

# Social-movement Unionism in Theory and in Sweden

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**ABSTRACT** *Many union leaders and observers of unionism in industrially advanced countries have recently argued for stronger links between unions and social movements but their arguments leave the nature of social movements underspecified. This article reviews the literature on social movements and argues in favour of a minimalist theory of the social actor rather than choose between American and European approaches to studying social movements. Both Melucci's European approach and McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's American approach to integrating the European and American schools of thought on social movements are inadequate to the task of specifying social-movement unionism. Hindess's minimalist theory of the social actor and articulated arenas of conflict offers a stronger approach to understanding social-movement unionism and appreciating its strategic pertinence in particular times and places. Two episodes of contention in Sweden illustrate the advantages of a minimalist theory of articulated social-movement unionism.*

**KEY WORDS:** Social movements, collective behaviour, social action, social conflict, Swedish labour unions, Swedish industrial relations

## Introduction

The success of alliances among radical workers and social-movement activists protesting against the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999 and elsewhere since have prompted suggestions that 'social-movement unionism' might renew many labour movements (Waterman, 1999, 2001; Robinson, 2000; Seoane & Taddei, 2002; Taylor & Mathers, 2002; Burgmann, 2003). The strategy of renewal entails emulating the wider political role of workers' organizations during the democratization of Spain, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, and Brazil (von Holdt, 2002; Lewis, 2004). In industrially advanced countries, the strategy draws variously on calls for global justice, popular resistance to neo-liberal globalization and corporate power, and the post-Leninist willingness of radical workers to favour horizontal alliance with other social movements (Brecher & Costello, 1990; Scipes, 1992; Castells, 1997; Moody, 1997; Eimer, 1999; Klein, 2000). Ideas about social-movement unionism have led unions to move beyond the 'service model' to enlist

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free riders in favour of an ‘organizing model’ to enliven unionism (Australian Council of Trade Unions, 2000). Where the service model targets members with supplementary services that make individual membership worth maintaining, the organizing model of social-movement unionism hopes to inspire more members to join and to mobilize more members into active membership. If social-movement unionism is to mean something more than the electioneering public relations of mainstream labour parties or the popular front of Western communist parties in the 1930s and 1940s, then calls for social-movement unionism need to specify exactly what is meant by ‘social movement’ today.

The American literature disregards issues of class and therefore places unions, along with social movements and interest groups, on a spectrum of contention between revolutions at one end and established parties’ competition for government office at the other end. This offers explanation of *how* social-movement unionism can operate but little explanation of *why* it might arise. On the other hand, the European literature either insists upon the salience of Marxism and the pre-eminence of class analysis for studying social movements or rejects Marxism and suggests that new social cleavages have produced ‘new’ social movements that operate in tension with the ‘old’ labour movement. This explains why new social movements have emerged around new social cleavages while the labour movement has declined in many countries, but it cannot explain how social-movement unionism has operated during periods of democratization or how it can operate in established democracies.

Over the last ten to fifteen years various writers have attempted to integrate the diverse contributions of American and European schools of thought on social movements. Inevitably, these attempts to integrate the best aspects of each have difficulty reconciling different, if not contradictory, assumptions about human nature, society, and politics (Meyer, 1995; Burgmann, 2003). They therefore tend to favour either the American or the European approach, and tend to favour either a political concept of social *movements* or a sociological concept of *social* movement. An alternative to taking the best elements of diverse theories and cobbling together a more comprehensive synthesis is to move in the opposite direction and derive a ‘minimal’ theory that avoids the various shortcomings of diverse theories.

This article discusses the work of Alberto Melucci, as the most influential European attempt to integrate the American and European schools, and the recent work of Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly as the best American attempt to move beyond differences between the two schools. Discussion then points to the advantages of Barry Hindess’s conceptions of the actor and articulated arenas of struggle. Hindess’s (1986, 1988) minimal concept of the actor presupposes a concept of discursive context and a constructivist concept of articulated arenas of struggle. This minimalism is summarized in a three-dimensional model of articulated social-movement unionism. A successful strike in 1995 and serious riots during an EU summit meeting in 2001 provide Swedish illustrations of the advantages of this model over attempts to merge the American and European approaches to social movements when thinking about social-movement unionism.

### **A European Integration of Schools of Thought about Social Movements**

In his widely cited book *Nomads of the Present*, Alberto Melucci (1989, p. 18) observes that after the Second World War what might be termed the American modernization

school analysed social movements from the perspective of established political institutions threatened by the possibility of social misfits in a crowd led by insurrectionary fascist, communist, or racist ideologues. From a perspective more sympathetic to social movements and their members, but also located outside of the movements themselves, academic Marxist analyses of how class in itself becomes a class for itself viewed social movements as the products of socio-economic conflict (1989, p. 18). The dualism of a contrast between modernization and Marxism was updated in the 1970s by a contrast between American explanations of 'how' social movements operate and European explanations of 'why' they arise and persist (1989, p. 21).

The American focus on the mobilization of resources in protest movements organized by rational and socially well-adjusted individuals from the middle class was a departure from the older focus on the crowd psychology of irrational misfits. The American focus on resources looked at movements for civil rights, against the Vietnam War, for women's rights, against environmental degradation, and so forth and offered empirically testable explanations of how social movements operate. In Europe, departures from Marxism, class analysis, and the 'old' labour movement offered much more general explanations of why transitions from an industrial to an information or knowledge economy, from bureaucratic to networked power, and from national to global political economy had called forth 'new' social movements.

When Melucci attempted to integrate the how and why of the American and European approaches, he paid due respect to American concerns with the motives of individuals who switch from inaction to action. But his hermeneutic approach to understanding the individual and the collective favoured the European concern to depart from Marxism and its preoccupation with the labour movement (Plotke, 1995; Mische & Goldberg, 2003, p. 92). Melucci accepted Touraine's (1981, pp. 11–13, 13) European argument that 'Trade unionism ... has ceased to be the focal point of social opposition' because it had become incorporated into established economic and political institutions, but he pursued a less teleological argument about the so-called 'new' social movements. He disputed ideas that 'new' social movements were reified singular actors (*the* women's movement, *the* environment movement, and so forth) or bearers of any new sociological paradigm, pursuing a universal vision of a future good society. These criticisms led Melucci to note that both social-movement models based on class and class struggle and models based instead on political-exchange markets or rational choice assume reified actors and systemic conflict. Both methodological collectivism and methodological individualism necessarily reduce the social aspect of social movements down to a matter of political conflict between the movements and the authorities and neglect the role of culture and the importance of counter-cultural challenges (Melucci, 1989, pp. 40–45).

