

Dealing with unorganised workers in organised settings - experiences and strategies among Danish shop stewards

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Introduction and background

Although Danish union densities remain comparatively high, a declining tendency has been observed during the last 15 years (Visser 2006; Due et al. 2010). This development both reflects a rise in the number of workers with no union affiliation at all and a rise in the number of workers organised in alternative unions or so-called ‘yellow unions’. Local shop stewards in Denmark are therefore increasingly faced with a complex environment of organised workers and various forms of unorganised workers, when they negotiate and cooperate at the single company.

Yellow unions, which will be the focus of this article, offer workers individual juridical assistance but rarely negotiate collective agreements and are significantly cheaper to join than traditional unions. The price difference is explained by the fact that members of yellow unions do not help financing collective bargaining activities. This means that members of yellow unions contribute to trends of disorganisation on the Danish labour market, as the funding and legitimacy of the collective bargaining system will be eroding, if the development continues. In this perspective members of yellow unions can be characterised as ‘unorganised workers’.

Surveys have indicated that Danish shop stewards are faced with a dilemma, when it comes to workers who stay outside the traditional unions. Danish shop stewards are elected among members of the traditional unions at the workplace, and they are only obliged to represent those members. Still, approximately half of the shop stewards choose to offer non-members the same service as members, whereas the other half choose not to (Navrbjerg & Larsen 2011: 91; Larsen et al. 2010: 99). We know little about why shop stewards choose to offer their assistance to non-members. And if they do, do they offer the exact same service as to their members? Knowledge is also limited when it comes to the consequences of this choice. This paper will focus on the workplace relations between shop stewards and workers outside the traditional union who joined the yellow unions instead. It asks the question *why* local shop stewards in Denmark choose to offer (or not to offer) their service to alternatively organised workers, *what* this service includes and *which* consequences their choice has.

Managers and shop stewards might have similar or different views on how shop stewards should deal with workers in yellow unions. In a Danish context, employers and employees’ organisations often represent the point of view that all workers should be treated equally no

matter their organisational status (Due & Madsen 2007). This is also reflected in the regulation of collective agreements. If a collective agreement is present at the workplace, non-members are always covered in the same way as members of the traditional union. In contrast, shop stewards might look upon non-members as *free riders*, who have access to all the gains of an agreement but do not contribute to the collective bargaining system (Olson 1965). This could be a reason not to offer the same service to workers outside the traditional union. However, some shop stewards might also see an active representation of non-members as a way to educate, motivate and attract future members of the union. Especially, since the decline in union densities in Denmark and other countries often relates to difficulties in organising young workers (Visser 2002; Due et al. 2010).

Empirically the paper is based on two explorative case studies of how local shop stewards deal with the presence of alternatively organised workers within one of the sectors most affected by the rise in yellow unions, namely manufacturing (Ibsen et al. 2011: 115).

Unions densities and the emergence of yellow unions in Denmark

During the last decades Denmark has been characterized as a best case of organised labour markets (Traxler 1995; Ilsøe et al. 2007). In the 1980s and the 1990s the Danish labour market did not experience significant drops in union densities and in the coverage of collective agreements like many other countries in the Western world. In the US and the UK, for instance, considerable drops in densities and coverage could be observed. Also in Germany significant trends of disorganisation began to emerge (ibid.). However, after the millennium union densities started to decline slowly in the Danish case, too. The overall union density of 76 percent in 2000 had decreased to 71 percent in 2008. Furthermore, the membership rate of the unemployment insurance was reduced from 79 percent of the workforce to 74 percent (see Table 1). In combination, this meant that only 62 percent of the Danish workforce was both member of a union and of an unemployment insurance in 2008 compared to 70 percent in 1994. It has been debated, whether this means that the Ghent effect is diminishing in the Danish case¹. The coverage of collective agreements in the private sector also decreased some in the same period (from 75 percent to 71 percent), whereas the coverage in the public sector remained at 100 percent (Due et al. 2010: 81). Although manufacturing workers, who are the focus of this paper, typically have had one of the better union densities in the private sector in Denmark, they also experienced a decline after the millennium. Union density in manufacturing went down from 83 percent in 2000 to 78 percent in 2008 (Due et al. 2010: 100).

¹ Danish unions and unemployment insurance funds are separate organisations. It is possible to be member of one of them without membership of the other and you pay separate fees – even if you are member of both. However, each union has historically been administering their own unemployment insurance fund. This means that the Danish labour market *in practice* can be characterized as a Ghent system, where unions and unemployment insurance is combined (Due et al. 2010; Visser 2006). For many years this strong relation between union activities and unemployment insurance has contributed to the recruitment of union members.

Table 1: Unions densities and membership of unemployment insurance in the Danish workforce 1994-2008

	1994	1997	2000	2004	2008
Union membership (percent)	77	77	76	74	71
Member of unemployment insurance (percent)	79	80	79	78	74
Member of union and of unemployment insurance (percent)	70	70	65	66	62

Source: Due et al. 2010: 17.

