The Policeman as a Worker – or Not?

International Impulses and National Developments within the Swedish Police, ca. 1850–1940

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SUMMARY

A modern type of police organization was introduced in Sweden after the revolutionary movement of 1848. As always this was done with a keen eye on the development in the rest of Europe, and the new type of police organization was based on the most modern of all: the London Metropolitan Police. In this text the focus is on the social background of the policemen and its crucial significance for the development of the police and its social, cultural and political outlook. In the early years most policemen came from a working class background, while in later years, due to a direct strategy instigated by the authorities, they mainly came from a rural background and almost all had training as noncommissioned officers in the military service. This in turn led to increasing conflicts within the police ranks, with the most outspoken years of internal hostilities being in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Key words
police history, police and politics, recruitment, police reform, Malmö police

A modern type of police organization was introduced in Sweden after the revolutionary confrontational cycle of 1848. As always this was done with a keen eye on the development in the rest of Europe, and the new type of police organization was based on the most modern of all: the London Metropolitan Police. In this article I propose to discuss some of the social and cultural aspects of the policemen’s working conditions within this modernizing police organization in

late nineteenth and early twentieth century Sweden.\(^2\) The article will take into account aspects such as the social background of the policemen and its crucial significance in the development of the police and its social, cultural and political outlook. It is possible to discern a gradual shift from the mid-nineteenth century, where the international impulses mainly came from a Great Britain with its police tradition, to the early twentieth century, when it mainly came from the Germany and its more militaristic continental police tradition. In the early years most policemen came from a working class background, while in the latter years, due to a direct strategy from the authorities, they mainly came from a rural background and, almost all had training as noncommissioned officers in the military service. This in turn led to increasing conflicts within the police ranks, its most outspoken years of internal hostilities took place in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The main focus in the article will be on the city of Malmoe and its police organization. This is done for two reasons: 1.) Although there has been some research done on late nineteenth and early twentieth century Swedish police history, it has mostly been focused on the cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg. With a focus on Malmoe the similarities and differences between this, the third largest city, and the two largest, can be discussed. 2) The debate within the rank and file of the Swedish Police in the early twentieth century, as to whether a policeman was supposed to be seen as a worker or not, can be said to have had Malmoe as its center point. With a focus on Malmoe and its specific temporal and spatial social layout – not least culturally and politically – during the timeframe of the article some of the reasons for and outcomes of this can be discussed.

**A MODERN POLICE ORGANIZATION**

The first wave of industrialization hit Sweden with force in the last decades of the nineteenth century (more than a hundred years after its initiation in 1750s England), hastily transforming the society from agricultural to industrial. For Malmoe (situated in the far South of Sweden with the Danish capital Copenhagen just across the Sound) this process of industrialization transformed the city from a small merchant and shipping town (with 19 000 inhabitants in 1860) to one of the largest industrial cities in Sweden (with 113 500 inhabi-

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\(^2\) An important point must be made here. Throughout this article I am talking not about police in general but about policemen –this not an oversight. While Sweden indeed had women working within its organization since 1908, these were referred to as «police sisters» and worked with such duties as the American «police matrons» undertook in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Thus, women were at the time of this study not a part of the regular police force; they did not work as police constables walking the police line. Women police became a part of the regular police force, first for a trial period in the 1950s and then more generally later on. The hiring of «police sisters» was furthermore a drawn out affair, both temporally and spatially; Malmoe did not get its first «police sisters» in its police force until the mid-1930s. Nyzell, 2013, p. 170; Dahlgren, 2007, p 37–52. On «Police Matrons» and women policing in general, see: Schulz, 1995; Wells & Alt, 2005; Jackson, 2006. The author of this article is currently working on a project about transnational perspectives of women policing and its impact on the «police sister» organization in Sweden, c. 1908–1950.
ants in 1920). An article in the *Swedish Police Journal* from 1914 describes this growth and development of industrializing Malmö as «almost American in its speed and character».

Hand in hand with this deeply felt and seen transformation of Sweden into an industrial and urban society (although strictly speaking it was not until the 1950s that Sweden was more industrial than agricultural) was the development of a modern police organization.

