunden shows us with regards to the situation of Canadian labour archives, several factors have historically worked against the preservation of trade union records. While some of Stunden's examples are closely related to a Canadian context, many are important negative factors against the successful preservation of trade union archives anywhere.<sup>28</sup>

Stunden cites the prohibitive expenses of retaining essentially dormant files with little use for day to day union business as an important deterrent against keeping large archives. “[Money spent on dormant records] only reduces the funds generated to pursue the purpose for which unions exist, which is, after all, the improvement of the condition of their members and non-organized workers.”<sup>29</sup> She comments on the quality of local union minutes: “Not surprisingly, considering the education and daily experience of their creators, the minutes usually noted only decisions, with little

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28 Stunden 1977.

29 Stunden 1977, p 85.

explanation of what prompted them or the manner in which they were reached.”<sup>30</sup>. Later in the article, Stunden points to the lack of formal record management in local unions as one reason for recommending transfer of records to archival institutions “at relatively short intervals, perhaps every five years”<sup>31</sup>. To these factors, one could add that elected local union officers come and go, with a potential turnover of a whole local executive board in as little as four years.

Irving Abella echoes Stunden's analysis of the primary cause of the dearth of labour records, but with a bit more pathos: “Stories [of lost and destroyed records] are legion to students of the Canadian labour movement. Much of our recorded past has been destroyed through malevolence, fear, carelessness, or more usually, disinterest. To the men and women organizing unions, setting up picket-lines, and bringing organization to the unorganized, the fact that they were making history was the furthest from their minds. Their concern was immediate, with the present and not with the future or, for that matter, with the past. Similarly, union work was usually so frenetic and pressing that little thought was given to preserving records.”<sup>32</sup> This lack of concern for the future notwithstanding, Abella also cautions the would-be oral historian that “[c]onflicts in the labour movement or on the left never die, nor do they fade away; they are simply carried on by other means”, and warns us that “cassettes and tapes” might very well be turned into just such ammunition if the interviewer isn't properly prepared.<sup>33</sup>

### Categories of Strike Records

The inventory of the years 1987 – 1991 yielded 29 records with information pertaining to the strike in the broadest sense. Most of these records provide the reader with information regarding the situation that provoked the strike, a handful concern the consequences and aftermath of the strike, and only two give us any concrete information about the strike proper. I have attempted to organize the kinds of information into five categories. Note that some records include information that fits into more than one category, and have been included in all applicable categories.

1. *Demands of the strikers* (16 records).<sup>34</sup> Since the demands of the strikers are well documented (a wage of 13 000 SEK, and against the raising of the pension age from 60 to 65), we can follow their articulation and development in the records. The wage demand originated at a membership meeting at the end of 1988 in Sävenäs, outside the city of Gothenburg. At the meeting, the SF officer present refused to pass on the demand because he considered the wage increase

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30 Stunden 1977, p 83.

31 Stunden 1977, p 86.

32 Abella 1977, p 117.

33 Abella 1977, p 119.

34 The full list of identified and categorized records is included in Appendix 1 at the end of the essay.

“unreasonable”.<sup>35</sup> As we shall see, this becomes the catalyst for a rank-and-file initiative outside union structures. When the wage demand is discussed at a membership meeting in Stockholm, KA, the president of local 1301, puts emphasis on the fact that the demand has not been raised through proper union channels. When put to a vote, the members present decide to support the demand anyway.<sup>36</sup>

The second demand, against the higher pension age, is also raised by the membership meeting in Sävenäs. But this is in response to a proposal by the SAV (Statens Arbetsgivarverk, The State Employer Office) originating in the Social Democratic government’s attempts to cut back on state expenses. The employer’s proposal is thus put forward within the framework of collective bargaining. Within SF, this means that locals function as referral bodies for the proposal. Of the seventeen records mentioning the strike demands, a majority concern the pension age proposal. Local 1301 strongly opposes any raising of the pension age, and the local’s officers spend a considerable amount of time and energy analyzing, informing about and criticizing the proposal, in executive board meetings, at extra membership meetings and in letters to the SF leadership.