However, these figures do not tell us the full story of trends of disorganisation in Denmark. In recent years a new type of union has emerged on the Danish labour market, which is included in the overall union density figures. These are the ideological alternative or so-called ‘yellow’ unions, which offer juridical guidance and assistance but rarely negotiate collective agreements (Navrbjerg & Larsen 2010). They are cheaper than the traditional unions, as they do not contribute to collective bargaining and other activities of the collective bargaining system. Following the verdict by the The European Court of Human Rights in 2006, closed shop agreements have been forbidden on the Danish labour market. This made it possible for yellow unions to recruit members at more workplaces than before. Yellow unions are a serious competition to the traditional unions, as all workers at a workplace are covered by present collective agreements no matter if they are member of the traditional or the yellow union. Interestingly, however, the yellow unions have copied the Ghent-like tradition of the traditional unions by administering their own unemployment insurance in relation to their union activities. A comparison of the union activities in traditional and yellow unions is given below (see Table 2).

Table 2: Union activities – a comparison of traditional and yellow unions in Denmark

	Union members				Members of unemployment insurance
	Collective bargaining; support of industrial conflicts	Individual juridical assistance and guidance	Individual discounts on insurance, holidays and shopping	Supplementary unemployment insurance (supplementary fee)	Unemployment benefits; individual guidance in job seeking and further training
Traditional unions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yellow unions	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Apart from the difference in the membership fee (traditional unions are often three times as expensive as yellow unions) the most striking difference between yellow and traditional unions is the character of the services delivered. Whereas both types of unions offer *individual* services like juridical assistance and guidance, discounts on various goods and access to a supplementary unemployment insurance (that adds on top of the unemployment insurance system), it is only the traditional unions that contribute to the *collective* bargaining system including negotiations of collective agreements and resolution of collective conflicts. This also means that members of yellow unions do not contribute to the financing of collective bargaining, which help explain the price difference.

The two largest yellow unions are The Christian Union (Krifa) and The Union House. The Christian Union has around 100.000 ordinary members, whereas The Union House has around 80.000². The first developed as a protest to the social democratic orientation of the traditional unions, whereas the second is a fusion of several small yellow unions for self-employed that also invites employees to join. Both The Christian Union and The Union House have expanded their membership figures significantly the last decade. Whereas the memberships of yellow unions only contributed with 3 percent of the total number of union memberships in 1995, they made up 10 percent of the union memberships in 2010 (see Table 3). This means, that the union density of traditional unions on the Danish labour market is significantly lower than the overall union densities. In 2010, the union densities of the traditional unions reached a low of 61 percent of the workforce (Due et al. 2010: 86).

Table 3: Memberships of yellow unions as a percentage of the total number of union memberships on the Danish labour market (1995 and 2010 compared)

	1995	2010
Member of a yellow union (percent)	3	10
Member of yellow unemployment insurance (percent)	9	15

Source: Due et al. 2010: 88.

² Membership figures reported by the organisations themselves. Source: www.krifa.dk; www.detfagligeus.dk.

Alternatively organised workers on the shop floor – a challenge to Danish shop stewards

The Danish collective bargaining system has since its early days been characterised by both trends of centralisation and trends of decentralisation (Due et al. 1993; Ilsøe et al. 2007). Ever since the famous September Compromise in 1899 between industry and labour, the coordination of negotiations and resolution of industrial conflicts has been institutionalised at central levels. This has secured the managerial prerogative at company level and reduced the number of conflicts at the workplace. However, this was not at the cost of the possibilities for local level wage setting. Pay has been a matter of company level bargaining in the metal industry since the beginning of the 20th century, and today the majority of sector-level agreements in the private sector include a large room for manoeuvre for local level negotiations on pay. Danish shop stewards have therefore been important actors in the collective bargaining system from the very beginning.

However, we find various levels of decentralisation within manufacturing, which is the focus of this article. The Industrial Agreement, which covers workers in metal industry and some other industries, only regulate a relatively low *minimum wage* on top of which local managers and shop stewards negotiate further wage increases. This agreement is concluded by The Central Organisation of Industrial Employees in Denmark (CO-industri) and The Confederation of Danish Industry (DI). In comparison The Collective Agreement for the Food Industry, which covers workers in a large part of the food industry, stipulate a much higher *normal wage*, which is paid to many workers without supplementary negotiations at local level. This agreement is negotiated between The Danish Food and Allied Workers' Union (NNF) and The Confederation of Danish Industry (DI). These two types of wage setting in manufacturing result in somewhat different working conditions for the local managers and shop stewards. Although shop stewards are present in many manufacturing companies (one in two has shop stewards), their tasks and challenges varies (Larsen et al. 2010: 248).

In companies with local level wage setting, shop stewards typically re-negotiate company level agreements on pay (and other issues) each year, whereas shop stewards in workplaces covered by sector-level wage setting participate in less negotiations. One might therefore expect the presence of alternatively organised workers to be more challenging for shop stewards covered by minimum wage agreements. These shop stewards each year have to negotiate local collective wage agreements that cover all workers at the workplace no matter their organisational status. At the same time, however, they are not entitled to support, represent or negotiate any individual solutions for workers outside the traditional union. The difference in coverage and representation might make it more difficult for shop stewards to coordinate bargaining objectives among workers and establish an accountable negotiating mandate, i.e. to handle *intra-organisational bargaining* processes (Walton & McKersie 1965). It might also endanger the establishment and reproduction of trust between managers and shop stewards.