One important aspect in a discussion of the development of the Swedish police is the fact that for a long time it was locally organized. So when a modern police force started to be organized in Sweden it was the result of initiatives from the local communities. First out to organize a modern police organization was the two largest cities in Sweden: Stockholm and Gothenburg. It was the transnational revolutionary confrontational cycle of 1848 and its impact in Sweden – not least in the capital of Stockholm where demonstration outside the royal palace led to violent confrontations between the forces of order and the gathered crowds. The events of 1848 brought home to the Swedish authorities the necessity to reorganize the forces of order, at least in the larger cities. The police was both small in number and also too differentiated in its organization to be able to handle such events. Military troops were regularly called in to counter unrest, more often than not resulting in violence and bloodshed. A new kind of police force that was better organized and closer to «the man of the street» was more suited to deal with both the prevention of crime and meeting unrest, or so was thought. As always with this this sort of organizational transformation it was done with a keen eye on the development in the rest of Europe, and the new type of police organization that emerged in both Stockholm and Gothenburg was based on the most modern of all at that period of time: the London Metropolitan Police.

The process of organizing a modern police was a drawn out affair, temporally and spatially, as it was the local communities that had to take it upon themselves to initiate the shift. In Malmö, for example, the final decision to reorganize its police was not taken in the city council until 1873, twenty-three years after the reorganization in Stockholm and Gothenburg. Although it had been discussed and debated for many years before that, it had always been turned down. The reason for this delaying was the simple fact that the proposed reorganization of the city’s police force was deemed too costly. In the 1870s, however, the impact of urbanization and industrialization was changing the social layout of the city in an undeniable way, and it was now that it was

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6. It was not until 1965s that the Swedish police became nationally organized, even though there was a sort of transitional organization from the mid-1930s, with a State Police alongside (or rather as a part of) the locally organized police forces. No historical research has been conducted on this State Police organization; but Alkarp argues that the State Police often gathered the worst elements from the local police forces. Furuhagen, 2009, p 43–44; Alkarp, 2013, 111–146.
thought necessary to meet the demands of the new times with a modern way of organizing its police force.\(^8\)

Malmö adopted the same model of organization as Stockholm and Gothenburg. Its new police organization, established in 1874, divided the police in two parts: the District Police, and the Detective Police. Initially the city was organized as a single police district, with a central police station in the city hall, and two smaller police stations located in the city’s southern and eastern suburbs. Throughout the city, eight regular patrol lines were established with constables constantly on patrol. An office as the Commissioner of the Police was established at the same time. In the early twentieth century the organization of the police in Malmö was the same, albeit with more police districts, police stations and patrol lines as the city continued the grow. One ordinary policeman was hired for every 475 inhabitants in Malmö, a number comparable with that of Stockholm and Gothenburg.\(^9\) As the number of inhabitants in the city grew very rapidly during the decades before and after 1900 the police force also grew accordingly. There were four ordinary ranks: Superintendent [kommissarie], Sergeant [överkonstapel]; Inspection Constable [inspektionskonstapel], and Ordinary Constable [ordinarie konstapel]. There was also a reserve force of Extra Constables [extra konstaplar] that could be used should the need arise. All in all the Police Department in Malmö had 204 policemen in 1914.\(^10\)

As in the 1870s the police in early twentieth century Malmö was divided into a plain clothes Detective Branch and a uniformed District Branch, the latter, however, was organized into a Central Police Division and four District Police Divisions.\(^11\) The policemen of the District Branch (including those from the Central Police) were uniformed in German style uniforms and armed with sabers. In 1914 there were four police districts in Malmö, two were head-districts and two were sub-districts. The head-districts were each led by a Superintendent, the sub-district by a Sergeant who reported to one of the two District Superintendents respectively. In the four Police-Districts the Ordinary Police Constables patrolled the regular patrol-lines (or, as in some of the city’s outer areas, patrolled by policemen on horseback) every hour of the day. Each of the constables patrolled in four-hour shifts, with two such patrolling shifts, and one shift of four hours in reserve or doing desk duty at the police station, each day. Every ninth day was a day off work (although not off duty as policemen were obliged at all times to step in if they witnessed some sort of misdemeanor or other criminal act).\(^12\) The Central Police Division was the elite unit within the police force, its members undertaking many different sorts of tasks. Its Inspection Constables were charged with inspecting the work done by the patrolling members of the District Police, overseeing them and punishing

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\(^8\) Nyzell, 2013, p. 159; Hansen, 1949, p. 31–36.


