This is the published version of a chapter published in *Mellan klass och stat: Om arbetarrörelse, reformism och socialdemokrati*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Arkiv avhandlingsserie

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-42100
Summary

This thesis is entitled *Between Class and State. Essays on the labour movement, Reformism and Social Democracy*. The basic perspective in which the labour movement is understood is indicated by the title, i.e. I try to describe and analyse the labour movement in its double articulation to the working class and the state.

This thesis contains an Introduction and twelve chapters, divided into two main parts. In the first part (chs. 1-6) I present a critique and an analysis of different, "classical" theories, that have the ambition to explain working-class radicalism and/or (the rise of) reformism in labour movements.

In the Introduction I present the scope of the problems, theories and answers presented in the fields of sociology and history regarding the political and ideological form of working-class organizations and the supposed or real transformation of these organizations and their ideological positions.

Chapter 1 discusses theories and answers that have been produced in mainstream sociology, especially with regard to working-class radicalism. Radicalism is there mainly seen as a result of disturbances and strains. Sociology then tries to lay bare the mechanism that make possible the reintegration of this radical or non-adjusted group. Mainstream sociology regards the working class and its political radicalism within a spectrum where the poles are deviance and integration.

The sociological approach asks for the social conditions that produce the aberrant radicalism. That is a basic and fruitful question, but it cannot be fruitfully answered within the paradigm of mainstream, mainly parsonian, sociology. In this connection I criticize the most elaborated and advanced model within this tradition dealing with working class organization: N.J. Smelser's model presented in *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution*. This "sociological question" can best be answered in the framework of a Marxist tradition. This tradition is capable of relating in a systematical manner the different social relations and conditions that "produce" radicalism to the form of working class practices and labour organisations. In the rest of the book the object is to elaborate this statement. I chs. 3-6 I analyse in detail four major strands in the Marxist tradition, that try to explain the variation in ideological and organizational forms of the working class. In chs. 8-12 I present a systematization of *the basic organizational forms of the labour movement*. I regarding these as consequences of the type of exploitation and subordination that is specific to the working class in the capitalist mode of production.
Ch. 2 discusses some widely used concepts: radicalism, reformism, revisionism, opportunism and social democracy. The objective is not to give a set of philosophical interpretations but rather to relate them to each other in a preliminary way.

Ch. 3 argues against a tendency in the modern discussion that understands "reformism" as a kind of essentialistic phenomenon, as a more or less automatic reflection of the way the capital-labour relation functions. I present the rather simple model of "mystification" that Marx presents as a summing-up in ch. 48 in the third volume of *Capital*. The mechanisms of the economic process that produce mystification is laid bare. Mystification is here understood as an aspect of the mode of functioning of capital reproducing itself as a relation, that present society to its members and agents in a systematically obfuscating and alienating fashion, concealing the basic mechanisms beneath an altogether different surface. In the presentation of this "model" I point to some effects and mechanisms which I use in later chapters such as the mechanism that pushes the superprofits to the foreground so that the "normal" profit seem to vanish. This chapter ends with a summary of the main stages of working class organization and especially the role and ambiguities of the trade union. I argue that this process of mystification is a model on a rather high level of abstraction that cannot be applied automatically to concretely existing societies and labour movements. My own model of basic organizational forms of working class activity presented in chs. 8-12 can be seen as an analysis on intermediate level. This more concrete level is necessary if you want to relate the general theory in *Capital* to an analysis of concrete labour movements.

Ch. 4 seeks to analyse phenomena that arise in a developed labour movement with regard to its variations in ideological positions and organizational forms. I do this by a close reading of Anton Pannekoek's treatise on *Die taktischen Differenzen in der Arbeiterbewegung*. This work is analysed in its context of a German Social Democracy being confronted with a series of problems: internal differentiations, faction fighting, institutional thresholds in the German society etc. Pannekoek analyses the material, social and organizational background to the rise of tactical differences in the labour movement. In doing this he has given us a general model of how to analyse the relations between society, working class and labour movement.

In ch. 5 I discuss the widely used and well-known theory of the labour aristocracy as the explanation to reformism and revisionism in social-democratic parties. The structure of the theory, as it is used by Engels and Lenin, is demonstrated in detail. In the works of Lenin this theory is related to other types of theories and explanations of reformism and
revisionism; class relations, especially the role of the petty bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, social conditions as "backwardness" and periods of peaceful development, the effects of parliamentarism and the relations between different types of class organisation such as parties and trade unions.

Ch. 6 summarizes a tradition, with Mario Tronti as a central figure, that tries to analyse the working class, its history, class organisations and internal divisions in a direct relation to the development of the production process and the different methods of surplus value production. With examples from the working class in Germany around World War I this tradition has argued that the decisive division in the working class goes between the skilled workers and the new "massified" workers. Some examples of this kind of history writing are discussed and criticized. The conclusion is that, up till now, the most fruitful aspect of this tradition still lies at its starting point, i.e. Mario Tronti's theses on the necessity of a materialist history of the working class, related to its place in the process of production.