Local shop stewards are faced with a dilemma. On one hand they know, that all collective agreements will cover all workers. On the other hand, they are not entitled to represent or support workers in yellow unions. This means that they can negotiate agreements that mainly

addresses the needs and wishes of members of the traditional union, but will cover the non-members as well. They can also refuse to help non-members in relation to the agreements (answer questions; address problems to management etc.). Shop stewards might look upon workers outside the traditional union as *free riders*, who have access to all the gains of the agreements but do not contribute to the collective bargaining system (Olson 1965). This could be a reason not to offer non-members the same service as union members. However, some shop stewards might also see an active representation of non-members as a way to recruit new members of the traditional union. If shop stewards listen to their needs and wishes during negotiations, if they answer their questions in relation to collective agreements and if they choose to represent them individually in cases of any problems, they might be able to gain new members. The results of a large survey from 2010 show that Danish shop stewards split in two groups, when asked about their representation of unorganised workers. Approximately half of the shop stewards (48 percent) choose not to represent unorganised workers, whereas most of the other half (39 percent) choose to represent them (Navrbjerg & Larsen 2010: 91).

The results reflect that Danish shop stewards use different approaches towards unorganised workers. Considering the aim of this paper, it is possible to develop at least two different hypotheses on shop stewards strategies towards their alternatively organised colleagues and future recruitment of members to the traditional union:

1. Push strategies: Shop stewards refuse to represent alternatively organised workers, as these workers are not entitled to representation and do not contribute to the collective bargaining system.
2. Pull strategies; Shop stewards choose to represent alternatively organised workers, although they are not obliged to, to educate and attract new members.

In the case analysis we will use the concepts of push and pull strategies to identify, whether the local shop steward choose to offer or not to offer their service to members of the yellow unions. In which situations does he/she use push strategies and in which situations pull strategies? Furthermore, we will use the concepts to identify specific examples of such strategies and their effects.

Methods

The empirical basis of the paper is two explorative case studies of how local shop stewards deal with the presence of alternatively organised workers. Both studies were performed within one of sectors most affected by the rise in alternative organisations, namely manufacturing (Ibsen et al. 2011: 115). Case companies were selected among companies covered by sector-level agreements, with shop stewards present and with a significant group of alternatively organised workers (se Table 4 for the main characteristics of the two companies). Many companies in manufacturing are faced with such presence of alternatively organised workers in an 'organised setting'. Furthermore, cases were selected to include a case of local level wage setting (metal industry) and a case of sector-level wage setting (food industry). As mentioned earlier, Danish manufacturing is characterised by two types of wage settings. This means that shop stewards are faced with different demands of collective bargaining at company level, and perhaps different challenges with regards to unorganised workers. Each case study included an interview with the local shop steward representing the

largest group of production workers on-site and document studies of all relevant written agreements. The interview guide included questions of union memberships among the production workers, the development in union memberships over the last decade, shop steward representation of organised and alternatively organised workers, local negotiation and cooperation with management and challenges when dealing with workers in yellow unions. All interviews were transcribed in full before the final analysis, and all citations were translated from Danish to English by the author.

Table 4: Overview of main characteristics of the case companies

	Production workers (number)	Covered by sector-level agreement	Workers in traditional unions (percentage)	Workers in yellow unions (percentage)	Member of employers organization	Wage setting
Case A	250	Yes	50 %	50 %	Yes	Sector level
Case B	150	Yes	80 %	15 %	No	Local level

Analysis

The analysis of each case is structured in a short case description followed by an analysis of the interview with the shop steward on experiences and strategies with alternatively organised workers. After analysing the two cases, results are summarised and compared to develop further on the hypotheses of push and pull strategies.

Case A

Company A is a Danish food company with approximately 250 production workers. All of these workers are covered by The Collective Agreement for the Food Industry. After the verdict on closed shop agreements in 2006, the first workers joined the yellow unions leaving the traditional union. Before the verdict, it was not possible to work at the company without being member of the traditional union. Today, approximately half of the workers are in the yellow unions – especially The Christian Union and The Union House - and half of them are in the traditional union. All types of workers have joined the yellow unions – young, old, men, women, high seniority, low seniority. The shop steward representing the production workers has been with the company for many years and has followed the development closely. The shop steward is both member of the local works council and of the company management board. At present, no local agreements have been concluded between management and the shop steward. The company has recently been through a number of firing rounds due to increasing competition on the world market. This is also one of the reasons why the company mainly hires workers on temporary contracts.

Dissatisfaction with union services and snowball effects

The shop steward describes how the shift from traditional to yellow unions among the workers began very slowly, but now seems to accelerate:

In the beginning it happened very slowly. People did not talk back then. But then one person does it, and then another one. Suddenly it happened very quickly. (...) This year 15-20 people moved to the yellow unions. And then you ask them why. Some say it is all about money. They need to save the money. (...) Others say they have talked to their colleagues, who are member of the yellow unions, and they have told about the great service they get there. Then they join them. I have a colleague who has been here for ages and she made the shift last week. She has been considering it for a year. I asked her why. She told me that one of her colleagues did not receive the help she was entitled to when she got fired a couple of years ago. This was the reason she made the shift. [Shop steward A]

First, a few workers join the yellow unions, but as they start to talk with their colleagues, the speed of the development goes up. Each new member of the yellow unions talk with more than one colleagues and it accelerates into a snowball effect. This shop steward now feel that the development is out of control. Especially because the reason why people make the shift is not only the cheaper membership fee. Workers are also dissatisfied with the service offered by the traditional union:

