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Research Paper no. 1/05

Collective Action under Globalization

– An Institutionalist Perspective

Steen Scheuer

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Research Papers from the Department of Social Sciences, Roskilde University, Denmark.

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Abstract

Collective action in the form of industrial conflict has declined dramatically since the high tide in the 1970s in Europe. This article argues that this decline is the result of significant changes in both economic and institutional factors, influencing the calculations of employees and of their organizations deliberating collective action. Institutional factors are especially important for understanding still persisting inter-country variance, and they point to a novel industrial conflict calculus for employees. This calculus seems to entail a more restricted use, but not the withering away of the strike.

Abbreviations

CA	collective action
CB	collective bargaining
EA	employers' association(s)
EU	the European Union
HRM	Human Resource Management
IC	industrial conflict
ILO	International Labor Organization
IR	industrial relations
TU	trade union(s)
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WDL	working days lost
WTO	World Trade Organization.

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Collective Action under Globalization – An Institutionalist Perspective

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A. Introduction

In the 1970s, European employers and employees lost on average just over 400 (417) working days for every 1,000 employees due to industrial conflict (IC).[1] In the 1980s this figure dropped to around 200, and in the 1990s, it dropped again to 57 and now in the 2000s, this figure is down to 50 days lost, a ten times drop from the level of the strike-haunted 1970s (Table 0). In absolute figures, the number of working days lost (WDL) due to IC has come tumbling down from 48 million in the 1970s to just 6.7 million days today.

Part of the immediate explanation would seem to be the absence of very large and prolonged strikes, such the British Miners' strike in 1984 and the large strikes in Italy and Spain in the 1970s and 1980s. But even discarding these large strikes, even the underlying trend of shorter and minor strikes seems to be declining: In Denmark, for instance, even discarding large conflicts in the period from 1970 to 2003, the level for WDL has dropped from around 70 per year to 40, i.e. almost by half (Scheuer 2004: 6).

Similarly, while in the 1970s and early 1980s, researchers would write about the 'Resurgence of Class Conflict' (Crouch & Pizzorno 1978) or 'Strikes and Class Conflict in Capitalist Societies' (Korpi 1979), sometimes priding themselves with high, sometimes with low strike levels on their home turf, such language seems to have more or less evaporated from present-day academic publishing. Now, when authors do touch upon the subject, titles come more in versions of 'Peace in Europe' (Edwards & Hyman 1994) or 'The Worst Record in Europe?' (Rigby & Aledo 2001), nothing to be proud of, so it would seem.

Table 0
Average number of working days lost (WDL) per year due to industrial conflict (IC) in 15 European countries. Decades from 1970

Period	Dependent employment	Working days lost	Simpple average	Weighted average
	'000s	*'000s*	*Day lost /1,000*	*Employees*
1970-79	115,342	48,280	351	417
1980-89	129,807	25,947	175	201
1990-99	147,640	8,278	70	57
2000-03	142,511	7,257	44	53

Source: ILO, see appendix.
Note: Simple average is average of averages of countries (average disregarding country size). Weighted average is based on country averages by number in dependent employment. Countries are those with available data for almost the whole period. Countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (Western Germany until 1993), Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

[1] A list of abbreviations is found on page 2.

So whatever happened to strikes? Have strikes and IC really withered away? Are workers so content with wages and conditions that strikes are no longer a reasonable option? Or has the working class simply disappeared as a political force, and the strike with it, as some of the gloomiest pessimists have it (Crouch 2004: 53-7).[2] Not quite. Two things should be borne in mind:

First, newspaper reports about spectacular strikes by workers faced with companies outsourcing production lines to low-pay (or maybe just lower pay) countries are still about. Whether protesting against EU regulations allowing imports of cheaper commodities from inside or outside the EU, against moving production lines to third countries, against the privatization of public enterprises and utilities, or against the closing of factories following other restructuring measures by management, the strike still seems to be one valid form of expression and protest for employees (and not only for blue-collar workers).

Second, pay formation in many European countries still takes the form of some kind of local collective bargaining (CB), and these bargaining processes still seem to contain an impetus for local short-term strike activity, whether official or unofficial. In an interesting study, Elvander has compared local wage formation in four sectors of the economy in Sweden and the UK, coming up with some striking similarities, despite the well-known major institutional differences between the two countries (Elvander 1992).[3]

Changes have taken place, but IC is still a fact of life of European employment relations. In this article I shall attempt to diagnose some of the changes involved and some of their implications, by taking a descriptive macro-comparative look at strikes in Europe in the period from 1970 to 2003, attempting to answer the following empirical questions:

- What is more precisely the incidence and prevalence of strikes in Europe today and what is the extent to which they are declining?
- Do European strike patterns converge or diverge?
- Can we discern 'national models' in the strike patterns observed, i.e. is there a 'Nordic model', a 'Latin model', 'an Anglo-Saxon Model', a 'German Speaking Model', or does this kind of modelling make no sense at all?

Before going into these issues, the next sections contain a theoretical discussion of strikes and IC, their definition and their causes or motivations, seen from different theoretical vantage points. Then follow the comparative analyses, and finally the article discusses which explanations one can plausibly give to the trends we can observe concerning strikes and IC?

[2] In his most recent book, Crouch, the one-time editor with Pizzorno of 'The Resurgence …' (1978) has neither strikes nor IC in the index (Crouch 2004: 128-35).
[3] Unfortunately, this work of Elvander's hasn't been translated into English.

B. The Strike and the Right to Strike

The strike is 'a temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand' (Hyman 1972: 17).

All parts of the definition have significance:

- The strike is *temporary,* i.e. the purpose of the employees by the end of the strike (no matter the outcome of the strike, victory or defeat) is to return to the same work at the employer, and the employer normally expects the same. Longer lasting strikes may still result in the work stoppage becoming permanent, e.g. if the strikers are laid of or if the company goes bankrupt.
- The strike is a special type of collective action (CA), and it involves at least a group of employees, because one individual's work stoppage in protest against something is not considered as a strike.
- It is a complete work stoppage, and by this is different from other types of actions such as work-to-rules or overtime bans.
- It is also important that we are talking about *employees*, since CA from other groups in the society (when for instance French wine growers establish road blockades protesting cheap Italian or Spanish wine, or when students are boycotting classes in schools) are only referred to as strikes as analogy.
- Finally the strike is not an impulsive, but rather a *measured, calculating, and rational action*, used to achieve something (to force through a demand, hamper the demand of the counterpart or express a protest).

The corresponding right of conflict of the employers (and countermeasure to the strike) is the lockout, and the intersection of strikes and lockouts is called labour disputes. Today lockouts generally only occur in connection with large official conflicts over renewal of collective agreements, but it most definitely wasn't always like this (cf. for Scandinavia: Mikkelsen 1998: 269-70).

One of the basic rights, which organized employees and their unions often emphasize, is the right of free bargaining including the right to strike. This right certainly have not always been a given, neither historically in our own part of the world, nor if you take a broader world-view .

This right certainly have not always been a given, neither historically in our own part of the world, nor if you move a little further out – in countries with less democratic governments, e.g. fascist or communist dictatorships. It is well known that it was just as illegal to strike in Franco-Spain as it was in the Soviet Union, even though the reasons in the two places formally were different.

However it is not only the unions and its members who ascribe great significance to the right to strike. In every Democratic state this right is

recognised as something entirely fundamental, even though this recognition has quite different shapes: In some countries the right to strike is explicitly and specifically committed to the legislation, sometimes even in the Constitution (as for instance in Germany and France), in other countries the right to strike springs more implicitly or indirectly from legal practice of the courts and the legislators, as for instance in the UK and in Denmark, where the right to strike has never been laid down by law. The view in these countries have been that what is not directly illegal is allowed, and furthermore – especially in Denmark – that the deal struck in the September Compromise in 1899 (upheld since in every version of the Main Agreement between two main confederations, cf. Due et al. 1994; Scheuer 1998a) about the peace obligation when a collective agreement is in place implies that when there is no CB agreement (as e.g. when the agreement has expired), the peace clause has also expired or is non-existent, and, by implication, employees have the right to strike. This also counts for companies not covered by collective agreements (Due et al. 1994; Scheuer 1998a).

Neither in Denmark nor in the UK has the missing legislation to safeguard the right to strike caused employees not to strike, though. Quite to the contrary over long periods of time these countries been haunted by strikes, and it is therefore tempting to say that this difference between direct and indirect rights to strike does not hold much significance. On the other hand, the fact the in Germany, political strikes are illegal (because they aim not to improve collective agreements, but to influence government or parliament) would appear to be part of the explanation of the substantial and persistent differences between France, Italy and Spain on the one hand and Germany on the other (cf. section F below). Also in the UK, changes in legislation in the 1980s do seem to have had a significant institutional impact (Elgar & Simpson 1993).[4]

Strikes are not without costs, and that definitely goes for both parts of the conflict, and eventually for third parties too, these being the company's subcontractors and customers, patients, clients or pupils, even university students, and also the families of the strikers and society in general. The companies lose earnings and possibly market shares, the employees lose their wages and the unions lose the money they have to spend on supporting the striking workers. Often the strike is used as a threat, certainly among some groups of employees; however deciding whether or not to strike is never easy. Partly there are economic costs, as mentioned above, partly there are costs in the shape of the relationship between the striking employees and the managers is bound to suffer, which might pester the working environment for a short or long period of time after the strike's ending.

As a civic right the strike as a collective right can be considered as basic as the individual right to hand in his resignation, to quit, i.e. to take the 'exit option' (Hirschman 1970). Neither has this right existed at all times and in all societies. During slavery and serfdom the workforce was bound to the employer (the slave-owner, the feudal landlord), and it was basically the same way in the Soviet Union. The resignation is typically

[4] Public-sector strike bans in the USA also have effects, cf. Hebdon & Stern 1998; 2003.

for good, while the strike always is temporary, but it goes equally for both rights that they – to benefit the one who exercises it – that it not necessarily must be exercised, and definitely should not be exercised too often. If the strike is being used to often, then it might become self-destructive, however this might presuppose a specific perspective on society and on the company. Therefore it can be useful to first investigate some of the different perspectives on society and on companies, to understand the different perspectives you find on strikes as a phenomenon.

C. The anatomy of the strike: motivations, explanations

Considering contributions explaining the patterns, outcomes and motivations of IC, theories and perspectives abound. Fundamentally one may view the following strand of theory as the most basic: the unitary perspective, conflict theory, systems theory and CA theory are four basic approaches to the study of IC, and they will be discussed in the following.

THEORIES OF STRIKES AND INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT

1. The unitary perspective (and HRM)
2. Conflict theory
   - 2.a. Pluralist theory
   - 2.b. Marxist theory
3. Systems theory
4. Collective action theory
   - 4.a. Mobilization theory
   - 4.b. Institutionalist labour market theory

In this section, these perspectives will be discussed in the same order as they appear above, and will be decided on how they can be used in understanding and interpreting strikes as phenomenon.

1. The Unitary Perspective (and HRM)

In this perspective the organizations and companies are viewed as based on the fundamental premise that all employees in a company share the same idea about what the goal of the company is, and that every thus basically work towards the same goal. This automatically excludes the existence of conflicts between the employees, or at least conflicts with any fair or legitimate basis.

The assumption is that all employees – by accepting employment in the company – have bound himself or herself to the goal of the company, and that they therefore identify with that or these goals, goals that are often stated as greater profit, greater market share, better quality of own products or own service, and good working conditions. The employees of the company are thereby (or are considered) a team, which must work together on a joint assignment, or in more extreme cases as 'one big family', and in such perspective there is no room for to opposing parties. There is no room for TU and especially strikes in such a perspective on companies, because it essentially is the management's job to make sure that everything works in the best interest of everybody in the team/ the company. The moment the employee decides to sign a contract about making himself available to the company for a salary, the interests of employee and the company are *a priori* identical. This viewpoint is the basis of much economic theory, but as mentioned earlier for some of the rational organizational theory , e.g. for both Taylorism and Elton Mayo's Human Relations School (cf. Brown 1992: 44-6; Hyman & Brough 1975; Scott 2003: 31-82; Scheuer 2000: 43-89), and in more recent organizational theory – if one excepts the Marxist interval in the 1970s, e.g. with Braverman's labour process theory contribution - the concept of open conflicts appears as something clearly negative and most often irrational, nearly pathological (as in for instance Elton Mayo, but in many later contributors too).

