

# In Everyday Life and in the Movement

## A Network Approach to Labour Relations in the Process of Modernisation in Finland 1880–1920

### Everyday life, movement, networks

This study analyses Finnish labour relations in 1880–1920. It is based on the traditions of research into the history of everyday life on one hand, and on the traditions of research into social movements, on the other. The aim is to open new perspectives into the current discussion on labour market flexibility and regulation. The study also takes a critical stand on the ‘great narratives of modernisation’ that have described the making and emergence of the structures of the industrial society. The modernisation of labour relations is understood in this study as a process characterised by conflicting tendencies, temporal dislocation and several alternatives. The content, direction, and speed of advancement of this process were not predetermined but resulted from the behaviour of different actors.

The history of the trade union movement is here approached ‘from below’, and with a view to the history of everyday life, in order to critically surpass the limitations of research that exclusively concentrates on formal organisations. What is examined here is not everyday life *per se*, or in its entirety, but instead how workers were able, as individuals and collectively, to express their needs and interests directly at the shop-floor level. The study builds on the concept of everyday politics and ‘Eigensinn’ developed by the German social historian Alf Lüdtke. The focus is on how workers individually or together with others managed to stake out time and space for themselves in working life, to handle things in their own way and to assign their own meanings to employer-defined norms of discipline and power relations. The perspective of everyday politics allows us to question the notion that some authority would have had complete control over how people were to live and act in and outside the workplace.

The study challenges the standard interpretation of politics, according to which politics is conducted solely within a formally organised representation of interests that spans extended periods of time. We abandon the notion that the

borderline between the private and the political sphere is predetermined and historically constant. Instead, the relations between these spheres are examined as a 'multidimensional matrix'. This allows us to study how, on the one hand, politics has penetrated everyday life through the actions of institutions and movements, and how, on the other hand, aspects of everyday life have been politicized even when they have not been part of formal politics – for example, when what is personal has become political.

The second central question of the study is to what extent the trade union movement, which was strongly committed to the interests of wage-labour, succeeded in identifying the changing aspirations and needs of workers and channelling them into the collective representation of interests and into national social policy. The question is to what extent trade unionism placed itself above everyday life as a factor that shaped it and gave it new forms, and to what extent the movement had to be part of everyday life in order to identify and articulate the needs and interests of workers. Through the early history of the movement we can approach the question of how unions with a small membership had to rely on direct social communication between workers, when representational bargaining and contractual relations were unstable and limited to a small number of industries, and the help available from union strike funds during industrial actions was scanty.

The relation between everyday life and the labour movement, and their mutual involvement, is described in this study using the sociological concept of the social network. The study is, however, not an empirical network analysis; rather, the notion of the network is employed as an umbrella concept and heuristic perspective, which directs the research and makes it possible to detect various forms of collectivity and social communication in labour relations. The network approach serves as a tool that enables us to overcome limitations in the tradition of organisational research which has made the clearcut distinction between informal and formal organisation.

The network approach also connects the present research with the discussion concerning 'new' and 'old' movements which has been a major theme in current research on social movements. New movements, such as the environmentalist movement, the women's movement, or the squatter movement, have been regarded as different from old social movements such as the workers' movement or trade unionism, particularly on the grounds that their relation to people's everyday life is different. The argument is that the new movements have been directly present in the practices of people's everyday lives, whereas the old movements have been formally organised and have functioned according to representational practices within the context of the national state. The distinction between new and old movements has, however, met with substantial criticism on the grounds that new movements in their early phases have often been compared with old movements in their mature phases. Even if the present study does not rely on the life-span theory of social movements, the analysis of the mobilization phase of Finnish trade unionism offers new insights into the relations between everyday life and social movements.

## Networks of everyday life

Within workplaces, an occupational and spatial identity shared by the workers, together with the internal organization of the labour process, resulted in networks that were maintained by unwritten social norms and moral codes. These were manifested, in the first place, in various transitional rites, through which the informal collective of workers made their ways of acting and their system of social relations known to newcomers. The analysis of such rites of passage shows that the informal collective of workers was built on practices related to the mastery of occupational jargon, physicality, and avoidance of industrial discipline. In the second place, social collectivity was also created and maintained during the long process of learning a craft or an occupation, when many other things besides technical knowledge or the skills required at work were conveyed to new generations of workers. A craft or an occupation was also a social construct with a knowledge base and collective memory of its own. The network stemming from occupational and spatial identity was upheld by mutual confidence and a consciousness of the social limits of the collective; each group of workers knew which tasks were part of his or her job or fell outside it.

