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A Historical Legacy Untouched by Time and Space?

The Hollowing-out of the Norwegian Model of Industrial Relations

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ABSTRACT

The Norwegian model of industrial relations has received a lot of praise. It is generally thought of as the pinnacle of the welfare state, a reason why Norway is not severely hit by crises, is highly adaptable, and thus still going strong. This article discusses the historical circumstances in which the model arose with a view to analyze the preconditions for its further existence, arguing that the model must be understood as consisting of, and thus dependent upon, shifting historical subjects. This calls for an analysis of the concrete interactions between various agents, and how it has changed over time and space. In this effort, historical accounts are combined with theories developed within the social sciences in order to explain the dynamics of these interactions. We will argue that the contemporary notion of a Norwegian model of industrial relations, and the accompanying praise, is an ahistorical conceptualization verging on a dogma, and that profound reconfigurations of power relations between the agents of labor and capital need to be taken into account.

KEY WORDS

Consent, hegemony / historical subjects / hospitality sector / labor relations / Nordic model / passive revolution / postal services

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Introduction

In Norway, there exists a strong notion, or even a dogma, on the existence of a uniquely Norwegian model of industrial relations, despite there being many similarities to the other Nordic countries, especially Sweden (see for instance Sandberg, 2013), a similarity we will not be able to analyze in this article. The establishment of the Norwegian model is often dated to the signing of the Basic Agreement by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Norwegian Employers` Confederation (NAF) in 1935, and we would, on the occasion of the 80-year-anniversary of this agreement, like to take a retrospective view on the development of this so-called "model" of industrial relations.

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In our view, there are at least three ways of looking at this model. First, as a socially constructed discourse or dogma, which implies that it, in theory, can come to denote a wide range of praxes, changing over time and space, that is, its meaning is "whatever we need it to be" and that, as a result, the model is, by definition, highly adaptable or capable of mutating. Second, it can be understood as a set of institutionalized procedures and understandings, more or less detached from, and thus resistant to, social change, that is, resilient and, by extension, conservative. However, this aspect is more fragile, being susceptible to change and/or decay. This leads us to the third aspect. The Norwegian model can also be understood as a result of social power relations and a strategy in the class struggle, and thus as a process. In this reading, however, it is important to emphasize that it originates in a particular time and space, although its deployment may be extensive in both time and space. This third reading leads us back to the two former senses, since the model, as a discourse and institutionalized praxis, may be employed in the ongoing struggle. We will argue that the Norwegian model of industrial relations, as such, may be self-defeating.

According to Heiret (2007:120, our translation), in Norway, there "exists a normative adherence to complicity and co-determination […] and to the national bargaining system as a means to secure competitive and efficient enterprises" including among researchers. This consensus is so strong and encompassing that it "threatens to overshadow the conflicts of interest and the (asymmetrical) power relations that form the basis even under organized capitalism."

This article progresses in the following manner. First, we seek an understanding of the historical circumstances in which the Norwegian model arose with a view to analyze the preconditions for its further existence. We will argue that the model must be understood as comprising shifting historical subjects, and this calls for an analysis of concrete interactions, in time and space, between various agents. We will combine a historical account with theories developed within the social sciences, with a view to explaining the dynamics of these interactions. Hence, our point of departure is creating a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding and explaining the emergence of a Norwegian model of industrial relations and its functioning in an interdisciplinary manner. We then move on to employ these theories and concepts in an analysis of the historical circumstances under which it was established.

Furthermore, we will employ Hernes' distinction between a macro and micro model in our discussion of the preconditions for the existence of the model, and also the praxis aspect of it with a view to analyzing the challenges it faces (Hernes, 2006). In studying the latter, the article draws on case studies of restructuring in the postal services and the hotel sector, the former being publicly owned and the latter private. We will argue that the contemporary notion of a Norwegian model of industrial relations, and the accompanying praise referred to above, is based on an ahistorical conceptualization verging on a dogma, and that profound reconfigurations of power relations between the agents of labor and capital need to be taken into account.

Empirically, the case study of the postal services rests on both secondary literature (Thue, 1997) and primary sources collected in connection with earlier works on the postal workers' union (Norsk Postforbund, NPF) (for a discussion of data collection and method, see Hansen, 2011). Our main focus is the NPF and their response to the restructuring process that took place in the period from 1981 to 1996.

The case study of the hotel sector is also based on both secondary literature and primary sources. As part of a research project financed by the Research Council of

Norway on industrial relations in the hospitality sector (running from 2009 to 2012), 12 interviews were conducted with contemporary union officials, delegates, and workers (in Fellesforbundet, which organizes hotel workers, Norsk Arbeidsmandsforbund, which organizes contract cleaners and the national center, LO, to which both these unions belong). The interviews with union officials (six interviews) were recorded and partly transcribed, while out of ethical considerations interviews with workplace delegates and workers (six interviews) were not. During the latter interviews, extensive notes were taken.

The historical account of the establishment of the Norwegian model of industrial relations is based on secondary literature only published in Norwegian. To this, we add the writings of the leader of the syndicalist opposition, Martin Tranmæl.

Raison d'être of the model

In our view, the emergence of a tripartite model can be explained theoretically with reference to Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and passive revolution, and his "dual perspective" on social politics, in which civil society is internally related to political society (Sassoon, 1987; Rupert, 1995). While political society designates the state in the Weberian sense, that is, a coercive apparatus, civil society constitutes the realm of cultural and ideological institutions, such as parties and trade unions, and practices in which hegemony is constructed and/or challenged (Rupert, 1995).

Hegemony is, according to Glassman (2004), related to striking a balance between coercion and consent. A situation is one of hegemony when consent is pivotal in reproducing social relations so that coercion becomes less visible and less required (Glassman, 2004). According to Gramsci, building hegemony and consent is necessary, and maybe even more important, than repression and coercion, in the process of political domination. However, ruling with consent—or, in Gramsci's words, being able to lead—depends not only on economic power but also the interrelated development of ideological, political, and cultural power. In other words, hegemony rests neither merely on political-economic dominance nor on cultural and/or ideological persuasiveness (Glassman, 2004).

