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Chapter 8

Denmark: Trade unions still afloat at ebb tide

Herman Knudsen, Jens Lind and Bjarke Refslund

Looked at in a European context in which trade union power is rapidly deteriorating, Danish trade unions remain strong, with relatively high union density and an enduring and strong institutional position (see Table 8.1). Collective bargaining is the centrepiece of the primary wage-setting model, and overall the industrial relations model remains based on a consensual approach between employers and unions. Trade unions remain an influential societal actor in Denmark and are perceived by the large majority of citizens as an important and legitimate actor. Union density has declined in recent decades, however, particularly in certain industries, while there is also a growing share of union members in 'yellow' unions, as well as migrant workers who are largely not unionized. On the other hand, unionization has been growing among white-collar workers with a university degree, and there has been an increasing union consciousness among white-collar segments of the economy.

Using the typology developed by Crouch (1993), the Danish (and Nordic) unions form part of an industrial relations system characterized by 'bargained corporatism' rather than 'contestation' or 'pluralist bargaining'. Among the five types of industrial relations used by Welz and colleagues to describe differences among European Union (EU) member states, Denmark (and the other Nordic countries) is of the type 'organized corporatism' (Welz et al. 2016). A further label often assigned to the Danish industrial relations system is that of 'flexicurity' because of a purported 'golden' balance between flexibility for employers and security for workers (Knudsen and Lind 2018; Madsen 2002).

Table 8.1 Principal characteristics of trade unionism in Denmark

	1980	2000	2019
Total trade union membership	1,794,000	1,870,000	1,868,000
Women as a proportion of total membership	n.a.	n.a.	52 %
Gross union density	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Net union density*	68 %	66 %	64 %
Number of confederations	3	3	2
Number of affiliated unions (federations)	n.a.	n.a.	95
Number of independent unions	n.a.	n.a.	19
Collective bargaining coverage	n.a.	85 %	83 %
Principal level of collective bargaining	Cross-industry	Industry	Industry
Days not worked due to industrial action per 1,000 workers	78	46	3

Source: Authors' calculations on the basis of Statistisk Tiårsoversigt, various years, and Statistics Denmark (Statistikbanken). 2000 membership figures from Ibsen et al. (2013).

* Number of trade union members in the labour force as a proportion of all participants in the labour force (employed, unemployed and self-employed persons).

Historical background and principal features of the industrial relations system

Unionization in Denmark took off around 1870. The first trade unions were craft based, but they were soon followed by a unionization wave among unskilled workers. In 1898 the great majority of the existing unions came together in the Confederations of Danish Trade Unions (DsF, *De samvirkende Fagforbund*), which later, similar to Sweden and Norway, changed its name to LO (*Landsorganisationen i Danmark*). The employers' side also united in 1898, with the creation of the Danish Employers' Confederation (today DA, *Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening*).

The DsF/LO first and foremost organized skilled and unskilled manual workers. Skilled office workers also joined unions affiliated to the LO, whereas unions for professions such as nurses, teachers and many other 'white-collar' groups remained outside. In 1952 unions for these groups of salaried/white-collar employees formed the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark (FTF, *Funktionærernes og Tjenestemændenes Fællesråd*). A third confederation, exclusively for professions with a university degree, was established in 1972, the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC, *Akademikerne*). A major distinction

between the three confederations was that the members of the blue-collar unions in the DsF/LO were workers paid by the hour (*timelønnede*), whereas the members of the FTF and the AC were salaried employees paid by the month (*funktionærer*). In 2018 an amalgamation was agreed between LO and the FTF leading, in 2019, to the establishment of one large confederation, the Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH, *Fagbevægelsens Hovedorganisation*). This leaves Denmark with only two major confederations, the large FH and the much smaller AC.

Already by 1952, an American scholar had identified a number of central peculiarities of the Danish system (Galenson 1969). He found that trade unions and employer associations played a remarkably prominent role in the regulation of labour relations in Denmark, in particular by means of collective agreements. He also noted that relations between the two sides were relatively harmonious, characterized by a cooperative spirit and with a minimum of state regulation, which was aimed mainly at facilitating institutions set up by the parties themselves.

The same features nowadays are often described as ‘the Danish model’, as those pinpointed by Galenson were also emphasized later by several Danish scholars (Andersen et al. 2014; Due et al. 1993; Jensen 2007; Kristiansen 2014; Lind and Knudsen 2018). The centrality of collective bargaining is no doubt the most important feature. The rules governing collective bargaining have been established by the parties and are supported by the state. A central document in this respect is the Main Agreement (*Hovedaftalen*), which sets the frame for the Danish industrial relations regulation. It has been renewed several times and dates back to its first version, the September Agreement (*Septemberforliget*), which was the result of the first generalized conflict between capital and labour in Denmark, the great lock-out of 1899. This was a long and bitter confrontation between unions and employer associations in which the latter aimed to eliminate the unions’ tactics of exploiting the combined strength of one or more unions to target one employer at a time through strike action (*omgangsskruen*). The conflict resulted in a compromise between the combatants: the union side had to recognize the right to manage as an employer’s prerogative, while the employers had to acknowledge national unions as legitimate bargaining partners.

While substantive collective agreements dealing with wages, working time and working conditions are treated in a separate section below, another collective agreement dealing with procedures and rights, such as the Main Agreement, is the Cooperation Agreement (*Samarbejdsaftalen*).

The first cooperation agreement was concluded between the DsF (LO) and the DA in 1947 and covered workers in the private sector. Later it was supplemented by a similar agreement for the public sector. Cooperation agreements regulate the setting up and functioning of cooperation committees in individual workplaces. These committees consist of management and employee representatives and have the aim of furthering both enterprise and employee interests through an ongoing dialogue. The birth of this institution was strongly influenced by the German works councils, which were reintroduced in Germany shortly after the Second World War (Knudsen 1995).

The establishment over the years of viable industrial relations institutions by the labour market parties themselves has resulted in a high degree of consensus among unions, employer associations and the main political parties that parliament and government should intervene as little as possible in industrial relations. In fields with legislation, such as occupational health and safety, unions and employer associations are normally given the opportunity to influence the contents of the legislation in decisive ways. A strong norm, although not always adhered to, says that only labour legislation that can muster the support of both sides should be introduced (Knudsen and Lind 2018).

Structure of trade unions and union democracy

Structurally, trade unionism in Denmark ranges from the workplace level (shop stewards, and in some instances workplace clubs), via the local branch level and the national federation level, to the confederal level. In unions with a complex structure there are also substructures along sectoral, professional and/or occupational lines.

Historically, the organizational principles and structure of trade unions followed trades, and later in particular professional or educational patterns. This has been supplemented to a limited degree by other factors, such as gender, religion and political ideology. Originally there were unions for skilled workers and later for unskilled male workers (1896) and female workers (1901). There are also a few examples of industrial unions, notably in the food industry and finance, but they have never become decisive for union structures, as in Germany.

