

Swedish social democracy

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young fabian pamphlet 29 25p

into the seventies



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SBN 7163 2029 0

1. introduction

A Frenchman passing through Sweden in the 1870's noted that "... in a Europe which is becoming more Americanised every day, the Swedes alone have been able to conserve the traditions of our old and aristocratic societies." 50 years later, when the Swedes were at the height of their socialist fervour, Lenin was to chide the social democrats (in *State and revolution*) with "overriding revisionism." Today Sweden has, by gradual reform, become the leading social democracy in Europe. Yet critics would claim that the Swedish reforms, humane and ingenious though they may be, have failed to change the fundamental character of Swedish life, which remains rooted in the 19th century, and even earlier.

Sweden has become an organised society *par excellence*. 90 per cent of the work force belong to either an industrial, white collar or professional union, virtually all farmers market their products through agricultural co-operatives and over one third of households belong to a consumer co-operative. With the social democrats in power since the 'thirties, commentators in the 'sixties were claiming that ideological cleavages had almost disappeared. Yet, as Sweden entered the 'seventies, "the middle way" which characterised Swedish politics for almost half a century, began to give way to a new style of direct confrontation, between youth and their elders and between left and right within and outside the party framework.

historical background

Together with Denmark and Norway, Sweden is one of the three Nordic countries forming Scandinavia. Although differentiated by the influences of history and geography, they share a common culture. The most highly industrialised of the three countries, Sweden employs one quarter of the industrial work force in Scandinavia, although raw materials such as iron ore and timber account for much of the nation's total export income.

Language differs from one Nordic country to the next, but (except for the Finns) they are able to understand each other. In

the Viking age there was a common tongue, but by 1300 AD differences had become well defined, and by the time of the Reformation there were distinct languages, each with its own literary tradition.

Around 100 AD the Latin poet Tacitus held up the pristine and virile *Svear* as a virtuous example to his supposedly degenerate countrymen. 700 years later, however, the performance of the Scandinavians in Viking raids, which included large scale abduction of women from Ireland, brought the Nordic mores more strongly into focus throughout Europe. Between the first and eighth centuries, there were numerous forays eastwards, some of which, according to Swedish historian Kurt Agren, resulted in the founding of the Russian state. Christianity did not finally establish itself in Sweden until well into the twelfth century, although it was in 830 that the first celebrated missionary to Sweden, St. Ansgar, founded the first church at Birka (now in the central industrial region around Lake Malaren).

From the 13th century until the 15th century, the Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, were under the hegemony of the Hanseatic League, a time which left a legacy of German terms for the language of commerce, handicraft and public administration. Seeking a counterweight to Germany, the Kalmar Union was established in 1397, linking the crowns of Sweden, Denmark and Norway. However, the genesis of the Kalmar Union is less well remembered than the many fights which took place while it lasted. The union finally disintegrated in 1520, with the liberation of Sweden from the Danish crown by Gustavus Eriksson Vasa.

Gustavus Vasa's reign brought with it "100 years of greatness" during which time Gustavus established the tradition of royal succession by heredity, where formerly it had been the practice to elect rulers. Economically, the reign of Gustavus Vasa was marked by a minimum of change. The late Eli Heckscher, the Swedish economic historian, estimated that the level of economic development

of sixteenth century Sweden was about equivalent to that of Carolingian France in the year 1000. Sweden remained essentially medieval throughout the sixteenth century. During the next half century, however, it was sucked into the whirlpool of political conflicts on the European continent.

When the house of Hapsburg, which had plans for a universal Roman Catholic empire, advanced towards the Baltic, crushing the Protestant princes in Germany on its way, Gustavus Adolphus, the grandson of Gustavus Vasa and a ruler of superlative ability, decided to enter what turned out to be the Thirty Years' War. Using mostly draftees, he created a unique peasant army. The emperor's troops were forced to retreat, but Gustavus Adolphus was killed in battle. His loss was a disaster and the basis of the Swedish policy of expansion was shattered.

