

# The Outer Boundaries of Wage Work

## Creating Occupationally Handicapped Workers

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In this article changes in the work environment and working conditions are explored through an analysis of processes that exclude some categories of the work force from working life. The analysis covers more than a century and concerns the Swedish situation. The categories excluded are today labelled as persons with disabilities. Can a study of work from the somewhat atypical viewpoint of these categories actually tell us anything about changes in the work environment? In my opinion the perspective is very useful for making comprehensive and long-term changes in wage work discernible, changes which otherwise easily are hidden by more conspicuous and rapidly occurring changes. An examination of wage work from a position in its margins makes it possible to see changes in its boundaries. The drawing-up of new boundaries tell us about those enduring and fundamental changes in the conditions and demands of work that mean that some categories of workers are excluded from work, while others who were excluded earlier can be included. The perspective also makes obvious that criteria for the recruitment of, and the demands on, workers are determined by more than the actual work tasks and the content of work. Underlying long-term trends reshape the organisation of work and other social institutions. In order to gain an understanding of changes in working conditions, the institutional contexts and changes in these must be taken into consideration in the analysis.

The article begins by summarising how the formation of work by industrial capitalism excluded large groups of people from the workplace, because they did not match up to the new demands of work. Blind persons, deaf persons and “crippled” persons were among those excluded. The standardisation of work, competition through underbidding and minimum wages are key concepts for understanding the excluding processes.

By the 1940s, the exclusion from work of persons having only a partial working capacity had become more widely acknowledged as a social problem. The second part of the article deals with measures taken as a consequence of this understanding, on the continuing structural transformation of working life and on changes in industrial relations. “Performance competition” and consensus between unions and employers’ organisations are important concepts.

A third part focuses on elements in the latest, still ongoing, transition of working life. Some new criteria for inclusion in wage work are identified. Individua-

lisation, organisational change and communicative skills are concepts that I regard as crucial for the understanding of this phase. The article concludes by drawing together threads and pointing at challenges to the present system of employment subsidies.

The historical parts of the article are based on a sociological study of disabled persons' relationship to wage work: Blomqvist (1990) *Hundra år av undantag*. (One Hundred Years of Exception) Unless otherwise stated the historical analysis is taken from this publication, where it is developed in more detail. The analysis of the situation of today is to a large extent based on a study on the attitudes of trade union representatives and employers towards workers with disabilities and on a research project in progress.<sup>1</sup>

The one thing we know about the future is that it is not predictable. Even when the point of departure is lessons based on knowledge of the past, discussions on the future to some extent always involve predictions of what is to come. The future discussed in the conclusion is a very near one, which makes it possible to keep the number of predictions down, but not to fully avoid them.

## Exclusion from Wage Work

With the coming of industrial capitalism wage work became the dominant form of work. For some categories of workers the new organisation of work was excluding. Concurrently with the spreading of wage work, other possibilities to earn one's living became more and more circumscribed. During the first half of the twentieth century the situation for groups excluded from wage work became more and more precarious.

### Work According to Capacity

In the pre-capitalistic society everybody who was able to work was also assumed to be capable of earning her or his living through work. Only persons unable to work at all could be allowed poor relief. The administration of poor relief therefore did not make any other distinctions than the one between "able to work" and "not able to work". Legislation was modelled for a society in which every person's working capacity could be transformed to some form of earnings and in which the duty to earn a living for oneself and one's family corresponded to real possibilities to work.<sup>2</sup> To be without work when one had some working capacity was thus assumed to be due to the individual's idleness and was unlawful until the mid-nineteenth century. However, actual imbalances between the obligations to earn one's living by work and the possibilities to take up wage work resulted in

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<sup>1</sup> Blomqvist & Dahlkild-Öhman (1987). The project is titled *The transition of working life*.

<sup>2</sup> SOU 1931:20, Montgomery (1951) and Samuelsson (1973).

underemployment and widespread poverty. Though the concept of unemployment had not been invented, unemployment had.

In the nineteenth century most blind, deaf and “crippled” persons seem to have either earned their living themselves or contributed to their own support by working.<sup>3</sup> Though it on average must have been more problematic for them to earn their living than for persons who could see, hear and move unhindered, their difficulties manifested themselves very differently. Deaf and blind persons seem not to have had more in common with each other than with hearing and seeing persons. The limitations seem to have been more distinguishing than they were points of similarity. The nineteenth century’s population statistics registered deaf, blind and “mentally deficient” persons, but did not have one term referring to them all.<sup>4</sup> The 1900 population statistics were the first to use one term – “crippled” – as a heading for all these groups, thereby recognising that the groups had something in common.<sup>5</sup> Data on deaf, blind and “mentally deficient” persons was however still presented separately; they were not merged into one category.

### **The Employment Relationship**

Until the beginning of the twentieth century Sweden was a very poor country, on the border of Europe. Migration waves used to follow upon several years of bad harvests. Between 1851 and 1930 as much as a quarter of the Swedish population emigrated to America, an indication of the level of destitution.<sup>6</sup> For a large part of the Swedish population, the industrialisation process during the second half of the nineteenth century led to less poverty. The underemployed in the rural areas could find work in the factories located in more densely populated areas, and work in the manufacturing industries was also better paid than agrarian work.