The FTE, founded in 1952 (and merged with the LO in 2019 to form the FH) was a confederation of unions organizing mainly, but

not exclusively, public sector workers with a medium-high education, such as social workers, nurses and teachers, while its largest membership private sector union was the Finance Workers Union. When the FTF merged with the LO there were eighty affiliated unions. A main historical difference from LO was, apart from the professions, that the FTF-affiliated unions did not approve the close relationship between the LO and the Social Democratic Party (*Socialdemokratiet*). The FTF claimed to be politically neutral, so when LO gradually abandoned the intimate relationship with the Social Democrats the road was clear for a merger between the two confederations.

The creation of FH signalled a turning point in several respects. First, it happened at a time when the LO, historically virtually synonymous with Danish unionism, had lost its position as the umbrella organization within which a majority of union members were organized. Second, for the first time a woman was elected leader of the peak confederation of Danish unions. Third, for the first time the leader did not come from 'blue-collar' ranks but from the commercial and clerical workers' union and had a 'white-collar' background. Overall, the creation of FH indicates deeper changes in the structure of the Danish union movement, with lower to medium paid white-collar workers, such as nurses, clerks and teachers, gaining a more prominent role, although manufacturing remains the level-setting sector in collective bargaining rounds. White-collar workers have become more attentive to unionism as a means of improving their working conditions, which have been steadily declining because of increased work pressure and the reduced prestige of public sector employment. A major motive for the merger was to be able to show strength through unity: to have one confederation representing a majority of union members, rather than the more fragmented picture of three 'minority' peak organizations.

AC is a confederation founded in 1972 primarily of unions organizing employees with an academic education, such as engineers, medical doctors, economists, architects and university staff. When LO and FTF merged in 2019 some FTF-affiliated unions did not approve. In consequence, unions of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and midwives joined AC instead of FH, while the union for workers in banking and finance, with some 40,000 members, became independent (until it joined FH in 2022).

Table 8.2 presents the confederations' respective shares of total union membership, as well as the shares of independent unions. Among the unions outside the confederations, some adhere to different principles

from the unions in the confederations, such as the Christian Union (Krifa, *Kristelig Fagforening*), which for example, opposes resort to strike action. The shares of 'yellow' unions and of unions ideologically at odds with the traditional unions grew from 7 per cent in 2007 to 18 per cent in 2019. The remaining 10 percentage points of union members outside the confederations in 2019 are accounted for by the Danish Association of Managers (LH, *Ledernes Hovedorganisation*) and other traditional unions, including the Financial Sector Union (*Finansforbundet*) and the Danish Union of Journalists (DJ, *Dansk Journalistforbund*). These unions are thus not 'yellow' unions, but rather alike the other FH unions.

Table 8.2 Trade union membership: shares by confederations and independent unions

	1980		2000		2019	
	Members	Share (%)	Members	Share (%)	Members	Share (%)
LO	1,250,000	70	1,167,000	62	–	–
FTF	277,000	15	350,000	19	–	–
FH	–	–	–	–	1,092,000	58
AC	70,000	4	150,000	8	259,000	14
Independent unions	197,000	11	203,000	11	669,000	28
All trade unions	1,794,000	100	1,870,000	100	1,868,000	100

Note: As trade unions have joined and left the confederations, and the membership statistics are not directly comparable with earlier years, figures cannot be directly compared across years. LO and FTF merged in 2019 to form FH.

Source: Danmarks Statistik, FH: <https://fho.dk/om-fagbevaegelsens-hovedorganisation/medlemstal/>

In 2019, 64 trade unions were affiliated to FH. The four biggest (representing more than 50 per cent of FH membership) were former LO unions, namely the United Federation of Workers (3F, *Fagligt Fælles Forbund*), the Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark (HK, *Handels- og Kontorfunktionærernes Fagforbund*), the union for mainly health and care workers (FOA, *Fag og Arbejde*) and the Danish Metalworkers' Federation (Metal, *Dansk Metalarbejderforbund*). 3F organizes manual workers of many kinds, both skilled and unskilled, HK clerical and sales staff, FOA mainly public sector manual workers and Dansk

Metal skilled metal workers. 3F originally organized unskilled manual workers but over the past thirty years or so, a number of unions – such as those of bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers and other traditional skilled workers – have joined 3F. Apart from nurses, schoolteachers and social workers most unions initially affiliated to FTF were very small and specialized, such as surgical appliance makers (forty-seven members), the Royal Court staff (forty-eight members) and radio telegraphists (313 members). The Danish Society of Engineers (IDA, *Ingeniørsammenslutningen i Danmark*) (78,000 members) and the lawyers' and economists' union (DJØF, *Dansk Jurist- og Økonomforbund*) (64,000 members) are the biggest unions in AC.

Mergers have been a permanent feature, leading to changes in trade union structure. Besides the abovementioned merger between the two largest confederations, important amalgamations and acquisitions have also taken place among the national federations, especially in the LO domain. By the time of the confederation merger in 2019 there were seventeen LO-affiliated unions compared with twenty-two in 2000. Most of the mergers in the period after 2000 involved 3F, with unions representing female unskilled workers, brewery and restaurant workers, building workers and others joining this union, thus contributing heavily to 3F's transformation into a general union.

Both FH and AC are confederations with a wide variety of members. Accordingly, the complexity inside the confederations makes it difficult to maintain a centralized decision-making structure. One obvious example of this is the fact that collective bargaining is not conducted directly by the confederations, unless the member unions ask them to do so. The confederations' functions include coordination of collective bargaining and formal relations with the government in tripartite negotiations.

The leaders of FH are elected by the affiliated unions at a Congress held every four years, while those of AC are selected by the main committee every two years. The biggest unions have the most votes and influence. In FH, the main committee has some seventy-eight members from the most important unions and the Executive Committee twenty-five members. The AC Executive Committee has eleven members, so power is more centralized than in FH.

The typical structure of democracy in manual trade unions is that local unions elect their leaders at a general assembly. Local trade union leaders and section leaders can be represented at a Congress, at which the

union national leadership is elected. In the larger unions various sections elect an Executive Board which is responsible for leadership between congresses. This structure, for instance, can be seen in 3F.

In most AC affiliates, members elect the union leadership in general elections. This is, for instance, the case in the Union of Professionals from Arts and Science (DM, *Dansk Magisterforening*). This union is divided into five sectors, whose leadership (Chair and Executive Committee) is also elected. DM's policy is decided at a Congress held every three years, delegates to which are selected by the sectors.

In general, trade unions in Denmark are democratic organizations, although indirect elections for leaderships being the dominant principle. The main problem is that membership participation in elections is often sparse and provides a good opportunity for the development of a kind of 'oligarchy', or at least that is the impression among some members. The relatively low level of participation can also be seen in the ballots on new collective agreements. It varies among unions, but it is not unusual that under 50 per cent actually participate, although it has been above 50 per cent in recent ballots (Andersen and Hansen 2020).