Sweden took a long time getting used to her diminished rôle in European affairs. The series of wars against Russia during the 18th century were unsuccessful attempts to capture past glories. These struggles culminated in the Napoleonic wars when Russia forced Sweden to cede Finland. Following her final defeat in 1818, Sweden withdrew from the continental scene and she has abstained from conflict for the past 150 years.

political background

Like Britain, Sweden has a continuous tradition of monarchy and popular representation that dates back to the middle ages. Between 1718 and 1889 Sweden went through a cycle of absolute monarchy, parliamentary supremacy, royal restoration, and constitutional monarchy, as Britain did from 1640 to 1689 and France from 1780 to 1830. Each turning point was marked, as in France, by the adoption of a new written constitution; yet the evolution from about 1809 of the modern cabinet system followed the British pattern of uncodified precepts. Finally, in all three countries political parties first appeared during the second, or parliamentary phase of the cycle.

The constitutional documents of Sweden are among the oldest in the world. After the British parliament, the Swedish *riksdag* is the second oldest national legislature in the world. The constitutional relationship of the Swedish citizen to his government can be traced to the 14th century when the ancient rites of the nobles against the king were first defined. However, it was not until 1809 that the Instrument of Government (*regeringsformen*) was promulgated.

The *riksdag* dates from 1435, although it was not until 1866 that an act was passed (the *riksdagsordningen*) which stated the principles and functions of the Swedish parliament. The constitution did not lay down the parliamentary system. When, in fact, this system was decisively accepted in 1917, the change took place without any alteration in the constitutional provisions, which still give the king, not the ministers, the governmental power and still permit the king to choose his ministers without regard to party support or majorities in parliament (although this right has never, in practice, been exercised). From 1866 to 1970 the *riksdag* was divided into two houses, which had equal powers but were separately elected. Under the new system, whose introduction coincided with the 1970 elections, the houses were combined, and the number of MP's was reduced from 384 to 350 and all but 40 seats were distributed between constituencies according to population.

2. the social context

Journalistic clichés about Sweden abound, and the legendary tendencies of the Swedes towards promiscuity, alcoholism and suicide are topics of much fascinated speculation, particularly in Britain and the United States. The late President Eisenhower typified the negative and ill informed attitude, that for long existed towards Sweden, when he ascribed Sweden's supposedly rising suicide rate to the country's "socialistic philosophy."

national character

Understandably, the Swedes are sensitive to, and defensive about, the perpetuation of these kinds of myth. According to Lars Gustafson (in *The public dialogue in Sweden*) the Swedish myth tends to take one of two forms. Firstly, that Sweden is an unbearable place because it has achieved such a condition of social cleanliness and standardised comfort that the drama of life has disappeared and, as a result, the Swedes are silent, forbidding and unhappy. Secondly, that Sweden is confronted by a situation born of the welfare state which has led to sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, a high frequency of suicide and juvenile delinquency. If the foreigner went more deeply into his subject, however, he would find that Swedish society has its own inbuilt checks against too permissive behaviour not obvious at first sight. Swedes, for instance, take quite a moralistic stand on issues such as drunken driving and other matters which the visitor may be used to treating as permissible.

The Swedes draw a sharp distinction between the quality and character of life in their country. Criticising aspects of the former (such as environmental pollution) does not necessarily lead to conclusions about the latter. Evidence of the character of life is to be found in Sweden's rational economic and social planning, frictionless social justice, good taste and generosity to the arts. There is, however, an underlying danger of complacency and smug self congratulation.

Torsten Ehrenmark's subtle denigration of the national sense of superiority illus-

trates this. "The Swedes are the greatest! We're too modest to say so openly, but that in so many words is what we mean. How could it be otherwise when the evidence speaks so plainly . . . our system of social security, our homes, our modern Swedish style of furniture, our free and easy morals, our beautiful girls, our finely engineered products, our matches, our athletes and our *smorgasbord* . . . Until a few years ago we could have added 'our United Nations' to the list. As long as Dag Hammarskjöld was secretary general, we regarded the UN as being Swedish; pure and simple. It came natural to us to guide the world's destinies with becoming modesty. With such overwhelming superiority in our favour we can generally afford to be tolerant to tourists. The years have taught us to realise that not everyone can have the good fortune to be born in Sweden. Above all, we take it as axiomatic that foreigners should want to see for themselves how earthly life can be lived at its best." In similar vein, Swedish economist Gunnar Adler Karlsson relates the story of the Swedish economic expert visiting India, who, having seen the misery of Indian peasant life and urban slums, began lecturing an Indian colleague one night about the virtues of the Swedish system. He spoke in superior tones, with almost a hint of bragging, until his Indian friend suddenly interrupted; "how many people do you have in Sweden?" "Seven million," replied the Swede. "Well," said the Indian, "that is what we call a laboratory."