This is in line with Lukes' (2005:1) emphasis on thinking about power broadly, in three dimensions, since "power is at its most effective when least observable." As a consequence, power cannot be reduced to (observed) behavior, that is, its overt exercise or the results of such. Particularly, the inclusion in the second dimension of organization as the mobilization of bias is of importance to our analysis. Power may actually be studied in an anti-behavioral fashion and including nondecision-making, for instance as seeing it as "confining the scope of decision-making to relatively 'safe' issues", that is as controlling the *political agenda* (Lukes, 2005:22). Important in this regard is Burawoy's (1985) insistence on extending politics and hegemony all the way into the process of production. According to him, the process of production has two political moments: (1) through the political effects of the organization of work, and (2) the regulation of production relations by means of distinctive and ideological apparatuses. By extending hegemony into the factory, Burawoy (1985:10) attempts an explanation of how workers have been drawn into the pursuit of productivity and profit in "the interests of all." In this production of consent in the process of production, institutions, such as the Norwegian model, produce an apparent balance of power that, although mostly constraining worker

action, has a major role in coordinating the interests of workers and management. The effect of generating consent this way is getting acceptance for the rules while "obscuring the conditions that framed them" (Burawoy, 1985:11). There is, in other words, a shift from domination to reproducing certain social relations. Our analysis shows how these processes of coordinating the interests of labor and capital, by means of the Norwegian model of industrial relations as institutionalized procedures, occur both at the factory/micro- and national/macrolevel, thus (re)producing the social relations that (de)stabilize the institutionalized aspects of the model.

A particular strategy pointed out by Gramsci is passive revolution, which is a strategy of maintaining power through (further) weakening opposing social forces. Key ingredients, and its political basis, are class compromises and reforms, the intention of which is to concede material advantages to broad sections of the population. A major objective is thus preventing the adversary from developing through cooptation (Sassoon, 1987). Furthermore, Gramsci regards reforms as a concrete basis for ensuring the consent of the majority through creating expectations and hope (Sassoon, 1987).

The Norwegian model as a passive revolution by contingent historical subjects

In Norway, there was a radicalization of the labor movement from 1911 onwards led by Martin Tranmæl and the rest of the more or less syndicalist opposition within the LO ("Fagopposisjonen"). This radicalization entailed, among other things, a strategic shift in a focus from bargaining and agreements to "direct actions" (Olstad, 2009). Tranmæl (1920) argued that unions must be willing and able to adopt revolutionary stances. Hence, he proposed that unions should not enter into any binding agreements with employers, nor advocate any insurance schemes. Regarding the means of struggle, Tranmæl proposed in order of priority: strikes, sympathy strikes, boycotts, obstructions, sabotage, and lastly, cooperation (Tranmæl, 1920; Olstad, 2009). Moreover, during this period, there was massive unionization, as the membership of LO surged from 15,600 in 1905 to 148,000 in 1920 (Olstad, 2009).

The years between 1911 and 1931 saw a number of disputes, where the period between 1917 and 1925 was particularly turbulent, with major strikes and lockouts in 1921, 1923–1924, and 1931, which were, and still are, unprecedented in Norwegian history. In 1931 alone, around 7.6 million workdays were lost (Olstad, 2009). The employers' confederation was as militant as the union movement, being on the offensive with major lockouts between 1907 and 1916 (Bjørgum, 1985). Despite, or maybe because of their militancy, the employers' confederation and the LO were, from the outset, united against state interference in industrial relations (Bjørgum, 1985).

Part of the militancy from 1917 onwards might be explained with reference to the October Revolution, which inspired many a labor movement throughout Europe, providing an example of a successful seizure of power. According to Olstad (2009:204, our translation), "the question of revolution became more pressing than ever" in Norway in 1917. Surely, this development not only created fear among capitalists but also fissures internally in the LO. While the Labor Party was openly revolutionary from 1918, the LO adopted a revolutionary stance during the Congress in 1920. Hence, the radicalization encompassed the entire labor movement, and the Norwegian Labor Party followed the

"Conditions of Admission to the Communist International" and remained a member of the Third International when its sister organizations in Sweden and Denmark pulled out (Hernes, 2006). Moreover, both the Labor Party and parts of the LO had close contacts in the Soviet Union, and Norway was a transit country for propaganda and money (Olstad, 2009). How this affected industrial relations can, according to Bjørgum (1985) and Olstad (2009), be glimpsed in the submissiveness of employers between 1917 and 1919. Knutsen (1985) even terms the radicalization of the labor movement and the socialist threat the paramount problem of the Norwegian employers' confederation (NAF) in the years between 1918 and 1920.

The 1920s were, on the other hand, characterized by a weakening of both sides, due to economic recession, with a simultaneous intensification of industrial conflict (Bjørgum, 1985). When the situation was at its gloomiest for the employers' confederation (NAF), the organization commenced on a three-pronged strategy closely related to Gramsci's concepts of coercion, consent, and passive revolution. First of all, the NAF ensured the support in the coercive apparatus of the state, the "armored fist," and thus a military line of defense. Second, the NAF tried to gain consent among workers through conceding material advantages, paying what Knutsen (1985:378, our translation) terms an "insurance premium against revolution." Third, in order to prevent revolutionaries from developing within the LO, the NAF made clandestine contacts with the LO leadership in an effort to give them, and other moderate forces in the union movement, backing and strength against a radicalized rank and file (Knutsen, 1985). These contacts were termed "select conferences" and were undertaken "under strict confidentiality" (Knutsen, 1985:407, our translation). The NAF's leader even challenged the leader of LO to demonstrate that "he actually was the leader and had authority and power over his troops" (Rasmussen quoted in Knutsen, 1985:383, our translation).