Unionization

Trade union density peaked during the mid-1990s at around 73–75 per cent and has gradually declined since to 64 per cent in 2019.¹ Membership decline may be observed first and foremost among the LO-affiliated unions, whereas FTF and AC have gained members, together with independent unions. The general decline is not as dramatic as elsewhere, as a union density of 64 per cent is still high. Nevertheless, the loss of members at LO – now FH – is a major concern in the union movement, particularly in light of the growth of the 'yellow' unions now potentially challenging the overall functioning of the Danish industrial relations model. If only the traditional, or mainstream, trade unions are counted, the unionization rate was down at 52.6 percent in 2019.

¹ If we exclude the self-employed, which would make a lot of sense because they are rarely unionized, the current net union density is 67–68 per cent (depending on how many self-employed we count in). Arnholtz and Navrbjerg (2021) set the net unionization density at 68.4 per cent without the self-employed. Pensioners and students may have been included in the historical figures, so it is difficult to compare union density over time.

One main reason for the loss of members among the former LO-affiliated unions is the shift of occupational structure from manufacturing to the service sector and occupations that require higher levels of education. This development has resulted in fewer union members in the LO-organized area and more in the FTF and AC areas. There are also industries that typically come from within the LO-organized area, such as cleaning, hotels and restaurants, and agriculture, in which unionization has traditionally been lower and where membership has declined, partly because of a strong increase in the inflow of migrant workers, who are much less unionized and remain difficult for the unions to organize (Refslund 2016).

LO membership decline can also be ascribed to the changes in the so-called Ghent system of unemployment insurance (Lind 2004b, 2009). The Ghent system was introduced in Denmark in 1907. As voluntary insurance it was based upon membership of unemployment funds set up by the trade unions and funded by members' contributions. In the post-war period membership of such funds was increasingly made more attractive as the state financed higher proportions of the cost and the level of unemployment benefits increased in relation to wages. By that time, in other words, Denmark had a highly state-subsidized unemployment insurance system of the Ghent type which 'is indeed associated with higher rates of unionization' (Rasmussen and Pontusson 2018: 813). Furthermore, during the late 1970s an attractive early retirement scheme was introduced that covered only members of unemployment funds. Since the early 1980s, however, membership fees have increased, the early retirement scheme has been virtually abandoned, unemployment insurance has been made less attractive, and the ties between unemployment funds and trade unions have been loosened. This has weakened the unemployment funds as a recruitment vehicle for many of the former LO-affiliated trade unions. The bonds between FTF- and AC-affiliated unions and the unemployment funds have never been as tight as in the case of LO, with the result that these two confederations have not lost as many members due to this reason (Ibsen et al. 2013).

Apart from not unionizing at all, an alternative to union membership of a confederation affiliate is to join a union outside the confederations. Some of these are traditional unions, but around seven are completely outside the 'Danish model', and hence not part of the regulatory framework erected by the traditional unions and their employer counterparts. These unions, in general, do not call industrial action, and only offer

their members legal help and advice. They often also have more limited member democracy, and rarely sign collective agreements. Such ‘yellow’ unions are obviously not popular among the traditional unions and are described as free-riding on the latter’s gains, in particular those arising from collective bargaining (Caraker 2013; Ibsen et al. 2013). It can be disputed whether ‘yellow’ unions qualify as genuine trade unions: a more accurate label might be ‘insurance companies’. Nevertheless, they also differ among one another: the Christian Union (Krifa, *Kristelig Fagforening*) dating back to 1899, does sign collective agreements, whereas others do not, such as the ASE. These unions attract members by their much lower membership fees and ‘non-political’ orientation, which also includes their attitudes to collective bargaining (Caraker 2013). Five ‘yellow’ unions, in particular the Christian Union, three unions under the Trade Union House,² and ASE have recorded significant membership growth since 2002, when the conservative-liberal government made it possible to establish interprofessional unemployment insurance funds (Lind 2003), and since the outlawing of closed-shop agreements in 2006 (see Ibsen et al. 2013).

Overall, the total membership share of ‘yellow’ unions increased from 7 per cent of total union membership in 2007 to 18 per cent in 2019. In particular, the Trade Union House and ASE, originally an unemployment fund for the self-employed, have flourished as a result of liberalization of the rules on unemployment insurance. The growth of these unions is a by-product of the expansion of the interprofessional unemployment funds. It is possible to be a member of an unemployment fund without joining a union, but many decide to take ‘the whole package’. In Table 8.3 below some key characteristics of the largest trade unions in Denmark are presented.

² Trade Union House is an organization that consists of three organizations for various kinds of employees, one for the self-employed and two unemployment funds.

Table 8.3 Largest twenty trade unions in Denmark, 2019

	Members	Women share (%)	Confederation	Category	Sector
3F (general union)	222,060	25	FH	Blue-collar	Mainly private
HK (office & commerce)	176,276	76	FH	White-collar	Both
FOA (various occupations)	151,348	85	FH	Blue-collar	Mainly public
Krifa (Christian; general union)	115,396	51	'Yellow'	Both	Both
LH (managers)	104,567	29	Outside	White-collar	Both
IDA (engineers)	78,069	26	AC	White-collar	Both
Metal	72,071	4	FH	Blue-collar	Mainly private
Nurses	71,973	96	FH	White-collar	Public
DJØF (lawyers and economists)	63,626	55	AC	White-collar	Both
2B Trade Union House (general union)	58,795	48	'Yellow'	Both	Both
ASE Employees (general union)	58,757	40	'Yellow'	White-collar	Both
Teachers' Union	58,146	71	FH	White-collar	Public
Child care workers	54,228	83	FH		Public
Danmark Trade Union House (general)	51,504	35	'Yellow'	Both	Both
Finance Union	39,360	50	Outside	White-collar	Private
DM (Arts and Science)	35,832	64	AC	White-collar	Public
Social care workers	35,602	75	FH		Public
Electricians	23,867	0.1	FH	Blue-collar	Private
Business Denmark (salespersons)	23,496	28	'Yellow'	White-collar	Private
Technicians	22,146	44	FH	White-collar	Mainly private

Source: Statistics Denmark (Statistikbanken, LONMED3).

Around 48 per cent of the labour force are women, but more than half of union members are women (52 per cent). The female workers' union (KAD, *Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund i Danmark*), established in 1901,

existed for more than 100 years until it merged into 3F in 2005. Now all unions organize both men and women, but with a strongly varying gender composition in line with the gender segmentation in the labour market. Manual blue-collar, private sector unions have the smallest proportion of female members – for instance, the electricians and the metal workers union – while the highest proportions of female members are found in white-collar public sector unions. In this way the gender segmentation of the labour market is reflected in the unions' gender profile.