To overcome these shortcomings in European studies of 'new' social movements and American studies of resource mobilization in diverse protest movements, Melucci combined arguments about organization, individuation, culture, and power. On organization, Melucci (1989, p. 5; 1989, p. 206) applied McLuhan's ideas about electronic communication and argued that 'the message' that social movements impart today is their informal, temporary, and provisional network form of organization rather than the content of any protest or campaign. Melucci (1989, pp. 45–49) used Foucault's argument about individuation to support his rejection of, say, Lyotard or any 'post-modernist' turn from interest politics to identity politics. Joining any sort of social movement – in art, fashion, music, attitudes and behaviour, or to struggle for justice and

freedom – has long entailed identity formation. The difference today is that the members of contemporary social movements are ‘nomads of the present’ because they have multiple possible homes or identities and have no plan for how they will achieve a future good society within a nation-state or anywhere (1989, pp. 55–57). Since the challenge of contemporary social movements:

... manifests itself by reversing the cultural codes ... [and] ... power lies increasingly in the codes that regulate the flow of information ... [then] the very form of antagonistic collective action ... transmits a message to the rest of society ... [and] ... creates new spaces which function as a genuine sub-system ... [and] ... include not only conflictual action but also deviant behaviour and cultural experimentation. (Melucci, 1989, pp. 55–56)

With this concern for the power that lies in challenging cultural codes, Melucci (1989, pp. 44) avoids what he calls the ‘myopia of the visible’ in the American focus on protest movements, and this leads him to develop Habermas’s (1981) ideas about the complex society that has begun to supplant industrial society.

In industrial society, social time was linear – in the Augustinian sense of before, now, and after – but in complex society, social time has been complicated by multiple senses of cyclical time in individuals’ inner experiences. This inner cyclical time is stimulated by new theories and new evidence about personal relationships, child rearing, exercise, health, dieting, gender roles, and fertility choices along with the inner stimuli of religious cults, drugs, advertising, and electronic broadcasts. As inner knowledge complicates social knowledge, all knowledge has become less a matter of learning and more a matter of learning how to learn: ‘knowledge is increasingly reflexive’ (Melucci, 1989, p. 110). The feminist and environmental movements have become important because of the great increase in people’s reflexive knowledge in post-industrial complex societies.

These views on complex society lead in turn to expressly structuralist arguments about the priority and wider scope of sociological processes in post-industrial democracy (Melucci, 1989, pp. 170–171). In complex societies, there is a structural tension between individuation and reflexive knowledge. On the one hand, socializing pressures on individuals to learn about themselves, conform to the norms expected of them, and integrate themselves in their society entail greater social control. On the other hand, individuals enjoy greater possibilities to use reflexive knowledge to shape their own identities, patterns of everyday life, and life stories. In contemporary politics, such complexity has accompanied the declining meaningfulness of industrial society’s contrast between a left oriented towards progress and achieving a better future and a right oriented towards conserving the best aspects of the past in order to avoid a worse future. The old left looks askance at the middle-class concerns of the new social movements while the old right sees them as crypto-communist flaunters of law and order, but neither view appreciates the importance of their new organizational form. New dilemmas of representation, created by the changeability of reflexively constructed interests and the fragmentation of power among contending sources of cultural coding, also accompany the complexity of post-industrial society. In consequence, the state can no longer be a unitary agent of action and intervention. Transnational corporations, international political bodies, and global cultural processes have diluted the state’s power from above, while the knowledgeable staffs of many public and private bureaucracies, other organizations, and

systems of representation and decision making have diluted its power from below (Hindess, 2000, argues a similar point).

In summary, Melucci offers an insightful critique of the shortcomings of methodological individualism and collectivism in the American and European traditions. He attempts to navigate a path beyond the two, noting both the importance of individuation, identity formation, and personal networking in the counter-cultures of social movements and the increasing reflexivity of knowledge that has wrought an epochal shift in the nature of society and of politics. His concern with reflexive knowledge and complex society sees him emphasize the sociology of *social* movements and largely remain within the European tradition. In America, McAdam *et al.*, (2001) have come closest to incorporating the concerns of the European tradition even though they too remain largely within their tradition and emphasize the politics of social *movements*.

### **An American Integration of Schools of Social Movement Studies**

McAdam *et al.* (2001) offer interesting ideas for thinking about social-movement unionism because they have recently departed from not only their political processes version of resource-mobilization theory but also resource-mobilization theory in general. What they now describe as the classic theory of resource mobilization (McAdam *et al.*, 2001, pp. 14–18) is not especially useful for thinking about the prospect of social-movement unionism. It assumes that social movements will only be effective if they come to resemble institutionalized unions or organized pressure groups. This reinforces the European perspective on tensions between institutionalized unions and the new organizational form of contemporary social movements, and has indeed informed some European research on social movements (see, for example, Kriesi *et al.*, 1995; Giugni *et al.*, 1999; Rucht & Neidhardt, 2002).

The older, narrow version of resource-mobilization theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1987, p. 18) took Mancur Olson's free-rider problem as a starting point and added Michels and Weber's theories about modern organization along with Schumpeter's market model of modern democratic politics. Later, a wider version of resource-mobilization theory (Tilly, 1979; Tarrow, 1994; Kriesi *et al.*, 1995; Giugni *et al.*, 1999; Rucht & Neidhardt, 2002) argued for the inclusion of 'ideational elements' – such as frameworks of interpretation and repertoires of contention – as resources that are equally as important as money and labour (Meyer, 1995, pp. 176–182). But, Meyer argues, neither the narrow nor the wide versions of the resource-mobilization school challenged the American predilection for 'utilitarian liberalism, . . . instrumental rationality and pragmatic problem solving' and both remain committed to analysing social movements alongside interest groups and political parties in a way that is particular and specific to the American post-war context (Meyer, 1995, pp. 184, 189).

Subsequently, McAdam *et al.* (2001) have published an auto-critique of their earlier work on the wider, ideational version of resource-mobilization theory (Mische & Goldberg, 2003). They have called for a shift in research emphasis away from analyses of static structures and Western social movements to analyses of dynamic processes and causal mechanisms. Now they seek to explain why episodes of contentious politics arise and then succeed or fail, and how social movements compare not only amongst themselves in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia during modernity but also how they compare

against revolutions, strike waves, and routine politics in the same time and places (see Barker, 2003; Flacks, 2003; Porta, 2003).