The establishment of the Norwegian model of industrial relations is often dated to the signing of the Basic Agreement by the LO and the NAF in 1935. As we have seen, much of the period leading up to the agreement was characterized by militancy, the threat of the Soviet Union and later, this time in the other direction, Fascism. According to Olstad (2009:320, our translation), it was only when the Communist challenge had been suppressed that the ground was laid for a "partnership for peace." To this must be added a certain "battle weariness," especially since the major dispute in 1931 ended in a tie, with both organizations, the LO and the NAF, incurring huge costs. There was, in other words, a sense of balance of power, where neither side could break the other, leading Olstad (2009) to term it a balance of powerlessness. However, it is important to be reminded that "top-level partnerships" were not invented in 1935 (Olstad, 2009:172, our translation), having some foothold in the period between 1905 and 1915, and the Basic Agreement had a predecessor in the period between 1902 and 1905 (Bjørgum, 1985). Still, there was greater opposition to such arrangements prior to the post-World War II era. There were also fissures between the union leadership, which entered into agreements, and the rank and file, who frequently disregarded these and went on wildcat strikes, such as in 1923. However, as we have seen, there were clandestine contacts between the leaders of the NAF and the LO even during the most turbulent years, a situation Knutsen (1985:399, our translation) explains with reference to their common goal of preventing socialist revolution, that is, "preventing the 'recalcitrant elements' from 'fanning the embers.'" The NAF thus regarded it as their task to assist the leadership of the LO in subduing "Fagopposisjonen," that is, undertaking a passive revolution.

According to Wahl (2004), the prevailing analysis in the union movement is that, based on the experiences of the first third of the 20th century, intense conflict between capital and labor brought the working class nowhere, while the peaceful social pact with capital and governments was the way forward. However, as Wahl (2004) points out, this analysis is erroneous, as it is precisely the previous militancy that shifted the balance of power and facilitated the class compromise, and subsequently the improvements in living and working conditions.

Today, the balance of power may have shifted in the opposite direction, and capitalists have built up a significant freedom to maneuver (Kelly, 1996). This shift in the balance of power was linked to what has generally been referred to as the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. These changes, which were rooted in the 1970s recession, also marked the end of the Golden Era of Western capitalism. The many years of stable economic growth and organized capitalism, which "the Golden Era" refers to, are not the subject of analysis in this article. The crisis in the Fordist regime of accumulation soon called for regulatory changes and hence re-regulation, although the term often used is "de-regulation," in accordance with a new regime of accumulation (Lipietz, 1982; Peck & Tickell, 1994; Hyman, 1999). In Norway, the "social-democratic order" came under pressure, and neoliberal ideas gained acceptance (Furre, 2000). The unions again joined the effort to increase productivity and thus competitiveness, which had been a central element since the 1930s and a main task during the post-war era (Halvorsen, 2000). Two examples of changes that followed in the aftermath of the Fordist crisis will be explored in this article: Firstly, the public sector became an object of change. Reduced public spending, privatization, and reformation were high on the agenda of governments in most Western countries (Harvey, 2003). The postal service was only one of many public enterprises that underwent changes in Norway. Secondly, the so-called standard employment relationship was challenged by the gradual introduction of atypical, or precarious, work (Vosko, 2006), as we shall see exemplified in the hospitality sector below.

In sum, the Norwegian model of industrial relations came about due to the strength of the trade union movement, and the lurking of the Soviet Union in the background (Wahl, 2004). In order to avoid the situation getting out of hand, the dominating classes realized that since they could not defeat the union movement, they had to undertake a passive revolution by bringing the unions on board and providing them with certain concessions. In other words, the welfare state and the improvements in wages and working conditions were "what the labour movement gained in exchange for giving up its socialist project" (Wahl, 2004: unnumbered). Olstad (2009:94, our translation) concurs, maintaining that the Norwegian system of industrial relations can be regarded as a "gigantic barter" made in the 1930s, where the union movement ensured gradual increases in pay and a shortening of the workday in exchange for consenting to capitalist development.

The sunken path: Opportunism in the union movement

Gramsci's way of analyzing how contradictions are absorbed not through any resolutions of them, but their containment within new forms of domination and subordination, is useful in understanding the development of the Norwegian model of industrial relations. According to Moody (1997), the establishment of unions as central agents in

tripartite arrangements was a response from capital to a growing working-class militancy. Writing from a Norwegian perspective, Wahl (2004) argues that while the social pact brought important achievements in welfare, wages, and working conditions, and was thus to a certain extent justifiable as in the interest of the working class, it also had a flipside related to hegemony; the revolutionary parts of the labor movement were marginalized and repressed, and the pact resulted in depoliticization, deradicalization, and bureaucratization of the union movement.

Furthermore, according to Wahl, the union leadership does not understand the above-mentioned shift in power relations, and clutches to the ideology of social partnership. Hence, rather than confronting the attacks made by capitalists, they accept alliance with, and consequently subordination to, them. Such cooperation and signing of agreements might increase the vulnerability of unions to the capitalists' offensive, as it signals that union members will not be mobilized to fight it (Ackers & Payne, 1998).

To some extent, we would argue that the material rewards many hold as one of the merits of the Norwegian model of industrial relations were, in other words, carefully planned by the employers' confederation in order to convince union members and workers that top-level negotiations were rewarding, and thus that militancy should be abandoned. In other words, the employers' confederation was involved in convincing the union movement about the rewards of what Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) term "opportunism," including the necessity of favoring success in negotiations over survival through organizing and mobilizing members, thus sustaining militancy. Hence, there was a clear realization on the part of the NAF that workers should be brought under "organized control." That the union leadership bought into this strategy can be seen in the Janus face put up by the leader of the LO, stating one thing in public and another to the NAF. However, this is not to imply a systematic difference in levels of rationality and strategic capabilities between the representatives from the employers' confederation and the union leadership. In other words, it should not be taken to mean that the union leadership was naïve, duped, or in other ways fooled into taking erroneous individual choices. We are of the view that both the actors are (equally) fallible, and even more so if the discrepancy between individual and collective rationality, and short-term and long-term consequences, are taken into consideration. However, in our case, it may seem that the union leadership underestimated the "power of the ensuing system," that is, the model they created as dogma and institutionalized procedures was power in the sense of "the bias of the system," which can be "mobilized, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individuals' choices" (Lukes, 2005:25). This could, in turn, act to confine the political agenda and make the continued operation of the system a chief concern so that voicing critique could be seen as threatening the realization of goals of greater importance.