2. *Feldttågskommittén* (10 records). The rank-and-file initiative in Gothenburg resulted in a national committee that came to be known as the “Feldttågskommittén”, a word play involving the name of the Social Democrat Minister of Finances (Kjell-Olof Feldt) and the Swedish word for a military campaign (“Fälttåg”). The first action organized by the committee was a train drivers’ march from Stockholm Central to the Department of Finances on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1988. The demonstration was followed by a nationwide slowdown of trains from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March the following year. Train drivers, predominantly in southern and western Sweden, slowed down the speed of the trains to one they felt was more in line with their wage level. Then, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, another march was organized, this time to the SAV offices. Finally, the *Feldttågskommittén* collected the signatures of 1 803 train drivers demanding that the national unions organizing train drivers’ (SF and the minority white collar union ST-LOK) would adopt their demands. When neither union showed any interest in doing so, the train drivers’ went on a strike of their own.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned, the members of local 1301 voted to support the rank-and-file initiative, despite the reservations of the president. This included joining the demonstration against the Minister of Finances. The membership decision led to a debate in the executive board, where it was decided that any member of the board had a right to participate in the march, as long as it was in an individual capacity.<sup>38</sup> The central leadership of SF appears to have adopted a less diplomatic position, leading

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35 Verksamhetsberättelse 1989, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.

36 Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 881116, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

37 Verksamhetsberättelse 1989, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.

38 Styrelseprotokoll 881208, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

to a letter of resignation from at least one member.<sup>39</sup> The lukewarm reception from the local's executive board was also criticized in a letter by member HL<sup>40</sup>, later elected as a safety representative of the local and one of three officers who joined the strike.

This passive stance of the local was later, in response to membership pressure, changed for one of active support: In February, LC from the Feldttågskommittén is invited to speak at an extra local membership meeting.<sup>41</sup> And at the march in June, the local provided sandwiches, coffee and rented an auditorium for the demonstrators. By now, the executive board minutes express disappointment at the low attendance of Stockholm drivers.<sup>42</sup> The slowdown in March is only mentioned in a daylight, likely a consequence of the legal repercussions of supporting industrial action under the duration of a collective agreement.<sup>43</sup>

3. *Relationship between local 1301 and the SF leadership* (14 records). The local suffers membership loss during the years in question, a situation exacerbated by the central SF stance against the wage and pension demands, and later its stance on the strike.<sup>44</sup> And not only from the rank-and-file: At least one elected officer in the local resigns over the way SF handles the strike.<sup>45</sup> After the strike has ended, the local sends a protest to the central leadership over the way they handled the strike.<sup>46</sup> Many members want to go further; the above mentioned HL and strike leader AS demand the resignation of a local ombudsman in a letter to the executive board. The minutes from the executive board meeting show us that the board sympathizes with the sentiment but deems it strategically unsound.<sup>47</sup>

When the president of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), Stig Malm, makes a no-strike, wage-freeze deal with the Social Democratic government in early 1990, the board proposes that the annual meeting of the local demands his resignation. This passes, but with an addendum suggested by AS: That the local also demands the resignation of the SF leadership.<sup>48</sup>

4. *Legal considerations surrounding the strike* (5 records). During an extra executive board meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, the day after the strike ended, the strike is discussed. Or, according to the minutes, not the strike *per se*, but the potential legal ramifications of the fact that three local officers participated in the strike. "This could cause us big problems", the minutes note, and adds

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39 Styrelseprotokoll 890109, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

40 Styrelseprotokoll 890109, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

41 Styrelseprotokoll 890216, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

42 Styrelseprotokoll 890609, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

43 Diarielista för AU-möte den 15/3, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 1.

44 Diarielista för AU-möte den 10/4, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 1.; Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 891109, ARAB, SEKO106, A2:1

45 Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 890925, Mötesprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A2:1.