\(^12\) Hårleman, 1914, p. 208–225.
those not following the very strict code of conduct demanded of them.¹³

Twelve men from the Central Police Division made up the riding police force. The policemen on horseback were used to patrol the suburbs in patrol-lines very similar to those patrolling on foot.¹⁴ The first police car was introduced in 1922 and as late as 1940 the Malmoe police still had only two cars and one motorcycle for patrolling.¹⁵ One of the most important duties for the policemen of the Central Police Division – including its riding force – was to be at hand as a reserve force that could be used to deal with large-scale disorders, such as the Malmoe Riots of 1890, the Municipal Workers Strike in 1908 and the Möllevången Riots of 1926.¹⁶

The policemen of the Detective Branch primarily worked with more serious crimes, but also with surveillance and other forms of crime preventive work. The principle was that the District Police was to handle misdemeanors and such lesser crimes as were handled by the Police Court (such as drunkenness and disorderly conduct), and the Detective Branch the more serious crimes leading to prosecution in public court (such as larceny, aggravated assault, manslaughter, and murder).¹⁷

THE POLICEMAN’S SOCIAL SITUATION

To be hired as an Extra Constable within the Malmoe Police Department in the early twentieth century several demands had to be met: one had to be between 22 and 28 years old, at least 176 centimeters tall and with a strong physique, be in good health, have a respectable appearance, have a predisposition for good discretion, have a calm temperament, have been recommended for having a good character and have graduated school.¹⁸ Training at police school was done after being accepted as an Extra Constable. Teaching was conducted at the local level, as there was not as yet a national police school, with the officers of the Central Police Division as teachers under the direction of the Police Secretary. The latter, an office directly under the Police Commissioner, was also responsible for the examinations of the policemen-to-be. Training lasted about a year, after which the Extra Policemen could be on duty if needed. After that the Extra Policeman could be promoted to Ordinary Policeman when a vacancy arose. After being promoted as Ordinary Constable it was possible, given time within the service, to rise in rank, most often to Sergeant or Inspectio Constable.¹⁹

¹⁵. The policemen in Malmoe could use the city’s taxis and trams for free when the need arose to transport them more quickly in the line of duty. Hansen, 1949, p. 98–101, 106.
In the early twentieth century, policemen increasingly had a background as noncommissioned officers. This was a development encouraged by the state authorities, and there were for several reasons for this: firstly, it was thought that the military training and discipline would be of use in the police service; secondly, it was thought that those who passed through military training as non-commissioned officers would be more loyal to the state authorities – this was at a time when radical political ideologies, such as socialism, anarchism and syndicalism were spreading fast among the working classes.

Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, as the modern police organization was initiated, most of the recruited policemen had a working class background, socially and culturally. In the late nineteenth century this was increasingly viewed as problematic by the authorities as it implied social and cultural open or hidden loyalties from the rank and file of the policemen towards the working class communities. To counteract this, a strategy was developed to hire policemen from rural backgrounds, as these were seen as having less social and cultural bounds with the working class communities they – for the most part, at least in cities as Malmoe – were supposed to work in. The result was that in the early twentieth century there was an older generation of policemen with a predominantly working class background and a younger generation of policemen with a more rural background. This led to some situations of dissent between the two generations and the quite different social and cultural spheres they represented. While there is room for some caution here; many of the members of working class communities in the mid- to late nineteenth century had a rural background (due to the fact that they were part of the transformation of society due to the processes of urbanization and industrialization), and many of those with rural backgrounds in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had for the same reasons family ties to urban working class the communities; this can explain some of the ideological dissent within the police ranks as well as the marked shift from the ideological left to the right in the inter-war years. In short, while the Swedish authorities were worried that the police forces had too strong ideological ties to the political left in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – and indeed the movement within the police to unionize and to affiliate themselves with a socialistic political party, the Social Democratic Party (SAP), in the late 1910s and early 1920s, seemed to underline these fears – the development in the late inter-war years and the during the Second World War was characterized by a marked ideological shift to the far right politically and caused the authorities equal concern. Indeed, from the perspective of the Swedish state authorities, socialistic and national socialistic policemen were equally worrying. At the same time this development was to some extent the result of the policies of the same authorities in their endeavor to root out any affiliation to socialism within the police ranks.  