The line between public and private life is drawn differently in Sweden. In one sense, the bureaucratic state has rendered the nation more open to inspection and there is less privacy in Sweden than any other advanced industrial society. One sees fewer walls and hedges surrounding private houses than in Britain or the United States. People undress in front of each other casually, but not exhibitionistically, in the sauna, for swimming, or to lie in the sun. Salaries are discussed openly and the government publishes annual statistics which include the incomes of all persons earning over £2,000 a year.

In some ways, however, Sweden has acquired the trappings of the "data bank society." It has become one of the most "counted" nations in the world and continuous registration is a central feature of life. Since 1947 every Swede has had a number, a digital registration code, which is included in all personal reports and follows him relentlessly from birth to the grave. It lists birthday, sex and place of birth. So, it is virtually impossible to deceive a potential spouse, employer or conscription officer about real age; or as one observer commented, "a woman turning 30 may fidget over her rigid digits, but hide them under a bushel she cannot."

At the present time, the state is in the final stages of integrating all its statistical files, based on three registers: property, population, and all firms or organisations to which people belong and from which they gain their living or receive their education. To be fair, however, the Swedes have built safeguards into their system whereby the publicly owned and controlled data bank is run by officials responsible to a minister, according to rules approved by parliament and subject to appeal to the ombudsman. A unified information system will eliminate the need for a conventional type of census and help to create, it is hoped, an even more open society.

Such public openness, however, does not make for greater community feeling or neighbourliness. If anything, it probably brings into sharper focus those spheres of life which are able to be maintained with a maximum of privacy. Home and family life remains, relative to other countries, a sphere of life closed to all but the closest relations and friends. Life in high rise housing is notoriously impersonal, few people know who their neighbours are from one year's end to the next. This pattern appears to be the same even in new detached villa style suburban developments.

The all pervasive silence of people on public buses and trains is a curious experience. One West Indian friend of mine found the silence was too much. Travel-

ling on the underground one morning in the silence of the 8 am commuter community, he turned to a tall, silent, young executive beside him and shouted, "For God's sake man, say something!" The Swedish underground is probably the only one in the world where the prime minister can travel to work each day (as Tage Erlander reportedly used to do) and not have one person speak, let alone argue with him. In the north, where the winter is long and dark, families may go for months without uttering a word.

Herbert Hendin, an American psychiatrist, has noted that Swedish children, by and large, are taught not to show too much feeling. The ability of children as well as adults to be reasonable and control their emotions is highly valued. The frequent emotional outbursts of southern Europeans are not to be found among the Swedes. Not only foreign visitors but the Swedes themselves often complain: "Swedes are stiff and boring," or more literally, "Swedes are like wooden beams." Yet, when it comes to choosing husbands, business executives, trade union leaders, the ability to remain calm and keep emotions under control is highly esteemed. With these characteristics, it is maintained, such persons are better equipped to win the upper hand at decisive moments and to withstand pressures.

Swedes commonly remark that they are "still a country people, a nation of peasants." The national character of the silent, brooding Swedes still reflects their history as isolated farmers and backwoodsmen; which perhaps explains their lack of talent for creating even a minimally warm, gregarious urban environment.

sex

The Swedish welfare state can be seen as a large scale development of the old farming society that broke up later in Scandinavia than in the rest of northern Europe, because industrialisation did not take place until the beginning of this century. The attitudes to love and sex need to be seen against this background, to be understood fully. Large sections of the

Swedish community (and those of the other Nordic countries) have always regarded premarital sexual relations leading to marriage as normal behaviour. This view no doubt has its roots in the old custom prevailing in many primitive societies that the woman must prove that she is fertile before the relationship is officially sanctioned. Trial marriage has a traditional place in Swedish society, particularly in some rural areas. Pregnancy outside wedlock by no means carries the social stigma or shame which it does in some other western societies. Because of this, there has also been less of the double standard for men and women, which has led, in some societies, to widespread prostitution.

