

We're still here – and there are more of us



BY

Flemming Hansen

General Secretary, NNF Østjylland



AND

Finn Grosen Madsen,

Deputy General Secretary, NNF Østjylland

A YEAR AGO, the corona virus shut down Denmark for the first time. As we primarily work with food – which is needed on a daily basis, the impact was not disastrous. This is not to say that we got off scot free but, as a trade, we have not suffered unemployment to such extents as many others.

We suffer mentally, though – lacking the close contact which is of major importance in our union work. Though the nature of our daily union-related work at the workplaces has undergone changes, this work was nevertheless carried on in the best possible way – in spite of severe conditions.

It is an awfully long time since our members last heard from their branch. This newsletter intends to make up for the situation.

100 new members

Status for the NNF Østjylland branch is that we now count 3,872 members – well over 100 more members since Denmark was hit by COVID 19 in March 2020. For periods, we have had examples of a decided labour shortage, whereas other workplaces had to make staffs redundant and/or put their employees on short time. Thus, our new members may either be completely new to the trade, or they are perhaps “old hands” having discovered that obviously they’d better join a real trade union – one with a collective agreement.

We are busy in new ways

Those of us who work as branch officials are still here, albeit busy in different ways as compared with our usual approach. Our branch offices do not receive as many members because many matters have to be dealt with via the telephone and/or virtual contact. And we have become quite adept at this. Also, as is the case throughout the labour market, testing for corona has become a natural element in our routines.

We have discovered that online courses for representatives cannot replace the good old-fashioned analogue courses, and we are therefore looking forward to a return to normalcy.

Joining new communities

Since our most recent ordinary general meeting – held 2 years ago, we have become a part of new local communities. To begin with, LO and FTF merged at the national level to become the Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH) – (Fagbevægelsens Hovedorganisation). This was accomplished prior to the corona crisis. However, we subsequently needed to find one another at a local level.

This has now resulted in FH branches across the country – within our area: FH Århus, FH Østjylland (Silkeborg, Randers, Favrskov and the two Djursland municipalities), FH Horsens Hedensted and FH Trekanten (the Triangle: Vejle, Fredericia and Kolding municipalities). The general secretary is headquartered at the FH Århus executive committee, FH Østjylland and FH Horsens Hedensted while the deputy general secretary is attached to the FH Trekanten branch.

A shared union house in Horsens

Shortly after New Year, we moved our Horsens branch from Fælledvej to the harbour. Here, we share a house with 3F and FOA, and we would like to see more trade unions move into our Union House in Horsens. We have the space.

At the harbour, we have not only obtained a wonderful view, practically opening up to a planned harbour bath, as we have also gained access to really fine facilities – some of which to be shared with colleagues together with whom we have already benefitted greatly from the exchange of experiences and the discussion of challenges – in spite of corona restrictions.

A large housewarming ceremony was originally planned to be held in mid-January. Naturally, this was not an option. Now, we are looking forward to showing our house to members, collaborative partners, and other interested parties, when gatherings will once again be possible.



Membership intake at the national level, also



BY

Jim Jensen

NNF Deputy General Secretary

The corona crisis manifests itself differently in the four areas into which NNF is divided: the retail trade, the food industry, dairies, and slaughterhouses. In general, however, we have fared far better than it was feared when we were hit by the pandemic. And today we have 500 more members, nationwide, than we had a year ago.

By and large, the daily and weekly actual contact with representatives and workplaces is fine. It is easy to organise a digital Teams meeting and, bit by bit, systematisation has become a matter of course.

We miss the informal chat

But there is no doubt that nuances are lost when we meet one another this way. And I experience that many of our representatives miss the daily sparring that springs from physical meetings with colleagues from other workplaces. In other words: The formal agendas are easily maintained. But we all miss the informal chat very much. For my part, I experience this in my capacity as head of a secretariat with a staff of 21. We may well save time relative to the formal, concrete topics, but we miss the dynamism arising when people meet in real life.

When we can go back to normalcy, we should take the best from the two worlds – that is, digital conferences on concrete topics and physical and social getting together when major subjects and ideas generation are on the agenda.

Changing unemployment insurance regulations



BY

Marie Beck Jensen

Head of Unemployment Insurance, NNF

It was certainly not an easy year. But, looking back, I realise that it might have been much worse. As we all know, other trades laid off thousands temporarily, whereas we experienced employment rates to be almost unchanged. Normally we average 4.5 percent fulltime unemployed, allowing for such seasonal fluctuations as are representative of certain areas. Unemployment rates peaked during the summer of 2020 – with percentages close to 6.5. Now, we are back to normal.

10 days later: new rule

Over the past year, however, many more workers than usual had reason to contact the unemployment fund, because many employers made use of the options for short time working, It is my impression that – during periods of lost earnings and benefits – our members have accepted the situation with the appropriate community spirit. Inasmuch as we – as everyone else – feared the worst, I believe that we and our members got off relatively lightly, after a year dominated by the corona virus.