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The militarization of the Swedish police force during the first decades of the twentieth century is an important development. In 1914 there were few policemen in the Malmö Police Department that were not trained as non-commissioned officers from one or another of the military services. An illustrative example can be taken from the muster-roll of the Malmö police, where such things as the policeman’s previous occupation and the extent of military training are noted. Of the first 60 names on the muster-roll that had active duty in 1914, no less than 58 had a military background – from infantry as well as artillery or cavalry. About 10 of these had served as private soldiers, 5 of these in the cavalry as hussars or dragoons. Most, though, were non-commissioned officers; no less than 29 out of 60 were corporals. Only 2 had a non-military background, one was carpenter and the other a station agent for the railroad. Many policemen in 1914 Malmö had a background as either a private or non-commissioned officer from the local Cavalry Regiment that was stationed in the city – The Crown Prince’s Hussars – or from some other cavalry regiment. Consequently no riding school was needed for the Riding Police in the Central Police Division. The situation in Malmö echoed that of Gothenburg and Stockholm. In 1917 no less than 96 % of the policemen in the Swedish capital had a background from the military service; this is to be compared to only 19 % in 1850.21 Moreover, while non-commissioned officers were often recruited as policemen, officers were recruited as high ranking policemen, such as Superintendents.22

To further emphasize this militarization of the Swedish police the policemen in the first decades of the twentieth century wore uniforms based on the «German look» – including the helmet – and were armed with sabers. This was a marked difference from mid-nineteenth century uniforms in Sweden, with the influence by the British police tradition with its policy of non-militaristic uniforms and unarmed policemen.23

The life of a policeman was characterized by discipline and surveillance. In his professional role this was clearly the case in the relations between the policeman and general public that he was supposed to control and oversee in his day to day work. At the same time, the policeman was under constant supervision by his superiors. The borders between leisure and work time was thin. Even private life was constantly affected by professional life. First of all, the policemen were never really off duty, always required to step in the professional role when confronted with any form of crime. Moreover, they were encouraged to live within the precinct they were working in, i.e. they were often «walking the beat» of the patrol-lines in their own neighborhoods, thus reinforcing the thin borders between public role and private life. Furthermore, many had a hard

23. There were regional differences too. It was up to the local authorities how the police were to be uniformed. In Gothenburg on the Swedish west-coast, for example, with its close communication with the east-coast of Great Britain, the policemen wore British looking uniforms, including the «bobby style» helmet, until 1897. Bergman, 1990, p 81–85.
time making ends meet with the rather low salary of a policeman, especially if they had a family to support. This meant that many policemen had to take on extra work, in other words outside the work-hours requested in the police force. Many, for example, became Deputy Landlords in the same houses they were living in, work that could be done whenever there was some spare time. This in turn meant the policeman’s role as controller and overseer was emphasized even in private life. Furthermore, the entire family of a policeman was to an extent affected by his professional choice. It was in many ways a socially upward move for the family as a whole if one of its members was a policeman. At the same time with this incurred the risk of social isolation for the police family in the working class neighborhoods were most part of all policemen lived. The discipline and surveillance that characterized the police professionally probably led many neighbors to distance themselves somewhat from the policeman and his family. And lastly, the fact that the policeman was never free from his work meant that any sort of misdemeanors – even if they were done off duty – were punished.

The list of possible misdemeanors, both off and on duty, were both long and manifold. The possible punishment ranged from suspension (i.e. working without pay), demotion to a lower rank, or discharge.