McAdam *et al.* (2001, pp. 22–26, 43–44) seek to apply ‘relational mechanisms’ to the classic theory and put each of its aspects ‘into motion’. For reasons comparable to those advanced by Melucci (and Hindess), they reject the reification of actors and the assumption of systemic conflict found in structuralist Marxism and rational choice theory. Instead, they advance a ‘relational persuasion’, which resembles Rustow’s (1970) critique of procedural democracy as theoretically static and therefore incapable of appreciating the genesis, the processes, or the possible outcomes of democratization. Like Hindess but unlike Melucci, McAdam *et al.* also reject phenomenological and cultural approaches because they focus on the assumptions, beliefs, values, and norms that operate within individuals’ minds. How, then, does a relational persuasion put the classic resource-mobilization theory into motion?

In general, the classic theory looked at the origins and outcomes of social movements as expressions of either social structures or the thinking (rationality, consciousness, or culture) of individual members and leaders of social movements. Instead, McAdam *et al.*’s new research agenda regards social interaction, social ties, communication, conversation, and the continuous negotiation of identities, policies, and agreements ‘as active sites of creation and change’ that are central to the dynamics of contention (McAdam *et al.*, 2001, p. 22). Ontologically, this entails rejecting both the methodological individualist focus upon individual minds and the methodological collectivist focus on general cleavages and systemic conflict in favour of ‘relational realism’ about webs of interaction among actors and sites of interaction. Epistemologically, it rejects the search for general laws to explain particular events in favour of explanations based on causal mechanisms that appear in widely different settings, sequences and combinations, and therefore result in different outcomes. The deployment of discursive analysis to make a comprehensive move beyond both the methodological individualism of the American tradition and the methodological collectivism of the European tradition has at least two fruitful consequences.

One consequence of the turn to discursive analysis is that McAdam *et al.* (2001) offer an exciting approach to the ongoing negotiation of identity. Since identity is not fixed (by assumptions about individuals’ human nature or about, say, workers’ real interests) but is instead embedded in a particular historical and cultural context, then the negotiation and renegotiation of identity (‘Who am I?’, ‘Who are we?’, ‘Who are they?’) proceeds from beginning to end of any episode of contention. Not only leaders but also the members and potential members of each party to an episode of contention negotiate their identities, *and* their opponents’ identities. McAdam *et al.*, (2001) provide several interesting illustrations of this process on several continents over the last 250 years. The ongoing renegotiation and contesting of identity was crucial in each case they study but on its own such identity politics cannot cause the failure of an uprising, the success of a revolution, the avoidance of civil war, the success of democratization, or the peacefulness of secession. The starting points of contention and its historical, economic, cultural, and political contexts were quite different in each case, and therefore the outcomes were also quite different, but the negotiation of identity was a crucial aspect of the formation of the parties and the course of their struggle in the respective episodes of contention.

Another fruitful consequence of the turn to discursive analysis is that McAdam *et al.* (2001) move beyond alternative structural theories for modelling the trajectories of social movements and periods of contention (McAdam *et al.*, 2001, pp. 64–67). The Michelsian

'career model' postulates an inevitable trend of de-radicalization and bureaucratization, away from a social movement's spontaneous origins in principled opposition, and towards professional staffs, who run re-election machines and uphold established institutions of mainstream politics. According to McAdam *et al.* (2001, p. 65), '[The career] model aptly summarised what had happened to central European Social Democracy in the early twentieth century' but it 'badly matched' the trajectory of social movements from the 1960s onwards. This model offers a summary description of much of the history of social democracy over a longer period but it cannot explain that trajectory, let alone strategic departures into alternative trajectories. Michels's theory can describe but not explain the trajectory of social movements because it privileges internal tensions within a single actor and neglects interaction with other actors and any wider context (as many have noted; see Gramsci, 1971, pp. 150–151; Hindess, 1971, pp. 34–46, 37; McAdam *et al.*, 2001, p. 65).

Sidney Tarrow (1994) has been a prominent promoter of the 'protest-cycle' model as an alternative to the career model but he has joined his co-authors' move beyond that model as well. Tarrow's protest-cycle model postulated a phase of mobilization (during which the success of an initiating challenger poses opportunities for other social movements) and a phase of demobilization (during which exhaustion, repression, or incorporation close down opportunities for other movements). This model's presupposition of interaction between actors offered an important improvement on the career model but its assumption of two unchanging stages of protest left 'untheorised the relations between actors, their actions, and their identities' (McAdam *et al.*, 2001, pp. 66–67). This meant it had nothing to say about why some protests are protracted and others are brief, or why some protests expand into revolution or civil war and others end.

McAdam *et al.*'s (2001) turn to the discursive analysis of identity has invigorated their theorizing about social movements along with other forms of contention between authorities and challengers of authority but there remains one important gap in their work: they have nothing to say about arenas of contention. Their critics have suggested that they focus too narrowly on *political* contention between governments and other actors or actors in formation that challenge the governments' authority. On his co-authors' behalf, Charles Tilly (Mische & Goldberg, 2003, p. 90) responded with an exposition manageability defence. Limiting their examples to political movements against governments offered a convenient way of delimiting the exposition to a manageable scope. Of course, any discussion of large themes must decide on criteria for omitting issues but the exposition manageability defence hides the surprising extent to which their book moves almost exclusively in a world of contention limited not only to politics but also *domestic* politics. Their choice of comparative case studies on different continents demonstrates their acute appreciation of the criticism that the study of social movements has a Eurocentric focus on the industrially advanced countries (Thörn, 2003) but there is very little note taken of how challengers and governments in one polity learn from the course of contention in another polity. This is surprising, given extensive and prominent debates about globalization; it also reveals their remaining anchorage in the American political-science tradition of social-movement studies.