Yet strikes and especially conflicts between employees and management *do* occur to a great extent in companies too, how then can this be explained? The explanation with pathology was not very far-reaching after all. In unitary theory this is explained by the fact that one or more of the parties in the companies have not done their job properly. It is not the system as such that is wrong, but the manner in which some actors perform their duties:

- the lack of management skills by management,
- the lack of or poor communication between the different parties about goals or methods,
- the employees' lack of understanding of the concept of shared interests,
- or simply oppositional attitudes by employees, for instance for political reasons.

Conflicts and strikes are therefore in this perspective basically seen as caused by the fact that one or more of the parties have not done their job properly, or that they have an aim, that legitimately does not coincide with the aim of the company. This is a classic theory in economic theory and organizational theory, but it is definitely not outdated. Much of modern management in large, maybe especially American companies like IBM, HP and others, is based on a management philosophy that clearly subscribes to the unitary perspective: It is simply not legitimate to air

views that might collide with the views of the company or the management. Or in other words: There is no room for disagreement, when the management have put forward its views. Modern management philosophies e.g. theories on organizational culture or on Human Resource Management (HRM) are in many cases also considered as belonging to the unitary perspective (e.g. Bratton & Gold 1999).

One consequence of the unitary perspective is a view on open conflicts and strikes as irrational, as something a healthy personnel policy or a good management ought to be able to prevent, or as something that stems from politically motivated opposition activity on the side of show stewards and activists (these being then 'out of pedagogical reach of even the best HRM policy'). Actually you could label the perspective an autocratic or authoritarian perspective, since it monopolizes discourse inside the company, as critique and expressions of special interests is definitely considered illegitimate. A manifestly practiced unitary perspective inside companies is therefore actually often suppressing the legitimate interest of the employees in different areas, sometimes only a few, sometimes several, as the premise of the unitary theory about an ideal world - where the management is taking care of everybody relations, including the ones of the employees, in a fair way – is certainly out of sync with reality most places.

Unitary theorists will say to this that one should make an effort to reach this ideal, while others will argue that the continuingly occurring conflicts (and strikes) in the companies show that have to be other and more fundamental factors playing a part than the parties' lack of understanding of their own interests. In fact an important partial reason with the unitary theorists for the fact that the world do not always behave as they say, is the irrationality of the parties. This however is obviously not satisfying: Of course individuals and small groups can behave irrationally and harm themselves for a longer period of time, but after all it is difficult to imagine that this would go for larger groups of people, e.g. employees in companies.

2. Conflict Theory

Conflict theory and conflict perspectives are based on a more realistic fundamental premise (Clegg 1976; Jackson 1987; Walsh 1983): that conflicts exist in a society and in companies, and that it is necessary to have a theoretical frame and a system of theoretical terminology to understand conflicts not just declare them as irrational or based on subjective, political-irrelevant or simply inferior motives. In IR research the view is that a significant source of conflict is the perception about antagonistic contradiction of interests between owners/management on the one hand and the ordinary employees on the other. In companies conflicts may arise because of differences in value systems, in the understanding of the situation or more basically different interests in the management–employee relationship. This understanding has among other things been the basis of the entire development of the bargaining

system of the labour market, the existence of TU, of collective agreements, of representatives (with job protection) etc.

All this institutional order actually includes an institutionalized accept of the conflict perspective, as the TU legitimately can put forward demands that cut across the goals and interests that the management create. In doing so a institutional legitimizing of a 'counter discourse' takes place, that can make it possible for the employees to openly discuss the things in the company, that are the roots to their dissatisfaction.

Significant strands of conflict theory are (a) pluralist theory and (b) Marxist theory.

2.a. Pluralist theory

A moderate version of the conflict theory is made up of the pluralist theory. Here it is first and foremost acknowledged that occurrences of conflicts are an integrated and legitimate part of society and the companies, since both society and companies must accept that they consist of groups of people, who can have different and at times very divergent conceptions of what their own interests are, what values that should be the basis for the individual as well as for the CA, in society and in the world of work. Thus it is assumed – contrary to Marxist theory – that the interests of the parties at work can be both converging and diverging, and that they will often be converging in some areas and diverging in other. Furthermore contrary to Marxist theory it is assumed that the interests of the actors is expressed by themselves and therefore must be uncovered empirically (the can not be determined by priori, i.e. as a premise that does not have to be proven, as is in for instance Marxism). Finally – and contrary to the unitary perspective – is of course important, that conflicts are not just caused by coincidence or irrationality by the actors, but that difference in opinion in companies can be caused by fundamental different objective conditions or subjective values, i.e. objective differences in working conditions, salary conditions, working hours etc., or in subjective interpretations of these differences or of, which values and norms for good practice ought to be in effect.

The consequence of this view or perspective will be that companies presumably always will be influenced by conflicts and negotiations, in which the more or less contradictory interests and attitudes can be bend and adjusted to one another. In this perspective strikes will then occur, when such negotiations for one reason or the other fail, which may be caused for various reasons. They might also occur, if one of the parties' interests become so deeply violated that this party almost sees it necessary to react more aggressively, e.g. in the case of mass dismissals.

Pluralist theory has many supporters because it fits quite well with reality, and also corresponds to the prevailing democratic model for our understanding of the society. Yet it might be so terribly good at predicting, why some strike more than others, but it points to the need for empirically to map the connection between differences in values and attitudes on the one side and the incidence and prevalence of strikes on the other.

2.b. Marxist theory

One of the best known conflict theories is Marx' economic theory on exploitation and class struggle. Marx' theory states that society basically only consists of two antagonistic social classes, the working class and the bourgeoisie. In this conceptualization workers will always be subject to exploitation, placing them antagonistically in opposition to the owners of capital. Thereby strikes were always well-founded, but this was a moral judgement, not one based upon an assessment of the specific origin of a particular strike, but from the interpretation that the workers have already been 'robbed' by the employers, thus they always have the right to strike in retaliation.

One might have thought that this highly simplified idea had been challenged in the matter that not too many workers themselves have this idea of having been robbed. Marxism's solution to this was to declare that the workers suffered from 'false consciousness' and consequently could not pursue their 'objective interests'.

Marxism is, however, not a consistent conflict theory. The political idea was that when workers had conquered political power then subsequently they would no longer have any reason to strike: thus, it is not surprising that strikes were outlawed in the Soviet Union and in the former Eastern Europe states, quite in parallel with the fascist dictatorships in Europe, e.g. Nazi-Germany, Franco-Spain etc.

As social science theory, Marxism was not particularly useful, since it did not contribute to the explanation of, why some countries had a higher strike frequency than others, why some trade groups were striking more than others etc.

3. Systems theory

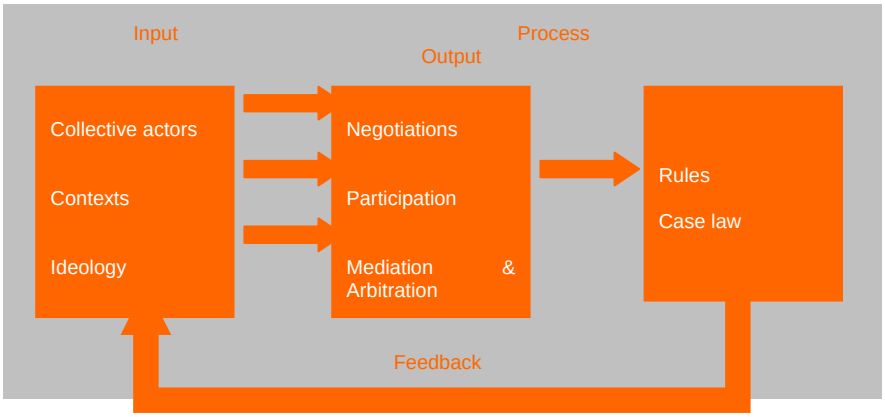
A somewhat different perspective on labour market relations and strikes is put forward in the so-called systems theory, which first and foremost is linked to the American labour market researcher J. T. Dunlop's work (Dunlop 1958, cf. Due et al. 1994)

The main point in systems theory is that the labour market system is viewed as a system, which on the input side consists of collective actors (TU, EA, state bureaucracies etc.), contexts (e.g. technological or economical opportunities or limitations), and ideology, which is the set of ideas that the parties share despite difference in attitudes and interests. The systemic aspect then is the fact that the disagreements, which might exist between the collective actors can be 'played out' and settled in a process field consisting of CB, negotiations, participation, mediation and arbitration. The results of the procedures will typically be rules (e.g. agreement renewals in relation to the CB agreements) and settlements (case law). These rules and settlements feed back to the collective actors and into the system, where it influences these actors and even their

ideologies, resulting (hopefully) in a strengthening of the system, cf. Figure 1.

Systems theory assumes that collective actors exist, and not least that they find it rational to take part in the continuation of the system and not least its expansion. Inside the rules that the system produce; rationality is increased by the shared system, which leads to better functioning labour market. Hence the system will assist in decreasing the incidence and prevalence of strikes and lockouts, because the parties instead of open conflicts rationally will chose less costly and straining ways of settling their conflicting interests, namely through the negotiation and mediation system.

Figure 1.
Dunlop's system model



Source: Green 1994: 7

In one very extensive and encompassing version of systems theory Due et al. assume that a highly system-influenced labour market as the Danish labour market is based on:

1. "a comprehensively organised labour market with strong organisations, both for workers and employers on both sides,
2. a centralized collective bargaining process, leading to the conclusion of agreements which cover virtually the entire Danish labour market […],
3. a *consensus-based relationship* between the opposing organisations, *a relatively low level of work stoppages and other forms of industrial action,* and
4. agreement-based regulation of virtually all conditions on the labour market via the voluntary system of collective bargaining rather than legislation, which is applied only to a very limited extent" (italics added, Due et al. 1994: 12).

The theory may look intuitive, but is blemished by a significant lack of plain and simple realism: To talk of "agreement-based regulation of

virtually all conditions on the labour market" is actually quite unrealistic in any European nation state today: How could unemployment even exist? Would that be decided and regulated by the organizations of employees and employers? Furthermore, while in many countries the relationship between unions and employers' associations could be seen as based on some kind of mutual understanding, speaking of a consensus in *all significant matters* really appears somewhat overdone. That might be stretching the consensus that actually does exist about the rules systems for the outplaying of conflicts (i.e. the procedural relations), a bit too far.

There probably is consensus about (large parts of) the *sets of rules* pertaining to industrial and employment relations, but when it comes to the substance, i.e. the content of collective agreements or the demands related to e.g. pay bargaining, the parties are almost certainly at variance in the majority of cases.

Systems theory predicts that a strong systemic regulation will lead to a low level of IC, *i.e.* the stronger the institutions are, the smaller the incidence and prevalence of strikes will be. We shall return to this issue in the next sections.

More generally one can say about Dunlop's systems theory, that it was developed in the USA in the late 1950s, from the assumption that the system would evolve and become stronger in the decades to come. Unfortunately it is necessary to point out that IR institutions in Dunlop's home country have developed in the diametrically opposite direction. Unionization in the US is at an all-time low, and as a consequence the American institutionalized IR system has become gradually more marginalized - to a level, where CB coverage (which in the US roughly corresponds to the level of unionization) is at 18% of the labour force (Traxler 1994: 173; Visser 1994: 99). The actors – and possibly the employers in particular –in other words have not considered it particularly expedient to act in accordance with the bargaining system, they would rather exclude the TU from the workplaces, in which they to a considerable extent have succeeded. This development is obviously highly unfortunate, but it is also unfortunate for systems theory, because in makes it clear that the theory can not explain why some individual actors, e.g. companies or individual employees, do not wish to become part of a system of collective actors and thus contribute to and participate in the system, and thereby systems theory has made itself blind to some of the weaknesses that may have been built into the American IR system.