SAMPLE POLICEMAN FROM MALMÖ POLICE DEPARTMENT

Johan Alfred Karlsson Sundström, Constable with service number 95, was born in 1874 in Väckelsång, Kronoberg County. He was enlisted as Extra Constable with service number 107 in October 1898, graduated as Ordinary Constable in December 1899, and promoted Ordinary Constable in April 1900. His previous professional occupation was as hussar at the Crown Prince’s Hussar Regiment (in Malmo). In December 1908 Sundström was transferred to the Central Police Division in the Riding Police (i.e. mounted police). On the 31st May 1929, at an age of 55, he was honorably discharged with pension.
The possibility of disciplinary punishment was a constant threat for the policeman. Moreover the police commissioner had the legal power to discharge a policeman that displeased him out of hand – more or less arbitrarily – making this threat all the more real. As studies of the police departments in Gothenburg and Stockholm have shown, there was a great deal of coming and goings within the file and rank of the police force, as policemen were regularly hired and dismissed. Misdemeanors such as drunkenness and violent behavior were common reasons for policemen being let go. At the same time those policemen reaching 55 years of age and with 25 years of service behind them could look forward to a pension for life. This was one of the very real benefits of being a policeman; at least before the National Pension Reform of 1948 provided for more general access to pension for the Swedish population as a whole.

ON PATROL AND KEEPING ORDER

As in the example of Officer Sundström many of the possible misdemeanors that policemen were charged with generally happened while they were on patrol-duty. This is no surprise in itself as most of the police work done by the file and rank of the policemen of the district police was in fact patrolling – or «walking the beat». The long hours of work – never less than twelve hours each work-day and sometimes split so one of the four hours of patrol-duty was

in the morning and the next in the afternoon or evening – with a day off duty only every ninth day, was demanding to say the least, both mentally and physically. To give a few examples, when on patrol a policeman was not allowed to smoke, to use a cane or umbrella, to put his hands in his pockets, to sit or lay down, to stop for anything outside the line of duty, or, indeed, to leave the patrol line at all except on police business. The policeman on patrol was discouraged from using the sidewalks, but was rather supposed to walk down the middle of the street (this was before cars compelled pedestrians to stay off the streets). At the same time, however, the strict discipline demanded of the policemen while on patrol was often notoriously lacking. It was a well-known problem that many policemen on patrol-duty happily enough left their patrol-lines do so something else; seemingly more or less whenever the opportunity arose. It was a common enough occurrence that policemen on patrol-duty simply left their patrol-lines without any pressing reason in the line of duty; to take a drink or two in the local pub for example. This, drinking alcohol while on duty, was a typical misdemeanor. It also happened that policemen went home to eat or sleep, or fell asleep outside, on benches or simply slept standing against a wall when possible. Those in charge of the police met these recurrent breaches in discipline with regular control by Inspection Constables, Sergeants or Superintendents, responding to any misbehavior with disciplinary punishment when someone was caught in the act. The function of the Inspection Constables within Central Police Division was primarily to inspect and control the constables of the District Police on patrol-duty. These inspections were unannounced and could happen around the clock. In the case of the sample policeman, Officer Sundström, he was for example caught «smoking a cigar and reading a newspaper while patrolling» and duly received a warning from his Superintendent. Furthermore, several times during his years of service he was warned and punished for drunkenness and violent behavior – while both on and off duty. On the other hand, the policemen soon learned the routines of the officers assigned to supervise them, and worked out counter-strategies to avoid detection when leaving the patrol-lines.

It was far from a daily occurrence that patrolling the lines led to anything like an arrest. Taking the example of a typical policeman on patrol-duty in the Fourth Police District in 1914 – Police Constable no. 75: Axel Morin – on a nine-day period in early March 1914 he made one police intervention which was written up at the desk at the police station. Specifically, Monday the 2nd March, around 3pm, Morin and another police constable (no. 77 Johan Andersson), arrived at the office of the Fourth District police station with a 34 year-old shoemaker, Anders Edvin Oskarsson, arrested for public drunkenness. As in the example above, most of the arrests made by the District Police on patrol-duty were for misdemeanors such as disorderly conduct or public

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drunkenness. In 1913 alone, a total of 4,677 arrests were made by the District Police for public drunkenness in Malmö.\textsuperscript{29} The total number of interventions by the Police Constables of the Fourth Police District during the same nine-day period as the example above was: nine cases of public drunkenness; two of violent disorderly conduct; one case where the police were asked to investigate whether an elderly neighbor should be taken into care in an institution, and one case regarding an individual who had applied to the police for permission to sell alcohol as fuel.\textsuperscript{30}