Admittedly, we encountered a number of stumbling blocks on our way, for instance because the rules on compensation and short time working were changed repeatedly, and this at short notice. For this reason, we cannot guarantee that the conditions applying for Paul, who was put on short time on 5 January, will also apply for Peter, who was put on short time on 15 January. We truly have to be ready to embrace changes – every single day.

Even though we are still working from home, it is possible to have a talk with us or the job centre. As a point of departure, we deal with matters over the phone. It is possible, though, to meet the members upon appointment in the event that the situation necessitates a physical meeting – always respecting appropriate Corona restrictions. Likewise, members' training and the upgrading of skills is still possible. And, as with so many other things, the best results are obtained when physical participation is feasible.

When colleagues are made redundant



AF

Carsten Nørgaard

Shop Steward at Lantmännen Unibake, Hatting

A year ago, the production counted 80 employees. But then sales of bake-off products to hotels, course-activity centres, and cruise liners disappeared. Initially, 14 colleagues were sent home with wage compensation, whereas the remaining workforce was on short-time work. The 14 people who had been fired returned for just a brief period but, sadly, this did not apply to the customers. Thus, we are now about 65 employees for a production that will probably gather speed when we are all vaccinated against the corona virus.

It is definitely more fun to be a shop steward when things are bright and we get new employees, than when people have to be made redundant. Fortunately, the Danish model functions satisfactorily at my workplace. At the beginning of the crisis, I thus met with representatives from the unemployment fund, the union, and the company management for the purpose of discussing how best to get through this sad process. Sad, certainly, but I think we did OK.

Back to reality

At this time of crisis, I'm glad that I have a good many years' experience – in worklife, and as a shop steward. These days, it must be really difficult to be a newly appointed shop steward – partly because of the crisis as such, and partly because digital meetings cannot replace real-life meetings. Both unemployment fund and union are doing a good job. However, I very much miss my usual union network, and I'm looking forward to the day when, once again, we can meet face to face.

And, also, I'm looking forward to the return of Lantmännen Unibake's bake-off customers – in Denmark and abroad. I'm convinced that hotels and course-activity centres will get back to business. But I have my doubts as to whether sales to the cruise liner industry will reach the same levels as before the corona virus.

A year characterised by satisfactory progress



BY

Henrik Redmond

Shop Steward, Danish Crown Foods Vejle

In times of crisis, the market needs canned goods. This has also been the case since the Corona Virus hit Denmark. In just one year, Danish Crown Foods Vejle, a manufacturer of canned meat, has increased its workforce from about 300 to about 350. Alone in the period since 1 January, we have welcomed 12 new colleagues. The decline feared in the wake of Brexit has turned into optimism, for instance because of the inflow of considerable orders from new US customers.

But the daily work as a shop steward has been a bit out of the ordinary. Within the Danish Crown group, we have a tradition of many meetings between shop stewards – and digital Teams meetings are simply not optimal.

It is difficult to keep up, and it is impossible to decode face and body language. Too much is lost, even though Teams may be a practical and time-saving tool. I'm also a member of the Danish Crown Foods' board, and here it has proved even more difficult to absorb everything via one's PC, because we often discuss very heavy material. Here, I definitely prefer the physical presence.

No infection at the factory

Then we have the everyday routines at the factory. With testing for virus two times weekly. With the use of face masks. With a staff restaurant only allowing 20 people at a time.

The fact that we have completely avoided corona virus at the factory, should speak for itself – underlining that the employees have got the message and, also, been really good at complying with the rules. Two of our employees failed to appear for work owing to corona, but this was because they had to remain quarantined because of family members who tested positive.

General assembly and congress



BY

Flemming Hansen

General Secretary, NNF Østjylland



AND

Finn Grosen Madsen,

Deputy General Secretary, NNF Østjylland

And now it is time to look ahead.

We have marked our calendar with respect to 7 August 2021 on which date we plan to hold our general branch assembly and, likewise, 23-26 September 2021 on which we hope that we will be (count on being) able to hold the congress we had to postpone last year.

Thanks to a good collaboration between members, representatives, union, and unemployment fund, we got relatively safely through a challenging year. We are convinced that the good relations will continue, and we believe that we see a glimpse of light at the end of a very long tunnel.

In the past year, we have heard much talk of front workers and community spirit. We would like to express our deep gratitude to our NNF members of the Fødevarerforbundet NNF Østjylland branch. Because, in our opinion, you have demonstrated both flexibility and community spirit during hard times.

And it is no secret that we are looking forward to more physical meetings with union representatives as well as members. Telephone and Teams meetings may well be practical solutions, but we really need direct eye contact with one another – and, also, bad jokes are much better when cracked in real life than when communicated via the PC!