In 1921, the LO Secretariat declared that “the magnitude now attained by the trade union movement requires a focus on educating and disciplining members to manage the tasks they encounter in trade union work” (Landsorganisationen 1921). The subsequent actions of the Secretariat indicate that the LO attempted to actively construct and enforce a collective identity in the face of the threat from the left-wing organizations. However, the thesis of this book—namely, that the LO used popular education to construct an organizational identity—also suggests that the identity under construction was not that of “workers in general” but rather of a particular kind of worker, the LO member, who embraced reformism and a spirit of consensus. The subject of this chapter is therefore the image of the LO that emerged in the educational materials used in the most popular study format: the study circle.

**Defining Identity: The Organizational Identity Approach**

Determining the characteristics of the identity formation process and ascertaining the nature of the message communicated to the grassroots both require a theoretical definition of identity. The classic definition of organizational
identity offered by Stuart Albert and David Whetten is simple but captures the core of social identity in organizations: organizational identity is the collective understanding of what is central, distinctive, and durable in an organization (Albert and Whetten 1985). My main interest here is not in organizational identity as the interaction between members and leaders (which is what the theory originally sought to capture) but rather in the content of the identity imposed by leaders on members. This content is best measured through a focus on the broad concepts of centrality and distinctiveness. “Centrality” refers to the essential features of the self-image that the organization constructs, while “distinctiveness” relates to what separates the group from other groups. Group identity is built on a sense of who belongs to the group and who does not: “one of us” versus “one of them.” Hence, if we analyze how “the others” are described, elements of what “we” refers to begin to emerge. Research has even demonstrated that some individuals join an organization simply because they wish to distinguish themselves from a particular group (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Finally, the concept of “durability” refers to persistent traits in the

![Organizational identity diagram](image-url)
organization’s self-perception; as the time dimension is not particularly germane in this study, the durability concept has been omitted from the analysis.

Measuring Central and Distinctive Features

How are centrality and distinctiveness best measured? For a distinct and transparent analysis of this matter, an operationalization is needed. My analysis is based on the concepts of “history,” “properties,” and “action”; in other words, the central and distinctive features of an organization can be captured if we focus on where “we” come from, what “we” are, and how “we” act. These concepts should be interpreted as arenas in which we may find the organization’s central and distinctive features.

History

The first category, history, is an important component of identity formation. It has been claimed that historiography plays an important role in the construction of national identities (Berger 2005; Berger, Donovan, and Passmore 2002). According to narrative theory, social identities are constructed through stories about the past, present, and future (Somers and Gibson 1994, 38), the past being part of the contextualization of the present. Similarly, the description of an organization’s history defines its origins, which can explain the present. Historiography bridges the past and present in the organization, thereby contextualizing the present (Friedman 1992, 837). Within narrative theory, coordinated stories about the individual and about the collective and its history produce class identity (Steinmetz 1992).

In situations of identity reformation, the organization’s history can preserve continuity. Reformulations of identity should be undertaken within the realm of the existing self-image. If not, there is a risk that members will be alienated and not recognize the organization. Leaders naturally want to prevent that from happening, even if they wish to reformulate the organizational identity. History can be used to frame new traits in such a way that they appear to have existed for a long time, thus tying the “old” identity to the new one. Inevitably, writing history is a selective process: the entire history of the organization can never be written, only parts of it can. The prioritization of certain historical elements can lead members to perceive their organization in a certain way (Linderborg 2001, 1–2, 31–35). Ultimately, those with the power to write the history of the organization can influence how it is perceived by the members.
Properties
While historiography emphasizes the development of the organization, analyzing the organization’s properties or characteristics is intended to uncover something about the organization’s nature. The core of identity formation is to define and describe oneself or an organization in a certain way. How the organization describes itself—its “identity claims”—is very important (Whetten and Mackey 2002). Ascribing various properties to the self constructs depictions of “ideal selves.” These ideal selves can serve as verbal symbols of the organization. Research has demonstrated that verbal and nonverbal symbols are important in an organization’s identification process (Cardador and Pratt 2006, 177–78). Moreover, Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted that “organizations often seek to generalize identification with an individual to identification with the organization through the routinization of charisma” (p. 22, my italics). In other words, identification with a group can be similar to identification with an individual. Identifying with an individual often implies that the individual wishes to be like that other person and thus adopts properties of the other. Ashforth and Mael suggested that such identification processes can also be applied to identification with the organization through charismatic leadership (exercised by leaders with qualities that individuals wish to adopt) or through the construction of the “ideal member.” The image of the ideal member can attract the attention of members and generate an identification process in an organization. An organization’s leadership can symbolize the ideal member, thereby enhancing members’ identification with the organization. Describing an ideal and assigning it certain properties can therefore contribute to the members’ identification with the organization.

In the identification process, the description of the properties or characteristics ascribed to others is as important as the identity claims. Such a description delineates what the self is not and what traits and features are not assigned to the organization.

Action
The properties ascribed to the organization also guide its actions. The description of the organization’s and its members’ actions contains a crucial disciplining element, so it is useful to study actions in more detail. Discipline can be created in the organization through reality claims or by explicit exhortations concerning how trade unions, and trade union members in particular, should be and should act. Such claims set out the “objectively” right ways for members to act. Research also suggests that organizations that can provide their members with “behavioral
consistency”—that is, mechanisms that encourage a certain kind of behavior for all members—can more easily construct organizational identities (Cardador and Pratt 2006, 177). I propose to examine how the actions of LO and of the “others” are described in LO’s educational materials, as well as how “correct” behavior on the part of unions and their members is portrayed there.

The Educational Material

A variety of educational formats were arranged by the Workers’ Educational Association (Arbetarnas bildningsförbund, ABF), but the main activities were lectures and study circles, with the latter becoming very popular among LO members in the 1920s. To meet the demand, the ABF-produced syllabi for the various study circle subjects included reading suggestions and educational materials. Consequently, there is a wide range of materials (mainly booklets) from which to choose when analyzing the projected image of an LO member.

The most important study circle courses were trade union studies and organizational studies (a detailed study of the study circles is presented in chapter 5). Sigfrid Hansson’s trade union studies course was not the only study circle course on organizational issues, as a range of courses treated similar themes. Many study circle subjects had more than one syllabus, and different ABF member organizations could have different syllabi for a study circle course in the same subject. For instance, the SSU, LO, and Left Party produced organizational studies syllabi with slightly different contents.

Most of these syllabi were published in one of the two popular education magazines, Studiekamraten (The Study Comrade) and Bokstugan (The Book Cottage). Studiekamraten was originally started and run by the Social Democratic
Youth League (Sveriges Socialdemokratiska ungdomsförbund, SSU) in 1919 but shortly afterward was transferred to the ABF. *Bokstugan*, founded and published by the ABF and the IOGT in 1917, was a magazine specifically for study circles. These magazines appear to have been widely distributed among the study circle libraries throughout the country. It seems that most of the ABF local libraries subscribed to at least one of the magazines, as it was a good way to keep up to date and to gain access to the syllabi and the literature. Subscribing was even recommended by the organizational studies syllabus (Socialdemokratiska-Ungdomsförbundets-studieråd 1930). Access to and familiarity with the syllabi were necessary to ensure that the workers followed the education plans laid down by the leadership, so the availability of *Studiekamraten* and *Bokstugan* among the local associations and libraries was very important.

**Trade Union Studies and Association Studies**

Between 1920 and 1940, trade union studies (*fackföreningskunskap*) had at least three syllabi, written by Rudolv Holme, Sigfrid Hansson, and Hugo Heffler respectively. The third was an abbreviated version of Hansson’s syllabus, covering the same literature as did Hansson’s course but containing fewer assignments and questions for discussion.