Is the theory more suitable for Europe, then? One must be very sceptical here, first because as mentioned earlier systems theory seems blind to the weak sides of the system, but mainly seems to be celebrating it,[5] and second because the theory neither has concepts for the interaction between individual and collective actors, nor for the interaction between the more rational and economic considerations on the one side and the more value based, joined considerations (and changes herein) on the other.

[5] This is expressed in the 'national pride' of those forwarding their national 'models' and ideals for the world to follow.

So even if systems theory has had its share of supporters, and still has some, one must say that it has seen its prime, and is mainly of historical interest today.

4. Collective action theory

Some of the newer sociological and political social theory chooses a somewhat different type of explanation models in viewing IC and strikes, namely the category of theories that often is referred to as CA theory, or the problem of CA). Here the basis of the theory is the fact collective organizations such as TU and EA and CA such as strikes contain a problem or a paradox, namely the fact that participation in e.g. a strike probably in many cases can be for the greater good of (rational for) all the participating workers, while for the individual worker it will often be more profitable (individually rationally) not to participate or contribute. The paradox has been expressed most succinctly by Jon Elster:

- Each individual derives greater benefits under conditions of universal cooperation than under conditions of universal noncooperation, [but]
- Each individual derives more benefits if he abstains from cooperation, regardless of what others do (Elster 1985: 139).

The reason for this is that the result in these cases, benefits, that will be available to everyone, no matter if they have participated and thus always will benefit the individual, while the contribution of the individual is marginal to the collective effort, i.e. to the production of the result (whether 100 or only 99 participate makes no difference for the success of a strike), while the contribution (e.g. in shape of lost salary) is not marginal to the individual.

The existence of collective organizations or CA to represent groups with objectively common interests are therefore not just a given, which is emphasized by the fact that the levels of union density in the Western democracies are extremely different: From 10-15% in for instance the US and France to over 75% in for instance Denmark, Finland and Sweden (Kjellberg 2001; Strøby Jensen 2004: 8; Visser 1999). How one in practice attempts to tackle and solve the problem of CA has hereby become an essential issue in the social sciences (important recent discussions and debates are Gold 1997 and Kelly 1998. See also Crouch 1982; Olson 1965; 1982; Knoke 1988).

For this branch of theory one central issue problem is how one can understand and explain that individual actors unite and act collectively on some occasions and in some situations, but *not* in other. In other words the former theorists somewhat naïve conceptions have been abandoned. The conceptions that collective organizations were 'natural' phenomena, whose existence and activities did not need to be explained,

to see that these activities as socially constructed results of specific human considerations, actions and experiences, and one tries to contribute to the understanding of, in which situations the individual actor voluntarily will hand over his or her resources or time to a group or a collective organization, or participate in a CA, even though certain aspects in the actions of the individual causes it to be seen as a sacrifice for the group. When will the individual make a sacrifice for the group, and when not? And how can the understanding of this contribute to the understanding of the affiliation with collective organizations such as TU (and EA) and with CA such as strikes. Systems theory simply assumes that the actors by nature will act collectively. It is this assumption that the CA theories deal with. Economic theory is also based on rationality assumptions, yet economic theory primarily deals with the individual choices of the actors, while sociological CA theory deals with how human behaviour basically is collective by nature, and is highly influenced by collective actors (cf. Crouch 1982: 41).

Two important contributions to this discussion, especially when in comes to CA and strikes, are the mobilization theory and institutional labour market theory.

4.a. Mobilization theory

This theory or group of theories are based on the assumption that actors, both individual and collective actors, make up their mind about participation in actions based on a number of ponderings of the possible outcome and risks associated with the action. The condition for the individuals interests to peak with the interests of the others, is that there are some shared fundamental interests (i.e. objective collective circumstances), that there is some sort of organization, that there is process involving mobilization of resources, and that there is "opportunity", i.e. an apparently favourable opportunity for CA. This theory is especially linked with American sociologist Charles Tilly (1984; 2004, cf. also the classic Shorter & Tilly 1974; and Tilly & Tilly 1981) and the Swedish sociologist Walter Korpi (Korpi 1984; Korpi & Shalev 1979). In the Scandinavian context, this theory has been represented by Mikkelsen (1992: 28-39).

Mobilization theory however covers other issues than strikes and IC. In recent historical literature it also covers hunger strikes and revolts, and in sociological literature for instance different protest movements, from activism such as occupation of housing and other civil disobedience to collecting signatures and membership of environmental movements etc. (e.g. Knoke 1988;)

Mikkelsen's large study of IC in Scandinavia since 1848 (Mikkelsen 1992) among other things showed that exactly unionization was a crucial prerequisite for the former labour movement to progress from purely spontaneous and improvised (sometimes provoked) types of actions, which often led to defeat. When the workers finally had become organized in TU the problem of CA had been partly solved, and the workers now could work up greater consensus about when to strike, as well as there was greater opportunity to rationally consider if it in a given

situation was wise to strike, and there was also better resources; since the new TU worked up strike funds (as well as sick-benefit associations, funeral funds and unemployment funds, however that is a whole other story).

But why did the workers not become increasingly good at striking as the number of TU members increased? When one supports Tilly's theory with the ground-braking contribution of Walter Korpi, one can put forward the following interpretation. The aim of the strike naturally was to improve the conditions of the working class, however the stronger the TU and the Social Democratic Party became, the more possible it became for the workers to promote the their interests via the parliamentary road, therefore the political strike became less and less necessary and legit. It became less rational to strike, if the same aims could be reached via the political road. This theory has however also been subject to criticism, and the mobilization theory - despite improved explanations for the occurrence of IC and strikes – to a certain extent gives a convincing explanation to comparative strike patterns. Here one has to point out that the theories still have not come that far, and maybe never do.

Theoretically the problem with the mobilization theory is furthermore that it maybe to a to large extent focuses on the political strike and the political revolt, i.e. on historically rather rare occurrences, and to a lesser extent on trade oriented strikes in spite of the fact that they are much more common, either local strikes directed at the individual company or national strikes as a step in the renewal of collective agreements. Hereby the mobilization theory still separated itself quite far from the individual actor and even also from the local collective, the individual TU etc., and took on an almost meta historical view on strikes and CA.

4.b. Institutional labour market theory

This term covers a number of theories, which originate partly in Mancur Olson's book about problems of CA (Olson 1965), partly in Colin Crouch's use of these theories on TU and strikes (Crouch 1982), to which has come a large number of recent theoretical and empirical contributions, which from these describe and analyze the collective organizations and actions of the labour market either nationally or comparatively (i.e. in comparisons between nations (cf. et al Clegg 1976; Edwards & Hyman 1994; Hyman 2000).

According to this theory one should view the individual institutions of the labour market (i.e. its TU, employers' association, labour law, CB agreements, institutions of arbitration and mediation etc.) as a network of rules and regulations, which makes up the frame for both considerations and actions of single actors and collective actors. The understanding of the institutions to some degree draw on Dunlop's systems theory, but moves beyond it, because it does not presume that the actors impulsively and unconditionally join the unions and institutions, but that they on the contrary have the opportunity to chose to act more or less collectively in any given situation. The considerations and actions of the individual should be viewed also in an Olsonian

(Olson 1965) free-rider perspective, as any CA, for instance a strike, contains a significant incentive for the individual to defect. Olson argues that only negative selective incentives may prevent strike breaking when dealing with strikes, while more recent theoretical developments (especially Coleman 1990; Elster 1989; and inspired by this Scheuer 2000) have emphasized how the problems with CA often practically in society are solved on the basis of the existence of shared social norms and values e.g. norms for equality or justice.

This perspective makes it possible to obtain a more differentiated view on TU and strikes: when one compares strike patterns in different nations, then the individual nation's concrete institutional set-up of the labour market plays an important role for the actual strikes patterns, which is why the actors incentive and action patterns are to be analyzed inside the institutional network of rules, which only to a limited extent change over time.

As an example when it comes to strike occurrences one can think of the differences between Denmark and France. In Denmark union density is close to 80%, in France approximately 15% (Visser 1999), and on this basis one might assume that French workers would have very weak capabilities of striking. Nevertheless, this isn't the case at all, as it is well known: In fact, the right to strike in France is laid down in the Constitution, which means that no TU can legally prevent their members from striking. The right to strike is the individual employee's civic right. Peace-clauses are a lot less feasible in France than e.g. in Scandinavia, where they prevail in the organized sections of the labour market.

The theory can also explain why there is such an extremely strong resentment against strike breakers in the labour movement. This is certainly an international phenomenon. Naturally, resentment against non-unionized workers also exists (being 'sent to Coventry', cf. Coleman 1990: 278-85; Elster 1989), but the strike breakers often call out extremely strong feelings of virtually hate. Now why is that?

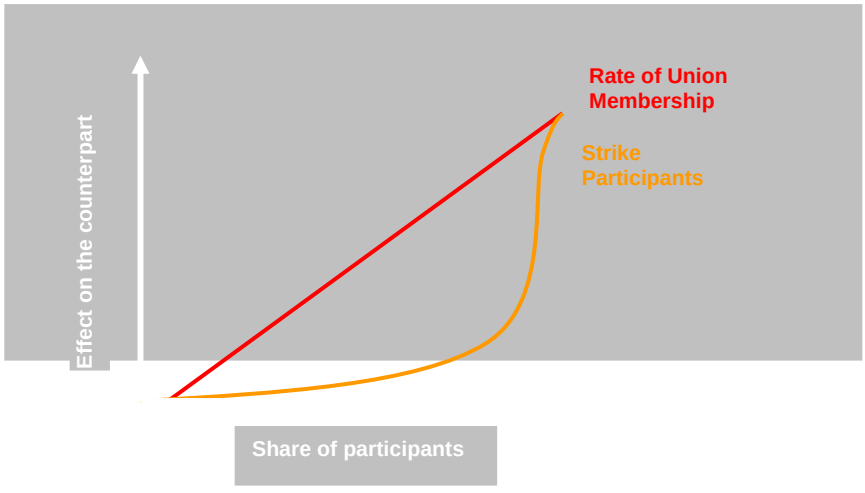
This can be explained if one views the strike in game theoretical light: the strike is a special type of CA game, one which is especially vulnerable to individual defection. If for instance 75% of the workers at the workplace are members of the TU, this is most often more than enough for the TU to obtain a CB agreement and the shop stewards will then often play a dominant role in pay negotiations. The fact that 25% not are members may be a nuisance, but it does not really hamper the shop steward's opportunities to do his job: The more, the better, that is obvious, but one can do all right without the rest.

When it comes to the strike in most occasions this is quite different: here rather few strike breakers – just 5 or 10% - can result in the effect of the strike is virtually equal to none, because a small minority of the workers often can sustain deliveries, for a while at least (shown in Figure 2). Normally it is presumed that the more that contribute to a CA, the greater effect it has on "the counterpart", often viewed as a linear effect. This naturally is a highly simplified assumption (cf. Elster 1989: 17-50), but in relation to strikes it is quite obviously wrong: here, strikers are dependent on the participation (non-defection) of all employees.