An important mechanism that regulated the internal relations within a given craft or occupation was the code of honour. The social norms of the job were taught in practice by 'portioning out' feelings of shame and honour to new workers during everyday work. The workers were constantly in the process of defining the limits of what was allowed or prohibited, and within these limits there was also room for individual 'Eigensinn'. On the basis of previous research, personal recollections, and trade union documents, this study has identified three general social norms that regulated the relations between workers and their relation to the industrial hierarchy: norms regulating the pace of work, norms concerning group identity, and the norms of social distance. Workers followed 'unwritten rules', which they used to articulate their needs and interests in everyday working life and to regulate and constrain mutual competition. Adherence to social and moral codes enabled the workers to remain within the informal community of mutual help and support. Such mutual practices created social protection in conditions of meagre and uncertain subsistence, and supplemented the protection provided by the benefit funds of factories and unions, particularly when crisis support was needed in the life of the workers.

## Control over time and space

The modern factory system that began its gradual expansion in Finland in the mid-19th century was based on control over time and space. Employers issued factory regulations to weed out pre-industrial practices and to inculcate a new factory order. The regulations served to extend the social order into the

factories, and factory order became part of the order of the society. While the meticulous rules unilaterally drawn up by employers expressed their wishes concerning what a disciplined and efficient factory should be like, an additional 'second' order developed at the workplace: the workers' own interpretation of the organisation of time and space at the shop-floor level of working life. When the opportunity or need arose, workers took from employers 'social time' of their own, hidden within the 10 to 12-hour working day. In Finland, legislation concerning the 8-hour working day was enacted in 1917. The physical space of the workplace also acquired worker-assigned meanings arising from the renewal or reproduction of the workforce. Although the reformers of industrial relations attempted to separate working time from leisure time, and working space from space reserved for social facilities, these were intermixed in many ways during the period studied. Not even the direct control by employers managed to weed out entirely the workers' self-willed practices of thought and action.

In the early phase of industrialization, employers were dissatisfied with the efficiency of the workers, and attempted to increase it by adopting new wage modes geared to encourage efficiency. In Finland, the idea of a correspondence between work performed and remuneration is relatively young. The transfer from 'natural' time to measured working time took place in Finland in the 19th century. The hourly wage mode was adopted slowly, as was piecework, and at varying speeds in different industries. With piecework, employers strived to bring working efficiency under the self-control of the workers. Piecework was aimed at stimulating an entrepreneurial spirit in the workers and at bringing about a personalised experience of labour within a capitalistic wagework relationship. The trade union movement took an extremely critical stand towards piecework from the end of the 19th century onwards, and associated it with nearly all the phenomena it considered negative in working life. Socialists branded it unambiguously as 'corruptive exploitation invented by capitalism', which would, it was feared, weaken working-class unity by corrupting the individual and dispersing the collectives.

The breakthrough of piecework did not take place in Finland as a conflict-free learning process, with workers adopting a new concept of work as a natural development. The approaches of modernization theory have overlooked cultural forms that did not conform to the terms of wagework relations and represented interpretations of piecework that deviated from the objectives of employers. Piecework created both hopes and disappointments in the workplace. Unions saw it as a threat to the collective structures they had managed to erect for the protection of workers. Construction workers in particular strove to abolish piecework entirely from their field either through unilateral decisions by workers or stipulations in collective agreements at the local level. At times, these goals were temporarily achieved. What became the central objective, however, was the regulation of piecework with safety clauses meant to guarantee minimum hourly wages or by reinforcing the shop-floor practices of collective bargaining. Trade unions attempted to establish

piecework tariffs on a parity basis, but were not generally successful, with the exception of the handicraft and construction branches. Piecework had contradictory effects on the collectivity of workers: it reinforced the significance of individuality on one hand, and of collectivity on the other.

F.W. Taylor's doctrine of scientific management became known in Finland before and during the First World War. Although the direct application of the theory did not begin systematically until the 1930's, the organization of work underwent changes in several large manufacturing plants involved in the production of war supplies: in Tayloristic terms, the conception of work became separated from the execution of work. Finland's position in the First World War was dualistic. The country was simultaneously at war and outside it. Finnish workers were closely tied to the Russian war economy, yet they were not drafted into military service. There was no need in Finland for industrial rationalization programmes typical of several Western European countries, nor was it necessary to substitute male workers with women and adolescents. However, the increasing demand for war supplies forced industrial plants into the mechanization of production processes and to some extent also into mass production. Taylorism was connected in Finland with the discussion that emerged during the First World War on the significance of scientific knowledge to the economic success of the country.