46 Extra Styrelsemötesprotokoll 890824, ARAB, SF1301, Vol 2.

47 Styrelseprotokoll 900223, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.

48 Årsmötesprotokoll 900308, Mötesprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A2:1.



that the president KA has started informal discussions with the local employer representative in an attempt to persuade them to refrain from going to the Labour Court with a legal complaint.<sup>49</sup> After the strike, the SF leadership circulates a directive, clarifying the duties of union officers during wildcat strikes.<sup>50</sup>

During the extra executive board meeting, it is also decided that KA will have an equally informal discussion with the strike leaders at his home, to “try to help them”.<sup>51</sup> In “The Archival Edge”, Ham quotes Arthur Schlesinger on the problem of quality of information. “If a contemporary statesman has something of significance to communicate, if speed and secrecy is of the essence, he will confide his message, not to letter, but to the telephone.”<sup>52</sup> It wouldn't be too bold a paraphrase to suggest that if a union militant has something significant to communicate with regard to the organizing of wildcat action, he will confide his message to speech, to telephone – but surely not the minutes.

In his “Oral History and the Canadian Labour Movement”, Irving Abella makes the case for oral history as a vital tool for historians and archivists engaging with labour archives. His point of departure is the largely unwritten history of the labour movement, rooted in “a widespread, deep-seated and, it might be added, completely legitimate sense of paranoia – a feeling that whatever is in print might be dangerous.”<sup>53</sup> He goes on to paint a picture of the state repression that, historically, fostered the reluctance to put pen to paper.

The Swedish labour movement has, in general, not had many reasons to foster a similar paranoia. Here, a long Social Democratic reign has worked as a political guarantee against the kinds of repression North American labour has had to contend with. But for unions handling wildcat action, Abella's description rings true. The reason for this is Swedish labour legislation, specifically the MBL, a law predicated on nationwide collective bargaining deals guaranteeing industrial peace. Since the MBL forbids, on pain of sizable fines, trade unions from condoning, supporting or organizing wildcat action for the duration of a contract of collective bargaining, national as well as local unions have a strong incentive to keep whatever participation they might have had in wildcat action out of minutes and written correspondence.<sup>54</sup>

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49 Extra styrelsemötesprotokoll 890824, ARAB, SF1301, Vol 2. While outside the scope of our investigation, it should be noted that employers' attempts to have workers and unions tried according to the MBL makes the recorded Swedish Labour Court (AD) proceedings a sometimes excellent source for research into individual wildcat actions, with the caveat that when workers are forced to trial it is often a sign of a strike lost and not necessarily representative of more successful strikes. In the case of the train drivers' strike, the employer elected not to sue the involved workers and union representatives to the Labour Court.

50 Styrelseprotokoll 890913, ARAB, SF1301, Vol. 2.

51 Extra styrelsemötesprotokoll 890824, ARAB, SF1301, Vol 2.

52 Ham 1975, p 9.

53 Abella 1977, p 115.

54 *Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act* 1996, cf. §§41–43.

Finally, at the extra executive board meeting, it is decided that the local will attempt to find out if any of those drivers who scabbed during the strike broke any working hours' laws or regulations.<sup>55</sup>

In December 1989, the employer withdraws their complaint to the Labour Court.<sup>56</sup>

5. *Aftermath of the strike* (9 records). A number of records give us disparate information about the fallout of the strike. Some aspects are mentioned above, but the two most important consequences are that the pension question was postponed to the negotiations of the next collective agreement<sup>57</sup> (where it resulted in a partial victory for the strikers – the raised pension age only came to effect railway personnel hired after a specific date) and that the wage demand was belatedly met.<sup>58</sup> At the annual meeting in spring 1990, the annual report covering the preceding year is presented to the membership. In it, the local's president writes with appreciation about the strike, calling it “a positive surprise” and “a breaking point in our union work” while speaking in very positive terms about the *Feldttågskommittén*. Not everyone agrees with his assessment of the year. The president's interpretation is called out by strike leader AS, who says that the strike was no such thing as a breaking point or breakthrough for union work, but instead interprets it as a critique of the official union line and a “resounding protest against the union.”<sup>59</sup> AS later follows this up with a letter to the executive board demanding the president's resignation, but is met by a compact membership majority that votes for his re-election.<sup>60</sup>

For all his critique of the local's leadership, AS is one of the most active members of the union. He attends membership meetings, authors letters of complaints and suggestions. In one letter to the executive board he proposes that union functions should be disseminated among the members, thus shifting the center of gravity from the executive board to the membership, or at least certain members of it. These suggestions do not seem to have caused any major changes to union organization, nor any shifting of responsibilities. AS's other line of attack, the distancing of the union from the Social Democratic party, on the other hand, is more successful and seems to reflect a sentiment shared with a large portion of the membership.<sup>61</sup>

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55 Extra styrelsemötesprotokoll 890824, ARAB, SF1301, Vol 2., The minutes also provides us with a few numbers by which to evaluate the strike's efficiency. From the minutes, we know that the amount of scabs in Stockholm amounted to five out of approximately 470 drivers, excluding local union officers and driving instructors.