Institutional labour market theory finally can explain some of the apparently strange dynamics that has surrounded strikes on the labour market in the 20th century, namely the fact that the labour movement in the early stages mainly used the strike to reach its goals, which could be economic goals, procedural goals (acknowledgement, e.g. entering into a collective agreement), or political goals (protests against political interventions or legislation), while the increasing strength and influence of the TU – especially in the period after the 1970s, cf. below – was accompanied by a general decrease in the strike level. One might ask: Was the decreasing strike level an expression for a weakening of the workers professional consciousness, that the salaried employees would not strike, and that the unions therefore generally were weakened, or did it express that the labour movement – after being acknowledged as legitimate counterpart and partner in the economical and political social game – now had to and could find other ways to influence and results? The latter was the view in the significant contributions by Walter Korpi (Korpi 1984; Korpi & Shalev 1979; see, however, for the views on union roles alternate nationally Hyman 2000). These views from institutional theory appear rather more convincing than e.g. the theories that try to explain strikes from economic conditions. As Stokke & Thörnqvist show (2001: 256-60), the trend in unemployment is for instance not a good explanation for the extent of strikes.

Figure 2.

Theoretical effect on employer of how large a share of workers, who (1) are members of the trade union, and who (2) participate in a strike.



D. Summing it up: The novel IC calculus

Strikes are often based on and have to be understood from rational calculations, imbedded in an institutional system, which to a large extent effects the actual calculation, not necessarily economic calculation however, calculations may be value-based (Hyman & Brough 1975; Scheuer 2000: 20-38). Not all participants in IC will agree on the calculation, but on these occasions the majority rules, since the CA otherwise becomes virtually impossible.

Hence IC may be seen as resulting from or as expressions of:

1. A warning or a frustration in wage negotiations over lack of results (the nurses reoccurring strikes can be led back to this) or warning to the counterpart in connection with the aggressive local wage negotiations with the purpose of forcing the counterpart to confessions (most often conflicts contrary to the agreement), cf. the German term of the "Warnstreik".
2. Frustration over large negative forced conditions, e.g. mass lay-offs in the case of declining markets, often as a futile, yet comprehensible cry for help (cf. the famous Vauxhall episode, which so defamed the survey method in some countries).[6]
3. Failed communication between the parties, misunderstandings, possibly caused by lack of trust.
4. Amateurism with one or both parties.
5. The imbedding of the negotiations in a unsuitable negotiation structure, e.g. when an organization is forced to join a negotiation cartel and subsequently feel run over by the more powerful others, or when a number of small organizations cannot coordinate, but have to negotiate separately, and no one dares take the first step in fear that others later will get more (as elaborated in Scheuer 1993).
6. Brinkmanship by one or both sides of negotiations, leading to mobilization which cannot easily be called off when agreement is reached, as it happened in the Danish General Conflict in 1998 (cf. Scheuer 1998b).
7. Unsuitable organization- and negotiation structure in the shape of competing national unions for basically the same groups of employees, including border conflicts: if strong unions compete for members by bargaining for better results than the competitors have achieved (with same or similar employers), then conflict becomes imminent in the system (this is possibly one of the explanations of the high strike-frequencies in the UK in the 1970s).

[6] At least in some countries, cf. Blackburn 1967: 47-50; Goldthorpe 1966; Goldthorpe et al. 1968: 195-198; Scheuer 2000: 135-9.

To put it in other words, there is nothing normatively or morally 'correct' about the strike in itself or the aim of the strike. Strikes are neither morally right nor morally wrong, even if both of these views by themselves have many supporters, often based on their respective places in the bargaining system or their political views. Whether this is right or wrong will always depend on the analytical understanding of the calculus, the particular concrete situation and the foregoing negotiations.

Often exactly the rational calculation concerning strikes does not seem particularly well thought out, being that the cost the parties in IC inflict on one another easily can exceed the possible gain. This is true when for instance the workers strike in connection with mass lay-offs, like the German automobile workers did in the fall of 2004. Why are they doing it? In some way they are only helping the employers, who then do not have to pay them salary the employers already argue is way too high! The are probably doing it because they feel, that the attention of the public needs to directed at the phenomenon with the high number of jobs being outsourced to third world countries. Another explanation might be that the TU representatives – confronted with a sizeable setback, *e.g.* a firing round – at times rather want to fight and loose than not fight at all.[7]

The thought of rational calculation makes it possible to expect that there will be a decreased striking activity as the markets are being globalized and outsourcing of jobs is made much easier. Workplaces are simply much less protected by national borders than they were in the 1970s. It also makes it fair to expect the European nations to go against convergence, i.e. that their strike patterns become more and more similar.

E. Strikes and Strikers in Europe – Issues and Methodology

This section will take a closer look at the strike patterns, which empirically can be observed in the Western European countries from 1970 up till today. Then intention is to provide a general and comparative, mainly descriptive presentation of the tendencies, which can be observed history-dynamically from the strike haunted 1970s and onwards, and also comparatively for illuminate how the strike patterns of the European labour market possibly differentiate themselves. The following issues will be of particular concern:

- What is more precisely the incidence and prevalence of strikes in Europe today and what is the extent to which they are declining? Are strikes really 'disappearing' or are they reaching a lower, but constant level?

[7] Elster 1989

- Do European strike patterns converge or diverge, as the EU gradually and increasingly influences national labour market legislation and as globalization makes its sway?
- Can we still discern 'national models' in the strike patterns observed, *i.e.* is there a 'Scandinavian model', a 'Latin model', 'an Anglo-Saxon Model', a 'German Speaking Model', or does this kind of modelling make no sense at all?

15 European countries have been selected for the comparative analyses, and in the tables they have been grouped as shown below:

DATA BASE – COUNTRIES SELECTED FOR COMPARATIVE ANALYSES

- **Scandinavia**
  - Denmark
  - Finland
  - Norway
  - Sweden
- **British Isles**
  - Ireland
  - The United Kingdom
- **North-Western Continental Europe**
  - Belgium
  - France
  - The Netherlands
- **Southern Continental Europe**
  - Italy
  - Portugal
  - Spain
- **Central Continental Europe**
  - Austria
  - Germany
  - Switzerland

The reason for this selection is that all these countries have good statistics for all or most of the time periods covered (1970 and onwards), Iceland and Luxemburg have been excluded. For Greece, data in the main do not exist, and for the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, only some have strike data at the ILO and these data do not go further back than to the 1990s.

The data have been drawn from the Statistical Yearbook of the ILO, the International Labour Organization.[8] The procedure and national definitions and delimitations appear in the Appendix.

By the use of these comparisons it is important to be aware that national definition may vary, just as delimitations (e.g. the lower limit for when a strike is included in the statistics) vary quite a bit (cf. Jackson 1987; Stokke 1999: 27; Stokke & Thörnqvist 2001: 250-2; Walsh 1983). In this article no attempts have been made to compensate for these variations, since experiences in doing so show that it does not make much difference. In fact, the ILO statistics are the generally acknowledged resource for this information, even with the limitations that includes.

When one wishes to calculate the strike dimensions in a specific country, the ILO statistics provide different options, each with its advantages and disadvantages:

- the number of IC
- the number of workers involved in IC and
- the number of WDL as a result of these IC.

On the basis of this one can calculate different measures for strikes, e.g. the following

All three measures are used in comparative strike analyses in the theoretical literature, depending on the more particular theoretical interest. Thus, in a recent article about the USA, Morris (2003) applies the number of strikes measure to show how union organization influences strike activity. In this article, the main interest is in how much IC 'disturbs' ordinary production, and therefore, the last of the three measures - WDL – would appear to be the most relevant measure. A further reason for this choice would be that this measure is less ridden by statistical measurement problems than the other two, since differences in the reporting principles and practices of the countries may influence the 'number of strikes' measure more than the number of WDL measure.

For this reason this article mainly focuses on the third measure, WDL, since this must be seen as the most real and realistic measure for the economic and social significance of IC, and at the same time methodically as the most reliable measure (cf. uses in Edwards & Hyman 1994: 252; Stokke & Thörnqvist 2001: 248).

[8] These data are now available via: www.ilo.org, more specifically the statistics are at laborsta.ilo.org, a quite useful site.

F. Decline Whereto?

F.1. The Overall Picture

Table 1 shows the overall picture: Here the share of employees, who have been involved in IC (per 1,000 employees) shown in the top and the number of WDL per 1,000 employed shown at the bottom part, stated as averages for the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s.

It is quite clear from the charts that both the share of participants in IC and especially the number of WDL clearly have been declining markedly in most European countries since the 1970s (where they by the way reached a high point, something the chart does not show, cf. Crouch & Pizzorno 1978)). This is true for the Scandinavian countries, for Ireland and The United Kingdom, but also for some of the Southern European countries, especially Italy and Spain. These countries had strike dimensions (both measured as participating employed and as lost working days), which were almost twice as large as in Northern Europe, so in these countries (Italy and Spain) the decline is certainly much more dramatic. What furthermore appears is that in the middle of the chart (and at the centre of Europe) we find a number of countries, where strike incidence and prevalence are very low, first and foremost in 'the Six' (the founder members of the EU), but also in Switzerland.

By looking at the strike dimensions from today's vantage point, one might conclude that the pattern today is not all that different from what it was in the 1970s (countries in the high end of the scale then are also in the high end today), the variance having grown significantly smaller than in the 1970s. Whatever the causes may be, one cannot fail to conclude that the European labour market conditions – when it comes to IC – is moving significantly towards convergence. Strike patterns become still less differentiated over the thirty year time period from the beginning of the 1970s to today. The differences in IC in the part of existing EU that also were members before the latest expansion to the East, is possibly – with Italy and Spain as late-coming exceptions – are today relatively small. But they are still there, as it will be discussed in the following sections.

F.2. Convergence or divergence?

The following five tables 2-6 show WDL per country over the period from 1970 to 2003, as far as data are available. For the purpose of presentation divided into five country 'groups'. In Table 2 for Scandinavia one sees that Finland has until 1986 a substantial number of years with a quite high number of WDL due to IC, over 1,000 in 1971, 1973, 1976 and again in 1986. After 1986 only twice has the score approached 500 WDL. In Denmark, the peaks are in 1973, 1985 and (perhaps against the general trend) in 1998. The 1998 Great Conflict is in fact the highest number of working days in any country since 1990. The Danish levels are lower than in Finland, but higher than both Norway and Sweden, but at the same time it stands out that Norway and

especially Sweden experienced a small increase in the 1980s and after that Finland and Denmark since the 1970s, for Norway and Sweden since the 1980s clearly have been approaching approximately the same low level. If Norway and Sweden had more stabile labour markets in the 1970s than Denmark and especially Finland this difference has been completely levelled after the year 2000.

The trend for the British Isles (Ireland and the UK, cf. Table 3) is almost completely alike and in reality very close to the Finnish development: A somewhat tumultuous labour market in the 1970s became more peaceful in the 1980s, and in the 1990s conflict level is as low as the level of the Central European countries, which also continues in the 2000s. The chart especially for the UK shows the big labour disputes, partly in the 1970s up to the point in 1979 when the Labour government was replaced by the series of conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher, the downward trend becoming interrupted in 1984 by the Miners' strike. The return of New Labour under Tony Blair has not broken this trend. In the UK, there seems, however surprisingly, almost to be industrial 'peace in our time'.

In North-Western Continental Europe (Table 4) a similar trend can be seen, both in the cases of France and Belgium. The Netherlands have a lower level.[9] The table does show a rather different structure for the IC, since the highpoints are certainly not at big as in Scandinavia or on the British Isles, and the period since 1982 seems very peaceful and even, excepting one 'blip' in the Netherlands in 1995. Furthermore there are indications of an increasing trend in France in the most recent years, something which places France marginally higher on the aggregate scale than the other countries shown here, and also higher than the UK (cf. Table 11 below).

As for Southern Continental Europe (Table 5) it can be seen that Spain and Italy as mentioned earlier had an extremely high level in the 1970s, but in this case there has been a drop, a very extreme drop actually, even though Spain has maintained a level for IC that almost corresponds to the Belgian-French in the 1970s. Portugal on the other hand has a quite peaceful labour market. What comes forward, especially for Spain, is a pattern of 'waves' and very big disputes: The first ones appear in the wake of the democratization era after the death of Franco, but again in 1988 and in the beginning of the 1990s significant highpoints occur, with over 600 WDL (for a discussion, see Rigby & Aledo 2001). The Italian pattern has quite different origins and explanations, probably partly to do with the state's role in upholding employment (cf. Franzosi 1995).