Knutsen (1985) explains this with reference to Michel's iron law of oligarchy more than to the personality of the leaders, arguing that people go through a transformation when they move from opposition to position. However, it could be argued that Michel's theory is overtly deterministic and does not pay sufficient attention to countervailing tendencies (Hyman, 1975; Bergene, 2010).

Before turning to our analysis of challenges to the Norwegian model of industrial relations, it is worth mentioning the warnings that have been raised against what Hyman (1992) terms "organizational sclerosis." By this, he means their institutional consolidation through which the success of unions is tied to external guarantors rather than the

membership, during what Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) regard as the fourth stage of union development. Hyman (1992:150) argues that this institutional consolidation is based on "historically inherited constituencies and projects, and have generated procedural routines […] which are resistant to the radical changes which new circumstances require." The Norwegian model as a set of institutionalized procedures may thus act as a conservative force even in times of restructuring, at least when it comes to its own reproduction.

The Norwegian model as a timeless model: Its macro and micro components

So far, we have largely been treating the macro model, through analyzing its historical origins. The macro model is defined by Hernes (2006:13, our translation) as "a well-organized democratic community where the partners are committed to each other and to increasing welfare for all." The macro model is also held to increase the competitiveness of the Norwegian economy through ensuring a well-regulated bargaining procedure and a peaceful resolution of conflicting interests, where the latter, in fact, means no-strike clauses for interim periods. Considering the theoretical framework above, it is interesting that the main proponents, such as Hernes (2006), argue that a merit of the macro model is that it is in the interest of business, as it increases predictability for capitalists who can define the rules of the game and enter into agreements which are not only binding for all union members but also defining for non-members.

The micro model functions as a supplement to the macro model, as the praxes associated with the micro model ensure commitment to the operation of the enterprise and foster support for reorganization processes. Despite the withdrawal of state involvement in industrial relations being, as we have seen, a background for the establishment of the Norwegian model, Hernes (2006) argues that the state plays a very central role as the "third man" in the tripartite arrangement, also as a guarantor of peace through forced arbitration. However, as pointed out by Hernes (2006), the Norwegian model of industrial relations cannot be reduced to its institutions; it is also to a large extent a political culture of norms and mindsets. We are now approaching the more fragile and challenged parts of the model.

The micro model consists of several components: wage negotiations, co-determination at the workplace, and workers' participation in the development of the company, both as board members and as innovators. According to Hernes (2006), the merits of the micro model are that routines for dialogue and conflict resolution/compromises are developed, and that it fosters mutual respect and trust. In Hernes' (2006:28, our translation) words, the micro model involves "frequent contact, close communication and regular meetings which foster mutual understanding—it becomes possible to understand, and maybe even to some extent sympathize with the opponent's demands and to accept part of them." It is stressed that repeated and long-term interaction opens the possibility to bring expectations in line with each other. Most importantly, Hernes points out how the interaction at the local level was both precipitated and strengthened by the centralized agreements and structures that provided the partners with rights and powers, and that it relies on social capital, that is, relations and networks between agents (Hernes, 2006). The development of social

capital has had certain key characteristics: predictability, and through routines and personal relationships, a long-term perspective and trust.

The transformation of postal services in Norway

In 1980, the public sector got its Basic Agreement when the State, as an employer, and the civil servant unions laid down provisions on cooperation, including the right to co-determination (Lægreid, 1983). In the joint declaration, it was stated that "the parties agree that the Basic Agreement shall provide the basis for the best possible cooperation between workers and employers so that it can provide the cohesion which is a precondition for efficiency and satisfaction in working life" (Basic agreement for civil servants and special agreement for postal services, 1980). That same year, a special agreement concerning postal services was finalized. According to this agreement, the parties agreed, among other things, to "through decentralization and delegation negotiate arrangements where employees are provided with genuine co-determination at several levels in the business" (Information on Part II of the Basic agreement: Co-determination and special agreement for postal services, 1980, 3).

According to Hagen and Pape (1997), the purpose of regulations in the state sector is two-fold. It is supposed to regulate the conflict of interest between the management prerogative and workers' democratic right to involvement on the one hand, and realize common interests in terms of ensuring the effective running of government agencies on the other hand. Central elements are the Civil Servants Disputes Act (Tjenestetvistloven) of 1958 and the above-mentioned basic agreement of 1980. Through the Civil Servants Disputes Act, civil servants unions obtained the right to negotiate, but at the same time strike as a means of action that was brought under control through no-strike clauses in interim periods (Bjørnhaug et al., 2000). Similar to the turbulent period leading up to the signing of the Basic Agreement in the private sector in 1935, the Civil Servants Disputes Act was signed after a period of extensive strikes in the public sector. It could thus be argued that the government needed a means of controlling their civil servants (Bjørnhaug et al., 2000). Similar to the Basic Agreement entered into between the LO and the NAF in 1935 referred to above as a "gigantic barter," the basic agreement of 1980 between the civil servants unions and the state may be regarded as a "trade," where the unions gained the right to co-determination in exchange for guaranteeing that they would cooperate in reforming the public sector.