56 Styrelseprotokoll 891208, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.

57 Styrelseprotokoll 891102, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.

58 Verksamhetsberättelse 1989, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.

59 Verksamhetsberättelse 1989, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1.; Årsmötesprotokoll 900308, Mötesprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A2:1

60 Styrelseprotokoll 900823, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1. It should be noted that the amount of discarded votes, i. e. votes that didn't follow the election rules, were noticeably larger during the executive board elections in 1990 than previous years. Cf. Årsmötesprotokoll 900308, Mötesprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A2:1

61 Årsmötesprotokoll 900308, Mötesprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A2:1; Styrelseprotokoll 900823, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1

## Breaking the Silence

One record stands out from the others in the archive: The annual report over 1989, presented by the executive board to the members at the annual meeting in March 1990, includes a summary history of the strike and its prehistory. The part concerning the strike is written by the aforementioned HL, one of the three local union officers from 1301 who joined the strike.

Her section of the annual report is the only record that describes the *strike* rather than its consequences. HL gives us a comprehensive, if brief, overview of the actions leading up to the strike, as well as the strike itself. Her perspective is grounded not in internal union procedures, but in her role as train driver, strike participant and rank-and-file militant.<sup>62</sup>

Why does this record stand out from the rest? There are at least two potential reasons for this; First of all, since the employers had withdrawn the legal case against the strikers from the Labour Court, union officers could speak more freely about the strike and its impact. The second reason concerns types of records. Trade union minutes are not produced to provide an account of history. They are there to document decisions, events, activities and facilitate union work. A secretary does not normally write his or her words with an eye towards future research, but rather towards the next membership meeting, the union trustees, the next annual meeting. The annual report, on the other hand, *is* actually intended to give an overview of the past year and its important events. The preservation and quality of annual reports is, thus, key to any attempt to put together a history of workplace struggle or other important occurrences at a workplace.

## Interpreting the Strike-Sized Gap

As we can see, the strike itself is largely absent from the records. Discussions of it are limited to the legal effects it might entail (scabs violating working hour regulations, the union being sued to AD), the demands it put forward, and membership reactions to the official union position. We know from the records that this was not the only way the union engaged with the strike, as evidenced by the organization of a meeting with pensioners about the strike<sup>63</sup>, as well as the “informal gathering” with the strike leaders in Stockholm, but the records give no hints about what those meetings discussed.

The MBL forces a complicated balancing act on union officers with regard to wildcat actions that encompasses a majority of coworkers and proposes popular demands. They can't participate in or support the action without running the risk of legal actions from the employer, potentially ruining the union finances. It also means that union officers have to work during wildcat actions, even if

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62 Verksamhetsberättelse 1989, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1

63 Styrelseprotokoll 900115, Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor, ARAB, SEKO106, A1:1

their coworkers strike, if they wish to keep the organization from harm. The letter of the law further demands that they work actively to end the strike.

At the same time, wildcat action obviously changes the union bargaining position for the better, and if handled badly, the union risks a significant member loss. This balancing act between using wildcat actions to strengthen the bargaining position while also avoiding legal repercussions was an important, if unacknowledged, part of the Swedish Model in the labour market. In an article, Frances Tuuloskorpi quotes a union ombudsman as sighing and saying: “I have no power unless people sit down. People don’t understand that they need to sit down.”<sup>64</sup>

With that quote in mind, it is possible to interpret the silence in several different ways. As a distancing, pure and simple, by 1301’s executive board from the strikers. As a precaution against legal repercussions. As an inability to put union procedures to work in a new and unexpected situation. Or, perhaps, the silence might be a simple consequence of the fact that communications occurred outside of formal, minute keeping meetings.

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64 Tuuloskorpi 2008.