### **A Minimal Theory of the Social Actor and Arenas of Conflict**

Barry Hindess's (1977, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1987) definition of the social actor and his conception of a discursive context resemble McAdam *et al.*'s (2001) ideas summarized

above but they are integrated with a concept of articulated arenas of conflict. His definition of 'a minimal concept of the actor' is reiterated in several chapters and articles (Hindess, 1982, p. 501, 1984, p. 267, 1987, p. 141, 1988, 1991, pp. 159–161, 1993, pp. 187–190). This is one of the fullest versions:

An actor is a locus of decision and action, where the action is in some sense a consequence of the actor's decisions. Actors do things as a result of their decisions. We call those things actions, and the actors' decisions play a part in their explanation. Actors may also do things that do not result from their decisions, and their explanation has a different form. This is a minimal concept of the actor. Most accounts of action build considerably more into their concept of the actor than is provided here. Actors are said to be characterized by their possession of a more or less stable portfolio of beliefs and desires, they are frequently supposed to be rational and to possess a utilitarian structure of preferences, and more often than not they are assumed to be human beings. (Hindess, 1991, p. 159)

To require reference in this way to definite means of making decisions and acting upon them is to reject the untenable postulates of 'unjustifiable and often surreptitious structural determinism', which take diverse forms within rationalist doctrines ranging from Marxist structuralism to liberal humanism (Hindess, 1977, 1984, pp. 262, 267).

Compared to Melucci and McAdam *et al.* Hindess looks more closely at the misleading assumptions built into methodologies of individualism and collectivism. Methodological individualism makes three misleading assumptions about diverse and complex actors. First, human individuals are actors but not all actors are individuals of any sort. The social actor is irreducible to the actions of a leader. It is also irreducible to the formal processes by which a legal or 'allegorical' individual collates and aggregates a large number of individuals' choices. Unlike a psychotic person but like socially well-adjusted people, the actions of social actors are complex. They consider the likely effects of their possible actions upon others, including members, potential members, and other individual and social actors along with their members and potential members (Hindess, 1984, pp. 267–270).

The second and third misleading assumptions of methodological individualism are that the actor is intrinsically rational and that the actor thinks in a categorically homogeneous fashion. To postulate that actors within a category of action are all intrinsically rational in basically the same way is to say that, for example, entrepreneurs are all profit maximizers, employees are wage maximizers, voters are benefit maximizers, bureaucrats are empire builders, and so forth. To reduce people down to the functions performed within a network of relationships can provide useful analytical insights but much is lost. Suppositions about these categorical individuals' intrinsic rationality and homogeneity of reasoning necessarily exclude considerations of altruism, commitment, diverse reasons for acting without a prior decision or specific preference, and the appeal of multiple but conflicting objectives (Hindess, 1984, pp. 264–267). Hindess's critique of methodological individualism's misleading assumptions aligns well with both Melucci's arguments against the individualism of the American tradition and McAdam *et al.*'s (2001) arguments against the classic resource-mobilization theory of social movements.

Methodological collectivism makes one misleading assumption about the spurious unity of actors. Melucci makes a similar point about the spurious reification of complex movements. Hindess goes further when he notes that the reification of labour, capital, and



the state has generated an extensive Marxist literature about the 'relative autonomy' of politics from the capitalist economy and class society. Hindess lists many forms of spurious actor thought to be *both* autonomous *and* an expression of basic structures. These include classes, genders, and races; society, the economy, the state, patriarchy, and the white man; and general trends towards bureaucratization, industrialization, and modernization. These are all spurious actors because they lack any determinate means of making decisions or undertaking actions to implement decisions (Hindess, 1987, p. 147). In any case, since autonomy is indivisible, incoherence plagues arguments about the 'relative' autonomy of politics. 'Sleights of hand' hide an incoherence that is common to Bernstein, Kautsky, and Lenin. These prominent Marxist writers each reduce events on a political level down to being expressions of determinate events on a deeper economic or class-structural level. Then they turn around and attempt to keep socio-economic determinism from getting out of hand and insist upon some consideration of politics (Hindess, 1983, p. 36).

Hindess's rejection of the structural determinism that is common to suppositions of categorical homogeneity and spurious actors in rational choice theory, Weberian sociology, and Marxist political analysis leads to an attempt to retrieve the notion of interests per se. He retrieves interests from reduction to either categorically presupposed interests or supposedly given 'real' interests (Hindess, 1982). This retrieval resembles McAdam *et al.*'s (2001) arguments about identity politics because it entails conceptions of a discursive context. It differs from the arguments of McAdam *et al.* (2001) because it entails a different notion of discourse and an argument about articulated arenas of conflict.

Hindess's conception of discursive context is Foucauldian (Foucault, 1991; Hindess, 1996), which is to say it focuses on relations of power rather than relations of communication in the tradition of either Melucci or McAdam *et al.* (Mische & Goldberg, 2003, p. 93), and many others including Oakeshott, Habermas, and Rorty. As Hindess sees it: '... all discourses must be analysed in terms of the concepts and relations between concepts which are entailed in the positions developed in the discourse in question' (Hindess, 1977, p. 161). This entails a minimum of theorizing about discourse per se.

Hindess's minimal concept of the actor and his bare-bones concept of discourse focus upon the 'modes of deliberation' available in collective actors' discursive context. These are sub-divided into modes of strategic assessment and modes of formulating objectives. Thus:

... in many, perhaps even most, political contexts actors have several forms of assessment available to them. Racist and sexist discourses are available to many British workers, which make it possible for them to formulate objectives that contradict those of worker solidarity against management – leading, for example, to a failure to respect picketing by blacks or women. (Hindess, 1984, pp. 270–271)

There are two important upshots of this focus upon many modes of deliberation available to actors.

One upshot is that rationality is neither intrinsic to an actor nor inherent in a situation. Instead, logic, reason, or rationality is no more than an aspect of one or more modes of deliberation available to actors. The other upshot is an open-ended sense of politics and history:

... the question of a relationship between political life and the economy that is able to combine the ultimately determining role of the one with the irreducibility of

the other is wrongly posed. . . . The point rather is that, where such organisations or entrenched interests exist and are effective, it is as the outcome of struggle, perhaps of a series of struggles, to mobilise support around specific objectives, to defeat opposing attempts at mobilisation, to establish particular organisational forms . . . and so on – not of any necessities that may be thought to arise out of the character of capitalist economic relations. (Hindess, 1983, pp. 41–42)

This calls for a historically informed specification of how the outcomes of a series of struggles constitute, re-constitute, and articulate arenas of struggle. It also entails rejecting Melucci's argument that new social movements' organizational form expresses an epochal shift from industrial to complex society.