The transformation of the Norwegian postal service from a public enterprise to a publicly owned company runs in accordance with business principles, which must be seen in relation to more extensive changes in Norwegian and Western politics. In Norway, the beginning of the 1980s marked the end of the so-called "expansion state" and the "social-democratic order" came under pressure. The conservatives formed a government in 1981, and shortly after they introduced measures to reorganize the public sector in accordance with neo-liberal ideas. These measures of administrative reforms fell within what became internationally known as New Public Management (NPM) (Grønlie & Flo, 2009), encompassing "managerial thinking and a market mentality where the private sector became the role model" (Christensen & Lægreid, 2001a:17).

Christensen and Lægreid (2001b:73–74, our translation) have questioned the impact of NPM reforms in Norway compared with other countries, characterizing the

administrative reforms as "slow, cautious and pragmatic," at least until 1995. The reason for this, they claim, is a lack of economic reasons for NPM reforms, "nor a political-administrative structure that easily promote such reforms, and not a cultural tradition in accordance with the contents of NPM" (Christensen & Lægreid, 2001b:73–74, our translation). However, according to Grønlie and Flo (2009), this statement is worthy of discussion. Although they agree that public management policy in the 1980s and early 1990s did not involve a dramatic break with the Norwegian tradition, and that changes were often accompanied by an understanding of and solutions to problems which were within this tradition, they find it "difficult to imagine significantly greater changes in such a short time" (Grønlie & Flo, 2009:161). Even more important, they say, the "reforms in the 1980s and 1990s contributed greatly to lay the groundwork for more radical reforms in the next decade" (Grønlie & Flo, 2009:161).

Returning to the postal services, this reasoning demonstrates the importance of drawing comparisons, not just over space but also in *time*. Although the changes at first seemed small, compared with other countries, and since the postal services have remained a monopoly under state ownership, the changes since the late 1980s have been substantial compared with earlier periods. The transformation, which can be traced back to the 1970s, was in line with NPM reforms and was actualized in 1988 when the first major restructuring took place. Firstly, this implied a change in management systems. From 1989 onwards, it was government policy that Postverket (the state-run Norwegian postal service) was to be governed by costs, incomes, and productivity. Furthermore, the traditional management system in public administration—rule-based management—was replaced by results-based management. Secondly, the restructuring implied changes to the organizational structure, the purpose of which was to make the enterprise market-oriented through decentralization, and the delegation of authority and responsibility to lower levels of management (Thue, 1997; Hansen, 2011).

Most importantly for our analysis, the union organizing "blue-collar" postal workers, NPF (Norsk Postforbund), accepted competitiveness as a goal and reorganization as a means to maintain postal services as a public enterprise, from the outset. The attitude of the NPF toward the changes can be illustrated by the following statement from 1984: "Postverket must (...) adapt to modern development and must always be organizationally and commercially in line with ongoing developments. The staff is prepared to accept and adapt to the new ideas related to business policy, which will involve staff at all levels" (Postmannen, no. 10, 1984: 259, our translation). However, a sole focus on market competitiveness was not the only possible way forward. For example, a public report published in 1983 suggested an extended monopoly in postal services, but despite supporting the suggestion, the NPF did not make it part of their strategies (Hansen, 2012). Instead, the NPF had already decided at the beginning of the 1980s that their main strategy would be to keep the postal services as a publicly owned enterprise (i.e., resisting privatization), yet run in accordance with business principles. As seen above, Gramsci regarded concessions as a concrete basis for ensuring consent through creating expectations and hope (Sassoon, 1987), and the participation of the NPF in the reorganization process rested upon expectations that the reforms would not only strengthen the competitiveness of the enterprise or prevent downsizing but also lead to positive outcomes for the workers and their unions in terms of democratization. The strategic response from the union can be summarized as cooperation and consent to reorganization.

That the transformation of postal services should happen with union, and ultimately worker consent, was achieved through co-determination and involvement. In other words, the point of departure for the reorganization of the postal services in the 1980s and the 1990s was formalized cooperation between unions and the employer. In other words, by way of the micro model, the union made restructuring *a project of their own*. This begs the following question: To what extent did the reforms, in the next instance, change the operation of the micro model? Here, we can glimpse the tension between the adaptable, resilient, and self-destructive aspects of the so-called Norwegian model of industrial relations. This brings us back to the main subject in question in this article: The micro-model in practice and the hollowing-out of the Norwegian model of industrial relations.

The micro-model in practice: Killing the goose that laid the golden egg?

Shortly after the reorganization in 1989, local union representatives raised critique. One example was Arne Rognaldsen, the leader of one of the local branches of the NPF. Despite seeing "some positive consequences of the reorganization," he experienced "too much emphasis on economic and commercial factors, while human considerations are given too little attention" (Posthornet no. 4, 1990:20, our translation). Others saw the delegation of responsibility and authority to lower levels of the organization primarily as a tool for financial management, and not as the stated means to increase the level of co-determination. As stated by union delegates Sissel Helle and Ståle Bjørnseth: "We have not gained more influence" and "co-determination works poorly. We become involved too late, and when we are, the issues are fully or partially settled." They also experienced more emphasis on commercial issues: "We are constantly inculcated that we need to make savings […] It is always the workers on the shop floor who have to pay the price" (Posthornet no. 4, 1990:6, our translation). According to these union delegates, the basic principle of involvement in the transformation process was not fulfilled as co-determination was subsumed efficiency and profitability considerations as final arguments.

The relationship between co-determination and the efforts to increase productivity was not unique to the postal services. In 1985, a public report regarding corporate democracy was published in Norway (NOU 1985:1 "Further development of corporate democracy"). According to Heiret (2003), the report marked a shift in the normative justification for providing employees the right to co-determination. Co-determination was to a greater extent than before seen as a means to improve efficiency and to contribute to the development of enterprises. Cooperation between employers and employees was proclaimed a national advantage in the ever-harder international competition, and co-determination arrangements were seen in the light of competitiveness and an ability to restructure. From the mid-1980s, union representatives increasingly stepped into the role as, in Heiret's (2003:186, our translation) words, "agents of reorganization." During the 1980s and 1990s, the union movement in Norway was in a defensive position, as rationalization and plant closures threatened industrial employment. Union delegates in major corporations used their positions in corporate boards strategically and co-operated with management to secure jobs and profitability. The active participation

of union representatives was, according to Heiret (2007:101, our translation), "most likely a prerequisite for that the major restructuring and downsizing processes that came to characterize Norwegian working life, was conducted without greater resistance from the workers."

