

## Criticism: Trade Union leadership has forgotten gender equality

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It seems sluggish to get more women elected to top positions in the LO trade union movement. It is a huge democratic problem, thinks more trade union leaders and gender experts. The losers are the women who are lagging behind men in pay and pensions, because the top of the trade union movement has not sufficiently focused on gender equality.

It is a democratic problem that there are so few women at the top of the trade union movement. And it slows the progress towards equal pay and pensions for men and women, researchers believe.

Half of LO's members are women, but when LO's Executive Committee meet, there are only three women to discuss trade union and policy issues. The other eleven around the table are men.

Only 2 out of LO's 17 unions have female chair persons, and it also has the consequence that women are outnumbered in LO's General Council. Here, 16 are women and 25 men.

### Few women in LO top

The lack of women in the top of the Danish trade union movement has the consequence that the trade unions neglect work for equal pay and other equality policy agendas, believes a number of key leaders in the trade union movement.

Deputy chairman of 3F Jane Korczak believe that the top of the LO trade unions do not consider gender to be a sufficiently significant problem.

"It is a huge problem that equality is not being taken more seriously at home, not in unions or in society in general," she says.

Chairperson of the Danish Association of Professionals Technicians (TL) Gita Grüning retires this upcoming Saturdays after 20 years in the top of the Danish trade union movement. As President, she has held a seat in LO's management and National committee, and she recognizes Jane Korczaks feeling that it goes very slow in getting women elected into leadership positions.

"I guess that we will see gender equality in the rest of society before we see gender equality in the trade union movement," says Gita Grüning.

Also Federal President of FOA and a member of the LO's Executive Committee Dennis Kristensen is very annoyed about the fact that the LO-top does not reflect the member composition.

»LO is significantly behind when it comes to living up to what we require in all sorts of other contexts, namely that the leadership of the trade union movement must reflect the composition of the members -

both in relation to women and ethnic minorities. It gives us a clear disability that is not the same in the back room as in the showroom, and it's something bad, "notes Dennis Kristensen.

But Vice LO Lizette Risgaard calls it exaggerated that the equality fight is languishing in LO.

"The fact that there are not more women in LO top right now, is not the same as that nothing happens. In my time as Vice-president, LO has adopted an equal pay strategy and fighting for the gender-based wage statistics that are now on the way, just as we work to put more focus on the gender-segregated education choices. We also had a mandate to fight for more paternity leave for fathers. That the government afterwards chooses to drop father's maternity is their responsibility. We continue to work to ensure fathers' rights to more maternity and improve gender equality, " says Lizette Risgaard.

### **No energy in equality work**

Jane Korczak was Vice-President of Women Workers, which some ten years ago was merged with the General Workers' Union for the current 3F. When has to reflect on the of gender equality work in Danish trade union movement in the last decade, she is discouraged. The Confederation of Trade Unions should be a lever for gender equality, but she experiences a greater indifference about equality work today than in the past.

"It is strange that you do not have an overall idea or vision for gender equality work. It lacks both energy and commitment to this agenda in the trade union movement, "she says.

A comparison by A4 (Danish Newspaper) shows that the gender gap in the top of the trade union movement has hardly changed for the last ten years. Back in 2003, there were also two federal presidents of LO family, i.e., chairman of the former Women Workers Lillian Knudsen and chairman of The National Federation of Social Educators, Kirsten Nissen.

Today only The Danish Artistes' Union and Danish Association of Professional Technicians have women as presidents. Each LO Federation is sovereign, and when 15 out of 17 federal congress chooses men as presidents, it leads to a distorted gender balance in LO-top.

In many federations women are vice-presidents or sector chairmen. HK Denmark, where three out of four members are women, has chosen Kim Simonsen as Chairman and Mette Kindberg as Vice Chairman. In return, the four sectorial federations equally divided with women as leaders of HK Municipal and HK State and men as leaders of HK Private and HK Trade.