For persons with a reduced working capacity, however, the first phase of industrialisation resulted for the most part in worsening circumstances. For them, industrialisation and the growth of wage work meant that the possibilities to earn their own livings gradually diminished.<sup>7</sup> The organisation of work in the manufacturing industries dramatically changed the conditions for work. As work in the factories presupposed an employment relationship, work became a question of “either/or”. In order to earn one’s living by wage work, the individual first had to sell her labour, i e to negotiate an employment contract. The autonomous craftsmen competed with their products; it was the products, the results of their work, which were marketed and sold in the market. Wage work in the manufacturing industry meant that the market took one step forward. Now before the worker

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<sup>3</sup> Olsson (1982) and Uchermann (1897).

<sup>4</sup> Befolkningsstatistik för år 1840, för åren 1851 med 1855, och för 1870.

<sup>5</sup> Befolkningsstatistik för år 1900.

<sup>6</sup> SCB (1991) p 12 and Lundh & Ohlsson (1994) p 10.

<sup>7</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 17.

could do any work and produce any products, his or her labour had to be sold in the labour market. What used to be a continuous relationship between working capacity and the possibility to earn one's living was now dichotomised.

Work in the factories also required adaptation with regard to time and space. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the demands for control and for discipline gradually increased in the factories: the work process became more efficient, more rules were introduced and the demands for timely adaptation and regularity in work increased.<sup>8</sup> While the autonomous craftsman could keep his own pace and adapt body movements and work operations to his own requirements, the work pace in the factories was often set by machines and was therefore beyond the worker's own control.<sup>9</sup> The work process required that work operations were co-ordinated with the operations of other workers as well as with machines. Workers who could not keep up with the new demands were sifted out.

### **Without Social Security**

The patriarchal working conditions in farming and in iron works continued to exist for some time also in the factories, offering workers and their families some, though arbitrary, security in cases of unemployment, illness and old age.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, however, this patriarchal, feudal security system was abandoned, to be replaced by no security at all.<sup>11</sup> In order to compensate for the increased insecurity, workers organised health insurance funds, unemployment benefit funds and funds for funeral expenses. Some of these funds were part of trade unions in the making, a number of them later developing into trade unions; others were more religiously inclined or depended on charity. Blind, deaf and "crippled" persons seem less than others to have been members of these security funds, especially of the ones organised like trade unions. This was probably because their impairment implied an increased need to make use of the fund, which made them unlikely to be accepted as members. More than others, they were thus subjected to the risks of wage work.<sup>12</sup> The social problems of that time, discussed under the heading of the "Workers' Question"<sup>13</sup>, was thus especially burning for these groups.

### **Minimum Wages**

As long as the wage could be fully set to match a person's capacity for work, nothing stopped employers from employing persons without a full working capacity. However, the growth and increased strength of trade unions had a

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<sup>8</sup> Horgby (1986).

<sup>9</sup> Isacson & Magnusson (1983).

<sup>10</sup> Lindström (1990).

<sup>11</sup> LO (1951) and Hultén (1978).

<sup>12</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 20.

<sup>13</sup> Gustafsson (2000).

curbing effect on the adaptation of wages to working capacity and thereby on the employment of workers who did not have a full working capacity. This seldom acknowledged side effect of trade unionism needs some explanation.

The growing trade unions negotiated fixed minimum wages as part of the wages agreements. A stipulated minimum wage not only guaranteed workers a certain wage level; it also protected workers against the competition of unemployed workers, who were willing to accept a job for wages lower than the ones negotiated by the unions.<sup>14</sup> However, exceptions to the minimum wage were explicitly allowed for workers whose working capacity was reduced. The very first national agreement for the engineering industry, signed in 1905, thus included a paragraph allowing for exceptions for “workers who have reached 60 years of age or whose working capacity is reduced because they are ‘crippled’ or due to illness”.<sup>15</sup> Similar exemption clauses were successively introduced into most of the collective agreements to follow. Anxious to prevent misuse of the paragraph, the unions were however very restrictive when allowing for exceptions to the minimum wage.<sup>16</sup> The exemption clause was therefore seldom used. Instead employers became more selective when recruiting workers. The scope for humane considerations when employing therefore became more limited than before. More efficient forms of control were developed, and the demands on work performance and on work pace were standardised.

Until the 1930s competition for work through underbidding posed a factual threat to the trade union movement.<sup>17</sup> This competition was made up of unemployed workers with a full working capacity. The workers with less than a full capacity tried to find a job in spite of a lower performance and offered to work for a lower wage. They were not part of the competition through underbidding, but the trade unions measures to delimit this – the minimum wage – nevertheless contributed to their exclusion from work. It is important here to underline that the unions were not the driving force behind this exclusion. However, an unintended consequence of the union’s methods to secure its own existence was that employers’ recruitment of these workers was severely hampered.

### **Exclusion Made Visible**

A person’s capacity to work thus gradually became more and more decisive for her or his possibilities to find a job, i e to sell his or her labour. A discernible injury – deafness, blindness or being “crippled” – signalled a possible limitation

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<sup>14</sup> Åmark (1986).

<sup>15</sup> Sv Järn- och Metallarbetareförbund (1906) p 7.

