

Ronny Ambjörnsson

The Honest and Diligent Worker

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Editor: Donald Broady  
Stockholm Institute of Education  
Department of Educational Research  
Box 34103  
S-100 26 Stockholm, Sweden  
Telefax 08-6569095

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## Foreword

Ronny Ambjörnsson, historian of ideas at the university of Umeå, has coined the expression "den skötsamme arbetaren" to cover a main ingredient in the ethos of the early Swedish labour and temperance movements.

"Den skötsamme arbetaren" depicted by Ambjörnsson was the honest and diligent, well-behaved and industrious, tidy and orderly worker, a man who mastered the art of self-control, who eschewed futile idleness or alcohol and devoted himself to organizational and educative efforts that served to ameliorate the conditions for himself, his family, his class, and the whole society. In Ambjörnsson's eyes it was less a factual life-style than an ideal embraced by labour and temperance movement activists, as well as a project aiming at the creation of citizens in a future democratic society.

This, hitherto unpublished, English translation of Ambjörnsson's seminal paper<sup>1</sup> on the subject was produced in connection with the preparations for a seminar in Stockholm in May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1987. The seminar was sponsored by UHÄ (The National Board for the Universities) and HSFR (The Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences). Its main objective was to give the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who paid his first visit to Sweden, an opportunity to discuss with invited scholars from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland.

The ethos or ideal described by Ambjörnsson seem to some extent to have been a Swedish or Scandinavian speciality, which is why a translation of his paper was prepared to the seminar. It might even be that these specific features of the early Swedish popular movements have some bearings for today's sociology of power. When comparing the recruitment of the Swedish power elites with, e.g., that in France, one of the most striking distinguishing traits is the significance of the trajectories through the popular movements, the labour unions, or the Social Democratic party. Therefore, it might be fruitful to study a specific kind of resources -- a "species of capital", to use Bourdieu's terminology -- accumulated by certain Swedish families, social groups and institutions, resources which give access to certain regions of the Swedish field of power and might be converted to other species of capital (economic, political, etc). Tentatively, we might label this kind of resources "organizational capital". A hypothesis worth further investigations is that the development so well analyzed by Ambjörnsson, i.e. the genesis of the ethos of diligence in the popular movements of the early twentieth century, might be regarded as the "primitive accumulation" of today's organizational capital.

Donald Broady

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<sup>1</sup> The original swedish version of this paper, "Den skötsamme arbetaren", was read at the colloquium "Komponenter i en nationell kultur -- 'Den svenska modellens' kulturella ansikte" (Components of a national culture -- the cultural physiognomy of 'the Swedish Model'), arranged at the university of Umeå, Sweden, 14-16 January 1987, and sponsored by UHÄ and HSFR. A different English version of the paper was published in *History of European Ideas*, X, No. 1, 1989, pp. 59-67. A French version was published in *Ethnologie française*, XXI, n° 1, 1991, pp. 67-78. Cf. also the comprehensive discussion in R. Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren. Idéer och ideal i ett norrländskt sågverkssamhälle 1880-1930*. Carlssons Bokförlag, Stockholm 1988.