The underlying principle of all serious discussion about sex is one of promoting personal responsibility. This is one of the themes in *Sex and society in Sweden* by Mrs. Birgit Linner, which discusses sexual freedom and equality, marriage, divorce, illegitimacy, birth control, abortion and venereal disease. The book reflects the continuous debate that has taken place in Sweden over the past ten years about men's and women's rôles in society. In recent times there has been concern in Sweden about the future of the institution of marriage as presently constituted. The marriage rate has decreased quite markedly of late. In 1966, the total number of registered marriages exceeded 60,000; by 1969 the total had declined to around 48,000. The trend is continuing and by the mid-seventies it is estimated that the marriage rate will have decreased by 25 to 30 per cent. In 1970 there were about 100,000 unmarried couples in Sweden. Apart from conscience marriages, which are an act of protest against traditional society and its laws, there are economic reasons for unwillingness on the part of many people legally to register their "marriage." Some couples believe that they would have to pay higher taxes as a married couple, although this is no longer the case. Widows, nevertheless, still have to forfeit their state pension when they re-marry. Due to the acute housing shortage, particularly in larger cities, some couples prefer to wait for the birth of their first child, when they can

obtain priority over single people or childless couples in the state housing scheme, before getting legally married. There is a royal commission examining the present laws governing marriage in Sweden, which is due to publish its findings in 1972. No doubt the publication of the commission's recommendations and the discussions which follow in the mass media and elsewhere, will influence people's attitudes and behaviour in the future, but in which direction, it is difficult to predict.

Since 1938, when distribution of information about contraceptives became legal, increasingly efficient methods of advertising have been used. Thus, both private firms and RFSU (the government sponsored Swedish Association for Sex Education) advertise freely in newspapers, posters are displayed in underground stations and film trailers are shown in cinemas before the main programme. The film trailers caused some amusement when they first appeared in the early 'sixties, with texts such as the following, in between the usual hairspray and soap advertisements, "Can she trust you? Can you trust yourself? To be safe is the most important thing for both of you. Think RFSU." Little public outcry followed, however, even from the churches. Significant of the enlightened view of the Lutheran State Church is that the Archbishop of Uppsala cast the deciding vote in the city council for placing coin operated vending machines in public places.

In 1955, Sweden became the first country in the world to make sex education compulsory in all schools, starting in the first grade, although it was in 1942 that the minister of education had first urged schools to introduce the subject. Even though Swedish sex education has been considered very daring and progressive by most foreigners, and even by some Swedes, complaints about its deficiencies were so outspoken, that in 1963 the National Board of Education asked the government to appoint a royal commission to re-examine the programme. The main deficiency found by the commission was that youngsters were not getting enough unbiased information.

Sweden, earlier than most countries, saw the danger of abortions performed by unqualified practitioners or by the pregnant women themselves, and the present law on abortion was introduced in 1939. Recently it has been reported in the Swedish press that abortion on demand will be suggested in a draft bill drawn up by the Swedish parliamentary enquiry on abortion which was set up in 1965. According to Dr. Elizabeth Sjövall, who is a member of the enquiry, the bill will contain a recommendation that abortion on demand be granted up till the twelfth week of pregnancy, and after that on strictly medical grounds only. If this bill is accepted by parliament, the law will be similar to that of most countries in eastern Europe and Japan. If abortion on demand is going to be considered as another sign of "sinful Sweden," it is difficult to understand perhaps why the communist countries and Japan do not enjoy the same permissive reputation. Every now and then individuals publicly and privately bemoan the state of sex activities in the country. Early in 1964 a group of 140 medical doctors signed a petition to the government, warning about the spread of promiscuity. However, the medical men urged that schools should play a more active part in strengthening the characters of youth.

censorship

Foreigners are usually surprised and sometimes stunned to see how sensitive the Swedish Broadcasting Company and the film censors are to all forms of violence, while they display an unequalled permissiveness towards sex as long as it is not combined with violence. Nudity hardly raises an eyebrow, but as soon as violence or sadism is introduced various forms of censorship awaken. Until a few years ago Swedes were not allowed to see Westerns until their eleventh birthday, later raised to 15 years of age. Even now, only one or two Westerns are shown on Swedish television each week.

The general level of social inhibition among Swedes is closely related to the spectacular pornography industry that

flourishes in the country. Pornography went completely public about five years ago, after a break through film (Bergman's *The silence*) and a book of erotic stories by established authors (*Love I and II*). Since then there has been something of a boom in the Scandinavian "porno industry." One of the largest papers, *Expressen*, carries a plain spoken column written by a Danish couple, giving advice and information on sexual matters. "Sten and Inge" have become household names in Scandinavia, and they have been hailed the Dr. Spock of the Scandinavian bedroom.