<sup>16</sup> Brodén (1939), Åsbrink (1939).

<sup>17</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 33 and p 136. By the 1930s the trade union movement was established and generally accepted. Though competition through underbidding has presented a threat to wage levels for a long time thereafter, it has not been a threat to the existence of trade unions.

of working capacity. Comparatively many persons with bodily imperfections therefore continued to work as craftsmen and in farming where the manufacturing industries' conditions for work were not valid. But craftsmanship and agriculture were also rationalised. The trades were exposed to very hard competition from the mass production of the manufacturing industries, and in farming industrially produced machines and tools were beginning to be used to increase productivity. The demands on work performance and on efficiency therefore increased in these sectors as well. Practically all parts of the labour market were affected by the rationalisation and standardisation of work, circumscribing working possibilities for persons with less than a full working capacity. More and more persons were thought of as not having a full working capacity.

This development seems to have negatively affected more men than women. The surplus of male workers from farming to a large extent went to work in the factories, while women often took on domestic jobs. As regards rationalisations, household work constituted a labour market niche, unaffected by standardisation and regulations.<sup>18</sup>

As late as the 1930s however, deaf mute and "crippled" persons, men as well as women, to a very large extent supported themselves by work, while "mentally deficient" and blind persons did so less often.<sup>19</sup> Different disability categories were also segregated into different occupations. The occupational patterns followed the occupational training offered by the educational institutions for different disability groups. Noticeably many deaf mute persons thus worked as tailors and shoemakers, and many of them were autonomous craftsmen. So were many blind persons, who often worked as brushmakers and basket-makers.<sup>20</sup>

The shortage of work characterising underemployment was gradually transformed into unemployment. The insight that it was not always possible for persons with a diminished working capacity to earn their own living was slowly accepted by the authorities. When the government undertook the first assessments ever of unemployment, this awareness had had an influence on the way the unemployed were categorised. The very first unemployment assessment in 1909 took an interest in the working capacity of the unemployed and categorised the persons reporting themselves as unemployed into three categories: no working capacity, not a full working capacity and full working capacity.<sup>21</sup> Only persons belonging to the second and the last category were considered as unemployed. An assessment of unemployment conducted in 1927 showed an increased interest in ranking the working capacity of the unemployed.<sup>22</sup> Persons accepted as unemployed were now sorted into four quality groups according to occupational skills,

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<sup>18</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 32 and p 48.

<sup>19</sup> SOS (1936).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Arbetslösheten i Sverige under vintern 1908-1909.

<sup>22</sup> SOS (1928).

working capacity, adaptability and willingness to work. According to the instructions for the categorisation, working capacity, especially physical capacity, was a crucial quality criterion. However, it was not solely decisive. Also persons with physical impairments could, in cases where they were thought of as “skilled and willing workers”, be considered as an “adequate and well functioning work force”.

According to the 1927 unemployment assessment the proportion of partially disabled had doubled since 1910. The assessment understood the increase as a

“natural result of the increased intensity and long duration of the recent economic depression which has lead to a more rigid weeding out of inferior workers.”<sup>23</sup>

The growth is thus seen as a result of social change, or more specifically of the more competitive labour market.

Increases in the proportions of “crippled” persons during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were also registered in the population statistics.<sup>24</sup> The population statistics express an awareness of the vagueness of the concepts and of their changing meaning over time. The increase in “crippled” persons is seen as a result of such changes and of more reliable data. Regarding a very marked increase in mental diseases that had taken place since the 1860s, the 1920 population statistics commented:

“A continuing increase in mental diseases is perhaps /.../ one for our time’s, with its restless development in different social areas, characteristic phenomenon.”<sup>25</sup>

The government officials producing these population statistics 80 years ago thus did not seem to have had any illusions about stable statistical categories. They seem to have realised that social changes affect the contents and definitions of these categories, even when they have not been formally altered. One would perhaps expect this constructionist insight to have had an impact on the civil servants’ attitudes towards those without a full working capacity. Seemingly it did not. Or at least it did not influence attitudes expressed in reports on the unemployment assessments. These reports express discontent about persons who volunteered for registration, but who due to a low working capacity were not accepted as unemployed.

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<sup>23</sup> SOS (1928) p 146

<sup>24</sup> SOS (1918) and SOS (1936).

<sup>25</sup> SOS (1925) p 32.

## Including the Excluded in Employment

The exclusion of some workers from wage work was gradually acknowledged as a social problem. In the 1930s measures to meet these needs were a subject of political discussion. In the 1940s a government investigation worked on the issue, and subsidised employment designed to meet the demand of the partially disabled workers for work was eventually organised.

### Industrial Relations

In the beginning of the 1940s collective agreements covered most of the labour market. Competition through underbidding no longer constituted a severe threat against the trade union movement. This did not mean that the unions accepted exemptions from minimum wages. The wages and increases in the wage levels now had to be motivated and one obvious argument available to the unions when negotiating was the performance of the workers. The competition regarding the price of the work thus turned into a competition about work performance.

The Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF) and The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the main association for blue-collar workers, had established a mutual understanding in the late 1930s concerning co-operation for the development of rationalisation and peaceful relations on the labour market.<sup>26</sup> Their mutual understanding on the rationalisation issue made it obvious that active efforts for solving the problem of workers without a full work capacity were not to be expected from employers or unions. It also made it clear that the future could be expected to bring even more marked difficulties for those who did not meet with the increasing demands of working life. As employers and unions were not willing to shoulder any responsibility, it was left to the state to take action on the matter.<sup>27</sup>

In a very well known contribution to a debate on declining fertility rates, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal (1935) confronted the trade union movement regarding its minimum wage policy, which excluded workers performing at less than maximum capacity from work. The Myrdals argued for the need to organise special production units for the less "productive" part of the work force and they stressed how important it was that the trade union movement did not obstruct such plans:

"If it does that, it jeopardises its most fundamental social policy ideal, that of safeguarding the interests of working people. For even individuals who are not top-grade are part of this group or at least should be. A trade union movement that in this and other respects developed in such as way as to

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<sup>26</sup> An agreement met by the LO and the SAF in 1938 is often seen as the symbolic starting point of the Swedish model, and the place for the meeting, Saltjöbaden, has given its name to the negotiation climate for at least the following three decades (Edlund et al 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 52.



thrust aside the weakest and shield the strongest would become soulless – it would embrace its own destruction just at the point when it wields its greatest power.”<sup>28</sup>

At the time there were no alternative employment opportunities for “less productive” workers. The idea was however a subject of discussion. The comments of the Myrdals indicate that an unreserved support from the trade union movement could not be taken for granted. The trade union was held responsible, not only for being uninterested in the exclusion of “less productive” workers from work, but also for its possible objections to the development of alternative employment for those workers, all in order to secure the union’s power.

The Myrdals may have been among the first ones to openly challenge the trade unions on their attitude towards “less productive” workers, but they were not the only ones. To all appearances the collective agreements, together with the rationalisations taking place in industries, were commonly identified in the late 1930s as important obstacles facing those of a reduced working capacity.<sup>29</sup>

### **Defining the Excluded**

In the 1940s a government investigation whose purpose was to propose measures making it possible to make use of the work of “those of reduced working-capacity” was set up. The investigation defined “those of reduced working-capacity” as “persons, who, due to physical or mental work obstacles or social encumbrances find it, or can be expected to find it, more difficult than others to get and to hold on to gainful employment.”<sup>30</sup> This, the very first common denomination for these groups, thus directly referred to their labour market situation. It implied that what blind persons, deaf persons and “crippled” persons had in common was that they were confronted with similar difficulties when entering the labour market.

In 1942 the associations for blind, for deaf, for “crippled” and for persons suffering from tuberculosis founded their first confederation ever and picked up

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<sup>28</sup> Myrdal & Myrdal (1935) p 256. Wordings from the very same chapter in this publication have more recently, in 1997, been taken as a pretext for accusing the Myrdals of being in favour of racial hygienics. As far as I can see, the formulations referred to in this debate were in no way outstanding for the time. They indicate an élitist ideology, but hardly racial biology lines of thought. The debate took off after two articles by Maciej Zaremba in *Dagens Nyheter* 20 and 21 August 1997.

<sup>29</sup> A collection of articles published in 1939 discuss from different points of view the social problems of those of reduced working capacity. The authors represent different political organisations and their understanding of the issue is obviously very different. However, when discussing explanations to the situation, all authors bring up rationalisations as well as collective agreements. This is not to say that they all find them relevant. It does however show that the understanding of collective agreements as an obstacle for those of reduced working capacity was widespread. (*Social Årsbok* 1939).

<sup>30</sup> SOU 1946:24 p 12

the concept of “those of reduced working-capacity” when naming it.<sup>31</sup> The constitution of the confederation as well as its name illustrate very well, I think, Iris Young’s (1990) understanding of what defines a social group.

“Groups /.../ exist only in relation to other groups. A group may be identified by outsiders without those so identified having any specific consciousness of themselves as a group. Sometimes a group comes to exist only because one group excludes and labels a category of persons, and those labeled come to understand themselves as group members only slowly, on the basis of their shared oppression.”<sup>32</sup>

The naming was however controversial; it meant defining all blind, deaf and “crippled” persons’ working capacity as reduced. A renaming of the confederation attempted to cut the link between labour market problems and being deaf, blind, “crippled” or suffering from tuberculosis, i.e. to redefine these groups’ relationship to the labour market. Relabellings to this or similar purposes have since taken place several times in the history of the confederations of associations organising the groups that today are called disabled.

### **State Intervention**

The need for special measures for “those of reduced working-capacity” was explicitly motivated with the demographic situation – declining fertility rates were at the top of the political agenda – and with a shortage of labour. Though the explicit reasons were mainly financial/economic, there are strong indications that the social motives were more relevant, although the economic arguments were thought to be politically more current.<sup>33</sup>

The government investigation and the measures proposed by it were in many respects groundbreaking.<sup>34</sup> It made up one of the cornerstones of the welfare state and for years to come had an impact on society’s view of persons without a full working capacity.<sup>35</sup> The measures were composed of different forms of employment opportunities for which the state paid part of or (eventually) the whole wage. The autonomy of the employers and trade unions was fully respected. The measures did not in any way interfere with their doings.

In the 1950s a cautious implementation of measures proposed by the investigation began, followed by a steady expansion during four decades.