While keeping the order was the primary function of the district police, investigating more serious crime – such as larceny, aggravated assault, manslaughter and murder – was carried out by the Detective Police. During the same nine-day period as above the total number of cases investigated by the officers in the Detective Police Division in Malmö was: four cases of larceny, one case of rape, one of insult and threat, and one case of domestic violence.\textsuperscript{31}

**THE POLICE ASSOCIATION**

The comparatively low wages, long hours and bad working conditions, combined with the constant risk of being discharged for reasons that were more or less arbitrary, resulted in the formation of police associations in the late nineteenth century – and, in the long run, police unions. The impact from the social democratic labor movement – both its political and union branches – and its successes in asserting workers’ rights, in the face of both state authorities and various employer organizations, were important impulses for unionization of the Swedish police force to. In the late nineteenth century there were still a large number of policemen with working class backgrounds, a fact that made the social and cultural distance between the file and rank among the police and the working class community much closer than it would become later on in the interwar years of the early twentieth century. To call these interest-organizations of the policemen unions was far too provocative in the eyes of most police commissioners in the late nineteenth century. Instead these organizations were called Police Associations and had statutes that addressed the social and cultural improvement of the police force, expressively forbidding any kind of union activity. Several times in the 1880s and 1890s such Police Associations were expressively forbidden at different police departments, as it had transpired that their members had been working towards bettering the wages or working conditions of their associated policemen. Those policemen who advocated unionization were let go should it come to the attention of those in command. But despite the resistance and harsh repression at times most Police Associations over time tuned into more formalized interest organizations outspokenly asserting their

\textsuperscript{29} Hårleman, 1914, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{30} Polisvakterdisrktet IV i Malmö, Rapportjournal, 1913–1914, A2A:5, Malmö City Archive; Nyzell, 2013, p.168.
\textsuperscript{31} Detektiva polisen i Malmö, Rapportjournal, 1914, A2A:20 Malmö City Archive; Nyzell, 2013, p.168.
right to voice demands for better wages and working conditions for its members. The change in attitude from police commissioners to this, the right to organize, came at the turn of the century. First the Police Commissioner in Gothenburg accepted such Police Associations in 1902, others soon followed and the following year saw the Swedish Police Association was founded, a national organization of affiliated local Police Associations. In Malmoe the first local interest organization for the officers of the city’s police department accepted by the police commissioner was founded in 1903: the Police Association Comrade.32

THE POLICEMAN AS A WORKER – OR NOT

Over time the Police Associations became more or less outspoken police unions, but it was not until the late 1910s that there was a fraction within the Swedish Police Association large enough to be able to demand, and indeed enforce, that the organization should consider taking more radical action in its struggle for the rights of policemen – such as threatening police strikes. There were even talks from this more left-oriented fraction within the Swedish Police Association of formally affiliating the organization with the Social Democratic Party (SAP). Many policemen saw themselves as belonging to the working class and were strongly in favor of such a development. However, this development was met with outspoken opposition from other, more conservative fractions; such radicalization and affiliation to a socialist party with was viewed with a sense of horror. Indeed, when news reached the board of the Swedish Police Association in 1919 that the local Police Association in Malmoe had already taken this step – i.e. formally applied to, and been accepted into, the Social Democratic Association in Malmoe – this caused quite a stir. After some deliberation the members of the board in Stockholm took it upon themselves to expel the Police Association Comrade in Malmoe and all its members from the Swedish Police Association in response to this open display of affiliation to a socialist political party. In the Police Association Comrade, for a considerable time there had been a growing fraction – albeit not without some fierce opposition from the more conservative minded policemen – wanting to identify themselves as workers and to affiliate themselves to the social democratic labor movement. In the late 1910s this politically more left-oriented group gained the upper hand had immediately seized the opportunity to affiliate the Police Association Comrade with the Social Democratic Association in Malmoe. As all members of the Police Association Comrade as a collective became members of the Social Democratic Association in Malmoe, this meant that they statutorily became members of the Social Democratic Party.33