Finally we have Central Continental Europe, Germany, Switzerland and Austria (Table 6). The level for these three countries is extremely low, and it has been that way always. This may be a surprise so some, since sometimes IC erupts in *e.g.* Germany receiving substantial media coverage, as most recently in the case of the Opel workers in October

[9] Please note that the scale on the vertical axis in the Figures 2-6 is not is the same: the strike level measured as the number of WDL in e.g. France is less than a third of e.g. the British.

2004 going a dispute about the outsourcing of jobs. The numbers then show that when one leaves out these mega disputes, the German labour market and those of Austria and Switzerland too are only hardly ever marred by IC. Even here certain years clearly appear as highpoints. Concerning Germany highpoints were 1971, 1978 and 1984. The latter was the year with big labour battles caused by the implementation of the 35-hour week. As we know the trade-union movement was victorious in these battles. Today these accomplishments are being rolled back in Germany, but that is a different story. Austria did however break its record completely in 2003: completely in contradiction to its own tradition, a number of very large conflicts erupted in Austria in 2003, in the main political strikes against the government's planned pension reforms. The Austrian Trade Union Confederation, the ÖGB, organized a number of very large protest strikes (similar to what is more often seen in France), the most far-reaching since World War II. Added to this, there were major strike outbreaks in the railways and the Austrian Airlines, resulting in an aggregate loss of 1.3 million working days, or 400 WDL per 1,000 employees.[10]

Table 7 shows the decade averages of all the countries into one table: this makes it possible to compare both vertically and horizontally. The clear picture again becomes one of convergence and of a clearly falling level of IC: In the 1970s countries like Italy, Spain, Ireland, the UK and Finland had a very high level, while Denmark, Belgium and France were in the middle group. Today the level is much more similar and naturally much lower. Convergence reigns much more, as much as the days of the great numbers of WDL are over. This does not imply that such conflicts are all but over, though.

F.3. The European league table, then and now

A different way of viewing this development – a way that focuses especially on the differences between the European countries – is to look at rankings. If there is s general downward trend in strike activity, it is interesting to see whether this trend influences all countries in equal measure, or if some countries change place over the decades. Thus, in the 1970s (table 8) Spain and Italy were positioned in the top, with the UK, Finland and Ireland at a high medium level, Denmark, Belgium and France are in the middle, while Switzerland, Portugal, Holland, Sweden, Norway and Germany are all in the very low end. Does this pattern persevere? To some extent it does.

Looking at the 1980s (table 9), the league table is still headed by the same five countries (Spain, Italy, Finland, the UK and Ireland), while in the middle, countries like Sweden, Norway have moved somewhat up the scale from their very low levels in the 1970s. Maybe the 'resurgence of class conflict' came a bit later here? Otherwise, the overall ranking hasn't changed much.

[10] Se the description by the European Industrial Relations Observatory On-Line at: http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2004/01/feature/at0401203f.html

In the 1990s (table 10), Spain is still the most strike-prone country, but some large conflicts in Denmark and Finland have moved these two countries to the second and third place. In Denmark, just one official conflict (almost a general strike) incurred a levy of 1,178 WDL per 1,000 employees,[11] the highest number for any European country since 1990. The UK, France and Portugal, on the other hand, have become much more peaceful. Also Norway has moved up the scale, although not due to increase in the strike activity of the Norwegians, but because strike levels dropped by more in most of the other countries than in Norway.

Finally in the 2000s (table 11) – with the lowest general level for WDL – we find again Spain, Italy and Finland among the top five, as in the 1970s, but now Norway is among the 'top' countries, due to a very large conflict in 2000. Also, as a novelty, Austria has taken the second place that was occupied by Denmark in the 1990s. At the very bottom, the least strike-ridden countries are (in ascending order): Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Portugal.

A general conclusion on the country variation patterns would be that while some countries persevere in their position in the league table, in the high (Spain, Italy and Finland) or in the low end (Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and to some extent Portugal), others do change places and significantly so: Denmark is usually in the middle, but was high ranking in the 1990s, the UK used to be one of the most strike-ridden, but since the 1990s it is now in the middle or just below, while Norway seems to have moved relatively, in the opposite direction. Austria of course is a complete surprise.

F.4. Why the Overall Declining Trend in Strikes?

Finally, this article will discuss two aspects of the patterns detected: first, a discussion of potential explanatory factors behind the decline in strikes, and second some possible considerations concerning the still prevailing country differences. Some of the explanations suggested in the literature are the following:

- *Declining union density:* The most evident one that comes to mind would be the general weakening of TU organization in Europe, first and foremost the decline in union densities. This decline is described in many sources (Ebbinghaus & Visser 2000; Visser 1991; 1994; for the USA, see e.g. Kaufman 2004: 53), but it cannot really be the only explanatory factor: the fact is that even in countries with stable union densities in the period, strike levels have dropped significantly.
- *Declining CB coverage:* Coverage has declined in some countries: in Germany in the period just from 1995 to 2001 from 83 to 71% in the West and from 73 to 56% in the East and in the UK in the period from 1984 to 1998 from 66 to 42%, quite significant

[11] In total about 3.1 million WDL in ten days.

rates of decline).[12] But in most other countries, as Traxler (1994) has shown, there is not a trend towards a general declining bargaining coverage. Countries with extension clauses and with extensive uses of them (Austria, France etc.) have not reduced their uses, while most countries with a less legalistic approach to CB coverage (such the Scandinavian countries) have not experienced this kind of decline.

- *Globalization with less state intervention and national protection:* The existence and the strengthening of the EU, in combination with the gradually increasing impact of WTO imply less state protection of national companies and industries and less state financial intervention. The implication is that striking for state support to *e.g.* shipyards today has much less of an appeal to workers than it used to. At the same time, globalized competition means that some employees may face losing their work to third countries, should they strike too extensively. That globalization plays a role in pulling out the teeth of the labour movement and especially of the strike weapon is probably true in the general sense.

- *Sectoral and occupational changes:* While any mention of a change from the production to the service economy might appear as old news, the ever-increasing trend from employment from manual worker to salaried employee may play a role, but the direction is ambiguous. Increased public employment may in fact increase the tendency to strike (due to the strong centralization on the part of the employer and the better employment security), while increases in the private service and the knowledge economy may pull in the opposite direction.

- *Individualization:* This more general sociological factor may also contribute, although it is of course difficult to say why today's employees should be so much more individualistic, and when that particular change took place. However, individualism may have better room for manoeuvre in a setting as today's, making strikes a less attractive option, with the sacrifices involved.

F.5. Strike Patterns: The 'many cases of Europe'

Why do strike patterns differ in Europe, and why do these patterns seem to persist? Looking at the patterns analyzed above, it is tempting to state that we have in one end two countries with relatively quite high strike frequencies, Spain and Italy. Explanations for the perseverance of striking in these countries have been discussed elsewhere (Franzosi 1995; Rigby & Aledo 2001). While these authors point to several important factors at play, the most important one appears to be the fact that in sectoral bargaining, striking plays an almost integral role. In other

[12] In the UK private sector from 48 to 25%. For Germany, see Müller-Jentsch & Weitbrecht (ed., 2003: 195); for the UK, see Millward et al. (2000: 96).

countries, such as the UK and the Scandinavian ones, pay bargaining including unofficial strikes typically takes place at the workplace level, something which doesn't mean that they disappear, but that when they break out, it is only in a minority of companies and thus the toll in WDL becomes much smaller. Another factor seems to be political strikes, which have all but disappeared in Northern Europe, but which are still a fact of life in Italian and Spanish IR. It is tempting also to mention the very high employment security for workers in Spain and Italy (in Spain a legacy of corporatist Franco-Spain), which makes it a lot less risky for workers to go on strike.

In the other end of the spectrum we find a number of countries with very low strike frequencies, both in absolute and relative terms: Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium and to some extent also Portugal. These are countries where there is no tradition of large political strikes, and where sectoral bargaining (under the theme of the "Tarifautonomie", cf. Jacobi 2003), generally takes place without strikes or with strikes only few and far between. There are exceptions to this, especially Germany does have individual years with a larger number of WDL, but it comes nowhere near the tables with large losses in Southern Europe or in Scandinavia. It is interesting that the most recent English-language introduction to German IR only makes a few passing references to the issue of IC at all (Müller-Jentsch & Weitbrecht, ed. 2003). One part of the explanation for the extraordinary labour peace in these countries might be (for Germany) the works council system, which gives employees much more say in the everyday business of their companies, and thus makes striking 'against oneself' appear meaningless.

Finally, we have a number of European countries of the 'middle range', where there is some, but not overwhelmingly much IC. These include France, Ireland, the UK and all four Scandinavian countries. Here, strikes are still in use either in the recurring processes of local workplace pay bargaining, or as a political means of protest (or both). However, the uses of strikes in local bargaining or in connection with political protests (the latter mainly concerns France) is – contrary to what is the case in Spain and Italy – irregular and non-recurring: while local pay bargaining is recurring, it only sometimes gives rise to IC. Trade unions and EA therefore constantly monitor the area in order to contain the eruptions that do occur, something which in France is left to the politicians.

It is worth noticing here that countries, whose institutional organization of the labour market are even quite different, as for instance those of the Scandinavian countries, France and the UK, today have levels for IC that hardly are distinguishable.[13] France has the constitutional right to strike, the Scandinavian neighbours have the embargo on striking and lock-outs, and in the UK they have neither of these. What do these institutional differences mean to the general occurrence of IC? Apparently they do not mean a lot. If the workers wish to strike, the specific national institutional rules apparently is of little significance. This however can hardly be the truth, since the patterns in IC can be

[13] This is in some ways surprising, and some observers might say that close study would reveal how legislation influences the pattern of strikes in the various countries. In the US, public sector strike bans have been shown to have effects (Hebdon & Stern 2003).

quite different, and as a lack of national rules naturally must be considered as potentially highly influential on the level.

One might argue that high levels of striking, as in the 1970s, are unhealthy and self-defeating in a globalized economy as the one we have today. It's a little like the right to quit a job: we consider it a basic democratic right and would consider it an infringement on individual and democratic rights if someone would politically try to take this right away. On the other hand, the individual employee when he or she quits (without another job at hand), always runs a risk and doing so repeatedly can also turn self-defeating. So the right to strike is there and is important, but extensive use is a symptom of ailments in the IR system.

That is why it is fundamentally wrong to say *e.g.* that Scandinavia qua 'the Danish model' has an especially peaceful labour market, as it is sometimes claimed by various 'model defenders' (Due et al. 1994). As Stokke has emphasised (1999: 28-30), IC of the Scandinavian countries have a level quite close to most other European countries.

G. An attempted conclusion: Peace in our time?

But what do the generally falling trends in IC mean? Will the labour the IC wither away or dry up in a not too distant future? Are strikes an extremely out-dated way of fighting? Or will the right to strike and the strike as a weapon on the other hand have to be used once in awhile if we are not to forget about it completely? Or can situations still occur, where the strike as a form of action still today and in the future will be the legitimate expression for the collective interest or collective protest of a specific group? Will there be "Peace in our time"? Or will the companies also in the future have to balance on the risk of conflict, when the collective agreements are to be renewed, or when the local wage negotiations take place?

One could believe in "Peace in our time". The strike figures are actually extremely small: The European strike level in the 2000s corresponds to 43 WDL annually for every 1.000 employees (who each work approx. 225 days a year), the loss of workdays due to strikes in other words make up barely 0,02% of all possible workdays or less than one fifth per thousand!