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<sup>31</sup> Ransemar (1981) p 88. The confederation’s name was *Samarbetskommittén för Partiellt Arbetsföra* (The committee for co-operation between those of reduced working capacity).

<sup>32</sup> Young (1990) p 46

<sup>33</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 95.

<sup>34</sup> SOU 1948:54.

<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that the members of parliament first proposing the government investigation did not represent the social democrats, but the conservatives (Blomqvist 1990, p 76).

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the structural rationalisations of industry produced new groups that did not meet up with the demands of working life. The LO still backed the rationalisations – the LO’s wage policy of solidarity with low-paid workers had very clear rationalisation effects – but it was becoming increasingly aware of the problems facing in particular elderly workers.<sup>36</sup> “Work for everybody” – the political ambition during the same time – meant that their claims for work could not be overlooked.

Women’s rising labour force participation rates further widened the population covered by the full employment policy. Employment became normative also for disabled women, which added to the demand for subsidised employment. The state supported more and more employment. The subsidised forms of employment gradually developed into a labour market of its own financed by the state.

To some extent, this subsidised employment explains the very high figures on labour force participation rates in Sweden. And the other way round: the generally high economic activity rates produce a great demand for subsidised employment.

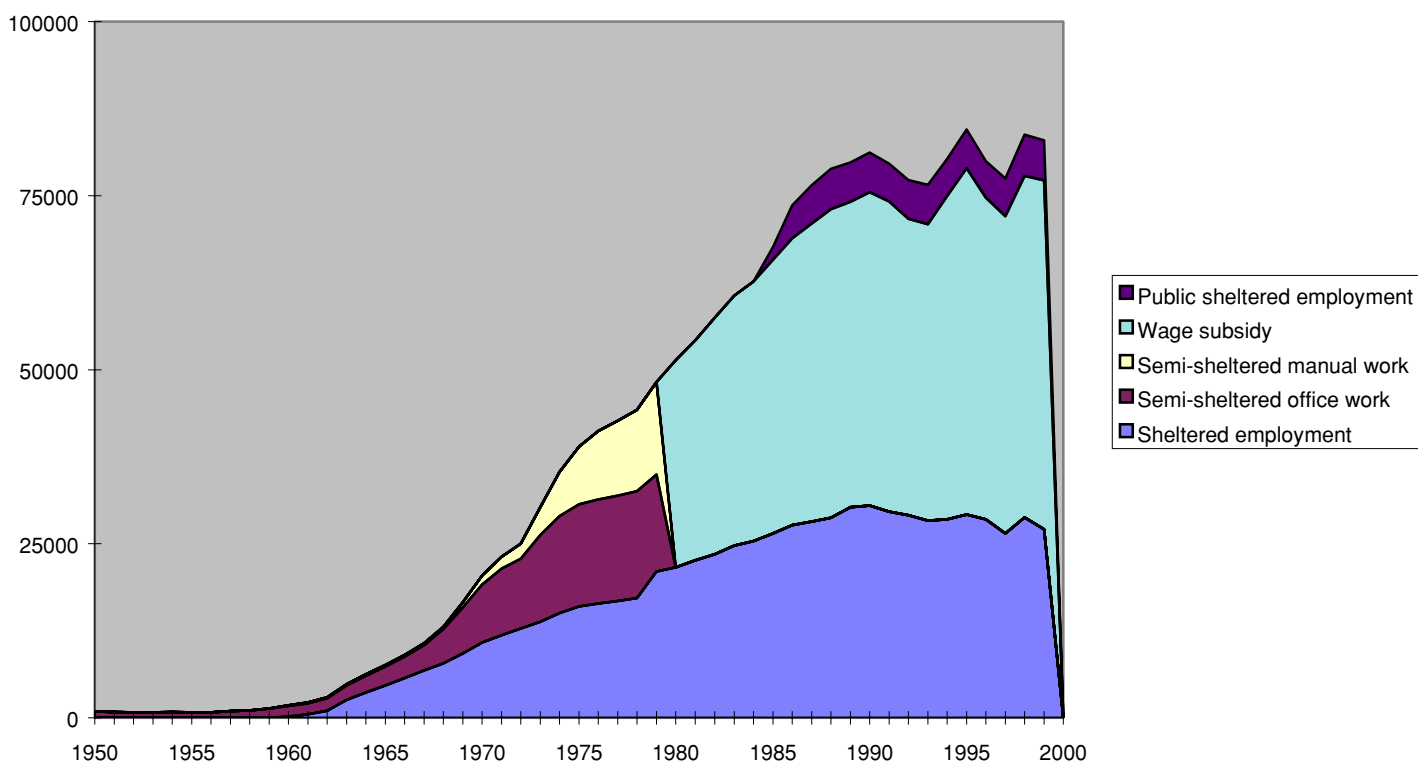
A new concept, “occupationally handicapped”, was coined as a heading for the categories of unemployed who could be considered for subsidised employment: “Occupationally handicapped” was (and is) a purely administrative concept and allowed for a flexible use of the subsidies. It included the traditional disability groups, but also the less than precise category of “socially maladjusted”, eventually renamed to “socio-medical disabilities”.