By that time Malmoe was the third largest industrial city in Sweden, with an already large and steadily growing working class community. The social democrats in Malmoe had gained political influence early on and indeed ruled the City Council even before the so-called democratic breakthrough in the late 1910s gave all working class men and women the right to vote in the national elections. Malmoe was in effect a social democratic city and from such a perspective it was thought, at least by some of the members of the local police association, to be strategically prudent to affiliate their organization with the ruling social democrats. What could be better, those so minded argued, then to have the ear of the political party in power? Policemen, the same persons argued, should be seen as workers and as belonging to the working class community—not as repressive tools of a reactionary state authority. This was a development feared by police commissioners and other members of the state authorities; i.e. that there was an influential fraction within the police force with sympathies to socialistic political groupings, unions or parties. Their response to this dilemma was the policy of recruiting more policemen from social and cultural backgrounds other than the working class. As has been said before in this article, this policy tended to backfire in the 1930s, as policemen increasingly turned to the far right in their political outlook; an uncomfortably large number, at least in the eyes of the more democratically minded within the state authorities, were members of fascist or national socialist associations or parties. In the early twentieth century, however, this movement of the pendulum from left to right of the political spectrum was yet to take place. As it transpired, when the Swedish Police Association met for its congress in Linköping 1920 the general feeling among the representatives of the local Police Associations from all around Sweden was that the decision by the board to expel the members of the Police Association Comrade in Malmoe was incorrect. Indeed, the delegates from Malmoe had traveled to Linköping despite their expulsion, and once there they demanded the right to attend the congress and to address the gathered delegates. A vote on that issue resulted in the delegates of the congress, in opposition to the board, accepting the Malmoe representatives’ right to attend the congress and to address the gathered delegates on the issue of their expulsion. When given the opportunity to address the gathered congress, one of the representatives from Malmoe—Police Constable Johan Levin—held what must have been a formidable speech defending the right of the Police Association Comrade to affiliate itself to SAP. Not only was Levin’s speech received with general approval, the majority of the delegates shortly afterward voted for the immediate removal of the board’s decision of expulsion. The preceding board resigned in the face of such clear opposition to its authority and a new board was elected, with Johan Levin as the new chairman. Thus, at the turn of the decade, the general political mood within the Swedish Police Association and its locally affiliated Police Associations was that: 1). It approved the idea that policemen were to be seen as workers; and 2). at the very least accepted the idea that a local association—such as the

Police Association Comrade in Malmö – had the right to affiliate itself to the Social Democratic Party. At the same time the congress decided that the Swedish Police Association would continue its policy not to affiliate itself with any political party or ideology. Any such affiliation was left up to the local associations to decide whether or not to pursue. Indeed, to my knowledge the Malmö association was the only one taking such a deliberate step.\textsuperscript{36}

**THE WORKING CLASS POLICEMAN – THE IDEA PUT TO THE TEST**

The Police Association Comrade in Malmo remained affiliated with the Social Democratic Movement in the city between 1919 and 1927. The relationship between the policemen and the rest of the social democratic organizations in the city was distinctive in many ways. On one hand the police association was politically affiliated with the Social Democratic Association in Malmö and thus with the Social Democratic Party. On the other hand the policemen were very clear that they were not a part of the social democratic trade union. As strange as this may seem – as the Police Association Comrade was effectively a union for its members – it was seen as a necessary step by the members of the police union to be able to remain neutral when it came to industrial disputes. As the police force was regularly commanded to enforce law and order when industrial disputes led to confrontation – a common state of affairs in the inter-war years when strikes from trade unions were met with lockouts and strikebreaking from the employers organizations, and this in turn more than not led to violent confrontations between striking workers and strike-breakers – such neutrality was in effect seen as necessary due to the very nature of their work.\textsuperscript{37}

The issue of where to draw the line between what was to be seen as political and trade union affairs came to be regularly discussed at the members meeting of the Police Association Comrade throughout the period from 1919–1927. The association thus decided to financially support social, cultural and political activities organized by the social democratic movement. Its members were strongly encouraged to subscribe to the local social democratic newspaper – *Arbetet* – with the motivation that «it is each and everyone’s duty in this respect to stand in solidarity with the class he belongs to.»\textsuperscript{38} But when a letter reached the members of the association in 1919 from the Social Democratic Trade Union Association in Scania it was not even taken up for discussion as the police association «was not a part of the trade union branch of the social democratic movement».\textsuperscript{39} On the same grounds, the policemen stated that they would not take part in the 1\textsuperscript{st} May Demonstrations, nor give financial support to the striking construction workers in an ongoing industrial conflict. At the same time, though, this seemingly more or less well-defined division between union and party affairs was not always as strict when actually put to the test.