## Final Discussion

### Mapping Out the Gap

As we have seen, the records of local 1301 tell us quite a lot about the moods within the train drivers' collective, the situation within the local and workplace conditions in general. Even more so if we take a step back from the 29 identified records and view the archive in its entirety. Through the minutes, we get a pretty good idea of how the local interacts with the SF leadership on the one hand, and the rank-and-file initiative *Feldttågskommittén* on the other.

The strike, however, is almost exclusively reflected through its prehistory and consequences. In itself, it is almost invisible. How it was organized, how it developed over the three days in August is, with the exception of HL's section in the annual report over 1989, absent from the records.

The records reflect the executive board's attempt to balance the conflict of interest that is put into play when a workers' collective believes that their union organizations are unable or unwilling to satisfy demands that the workers perceive as realistic, desirable or necessary. Because of the conditions under which such a conflict takes place, the reflection won't be complete but rather, in Harris words, a "sliver" of union activity. This is at least partly a consequence of the nature of minutes as products of union discussions and procedures rather than overviews or attempts at historical narration.

In other words: The strike does form a "gap" in the archive, but a gap that is relatively well mapped out by the records. The categories of information the archive provides gives us the contours of the strike, and indirectly a summary overview of its prehistory, its organizational basis and the demands raised. Further, the records give us important clues about where we should look and who we should talk to if we want to learn more. These clues make the archive a good point of departure for archivists or oral historians attempting to collect or create records describing the strike from the participants' perspective, primarily by identifying a number of strikers.

Since the gap is not a contingent one, not merely a product of chance, it also gives us important insights into the record creator, and the action space of a local union situated in the Swedish model of labour market relations just prior to the crisis of 1990. Given the letter of the MBL law, the response to a wildcat strike from a local union should be one of repression or antagonism. As we have seen, this was not the case in our object of study. There is *not one* record detailing any attempt to stop the strike. Rather, the records reflect a passive stance with a few instances of active participation (the three officers who joined the strike) and an unspecified "helping out" in the aftermath of the strike.

Thus, the legal threat seems to have worked effectively as a deterrent against formal union participation in the strike, but only as one factor among others for the local executive board to take into account. The legal demands on the union had to be balanced against the possible loss of legitimacy among the membership, and the fact that a nationwide strike has an obvious, potentially positive effect on the bargaining position of the union. This kind of navigating, viable to a local union, seems largely absent from the SF leadership's stance that (at least as reflected through local 1301's records) seems to have been firmly set against the strike.

The silence surrounding the strike can, as shown in the conclusion of the previous section of this essay, be interpreted in a number of ways. As a distancing from the strikers, an inability to engage with wildcat action, or as a complicit silence. A local is not monolithic, its executive board is made up of several individual workers with different viewpoints, and its functioning in a space determined by the factors of labour law, union protocol, employer power and membership pressure makes it likely that the silence is not reducible to one interpretation. Rather, it should be viewed as an *ad hoc*, after-the-fact *assemblage* of specific silences, with disparate, sometimes contradictory causes.

### Now, About Filling That Gap

This study is a qualitative one, and cannot be generalized into any universal claims about local union archives. It does, however, point out certain structural elements in union archives that would be pertinent to consider when using local union archives as a source of information for wildcat action and, to a lesser extent, the everyday life of workers.

In his dissertation about the miners' strike of 1969, Nilsson Mohammadi includes a telling quote by journalist Joar Tiberg from 1999:

Jag fick inget grepp, förstod inte. Jag satt i källaren på Kungliga biblioteket, stirrade i mikrofilmerna, ledarspalterna och krigsrubrikerna, begrep inte. Jag satt på Gruv 4:ans kontor på bottenvåningen i Folkets hus, Malmberget, läste historikerna, frågade runt. [I couldn't come to grips with it, couldn't understand. I sat in the basement of the Royal Library, stared at the microfilms, the editorials, the dramatic headlines, and couldn't understand. I sat at the offices of the Miners' local 4 on the ground floor of Folkets hus, Malmberget, read the historical accounts, asked around.]<sup>65</sup>

Nilsson Mohammadi focus is on how Tiberg constructs a very particular history, tries to tell a very specific story that fits a certain aesthetic and narrative.<sup>66</sup> But the being-at-a-loss faced with the historical records also says something very concrete about the records produced by newspapers and

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65 Quoted from Nilsson Mohammadi 2018, pp 87–88.