Over the years the subsidised forms of employment have been made the target of two main types of criticism.<sup>37</sup> The first is raised by employers and questions the economic conditions for companies in a particular group – Samhall – organised for the sole purpose of employing persons with working disabilities. Privately owned companies doing business in the same branch of industry as Samhall-companies now and then complain that the state owned companies, due to the favourable wage subsidies, expose them to unjust competition. The other type of criticism is delivered by associations for different disability groups and focuses on the recruitment of persons for subsidised employment. According to this criticism, unemployed workers lacking a “genuine” disability are often given priority, while persons with “real” disabilities are instead sorted out from subsidised work. The unjust competition brought to the fore here concerns competition for employment between individuals ascribed with different disabilities. The disability category that is questioned foremost is the socio-medical one.

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<sup>36</sup> LO (1961 and 1966).

<sup>37</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 124 and p 126.



**Diagram 1.** Occupationally Handicapped in Subsidised Employment 1950-2000

Source: National Labour Market Board

### The Work Environment Made Responsible

The growth of employment organised for persons with disabilities clearly demonstrates an ideological change in the understanding of disabled persons' difficulties to find themselves a job. Their problems had now become a concern of society. However, while it was a matter for the state to organise subsidised employment, employers were not totally freed from responsibility as regards the excluding processes. Some of the many changes in labour law in the 1970s held employers responsible for the rising demands of work and for the exclusion of people from working life.<sup>38</sup> The Swedish Working Environment Act has gradually included more and more aspects of working conditions in its definition of the working environment.<sup>39</sup> Until recently The Occupational Injury Insurance's

<sup>38</sup> A presentation of the labour law introduced in late 1970s is found in *1970-talets reformer i arbetslivet* (1982).

<sup>39</sup> Since 1991 it includes technology, work organisation and work content. "Technology, work organisation and work content shall be designed so as not to expose the employee to

definitions have followed changes in the Act, accepting more and more injuries as injuries caused by the working environment and thereby granting compensation for more and more injuries. The Protection of Employment Act of 1974 circumscribes the employers' right to hire and fire at their own discretion and offers elderly workers and disabled workers more protection than other workers. The Act for Promotion of Work of 1974 makes it possible for the state to intervene if employers do not on their own initiative employ reasonable numbers of elderly and disabled persons. All these changes aimed to press the employers to take more responsibility for how work demands and the working environment were developing.

For decades, the unions, especially the LO-affiliated ones, distanced themselves from the associations for the disabled and seem actively to have avoided getting too involved in investigations into these groups' relationship to the labour market. The associations for the disabled on the other hand seem for a long time to have avoided confrontation with the very powerful unions. In the mid-1960s, however, a first very heated dispute broke out.<sup>40</sup> The associations for disability groups accused the unions of not caring for their disabled union members and of their mistreatment. The debate made obvious how tense the relations between unions and disability associations actually were underneath the superficially undisturbed surface of non-communication. It was not until 1980 that the LO defined some of the issues of the disability movement as union issues.<sup>41</sup>

## New Boundaries

The increase in subsidised employment continued during the 1980s but levelled out in the 1990s. However, this does not mean that the demand for such employment has been met. As the demand is directly related to developments in the labour market, it has no fixed limit. Changes in working life taking place in the 1990s give reason to believe that future exclusions to some extent may follow newly created boundaries.

## Recent Transformations

The industrial society is now in the midst of a transformation into an information society or a post-industrial society. Since the mid-1960s the numbers of persons employed in the manufacturing industry has been declining. Jobs involving only

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physical or mental strain, which can cause bad health or accidents." (Working Environment Act, 2 Chapter, 1§).

<sup>40</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 170.

<sup>41</sup> The rapprochement was however between the central level associations. The declarations made by the LO (LO 1980) were couched in general terms and not very obliging for the local unions.

manual work tasks are becoming increasingly rare; practically all jobs involve elements of intellectual work tasks as well.

The regulations in time and space introduced in the industrial society are losing their relevance. In some industries these regulations have been dissolved altogether, and in most industries they are less significant than they used to be.

Work organisations are being modified in order to increase the flexibility of the work process. Individual piecework has been replaced by teamwork, job rotation and job enlargement have been introduced and autonomous work groups are taking over the tasks of supervisors.

Many reorganisations involve the delegation of control over workers to the work teams, making the teams responsible not only for planning but also for work performance. The individual's performance thereby becomes a collective interest, and the solidarity with the ones not doing their share is put under severe pressure. Individual wage systems add to the "performance competition".

For many employees these changes are for the better. Job enlargement means more varied work tasks, which makes work more interesting and reduces the risk for musculo-skeletal injuries. High performance workers may prefer an individual wage system. For those who do not meet up with the ever-increasing performance demands, or who for other reasons find it difficult to adapt to the new organisations, the changes constitute a threat however.

At the same time, many work tasks not at the core of the work process are sorted out from the work organisations. Such tasks, which do not form a necessary part of the ordinary work process, were previously often done by employees who for some reason had difficulty doing work that demanded a high performance or working on a team.

Widespread reductions in personnel result in further increases in the pace of work. Time is becoming an increasingly scarce resource. Tolerance declines with increases in the level of stress. Harassment at workplaces seems to constitute a growing problem, probably related to a harder climate due to the increased pressure put on workers.<sup>42</sup>

The reorganisations thus threaten to contribute to a substantial and systematic exclusion of persons, who for some reason are, or are thought of as being, difficult to integrate into the new work organisations.