The main criterion for being permitted to become a member of a specific trade union is to have had a special education or to be employed in a specific area of work, often synonymous with the coverage area of a collective agreement signed by the union. Most unions only recruit members with that sort of profile. The unions and confederations have specific rules to regulate the system and resolve conflicts about membership recruitment to avoid too much competition in their efforts to recruit new members. In contrast, most 'yellow' unions accept all sorts of employees as members.

The impact on unionization of 'new' groups in the labour market, such as migrants, precarious workers, platform workers, self-employed and freelancers varies considerably, but the number of migrant workers, in particular from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), has increased substantially in the past decade in certain industries, including construction, cleaning and agriculture. While these groups have much lower unionization levels, the unions have become much more attentive to them. For most unions, attention is directed towards migrants, precarious workers and the self-employed, while platform workers and freelancers typically are more relevant for HK and other unions organizing professional workers. The unions are still seeking appropriate strategies to reach these workers.

To organize migrant workers, unions have resorted to their traditional measures, seeking to convince migrants at the workplace to join the union, but they have also supplemented their efforts with targeted information campaigns. While the Danish unions have always been attentive to organizing workers, as reflected in their high union density, increasing attention has been paid to the methods and approaches applied to organizing different workers. Here some inspiration has been drawn from the 'organizing approach', even though it was developed for low union density settings and Danish unions have adapted and cherry-picked elements from it (Arnholtz et al. 2016). An example of such a process, where unions

have improved their approach to organizing, is the struggle for decent working conditions for all foreign workers involved in the construction of the new metro line in Copenhagen from 2011. The main contractor was a consortium of Italian companies, CMT, which subcontracted the work to numerous subcontractors from twenty-four countries. CMT was hostile to union involvement, so the Danish unions tried to convince the workers, publicize the poor working conditions, and take a case to the labour court. They won the case and could then distribute the fine imposed on the employer among the workers, which helped convince them that it was worth joining a union. Around 30 per cent of the transnational workers in the metro construction project became union members, in comparison with the normal rate among other transnational workers in Copenhagen of around 6–7 per cent (Arnholtz and Refslund 2019).

Union resources and expenditure

Union accounts are usually not publicly available. In the Danish union movement, there is a long tradition of concealing information about economic resources, so that the employer counterpart cannot estimate accurately, for example, how long unions can pay out strike benefits in case of a major conflict.

Economically, unions rely almost entirely on membership fees. Fees vary from union to union, with a cash sum between €60 and €70 per month being typical, although the fee is considerably less in ‘yellow’ unions (in the unions set up by the Trade Union House less than 10 euros per month). Most unions have reduced rates for part-time workers and students/apprentices. It can be estimated that Danish unions in total receive between €1 billion and €1.5 billion per year in fees, which makes them financially powerful organizations. Since the early 2000s, decreasing membership in the traditional unions, combined with increased price competition from ‘yellow’ unions, have made resources less abundant than in previous decades, particularly among unions that used to affiliate to LO. The merger between LO and FTF was not driven primarily by financial considerations, but it was certainly one of the motives behind it.

Among the unions in the former LO-organized area, union fees are normally paid to the local union or branch. From there some of the income is channelled to activities at company level, union clubs and shop stewards, and to the national and confederation level. In unions with a complex structure, such as 3F, resources are also devolved to occupational

subgroups. In unions affiliated to FTF and AC fees are typically paid to the federation at national level; from there some of the resources are allocated to local activities. The confederations FH and AC are financed by contributions from the member unions. Union membership is subsidized in the sense that members can deduct the fee, and payments to the unemployment fund, from their income before they pay income tax.

A further, but minor income source stems from institutions established and administered jointly with employer organizations. Pension funds and training funds, as determined in collective agreements, are run by various boards consisting of union officials and employer representatives. Other union leaders may sit on boards in public companies or cooperatives. Fees from board membership often constitute a considerable extra income for union officials, and several unions, including FH, have rules that limit how much of this income may be kept by the board members themselves. Amounts above the limit must be passed on to the union organization in question.

At company level, collective agreements and legislation provide for shop stewards, cooperation committee members, work environment representatives and employee members on company boards to be compensated by time-off from work for the time they spend on union matters and on representing workers. There are no fixed norms for this time compensation, except that the employer shall make sure that the representatives are given the 'necessary time' to fulfil their tasks (Kristiansen 2014), so, in reality, it is a bargaining issue at workplace level.

Part of union resources can be used as strike funds to pay members while they are conflicting and not receiving any wages. Normally, unions do not publish anything about the size of their strike funds, or resources that may easily be made available for strike benefits, but sometimes they may see an advantage in doing so. This seemed to be the case in 2007 in the early stages of the process of renewing collective agreements in the private sector. Unions were quoted in the press as having money enough to ensure member strike benefits for several weeks should a conflict break out. Likewise, employer organizations highlighted *their* ability to support their members during a conflict (Berlingske Tidende 2007). In a twenty-five-day-long lock-out of teachers in 2013, the Teachers' Union paid out about €70 million in benefits (DR 2018). If normal funds should prove too small to cover strike benefits, other resources can be drawn upon. Many unions own their office buildings; the large unions own training facilities as well and would be able to obtain bank loans on that basis, at

least from Arbejdernes Landsbank, Denmark's sixth largest bank, owned by unions and union members. Furthermore, a group of unions own an investment company with investments in real estate and a range of funds and production companies. In 2019 the company had assets worth about €600 million (AKF-Holding 2020).

Union resources are spent mainly on maintaining a union apparatus staffed by a combination of elected union officials and union officers employed to handle various union tasks. The union apparatus is geared primarily to providing services to the members, such as negotiating and monitoring collective agreements, preparing and taking part in meetings and labour court cases related to dispute resolution, and dealing with individual grievances to ensure that members receive the compensation they are entitled to in case of unfair dismissals, work accidents, company closures and bankruptcies.

In recent years, a new job title has appeared among union officers, that of 'organizer'. Organizing used to be a task undertaken mainly by local union activists and shop stewards, but the growing influx of foreign workers, as well as new, less union-friendly attitudes among young workers, have spurred unions to establish jobs specifically designed to recruit new members. More resources are also spent on recruitment campaigns through advertisements in the media and on increasing unions' visibility through sponsorships of sports activities and teams. A further activity worth mentioning is internal training. Among the FH-affiliated unions most training is aimed at the elected leaders at local level and workplace representatives: shop stewards, members of cooperation and work environment committees, and members who are elected to company boards.

Collective bargaining and unions at the workplace

The most important collective bargaining takes place at industry and national level: in the private sector between employers' organizations in four or five industries and bargaining cartels of various trade unions, and in the public sector in three areas: state, region and municipality. In the private sector, the DA and its affiliates have successfully refused to negotiate collective agreements with AC organizations at national level, and for HK (clerical and commercial workers) a special clause determines that the national agreement shall apply only in workplaces where union membership is at least 50 per cent. According to most agreements, wages are also bargained at company level (see below).

