

## **Recent national debates in Sweden**

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### **Work in practice**

The white-collar trade union SIF started a project called “*Lokalt inflytande globalt*” (Local influence globally)<sup>1</sup> in 2005, the idea of which is to find new ways to increase union influence in companies with foreign owners. The companies SAAB Automobile, EDS and Lear are mentioned as examples of American-owned companies whose Swedish affiliates have been affected by trans-Atlantic decisions without any means of influencing these decisions. The new project is also focusing on those three companies.

At SAAB, the union has already taken a couple of steps to get a better overview of the company and to “spread the word”. The union had to find new ways of working when the workers at the plant in the Swedish city of Trollhättan suddenly found themselves in “competition” with the plant in Rüsselsheim, Germany. Among other measures, a delegation from the local union in Trollhättan went to Germany to discuss and negotiate on the appointment of managers whose field of responsibility includes the Swedish part of General Motors.

Another measure is the improvement of cooperation with European colleagues through the European works council. The head of the local union in Trollhättan has also drawn up a “roadmap” of ways of exerting influence in General Motors Europe.

The project also includes a closer look at companies with Finnish ownership in the region of Dalarna, and is also focusing on European-owned companies in the region of Småland. The main idea is to find tools for local unions in internationally-owned companies in general.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My translation.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Svensson, *Siftidningen* (2006-01-27).

## **National debates on the future of corporate governance and domestic company law**

Since September 2006 there has been a new right-wing government in Sweden which has, among other things, announced changes to unemployment schemes. One of the effects of this change in the political climate is that labour-related discussions tend to focus on these unemployment schemes; hence, the corporate governance issue has been somewhat neglected. One issue that has been raised by the Swedish Trade Union Confederation – LO – is financial responsibility for the training of workers' representatives on company boards. A list of eleven demands concerning the upcoming negotiation round of 2007 has recently been published by LO, and the financial responsibility for the training of workers' representatives on company boards is on it. The background is that the training of board representatives and safety representatives has to a significant extent been government funded. The new Swedish government has, in its budget proposal, abolished these "training funds". According to LO, the consequences will be uncertainties and disputes about the employer's responsibility in these matters, and that the prerequisites for effective cooperation will be hampered. LO is therefore listing a common position, together with the employers' associations (as a solution to the issue), as a demand in the upcoming negotiation round.