Holme’s syllabus focused on the development of the Swedish labor movement. The first version was published in 1924 and was entitled “Syllabus for the Trade Union Movement and Syndicalism” (Holme 1924). Holme was an activist in the syndicalist movement, which is evident from the first version of the syllabus, in which much of the literature was about syndicalism. Nevertheless, Hansson’s book *Den svenska fackföreningsrörelsen* was part of the recommended literature, indicating that the book was respected throughout the labor movement, probably because it dealt with the whole history of the union movement in Sweden (Holme 1924; Holme 1928). Shortly afterward, Holme left the SAC (Bäckström 1963a, 383). His move to the reformist union movement is reflected in his updated syllabus of 1926, renamed “Syllabus for General Association Studies,” which included both Hansson’s book *Den svenska fackföreningsrörelsen* and the social democratic theorist Nils Karleby’s book *Socialismen inför verkligheten* in the recommended reading. The syllabus also contained questions and exercises about the labor movement and its various branches. This study circle course had the same features as did courses on organizational and association studies, stressing procedures for holding meetings, and because of its general characteristics the syllabus could be used by associations from different movements. However, the political message was clearer in Holme’s syllabus than in the courses on organizational studies (Holme 1926).
Finally, what appears to be the most influential syllabus in trade union studies was designed by Sigfrid Hansson. Hansson wrote one syllabus for a course in trade union studies in 1923. As noted in chapter 3, Hansson was in charge of study leader education at Brunnsvik, and his first syllabus in trade union studies was designed for this summer course, offered at the people’s high school in Brunnsvik each summer from 1923 onwards. However, the syllabus spread to the study circles, and within a year it was being used all over the country (ABF 1926). In 1927, a complete syllabus was published in the LO’s booklet series (Hansson 1927c). The literature recommended in the syllabus consisted of articles from the magazine *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, booklets, and a few books. Booklets were popular as educational materials because they were cheap to produce and could be offered at a low price. However, the main reading for the course on trade union studies was Sigfrid Hansson’s *Den svenska fackföreningsrörelsen*. This textbook was originally published in the booklet series, so the LO Secretariat sent letters to the sections encouraging them to buy it (Landsorganisationen 1923a). The book became very popular because at that time it was the only complete description of the Swedish trade union movement and its historical development. This also explains why it was published in several different editions, the first in 1923 and the last in 1943.

Organizational and Association Studies

David Berg, the organizer ombudsman, stationed in Norrland, designed a syllabus for courses in association studies. Berg’s syllabus was published in 1924 in *Studiekamraten* (Berg 1924). The syllabus did not contain any literature on the labor movement per se but was aimed primarily at establishing procedural norms for meetings, the main goal being to teach the participants how to conduct themselves. The best way to study meeting procedures, according to the syllabus, was to discuss a topic or even take a course in a specific subject and apply the norms and rules on meeting procedures when studying this topic, preferably trade union studies (Berg 1924).

In 1930, the SSU published a new syllabus on organizational studies. The syllabus resembles Berg’s in that the main focus of the course was meeting procedures. However, the literature list was somewhat longer, and the very first book on the list—recommended to every course participant—was Sigfrid Hansson’s *Arbetarrörelsen* (The Labor Movement). It was very similar to the main book in trade union studies but shorter and much cheaper (Hansson 1930a).

Both association studies and organization studies were intended to teach the rank and file practical organizational skills and how to run the movement
properly. It is difficult to determine which syllabus was used most frequently because the study circles were very lax in reporting to the ABF which syllabus they had used. In addition, the ABF seems to have regarded the courses as interchangeable, periodically alternating the course names “Association Studies” and “Organizational Studies.” A rough estimate indicates that Berg’s syllabus was more common in the 1920s, whereas the SSU’s syllabus was more common in the 1930s.2

Selected Educational Material
The educational material analyzed here is taken from the syllabus for the study circle course in trade union studies and from the magazine Fackföreningsrörelsen. This selection was made for three reasons. First, trade union studies and organizational studies were the most common subjects studied by study circles during the 1920s and 1930s (see chapter 5), so the messages conveyed in these courses reached many workers. Second, the contents of trade union studies and organizational or association studies courses would in theory suit strategic identity formation, because they dealt with the foundations of the trade union movement and offered a good opportunity to define the LO.

The third reason for the selection is that the trade union studies course was intended to teach members how to run local trade union sections, so it can be assumed that at least the activists in the local associations attended these study circles. The activists among the grassroots were crucial for the leadership because of their central position and influence over the local sections, which had far-reaching authority in some of the LO affiliates. Local section activists were a group whose loyalty the LO desperately needed.

Central Features of the LO’s Self-Image
The first part of the analysis of the educational material focuses on what was central for the organization—in other words, how the LO depicted itself in the educational material.

The History of the LO
Three themes above all were emphasized in Hansson’s account of the LO’s history and development: first, that trade unionism had a long tradition in Sweden; second, that the LO had strengthened over time; and third, that the LO had never been a socialist organization—not even at the start.
The very first trade unions in Sweden had emerged from the guild system, which originated in medieval times. Skilled craftsmen had long organized guilds, which eventually were transformed into the new form of organization, the trade union (Hansson 1923, 27–28, 35–36; Hansson 1924). Hansson put considerable stress on the legacy of the guilds, especially in the early editions of his book (Hansson 1923, 18–19, 37–41). In later editions, however, he highlighted negative aspects of the guild system and emphasized the superiority of trade unions (Hansson 1923, 37–41; Hansson 1938b, 18–19). Clearly, the LO wished to be regarded as an organization with long traditions. This was, among other things, a way of distancing itself from the syndicalists, which, as we will see, were framed as a very new organization.

Another characteristic of the history of the LO was its stress on the organization’s constant growth. The LO had grown increasingly strong over time (Hansson 1923, 206; Hansson 1926a, 3; Hansson 1930d), transforming itself from a small and rather ineffectual organization into a powerful body enjoying widespread respect (and inspiring fear in the Right). The mobilization of workers had paid off: after several decades of struggle, the LO was an organization that could not be ignored regarding labor market issues (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1930; Hansson 1923, 206–16, 224–25; Hansson 1926a, 3; Hansson 1935d, 13–14; Hansson 1938b, 252–56, 261–69). Regardless of what the left-wing organizations claimed, the LO was the organization that had accomplished the difficult task of mobilizing the workers, so the successes of the labor movement were ultimately the result of the LO’s work. Early trade unions were portrayed in the materials as humble actors with much less power than the employers. Due to the increasing number of their members and the work of previous generations of LO members, however, trade unions had become an important force in society (Hansson 1923, 148; Hansson 1926a, 3).

Ideologically, Hansson described the Swedish trade union movement’s development as a journey from liberalism to social democracy, with a short stop in socialism (Hansson 1926b, 408–19). The LO had never been a socialist organization, not even early in the labor movement’s history (Hansson 1923, 276–77; Hansson 1926b; Hansson 1935f, 40–44; Hansson 1938b, 293–97). In Hansson’s portrayal, the process of building a coherent trade union movement during the nineteenth century was a struggle between liberal ideas, on one hand, and the socialist ideas championed by the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiska arbetarpartiet, SAP), on the other. It was the SAP that had emerged victorious (Hansson 1923, 23–27; Hansson 1932, 8–12; Hansson 1938b, 18, 25–29), so the unions moved from liberalism to social democracy without difficulty. Hansson (Hansson 1926b, 419) explained the development in the SAP magazine Tiden as follows: “With these observations, I think I have shown that the trade union
movement in our country was far from being socialist in origin; on the contrary, it took quite some time and required considerable effort before socialist ideas really took root in the labor movement. . . . After the breakthrough actually occurred, it did not take long until social democracy captured one union after another, and the unions also became the foundation on which the Social Democratic Party was built during the following decades." Clearly, Hansson wanted to avoid giving the labor movement a “socialist” history, which can be interpreted as a way for the LO to distance itself from the syndicalists and communists. By choosing the reformist path, the LO had moved away from the path leading toward a socialist society and instead embraced the capitalist system, making it easy for the syndicalists to criticize it for betraying its origins. If the LO had had no socialist origins, however, this argument would lose its force. Moreover, if the goal was to improve relationships with capital, this was probably the best way for the LO to go. The deprecation of socialism also assigned the LO a status as a particular kind of organization within the labor movement. The liberal origins of the LO were acknowledged by other members of the LO Secretariat but not emphasized to the same degree as by Hansson (Johansson 1924a).

Finally, the events of the LO’s history were described very objectively and “scientifically” in the book. Hansson presented all the statistics available in describing how the different affiliates and the LO had developed over time. Hansson’s description of the history of the union movement seemed to have been inspired by the idea of three stages of union movement development, originally developed by Richard Calwer in an article in *Fackföreningsrörelsen* in 1921. According to the article, the union movement’s first stage was conflictual and was marked by a substantial number of strikes. In their first stumbling steps, it was natural for the unions to test their strength relative to that of the employers. It was also necessary, Hansson explained, *so that the workers would realize that spontaneous strikes do not enhance the workers’ struggle*. In other words, wildcat strikes were very immature and beneath the dignity of the reformist unions, which, at that time, were on the verge of step three. The second stage was characterized by a centralist organization and the realization that the labor movement could influence the government through political activity. The third step was to use this political leverage to seize power over the state and to use the state to democratize production (Hansson 1921a). How the democratization of production was to happen is not well developed in the article, but Hansson seems to have shared Wigforss’s vision of industrial democracy.