Collective bargaining coverage in the private sector is around 65 per cent and in the public sector close to 100 per cent. There is no legislation on minimum wages in Denmark, and collective wage-setting is left entirely to unions and employers' associations. It is a widespread opinion, also held by employers, that governments should not intervene in these matters. This makes arrangements such as legislation on a minimum wage very unpopular among the social partners.

In the private sector, the traditional bargaining parties were the confederations LO and DA. In the course of the 1980s, however, this changed, as the trade union federations took over to avoid the many conflicts and state interventions of the 1970s. This 'decentralization', as it was called, led to a relatively stable structure during the early 1990s when DA implemented a major reorganization and the unions had to adjust to the new DA bargaining bodies (Lind 1995). The unions created five bargaining bodies that represented various unions. The most important of these bargaining bodies is CO-Industry (established already in 1912), which bargains with the Danish Industry (DI, *Dansk Industri*), the most powerful organization on the employers' side. At a later stage in the 1990s the collective bargaining system was further transformed to provide more room for local negotiations at company level, although this decentralization is regulated via agreements at the industry level. The present system has been termed 'centralized decentralization', 'multilevel bargaining' (Due and Madsen 2006) or 'coherent fragmentation' (Lind 2004a) to emphasize that, although decentralized and local elements are in place, it is a misunderstanding to call collective bargaining in Denmark decentralized.

Collective agreements are normally bargained for two to three years and the bargaining normally starts with aiming at reaching a compromise between Danish Industry and CO-Industry. This agreement then sets the level for the remaining bargaining areas. The argument for this is that manufacturing is exposed to international competition and accordingly should set a level that can secure competitiveness. This joint understanding draws on the principles agreed upon in the Joint Declaration (*Fælleserklæringen*) of 1987, in which wage development is adjusted over time and one of the main aims is to avoid inflation through high-wage growth. The metal industry agreement accordingly still sets the bargaining standard for the rest of economy through pattern bargaining (Müller et al. 2018).

Bargaining used to take place in the public sector in the same years as in the private sector, but over the past 20 years public sector bargaining has taken place in the following year. The idea is that the public sector then can adjust its level of agreements to the current level in the private sector. Public sector bargaining includes central state, regions and municipalities and on the union side FH and AC have formed joint bargaining bodies, the Central Bargaining Unit (*Centralorganisationernes Fællesudvalg*) for central government and the United Bargaining Body (*Forhandlingsfællesskabet*) for regions and municipalities.

In both the private and the public sector wages set by national collective agreements can be adjusted locally. In the private sector this depends on the pay system for manual workers, which can be either 'minimum wage' or 'normal wage'. Some white-collar workers have so-called 'figureless agreements', in principle leaving wage-setting entirely to the local level.

Before the 1990s unskilled manual workers generally had a 'normal wage' system, meaning that their wages were set at the national level for the entire bargaining period and not adjusted locally. Skilled manual workers normally had a 'minimum wage' system, in which a minimum wage was set in the national bargaining round, typically followed by local negotiations. DA wanted a more flexible and decentralized system and during the 1990s they managed to reduce the areas with a 'normal wage' system. For white-collar workers organized in HK, who traditionally had a more individualized system, almost like a 'minimum wage', the employers were able to bargain 'figureless agreements'. This means that wages are adjusted to the capacity to pay at the individual workplace, resulting in a far more differentiated pay structure. 'Normal wage' is mainly used in low-skill/low-wage industries, and the collective agreement in the transport industry sets the standard for wage development in bargaining areas with 'normal wage'.

In the public sector the implementation of the neoliberal model, in particular New Public Management, which imposes mechanisms on the public sector that are supposed to emulate the dynamics of the market and competition, has since the early 1990s led to the introduction of pay systems to be bargained locally – so-called 'local pay' and 'new pay'. This is supposed to grant individual pay supplements for especially productive and valuable staff. This local bargaining plays only a minor role in the public sector, especially in periods of austerity.

Such flexible wage-setting arrangements currently apply to around 80 per cent of the Danish workforce: figureless agreements apply to 20 per

cent and the minimum wage system to 60 per cent (Ibsen and Keune 2018: 27). This in turn means that in a majority of cases the wage levels bargained at national industry level are only a floor for the wages bargained at local level, often several times during the term of an agreement.

Unions were reluctant to adopt these pay systems in both the private and the public sector because they were a clear breach of the traditional solidaristic wage policy and undermined the importance of national agreements. But they have now accepted them because they make trade unions, particularly shop stewards, more visible and important in local negotiations. This, in turn, illustrates the role of the unions for the members, and hence contributes to membership retention.

If an employer has signed a collective agreement all workers within the occupational area defined by the agreement are covered, regardless of whether they are union members or not. This system of course faces a high risk of 'free-riding': a worker does not have to pay the union membership fee to be paid according to the agreement.

Unions and employers' organizations are very keen on avoiding any weakening of collective bargaining. Therefore, it is important for them to have as many issues as possible settled through collective bargaining, not just pay and working time, but also pensions, training, holidays and parental leave. The importance of issues beyond wages and working conditions have been growing over recent decades and they now constitute an important element of collective bargaining, where the unions have achieved substantial gains. The demarcation lines between legislative regulation of the labour market and collective bargaining are in fact flexible when it comes to pensions, holidays, redundancy, training, maternity leave, employment and unemployment policies. Wages and working time, however, are almost entirely a matter for collective bargaining.

Industrial conflict

The right to strike is a collective right, as are many labour rights. For instance only unions and employers' associations can bring a case to the labour court. Collective rights, as opposed to individual legal rights, make the Danish industrial relations system different from most other legal systems (Dølvik et al. 2018; Høgedahl 2020). Only trade unions can call an industrial conflict, bargain collective agreements and 'own' a collective agreement. And if the labour court decides that the employer

has not acted according to a collective agreement, the union, not the workers affected, will receive the compensation (and then pay the members affected).

The right to strike is confined to 'conflicts of interest' as opposed to 'conflicts of rights', which must be solved through mediation and arbitration (Kristiansen 2014). Conflicts of interest are defined as conflicts connected to the conclusion or renewal of collective agreements, while conflicts of rights are related to disagreements that may occur over the interpretation of collective agreements and management decisions.

The distinction between the two types of conflict, and the different procedures set up to regulate them, was laid down by the 1899 September Agreement and regulations based on the work of a public commission, with representatives from unions and employers' associations, established in 1908. Besides an agreement on 'norms guiding industrial conflicts and their resolution', this work in 1910 resulted in two important industrial relations acts establishing the labour court and the Conciliation Board (*Forligsinstitutionen*), which essentially are institutions aimed at helping the parties themselves to resolve conflicts (Kristiansen 2014).

The right to strike and the right to lock out workers to a large extent mirror each other. In processes of renewal of industry-level or sector-level collective agreements, unions will typically at a certain stage give notice of a strike. To avoid straining strike funds too much, typically only a minor fraction of the members will be called out on strike, hitting strategic areas in which employers and/or society will soon experience negative effects. Subsequently, the strike notice will often be followed by the employers' association giving notice of a much broader lock-out hitting the entire labour force, or a large share of it, within the area concerned. In most cases neither the strike nor the lock-out is implemented as the parties reach agreement at the negotiation table. If a conflict breaks out, however, a high number of working days is likely to be lost.

