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Cf. maybe –what kind of 'voice' do workers want at the individual, plant and company level?

Employee directors at the board: Representing interest, interest representation?

How to make sure that shop stewards and employee representatives at the board have sufficient knowledge and skills are a major challenged for trade unions and training and other tasks are constantly on the agenda. Less attention is given to the *representative role* of the representatives.

The choice between 'employee elected directors' and 'board level employee representative (BLERs)' is deeply embedded in how the role and mandate of the position is perceived. Are BLERs representing the employees or are they elected to the board by the employees in order to maintain company interests? Hannah Pitkin's (1967) distinctions between i) representation as symbol and as representing interests and ii) representatives as trustees or as delegates is my point of departure. Both distinctions are important when representatives are elected and secondly: to what extend are representatives obliged to ask the opinion of employees/trade union members when important issues are on the agenda? When are they free to act as trustees of a common good?

In a time with decreasing trade union density and less trade union activity at the company floor the need to examine the representative role is evident. A comparison between Norwegian and the Swedish BLERs(!) offers a possible way into these questions and to look into how the institutional framework affects the role of the BLERs. In both countries the BLERs legally liable to look out for company interests. And in both countries participation at company level is in the hands of the local branches of the national trade unions. The social dialogue anchored in collective agreements. The Swedish BLERs are appointed by the local trade unions, e.g. in line with the overall principle of the system. In Norway they are elected by all the employees, e.g. an institutional discrepancy. And unlike Sweden, BLERs are also found in companies with no trade union present. Does this affect the way the BLERs behave at the board and towards the employees? Are Swedish representatives more liable to act as employee delegates with a mandate while the Norwegian act as trustees of the company relying solely on their own personal judgement? How do these different roles affect the possibility to exercise influence at the board?

The analysis is based on the survey among BLERs in Europe (Waddington and Conchon 2016).