The criticism of Taylorism by Finnish socialists continued the earlier denouncements of piecework: scientific management was seen as a 'diabolical' form of the piecework mode, and as a scientific system for 'putting pressure on the workers'. The premium systems that preceded Taylorism were known in Finland as early as the beginning of the 20th century, but were not systematically applied in the country's industry. Finnish technical education, particularly after the 1910's, paid a certain amount of attention to the treatment of workers and the efficiency of labour; these were increasingly understood as areas of technical and management expertise. Improvements in the training of foremen and the enhancement of their authority were connected with the systematization of employer policies, the aim of which was to weaken the control that workers exerted over the production process.

## Movement: Connecting formal organization and everyday life

In the everyday life of workers, it was, however, impossible to change large-scale structures and solve all problems. At the level of everyday tactics, the activity of workers took place within existing structures, whose limits, however, were constantly called into question. Activity was usually restricted to only one workplace or section of workers within it, or one occupational group. The achievement of structural innovations – for example, establishing regulation systems for employment relationships, or introducing legislation on the protection of workers – required action at the strategical level. This meant participation in a movement that surpassed the locally prevalent social relations

of subordination; it also meant resorting to formal politics to influence the representation of interests within labour market relations and within the political system. The social collectivity that was constructed in everyday life was, however, a 'constitutive condition' for the development of the trade union movement.

Regulating the conditions of the selling of labour power efficiently at the local, and to an even greater extent at the national, level required extensive cooperation in order to make the achievements as general and permanent as possible. The formal trade union organisation had the potential to connect workers dispersed throughout different workplaces and to create wage norms that applied to the entire locality or even at the national level. Local unions began to appear in Finland from the 1880's onwards, but the unionization of workers was irregular and temporally scattered. As in other Western European countries, unionization was led by the skilled workers in the narrow labour markets of the handicraft and construction branches. It was not until 1905 that unionism developed into mass mobilization in Finland, as part of the political mass movement connected with the general strike of that year. The goal of the strike was equal voting rights for all and parliamentary reform, and factory workers now joined the trade union movement in larger numbers than before, strengthening the national unions in the process. The Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions ('Suomen ammattijärjestö', SAJ) was founded in 1907.

The finding of the present study is that the union movement had a strong presence in everyday working life. On the other hand, the movement also tended to detach itself from everyday life and strove to develop the social forms of worker collectivity into a power resource of its own. At least two explanations can be found for the close connection that existed between the Finnish trade union movement and everyday life during the period studied. *Firstly*, unions were small and unstable and did not exist in all industries or in all localities. By no means all workers had an equal chance to promote their own interests through formal organizations. For nearly the entire research period, unionized labour was in the clear minority. Local unions lacked an indisputable and permanent right to represent all workers within a given branch in relation to employers. Unions remained unrecognized by employers as the representatives of the workers' collective interests, particularly in the manufacturing industry. Small unions were constantly faced with the task of winning the confidence of the workers in their own branch and proving they deserved it. When they planned improvements in the terms of employment, they needed a mandate from the workers case by case.

The *second* factor that brought organisations and everyday life closer together might be termed the 'motional' nature of the unions. The unions themselves were in a constant state of internal flux: membership relations were characterised by a high turnover, and, rather than being stable and well-defined, the membership resembled a network. For trade union movements in the permanent process of mobilization, the present study distinguishes two basic types of member commitment: the 'upholders', who have relatively close ties

with the organization, and 'temporary' members with looser ties. The large proportion of the latter made the organizational borderline indeterminate: out of the non-unionized workers – the overwhelming majority – some were constantly either joining or resigning. The temporary members with loose union ties constituted the actual membership base, but tended, however, to keep their distance from the organisation. Temporary members joined the unions before and during collective actions, even though this did not bring them substantial and immediate benefits. They cannot be regarded simply as 'free-riders', since although they were organizationally inactive, they were still prepared to participate in collective actions to advance the interests of waged workers, i.e. themselves as well as the workers' collective. If they were not exactly within the organization, they were more or less permanently on its fringe.