The role of union representatives as "agents of reorganization," and their participation in reorganization processes, can be further illustrated by what Colbjørnsen (1981: 53, our translation) has labeled "the dual function of the union": From the members' point of view, union representatives may act both as promoters of workers' interests vis-à-vis management *and* as a regulator that promotes social control between parties with potentially conflicting interests. For the NPF, the role as a regulator may have been strengthened as a consequence of the transformation process, as union delegates to a larger degree than before became involved in the day-to-day operation of the enterprise. In 1989, the leader of a local branch, Erling Sørensen, looking back at 20 years in elected positions, described a "colossal" change in the role as a union delegate, "not the least related to the restructuring of Postverket, and the ensuing delegation of authority and responsibility":

> Branch leaders participate as fully fledged members of the management teams. They help to shape strategies for Postverket to achieve its goals. Union delegates have a huge responsibility to protect members' interests. At the same time, they are expected to create an understanding of necessary actions on Postverket's behalf. In good times this is not so difficult. In a recession, it is much more complicated (Posthornet, no. 4, 1989:24, our translation).

The above statement illustrates what we may call the "dual loyalty" of union representatives (Sejersted, 2005) deriving from the micro model, and how it implies a role as a mediator, which can be difficult to reconcile with safeguarding the experienced interests of members. In a situation where the unions are pushed on the defensive role as a regulator seems to dominate through defining workers' interests as coincident with business profitability, which in turn fosters support for restructuring. The leadership of the NPF appeared as a guarantor for restructuring—promoting the need for reorganization.

Until the early 1990s, critical concerns were only raised by a few local union representatives. However, during the 1990s, the interpretation of the Basic Agreement concerning co-operation, and thus also how it was put into practice, came under criticism even from the NPF leadership. For example, in 1992, the national executive of the NPF claimed "that the attention given to reorganization, de-coupling from the state and business has set aside knowledge of, loyalty to and respect for the rules" (Minutes from National Delegates' Meeting, NPF, 1992:127). According to a declaration from the national executive in 1996, this tendency had been reinforced: "Market requirements, efficiency and financial issues predominate, without a strategy for co-operation […] There is a tendency that an increasing number of managers do not see the value of the culture we used to have" (NPF Annual Report, 1996:42).

What may explain the changes in the relationship between management and the union leadership? Part of the explanation should be sought in how external factors during the 1990s impacted on the relationship between NPF leadership and management. By the mid-1990s, competition had hardened and the government had put increasing pressure on the public sector in general. As the then General Director Pettersen stated

in 1993: "If Postverket is to maintain its position in the market, this will require that decisions, which for some may feel uncomfortable and involve disadvantages, but nevertheless, will have to be implemented with vigour and conviction" (Annual Report Postverket, 1993: 16).

However, it may also be argued that the critique had its origin in the way that the micro-model was transformed with the NPM reforms. According to Hagen and Pape (1997), collective arrangements, including co-determination through union representatives, are incompatible with NPM ideology. This is because the NPM ideology stresses management sovereignty, and that workers' influence should be at the level of the individual. In addition, through the NPM reforms, management was provided with a "tool" for governing based on profitability considerations. As early as 1985, local union representatives who took part in a pilot project expressed their concerns. This project later became the model for the results-based management system across the enterprise, thereby including the union leadership as well. Hence, the changes in the relationship between management and the union leadership were not merely a result of changes in market conditions but also a consequence of changes that came with the NPM reforms, which were introduced through the channels established as part of the micro model. In other words, the reforms must be regarded as a precondition for changes to the relationship between management and the union.

The case of the postal services illustrates that the historical situation in which the micro-model operates is vital. NPM can be seen as the manifestation of neo-liberalism in the public sector, and in the postal services in particular. The changes related to NPM affected the micro model primarily as a process, and by extension, as institutional procedures. As we have seen, consensus and cooperation implied that the NPF itself contributed to the implementation of reforms, thus being partly responsible for the result, which later threatened to undermine core elements of the micro-model. This observation we may call the paradox of the micro-model: The core purpose and value of the micro model, which is claimed to be to foster support for, and cooperation in, reorganization (see, e.g., Hernes, 2007), can undermine elements of it, and thus hollow out the Norwegian model of industrial relations.

Casualization and hollowing out of the micro model in the hospitality sector

Hernes' (2006) chapter on factors that may undermine the Norwegian model pays most attention to the (prevailing) Norwegian ideal of equality and how a segmented labor market would challenge this, but it also mentions reorganization of production, providing fragmentation and outsourcing as examples. We will in the following discuss these challenges to the micro model, and by extension the complex of the Norwegian model of industrial relations, as they manifest themselves in the hospitality sector. It could be argued that central pillars of the Norwegian model of industrial relations have always stood on shaky ground in the hospitality sector, although, as we shall see, the Norwegian model as a discourse or dogma has led to attempts to ensure the development of institutional procedures and understanding paving the way for (undermining) reorganizations. Furthermore, analyzing the dynamics of industrial relations in the hospitality sector is an important task, as it is a major and established part of the growing private services sector.

Although the hospitality sector has not gone through any corresponding transformation as did the postal services, there are some similarities, both when it comes to the consequences of restructuring and to how the Norwegian model of industrial relations, as institutionalized procedures, have been undermined by mechanisms internal to it, and also in how it impacts upon intra-union relations, more specifically between local representatives and union leadership. Regarding the latter, as we saw above, it has been argued that the union leadership often does not understand shifts in power relations, and that they often seek alliance, rather than conflict, with employers, often in restructuring itself. This makes them responsible for the results, as they have not only given their consent, but been part of the implementation, creating splits internally in the union and increasing the vulnerability to future restructuring since it signals that the union will not mobilize to fight it.