The reason why members have shifted to the yellow unions is that our union is too expensive and that members have not received a proper service. I am sorry, but I have to tell it like it is. (...) It is about guidance and counselling. People can call the union three times and get three different answers. That is not OK. I really try to call the union every time it happens and tell them: " That is not OK. If you want new members, you have to make sure that it works". (...) If you pay more to the traditional unions than to the yellow unions and you do not get help when you needed, then it is the unions own fault that people move. I know that some of those workers who shifted have been members of our union for more than 20 years and paid their fees happily. And then some day when they need help from the union they do not get what they are entitled to. I think that is unacceptable, and I understand why they shift to the yellow unions. [Shop steward A]

In fact, the shop steward underlines that the insufficient service by the traditional union is a larger problem than the more expensive membership fee:

One of the union managers said to me: "If I reduce the membership fee with 20 percent, will you then be able to promise me some new members?" I cannot promise that. The fee is still more expensive than in the yellow unions. They want us [shop stewards] to work a lot, and we want to work a lot. But the union also has to deliver. (...) If it gets my attention that one of my workers has a problem with her arm after many years at the assembly line, and I recommend her to call the staff at the local union office, then it is unacceptable if they do not pick up the phone. If I have to work on recruiting members, the unions has to work on it, too. [Shop steward A]

Push strategies: selective service and critique of the local union office

The shop steward in company A is well aware of the fact that alternatively organised workers in some other companies get squished out of the company by their colleagues. This push strategy towards alternatively organised workers is, however, not something that is practiced by this shop steward. One of the reasons to this is that it is illegal. Another reason is that the company hires a lot of workers on temporary contracts:

The union criticizes that I do not ask people to fill out an application for union membership, when they are hired. No, I should not do that, when workers have the right to choose the union they want. And it does not make sense, if people only are hired for two months. The paper work will hardly be finished after two months. [Shop steward A]

However, the shop steward uses a number of other push strategies to clarify the difference between traditional and yellow unions. One of them is only to assist members of the traditional union, when the company fires people, and to leave alternatively organised workers on their own:

Last time we were firing people, only 6 of the fired workers were members of our union. I accompanied them to all meetings and I checked out that everything followed the rules (...) I did not do anything for the other workers. That was the clear message. But I have been here for 23 years and many of the other workers have been here as long I me. If some of your old colleagues get fired you get sad even if they are non-members. But they made the choice themselves. [Shop steward A]

A second push strategy is to refuse to answer difficult questions, when they are raised by non-members. The shop steward does not mind to answer simple questions, but questions that need further research are rejected:

If a worker asks a question that I do not know the answer to, I will call the union and ask for help, if the worker is in our union. If the worker is member of the yellow unions, I will say: "You have to call your union and ask about that". [Shop steward A]

Thirdly, the shop steward is arranging debate sessions for members only. The workers are very interested in them, and it is therefore a clear disadvantage to non-members:

Tomorrow we are going to have a debate session about early retirement benefits, and somebody will give an introductory lecture. This event is for members only. (...) We must do things like this more often. [Shop steward A]

A fourth push strategy used by this shop steward is to contact the local union office directly and make them aware of every mistake that they do. This push strategy is not directed at the alternatively organised workers, but aims at preventing more workers to join them:

I try myself to shout and scream at the local union office, because I want to give them a wake-up call. Every time I visit them, they tell me to take action on the loss of members. I know I need to do something, but they have to take action, too. Every time they do not deliver the service the members are entitled to, I call one of the managers at the local union office and report it: "You cannot understand why people leave the union? This is one of the reasons." [Shop steward A]

Pull strategies: information and dialogue

The shop steward does, however, not only use push strategies in relation to the alternatively organized workers. Pull strategies are also on the repertoire. One of the pull strategies is to ask newly hired workers, whether they are member of the traditional union, and explain the advantages of such membership. But this strategy is reflexive in the sense that many new

workers are on temporary contracts, and the shop steward understands if they want to wait and see if they get a permanent contract:

“When I speak with new workers, I ask them if they are in a union, and most of them are. Then I tell them that we prefer that they join our union, because it strengthens our bargaining power at the workplace. Some of them have been in yellow unions for a long time. If they only are hired for a shorter period of time, I often tell them: “We will get back to it, if you get a permanent position”. (...) Many workers in the yellow unions ask, how much our union costs. When I tell them the price, they often decide to stay with the yellow union, because they do not know, if they will be hired for a longer period. This uncertainty make people say: “We want to wait and see what happens”. [Shop steward A]

The difference in seniority among workers creates a dilemma for the shop steward. On one hand, the shop steward is a union representative and should help recruit new members to the union. On the other hand, the shop steward is a representative of the workers at the workplace, and should reflect on what is best for the single worker. Is it fair to make a worker join the traditional union, if the worker only has a contract on a few months? Another aspect of this dilemma concerns those workers, who have a high seniority at the workplace and only recently made the shift from the traditional union to a yellow union. Which service are they entitled to? Are they entitled to a better service than newly hired members of the traditional union? Some of these workers have been the shop steward’s colleagues back to the days of piece work, where it was important with a strong solidarity at the assembly line. If one of them had a bad day, the others would work harder to make everybody meet the demands. This creates a dilemma for the shop steward between *workplace solidarity* and *union solidarity*:

It is difficult. It is very difficult. I know, I should offer the same service to a new colleague as to a colleague, I have been working with for 20 years. But it is obvious that I feel different for an old colleague. (...) One of the recently fired workers called me, because the company fired her while she was pregnant. She has been on maternity leave four times during the last five years, and then she calls me, because you cannot fire someone ,who is pregnant. (...) I send her to the union for juridical guidance. I do not want to deal with that. [Shop steward A]

Another pull strategy is to offer all workers an opportunity to give inputs to the next collective bargaining round. The local union office has together with the shop stewards conducted a survey among the workers on wishes to the content of a future collective agreement:

We asked people what they wanted to be included in the collective agreement. The survey was given to all workers, and less than half replied. (...) Many workers complain that the union is invisible on the shop floor. This was a way to make ourselves more visible. (...) To encourage people to participate it was possible to win a summerhouse stay. One of the workers, who won was not member of our union. It was an attempt to provoke the members of the yellow unions and say: “You are not a member of our union, and you should not be able to participate. Yet, you have won”. [Shop steward A]

This pull strategy is based on the principle not to distinguish between members and non-members. Informing about - and including non-members in the collective bargaining process

can help them see the advantages of having a strong representation of the traditional union at the workplace.

Case B

Company B is a Danish machine company with approximately production 150 workers. The demand for the company's products has been on the way up the last couple of years so they plan to hire new workers on open-ended contracts. All production workers are covered by The Industrial Agreement. After the verdict on closed shop agreements in 2006, the first workers joined the yellow unions leaving the traditional unions. Before the verdict the traditional unions organized all production workers at the company. Today, approximately 15 percent of the workers are in the yellow unions – especially The Union House - and 80 percent are members of the traditional unions. Both young and old, male and female and workers with high and low seniority have made the shift. The shop steward representing the production workers has been with the company for many years and has followed the development from the beginning. The shop steward is member of the local works council and of the board of the local union office and has concluded several local agreements with the company on pay, working time and fringe benefits. Wage increases are typically negotiated every year.

Free riders and group dynamics

Like in company A, the shop steward in company B experienced the first shift from a traditional union to a yellow union in relation to the verdict on closed shop agreements. After that a snow ball effect could be observed. Workers realized that it was possible to pay less and still get the same (coverage by the collective agreement negotiated by the traditional union + individual service from the yellow union), and more and more workers chose to *free-ride*:

It began when we hired a new worker, who refused to join the traditional union. First, he was forced to join the union. We voted in the canteen and decided he should join. But after the verdict he immediately left the union again. And then it came step by step. Some workers said: "Why should we join, when we can have the same cheaper somewhere else? When he can do it, we can do it, too." Then it slowly developed. [Shop steward B]

The shop steward has the impression that workers in the yellow unions talk other workers into making the shift by convincing them of the advantages:

Sometimes it takes place in groups. We just had four people working together, who all made the shift within 20 minutes on the same computer. They all kept their unemployment benefit insurance, but it is still a mess. (...) Because they are angling for new members, and I do not want that. Suddenly, four workers had made the shift. [Shop steward B]

Push strategies: clubs members only

The shop steward is aware of the tough approach some shop stewards are using to keep all workers organised. Bullying is not an unknown phenomenon. The shop steward does not approve of this method, but understands the mechanisms behind it. It is much easier to stop the first worker in making the shift than deal with a larger group of workers, who can talk more workers into making the shift, too:

I hear some tough stories from other workplaces. Here, bullying keeps the yellow out. (...) They are fully organised, and only have to deal with one new worker at the time. That is much easier than to deal with 20. It is almost impossible to deal with 20. [Shop steward B]

This shop steward has chosen another strategy; to make a sharp distinction between members and non-members. The shop steward only represents members of the traditional union and the local union club. All members of the traditional union except one are member of the local club, and the local club is therefore the most important forum. The shop steward does not talk about union matters with workers in the yellow unions and refuses to answer any questions on union matters from them. However, there is a knowledge gap among the workers in the yellow unions. Some of them think they are entitled to the same service from the shop steward as the members of the traditional unions. This has led to confrontations in the local union club, where alternatively organised workers wanted to attend a meeting on local negotiation on pay. However, the shop steward did not accept this attempt to participate in the *intra-organisational bargaining* process:

We did not exclude them in the first place. They have excluded them selves from the negotiations. And then they show at the club meeting. I started the meeting by saying: "Welcome to the club meeting. This is a legal club meeting, and I can see that some of the people present are not members of the club. Can you tell me, why you are here?". Then a man got up and said that they had the same right as anybody else to participate in meetings on local negotiations on pay. I told him that they did not have the same rights. If they did not want to leave, I would close my computer and leave. Then they left. They were very angry and complained to management afterwards. (...) They wanted their own shop steward, because I did not represent them. But I did not do anything illegal. I just think I am being fair to those members, who pay to the traditional unions. They pay more every month, and therefore they have certain rights. [Shop steward B]