What are the results of this massive saturation of the public newspaper and bookstalls with pornography? Many Swedes have voiced their objections, mainly on the grounds that it subverts the public commitment of the Swedes to be more sensitive than other people to conferring dignity and genuine liberty upon women. One effect attributed to the freedom to manufacture and distribute pornography, however, has been the eroticising of sex; so that in the open it loses its alluring quality. Doubts have been expressed, however, within Scandinavia, about the intensity with which sexual life is pursued. "Can it be," asked Torsten Ehrenmark, "that the Swedish male is really an erotic illiterate and the Swedish female more willing than able? and the pornographic flood merely an attempt to balance perceived deficiencies? After all, what need has a country for pornography when it already enjoys the world's most solid reputation for sin?"

alcoholism

Whilst sex, in most western societies, is a major cause of anxiety, in Sweden the main focus of guilt has shifted to liquor. Alcohol is not just a social stimulant, but something which releases aggression and facilitates intimacy. Because of the high value placed on restraint, there is a fear of "letting go" and, of course, a craving to do just that. American novelist, Susan Sontag, describes alcohol as having the status, in Sweden, of "a mythic substance, a magic elixir . . . To take even one drink

is a quite literal signal to others present that one is about to become a different person: warmer, perhaps indiscreet, a little aggressive."

Sweden has a long history of prohibition. In 1914, as the result of an effective campaign by a genuinely popular temperance movement (which still exerts a considerable influence in society today), rationing was introduced. This restricted the purchase of hard liquor to wage earners over 25 years of age, at a rate of three to four quarts per month. Women who were married or without incomes were barred entirely from buying strong drink. A national referendum in 1955 ended rationing but the act of purchasing liquor, as anyone who has visited one of the state owned liquor stores will know, still retains a definite illicit quality. The stores have no window display and hard liquor is kept under the counter or stacked on shelves. Each customer receives his purchase in brown or grey green bags on which there is sometimes printed "say no to liquor" or "it is a crime to give minors liquor." Of course, everyone recognises the bags but carrying an unwrapped bottle on the street, whilst not illegal, is the social and emotional equivalent of indecent exposure. While Sweden does have an alcoholism problem, it is by no means worse than in many other countries (for instance, the Soviet Union, France or Ireland); but alcoholism feels a much more serious problem because of the social stigma and shame attached to intoxication. Where alcohol is concerned, every Swede is guilty until proven innocent. There is the widely quoted instance of the Swedish MP who killed himself after a newspaper carried an article accusing him of drunkenness. In normal circumstances, however, it is probably fortunate that alcohol, rather than something more lethal, provides the average Swede with a safety valve from an otherwise highly rationalised milieu.

suicide

In *Suicide and Scandinavia* (1964), American psychiatrist Herbert Hendin attributed suicide in each of the three Nordic countries to separate and distinct causes.

A "performance" type of suicide, "based on rigid performance expectations, with strong self hatred for failure" was found to predominate in Sweden. Other studies have corroborated Hendin's finding that the Swedes, by and large, have a high level of achievement motivation (or avoidance of failure); and suicide, it is generally agreed, is usually an extreme reaction to actual or anticipated failure.

Closer scrutiny of the most recent statistics, however, cause one to wonder why Sweden's suicide problem is so often singled out when, with a rate of 21.6 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants (in 1967) it ranked only fifth highest in western Europe, trailing Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Finland, and was placed ninth internationally. Among the white male population of the United States suicides occur in much the same frequency as they do in Sweden. Furthermore, Swedish statistics are well known to be among the most accurate in the world (comprehensive statistics have been maintained since the early 1700's), and unlike some other countries, suicide in Sweden is not treated as a crime. Finally, Swedes enjoy greater life expectancy than any other nation and the suicide rate is highest in older age groups.

Whilst the rate of suicide in Sweden relative to other countries, is given undue emphasis by outsiders, the problem of mental health, in general, appears to receive a disproportionate lack of attention within Sweden itself. Only 7 per cent of the doctors who staff the country's undermanned health service are assigned to treatment of the mentally ill, who occupy 40 per cent of hospital beds.

Despite the otherwise humane and enlightened approach taken by most Swedes to human problems, psychiatry (of the post-Freudian variety) seems to have been neglected. If it is true that the Swedes, in general, suffer from a centuries' old chronic state of depression, "a collective historical tradition of emotional disablement," then it may well be that Sweden needs a far more radical change in the social context than it has experienced up to the present.