## **The Changing Demands of Work**

Though different studies and reports specify somewhat different qualifications as being important in the working life of today and of the future, on the whole it is the same kind of traits that are pointed out in different studies. Employer repre-

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<sup>42</sup> According to The National Board for Occupational Safety and Health, the numbers of employed persons exposed to bullying or harassment more than doubled between 1997 and 2000 (Arbetarskydd 2001).

sentatives in very different industries quite unanimously claim that the traits they nowadays look for when recruiting are social competence and the ability to co-operate.<sup>43</sup> Social competence, the ability to co-operate and (lately also) emotional intelligence all fit under the heading of communicative skills.

The most obvious explanation for the increased importance of communicative skills is the growing service sector. Perhaps less recognised, but equally important, is that more and more jobs in the goods-producing industries also make use of communicative skills. Workers producing the goods are increasingly involved in direct communication with customers. In addition, team-based work, introduced in the production of goods as well as in the service sector, presupposes co-operation.

Analytical skills and the power of abstraction are also becoming increasingly important. More and more work tasks make use of technology and communication, involving the handling of symbols and thus a capacity for abstract thought.<sup>44</sup>

Work demands are changing only slowly. As the qualifications of the work force are changing at the same time, lasting imbalances between supply and demand as regards the qualifications of the work force are not liable to occur. However, it is possible to identify long-term changes in the qualifications required in working life. In agricultural society physical capacity was a prerequisite. The industrial society stressed the workers ability to maintain discipline, be it in physically or in intellectually demanding work. The information society depends on communication and accordingly emphasises communicative skills. This does not of course mean that the skills required in the industrial society are made irrelevant in the twenty-first century. Rather they form the base on top of which communicative skills are asked for.

Women dominate in jobs involving service tasks and making use of communicative skills. Men on the other hand make up the majority of workers in the goods-producing industries where communicative skills used to be of little value. We would therefore expect more men than women to end up outside the new boundaries of wage work; i.e. provided the logic of competence takes over the logic of the gender system and provided the understanding of communicative skills does not change too much.

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<sup>43</sup> This holds true for sectors as different as the engineering industry, the food processing industries, banking and insurance, retail trade, central government and health and nursing. The data come from a study in progress, conducted by the author. Lena Abrahamsson (2000), in a study of the pulp industry, questions the demand for social competence as being genuine, suggesting that technological know-how, just like before, is what really matters, even when employers explicitly underline the need for social competence. I would suggest that technological competence *is* as important as ever for jobs consisting of technological work tasks, and that what is occurring is that social competence and the ability to co-operate is now demanded *on top* of that.

<sup>44</sup> Rifkin (1995), Reich (1991).

Another change in qualifications requested of the workers seems to consist of a shift from behaviour to personality. In the 1930s the ideal worker thus was expected to show “adaptability, vitality and attentiveness”.<sup>45</sup> A worker exhibiting these qualities could easily be integrated into an organisation where the work tasks were defined beforehand. The workers who are sought after today demonstrate “flexibility, creativity and social competence”. This is, I think, more than a change in terminology. Whereas the former terms describe a person’s behaviour, the terms of today refer to her or his personality.<sup>46</sup> Whilst the worker in the industrial society was expected to contribute to the work organisation with her or his work performance, the worker in the information society is expected to make use of his or her personality for the purpose of performance and also for the development of the organisation itself.

### **Individual Responsibility**

Whereas ability to think abstractly is taught and trained in the regular school system, formal training of communicative skills and of the ideal personality is more difficult to integrate into the educational program. Instead the individual herself is made responsible for the development of these skills. The shift in qualifications requested thus seems to correspond to a shift in responsibility: from society and work organisations to the individual. This change is in line with changes in ideology and in political power relations: from collectivism to individualism.

More striking and more concrete indications of change in the same direction are visible in changes in the regulation of working conditions. Beginning in the mid-1990s the rules for compensation for work related injuries became more restrictive. The burden of proof falling on the individual was made heavier. The statutes of The Protection of Employment Act have been weakened, allowing employers more leeway to decide the terms for personnel reductions. Both the regulation of compensation for work related injuries and the Employment Act have thus been changed to the employers’ advantage. The Act for Promotion of Work has not been changed, but has all the same not had any impact. Used only once or twice in twenty-five years for the purpose of increasing the recruitment of disabled persons, the Act for Promotion of Work is probably the most disregarded part of labour law. This is not to say that that the Act is of no or little importance.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> These criteria for a good worker were frequently recurring in the publications of the 1930s and were also repeated in government investigations (SOU 1939:13 p 151). Blomqvist, (1990) p 49.

<sup>46</sup> Blomqvist (1990) p 144.