As long as a collective agreement is in force, strikes and lock-outs are not allowed: a so-called peace obligation applies. Strikes and lock-outs are allowed only when agreements are being renewed, or if used as a weapon to achieve a collective agreement in an industry or, more typically, in a company not hitherto covered by collective bargaining (Kristiansen 2014). In the latter case, the employer will typically not belong to an employer organization and not want to be bound by a collective agreement. If it is a workplace in which workers are not unionized, or only

weakly, a direct strike against the employer may not be feasible. In such cases, secondary industrial action is a recognized weapon: 'the sympathetic work stoppage, so important in Denmark because of the strength of organization among workers and employers...' (Galenson 1969: 244). In secondary industrial action or sympathy action (*sympatistrejke*) union members not directly involved in a conflict may be called upon by their union to block the delivery of materials, goods and services to a firm that refuses to conclude a collective agreement (Kristiansen 2014). In contrast to countries in which a ballot among workers is needed, or the majority of workers need to be union members before a demand for a collective agreement can be raised, secondary industrial action provides Danish unions with a strong weapon that helps to increase union membership, as well as collective bargaining coverage. Not least within the large 3F union this weapon is frequently used for instance by the section for building workers at local branch level.

While strikes connected to collective bargaining are the most important ones in Danish industrial relations, accounting for the majority of working days lost, they are not the most frequent. The vast majority of strikes are unofficial or wildcat strikes, which breach collectively agreed norms regarding industrial conflict. An unofficial strike is usually confined to workers – perhaps only members of a single union – at an individual workplace. The decision to strike is taken by the workers themselves, sometimes spontaneously as a reaction to conditions that are experienced as unfair, and sometimes as part of local pay negotiations where, although constituting the local element of collective bargaining, no strike right exists. If an unofficial strike runs longer than a short period in which the relevant union and employers' association first attempt to find a solution, it will be brought before the labour court. The court will typically order a return to work and, in addition, impose a fine on the striking workers (Kristiansen 2014). In principle, all strikes at workplaces where there is a collective agreement are unofficial, but there are no official statistics distinguishing official and unofficial strikes.

Galenson (1969) found Danish industrial relations to be a case of 'industrial peace' when studying the conditions prevailing in the first half of the twentieth century, and peace rather than conflict is still often stressed as a core feature of 'the Danish model'. More recent international comparisons, however, place Denmark among the rather conflict prone countries. For the period since 2000, Denmark is situated closer to the top than the bottom of a European league of working days lost due to

industrial conflict (Appendix A1). In a historical perspective, however, the conflict level in Denmark, as in Europe as a whole, has decreased radically. Working days lost to industrial conflict were down to 49 per 1,000 employees in the period 2010–2018, compared with 103 during the 2000s, and 212 in the peak period of the 1970s (Appendix A1; Knudsen and Lind 2012a).

Table 8.4 presents data on conflicts for the two decades from 2000 to 2019. As official Danish statistics do not distinguish between strikes and lock-outs the concept of ‘work stoppage’ is used to cover both categories. While almost all work stoppages are strikes, lock-outs may contribute substantially to the number of working days lost. This was the case not least for the period 2010–2019, in which the lock-out of teachers in 2013 resulted in approximately 900,000 lost working days, or more than 80 per cent of all cases in the decade. In the private sector, lock-outs were part of the major conflicts in 1973 and 1998 but have not been practised to any significant extent since 1998. This is not because lock-outs have not been called, but because unions and employers have managed to renew the collective agreements at the negotiation table.

Table 8.4 shows a clear trend towards fewer conflicts and fewer working days lost because of conflicts. The incidence of industrial conflict has changed substantially, as has the overall pattern. Historically, the great majority of conflicts have occurred in the private sector, notably in manufacturing, and the major ones, with many working days lost, have also taken place in that sector, since 1945 notably in the years 1956, 1973, 1985, and 1998. They were all in connection with the renewal of national collective agreements. But in the past twenty years or so the public sector has taken the lead regarding large conflicts connected to collective bargaining and working days lost.

Table 8.4 Work stoppages in Denmark, 2000–2009 and 2010–2019

	Work stoppages	Workers involved	Working days lost
2000–2009, annual average	716	63,320	261,870
2010–2019, annual average	238	14,865	107,250

Source: Statistics Denmark (www.statistikbanken.dk/10324).

While most strikes used to take place in manufacturing this is no longer the case. During the period 2000–2004, 57 per cent of all conflicts took place in manufacturing but by 2015–2019 the share had fallen to just 23 per cent (Statistics Denmark n.a.). Contributing to the radical decrease in strike frequency in manufacturing was no doubt the fact that the bargaining agents in the industry, Dansk Industri and CO Industry (CO-Industri), agreed stricter procedures in relation to unofficial strikes in the 2004 bargaining round (Due and Madsen 2006). Furthermore, the sharp fall in inflation no doubt played a role in bringing down the number of strikes: the rationale behind many unofficial strikes – the fact that wages were lagging behind prices – simply no longer applied. Throughout the period 2000–2019 unions managed to secure increases in real wages, except for the years 2010–2012. But even in these austerity years workers and unions largely refrained from using the strike weapon. Faced with steeply rising unemployment following the 2008 financial crisis the unions instead showed restraint, awaiting better times, which came from 2013, with real wages growing about 10 per cent from 2012 to 2019 (Thomsen 2019).

Since 1998 there have been no large conflicts connected to collective bargaining in the private sector, whereas there have been two major conflicts in the public sector. For the period 2000–2019 the public sector contributed more than 80 per cent of the total number of working days lost because of industrial conflict (Altinget 2018; Statistics Denmark).

The rising conflict level in the public sector has partly been due to workers' dissatisfaction with pay and conditions, often influenced by cuts in public expenditure, and partly by more aggressive tactics on the part of public employers. In 2008, nurses and staff working in care institutions for children and the elderly went on strike, demanding a pay rise of 15 per cent over the next three years. The strike went on for fifty-nine days before it ended with pay rises of around 13 per cent (Altinget 2018). Another spectacular conflict occurred in 2013 when the association of municipalities, with the backing of the government, locked out some 43,000 teachers for twenty-five days, until, as the teachers' union refused to cave in, the conflict was ended by legislation (Altinget 2018). In this way public employers got rid of the so-called Working Time Agreement, which defined how much time teachers should spend on teaching compared with preparation and other job-relevant activities. This conflict, so clearly aimed at increasing individual teachers' workload, led to much resentment among teachers. Only in 2020 did the parties manage to reach a new national agreement on working time.