However, this strategy of 'club members only' rests on an important precondition. It is not possible to make a sharp distinction between members and non-members, if the shop steward is not aware of the organizational status of each individual worker. Therefore the shop steward has worked intensively on creating a map on the organisational status of all workers at the company. This has included research among the organizations but also individual interviews with workers outside the traditional unions:

When I was elected as shop steward it was a mess. I did not know who belonged to the union or not. My first move was to ask the company about the civil registration numbers on all our workers. Then I went to the traditional union and asked, who of these workers are members. I got a number of lists and I worked my way through them. Some of our workers were on none of those lists. Then I went for a walk around the company and asked those workers, which union they belonged to. Some said: "I do not belong to any unions". Others said: "I am a member of The Union House". And then I wrote that down, and I have kept it updated ever since. [Shop steward B]

Pull strategies: education and conversion

To the shop stewards experience there is a knowledge gap on the difference between traditional unions and yellow unions. Workers in the yellow unions think they are entitled to exactly the same as workers in the traditional unions. They are still covered by the collective agreement, but in fact they are not entitled to any help from the shop steward or to participate

in local union activities including negotiations. The shop steward thinks this knowledge gap is problematic - not only when workers have to decide whether or not to stay in the union – but also with regards to the daily work of the shop steward. After the confrontation with the alternatively organized workers at the club meeting, the shop steward therefore developed a strategy to teach all workers about the collective agreement and the differences between traditional unions and yellow unions:

After that incident I thought this is completely unacceptable. One of the workers who I asked to leave the club meeting had ignored me ever since. I took him into my office and asked him: “What is going on?”. He told me. Then I told him: “This is what I do, and what I pay for. Therefore your behaviour was not acceptable.” I explained it to him in detail. Then he started to realize, why I did it. I promised him that I would arrange a meeting for all workers no matter their union status, and I would explain the collective agreement to them. Which benefits do workers obtain from the agreement, and what are the advantages of union membership. I arranged the meeting and more than 100 workers showed. I showed them a power point on how much it costs to join the union per week and how many benefits they obtain from that. (...) I did it, because I was fed up. The trouble after the club meeting really got to me. Then I thought, if this anger is due to a lack of information, I should give them that information. That is why I did it. (...) Lack of information often contributes to that workers choose the yellow organizations over the traditional ones. [Shop steward B]

A later strategy has been to convert workers. Here the map of organisational status and the networks created when drawing it have been very useful. Now the shop steward has an agreement with the local union office to call if someone want to make the shift to the yellow union. Then the shop steward can address this worker and try to talk him/her out of it. This agreement with the local union office also helps updating the map which is an important job if the strategy on ‘clubs members only’ should work in the future:

If somebody in my company want to leave our union, they call me, and then I usually ask the worker: “I have heard that you have left the union. Why?” Then they give me an answer. Once I made a worker go back to our union. The union always call me, before they hit the button, so I can have a talk with the worker. (...) I always tell the workers who want to leave: ” Think about this and this as well. You might need us.” In one case, this made the worker stay. [Shop steward B]

However, the shop steward highlights the first entrance to the company as the most important possibility of recruiting members to the traditional union. It is easier to recruit members, when workers are recently hired:

I have moved a lot of workers from the yellow unions to the traditional unions. Both new and old workers. I think we have moved about 20 workers. (...) But it is always more difficult to convert workers, who have been here for some time. When they have made a decision, it is very difficult to make them change it. I have succeeded in converting a few, but it is much easier to make an impact on newly hired workers. [Shop steward B]

Therefore the shop steward and the local managers have agreed on asking all new workers about their union status. Furthermore, the shop steward informs them about the difference in the services delivered, when joining and when not joining the union:

I have a small agreement with our line managers and our production manager. They fill out a survey when new workers are hired, and they have included questions on union membership and club membership. Workers are free to choose a yellow union, but the managers ask them about it. After that I show them around and explain how the company works, and I also ask them, if they are members of the union. If they are not, I explain to them that it is a free choice, but I will not be representing them. I will not be helping them, and they stand alone. (...) We have a local club, which deals with negotiations on pay and many other issues. If you choose to stay outside, you are on your own. [Shop steward B]

However, the shop steward recently succeeded in converting a worker who had been with the company for a while. One of the line managers advised him to use a more inclusive strategy towards this colleague with the aim of convincing him of the benefits of the traditional union:

We had four workers who had a lot of hours on their time accounts. The crisis came and we had to do work-sharing, but before we could do that these workers had to take all their banked hours as time off in lieu. However, it was not possible to take all this time off. We therefore negotiated a special agreement for them. One of the workers belonged to a yellow union, and I said I do not want to help him – only the other three. Then a line manager gave me a good advice, and I said: “Okay, I will help all four workers”. I did, and afterwards I took the alternatively organised worker aside and I said to him: “Do you see the difference?”. He said: “Yes, just give me an application form”. Then he joined our union. This experience has made me think. I have been very tough when it comes to not helping out alternatively organised workers. I think joining the yellow unions is letting all your colleagues down. Here I was saying: “Okay, if can do a good deed and go ask them, if they see the difference, they might join the union”. If an alternatively worker asks me to help him, I have two choices. I can tell him: “I know nothing, call your union”. Or I can tell him: “I will help you, but then you have to reflect on the difference”. I have to consider in each situation, which choice is the better one. [Shop steward B]