On the other hand it is also easy to see from the analyses that the level of conflict in most countries seems to be declining from the 1970s to the 1990s, but from then on not really declining much further. One might interpret this trend in the way that the level of IC in Europe has dropped and converged to a level close to the level of France, the UK and Scandinavia, where it has then stabilized. The occurrence of spectacular strikes in connection with workplace closures and outsourcing is something, which may prevent the level from going towards nil, and these kinds of actions bring the attention of the public to processes that hit the employees, who otherwise may not have so much attention from the media.

In a more general vein, one might ask for explanations in these patterns of two things that stand out: the generally declining level of IC and the persisting and substantial variation between European labour markets: IC levels in the 1970s and today relate by a factor of 8/1, and IC in 'high level countries' (Spain and Italy) relate to those in 'low level countries' (Germany, the Netherlands, by a factor of at least 30/1. These are substantial declines and substantial national differences. How can one explain this?

Figure 3.
Effects of economic and sociological-institutional factors in explaining strike variations in Europe.

	Decline	Variation
Unemployment	0	0
Union density	(+)	0
CB coverage	(+)	0
Labour law (changes in)	(+)	+
Changes in market protection	+	0
Embeddedness	+	+

Note: Effects are denoted as 0 = No effect; (+) = slight effect; + = clear effect.

In Figure 3, six of the most important factors from the literature have been indicated, and my judgement of their importance has been given.

- *Unemployment levels* play a substantial role in the economic literature, e.g. in the Ashenfelter and Johnson model (1969).[14] Judging from the patterns, it is quite clear, however, that neither the decline in IC nor the intra-national variation could be explained by unemployment. While IC fell in concert with increasing unemployment in the 1970s, the reversal of employment in the 1980s and onwards was not accompanied by increasing strike activity, neither generally nor in those countries benefiting most from improved employment conditions.
- *Union density and CB coverage* may have had a slight effect on IC levels: both have been declining, especially density and this trend has not been reversed. As for the variation, however, it is certainly difficult to discern and connections between any of these two factors and IC: Both France and Germany have quite high CB coverage, but their IC levels vary substantially.
- *Labour law and changes in labour law* has achieved some merit in the literature (Elgar & Simpson 1993; Hebdon & Stern 1998;

[14] For a discussion of this model's merits in the Italian case, see Franzosi 1995: 30-55.

2003), and clearly, especially for the variation between the European countries, national labour law has a substantial say.

- *Changes in market protection,* meaning opening of national markets both due to EU regulation and to WTO arrangements, i.e. globalization probably plays a major role in explaining the decline in IC levels. Today, striking is much more risky for employees than it was in the 1970s, because short delivery times and Just-In-Time Logistics makes it a viable asset for a company to always deliver on time. These changes do nothing, however, to help us explain national variations.
- *Embeddedness,* or history, i.e. predicting the IC level in one particular from the level the year or years before, seems to be an important factor. A tradition of IC in particular companies or industries becomes embedded as a 'tradition', which it then becomes legitimate to draw upon in particular situations.

Thus, institutional factors seem to play a substantial role: legal-regulative institutions play a role in the dynamics of IC, while normative or cultural-cognitive institutions play a role in explaining national variation (cf. Scott 2001: 52).

Finally, one could remark that strikes are most often a manifestation, maybe a cry for help, and the most important work in most cases begins after the strike: Employees can force the management to sit down at the negotiating table (again), however subsequently they after all have to find a solution through negotiation, a solution that will save their jobs, improve their pay or other conditions, they may be dissatisfied with.

As a fundamental civic right the right to strike still is significant, but the actual occurrence of strikes can definitely not be seen as a simple expression for neither the strength of the labour movement (of for its weakness for that matter), as Korpi and Shalev have so eloquently pointed out. They must, however, be seen as an expression for the embedding of the actors in nationally specific negotiation relations, and their more or less rational action inside these.

Strikes may presumably always be seen as the beginning of a process, not the end: By striking a group of employees can set a new agenda or put new things on the existing agenda. That way strikes have actually often been used. However, one can not strike his way all the way to victory. The victories are won at the negotiating tables, where the strike threat at times can be a useful piece to play in negotiations, which however instantly loses its value when it is played. Negotiation victories include admissions from both sides, and it is a negotiation process, which leads to that, which is difficult to unite with strikes and lockouts, where feeling are riding high, and the parties may have difficulties acting and considering things completely rationally.

In other countries other solutions have been found (partly) to the same problems. The strike is still a significant civic right, but more as a type of emergency right than an "everyday right". The rationally institutional labour market perspective can bring us quite far in the understanding of,

why open conflicts break out some times, and why one in other cases (luckily in most cases) can find the solution to the problem at the negotiating table.

H. Appendix

The strike level in 15 European countries – References and methodology

All data are from ILO (the International Labor Organization), cf. the website http://laborsta.ilo.org (see however Germany)

The calculations have been made by:

Working days lost due to IC per year:

> (The number of lost days due to IC year 1 / Number of employees year 1) * 1,000

Working days lost due to IC per period:

> (((Number of lost days due to IC year 1 / Number of employees year 1) / 1,000) + ((Number of lost days due to IC year 2 / Number of employees year 2) * 1,000) + ((The number of lost days due to IC year n / number of employees year n) * 1,000)) / n, where n is the number of years

Number of participants in IC per period:

> (Participants in IC per period/ number of employees in the same period) * 1,000

If nothing else is noted, averages are calculated from the following four periods:

- 1970s: 1970-1979,
- 1980s: 1980-1989,
- 1990s: 1990-1999,
- 2000s: 2000-2003,

All years included see however notes on the individual countries below.

Strikes and lockouts include the following types, where nothing else is noted:

- Constitutional strikes
- Unofficial (or Wildcat) strikes
- Sympathy strikes
- Political strikes or protest strikes
- General strikes
- Work stoppages initiated by employers
- Rotating or revolving strikes
- Sit-ins
- Work to rule
- Go-slows
- Overtime bans

Both workers directly and indirectly involved are included

If nothing else has been noted, both workers directly and indirectly involved are included in the strike figures. In addition to regular paid employees, including part-time workers the statistics cover temporary, casual and seasonal workers. Unpaid family workers are not included, nor are workers who are laid off or workers absent on sick or annual leave or absent for any other reason.

Below are the countries, which are included in the charts, mentioned in alphabetical order with the special conditions that apply to the figures for the specific country.

Austria

From 1976-1993 independents and self-employed are not included the total employment. The number of workers involved is based on an 8-hour workday. Unofficial (or wildcat) strikes and lockouts, working to rule, go-slows, overtime bans and sit-ins are not included in the statistics. The statistics only include employees, who are directly involved.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Total employment: 1970-1975

Employees involved: 1970

WDL: 1970, 1993

Belgium

The total employment is calculated from the total number of people 15 years or older, and only includes regular paid employees, and includes the professional part of the army. The charts concerning strikes and lockouts, involved number of employees, and WDL only comprise the private sector. Sympathy strikes, work to rule, and overtime bans are not included in the statistics.

Due to lack of data the calculations made exclude the following years:

Involved number of employees: 1981-1984, 1986, 1987, 2003

WDL: 1981-1984, 1986, 1987, 1999, 2001-2003

Denmark

The total employment is calculated from the group age 15 to 66, after 1994 it also includes people from 66 to 74 years of age. Before 1984 only the civilian workforce (i.e. the non-military) is included. Until 1995 strikes and lockout are not included, if the total number of WDL is less than 100. The WDL figures are all rounded off to the nearest 100. Work to rule, go-slows, overtime bans, and sit-ins are not included.

Because of lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Total employment: 1970, 1971, 1980, and 1982

Involved number of employees: 1970

WDL: 1970

Finland

The total employment is calculated from the group age 15 to 74. Up until 1976 the professional part of the army is included too. Only strikes and lockouts that last longer than one hour are included. Strikes also include blockades.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Involved number of employees: 1970

WDL: 1970

France

The total employment is in 1970 to 1990 calculated from the total number of people 15 years or older. From 1991-2002 the total employment is only calculated from the civilian workforce. Local strikes and lockouts are includes, so that each company counts as *one* strike or lockout. Agriculture and civil service are not included. WDL are all rounded off to the nearest 100. Strikes and lockouts have to have lasted at least one day to be included. Lockouts, work to rule, go-slows, and overtime bans are not included.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Total employment: 2003

Employees involved: 1970, 2003

WDL: 1970, 2002 and 2003

Germany

The calculations for total employment are based on everybody aged 15 or older. Prior to 1990 the total employment only includes the former West Germany (these data are from OECD: www.oecd.org).[15] Up until 1993 the number of WDL caused by IC only includes West Germany. As strikers are only included employees, who are involved directly, and only work stoppages initiated by employers, where at least 10 employees are involved, and which lasts more than one day. Strikes, which last less than one day, are only included if more than 100 workdays are lost. Concerning employees involved the public sector and conscripts are not included. Lockouts, working to rule, go-slows, overtime bans and passive resistance are not included in the statistics. Trainees are included. Employees absent on sick or annual leave or absent for any other reason, e.g. education, are included.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

WDL: 1970

Ireland

The total employment is calculated from the total number of people 15 years or older. From 1986 only the civilian workforce is included. Strikes and lockouts, which lasted less than one day or with the number of aggregate days less than 10, are not included. Employees, who are sent home because of the strike and unpaid family employees are not included, nor are employees who are laid off or employees absent on sick or annual leave or absent for any other reason. Work to rule, go-slows, and overtime bans are not included.

[15] The exact website address is: www1.oecd.org/scripts/cde/members/lfsdataauthenticate.asp

Due to lack of data the calculations made do not include the following years:

Employees involved: 1970, and 2003

WDL: 1970

Italy

The calculations for the total employment are based on everybody 15 years or older and also include conscripts. Before 1974 are political strikes not included. Concerning the number of employees involved; the years 1971 and 1974 are without political strikes. All figures between 1971 and 1995 have been rounded off to the nearest 1000 and from 1996 rounded off to the nearest 100 before being included in the calculation. The calculations for the number of WDL are based on 7-hour workdays and all figures have been rounded off to the nearest 100 before the comparison with the total number of employees. Work to rule and overtime bans are not included in the statistics. Furthermore, sit-ins have not been categorized. The statistics only include employees, who are directly involved. In the case of lockouts the employers are included as well.

Due to the lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Employees involved: 1970

WDL: 1970

The Netherlands

The total employment is calculated from the group age 15 to 64. In 1981 age 14 is included though and from 1981 to 1987 all people over 15 years of age are included. Work to rule, go-slows, overtime bans and sit-ins are not included in the statistics.

Due to lack of data the calculations made do not include the following years:

Total employment: 1970-1976, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 2003

Employees involved: 1970, 2002, and 2003

WDL: 1970, 2003

Norway:

The calculation of the total employment is based on group age 15 to 74. Until 1980 the professional part of the army is included. Before 1986 unpaid family employees, who work less than ten hours, are not included. Strikes and lockouts which last less than *one* day are not included. Only employees who are directly involved are included. Work to rule, go-slows, overtime bans and sit-ins are not included.