The general strike of 1909 was a key event in the LO’s past, so it is interesting to know how it was portrayed. Though the main book *Den svenska fackföreningsrörelsen* briefly describes general strikes in very general terms, assuming that the reader was already familiar with the concept, the strike of 1909 is surprisingly
not described in detail. Hansson stated that the strike was caused by the radicalization that preceded the conflict: “The general strike of 1909 must therefore be considered to have been evoked by powerful psychological factors, generated by a highly developed class consciousness, created by external compulsion from ruthless employer policies. The experiences of this strike did not create much faith in this means of exerting pressure” (Hansson 1923, 185). In an article in Fackföreningsrörelsen in 1934, Hansson developed his account of the strike and described the general strike as the result of syndicalist agitation and the rhetoric used by the reformist unions in 1909. The rhetoric was unfortunately the same type of agitation that was common when the union movement was young (and immature). The rhetoric had a strong impact on the union members, many of whom were relatively young; as a result, a battle between employers and workers was more or less bound to happen. Hansson also stressed that in comparison with general strikes in other countries, the Swedish one stands out because the disciplined and responsible workers refused to cause any disorder (Hansson 1934c). Two remarks can be made regarding this description: first, the syndicalist rhetoric is first cited as a reason for the failure in the 1930s; second, Hansson stressed responsibility even when describing a major catastrophe for the union movement. The immaturity of the movement appears to have caused the fatal decision to start the strike in 1909 and, as we shall see, was also a property attributed to the syndicalists. In other words, emulating the syndicalists could lead to a new general strike.

Properties

Hansson described the LO as a “democratic-centralist” organization. Democracy was the most important principle of trade unionism (Hansson 1921a; Hansson 1923, 78; Hansson 1934b) and the means of empowering the working class. An unquestionable devotion to democracy was of course one of the main characteristics separating the reformists from the revolutionary Left. Accepting democracy and rejecting revolution also meant accepting the bourgeois state, however, which was controversial in the reformist labor movement. The SAP had been criticized for cooperating with the enemy. Democracy within the union movement, on the other hand, meant that union leaders had to be elected. Legitimizing democracy was hardly a problem.

It was harder to find support for centralism among the LO members. The central organization became the scapegoat for the failed general strike in 1909, and subsequently the affiliates had restrained the central organization’s powers. Hansson’s solution to this dilemma was to establish a clear connection between democracy and centralization. First, Hansson proposed representative
democracy as the superior system. Consequently, the election of leaders sufficed for democracy to be realized. Second, because of the growing membership, Hansson explained, more and more affiliates were being founded, eventually making it necessary to centralize the umbrella organization, which was the only way to make democracy work in the LO. Such centralization as had taken place did not, in Hansson's estimation, undermine democracy within the organization but, if anything, had made it work better (Hansson 1922e, 313–14; Hansson 1923, 77; Hansson 1938b, 110, 115–19). As centralism had arisen through the democratic system in the trade unions, it represented a development of democracy (Hansson 1923, 83–84). In this way, democracy was used as an argument for centralizing powers in the LO. Of course, democracy was a very appealing trait to lay claim to—who could object to democracy?—while centralism was highly controversial. Since centralism was desirable for the leadership, however, it somehow had to be positively linked to democracy. “It must therefore be established,” Hansson wrote, “that the centralist system has in no way curtailed democracy. It may rather be regarded as a development of democracy, in that it has established guarantees that rights and obligations are distributed equally between all members” (Hansson 1923, 84).

Opponents of centralism were portrayed in the educational materials as young firebrands who lacked appreciation of the importance of centralism and who entertained a “primitive notion of what democracy was” (Hansson 1923, 83; Hansson 1927a, 180–81). These uneducated members and nonmembers had not understood that centralism was a natural development in both the workers’ and the employers’ organizations. Once these members matured, however, they would come to realize the superiority of centralist arrangements (Hansson 1923, 83–84; Hansson 1934a, 112–13). Such centralism was, moreover, a significant aspect of the “old trade unions,” as opposed to the new ones (in other words, the syndicalist unions) (Hansson 1938b, 96). Both the 1923 and 1938 editions of Hansson's work assure LO members that democracy and centralism are compatible, even mutually beneficial.

The materials also characterized the LO as a responsible organization. It was important to emphasize that the LO did nothing to threaten the social order: when it entered into a labor market conflict, for example, it took pains to ensure that other parties were not thereby put at risk. It took responsibility for maintaining all necessary societal functions during strikes (Hansson 1923, 232–33). In the 1923 version, in fact, it was asserted that the LO would ensure that so-called third parties were not affected by labor market conflicts; it was prepared to guarantee that society would not suffer from such conflicts.

Another sign of responsibility was the description of collective agreements: the parties on the labor market, Hansson stressed, were responsible agents who took responsibility for labor market peace during periods when collective agreements
were in force (Hansson 1938b, 254–55). As we shall see, the LO’s claim to be a responsible actor was a way for it to distance itself from the syndicalists. Moreover, the new organizations, the SAC and the Communist Party, had criticized the LO—and apparently recruited new members using the argument—claiming that the discipline it advocated greatly restricted workers’ freedom to act (Johansson 1924a). Of course, discipline was important to the LO, which inevitably curtailed its members’ freedom to act in relation to their employers, but “discipline” was not a good word to use to retain old or attract new members. “Responsibility,” on the other hand, sounded much more attractive.

Not only did the materials describe the workers as responsible, they also portrayed the employers that way. In addition, they stressed the importance of leaving labor market issues in the hands of the labor market organizations: the state should not interfere, since it had neither the knowledge nor the capacity to do so (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936a; Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936b; Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936c; Hansson 1938b, 265). This brings us back to the responsibility discussion: labor market parties are able and willing to take responsibility for labor market issues. The LO was framed as an organization that could and should take such responsibility. Regarding legislation as a means to create labor market peace, Hansson proclaimed:

Such a law must mean that the state assumes the obligation to guarantee, at all times, that the workers obtain the highest standard of living that the general state of the economy permits, and that the employers obtain assurances that wages are not to be set higher than the current economic situation allows. . . . Such a guarantee, however, cannot be given by the state . . . because macroeconomic science cannot yet provide adequate guidance in these issues. Practical statistics are also too incomplete to serve as a basis for a general assessment of these issues. The state cannot guarantee the workers that the employers will carry on in business with the wages that have been determined by arbitration, any more than it can guarantee employers that workers should be available for wages set in this way.

The state thus appears to lack the prerequisites to decide what wages ought to be suitable at any particular time and to ensure that companies stick to these fixed wages, or that workers accept them. Employers’ and workers’ organizations are also in agreement in their opposition to any legislation on compulsory arbitration of disputes relating to these interest conflicts. (Hansson 1938b, 265)

This interpretation of how the labor market should be organized is at the heart of the Basic Agreement, as both employers and workers realized that they had a common interest in keeping the state away from the labor market. The emphasis
on the existence of common interests between employers and workers, as well as the highlighted opportunities for negotiated solutions, served to downplay class conflict and facilitate the emergence of a culture of negotiation. The state was unable, according to the materials, to guarantee workers the highest possible standard of living or employers the lowest possible wages. Accordingly, legislation to create labor market peace was inappropriate, indeed probably impossible (Hansson 1938b, 265). Such legislative proposals only showed the ignorance of the Right. The same formulations appear in the editions of 1927, 1934, and 1938.

How Trade Union Members Should Act

A good trade union member is responsible, loyal to the organization, and proud of being part of the movement, according to the study materials. Moreover, a good member pays membership dues on time and contributes to the union through volunteer work on its behalf (Hansson 1926a, 3–7). A member should also have a certain level of education, so that one understands how unions work. A deficient education could lead, for example, to the delusion that centralism has a negative effect on workers’ influence on the labor market (Hansson 1923, 83). Immature behavior, such as blockades—a fairly common means of conflict in the syndicalist movement—could hurt not only the workers involved but also the reputation of the entire union movement, and, with its credibility damaged among the public, the union movement would suffer tremendously. Therefore, LO members needed to act responsibly, and mature members realized this (Hansson 1933d).