66 Nilsson Mohammadi 2018, pp 87–90.

trade unions, as evidenced by Nilsson Mohammadi's own decision to create an archive of personal interviews with the striking miners: While the records give us a lot of information *surrounding* the strike, the lived experience and the inner working of the strike is absent. And if this is true of the miners' strike, the subject of countless articles and books, it is even more so with regard to those strikes that haven't received a similar treatment.

As Stunden, Ham, Abella has shown us, the passing of time works against the archivist wishing to preserve records of events and movements when the principal actors work outside of any formal, record creating organization. Ham points out the special attention archivists must pay to this kind of vulnerable documentation "that has little chance of aging into vintage archives, that is destroyed nearly as fast as it is created, and which must be quickly gathered before it is lost or scattered."<sup>67</sup> If, as Stunden emphasizes, speed is of the essence when collecting official union records, this need for speed is even more acute when it comes to collecting records of wildcat action.<sup>68</sup> But here, the collection effort runs up against a formidable obstacle, in that the workers involved might have a very realistic fear of legal or extralegal reprisals from their employer.

In a way, time works both against and for the archivist here. In the immediate aftermath of a wildcat strike, memories are fresh and specific details can be preserved but may be withheld because of the threat of repression. After a few decades, participants might be more forthcoming, but specifics might be lost or distorted. One potential solution would be the collecting or creation of records into special archives only made available to researchers and the public after a set date.

Another important point is raised by the preserved record types of local 1301. Or, rather, the lack of preserved correspondence and, more importantly, the lack of newsletters and other written information directed to the local's membership. These kinds of records are key for any researcher that wants to use local trade union archives to piece together a history of workers' everyday life or rank-and-file militancy. Thus, collecting and preserving these record types should be a prioritized area for a would-be activist archivist with an eye on preserving the histories of wildcat actions.

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67 Ham 1975, p 10.

68 Stunden 1977, pp 85-86.

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A2:1 Mötesprotokoll med bilagor (Meeting minutes with appendices)

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## Appendix 1

### Identified Records by Archive and Volume (Applicable Categories in Parenthesis)

#### *SEKO106 A1: Volume 1: Styrelseprotokoll med bilagor (Executive board minutes with appendices)*

Styrelseprotokoll 891102 (1)  
Styrelseprotokoll 891208 (4,5)  
Styrelseprotokoll 900115 (5)  
Styrelseprotokoll 900223 (3)  
Verksamhetsberättelse 1989 (1,2,3,5)

#### *SEKO106 A2: Volume 1: Mötesprotokoll med bilagor (Meeting minutes with appendices)*

Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 890925 (3,5)  
Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 891211 (5)  
Årsmötesprotokoll 900308 (1,2,3,5)  
Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 900419 (1)  
Extra avdelningsmötesprotokoll 910110 (1)

#### *SF1301, Volume 1: Protokoll med bilagor (Minutes with appendices)*

Diarielista för AU-möte 890315 (2)  
AU-protokoll 890607 (1,3,5)  
Diarielista för AU-möte 890607, 890830 (1,3,4,5)  
Diarielista för AU-möte 890931 (4)  
Diarielista för AU-möte 900329 (1,3)

#### *SF1301, Volume 2: Protokoll med bilagor (Minutes with appendices)*

Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 880602 (1)  
Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 881116 (1,2)  
Styrelseprotokoll 881128 (1,2)  
Styrelseprotokoll 881208 (1,2,3)  
Styrelseprotokoll 890109 (2,3)  
Avdelningsmötesprotokoll 890116 (3)  
Styrelseprotokoll 890216 (2,3)  
Styrelseprotokoll 890317 (2,3)  
Styrelseprotokoll 890510–11 (1)  
Extra avdelningsmötesprotokoll 890530 (1)  
Remissvar, förslag på pensionsavtal 890607 (1)  
Styrelseprotokoll 890609 (1,2)

Extra styrelseprotokoll 890824 (3,4)

Styrelseprotokoll 890913 (3,4,5)