Due to the lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Total employment: 1970 and 1971

Employees involved: 1970

WDL: 1970

Portugal

The calculations made for the total employment are based on the civilian workforce. Strikes and lockouts that last less than one day are not included and are not included in the number of employees involved. International organizations and embassies are not included. Strikes also include "bouchon" strikes (rotating or revolving strikes). Working to rule, go-slows and overtime bans are not included.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Employees involved: 1970

WDL: 1970, 2003

Spain

Strikes and lockouts, which last less than one hour, are not included in the calculations. From 1976 to 1995 the total employment neither includes the self-employed nor the independent employees. From 1996 to 2003 the total employment is based on everybody 16 years or older. In the same time period independents and the self-employed are included, however the conscripts are not included in the total employment. Up until 1990 lockouts and the Basque country are not included. From 1983-1985 Catalonia is not included. Up until 1988 public servants did not have the right to strike, and they are therefore not included in the statistics. It is prohibited to strike in the army. Sit-ins and working to rule are not included. Only employees who are directly involved are included in the statistics.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Total employment: 1970-1975

Employees involved: 1970, 2003

WDL: 1970

Sweden

The total employment is based on the group aged 16 to 64 years. Before 1986 it is based on the group age 16 to 74, though. The professional part of the army is included. Unpaid family employees, who work less than 15 hours, are not included. Strikes and lockouts, which last less than 8 hours, are not included. Only employees, who are involved directly, are included. Employees absent on sick or annual leave or absent for any other reason, e.g. education, are included. Unpaid family employees and employees laid off are not included. Working to rule, go-slows and overtime bans are not included.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Employees involved: 1970

WDL: 1970

United Kingdom

The total employment does not include independents and the self-employed. The number of employees involved has been rounded off to the nearest 100, before being compared to the total number of employees. Strikes and lockouts with less than ten

employees involved or which last less than *one* day are not included, unless the total number of WDL is more than 100. Political or protest strikes, working to rule, go-slows and overtime bans are not included. Employees, who are indirectly involved, are here defined as those who do not participate, but cannot work because of the strike or lockout. Employees, who work at the same workplace but cannot work because of the strike, are included as employees directly involved. Employees at other workplaces, who are indirectly affected by the strike, e.g. because missing deliveries of materials or missing sales, are not included.

Due to lack of data the calculations do not include the following years:

Employees involved: 1970

WDL: 1970

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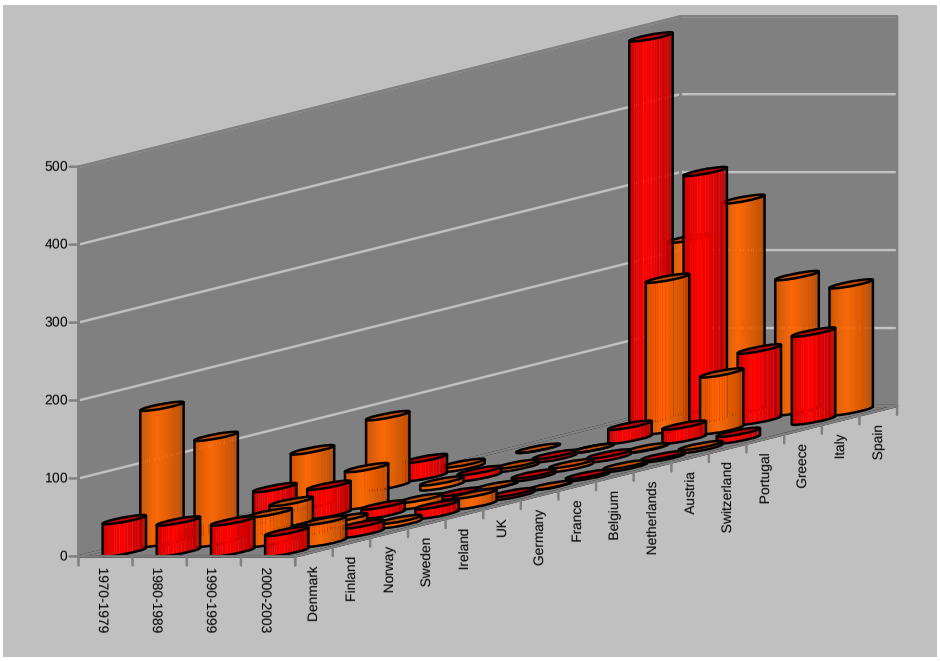
Tables

Table 1
Number of participants in IC per 1,000 employees (top section) and number of WDL due to IC (bottom section).



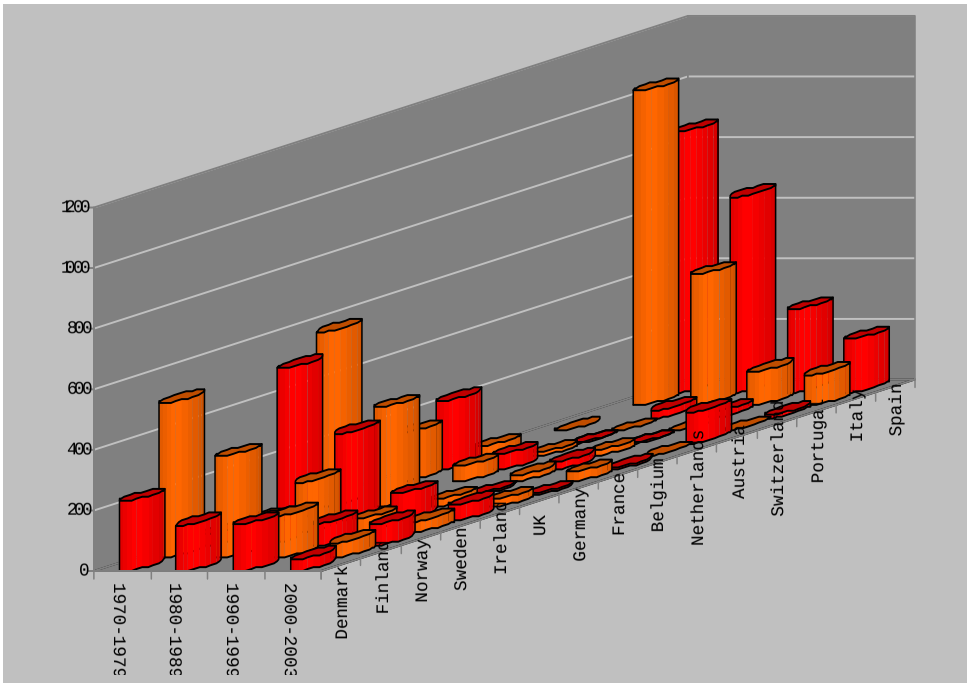


Table 2
Trend for Scandinavia
WDL per 1,000 employees per year

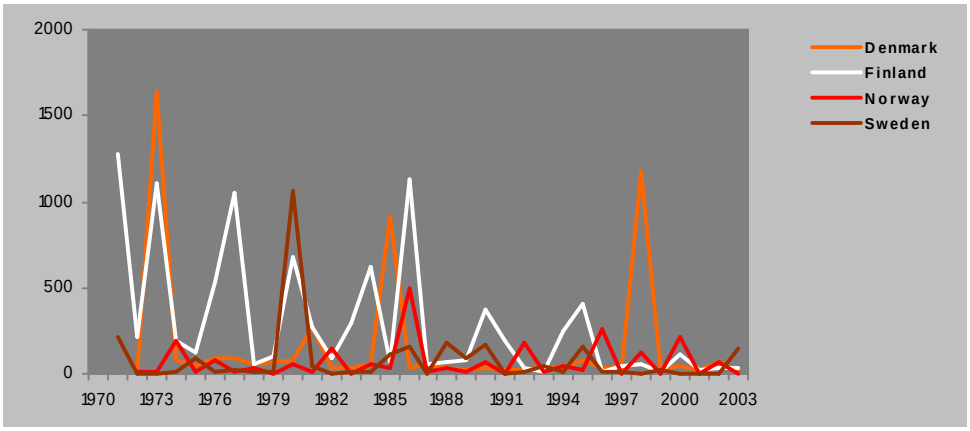


Table 3
Trend for British Isles
WDL per 1,000 employees per year

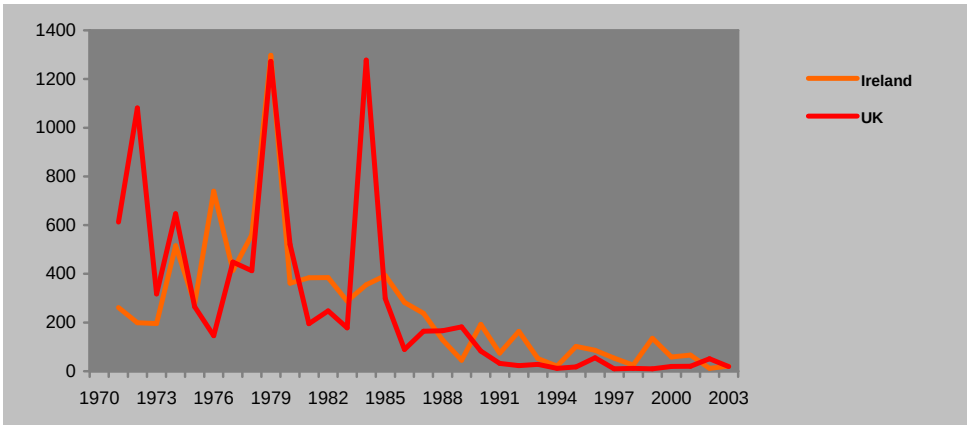


Table 4
Trend for North-Western Continental Europe
WDL per 1,000 employees per year

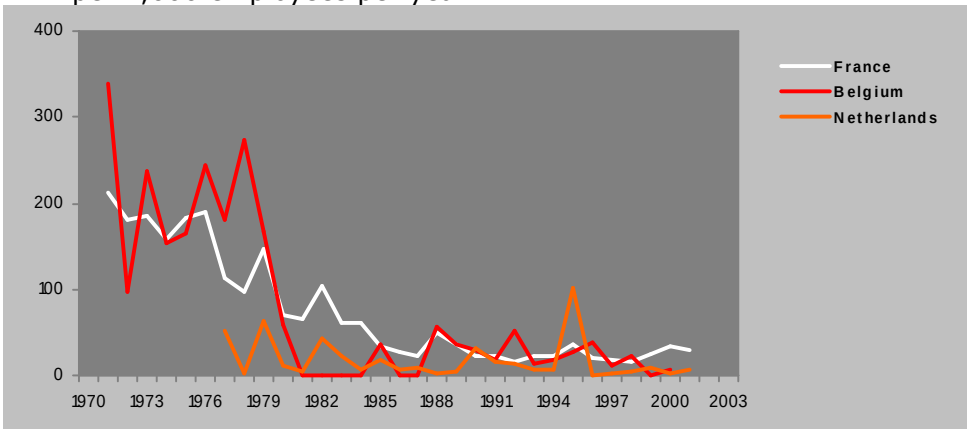


Table 5
Trend for Southern Continental Europe
WDL per 1,000 employees per year

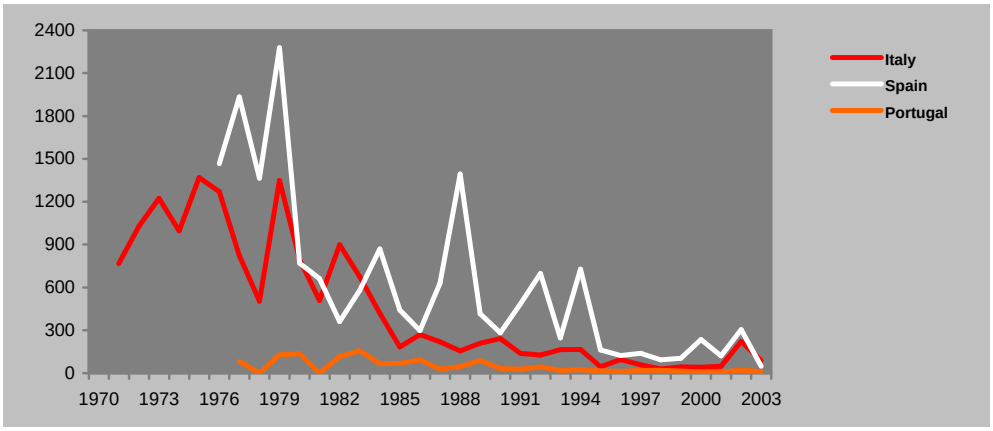


Table 6
Trend for Central Continental Europe
WDL per 1,000 employees per year

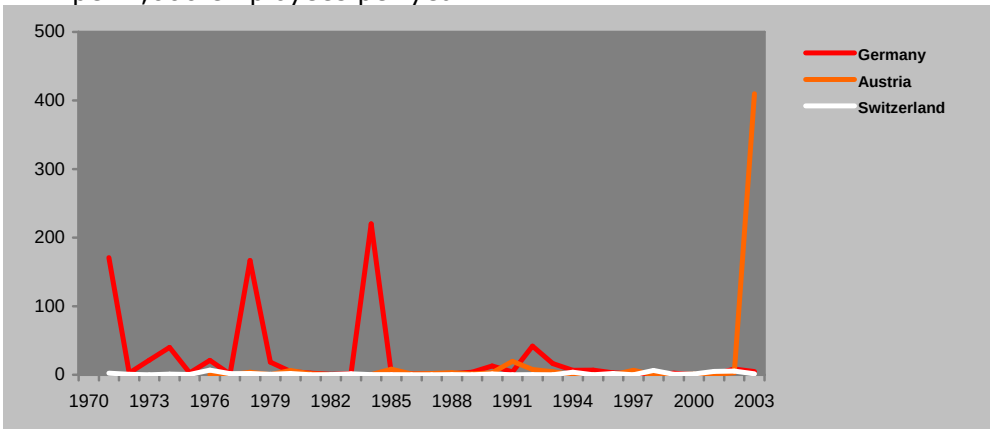


Table 7.
Aggregate trend: Average number of WDL per year per 1,000 employees, 1970-2003.