The connection with the organization’s properties is clear: the LO was a democratic and centralized organization, so members ought to act accordingly. Hansson wrote in 1926 that “the minority is always obliged to subordinate itself to the majority” (Hansson 1926a, 33–34). Decisions ought to be made on a majority basis, and once made they ought to be followed in accordance with the rule of law. If the charter of the organization and the rules adopted by the congress are not respected, the entire democratic system within LO might fall apart (and bring down the organization with it) (Hansson 1923, 83; Hansson 1926a, 6; Hansson 1935b, 24). Consequently, for internal democracy to be realized and respected, a good union member never acts on one’s own initiative but instead lets the union decide what measures are best in a given situation (Hansson 1926a, 6). This requires a certain amount of loyalty. Disloyal behavior did not belong in the LO: it was not a proper way for LO members to act and benefited only communists and syndicalists (Hansson 1933c). Again, this was a way of stressing the organization’s difference from the syndicalists, who called for more power to be given to the grassroots (with frequent labor market conflicts as a result). It also involved a disciplining message: “You should do as you are told.”
The very basis of the “social organization,” according to Hansson, was solidarity, together with a willingness to make sacrifices for the collective (Hansson 1928a; Hansson 1938a). This in turn meant that, while the union member would give up some autonomy, one would gain equality on the labor market, something that liberalism had failed to deliver (Hansson 1935e, 55–59). The worker’s personality would develop too (Hansson 1922d).

Turning to the actions of the organization, conflicts should be resolved through negotiations, according to Hansson. The materials claim that Swedish trade unions had always primarily sought to negotiate voluntary agreements with employers concerning working conditions; the strike was the weapon of last resort, to be used only after all attempts at negotiation had proved fruitless (Hansson 1923, 148–49; Hansson 1927a, 186–87). It was never in the LO’s best interest to go on strike, because it preferred to negotiate (Hansson 1923, 149–50; Hansson 1935b, 29–33). On this particular point, we can see a minor change in the materials over time. The 1923 edition blames employers for the high number of strikes; the 1938 edition states that both sides had always tried negotiations as the first step to resolving a conflict but that such a strategy had not always worked—hence the high number of work stoppages during the earlier period (Hansson 1938b, 165). Both workers and employers had come to realize that work stoppages were damaging for both parties and that the solution lay in negotiations.

One way of reducing the number of conflicts, according to Hansson, was to reach collective agreements for the entire workforce—in other words, national agreements were very desirable (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936a; Hansson 1938b, 257). While the push for national agreements originally emanated from the employers’ side, both employers and workers agreed, according to Hansson, that a lot of time and effort could be saved if general issues were settled in national agreements, especially since the system would then be more predictable (Hansson 1923, 248; Hansson 1938b; Hansson 1942, 257). Hansson stressed the importance of labor market peace during a collective agreement: once an

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<th><strong>TABLE 4.2</strong> Summary of central features of LO’s self-depiction</th>
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<td><strong>LO’S SELF-DEPICTION</strong></td>
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agreement had been concluded, work stoppages were not to take place. Nor was this injunction restricted to members: the entire organization and all its affiliates had to adhere to adopted rules and agreements (Hansson 1942, 252–56).

**Distinctive Features: Description of Others**

Having analyzed the LO’s self-depiction, we next examine how the LO framed others. The LO’s positioning relative to other groups is another indicator of its self-perception. There were several others. First, the LO had to distance itself from other trade unions and from left-wing factions, such as the syndicalists. Second, it needed to position itself relative to capital, in other words, the employers and the political Right.

**Demonizing the Syndicalists**

The materials describe the SAC unions as “new trade union[s],” as opposed to the old ones united in the LO (Hansson 1923, 74, 84–85; Hansson 1938b, 96). The LO was an old organization with traditions that could inspire members with trust, while the syndicalists were “the new ones.” This depiction mirrors the LO’s attempt to distance itself from the syndicalists, making the latter look young, inexperienced, and unorganized.

The SAC was portrayed as an irrational body, with a strange and complicated organizational structure. The syndicalists’ aim was to build a decentralized organization that would reinforce the local level, and Hansson saw this as indicative of a lack of maturity, for two reasons. The first line of argument emphasized the SAC’s illogical behavior: since the syndicalists were, compared with the LO, a new organization (Hansson 1923, 74, 84–85; Hansson 1938b, 96), they might be expected to embody new trends. However, it was the old trade unions that had adapted to changes in industrial structure. The LO had changed its organizational structure in accordance with the so-called industrial principle (i.e., all workers in one workplace should be organized by one union); the syndicalists, in contrast, had shown no interest in modifying their organization in accordance with such structural changes (Hansson 1923, 71, 74, 106; Hansson 1938b, 92–96). They lacked the maturity to do so, according to Hansson. The second line of argument attacked the federal system. The main idea of the SAC was to transfer as much power as possible to the grassroots. Giving the local level greater maneuvering room was referred to as federalism (Hansson 1922b; Hansson 1923, 85, 87), as opposed to the LO’s characteristic centralism.
This decentralized system was the reason for the chaotic appearance of the SAC's organizational structure. In contrast to the SAC's stated determination to keep power at the local level, the syndicalists had in fact established a central organization. This, Hansson argued, made them rather inconsistent and contributed to the confused organizational structure (Hansson 1922b; Hansson 1922e, 313–17; Hansson 1923, 74; Hansson 1938b, 92–96). The confusion was accentuated by the Marxist class logic of the SAC, which called for the working class to be united against the capitalist class. Ideally, according to the SAC, there would not be several different trade union confederations organizing the struggle; rather, all the workers would be united in the same organization (Hansson 1923, 71; Hansson 1938b, 92). In other words, the SAC did not differentiate between different kinds of workers. Simultaneously, however, the SAC did pronounce its difference from the LO. In conclusion, in Hansson's description, the SAC's claimed organizational rationale comes across as contradictory.

The LO described the SAC as having no control over its members. This lack of discipline had highly negative effects on members of the LO, who were well-behaved, responsible, hardworking people who followed the rules and respected other organizations (and so were prone to being taken in by the impulsive syndicalists) (Hansson 1926a, 34). Once again, the comparison between centralized and decentralized systems was a way for LO to distance itself from the SAC. Moreover, while the materials do not say so explicitly, the reader gets the impression that it would be very difficult to combine decentralization with democracy (Hansson 1923, 84–87).

There are several other instances in which the LO's materials portray the syndicalists as irrational. For example, one minute the syndicalists attacked the reformist unions for concluding collective agreements, while the next minute they concluded their own agreements (Hansson 1923, 255–56; Hansson 1938b, 218–21). The SAC had also condemned the LO's strike fund, claiming that economic support would hamper the revolution, yet eventually decided to establish a strike fund of its own (Hansson 1923, 106, 111–12; Hansson 1938b, 143; Johansson 1924b).

One of the most striking characteristics of the syndicalists was their methods. They believed that strikes, sabotage, and obstruction were the only effective methods in the struggle against capital and would lead eventually to final victory. A revolutionary, antistatist, and non-parliamentary class struggle based on trade unions was the best way to go. Syndicalists were accordingly skeptical of parliamentary reformist work, believing that such methods might make workers lose faith in the possibility of revolution (Hansson 1923, 185–86, 290–91). The syndicalists and their supporters in the LO were usually radical young trade
unionists. They were swayed easily by syndicalist rhetoric, and they believed in overthrowing capitalist society through a general strike, according to Hansson (Hansson 1923, 184–85). Here too, as the LO saw it, the difference between the organizations was clear. The SAC acted irresponsibly: it would go on strike at any time, without considering the consequences for other groups. Acting ruthlessly, it would put pressure on other groups, such as LO members, to undertake sympathy actions on its behalf (Hansson 1926a, 22, 29–30, 35–40). The misuse of sympathy strikes was an SAC strategy whose purpose was to create chaos in order to make the “reformist” organizations look bad (Hansson 1926a, 22). This sowed confusion among LO members over the meaning of solidarity and showed how self-centered the syndicalists were (Hansson 1925a; Hansson 1926a, 22).

The Political Right

Turning our attention to capital, the archenemy of the working class, we find two distinct actors: the political Right (the right-wing and conservative parties in Parliament) and the employers, which were treated separately in the LO’s educational material.