Ch. 7 discusses the concept of "working class". I try to define the processes that constitute, differentiate and make it homogenous. Distinctions are made between the different conceptual levels on which this central concept is normally used. Three levels are distinguished: (a) the exchange value of labour power (wage form etc); (b) its use-value (its place in the production process etc) and (c) a socially produced and reproduced class. This is illustrated by a sketch of the working class in two historical stages; when capital begins to subsume an existing society and an advanced capitalism.

The discussion in ch. 7 points to those mechanisms that produce differentiations in the working class. They function as given (or possible) barriers to the effective organization of that class; barriers that are inherent in its mode of constitution. To those differentiations of course one have to add the traditional sociological dimensions (ethnic, religious and regional background, etc).

This should be seen as a prelude to the central chapters in the thesis (chs. 8, 10-12) that try to present a model of the basic organizational forms of the working class. The bases for working-class practices and organizational forms is understood as the different kinds of exploitation, subordination and insecurities that afflict a working class in the capitalist mode of production. To the exploitation in the production process corresponds the trade union, the basic organizational form of the working class. This is a form that is inherent to the capital-labour relation itself. This exploitation (the primary exploitation) is central to capitalism, in fact its defining characteristic. Further basic forms for working class
organization are those that are related to the secondary exploitation. This is located in the transformation of the money wage to subsistence goods (food, clothing, housing etc). The existence of the money wage, with the concurrent rise of several distinct markets and prices (labour market/wage, housing market/rent, food, clothing/prices) make speculation possible. Food speculation has resulted in food riots, speculative and inefficient trade has been confronted by consumers co-ops etc. Housing, where the ground rent gives this secondary form of exploitation a special twist, produces its special kinds of resistance (tenants organizations, occupations and self-help-organizing). In this way, the different markets and speculative forms have generated distinct forms of struggle and organizations.

The political organisation is regarded as the fourth basic form. Here I concentrate upon the role of the party in relation to the state, regional and town administrations that are preoccupied with the central public prerequisites for the reproduction of labour power (education, health, social security, housing, planning etc).

As an interlude the labour movement is in ch. 9 contrasted to two central popular movements in Sweden that fall outside the labour movement – the temperance movement and the nonconformist churches and the revivalist movements. Although these movements may be said to be consequences of the same conditions that produce labour movement they do not – of course – relate to central aspects of capital – they are based upon reactions against a social misery that is caused by (but not only by) industrialization, urbanisation, etc. These organizational forms, are basically in line with a liberal ideology. This does not detract from their central historical role for the formation of the Swedish labour movement (adaption of forms, training of militants etc).

In ch. 10 I return to the model of basic organizational forms. First I develop another side of the political organization (parties), its ideological and socialist side, related to the state, not only as a street-builder but also to its central role in perpetuating a given society’s class character, its relations of productions. As the next form I discuss the subcultural organisations. They are regarded as central in the sense that they spin an organizational and ideological web around the class-individuals, fusing them together and ”protecting” them against other ideologies. As the last form I take the friendly society – historically the primary form. These are seen as reactions and defenses against conjunctural crises, unemployment and sickness.

In ch. 11 this model is illustrated by the case of the Swedish labour movement. Two theses are presented:
(a) the central aim for social democracy in Sweden has been its focus on
the real wages for the working class. That aim has had a number of political consequences.

(b) the Swedish (and Norwegian) mode of collective affiliation of the trade unions to the social democratic party has had certain unique advantages. It has directly involved trade union local leadership and activists in party affairs, strengthening the alliance union-party.

In ch. 12 some of the themes developed earlier with regard to the character of great reformist labour parties are taken up and developed. The phrase "bourgeois labour party" is analysed and its central content laid bare, meaning a party/movement trying to defend the working class, and to advance its position, especially with regard to its real wage, by furthering processes of growth, inherent in the capitalist mode of production. This theme is illustrated by the type of policies that Swedish social democracy has developed since World War II (labour market efficiency, furthering mobility of labour, furthering a rising technical and organical composition of capital). The epidemic endurance of left/right currents in social democratic parties are related to these components in the "bourgeois labour party". The chapter ends with a thesis of confirmation (the possibility of the party to materialize its objectives in different ways) as the central mechanism for upholding and reproducing the social democratic influence in the Swedish working class.

With regard to the first part of the book I would say that the "sociological question" (radicalism as the central problem to comprehend) is best answered by the marxist tradition. That tradition, so the argument goes, can present theories of the political, organizational and ideological forms that occur in the working class, relating these to the economic, social and organisational bases that account for them and that can explain their variability.

By using a rather simple model of relating organizational forms to different kinds of exploitation, subordination and insecurity that afflict the working class I have proposed a set of basic organisational forms for working class practices, which can give a model of the labour movement as a whole, its structure and its political-ideological variations. That model relates empirical generalizations of European working-class history to the systematic core of Marxism.