As mentioned, central pillars of the model, both as a dogma and as institutionalized procedures, have always stood on a shaky ground in the hospitality sector. However, as pointed out by Gray (2004), there is nothing innate in the sector that causes poor conditions except for precisely the lack of institutions. Historically, unions have put up a fight for such institutions, and there has internationally been a surge in efforts to organize low-wage service workers, such as cleaners and hotel workers, which has become an area for union growth in the US and the UK (Wills, 2008).

According to Berntsen (2010:15), the history of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union in Norway is "from day one a continuous demonstration of how workers in this sector […] have had to make use of strikes, sympathy actions, blockades and boycotts to force reluctant employers to recognize unions and their fundamental demand for collective agreements." In their formative years, it was decided that hotel workers should be organized along industrial rather than occupational lines, meaning that the locus of organization should be the individual hotel workplace (Bertnsen, 2010). This meant that industrial relations were defined and constructed at the workplace level, as is the norm in the Norwegian model of industrial relations with its focus on so-called "vertical organization," as opposed to "horizontal organization" based on occupations or work tasks. As we shall see, this construction of institutional procedures was the first move along a path that would undermine organization in the hospitality sector as outsourcing became a common practice.

Hotels have also historically been exposed to seasonal fluctuations and high worker turnover, thus not providing fertile grounds for establishing long-lasting relationships, neither between management and workers nor between workers. Still, they were often small workplaces, dominated by patriarchal relations between employers and workers (Berntsen, 2010). As part of a union movement still strong and confident after World War II, at its first congress after the war (in 1945), the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union discussed several propositions to the effect that the state should assume ownership of hotels and restaurants in the overall transition to socialism (Bertnsent, 2010). However, efforts at passive revolution were again successful, meaning that unions gave their consent to partake in the project of rebuilding the national economy, disbanding notions of class solidarity for notions of "societal" (i.e., national) solidarity. According to Berntsen (2010), the corporatist compromise soon spelled the opposite of a transition to socialism for workers outside the "core" industrial sectors, namely a more pure form of capitalism.

This became even more prevalent as "organized capitalism" became increasingly dis-organized in the period from 1954 to 1961 with, as we shall see, the consent of the

union movement who took part in "rationalization programs," including in the hospitality sector (Berntsent, 2010). The same period saw a recourse to the "top-level partnerships" we saw in earlier periods, this time between the state, the LO, and the employers' confederation around wage moderation (Berntsen, 2010). For the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union, this meant centralization, and the union leadership was granted the right to bargain and sign collective agreements without balloting members. In addition to ensuring control over wage development, the argument was put forward to members that this would also ensure strategic success in negotiations since the union would come through as more of an authority and as an autonomous agent (Berntsen, 2010). Centralization continued and became even more pronounced when the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union merged with Fellesforbundet (more or less directly translated as *The General Union,* organizing blue-collar workers in the private sector) in 2006. A present-day union delegate we interviewed thus lamented that the union leadership had no respect for members and would not listen to them. In his view, the union movement had throughout the years become highly bureaucratized and passive.

Furthermore, as mentioned, in the 1960s, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union agreed to engage in Taylorist rationalizations in the quest for increased competitiveness and profitability, where the union would gain job security for their members in return (Berntsen, 2010). At a joint conference on the hospitality sector as early as in 1966, outsourcing and labor hire were introduced as ideas for reorganization of production, and at the same time, the union gave their consent and even became a key agent in the dispersion of wage-setting mechanisms based on bonuses and individual efforts with a view to increase productivity in the sector (Berntsen, 2010). It can thus be argued that the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union, by engaging in these concerted efforts with employers, was part of introducing relations of production and wage-setting mechanisms, which fragmented the workplaces, challenging the unity and solidarity of workers and thus undermining the power of the union movement both at the micro and the macro level. While unions, as part of the micro model, are still bent on such cooperation in exchange for job security, the above-mentioned union delegate emphasized that this is now done on even more unequal, unbalanced terms as "management may have their cake and it eat too." In line with Offe and Wiesenthal's (1980) analysis of the tricky balance of securing survival through organizing workers and mobilizing them on the one hand, and ensuring strategic success in negotiations through seeking influence with external guarantors by threatening to take action without realizing it on the other hand, the present-day union delegate referred to above pointed out how Fellesforbundet has a lot of (institutional) power, but that they do not know how to wield it—they are neither willing nor able "to put up a fight" and only want to "take it easy." It can thus be argued that they lack organizational power, defined as the ability to organize and mobilize, which has, arguably, been undermined by the restructuring and rationalization to which the union gave its consent. The union movement has in general not been able to develop the necessary capacity to respond to outsourcing (Wills, 2009), and Hyman argues that the ensuing so-called atypical workers are "painfully difficult to unionize" (Hyman, 2002:13). However, he adds "if indeed unions have even made the attempt." Outsourcing may lead to "interest disaggregation" firstly through the polarization of workers into a core and a periphery, and secondly through resulting in intra- and inter-union conflict over issues of organizing (Hyman, 1992). Again, the path chosen by the union movement in Norway of vertical organization—that is, one

workplace, one union—has created divisions and disputes in the union movement over the issue of the right to organize hotel workers.

Similar to how restructuring in the postal services was introduced by the union leadership, outsourcing was thus, and still is, presented as "inevitable" in an effort to forestall critique among members. For example, an LO official we interviewed stated that "you cannot stop development" and that the "LO cannot stop outsourcing," despite the fact that he also emphasized how outsourcing severely threatens the Norwegian model, especially institutionalized workplace cooperation, which he stated was "important to the LO."