Still, the shop steward thinks that additional strategies are necessary if the shifts to the yellow unions should be stopped. Therefore the shop steward is thinking about a new strategy to make workers want to join the union. One of the heavy motives to leave the traditional union is that the membership fee is more expensive than in the yellow unions. Therefore the shop steward wants to remove this incentive to join the yellow unions. The idea is to negotiate a solution with management, where the company is paying the membership fee (via the local club) no matter which union you join. Then there is no difference in fees whether you join the traditional or the yellow unions; both memberships will be free of costs for the individual worker:

I am working on an idea for our next local negotiations. I want our membership fees to be paid by the club. It is OK in the juridical sense. The company will pay some money to the club, and the club will then pay the membership fees. The alternatively organised are not part of the club. This means that all surplus money will go to the club, when their fee has been paid. (...) Then the workers might as well join the traditional union. They know it will give them more advantages, and there will be no price difference. [Shop steward B]

Summary of analysis

The shop steward in company A and the shop steward in company B have dealt with alternatively organised workers in their companies for some time. In both cases workers started to shift from the traditional union to the yellow unions after the verdict on closed shop agreements in 2006. They characterise the development as a snowball effect; it started out slowly one worker at a time and suddenly the speed went up and larger groups made the shift together. The talk and recommendations among colleagues seem to play a large role in this process. Both shop stewards have used a variety of strategies to try to stop the development. Push strategies are used in some settings, whereas pull strategies are used in others. It is not an easy task, and it is challenging to pick the right strategy at the right time. Another challenge lies in the fact that shop stewards are torn between two forms of solidarity. When it comes to the question of union status, shop stewards are expected to show *union solidarity*. However, they still have to deal with *workplace solidarity* among their colleagues, which might transcend the union status. Shop stewards might feel obliged to help loyal workers with high seniority despite their union status, whereas shop stewards might not feel obliged to help less loyal union members with low seniority at the workplace (Case A). This makes it more difficult for shops stewards to use push strategies. Clear push strategies might split workers and threaten the solidarity at the workplace, and in such cases the shop steward must work on repairing the relationship (Case B).

The shop stewards have experienced somewhat different challenges with regards to workers in yellow unions. In company A the shop steward is struggling with the fact that the local union office delivers insufficient service to members of the traditional union at the workplace. They do not get the individual juridical guidance and assistance, they are entitled to. This is one of the main reasons why workers are leaving the traditional union and joining the yellow unions. The yellow unions are cheaper and deliver a better juridical guidance. The problem is, that the traditional union has failed on the individual service, which is the only aspect that workers can compare directly. No matter their union status, they are covered by the collective agreement. If the yellow unions are cheaper and offer a better individual service, there is no incentive for workers to stay with the traditional union. The shop steward is criticising the local union office every time they fail, but in the end the shop steward is not able to change their behaviour towards the members at the workplace. It depends on their decisions. The company is covered by a sector-level agreement which leave little room for local level negotiations (wage setting is at sector level), and therefore it is difficult for the shop steward to demonstrate a difference between being a member of the traditional union and staying outside at the local level.

This is different in company B, which is covered by a sector-level agreement that gives a large room for manoeuvre at local level. Here, the shop steward negotiates many agreements (including pay) each year, and the local union club at the workplace therefore plays a larger role. Individual negotiations also play a larger role. This makes it possible for the shop steward to include members of the traditional union and exclude non-members at various meetings and deliver a clear message on the different services offered. However, this scope of action imposes new challenges on the shop steward. Negotiations at local level cover all workers, but not all workers can participate. Members of the traditional union have a say, but the shop steward is entitled to exclude non-members from the negotiations. The risk of conflicts between union solidarity and workplace solidarity might therefore be large at workplaces with local level wage setting.

Push strategies compared

The two shop stewards use a variety of push strategies to fight the growth in members of the yellow unions. A dominant motive to push is to demonstrate the difference between being a member of the traditional union and staying outside, which corresponds well with our initial hypothesis. However, the shop stewards do not report any direct effect of push strategies on the recruitment of new members of the traditional union. Push strategies are considered fair to those workers, who pay the higher fee in the traditional unions. A group of these strategies is related to the shop steward taking on the role of a *policeman* (see Table 5 for an overview of push/pull strategies and shop steward roles). Here, the shop steward correct behaviour by workers in the yellow unions that exceeds what they are entitled to. Shop stewards refuse to answer questions and discuss job related issues, they do not invite non-members to meetings and debate sessions and they throw non-members out of meetings, where they are not entitled to attend (Case A & B). It is a strategy of 'club members only', and it needs a policeman to make everybody follow the rules. However, the strategy is difficult and might not be respected, unless it rests on correct information. Therefore one of the shop stewards has spend a lot of time creating an exact map of the union status of all workers at the workplace and on constantly updating the map (Case B). However, in the other case company, the policeman cannot stand alone. Here, the problem is not that workers think they get the same but cheaper in the yellow unions. The problem is, that the workers know they get something better at a cheaper price. The shop steward therefore needs to push the union as well. It is not sufficient just to show the workers the difference at company level. The service delivered by the local union needs to improve if the shop steward should be able to demonstrate a difference with respect. This shop steward has therefore taken on the role of a *whistleblower*, and report all lack of service to the manager at the local union office. If the policeman should be able to work properly, the system behind needs to work (Case A).