From the union movement point of view, what was even more important than membership was to be able to mobilize the non-unionized workers into collective actions in order to improve the terms of the employment agreement. The Socialist union movement, in accordance with its 'camp' ideology ('Lager-Ideologie'), perceived the non-unionized workers as part of the network of relations created by the movement. With respect to the organization of the union movement, it was a question of a balancing act between proximity and distance: the union had to distinguish itself from the non-unionized, but, at the same time, it had to maintain a connection with the majority of the workers. Underlying this connection was the fact that in the everyday networks of working life both groups operated together. The non-unionized were part of the movement as long as they followed the moral code of the workers. They became outsiders who were despised and even discriminated against if they turned into strike-breakers or otherwise betrayed the mutual confidence of the workers.

Through the moral regulation concerning otherness, which in essence meant the education of a 'decent' worker, the movement was constantly defining its outer borderline. All those who had not specifically been declared to be 'others' were, in principle, 'us'. Because the organization of the movement was weak, its relation to the non-unionized was quite close - in spite of the sharp tones of agitation discourse. Yet, the relation of the unions to those defined as outsiders was extremely strict, although the motives of those not adhering to the moral code were to some extent understood. The cohesion of the movement was upheld not only by ties that were political and rational but also by ties arising from the dynamics of affect, from norms and moral considerations.

## Actor networks

In wage actions, an attempt was made to mold the existing networks of everyday relations into public actor networks, where the role of formal organization varied considerably. In the period under investigation, employment relations were not typically characterised by linear modernization

resulting from the inevitable triumph of organizational relations. On the contrary, the study lends support to another view that has featured in international discussion: depending on the situation, workers creatively and flexibly searched for different forms of organisation and action.

Since employers as a rule did not recognize local trade unions as partners in bargaining and agreements, the terms of employment relationships could be improved mainly when it was possible to organize a wage claim action and go on strike if necessary. Unions were continually preparing themselves and taking precautions for a situation that would contain opportunities for a successful action. This created in a certain sense a natural systematicity for the operation. The task of the trade union movement was to find a situation in which the movement could expand and find new allies. Actionism increased during periods of political mobilization and during favourable economic conditions. The 'natural labour market calendar', born out of the harsh climatic conditions in Finland, strongly regulated labour activity before and after the turn of the 20th century: during winter a great number of workplaces were shut down, but plenty of work was available when the thaw set in. Steep seasonal fluctuations increased the power resources of the workers in springtime, and weakened them during the winter.

Collective actions had a direct strategic significance for the weakly organized trade union movement, and reflected the variety of its organizational elements. Three basic types of action can be distinguished:

*The first* type consists of actions led by unions or local branches. The goals were decided upon within the union, and the union represented all workers within its sphere of organization. In these cases, local collective agreements usually already existed for the industry, and the union had at least temporarily acquired a legitimized position in the industrial relations of the field. However, within the period under investigation, labour market relations were in the process of such abrupt transition that the position of the union was liable to change radically even within a short period of time. In actions led by unions, workers were represented and their interests were articulated through the formal organization. In order to achieve this it was necessary that the majority of the occupational group belonged to the union at least during the action.

The *second* type consists of industrial actions realized through temporary organization. Here the public actors were the workers within a certain craft, occupation, or factory, and not the union under its own name. In a general meeting of the group, all those participating in the action formed a temporary community of mutual contract, which was not identical with the formal organization of the union. Everybody personally endorsed its establishment by signing a document where the goals of the action were defined. The momentary 'degree of organization' of the resulting actor network had to be high before the action had a chance of success. The initiative for the establishment of such temporary organizations usually came from the trade union, which functioned as the initiator of the action. In spite of this, the union could not self-evidently represent the network of actors established; instead, the organization often set

up its own functional organs. Delegations, committees, or working parties elected in general meetings of the workers involved had to enjoy the confidence and support of the unionized and non-unionized workers alike. The workers participated primarily as members of their craft or the work group they belonged to.

Actions based on the model described above were in a way 'semi-unionized': the non-unionized workers were drawn into them, on the basis of equality, as participants in the trade union movement understood in a wide sense. Although networking of this kind increased the strength of the movement, union leaders also felt that it contained substantial threats. In their view, non-unionized workers with a low level of political awareness brought to the movement a degree of irrationality and unpredictability. Union leaders interpreted the setbacks experienced in local actions as a result of the extensive influence that the non-unionized workers exerted on how the actions were originated and conducted. In the view of Oskari Tokoi, the President of the SAJ, the non-unionized workers played such a central role in local strikes that there was reason to speak of the danger of syndicalism. Syndicalist doctrines and forms of industrial action aroused some interest within the Finnish labour movement at the beginning of the 1910's, but no actual syndicalist opposition developed within the trade union movement or outside it.