Hindess's open-ended sense of political struggle rejects not only a Marxist or post-Marxist reduction of politics to socio-economic structures but also a Weberian reduction of politics to an abstract capacity to secure an outcome (see also Benton, 1981; Hindess, 1982, pp. 506–509; 1986). To add up the resources of contending actors, compare the sums, and determine which has the more 'power':

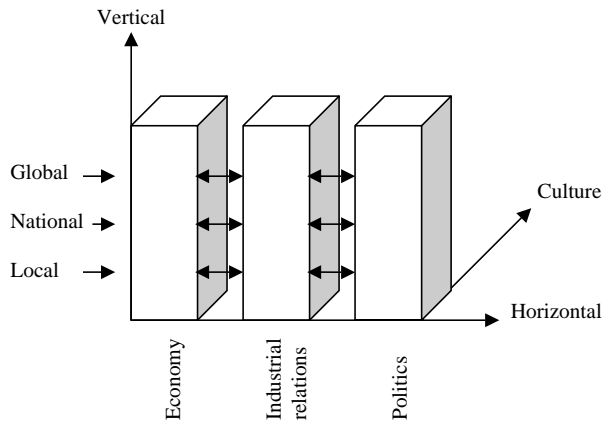
. . . denies the extent to which outcomes of struggle depend on the ways in which the contending parties deploy various means and conditions of action, often under complex conditions of struggle and are able to affect the behaviour of third parties. In effect, it denies the most basic aspect of struggle, namely, that outcomes are produced in the course of the struggle itself and are rarely the simple products of initial conditions. (Hindess, 1982, p. 505)

These arguments resemble McAdam *et al.*'s (2001) arguments against the static structuralism in both the career model and the protest-cycle model of social movement trajectories, except that Hindess deploys a concept of arenas of struggle in addition to considering the politics of actors' identity formation.

A social actor minimally conceived draws on available discourses to shape identities, assess its circumstances, formulate objectives, and then make decisions about how it will act to shape others' identities, avoid threats, and achieve objectives. At important moments, it also contests the rules of struggle within an arena and seeks to renegotiate the horizontal articulation of one arena with other arenas, and often the vertical articulation of levels within arenas as well. Both the vertical and the horizontal articulation of arenas of conflict pose important conditions for the prospect of social-movement unionism revitalizing unionism and securing the objectives of the alliance members. Figure 1 offers a schematic model of how the discursive context for identity politics might be labelled 'culture' and regarded as a third dimension to the vertical and horizontal articulation of arenas of contention.

### **Social-movement Unionism in Sweden**

In Sweden, as elsewhere, vertical linkages between the local and national levels of arenas are often understood in terms of Weber's rationalization and bureaucratization, Michels's career model of a social actors' history of de-radicalization, and radicals' critique of unions' incorporation into the institutions of a liberal state and a capitalist labour market (see, for example, Abrahamsson & Broström, 1980; Sahlström, 2003). There are some Swedish observers (Hadenius, 1976; Kjellberg, 1983; Therborn, 1983/1984, 1992) who



**Figure 1.** A schematic model of articulated social-movement unionism

reject the teleological theses of modernization, centralization, and corporatism, but such theses largely inform international interest in ‘Swedish models’ (see Vandenberg, 2000; Ryner, 2002). Horizontal linkages between a wide range of ‘folk’ movements, unions, and the Social Democratic Party have a long but much less widely understood history in Sweden. These have been described in various ways as a founding movement tradition that has died in the party but lives on in the unions (Lindhagen, 1972, p. 185), a democratic class struggle (Korpi, 1983), a popular front in the 1920s and 1930s (Theborn, 1983/1984, 1984), political unionism (Higgins, 1985, 1996), and movement socialism (Dahlkvist, 1999). This literature draws strongly on the mobilization of the labour movement during the democratization of Sweden before 1921. It also analyses the politics of identity among the people and the workers, proletarians and the middle class, blue-collar and white-collar wage earners, and so forth. In recent years, critiques of workers’ and unions’ poor appreciation of gender and the environment have emerged along with European analysis of tension between the old and the new social movements (Abrahamsson, 2003). It is beyond the scope of this article to investigate the historical aspects of the labour movement’s legacy from those founding years. Nor can we look at the feminist or environmental movements.

In contemporary Sweden, membership in all manner of organizations continues to run at internationally very high rates (Putnam, 2002) but recent trends would suggest this may not last. Today, the elderly ‘folk-movement generation’ belongs to parties, co-operatives, and associations in higher proportions than people under fifty-five years of age, and much higher than those under twenty-five (Vogel *et al.*, 2003, pp. 58, 64, 70–71). Some Swedish observers suggest that the career model can describe a delayed but inevitable de-radicalization and bureaucratization of an ‘ageing’ labour movement now run by cadre or political aristocrats among the children and grandchildren of early social-democratic activists (Isaksson, 2002; Ahrne & Papakostas, 2003; Sahlström, 2003). Social democrats are well aware of the problem of union and party remoteness from younger members (Orrenius, 2003: interviews Ingvar Carlsson, Håkan Bengtsson, Henrik Persson, Ann-Terese Morch). Indeed, efforts to bridge a supposed gap between old and new movements are a central part of the second episode of contention considered below.

To illustrate the strengths of a minimal concept of the actor, discursive analysis of identity formation, and articulated arenas of conflict, we can look at two episodes of contention in Sweden. The *Toys 'R' Us* dispute<sup>1</sup> of 1994 offers an example of how social-movement unionism can succeed. *Toys* sought to establish three 'megastores' in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö without employing anyone on a collective contract. Within a few months, American management techniques saw approximately three-quarters of the workers join the Commercial Workers Union, *Handels*. After futile attempts to negotiate a collective contract, the union launched a strike and called for a consumer boycott. The strike escalated in stages as other unions imposed boycotts on all shipping container and road transport deliveries, repairs to the stores, financial services, and the placement of press advertising. The final straw came when an international union body endorsed an international boycott against *Toys* and its investors' share value suffered. The union clearly won the public relations battle in the news media and thereby won consumers' support for a highly successful boycott, eventually forcing the corporation to sign its first collective contract anywhere despite the emergence of unemployment in Sweden in 1991.