The LO’s relationship to the Right is described as a long struggle against the latter’s attempts to constrain the labor movement through legislation intended to strengthen the employers. The first step in this struggle was the Åkarp Law, which made it illegal to prevent strikebreakers from working during a strike. Several other attempts to restrict workers’ rights of association followed without success, according to the materials (Hansson 1923, 203, 207; Hansson 1938b, 248–52).

The political Right is depicted as an enemy of the workers. The employers, on the other hand, are not mentioned in Hansson’s long account of how the Right tried to reduce union power through legislation. For example, in 1933 a major conflict started in the construction sector. The conflict caused both the Conservative and Liberal Parties to demand regulation of the right to start blockades. Such legislation would benefit the employers, according to Hansson, but the employers were never identified as the originators of the proposal (Hansson 1933b). (For a thorough analysis of the conflict, see Åmark 1989.) One might have expected some ire to be aimed at the employers for such legislation; after all, the chair of the Swedish Employers’ Association (Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen, SAF) was a member of Parliament for the Conservative Party. It would have been easy to treat the employers as a part of the political Right, to build a stronger class identity in opposition to them; Ragnar Casparsson, for example, did just that (Casparsson 1931). However,
the employers do not figure in the LO’s materials in that context (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936c; Hansson 1930c; Hansson 1930d).

Employers: History, Properties, and Actions

Finally, the third “other” that emerges in Hansson’s texts is the employers. Being an old organization, like the LO, the SAF had considerably improved on its past immature behavior. For example, the SAF had formerly used strikebreakers to fight the unions and had even tried to organize company unions (“yellow unions”) (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1930; Hansson 1923) but had since become much more accommodating. The employers offered company unions as an alternative to the reformist trade unions, but they never flourished. Furthermore, their harmful effects on the LO diminished, as working-class solidarity grew (Hansson 1923, 224–28). Hansson spent a great deal of time trying to explain the existence of strikebreakers in the past by stressing that organizations on both the labor and employer sides were not developed or powerful early on, compared with the situation in the early 1920s. This gave phony organizations such as “yellow unions” their chance. However, the major problem in the past had been that the considerable number of unorganized workers and unorganized employers made it hard for the parties to establish rules acceptable to both sides (Hansson 1923, 223–24). It seems there were some employers and some workers who refused to comply with the agreements reached by the relevant organizations. In this, Hansson’s account of labor market history absolves the SAF of some of the blame. Certain employers had indeed tried to harm the trade unions, but the latter had been able to overcome such attacks.

This description of the use of strikebreakers may have been used to create an “us against them” attitude within the union movement; however, the approach taken in the educational materials is very objective. Most of the described incidents had taken place well in the past, signaling that this was how the employers used to behave, not how they behaved at the time Hansson was writing.

The reformist unions had always cherished labor market peace, their primary goal being to improve conditions for their members through negotiations. The employers, on the other hand, had not always been so forthcoming. They had tried to prevent workers from organizing, and this hostile attitude had led to work stoppages (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1930; Hansson 1923, 148–49). This too had changed over time (Hansson 1923, 150), indicating a degree of maturation on the employers’ side.

Notwithstanding the efforts of both the workers’ and employers’ organizations to negotiate and find peaceful solutions, the number of work stoppages had gradually increased. Hansson tried to explain this in terms of the growth of the
organizations: not only the trade unions but also the employers’ organizations were getting stronger. As a result, the labor market organizations had been transformed into “fighting organizations” that were tempted to test their strength in conflicts (Hansson 1923, 152). This description of the past relationship between employers and workers is particularly interesting, since the Swedish labor market had been characterized by conflicts for many years; indeed, the number of work stoppages had steadily increased to become the highest in Europe in the 1920s (Tegle 2000, 165–69). However, this history of struggle is absent from Hansson’s description of past relations between the labor market parties. He was clearly trying to avoid demonizing the employers in connection with work stoppages. Such stoppages, he argued, were an effect not of class conflict but rather of rising membership rates and the growing strength of the organizations on both sides. He mentioned the incidence of strikes and lockouts but ventured very few comments or interpretations of the figures (Hansson 1923, 162–66).

The similarities between the unions and the employers’ organizations are emphasized in the materials: both are voluntary organizations (Hansson 1938b, 247–48); both have the same legal basis (Hansson 1938b, 247–48); both abide by the rule of law (Hansson 1923, 261–62); both are anxious to preserve labor market peace while collective agreements are in force (Fackföreningssrörelsen 1930; Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936a; Hansson 1938b, 252–56, 257); and both wish to resolve conflicts through negotiations (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936c). Legislation on labor market issues, furthermore, had merely codified the customs created and practiced by the two sides (Hansson 1938b, 247).

However, the LO’s description of the employers’ side is not purely positive. The materials describe, for instance, how employers had drawn up blacklists of former employees who had been union members, intending to make it hard for them to get new jobs. Some of the LO affiliates had approached the employers’ organizations on this matter because it represented a violation of the collective national agreements reached by the two main organizations that adopted agreements had to be followed (Hansson 1923, 193–94; Hansson 1938b, 197–201). This can be interpreted as an instance of the employers’ untrustworthiness. On the other hand, the cited event had occurred a good deal earlier, in 1914, so it could be regarded as ancient history. The account in the materials is very objective, not being disparaging and expressing no bitterness. In some cases, individual employers tried to do harm to the union movement; for instance, one employer in Eksjö hired strikebreakers, leading to the breakdown of attempts to resolve the conflict. But the LO chose not to tar all employers with the same brush (Hansson 1933a).

The shared interests of employers and workers are obvious, according to the materials. In fact, even on issues on which the political Right had tried to restrict the powers of trade unions through unfavorable legislation, the employers and
workers were able to find common ground (thereby making the Right look unreasonable) (Hansson 1938b, 261–62). Furthermore, as already mentioned, both sides wanted to keep the state out of the labor market. The state was not in a position to decide on labor issues or to secure labor market peace. It was the involved interest organizations that had the required competence as well as the will to make it work. They should therefore be entrusted with the task (Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936a; Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936b; Fackföreningsrörelsen 1936c; Hansson 1938b, 265).

This differentiates between the political Right and the employers, which did not have the same interests. Employers and unions, however, did have common interests, with both stressing the importance of the right of association and the need to keep the state out of the labor market. By separating the Right from the employers, the LO was able to combine support for the SAP with cooperation with the employers’ side. Since employers and the Right were distinct actors, cooperating with the former was not the same as supporting the latter.

Who and What We Are and Are Not

What type of worker did Hansson depict? What was the ideal LO member like? From the analysis of the material, the main trait of a good worker appears to have been “responsible behavior.” How does the responsible worker fit into the ideology of reformism? After all, the communists probably also wanted to have responsible members in the disciplinary sense (i.e., paying their membership dues on time, engaging actively in the organization, and so on), so how was the LO different from the other labor organizations?

According to its self-depiction in the materials, the LO was a “strong and growing organization with powerful resources.” The workers had once been humble servants, but because of the formation of trade unions that was no longer the case. Assigning power to the working class, as Hansson’s descriptions do, was not specific to the reformist labor movement, but it was important to build confidence in the workers, and, above all, it was important to maintain that the LO, not the new labor organizations, had given the working class these powers.

Another crucial trait of the organization was its adherence to the rule of law. Members were to obey whatever rules had been accepted by the organization—the centralized system required obedience—as democracy would not work otherwise. Hansson described the reformist unions as willing to take responsibility for labor market peace. The belief that the labor market could be made to work without the need for parliamentary legislation, but through negotiations with employers, is a notable feature of the LO’s self-depiction in the materials. No doubts are entertained that the labor market parties could make it work. These descriptions clearly separate the LO from the left-wing organizations: the LO was an organization that
negotiated, and its members were workers who realized the benefits of negotiation as opposed to the paltry gains of always taking the path of conflict.

