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Essays on Trade Unions and Functional Income Distribution

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation consists of four research papers and an introduction. The overarching theme for the four papers is the relationship between employers and employees in the labour market, or in more macroeconomic terms the relationship between capital and labour. Within this overarching theme the four papers connect with two distinct research discussions. Papers 1 and 2 study the income distribution between capital and labour, the so-called functional income distribution. Papers 3 and 4 study the agency of trade unions in Sweden in connection with European labour market integration. The introduction presents the research background of the papers, describes the theoretical perspective adopted (the power resources approach), summarises the papers and discusses the implications for further research.

Paper 1 studies the functional income distribution in Sweden from 1900 to 2000. Previous research has argued that long-run inequality is better explained by factors inherent in economic development than by social and political factors. This paper makes the argument that social and political factors matter more than previously assumed.

Paper 2 studies functional income distribution in 16 countries from 1960 to 2007, focusing on the association between trade unionism and labour's share of national income. Special attention is paid to varying effects over time and between countries.

Paper 3 studies the strategic actions of Swedish trade unions when the free movement of labour and services in the European Union was extended to 10 new EU member states in 2004. Unions in Western Europe were worried about downward wage pressure from this EU enlargement, but made different strategic choices. Previous research has stressed that national institutional factors influenced the strategic choices of unions, but Paper 3 argues that sectoral differences were as important as the national differences.

Paper 4 studies cases in the Swedish Labour Court from 2004 to 2010 involving Swedish trade unions and mobile European Union labour. It is shown that several labour market regulations and rights of trade unions have been contested in the process of integrating the Swedish labour market with the common EU labour market.

KEYWORDS: functional income distribution, labour share, inequality, trade unions, migrant workers, trade union revitalisation, trade union strategies, social dumping, industrial relations, labour courts, Laval case