In contrast, riots during the EU summit meeting in Gothenburg in June 2001 were reported in ways that were disastrous for activists (interview Jens Egron, Christina Hagner). At the end of the Swedish Prime Minister's first six-month term as President of the EU, President Bush visited the EU summit meeting. Approximately 10,000 protestors from throughout Europe came to join demonstrations against Bush, the EU leaders, and neo-liberal economic globalization. What was different about these protests compared to similar protests in Seattle (November 1999), Prague (September 2000) and Genoa (July 2001) was that the Social Democratic government leaders at both national and local levels made extensive efforts to promote dialogue with anti-EU and global justice campaigners. Let us now consider what these episodes can tell us about the advantages of a minimal concept of the actor and articulated arenas of conflict.

*The Toys 'R' Us Dispute: Vertical Linkages, Horizontal Linkages, and Identity Politics*

*Handels* won the *Toys* dispute in part because the union had stronger vertical linkages between members, workplace activists, and potential members in the new *Toys* stores, regional *Handels* organizers, national *Handels* negotiators, the national union confederation, and the international union confederation. In part, *Handels* won the dispute because *Toys* drew relatively weak links between its new Swedish workers, Swedish store managers, the Danish manager for Scandinavia, the British manager for Europe, the US managers for the whole corporation, and investors on international stock exchanges. The comparative strength of the unions' vertical linkages surprised many observers, no doubt because it contradicted the Michelsian career model of an 'old' and de-radicalized union movement run by officials who had lost contact with their members, their interests and their concerns.

Changing circumstances in the Swedish labour market, wrought by policies of liberalization, globalization, and Sweden's recent entry into the EU (Ryner, 1994, 2002), along with the emergence of high unemployment in 1991 after forty years below a few per cent (Therborn, 1986; Glyn, 1995), encouraged many to believe that employers could now alter the rules of industrial relations in their favour. The Danish, British, and American managers' ignorance about the rules of industrial dispute regulation in Sweden put them,

however, at a disadvantage from the start. The senior managers understood nothing of how a collective agreement between *Toys* and *Handels* would operate and their assertions about it made little headway in the media and certainly made no impression on the official mediator who became involved at the end of the two-month strike. Similarly, so-called 'secondary boycotts' are illegal in many countries so it would have surprised British and American managers to find sympathetic unionists could ban deliveries to their Swedish stores, repairs to their buildings, financial services, and finally placement of the corporation's advertising. For its part, *Handels* had little experience of industrial conflict but its officials turned to leaders of the Transport Workers Union who advised them to escalate gradually rather than moving directly to maximum pressure on the profitability of the corporation. By contrast, *Toys* had declined to join the retail industry employers' association and had no corresponding source of advice about the effective conduct of industrial disputes in Sweden.

Vertical linkages within and beyond *Handels* were stronger than those within and beyond *Toys* partly because of horizontal linkages at various levels. A linkage between the industrial arena and the economic arena at the global level worked against *Toys*. The American managers only became involved and ended the strike when international newspaper reports of an international union boycott of *Toys* in sympathy with the Swedish strikers saw the value of the corporation's shares decline on American stock exchanges. At the local level, linkages between the industrial arena and the economic arena failed to work in *Toys*' favour. As a 'power retailer' (*Discount Store News*, 1996), *Toys* drew on its well-targeted advertising and highly computerized stock monitoring to undermine the consumer boycott with extremely cheap disposable nappies (diapers). Small numbers of consumers did cross the pickets outside the empty 'megastores' but other unionists' boycotts prevented supplies of the nappies reaching the stores. In the end, they also stopped the stores' advertisements appearing in newspapers. At the national level, linkages between the industrial arena and the political arena worked in favour of *Handels*, which had opposed the metalworkers union and the Social Democratic Party leaders who pushed successfully for membership of the EU. By 1995, Sweden had formally joined the EU, and *Handels* attracted widespread sympathy for its campaign to defend Swedish values institutionalized in labour laws that give local unionists considerable powers to dilute the managerial prerogatives that are common in most industrially advanced countries. The union linked concerns about unionists' rights of negotiation about their conditions of employment with wider concerns about national sovereignty.

The identity of workers was a crucial aspect of the dispute. Were the *Toys* employees young individuals interested in working as part of a dynamic team that provided customers with the pleasure of wandering around in a megastore, looking at and choosing from a vast array of toys? Alternatively, were they people with an emerging sense of collective identity that has a long and proud heritage in the social-democratic labour movement's values of solidarity, equality, and freedom? *Handels* won the battle to represent the strikers as bearers of social-democratic values and a proud heritage of fighting for their rights. The corporation lost its battle to represent the union officials as a third party that only interfered in other people's business in order to maintain their own organization. Of course, this struggle over how to characterize the identity of the workers as part of a class struggle against capitalists or as individuals manipulated by power-hungry union officials has always been a key aspect of industrial conflict. What was different about contention over identity in this industrial dispute was that it had an international

dimension. The workers, and many journalists covering the dispute, reacted against what they regarded as the American individualism of the personnel handbook.

The *Toys* personnel handbook reserved a wide prerogative for managers to change wages and conditions as they saw fit and required workers to inform managers of any co-worker heard speaking ill of the company or its supervisors. It included a full chapter of rules that forbade workers joining in public debate or speaking publicly about the company, its internal policies (including the handbook), or union activities at its workplaces. All workers were required to inform managers of any suspicion that a co-worker was stealing (Anderson, 1995). In direct contravention of Swedish labour law, the mere suspicion of stealing was to be sufficient grounds for immediate dismissal. The corporation's Swedish lawyers had translated the handbook but no one re-wrote it for Swedish circumstances or considered the question of how Swedish culture and workers' legal rights, values, and attitudes differ from what prevails in the USA, or Canada and the UK.

Those who are sceptical about union activism will see the *Toys* dispute in Sweden as a heroic exception to the general accuracy of the careerist model (Anderson, 1995; Blomqvist, 2001). A central difficulty with the careerist model is that it assumes union centralization develops at the cost of local activism and participation. The Swedish union movement has, however, long been *both* the most centralized *and* the most de-centralized in the world: Swedish unions have succeeded because a centralization of unions both supports and relies upon local activism (Kjellberg, 1983; Higgins, 1985, 1996). The close interaction between young and industrially inexperienced unionists at the *Toys* workplaces, the regional *Handels* organizers, and the national negotiators provides a strong illustration of what Higgins (1985, 1996) calls 'political unionism'. Other observers might draw instead on the protest-cycle model and observe that after several years of liberalizing policies implemented by Social Democratic governments, at local and national levels in Sweden as well as in many other countries, it was time for protest to emerge somewhere. After a period of de-mobilization, it is not surprising that re-mobilizing protest should emerge in Sweden with its strong local union traditions. Here the difficulty is that the protest-cycle model offers an explanatory emphasis upon why protest should emerge, but has little to say about how it might emerge, proceed, and fail or succeed in a particular place and time rather than somewhere else at another time. A focus on the emergence, course, and outcome of the struggle between actual actors in historically constituted and articulated arenas poses an alternative to both idealism about the heroics of popular mobilization against global plutocrats and scepticism about an exception to a general rule about the de-radicalization of unions.