Acknowledgement of democracy as the best system was indeed a feature distinguishing the radical left-wing organizations from the reformists: the latter took the view that the labor movement should seek reforms through the democratic system to improve the living conditions of the working class. This was Eduard Bernstein’s main criticism of Karl Marx: the premises on which Marx had based his theories were wrong, as the working class was not becoming more exploited. Bernstein dismissed revolution as the main instrument in the hands of the working class and argued instead that bourgeois society should be overcome through gradual reforms (Hansson 1991, 11–12). Hjalmar Branting adopted Bernstein’s ideas at an early stage, providing Swedish social democracy with its ideological foundations. For the reformist branch of the labor movement, democracy was the most important tool for implementing reforms; indeed, democracy was a prerequisite for reformist success (Hansson 1991, 15–16). Bernstein’s ideas, however, were above all applicable to political parties. In the political sphere,

| TABLE 4.3 | Summary of the central and distinctive features of the LO relative to those of other organizations |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **LO’S SELF-DEPICTION** | **LO’S DEPICTION OF THE SYNDICALISTS** | **LO’S DEPICTION OF THE EMPLOYERS** |
| **History and development of the organization** | Strong and growing organization; long tradition; had evolved from liberal to social democratic; had matured | New movement; lacking history; had developed as a “disorganized organization” | Old like the LO; growing; had become increasingly friendly to unions; had matured |
| **Properties, self-depiction, and description of the “others”** | Centralist, democratic, reformist, responsible, mature; feared by the Right | Inconsistent, decentralized, complex, immature, inexperienced | Responsible; same legal basis as the LO; fairly trustworthy |
| **Actions: view of how the LO and the “others” should act** | Members should respect and follow adopted rules; should be responsible (e.g., should pay membership dues on time and engage actively in the organization); should display discipline and social responsibility | Irresponsible, selfish, irrational; disrespectful of adopted rules | Takes responsibility for the labor market |
democracy was the key to success and the realization of socialism. However, the trade union movement was not a political party standing in elections, so reformist ideas had to be converted into practical trade union work.

Democracy within the union sphere referred to internal democracy, in which the members elected the union leadership (as in a representative democracy) and in most affiliates could vote to accept or reject wage agreements. However, the labor market could not be regulated by means of democratic institutions but only through negotiations or radical struggle (unless every single agreement on the labor market were to be governed by parliamentary legislation, which seemed unrealistic). Radical struggle was the path chosen by the left-wing organizations, not the LO. Creating a relationship with employers built on struggle would make it hard to carry out reforms, as Bernstein suggested. If the political parties used parliamentary democracy as means in the class struggle, negotiations were the means the unions should use, according to Hansson.

Of course, one could imagine a scenario in which certain labor market issues, such as the minimum wage, were decided on by Parliament. Parliament was elected, so letting it decide on key issues was indeed to trust in democracy. However, politics in Sweden had been unpredictable since the introduction of universal suffrage, and social democracy did not immediately become a dominant force. Relying on Parliament to decide on labor market issues could have had unpleasant consequences for the working class. Meanwhile, the union movement was big enough to pressure the employers in negotiations, so keeping the state out of the labor market as far as possible was indeed in the interest of the LO. Few other options remained for handling labor market issues besides negotiations, given that revolution was not an option. Because of the LO’s internal democracy, LO leadership was given a mandate to do what it considered to be in the interest of the workers. This required that the workers behave responsibly. Unless the members followed orders from the leaders, the union movement would not speak with one voice, and its credibility would be lost. Discipline in the movement and a large number of members were prerequisites for the negotiation option to work best. The LO therefore needed to mobilize the working class but within the framework of negotiations. Hansson used democracy and the rule of law to justify member discipline and the centralization of the movement. This way, the spirit of consensus became a result of reformism applied to trade unions.

Surprisingly, the rhetoric of solidarity was almost absent. Hansson had written a booklet that was used in study circles on that very issue, aimed at proving that helping syndicalists through sympathy strikes was not an act of solidarity. In the main course book, however, solidarity was not discussed. This may seem a little odd; on the other hand, it was difficult to discuss the principle of solidarity and at the same time argue that it did not apply to syndicalist workers.
In addition, the materials are most accurate regarding what LO was not, that is, its organizational distinctiveness, with less attention paid to what LO was. The demonization of the syndicalists was meant to deter LO members from joining or helping them, and this mirrored the struggle to make trade unions a cohesive actor during this period. This is why the reformist unions did their best to crush their leftist rivals. Another noteworthy feature is Hansson’s altered terminology when confronting the leftist enemy: suddenly words and phrases such as “class struggle,” “methods of struggle,” “oppression,” “working class,” and “revolutionary” make their appearance (Hansson 1923, 85, 149, 185–89, 291–92). The rhetoric of class is almost absent from Den svenska fackföreningsrörelsen, and the few times it does appear, moreover, it is used with reference to the syndicalists (not the employers). One might otherwise expect such language to be used to create a strong class identity, which could be a powerful tool for mobilizing the membership. If the LO had chosen to build its collective identity on class identity, however, it would have found it difficult to justify cooperating with the employer side. Instead, the syndicalists were made out to be a slightly irrational and rather ignorant revolutionary group. Quite often, words or concepts with connotations of class conflict were cited in a highly condescending way, within quotation marks. The message conveyed to the reader is this: the syndicalists are a so-called revolutionary organization, which is trying to conduct a so-called class struggle. Reading between the lines, one might easily conclude that the syndicalists were poseurs who were not to be taken seriously. The LO probably intended to convey the notion that joining the syndicalists meant joining a meaningless struggle. Staying in the LO, on the other hand, meant being part of a growing organization with powerful resources and a promising future. This could also explain why the LO refused to describe its history as socialist. The apparent stress on distinctive features in contrast to the left-wing organizations suggests that the organizational logic had superseded the more ideological ideas of class struggle within the leadership, and that creating an organizational identity that clearly referred back to and distinguished the LO from other working-class organizations was the primary aim of the study material.

Moreover, one cannot help wondering what happened to the communists. There is very little in the materials about them, though we do know that the LO perceived them as a threat. One possible explanation is that the communists did not organize their own trade unions but were members of LO affiliates. The syndicalists, on the other hand, had their own trade unions, so they constituted a clear target and a rival. Demonizing communists, by contrast, would actually mean criticizing many members of the LO. In the worst-case scenario, such members might then leave the organization. An article in Fackföreningsrörelsen by Johan-Olov Johansson, member of the LO Secretariat, testifies to such opinions.
Johansson criticized the idea of revolution among unions and political parties and condemned the SAC, but revolutionary ideas in the political sphere were, he concluded, hard to separate from the LO because there were many communists among its members (Johansson 1924a).

Finally, what is clear in the materials is the emphasis on common interests with the employers’ side. A distinction is drawn between the political Right and the employers, which opens up the possibility of cooperating with the latter without being “unfaithful” to social democracy. If the materials did have an impact on the grassroots, it is not hard to see why the Swedish model of organizing the labor market found support among the grassroots. After all, the materials essentially encourage the readers to welcome closer cooperation with the employers. A remarkable finding from analyzing the educational materials is that the descriptions of the LO, employers, and syndicalists did not change notably over time. This is remarkable because the close cooperation with the employers, an element that has made the Swedish labor market famous, was sealed with the Basic Agreement in 1938. As early as 1923, however, when the first edition of *Den svenska fackföreningsrörelsen* was published, the spirit of consensus was already presented as the ideal way of organizing the labor market, according to the LO Secretariat.

**Relations with Employers**

The self-image of the LO depicted in the educational materials indeed embraced negotiations and reformism. The LO’s interpretation of the reformist ideology took the shape of applied reformism, exhorting specific actions, which can be summarized as *the spirit of consensus*. The spirit of consensus, one of the most prominent features of Swedish labor market relations, was entrenched by the study materials provided by the LO leadership. However, to argue that the leadership strategically constructed this particular image of the organization requires additional analysis of the LO leadership and its relationship to the employers. Was it a mere coincidence that Hansson’s descriptions of the movement encouraged friendly relations with the employers? Did the leadership make any other efforts to promote the spirit of consensus?

**The LO Secretariat and the Spirit of Consensus**

Undoubtedly, the Secretariat had particular motives for trying to make the LO’s members more friendly to employers, to which the challenges to the movement presented in chapter 2 bear testimony. Sigfrid Hansson was among the first to
articulate these quite controversial ideas, and we can date such attitudes to as early as 1921, at least on Hansson’s part (Hansson 1928a; Hansson 1938a). Was Hansson alone in holding such a view of employers? The remaining sources do not allow us to answer this question in detail. In Hansson’s own diary it is claimed that other parts of the Secretariat shared his views (e.g., see Edvard Johansson’s speech at the meeting with the LO Representatives in October 1921). Johansson, who at that time was secretary of the Secretariat and would become the president of the LO after Thorberg died in 1930, was the person who initiated the negotiations in Saltsjöbaden, which started in 1936 and resulted in the Basic Agreement. According to Hansson, Johansson stated: “They [the workers] ought to try to make the best of it [the economic crisis] for their own and the industry’s sake, and above all they ought to protect their trade unions and wait for better times that will enable the working class to focus their efforts on new, positive tasks related to the democratization and socialization of economic life” (Hansson 1921, 10 October, my italics).