Again in 2018 a major conflict in the public sector was imminent. Unions had given strike notice to 155,000 workers, and public employers had responded with a massive lock-out notice covering no fewer than 440,000 public employees (Altinget 2018). In the end, the action was called off after protracted negotiations and a major effort by the Conciliation Board. The rising level of conflict in the public sector has triggered discussion over whether it should have the same industrial relations system as the private sector, particularly given that relations between public negotiators and public legislators, who may choose to end a strike by legislation, are very close (Høgedahl 2019).

General strikes, being prominent in Belgium, France and Spain, are not part of the repertoire of Danish unions. There is a generally respected mutual understanding between the political system and the industrial relations system about non-interference.

Political relations

Historically, the LO-affiliated section of the Danish union movement developed long-standing and very close relations with the Social Democratic Party (*Socialdemokratiet*). Similar to the other Nordic countries, this close alliance was characterized as a key feature of Nordic social democratic capitalism (Korpi 1978, 1983). Often union representatives would have a political role in the Social Democratic Party. LO was officially represented in the executive bodies of the Party and vice versa. The other confederations, AC and FTF, were less political, smaller and, in general, played a less important role in the overall governance of society, because LO – and in particular unions in manufacturing – formed the core of the ‘social democratic capitalism model’. The ties with the Social Democratic Party have weakened since the 1970s, and in 2002 LO removed the reference to the Social Democratic Party in its constitution (Allern et al. 2007). The Social Democrats have additionally become more prone to introduce policies that run against unions’ demands, such as non-Keynesian economic policies and retrenchment policies in unemployment benefits, as well as cutbacks in welfare provisions (Klitgaard and Nørgaard 2014; Refslund and Lind 2021).

Given the declining official and political ties between LO/FH and the Social Democratic Party, the union movement nowadays seeks broader coalitions and engages more actively with other political parties. Nevertheless, many political overlaps remain with the Social Democratic

Party, and the party is still more aligned and attentive to union claims than right-wing parties (Klitgaard and Nørgaard 2014). Segments of the union movement leadership feel stronger connections with the smaller left-wing parties, the Socialist People Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti*) and Left Unity (*Enhedslisten*); notably some of the more ‘belligerent’ parts of 3F are more closely aligned with the political left, in particular Left Unity.

Overall, the union movement today appears to take a more pluralist approach, seeking broader cooperation in parliament and to influence the most relevant political actors. The unions thus have some relations with most major political parties and actively seek to influence most parties. There is also some variation across unions: low-wage unions such as 3F and FOA have closer ties with the left-wing, while the high-wage unions, such as those in the bargaining cartel CO-Industri, notably Dansk Metal, have stronger relations with the Social Democratic and the centre-right parties, because they share more political views, such as wage restraint to increase competitiveness. The anti-immigrant right-wing party Dansk Folkeparti (DF) has become increasingly important for the union movement, and vice versa, because of its recent preparedness to make political deals not just with the other right-wing parties, as was their traditional position, but also with the Social Democrats. DF’s anti-immigrant political agenda has also largely been accepted by the Social Democratic government in power since 2019.

Corporatist policymaking has, in general, declined, while other actors have gained more access to the policymaking process (Binderkrantz and Christiansen 2015; Jørgensen and Larsen 2014; Klitgaard and Nørgaard 2014; Refslund and Lind 2021). But the labour market parties, not least the unions, have played a huge role in policies addressing the labour market disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic since spring 2020, through several tripartite agreements to mitigate the effects of the crisis on the labour market. Overall, the social partners maintain an active role in policymaking, in particular on labour market policies, although less so than in the heyday of Danish corporatism in the 1970s (Mailand 2020; Refslund and Lind 2021). In line with the more pluralist interest representation, unions are actively seeking political influence, irrespective of the party affiliation of the government. Social dialogue may be stronger when a weak government, in a fragile coalition, is in power, particularly if it is from the centre-right (Mailand 2020). Unlike the trend since the 1990s, marked by negative reforms from a trade union perspective, the Social Democratic government that came to power in 2019 initiated

several policies that can be termed union-friendly, for instance on differentiated early retirement, which has been a union demand for years. Other demands, however, such as improvements in the strongly eroded unemployment benefits, have not been met.

Societal power

Overall, unions still play an important role as a societal actor, and the idea of unionism and the inclusion of unions in societal problem-solving is still influential. Most Danes continue to see unions as a vital and legitimate actor (Caraker et al. 2014). Since unions still have significant traditional institutional, associational and structural power resources, however, they rely less on societal and coalitional power than union movements that are deprived of such power resources (Bieler 2018). A study of the power elite in Denmark found four union leaders to be among the ten most powerful people in the country (Larsen et al. 2015). The study reached this conclusion by studying networks and interactions in central economic and political decision-making fora. It thus probably underestimates economic and political power, notably capital, parliament and government. Nevertheless, the study signals that the union movement is strongly integrated in the power structures of Danish society.

The unions are aware of the importance of public debates and discourse, and occasionally run large-scale public campaigns to influence public opinion on working conditions and wages, but also other issues they consider relevant for their constituency, such as the retirement age. Here the unions have been able to influence the political debate. Public debates are used more directly to influence industrial relations. The unions often create negative publicity on social dumping, such as underpayment of migrant workers, for instance in construction (for an example, Arnholtz and Refslund 2019). In addition, in the highly publicized public sector industrial dispute in 2013 on teachers' working hours the unions actively tried to use the media – also social media – to influence the outcome (Hansen and Mailand 2019).

Additionally, unions remain an important societal voice in public and media discussions, and leaders of the main unions and confederations participate in public and media debates on societal issues, reflecting the fact that most wage-earners are union members. At the industrial level, unions are also frequently included in public debates, when the issues affect union members. Nevertheless, the range and scope of topics that

are deemed relevant for unions may have diminished somewhat over recent decades. While there has been some historical engagement on the part of the unions in issues beyond the labour market, such as nuclear power, apartheid in South Africa and other transnational issues, this is currently limited. For example, the unions do not act as a pivotal actor in the climate change discussion. Regarding climate change FH has developed a plan for the ‘green transition of the economy’, but this is confined to union perspectives and does not include much ‘coalition-building’. Just to illustrate the relevant internal union disputes, the metal workers union and the employers’ association Dansk Industri jointly stated they are against a special Danish CO₂ fee, because they fear it will reduce competitiveness (Kaergaard 2020).

Much research on coalitions and unions has emphasized coalitions on issues including austerity and privatization (Ibsen and Tapia 2017). While the union movement has been partly engaged in protests on these issues, it has not developed any large-scale coalitions with other societal actors. In the Danish context, however, unions remain the key actor, and most of the protests outside the union realm on austerity and privatization probably originate from union activists.

Unions are increasingly paying attention to communication with members and others via social media. In recent collective bargaining rounds, some of the more critical union activists, who demanded stronger positions from unions in bargaining – for example, on social dumping – were very active online on Facebook and managed to engage in and influence discussions. Likewise, union leaders have sought to improve communications with members online. Recently the union movement made the members’ ballot on the collective bargaining results available online for the first time. They are thus trying to adapt their communication with members to the new online reality, although they have not yet found the perfect formula for online communication (Andersen and Hansen 2020).