The *third* group may be termed workers' actions, since here the union organizations played no role. In these actions, the workers of a workplace held a joint meeting and issued a collective demand to their employer. Even in workers' actions, a temporary organization was usually established; i.e. delegates were elected to represent the claims of the entire group to the employer. Unions usually found out about actions of this type only afterwards. When workers' actions accelerated into open industrial actions, the policy of unions was usually to assume the role of moderator. What usually resulted from the intervention of the union organization was the establishment of a formal local branch. In the view of union leaders, the affectively coloured, unplanned and non-unionized strikes endangered the opportunities for action by the unions and even their existence. Particularly after the employers had gained an advantage in industrial relations in 1907, strikes initiated through local decisions gave the employers a reason to introduce nation-wide lockouts, which were extremely hard for the trade unions.

Local actionism thus consisted of very different forms of collective action that created and maintained longer-term social networks. Although the temporary organizations were usually dispersed after the action, the commitments that the workers had entered into bound them in the future as well. When entering into employment contracts everyone was obliged to adhere to what had been achieved by the action. The norms concerning minimum hourly wages regulated the employment relations in the field and the borderlines of the craft. All those who had taken part in the action had the right to make sure that the common achievements were adhered to in practice. The task was not easy, and often not successful.

When the trade union movement is examined as action and not merely as organization, it emerges as an entity that consists of extremely heterogeneous and conflicting elements. The movement did not follow a single logic of action. The Finnish trade union movement can quite justifiably be characterised by Mark Granovetter's notion of 'the strength of weak ties'. The power resources of the movement were contained in its ability to control these weak ties, through which the movement's connections extended far beyond its formal organization. The movement, as it were, had accommodated itself to conditions where the organizational regulation of labour market conflict was weak and unstable. In the rest of the Nordic countries, national systems of collective bargaining consolidated the position of union organisations within industrial relations and the society in general.

### The modern movement

The trade union movement also continually operated in a social sphere where it was able to shape, structure and reform the workers' everyday life and its own local modes of action. The movement became instrumental in the operation of the varied group of educators and working-life reformers. It was important for union organizations to strengthen the rational self-control of workers and to enhance their political awareness. In their official operation, the upholders and functionaries of the union movement presented to the workers a far larger number of demands than to the employers.

The experiences of the strike wave after the 1905 general strike were interpreted by Finnish union leaders as a chaotic situation which had resulted from local actionism and had to be called to order. On the basis of these experiences, determined measures were taken to increase the centralization of the labour union movement. Centralization was part of the modernization process of the movement, and meant the adaptation of the movement to the laws of development within a capitalist economy. The movement based its demands for improving the economic conditions of workers on considerations of production efficiency and technical development. At the same time, the economic class struggle began to undergo a rationalization development based on the same principles that guided the development of capitalist enterprises. The internal structures of trade union activity were examined in the light of parameters stemming from the economic calculation of cost and effect and considerations of efficiency and scientificity. The movement was expected to function according to plan and with deliberation, relying on discursive knowledge, the theory of 'orthodox' socialism, and systematic statistical information, with which the movement lent support to the development of organized capitalism. The technology of risk-taking, i.e. the principle of insurance, became an increasingly important notion for the movement, and it was hoped that it would also solve the problems of membership instability. The economic benefits resulting from unionization were expected to bind the members permanently to the organizations.

The union movement strove to promote vertical centralization and horizontal concentration simultaneously. Particularly at the end of the 1910's and the beginning of the 1920's, the central organization of unions (SAJ) and the national unions themselves paid increasing attention to the standardization, bureaucratization and codification of local modes of action. At the same time, it was necessary to amass as great a strength as possible. This meant a constant enhancement of unionization, but it also meant that the small-scale organizations based on occupational groups, which reflected pre-modern labour relations, needed to be melted into increasingly larger entities. The goal was thus a form of industrial labour union that resembled the model of the factory and that of employer organizations. The idea of a centralized labour union movement included strengthening the position of workers as partners in wage-work relations, which meant opposing collective action based on the logic whereby the worker is seen as an autonomous subject in the work process.

The drive towards strong centralization in the Finnish union movement was combined with a relatively extensive local autonomy. The explanation for this contradiction is largely found in the local nature of labour market relations. The terms of employment were determined within the locality, or locally within individual enterprises. The system was decentralized as national bargaining and collective agreements were absent, with the exception of the branch of the printing industry, where the first national collective agreement was made as early as 1900. National unions were thus dependent on activity at the local level: improvements in the terms of employment could only be achieved through single actions. National achievements could therefore come about mainly through local activity.