Outsourcing is now becoming the paradigmatic form of employment also in other sectors of the economy (Wills, 2009), and an official in the LO we interviewed identified outsourcing and labor brokering as the LO's biggest challenges. In his view, "it shakes the Norwegian model to its foundations" particularly through its impact on the "core" of the model, namely workers' influence and workplace cooperation since it entails the "exteriorization of economic relationships" and the "devolution of decision-making responsibility to a network of business units" (Hyman, 1999:103; Herod & Aguiar, 2006:428) in "hollow companies" (Sabel cited in Hyman, 1999). In other words, what was once a relation between an employer and a worker is severed by the introduction of a third party. As one of our informants put it, through outsourcing "the link between responsibility and authority is severed." Wills (2009) thus argues that outsourcing has severe implications for traditional union models, based as they are on collective bargaining with employers, since with the introduction of outsourcing unions no longer bargain with the "real employer," that is, the client company (Wills, 2008).

Furthermore, outsourcing entails a "reorganization of the spatial shape of production" and, as a consequence, a spatial reorganization of the relations of production (Massey, 1994:22), challenging the workplace as a locus for industrial relations and organization, on which the Norwegian model, as institutionalized procedures, is built. The LO official we interviewed was thus worried that workers' influence and workplace cooperation would be rendered impossible as workers and employers are separated in space. The effects of this are aggravated in the hospitality sector by the fact that, in hotels, it is often the housekeeping department, which is outsourced, and, as pointed out by the LO official, this is where the majority of hotel workers are working.

An additional concern is that the nature of the business, involving short-term contracts and competition between potential contractors, leads to a breaking up of the mutual dependency between employers and workers which the micro model rests on. Similarly, the result may be that the attachment of workers to their employer, and to their workplace, might weaken. However, as pointed out by Dokka (2012), this is not necessarily the case. In a case study of a hotel which has outsourced housekeeping, she finds that workers feel an attachment to the workplace and the working conditions are better than in another case hotel which has not undergone outsourcing and where the workers are organized. In her case, we can see the Norwegian model operating as a dogma, in its cultural aspects, as Dokka (2012) concludes that the model is well and thriving, despite there being no union present at the workplace. However, as she notes, this state of affairs depends to a large degree on the personality of the hotel manager and on the competitive conditions the hotel finds itself in.

Conclusion

We have, in line with Wahl (2004) argued that union militancy at the start of the 20th century was the prerequisite for the ensuing class compromise. As pointed out by Burawoy (1985:28), "[h]istory suggests […] that the outcome of class struggle mollifies the opposition of interests and frequently coordinates the interests of labour and capital." We have in line with this argued that the material rewards many hold as one of the merits of the Norwegian model of industrial relations, made possible by a specific historical and spatial context, generated, along with rights to co-determination, consent both at the factory/micro and national/macro levels to abandon militancy. That is, these rewards convinced union members and workers that top-level negotiations were rewarding, despite the possible detrimental effects on the ability of future union militancy and mobilization. Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) term this type of union strategy "opportunism," which has the flip-side of favoring success in negotiations over survival through mobilizing members and sustaining militancy. This means that the militancy, or the organizational power, which was necessary to force employers into granting co-determination and material rewards, might have become weakened to the point where it threatens the reproduction even of the institutional power of being "inside the tent" where decisions are made, since this still relies on employers being willing to invite. While the centralized union movement seems to have developed a *dependence* on the model for its future survival, employers, on the other hand, are not dependent on it although they might, to different degrees in space and time, have some *interest* in the (further) existence of it, both as a dogma and institutionalized procedures. Employers may thus now "hollow out" the model by weakening the effects of the institutionalized procedures, while convincing workers and their unions that the meaning and value of the model, as a dogma, have shifted toward creating effective and competitive companies, and that resistance and militancy is counter-productive and negative for all.

The emphasis is on shifts and reorganizations, as crises seldom bring total breakdowns. *Hence, rather than being an empty shell which the unions and the employers' confederation agreed to in light of the culmination of conflict, the model itself is a result of, and thus saturated with, the relations existing at the point of establishment*. This means that the model is sensitive to historical changes and that we need to adopt a dynamic understanding, one based on changing historical subjects.

Two examples of changes that followed in the aftermath of the Fordist crisis have been explored in this article: Firstly, the public sector became an object of change through new public management reforms, involving reduced public spending and privatization (Harvey, 2003, 2006). The NPM can be seen as the manifestation of neo-liberalism in the public sector, and in the postal services in particular. The changes related to NPM affected the micro model primarily as a process, and by extension, as institutionalized procedures.

Analyzing the union strategies in the postal services, we argued that the Norwegian model of industrial relations is a consensus-building mechanism, which ensures that social contradictions are harmonized "within the confines of existing social relations" (Panitch & Gindin, 2000:4). Our analysis shows how such processes of coordinating the interests of labor and capital, by means of the Norwegian model of industrial relations as institutionalized procedures, occur both at the factory/micro and national/macro level, thus (re)producing the social relations that (de)stabilize the institutionalized

aspects of the model. This means that consent is manufactured, and unions will buy into presumptions such as "that neo-liberal prescriptions of efficiency are compatible with social justice" and in the over-riding goal of ensuring competitiveness (Panitch & Gindin, 2000:4). In our view, however, this impacts upon the power of labor and unions in the long run, and, by extension, the conditions for the existence of the model. In other words, the mechanisms of the model may be self-defeating, at least if it relies on a balance of power.

Furthermore, on the basis of experiences in the hotel sector, we identified outsourcing and labor brokering as severe threats to the Norwegian micro model, although the unions were invited into the process, which led to their introduction. However, while the institutionalized procedures are retained at the national level, giving the impression of a well-functioning, highly adaptable model, the necessary institutions and relations are, in many instances, lacking at the workplace level. In other words, we might see a Dorian Grayish development where the model as a dogma, just like Dorian Gray himself, seems to be in perfect health; this shiny surface hides the grim picture, not in the attic in this case, but in the "hidden abode of production."

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