\textsuperscript{36} Nyzell, 2012, p. 45–52.
\textsuperscript{37} Nyzell, 2012, p. 45–52.
\textsuperscript{38} Bodman, 1953, p. 19. The quote is the author’s translation from Swedish.
\textsuperscript{39} Bodman, 1953, p. 19.
Indeed, sometimes the members of the Police Association Comrade voted in favor of giving financial support to striking workers in ongoing industrial disputes. All in all, there was always a marked ambivalence when it came to the relations between these social democratic policemen and the members of the social democratic trade unions. This relationship was put to the test when policemen were seen to be defending the lawful rights, albeit in the eyes of the instigating trade union members, of strike-breakers. There were discussions from time to time among other social democratic organizations in Malmö as to whether policemen were actually to be seen as workers at all; as well as arguments from the policemen declaring why they indeed were workers. In an open letter published in *Arbetet* 24th July 1921, the Police Association Comrade was confronted with accusations from other social democratic organizations of partisanship against striking workers and police brutality during industrial conflicts in the city. In their response, the policemen of the association were very clear that they would not tolerate any of their members «overstepping the lawfully regulated limits» of their police work. At this juncture the trade union organizations and their members were admonished and instructed to not act in a provocative or confrontational manner in their interaction with the police on such occasions – a regular occurrence according to the open letter.\(^{40}\)

Throughout all of this there as always an outspoken minority among the policemen organized in the Police Association Comrade that continued to argue that the police should be in no way be affiliated with a socialistic party. Although never able to overcome the fraction in the association in an actual vote, this group never failed to make their voices heard. This division was not simply in accordance to rank; indeed one of the most outspokenly eager supporters for the police association’s affiliation with the social democratic movement was as high ranking as one of Superintendents of the Malmö Police Department.\(^{41}\) At this point in time the police association was open for all ranks within the police (although this to change later on in the 1930s). There is also some evidence that suggests that both Sergeants and Superintendents in actuality sometimes sided with striking workers rather than strike-breakers during industrial disputes in Malmö. Indeed, there is at least one instance where a representative from one of the employers’ organizations in Malmö writes to the police commissioner and complains that the police were taking the striking workers’ side against the strike-breakers in his factory, and that the policemen commanding their officers then and there were turning a blind eye to this.\(^{42}\) Thus there tended to be members of all ranks either in favor of, or against, the police associations affiliation to the social democrats. This in turn most probably led to considerable friction within the ranks of the Malmö Police Department.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) Nyzell, 2012, p. 45–52.  
\(^{41}\) Nyzell, 2012, p. 44.  
\(^{42}\) Nyzell, 2012, p. 49.  
\(^{43}\) Nyzell, 2012, p. 45–52.
In the end it was an industrial dispute that finally ended the Police Association Comrades’ sojourn as a part of the social democratic movement in Malmö. As an ongoing industrial conflict at the A.W. Nilsson factory in the summer of 1926 turned increasingly confrontational during the fall of the same year, the policemen of the Malmö Police department tended to find themselves in-between the violence committed by the striking workers and their sympathizers on one the side, and the strike-breakers on the other. It was an unenviable situation for the policemen being thus verbally and physically challenged by both sides of the conflict, not least so for the two politically active policemen – both police constables – representing the Social Democratic Party in the Malmö City Council. When the death of one of the striking workers at the hands of one of the strike-breakers escalated an already very tense situation into several days of full scale rioting in the working class neighborhood of Möllevången in November 1926, the police were ordered out in force to re-establish law and order with full use of repressive violence, this turned out to be a step too far for the organized social democratic workers in Malmö. In early 1927, the policemen of the Police Association Comrades were collectively expelled from the Social Democratic Association in Malmö – thus ending eight years of affiliation.  

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