Trade union policies towards the European Union

European Union (EU) policies and legislation, and in particular Court of Justice of the European Union case law, have influenced the Danish labour market. Since the 1990s, there have been strong concerns that Europeanization would cause upheaval in Danish industrial relations. Initially, the fear was that that the implementation of EU directives

would undermine some of the essential features of ‘the Danish model’, while later the notorious ‘*Laval* quartet’ were viewed as very damaging because they challenge collective bargaining. Major disturbances, however, did not materialize following *Laval* (Refslund 2015). The increasing ‘Europeanization’ of labour law and labour market systems is also influential in Denmark, illustrated by the recent EU Directive on paternal and maternal leave (EU/2019/1158) and the discussions on an EU-wide minimum wage. There is a great commotion over the proposed EU minimum wage, which is widely seen by employers, unions and politicians as a direct assault on the Danish wage-setting system and the broader industrial relations system (Müller and Schulten 2020).

While there have been challenges on implementing European legislation, a consensus between employers’ associations, unions and policy-makers on how to implement European legislation persists. Their point of view is that European legislation must be introduced within the framework of collective agreements, which remain imperative in Danish labour market regulation. The intention is to ensure that the implementation of EU legislation is handled bilaterally via collective agreements, and that the parliament adopts legislation to cover the residual workers not covered by collective agreements, if that is needed (Knudsen and Lind 2012b). The unions have accepted the basic idea of the free movement of labour, but avoiding social dumping is a recurrent issue. Transnational labour, like posting of workers, is used to circumvent national regulation, in particular collective agreements (Arnholtz and Lillie 2020; Arnholtz and Refslund 2019; Refslund 2016).

The Danish labour market parties have in general rather dragged their feet in their engagement with EU debates and peers, as they have prioritized the national partnership in preserving the Danish model of industrial relations (Knudsen and Lind 2012b). This has come at the cost of engaging in some European-wide discussions, which indicates that the unions have had a somewhat passive and more sceptical approach to the European Union cooperation, along with the other Nordic unions (Larsson 2015; Vulkan and Larsson 2018). Danish unions are nevertheless active in European cooperation. FH and AC are members of the ETUC, and the national union federations are in general members of the ETUFs, which they utilize for information sharing. But they find direct European cooperation with other unions on collective bargaining less germane. Their overall perception is that they cannot gain much from European cooperation because of the lack of power resources available

to unions in many other EU countries. This also means that unions typically prioritize national solutions and actions over supranational and European solutions (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013), for instance engaging in national discussion with companies rather than in European works councils.

There has historically been a strong bond between the Nordic unions, among the LO confederations in particular, institutionalized in the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (*Nordens Facklige Samorganisation*), which also occasionally serves as a coordination forum for the Nordic unions on their EU policy (Larsson 2015: 105). Moreover, Nordic and hence Danish unions often prioritize their own Brussels offices over the ETUC and ETUFs (Larsson 2015). While Nordic cooperation is important, unions also engage in particular with German unions in manufacturing because developments in Germany are highly influential on working conditions in neighbouring countries, including Denmark (Andersen et al. 2015; Müller et al. 2018).

Conclusions

The Danish unions' enduringly strong societal and associational position shows that unionism is not under severe threat. Danish unions remain firmly embedded in society and the labour market institutions, and there is a strong consensus between the unions and employers on the overall governance of the labour market and working conditions. Union density also remains high, at 64 per cent, and has been fairly stable over the past decade, although it has declined steadily since the peak in the 1990s. Hence, there is no frontal attack on unions and unionism in the Danish context, and the unions have also played a significant role in the labour market policy adjustments during the Covid-19 crisis.

Nevertheless, there are challenges, such as increasing membership of 'yellow' unions that do not form part of the collective bargaining system or the basic agreements that govern the relations between the parties, including the labour court. Growing numbers of unorganized migrant workers are also seen by many unions as a strong challenge to unionism. In certain industries, the impact of the unions and the reach of collective bargaining appear to be close to critical so that a substantial number of workers find themselves outside the protection offered by unions and collective agreements. The unemployment benefit system has also been

eroded and institutionally changed to the detriment of the traditional unions.

In sum this does not suggest that unionism in Denmark is unequivocally on a declining trajectory, although the role and power of the unions have diminished since the heyday of Danish social democratic capitalism (before the neoliberal turn), when unions played a key role in political and economic life (Esping-Andersen 1985, 1990). Whether these incremental challenges over time will undermine the unions' important role in Danish political economy is an open question. To date, the challenges have been accommodated within the system, with accompanying alterations and some limitations on union influence, rather than resulting in trade union marginalization.

Regarding the future, none of Visser's (2019) four scenarios fit the Danish case well. As mentioned above, *marginalization* is hardly on the horizon. Some tendencies towards *dualization* between organized and unorganized parts of the labour market may be a growing feature. We may also see more *substitution* in its specific Danish form, where voice through traditional unions is being replaced by a much meeker representation through 'yellow' unions. *Revitalization* will continue to be a feature, regarding both structures and practices. At least for the next decade or two, however, continuing strength and relevance will probably be more apt descriptions than any of Visser's four scenarios.

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All links were checked on 5 May 2021.

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Abbreviations

3F	Faglig Fælles Forbund (United Federation of Workers)
AC	Akademikerne (Danish Confederation of Professional Associations)
ASE	Arbejdsløsheds-kassen for selvstændige (Union connected to unemployment fund for self-employed)
CO-Industri:	Centralorganisationen af Industriansatte (Central Organization of Industrial Employees in Denmark)
DA	Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening (Confederation of Danish Employers)
Dansk Metal	Dansk Metalarbejderforbund (Danish Metalworkers' Federation)
DI	Dansk Industri (Federation of Danish Employers in Manufacturing Industry)
DJØF	Dansk Jurist- og Økonomforbund (Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists)
DM	(earlier Dansk Magisterforening) (Federation of Professionals in Arts and Science)
DsF	De samvirkende Fagforbund (Confederations of Danish Trade Unions)
EU	European Union
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETUF	European Trade Union Federation
FH	Fagbevægelsens Hovedorganisation (Danish Trade Union Confederation)
FOA	Fag og Arbejde (The union for mainly health and care workers)

- FTF** Funktionærernes og Tjenestemændenes Fællesråd (Confederation of Professionals in Denmark)
- HK** Handels- og Kontorfunktionærernes Fagforbund (Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark)
- IDA** Ingeniørsammenslutningen i Danmark (Danish Society of Engineers)
- Krifa** Kristelig Fagbevægelse (Christian Union)
- LH** Ledernes Hovedorganisation (Danish Association of Managers)
- LO** Landsorganisationen i Danmark (Danish Confederation of Trade Unions)