If, because of their weakness, the local branches had to be close to the everyday life of the work communities, for the same reason it was necessary for national unions to be close to or even part of what was local. It is precisely this fact, and not so much the quest for power on the part of trade union leaders, that explains the trend towards centralized decision-making. When unions took an active role in decisions concerning local actions, they were, on one hand, able to establish close ties with the local level, and, on the other hand, to regulate local activity through national demands. Local actors valued their autonomy but, at the same time, regarded the centralized union movement as an important power resource. Yet, a tension existed in the relationship between the local and the national.

## Continuities and discontinuities

The various traditions of action in the trade union movement were intertwined in a new way in the upheaval caused by the First World War and the 1917 Russian revolution. The exceptional conditions gave rise to two different processes whose roots extended far back to earlier developments. Firstly, the rise in the price of foodstuffs and the depreciation of currency caused an

unprecedented and continuous actionism from the last months of 1915 onwards. It materialized for the most part in the establishment of temporary organizations; from the point of view of the trade union movement, the unrest was largely either semi-unionized or non-unionized. Secondly, the mass unionization of workers began in the autumn of 1916 but reached its peak during the spring and early summer of 1917. The simultaneity of pervasive unionization and actionism that was outside the control of trade unions illustrates well the conflicting elements that were present in the union movement.

When reforms were introduced into the movement at the beginning of the 1920's according to the model provided by the international revolutionary movement, the issue was, at the same time, the formalization of earlier development. Different traditions that had been active within the movement were brought together: the mutual relationships of immediate actionism and centralization, the local and the national, organisation and movement, were explored in the new situation. Decisions taken in the 1920 Congress of the SAJ brought about, firstly, formal workplace organizations that were in fact given the status of a basic, first-level branch. They were to handle at least a part of the activity that previously took place at the level of informal organization. Secondly, the focus of decision-making was transferred to a larger extent to the local level, even though the principles of the centralized union movement continued to apply. According to the new concept of action, union activity was to be simultaneously flexible *and* centralized.

The changes that took place in the union movement towards the beginning of the 1920's involved, on one hand, an adjustment to prevailing labour market relations, which, particularly in the manufacturing industry, were based on the bilateral relationship between the employer and the individual worker. Employers in the manufacturing industries did not recognize the union branches as representatives of the workers' collective interests. However, the spread of formal unionization established a basis for the collective control of labour conflicts. The actionistic structure of the trade union movement fitted in rather naturally with the ideology of the left wing of the workers' movement – communists and left-wing socialists – who controlled the central organization of the unions in the 1920's. However, what was at issue was a deeper structural principle, which was also taken into account by the Social Democrats, who led the Finnish trade union movement in the 1930's. In its determined effort towards local and national collective agreements, the union movement continued to depend in the 1930's on activity at the local level, even though the national trade unions gradually increased their influence in the regulation of employment relations.

Even up to the end of the Second World War, the activity of the Finnish trade union movement was characterised by decentralization and instability in the collective regulation of employment relations, as well as by the fact that regulation by collective agreements was limited mainly to the handicraft and building sectors and to dockyards. Within the period investigated here, the terms

of employment relations were determined in a number of different ways. Unofficial practices originating at the shop-floor level were actually the only relatively constant element. Collective agreements at the local level were liable to be affected by fluctuations in economic or political conditions, and few sectors enjoyed longer-term agreements. During this period, it was necessary to return time and again to the same issues and practices; employment relations were characterized by uncertainty and instability. It was only after the Second World War that the system of interest representation experienced a fundamental change.

Collective bargaining did not emerge spontaneously nor was it established solely as a result of compromises made at the national level. The collective agreements that employer organizations and trade unions entered into during the mid-1940's had largely to do with the recording and codification of existing informal practices and locally established terms of employment, as well as the extension of national regulation to cover them. The essential change was that national collective agreements made it possible to gradually extend the collectively established terms of employment to all industrial sectors and throughout the country. The injustices and instabilities inherent in the local system could only be corrected at the national level. Looked at from below, this achievement was remarkable: when the 'rules of the game' had been determined, it was possible to concentrate on the essential points: wages, working hours, and working conditions. Local activity did not lose its significance after the Second World War, but it did become more and more closely integrated with national structures. However, local practices were not adapted to the new national control system without difficulty; this is one of the lines of continuity that spans the period of change and transition investigated in this study. The relation between local and national regulation of employment relations continues to be an important issue even today.