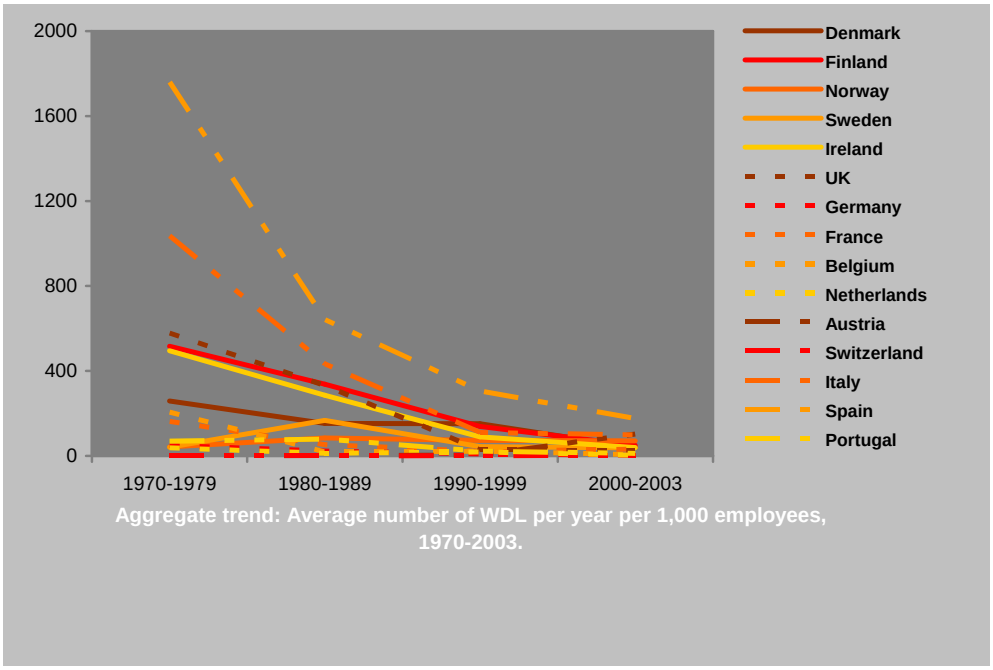


Table 8
Average number of WDL per year per 1,000 employees in Europe. 1970-1979.

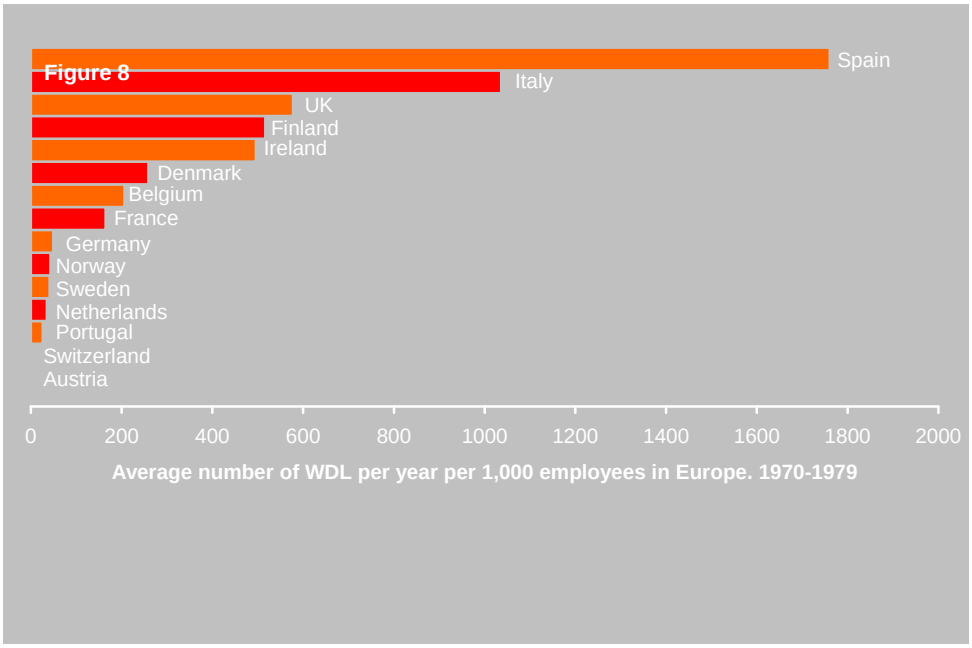


Table 9
Average number of WDL per year per 1,000 employees in Europe. 1980-1989**.**

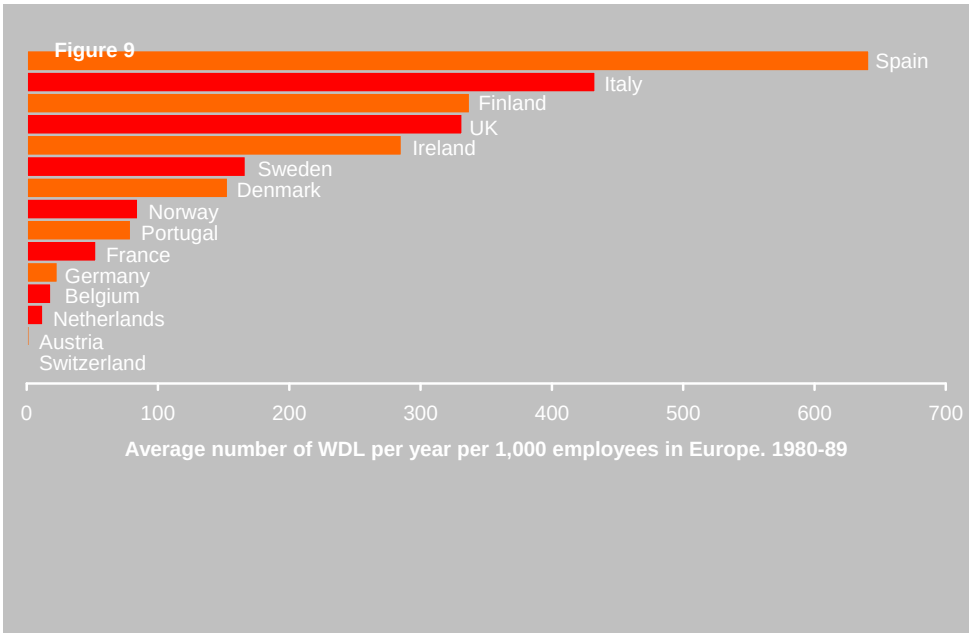


Table 10
Average number of WDL per year per 1,000 employees in Europe. 1990-1999.

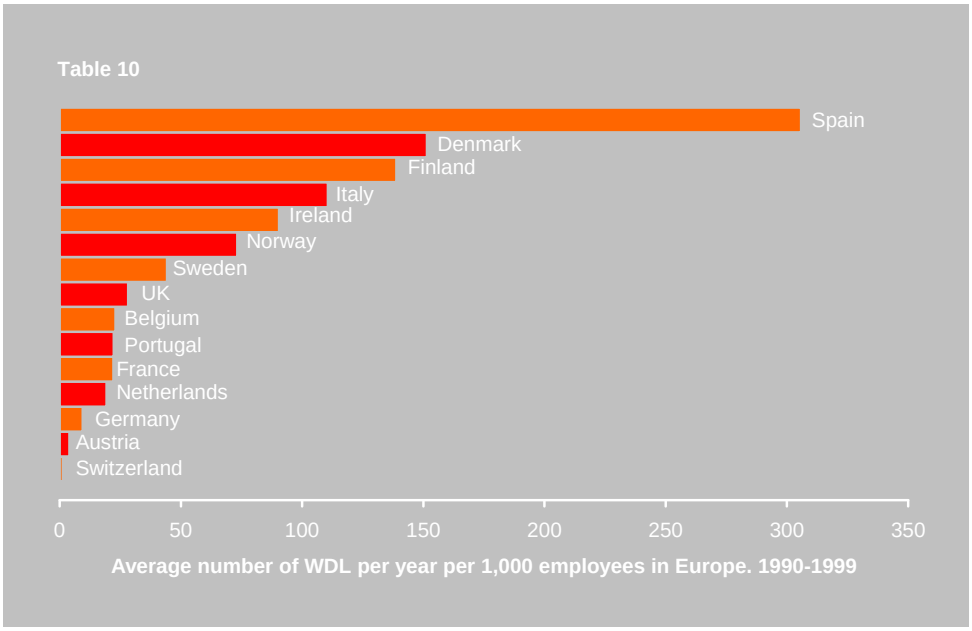
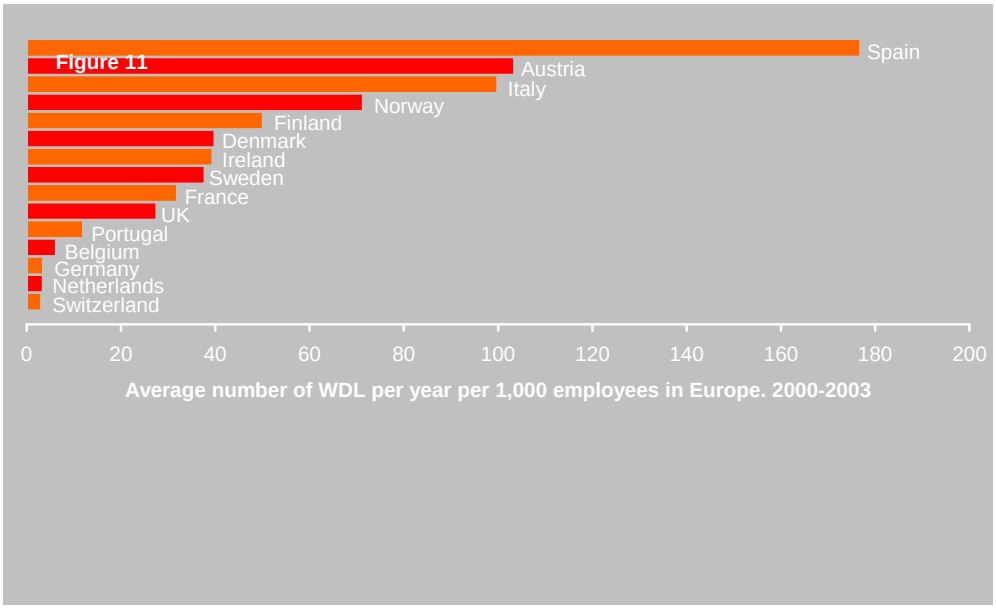


Table 11
Average number of WDL per year per 1,000 employees in Europe. 2000-2003.



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