Besides the struggle over local and international aspects of the workers' identity, the calculations, miscalculations, actions, and inactions of the contending parties to the dispute determined the outcome of the strike. A key aspect of those decisions was the rules of the industrial and other arenas of contention, the vertical articulation of local, national, and global levels within arenas, and the horizontal articulation of the industrial and other arenas.

#### *The Gothenburg Riots: Vertical Linkages, Horizontal Linkages, and Identity*

Vertical linkages between protestors on the streets, organizers of the protests, union and party leaders in Gothenburg, and national union and party leaders proved insufficient to

control the actions of the Gothenburg police authorities and particular police officers on the streets concerned about the security of the visiting US President. An important aspect of the discursive context lay in the unabashed ideological reasons for the Social Democratic Party leaders' interest in promoting dialogue with the Eurosceptics, feminists, environmentalists, and anti-globalization protesters. They wanted to demonstrate that during the Swedish Prime Minister's term as President of the EU they could enhance their vision of making Europe more like Sweden by encouraging active citizenship and democratic deliberation in public forums. There was more to this ambition than public relations aimed at re-election. Here, generalizations about 'the state' would obscure nuances in the interaction between the national government, Gothenburg city council, the police, various unions, and diverse protest groups.

The Social Democratic Party leaders' internationalism has a heritage in the party's founding Marxism, which, for example, endorsed free trade rather than protective tariffs. It also links directly to the interests of the union movement's traditionally most powerful members amongst the metalworkers who hope that engagement with the EU will generate more employment in the export-oriented manufacturing industries where they work. For the sake of preserving (public and private) service-sector employment, the municipal workers and the commercial workers have joined the communist and green parties in resisting the Social Democratic Party leaders' engagement in Europe. This context of division between particular unions' support for the government and other unions' support for protestors against the government differed in important ways from the discursive context of the protestors in Seattle in 1999. The AFL-CIO and North American unions offered unanimous support for the protests at Seattle because many workers' jobs, including those of car workers and other traditionally militant unionists, were threatened by the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the USA, and Mexico. In Sweden, divisions between manufacturing- and service-sector unions, and between the government's pro-EU policies and the new social movements' protests against the EU, are reinforced by gender roles, which has seen feminism become an important ideology of mobilization among municipal workers opposed to neo-liberal cuts in welfare services (Higgins, 1996).

Before the EU summit and President Bush's visit, senior police attended weekly meetings with organizers of planned protests and they promised to police the protests with restraint. Such co-operation was 'unique in the history of the Swedish left' (Löfgren & Vatankhah, 2002, p. 55). But the police never had any intention of refraining from using dogs, tear gas, live ammunition, and all possible means to control protestors who were *not* part of the planned rallies. The loose network organizational form, which (as noted earlier in the article) Melucci argues is an integral aspect of new social movements' 'message', proved inadequate for maintaining horizontal linkages between the various protest groups when put to a severe test.

Excessive police violence started with the construction of an 800 m long wall of shipping containers around an inner-city high school, which the Social Democratic mayor of Gothenburg had temporarily converted to a cheap hostel for visiting protestors. They claimed they had intelligence about armed German terrorists hiding in the school, but it is more plausible that they were actually concerned about approximately eighty anarchists (Josefsson & Quistbergh, 2001). Wearing white overalls over homemade protective gear, these anarchists had developed a tactic of 'active non-violence' (Norra Europas vita överaller, 2001). With this protection, they planned to burst through

police cordons, enter the meeting hall, and disrupt President Bush's speech. The preemptive police action against these particular anarchists greatly aggravated poor relations between some protestors and police. The next day, many protestors in an unofficial march fled from the police towards Gothenburg's central shopping avenue and caused havoc for about forty-five minutes. Black-masked protestors threw cobblestones at police, smashed windows of international fast-food restaurants, clothing chain stores, and banks (but not the local council library), started fires in the street, and posed for photographers swarming around them. Dramatic reporting of this far outweighed any reporting of the summit or the sanctioned protest rallies. Later in the day, anxious police fired live ammunition against other protesters. A cobblestone injured one police officer, four protestors received gunshot wounds, and one of those four was lucky to survive life-threatening injuries.

How and why has the Swedish labour movement reached a point where its culture of folk-movement activism could fail so dramatically to connect with the activism of the anti-EU and global justice protestors during a critical episode of contention? Following earlier discussion, we can eliminate several available but misleading explanations. It is misleading to look only for modernization, centralization, and de-radicalizing bureaucratization within the national government and the local council, the unions, and the folk movements. Equally, it is misleading to look inside the minds of the individual activists and generalize about 'new' movement cultures of anti-hierarchical networking that cannot co-operate with the modernist hierarchies of unions, parties, and governmental authorities.

In Gothenburg in 2001, both the protestors and all levels of the labour movement clearly lost the battle to identify protestors as active citizens seeking to engage world leaders in democratic debate about Third World debt, environmental degradation, prejudice against women and cultural minorities, and so forth. Since the journalists reporting the summit and the protestors failed to question the police force's scenario of German terrorists, many Swedes accepted the journalists' and police force's picture of the protestors as partly local hooligans and partly anarchists from abroad. The older American school of thought on social movements as unruly crowds led by extremist ideologues may have fallen out of favour among academics, union leaders and Swedish Social Democratic party leaders, but it still holds sway among Swedish police officers and journalists.

The local police in Gothenburg were severely criticized by the subsequent Public Inquiry into the riots (Göteborgskommitten, 2002) but no officers have been convicted of any misdemeanours. Despite aggravating tensions that led to considerable damage by black-masked anarchists and hangers on who rampaged through central Gothenburg, the police achieved their putative objective to frustrate the active non-violence of the white-overalled anarchists and to ensure that President Bush's visit proceeded as planned. In Seattle in November 1999, anti-WTO protestors greatly outnumbered the police and the protestors' militancy took them by surprise. Eighteen months later and after similar protests elsewhere in Europe, the Gothenburg police were much better prepared. In particular, it seems they knew about the white-overalled anarchists' particular repertoire of contention. Soon after Gothenburg, violently policed riots in Genoa saw a post-Seattle cycle of protest reach its zenith. After the bombings in New York and Washington in September 2001, greatly heightened security concerns saw a decline in protests at top-level meetings and heralded a new era of protest against the invasion of Iraq and the 'war on terror'.