Dennis Kristensen is president at FOA, where seven out of eight members are women. In FOA women as Mona Striib, Inger Bolwinkel, Karen Stæhr and Nanna Højlund are also selected on prominent places, but without making it to the absolute top.

Also in 3F more women are joining the first row. Among others, Eva Obdrup has become chairman of 3F's unemployment fund; Ellen Lykkegaard is in charge of the Public workers group and Tina Møller Madsen are for the Private Services, Hotel and Restaurant. And then there's Jane Korczak as Vice Chairman.

### **Equality is killing career**

When equality work not so high on the agenda in the trade union movement it is among other things due to the fact that so few women reach the very top, argues Jane Korczak.

"It's a natural consequence that when there are so few women in LO-top, you try not to raise these issues. It's a small exclusive group dealing seriously with this. Gender issues are unfortunately a career-killer in the Danish trade union movement, "says Jane Korczak.

3F's Vice calls that a united trade union movement – and the SR- government for that matter - takes the responsibility and changes some of the basic mechanisms that maintain inequality.

TL's resigning president Gita Grüning has not experienced that union chairmen look askance at her when she in the recent years in LO's General Council and the executive committee has talked about gender equality issues.

"You will not pointed at or talked about as a feminist, because you talk about gender equality. But it may well be the case that gender policy issues do not have quite the same focus, as if there was a more even representation of men and women in LO-top." she says.

3F's Vice-President, Jane Korczak, agrees in this. "It should be a common goal for trade unions to reduce the pay gap between men and women, and it must be a damn goal to ensure fathers maternity leave, just as we need and ensure a less gender segregated labor market." says Jane Korczak.

### **World is looked upon with man glasses**

FOA chairman Dennis Kristensen says bluntly that not enough is being done about the large pay gap between men and women before there are more women in trade unions leadership seats and in the top of the LO.

"If there must be decisive breakthrough in relation to equality at home, we need more women at the top of the trade union movement. Equal pay, gender segregation, the low priority and compensation of caring services and the entire family agenda suffer all under the fact that the leadership in the trade union movement today is male-dominated, "he says.

When the crucial decisions to be taken, it is men in suits, including Dennis Kristensen himself who are representing the trade unions. And it entails, according to Dennis Kristensen, that gender equality policies are shoved into the background.

"When making a decision about whether there should be an increased focus on equal pay in collective bargaining agreements renewal in the private sector that can set the tracks for the entire labor market, it is a man dominated assembly, which decides this. And it has a very specific and practical importance that we make decisions from a male perspective and very little with from a female "he said.

Dennis Kristensen, who as man is in charge of the LO Federation with the most female members, anticipates that his successor as FOA President is not a man in a suit. In addition, he emphasizes that eight out of ten union representatives in FOA are women, as are 69 percent of the chairs of the local chambers.

But no matter how much he emphasizes that FOA has a less biased gender composition than other LO trade unions is Dennis Kristensen well aware that one cannot talk their way out of the problems.

"The male dominated world is very slow to make decisions that can radically change an organizational world where women are not the front positions," he says.

### **Women lose on salaries and pensions**

Several experts agree with trade union leaders in the fact that there is a direct correlation between the few women at the top of the trade union movement and the lack of achievements on the politics of gender equality.

Social scientist at the Department of Political Science at Aalborg University professor Anette Borchorst finds it 'strange' that there is little discussion about gender equality in Danish trade union movement.

"It is a democratic problem that the trade unions have very few women at the top. And it is especially a problem because we can see that there are a number of core issues of gender equality, for example on pay and pensions, where there's just not much going on" she says.

When there is no equal representation of women and men on highest level of negotiators in the trade union movement, the fight for equal pay and other gender policy matters are moved down on the agenda.

"The losers are women, because they receive less pay and pensions. We know that women live longer than men, while they have had a lower pay and been on maternity leave, where they get no pension. The state pension will cover less in the future, so the women are facing a problem in the long term, which no one in the trade union movement really takes care of right now. It is simply a result of the few women at the top," says Anette Borchorst.