<sup>47</sup> According to a materialist analysis the Act fulfils some very important ideological functions (Blomqvist & Dahlkild-Öhman 1987 p 58). It helps to cover the conflict between disabled persons’ need for a job and production’s demands for efficiency. Through the Act difficulties disabled persons meet in the labour market appear as caused by the state administra-



While the labour laws of the 1970s singled out employers and the work organisations as responsible for exclusions from working life, the trend of today thus again seems to be a shift in the focus of responsibility, from collective solutions to individual ones. Individual responsibility is further underlined by the trade unions' loss of power. For six years in succession unionisation has been declining.<sup>48</sup>

### **Excluding and Including Processes**

According to the analysis above, new criteria for exclusion can be expected to be shortcomings as regards communicative skills and the capacity for abstract thought. Demands for measures to aid this group can be expected to increase further during the years to come. The subsidised forms of employment now available were meant for disabled persons. The wider category "occupationally handicapped persons", which in addition to the traditional disability groups also included the "socio-medically" disabled, was created for administrative purposes. Formally there is nothing to prevent that persons short of communicative skills are categorised as socio-medically disabled, making up an increasing proportion of persons in subsidised employment. Such a development will however most probably meet severe resistance due to reasons of legitimacy.

Over the decades the associations for disabled persons have now and then questioned whether persons recruited to subsidised employment are genuinely disabled or not, pointing primarily towards the socio-medical group. There is little reason to believe that the growth of subsidised employment for persons looked upon as socially unskilled would pass unquestioned; i e, supposing this was at all an attractive group for subsidised employment. There are indications to the contrary.

The competition for work in the labour market comprising subsidised employment now seems to exclude not only the traditional disability groups but also the socio-medical group from employment. Thus, a recent government report assessing the activity of the Samhall group of companies calls attention to the fact that increasing demands regarding occupational skills and social competence block recruitment altogether from the target group.<sup>49</sup> This group is, the report declares, in short supply of social competence. Obviously the target groups for subsidised employment do not qualify for measures aimed at their employment. The current system of employment subsidies seems unable to meet the demands of today.

For other categories the technological development is anticipated to bring with it possibilities for integration. Thanks to new technology several categories of

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tion and not by the structure and function of the labour market and the demands of production. The act also strengthens the legitimacy of paid work.

<sup>48</sup> Kjellberg (2001). See also Allvin & Sverke (2000).

<sup>49</sup> RRV (1999) p 145.

disabled are now offered the hope of either a remedy or of new and better means of assistance. For some disability groups the loosening up of the former regulations in the time and space of work organisations means that working conditions become less excluding. Changes like these are not likely to become visible on a labour market level in the short run. (For the individuals concerned they are of course all the more noticeable.) These groups' problematic relationship to wage work may well survive the material obstacles for their inclusion. Still, there is no reason to believe that the now ongoing organisational changes will cause more difficulties in relation to work for all disability groups. The changes actually seem to be to the advantage for some of the traditional medical and physical disability groups.

## Conclusions

The extent of employment opportunities subsidised by the state is comparatively high in Sweden. Considering the unions' relative strength, the agreements reached already in the 1930s between the SAF and the LO, and the early and thorough rationalisation of industry as well as of agriculture, there is reason to believe that the exclusion from wage work was more hard-hitting and more definite in Sweden than in many other countries. Once minimum wages were negotiated and collective agreements covered most of the labour market, it must have been comparatively difficult for persons who did not have a full working capacity to earn their own living. The rationalisations to come and the wage policy of solidarity with low-paid workers practised thereafter further contributed to the difficulties.

At the same time, there is a very strong and inclusive ideology of work in Sweden.<sup>50</sup> Occupational affiliation forms an extremely important part of many Swedes' identity.<sup>51</sup> Seen in that perspective, the fact that the Swedish state relatively early took measures to meet the demands for subsidised employment, and that these measures have grown extensively during a half century, is perhaps not all that remarkable. When in effect, these measures further strengthened the ideology of work.

Today's reorganisation of work and work organisations runs the risk of contributing once again to a very harsh exclusion in Sweden. Just as in the first part of the twentieth century, unions and employers are now in agreement about the reorganisations being conducted. We can therefore expect that a good deal of the

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<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Blomqvist & Dahlkild-Öhman (1987) p 31.

<sup>51</sup> Even if identity formation will be founded less in work and employment in the future, less in doing than in being, it is reasonable to believe that work will be of more lasting importance in work centred cultures like the Swedish one, than in others. Michael Allvin (1997) discusses the individualisation of work as "a process which has separated work from the identity-forming social practice."

changes planned will actually be carried through. Further, organisational change seems to be extremely widespread in Sweden and to affect all industries.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that the outcome of the reorganisations will on the one hand affect a very large part of the work force and, on the other hand, leave few lines of retreat for the ones not easily integrated into the changed work organisations.

When special measures for the traditional disability groups were decided on, processes very clearly excluding these groups from waged work had been in play for several decades. The analysis above hopefully makes clear that the processes and trends of today excluding new parts of the work force from waged work likewise are beyond the individual worker's control. When subsidised employment eventually grew more common it was in a context of a developing welfare state, in a society that had put work for everyone on the political agenda and in which solidarity was a word of honour. Today the welfare state is weakened, the political ambition to create "work for everyone" has been erased from the agenda and solidarity with disadvantaged groups has given way to individual interests. It took a considerable time before the burden of the exclusion from wage work was lifted from the shoulders of the individual disabled workers. The conditions of today are far from ideal, but it seems urgent to develop measures designed for the new situation.

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Alone in the team?

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