For all its merits, the protest cycle approach neglects the role of identity in the shaping and articulation of arenas of contention. In Gothenburg, the metalworkers and the Social



Democratic government leaders hoped to promote a pan-European citizenship consistent with the labour movement tradition of socialist internationalism (Carter, 2001, pp. 161–164). Their ambition to promote democratic debate with *Attac* (Abrahamsson, 2003; see also [www.attac.org](http://www.attac.org)) and other new social movements was certainly admirable but it was a relatively unfruitful mode of deliberation. The local police force's measures against a pan-European anarchist resistance to the EU leaders' policies largely frustrated that ambition. It would seem that vertical linkages between European and local levels of anarchists and also between international and national police bodies were stronger than vertical linkages between the national and local levels of the Swedish labour movement or those between the Swedish government and peaceful local protestors. The vertical linkages within the labour movement were relatively weak because they lacked strong horizontal linkages to debates and discourses available in other arenas of contention.

### *Comparing the Toys Dispute with the Gothenburg Riots*

Where *Handels'* consumer boycott succeeded in the car parks outside *Toys 'R' Us* megastores, the Swedish government's efforts to promote deliberative democracy and a pan-European citizenship among peaceful protestors failed in the parks and on the streets of central Gothenburg. *Handels'* campaign forged both strong vertical links of solidarity among workers and strong horizontal links between the local workers' concerns and discourses of national sovereignty in the political arena, which in turn prompted advantageous links between the American share market and the industrial arena within Sweden, but it is important to note that it was a defensive campaign. The Swedish government, by contrast, pursued ambitious efforts to construct a pan-European arena for deliberation between active members of the labour movement and new social movements. On this occasion, the eruption of violence stymied their efforts. Together, a police force that clearly had good horizontal linkages to other police forces and anarchist groups that used the Internet to maintain vertical linkages across Europe (Norra Europas vita överaller, 2001), constructed an arena of violent contention that shocked Swedes accustomed to the democratic procedures of their folk movement tradition. The Swedish government failed to develop a local arena for democratic deliberation about European concerns but the depth of dismay over the riots and the police violence demonstrates that the folk movement tradition lives on. It failed this time to contribute to the formulation of new rules of contention in the political arena but it no doubt retains a capacity to inspire campaigns of defence against opposing actors' deployment of economic liberalism to pursue unwelcome developments.

### **Conclusion**

The European approach to social-movement studies adopts sociological starting points in individuals' sense of their identity as members of groups pursuing post-industrial or post-materialist objectives. This approach argues that contemporary social movements are anti-hierarchical and non-ideological, in the sense that they reject liberal, socialist, or conservative visions of a good society for all, and therefore cannot co-operate with unions. The American approach to social-movement studies adopts political starting points in comparisons between the effectiveness of protest movements, established parties or unions, and riots or revolutions. Where the European approach to post-industrial,

post-Fordist, networked, or complex societies deploys a hermeneutic approach to the culture, rationality, or mind of the individual and the established power and structure of the collective, the nation, or the corporation, recent American approaches deploy a more open-ended and non-teleological approach to modern episodes of contention between authorities and those who resist authority. Since the American approach avoids teleological assumptions about the paradigms and organizations of a new epoch it is more likely to yield fruitful conceptions of social-movement unionism, but it lacks a concept of arenas of struggle.

Hindess's minimal notion of the social actor combined with a conception of discourses as a matter of power relations rather than a matter of communication leads to an attractive theory of how struggles over social actors' identities affect the outcomes of conflict. In turn, such outcomes affect the rules of conflict within an arena and offer a theory of why subsequent conflicts arise. The outcomes of major conflicts also affect the horizontal and vertical articulation of arenas of conflict over industrial relations, politics, economics, and culture at local, national, regional, and global levels. This theory of articulated arenas constructed as an outcome of major conflicts explains why tensions between markets and politics, capitalism and democracy, and commodification and culture change over time and in different ways in different places. Two recent episodes in Sweden offer abbreviated illustration of this theory, but they cannot explore the way the outcome of previous struggles shaped both the rules of contention in present arenas and the linkages between various arenas, and between actors operating in those arenas.

These conclusions presuppose no particular trend towards, say, liberalism, modernization, bureaucratization, or union de-radicalization in the complex politics of industrially advanced countries. Nor do they presuppose that any such trend will eventually meet popular resistance. If unions anywhere hope to emulate the comprehensive links to social movements developed by unions during democratization, whether that is in the past as in Sweden or it is in other countries such as Poland, South Africa, Brazil, or South Korea, then they need to consider how available modes of deliberation will support their own or their opponents' identities. Similarly, just as revolutionaries need to consider what to do after the revolution, social-movement unionists need to consider how achieving their objectives would affect both the rules of conflict in industrial, political, economic, and social or cultural arenas and the horizontal and vertical articulation of arenas.

## Note

1. The account below draws on a book by a union journalist (Allstadt, 2001), an article (Anderson, 1995) and a review (Blomqvist, 2001) of Allstadt's book in socialist newspapers, one scholarly article about corporations entering a foreign market (Elg *et al.*, 2004) and a trade journal article (*Discount Store News*, 1996).

## Interviews

Håkan Bengtsson, Journalist, Publisher and Chief Executive Officer of the Arena Group 20 March 2004.

Ingvar Carlsson, Former Prime Minister and Chair of the Public Inquiry into Gothenburg 2001, 19 March 2004.

Sven Englesson, Union of Commercial Employees, Stockholm (*Handels*), 1 March 2004.

Jens Ergon, Journalist and Swedish Attac (International movement for democratic control of financial markets and their institutions) 14 March 2004.

Christina Hagner, Ordfront and Save the Children, 1 April 2004.

Ann-Terese Mörch, Municipal Workers' Union and Workers' Educational Association, 26 March 2004.  
 Henrik Persson, Tennants' Association, Stockholm, 14 April 2004.  
 Ove Sahlström, Author, 15 March 2004.

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