Table 5: Push and pull strategies towards alternatively organised workers and shop steward roles

	Push strategies		Pull strategies	
	Policeman	Whistleblower	Teacher	Missionary
Case A	<p>Do not answer difficult questions from alternatively organised workers</p> <p>Do not assist workers in yellow unions when fired</p> <p>Do not invite workers in yellow unions to debate sessions</p>	<p>Report lack of service experienced by members of the traditional union back to local union office</p>	<p>Inform all workers about the collective agreement</p> <p>Asking all workers about input to collective bargaining</p>	<p>Inform new workers on longer contracts about the advantages of traditional union</p>
Case B	<p>Do not answer questions from alternatively organised workers</p> <p>Do not ask workers in yellow unions about job related issues</p> <p>Tell alternatively organised workers to stay away from meetings in the local union club</p> <p>Keeping record on the exact union status and unemployment insurance status of all workers (calling organisations; asking individual workers on the shop floor)</p>		<p>Inform all workers about the collective agreement</p>	<p>Inform new workers about the advantages of traditional union</p> <p>Ask workers who move to the yellow unions why they made the shift</p> <p>Negotiate individual solutions for alternatively organised workers and recommend union membership afterwards</p>

Pull strategies compared

In line with our hypothesis on pull strategies, shop stewards use these strategies to attract more members to the traditional union. The pull strategies used by the shop stewards fall in two groups. One group of strategies has to do with the shop steward working as a *teacher* at the workplace. It is the experience of the shop stewards that workers do not know the content of the collective agreement they are covered by and know little about union activities and union influence. Both shop stewards have worked on raising the level of information by distributing written material (Case A) or by presenting the content of the collective agreement at a big meeting for all workers (Case B). One of them has even asked all workers, including the alternatively organised, for input to upcoming negotiations in a survey (Case A). However, the shop stewards highlight that other pull strategies are more effective when it comes to recruiting new members of the traditional union: to act as a *missionary*. To their experience, the easiest way to convince workers of the advantages of joining the traditional

union, is to do it when they are newly hired. Therefore, the first talk between worker and shop steward is crucial. One of the shop stewards has also succeeded in converting workers, who have made the shift to the yellow unions after many years of membership in the traditional union. This was among others done by negotiating an individual solution for a worker in a yellow union and then ask him to join the union afterwards (Case B). In the latter case the shop steward also considers improving the possibilities of converting the workers by negotiating company paid union fees with management. If the company pays the money to the local club, the club can pay union fees for all workers, and there is not difference in costs for the single worker. This should make it easier to convince workers to join.

Conclusion and discussion

When asked if they represent unorganised workers, Danish shop stewards divide in two. Approximately half of them choose to represent unorganised workers, and half of them choose not to. This paper rests on an explorative investigation of, why Danish shop stewards choose different strategies towards unorganised workers, what their service to the unorganised workers include and which effects they can observe of their strategies. It focuses on the relation between Danish shop stewards and a specific type of unorganised workers; workers in the yellow unions. Two cases in Danish manufacturing are analysed – one with local-level wage setting and one with sector-level wage setting. The analysis indicates that shop stewards do not choose between representing alternatively organised workers or not representing them. Both push and pull strategies are used by each shop steward with somewhat different objectives. Push strategies are used to be fair to those workers who pay to the traditional union and make sure that workers in yellow unions do not get more than they are entitled to. This is not easy, as shop stewards can be caught between workplace solidarity and union solidarity. It can be difficult to combine push strategies with a strong workplace solidarity. Furthermore, it seems that no direct effect on recruiting members to the traditional unions can be observed of the push strategies.

Instead, shop stewards consciously use pull strategies to try to recruit new members of the traditional union. Only one type of pull strategies seems to be effective, though. Shop stewards have to work as missionaries and convert each single worker at the time, if they should have a chance to succeed. Chances are best during the first talk with a newly hired worker. However, certain preconditions are important if missionary strategies should work. One of the shop stewards underlines, that it does not make sense to convince new workers to join the traditional union, if they are hired on short contracts. Furthermore, this shop steward underlines that the traditional union needs to match the yellow unions on the individual service offered. If the yellow unions do better on individual juridical guidance and assistance, it is difficult to convince workers into joining a more expensive union with insufficient individual services. The individual services is the most visible element to the single worker, especially in areas with sector level wage setting, as all workers are covered by the collective agreement no matter their union status. Finally, another important precondition is that local shop stewards can identify workers that are in the yellow unions. Here, they depend on help from the local management and the local union office to supply lists. They also need to do workplace interviews with individual workers.

Shop stewards cannot work alone when they are faced with increasing participating in yellow unions. The challenges they face are large, and they need support from union offices to help identify and convert alternatively organised workers. Conversion is possible, but it is difficult and time consuming. If the traditional union gets a reputation of not helping out when help is

needed it becomes almost impossible. When shop stewards take on the role of the missionary, they move into a conflict/activist oriented conception of shop steward's roles (Chang 2005). This is even more so, if they take on the role of the whistleblower and deliver an internal critique of the union. These roles transcend the administrative character of shop stewards as teachers and (to some extent) policemen. The traditional unions need to be professional and strong organisations if they should be able to deal with missionaries and whistleblowers, who deal with alternatively organised workers at company level.

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