As an example of that gender equality is slipping more and more into the background in the Danish trade union movement, she argues that the LO Congress in 2003 decided to publish an annual gender equality accounting to keep the focus on gender. The gender equality accounts have since been dropped because it was too costly to make.

"When it lacks with an equal gender representation, it signals that it is neither considered important or as a democratic problem. We know that the labor market is segregated by gender, and that women are the losers in relation to salaries and pensions, and then the answer from the trade union movement: there is no need for women at the top. It does not look good," notes Anette Borchorst.

### **Masculine oligarchies**

Labor market researcher at Roskilde University, Liselotte Hansen, also believes that the gender imbalance signals that the trade union movement is old-fashioned and this is compromising the work with protecting the interest of the members.

"When I teach the young people at the university they associate the labor movement with white men with red braces. When we always see the same men and not seeing more women and persons with different ethnic backgrounds in the top of the trade union movement, it signals no renewal," she says.

Liselotte Hansen argues that there around the trade union movement and especially in many local chapters are renewal and that several unions, including 3F, are working with diversity, fair representation and new ways of organizing members.

"But the efforts with renewal of the trade unions do not pass if the top is still the same men. Outwardly it signals a lack of renewal, and internal it signals that women or ethnic minorities cannot become trade union presidents or chairman of the LO," says Lise Lotte Hansen.

Professor Anette Borchorst call the male-dominated leadership in the LO trade union movement for a "lodge brothers culture", while Lise Lotte Hansen emphasizes that men are sitting heavily on the power.

"All sorts of places in Danish trade union movement, we can identify something that may call for masculine oligarchies. And I agree with Jane Korczak in the fact that gender issues as fighting for equal pay is not topic that can be used to make a career in the Danish trade union movement," says Lise Lotte Hansen.

### **Goals and sanctions are necessary**

Both experts believe that the gender balance in the LO trade union movement will only be equal if centrally imposed goals or a form of quotas are being implemented together with sanctions if the goals are not being achieved.

Anette Borchorst underline that any suggestion of quotas systems is controversial in Denmark. This is the same in the trade union movement where members and leaders have very strong different opinions about quotas.

"It could be a start to have goals for women representation in LO's decision-making bodies. If there is not even a goal to make it less unequal, nothing happens," says Anette Borchorst.

Liselotte Hansen totally agrees with the view. "The Danish trade unions will rather not use, what is considered radical gender equality methods. The unions continue to argue that a change will happen automatically. But after ten years where nothing has happened we know that this is not true" she says.

Due to the lack of progress, she believes that the trade union top have to recognize the need to discuss goals for the number of women and men in decision-making bodies in the trade union movement.

"And there have to be sanctions if the trade unions do not reach the goals. Without sanctions the goals are not being taken seriously," says Lise Lotte Hansen.

### **No to quotas**

But TL-chairman Gita Grüning does not think that goals and sanctions will lead to something good.

"I am well aware that it is a naive way of thinking, but I believe that more gender balance will come by itself. Among other things by spotting talent more and push women forward. And the many men in the top must help to contribute to this" she says.

In addition, she points out that union representatives on the local level should play a role in the process.

"It is on the local work places that the most important fight for gender equality has to take place." she says and adds that LO-top can talk as much as they want about wanting to close the pay gap. It's at the work place where the local wage bargaining is being done, that the pay gap must be closed, and therefore the training of shop stewards must focus on gender equality.

Nor Vice LO Lizette Risgaard believe that quotas are the way improve things.

"It is clear that we in our decision-making bodies should reflect member composition, which is actually fifty-fifty. And I think that the LO trade union movement has a huge challenge when we after ten years still have not come closer to have more women at the top. The gender balance does not move, whether we speak of 'top-level' or unions locally and this we have to change. Not by using quotas, but by in future to have a much greater focus on getting more women elected," she says.