According to Hansson, Johansson’s point of view was common among the trade union elite. There are, however, no traces of explicit statements in favor of cooperation with the employers in the minutes from the LO Representatives that year. Johansson talked about the economic crisis and the need to act cautiously and not misuse strike funds, but the minutes do not say anything about considering the interests of employers. That does not necessarily mean that this idea was not well established in the trade union elite.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Hansson acted on his own without the support of the LO Secretariat. Hansson’s influential book was published in the LO’s own booklet series, implying that the Secretariat had approved the manuscript: the Secretariat was invested with the power to stop publication, and it did review drafts of items in the booklet series before publication. For example, Per Bergman’s booklet Vår fackliga kamp (Our Trade Union Struggle) was distributed to the entire Secretariat for review before it was published (Landssekretariatet 1921c). In the event, the book was used in the most common study circle course for almost twenty years.

**Actions of the LO leadership in the Late 1920s**

Whereas the LO’s main concern in the 1920s had been the left-wing organizations and the large number of strikes, resulting in outreach and educational efforts focusing on the syndicalists and communists, this focus shifted somewhat in the late 1920s. This was partly because of the increased interest of the Swedish Parliament in labor conflicts. The industrial actions in the 1920s disrupted the Swedish economy to the extent that addressing work stoppages was strongly
prioritized by Parliament. In 1926 the social democratic government initiated a public investigation of what was needed for sustainable labor market peace (SOU 1927: 4), and the Liberal government that succeeded it proposed a bill on collective agreements that had profound impact on labor conflicts. This new law bound the parties entering into collective agreements to peace, so conflicts were prohibited while an agreement was in place. If one party did start a conflict, the individuals involved would be prosecuted, and the organization could be sued. In other words, the organizations were responsible for making their members comply with the agreement. The members, on the other hand, were forced by the law to accept an agreement reached by the organization; and even if they left the organization, they could be sued for contravening this requirement (Casparsson 1951, 107–11).

Since any type of regulation of the labor market was regarded with suspicion in the labor movement, the law on collective agreements passed in 1928 was preceded by protests unprecedented in the history of the LO. The law might seem fairly uncontroversial in retrospect, but in 1927–1928 it was strongly contested by the labor movement because it constrained the right to strike. The law also put pressure on the unions to impose discipline in the movement. Complaints about the law poured into the LO Secretariat; protests were directed toward the government, but many local sections demanded that the Secretariat take action. The LO’s official standpoint was to oppose the law, as the SAP did, but this was done with little result.

The law may have helped the communist project, the Unity Committee (Enhetskommittén, see chapter 2), to obtain more support among Swedish workers, and its 1929 conference attracted almost twice as many local sections as did the first one (Casparsson 1951; Kennerström 1974, 10; Schüllerqvist 1992). Indeed, the law made it easy for the left-wing organizations to argue that the bourgeois state was trying to suppress the working class.

In response to the strong reactions to the law on collective agreements, the government attempted to improve labor relations in 1928 by organizing a labor market peace conference. Inspired by the Mond-Turner talks in Britain (McDonald and Gospel 1973), the conference’s purpose was to improve relations between workers and employers. The LO Representatives were torn regarding the peace conference. Some, including Sigfrid Hansson as the main proponent, defended the conference, claiming that employers and unions had common interests. However, meeting only when conflict had already escalated would never deepen the common interests, according to Hansson. Others strongly opposed such an approach (Casparsson 1951, 142–43). The conference resulted in the appointment of a new committee whose aim was to improve labor relations (Hansson 1928b). Hansson referred to the conference as the “consensus conference” in Fackföreningsrörelsen.
Threats of even greater interference in the labor market came in 1934. The SAP leader and prime minister (1932–46) Per Albin Hansson participated in the LO Secretariat’s meeting in December and made it clear that the state would interfere in the labor market unless other solutions to the conflicts could be found (Landssekretariatet 1934b).

The pressure from Parliament and the government more widely must indeed have given the LO an incentive to change the prevalent situation in the labor market and above all to change the image of the employers among the members. What was actually done besides creating employer-friendly content in the educational materials?

**Getting to Know the Enemy**

If the strategy was not only to actively address identity formation but also to change the image of the employers among the workers, what would be the best way of doing that? Sigfrid Hansson’s answer was to inform the LO members of the employers’ perspective on various labor market issues. If the demonized “other”—the enemy of the workers—was given the opportunity to tell the workers about their views of particular problems and their experiences of production, attitudes toward the employers could change.

Employing this strategy, Hansson invited managers of big companies to talk about their situation (and the production problems they faced) at meetings with trade union members. Information about these events is sparse, so it is hard to tell how often such events were arranged and whether the strategy was successful. In the correspondence between Hansson and Gerhard de Geer, the manager of Lesjöforsen AB in the Värmland region, we can ascertain that de Geer had been invited to talk about “work from the employers’ perspective” at least twice in 1934 and 1935. In 1934 the meeting had taken place in Viggbyholm, Stockholm, and workers’ reaction to de Geer’s speech had not been positive (de Geer 1935; Hansson 1935c). De Geer was an atypical and controversial representative of the employers, which might well have been why he was chosen. In the numerous attempts to reduce wages in the early 1920s, de Geer was one of the prime advocates of lowering wages. Representing the classic school of liberal economic theory, de Geer was one of the men who had provoked the LO to initiate a new general strike in 1920, which he asserted could “solve the union problem” once and for all (Casparsson 1951, 26–27).

Regardless of the results of such attempts, the whole idea of inviting managers to talk to union members in order to improve relations with employers illustrates how important it must have been for the LO to facilitate a change in attitudes.
The SAF at Brunsvik

It was at Brunsvik, again, that Hansson’s ideas came to be realized with the best possible effect. The SAF manager, Gustaf Söderlund, was invited to the LO school at Brunsvik in 1935. Söderlund gave two lectures, one on the organizational structure of the SAF, a lecture that, in his own words, “was hardly likely to give rise to discussion” (Söderlund 1935b), and one with the title “The Contradiction between Capital and Labor.” In the latter, which treated the relationship between workers and capital, Söderlund pointed out that the struggle between the labor market parties was inevitable because of the very nature of the labor market organizations. However, the antagonism between the two could be handled in different ways. He dismissed the syndicalist way and industrial democracy, saying that they would only empower the workers, not resolve the antagonism. He also criticized the option of letting the state resolve labor conflicts. The best way, according to Söderlund, was if the labor market parties could handle the conflicts on their own, without state interference. However, such an approach required that both parties restrain themselves, which would be easier if they learned more about each other (Söderlund 1935c). The symbolic value and importance of having the leader of the employers lecturing at Brunsvik, a location intimately connected to the labor movement, should not be underestimated.

The reactions were not long in coming. Söderlund’s appearance at Brunsvik caused reactions in the left-wing press, and Hansson had to defend the lectures in Fackföreningsrörelsen (Hansson 1935a). Later on that summer, Söderlund commented on the debate in a letter to Hansson in which he stated that “we may well rejoice that the critics essentially are named Ny Dag and Nya Dagligt Allehanda” (Söderlund 1935a). The newspaper Ny Dag was a communist newspaper and Nya Dagligt Allehanda was a conservative one. In other words, the speech was not publicly criticized by the LO affiliates or members of the SAF. Instead, it was the supposedly “natural”—in terms of class structure—friends of the employers (the political right) and the LO (the left-wing parties) that opposed cooperation. In 1935, the controversial de Geer was also invited to the LO school in Brunsvik (de Geer 1935; Hansson 1935c).

Once again, Sigfrid Hansson appears to have played an important role in the LO. In a letter to Sigfrid Hansson after Söderlund’s speech at Brunsvik in 1935, Stefan Oljelund, editor of the social democratic newspaper Ny Tid, pointed out: “I think that the spirit that breathes in your words, which testify to extensive experience and keen judgment of human nature, in the long run is more beneficial for those we want to serve than revolutionary or dogmatic speeches. Surely, we can have a good conscience that we are truly serving the working class. It will probably be more obvious what you meant in that regard” (Oljelund 1935).
Oljelund, like Hansson, appears to have been convinced that closer cooperation with the employers was the best way of serving the interests of the working class.

Inviting representatives of the employers’ side to talk about the common interests of the labor market parties was hardly a random act. Moreover, the correspondence between Hansson and Söderlund testifies not only to two men with common ideas as to “what had to be done” to solve the labor market issues but also to friendship. It is possible that the friendship emanated from the different committees on the National Board of Health and Welfare (the first Swedish government agency in which the labor market parties had representation, not only in the executive board but also in a number of committees) in which Hansson and Söderlund served as representatives of their organizations (see Statskalendern 1931–1938). Irrespective of how Söderlund and Hansson became acquainted, because of his success Söderlund was invited to give lectures at the LO school in Brunsvik again the following summer (Söderlund 1936).

The Enterprise from the Worker’s Perspective

Brunsvik was not only the venue where personal connections were forged between the elites of the labor market parties; the summer school classes also treated specific themes in line with the employer-friendly policy. In the summer of 1935, the course on trade union studies contained an essay competition on the subject “The Worker and the Enterprise.” Söderlund’s appearance at Brunsvik, lecturing about “the enterprise from the employers’ perspective,” was followed by an essay competition intended to complement that perspective with the workers’ standpoint. Approximately ten essays were entered, seven of which have been preserved. The winner, Tore Flyckt, also gave a speech on the subject (Landsorganisationen 1935, 148).

Analysis of the students’ essays indicates that the course genuinely tried to address the relationship between workers and employers. The essays all try to explain why workers held a particular view of the enterprise and what affected their perceptions. Structural factors such as type of employment (long-term vs. short-term), sector (export vs. domestic industries), and wages were all presented as factors affecting workers’ attitudes toward the enterprise (Andersson 1935; Flyckt 1935; Jakobsson 1935). Moreover, the perceived use of the production in which the workers were involved had an important impact on loyalty and commitment to the enterprise. When workers thought favorably of what they were producing and how it would be used, the workers would take responsibility for production (Flyckt 1935; Jansson 1935; Svensson 1935).

The essays also make it clear that course participants recognized how important it was that the enterprise should prosper. If the management assigned itself a
disproportionately high wage, the workers had a right to complain, but it was in the interest of the workers (and the employers) that the enterprise should deliver good results. In a company with efficient production, the workers could perceive themselves as important and thus feel a stronger connection to the company. Furthermore, under such circumstances, workers would show loyalty toward the employer. The essay writers considered rationalization a natural aspect of an enterprise (compare Johansson 1989) that was not necessarily harmful for the workers: if the enterprise rationalized its production, the workers could be sure that this was of use to society, and the work could become more meaningful for them (Andersson 1935; Flyckt 1935).

The essay writers all emphasized the importance for the workers and employers both developing a sense of belonging to the enterprise; in theoretical terms, the essays stressed the importance of an organizational identity in relation to production.

One argument made in favor of cooperation and consensus between the labor market parties was that of usefulness for society as a whole (Flyckt 1935). The idea that the labor market parties should stop focusing on narrow self-interest and instead consider Swedish society implies that the parties were co-responsible for the societal economy. This is hardly surprising, since this line of thought runs through Hansson’s book: “It is therefore of great importance that any conflict that might arise ought to be settled by peaceful means, if possible. On the whole, that is the approach generally taken. Since both parties are largely sympathetic to one another and are well aware of what conflict can lead to, in the long term they always seek to avoid open conflict” (Andersson 1935).

The history of the trade union movement was also described by the students. Initiated by perceived oppression, the trade union movement had a tense relationship with the employers during its first phase. However, because of better social insurance systems, for example, tensions had declined (Flyckt 1935).

Finally, the most important factor that affected the workers’ view of the enterprise was the enlightenment of the working class (Andersson 1935; Flyckt 1935; Håkansson 1935):

A worker with a high level of awareness sees the importance of the enterprise that employs him to society. In this way workers foster a positive attitude to the company . . . workers who are less aware, however, are unable to appreciate the significance to society of the company they work for. This means that they often have a negative attitude to the company, which then mostly appears to be a predator seeking to “exploit” the worker. Thus, both society and companies should make every effort to raise the workers’ educational standards as much as possible. (Flyckt 1935)
The importance of popular education for the maturation of the working class and therefore the insight that consensus could bring gains to the working class strongly confirms the thesis of the present study. One essay writer even recommended that the workers follow the “excellent” syllabi the ABF provided: “With regard to popular education in general, we cannot appreciate enough what the ABF has accomplished. The best way of doing so is, if we haven’t already done so, to join the ABF elite team and continue [the work] and thus strengthen the movement, whose aims are immensely valuable, not only for the workers themselves but also for society as a whole” (Andersson 1935).

Are the essays a measure of the outcome of workers’ education? The essays doubtless mirror what was taught at Brunsvik. The course transmitted a view of the employers compatible with the new relationship based on consensus that the LO Secretariat tried to establish among LO members. The essays also confirm the link between popular education and the behavior of the workers, seeing that an educated and enlightened worker would not act irresponsibly. The students, on the other hand, were unlikely to have been random members but rather were probably local activists occupying central posts in the labor movement in their home communities. What was taught at Brunsvik cannot therefore be freely generalized to the rest of the study activities organized in the 1920s and 1930s. We can, however, assume that the ideas expressed in the essays were ideas held by the study leaders who had attended the LO school. Flyckt, the winner, was clearly the essay writer who most accurately expressed Hansson’s ideas. As the

**FIGURE 4.2** Sigfrid Hansson (center, with open jacket) in front of the students in Brunsvik, 1937. Source: 3331/0845 Fotosamling Brunsviks folkhögskola, ARAB, Stockholm.
quotation above demonstrates, he both advocated cooperation with the employers and condemned the behavior of the SAC, while praising popular education.

Reformism and Consensus

Organizational members can indeed be controlled through identity formation. Matts Alvesson and Hugh Willmott noted that the morals and values defined by the organization can be used to establish a distinct set of rules of the game by which “norms about the ‘natural’ way of doing things” are established (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). “Natural” ways of doing things create a logic of appropriateness, and if such norms are established among the members, they will create discipline in the movement. The expounded morals and values with regard to how reformist trade unions have acted and how trade union members in general should act, which were entrenched in the study materials, contained all the right elements to set up such rules of the game.

The routinization of charisma, which promotes identification with an organization (Ashforth and Mael 1989), was not achieved through the idealization of the leaders (e.g., as “heroes,” a common view in communist communities); rather, the ideal everyday worker became the norm. This ideal member, the ordinary worker, had internalized the values important to the organization, particularly regarding his or her relationship to the employers and the left-wing organizations.

The actions taken by Hansson in the 1930s testify to the effects of strategic action taken to accomplish a change in attitudes using different kinds of education. Hansson appears to have played a central role in the LO and seems to have had few rivals. He was the editor of Fackföreningsrörelsen and was appointed commissioner of the board of the LO school at Brunnsvik in 1924, board chair of the ABF in 1928, and director of the LO school at Brunnsvik in 1929. He also wrote histories of many LO affiliates, as well as the memorial publication for the LO’s first twenty-five years. He was the author of several titles in the LO’s booklet series. He was assigned the task of giving a lecture course on trade union studies that was broadcast on radio in 1931 (the ABF had an agreement with Radio Sweden to broadcast for thirty minutes every Sunday). In other words, he occupied a key position in the system of workers’ education. Besides his various positions in the educational sphere he was also, in the capacity of editor, a member of the LO Secretariat as well as being an SAP member of Parliament. As the brother of Per Albin Hansson, the SAP leader, he was likely well informed about the party’s internal affairs. He had not, unlike the other members of the Secretariat, gained his position by working for his local union; rather, he had risen from the ranks of
the SSU and made a career as a trade union intellectual, despite limited experience of labor market conflicts. This might have allowed him to take an alternate ideological perspective on the problems facing the LO.

Did popular education indeed instill reformism and the spirit of negotiation in its participants? Hansson had a very objective writing style. Even though the content was radically reformist, it was presented as science rather than propaganda, increasing the likelihood that the workers would take it seriously. The next chapter examines in greater detail how popular education was perceived by workers.