3. class and power

Historically, as a marginal province within medieval European culture, Sweden shared in ideas (then in vogue) about the servitude of citizens to the state. The population, accordingly, was classified during the middle ages into four estates; the nobles, clergy, burghers or merchants and peasants. The existence of large population groups outside the estates was simply disregarded. This division constituted the framework for social functioning and social thought for many centuries. In 1865, when the estates were finally abolished as political forces and concepts, the four chamber parliament (*riksdag*) was replaced by a two chamber assembly, the members of which were to be directly elected to the second chamber, and indirectly elected to the first. Franchise was limited, however, to males owning considerable property and excluded many common sources of direct or indirect influence. Thus while wealth controlled the first chamber, absolutely, the farmers' party (representing large landowners) enjoyed 20 years control in the lower chamber.

According to some critics, the "estate mentality" has never really disappeared. Instead nobles, clergy, burghers and peasants have become the conservatives, liberals, agrarians and socialists. Only since the recent rapid growth of the Liberal Party into a movement supported by segments of all major social groups have the estates begun to disappear.

corporatism

On the surface, Sweden is a highly pluralistic society; housing several large and influential semi-autonomous groups, some of which are voluntary associations. These organisations favour compromise, they try to avoid state regulation and strikes, and they come to terms with each other by bargaining. The state itself consists of independently powerful agencies with great initiative of their own and a large degree of self government; the armed forces and educational institutions, in particular, command large resources and have as many constituents as the large voluntary organisations. There are chan-

nels between political parties and socio-economic organisations, for instance between the social democrats and the LO (the Swedish TUC) and between the Centre Party and the RLF (the association of Swedish farmers). The fact that the interest groups are not always organised along party lines, however, has caused overlapping membership and cross pressures. As a result, cleavages are not polarised or differences emphasised; rather the emphasis is on conciliation and compromise. In an article, *National pastime, the pursuit of power*, Hans Zetterberg, director of the Swedish Institute of Public Opinion (SIPO), commented; "the only thing unorganised in the life of the average Swede is his sleep." Indeed, in recent decades, Sweden has witnessed an organisational frenzy beyond compare.

In the US, which boasts of being a nation of joiners, estimates of the number of adults who belong to at least one association, exclusive of unions and churches, range from 36 to 55 per cent. Zetterberg's institute of public opinion has revealed that 51 per cent of Swedes are members of at least one association, excluding churches, unions and co-operatives, and that without these exceptions, virtually every adult Swede could be shown to belong to at least one association. According to Professor Torgny Segerstedt of Uppsala University, "Sweden's original transition to an associational society coincided with the urbanisation and industrialisation of the country." "In recent times," he says, "voluntary associations have grown out of the need for security in the impersonal and competitive modern world and have flourished with expanded leisure time."

Swedish law recognises three main types of associations. Commercial or industrial associations, which must register with public authorities and conform to certain rules to gain legal standing. Economic associations, which includes the whole range of economic co-operatives involving consumers, farmers, home owners and so on. Finally, non-economic associations including political parties, religious groups, trade unions and employers' organisations. Zetterberg notes that just

as an American might want to be thought of as popular; an Englishman as respectable; and a Spaniard as masculine; the Swede, with his multiple allegiances and commitments balanced against each other, likes to be regarded as one who is "lagom" or reasonable.

Overlapping memberships in associations, together with social mobility, appear to have infused Swedish society in a complex fashion that prevents serious rifts and generates a climate of compromise and conciliation. This organisational society is not without its problems, however. Within various organisations, like the gigantic *landsorganisation* or LO (the federation of labour) a considerable amount of bureaucratisation has developed and decision making has become centralised. Associational leaders complain that members are apt to be indifferent in their attitudes towards organisations to which they belong. Membership of organisations is often virtually, though not formally, compulsory and, as a result, identification with associations occurs much less than it did during the formative period. Whilst Swedes will often claim that organisations have contributed to developing a society which they consider to be more rational and realistic than others, they themselves often have only a hazy picture of the rôle which organisations actually play. Furthermore, most people do not know how to approach the organisations to which they belong.

C. M. Hermansson's *Fifteen families* (1966) and Ake Ortmark's *The power game* (1967), have raised questions about a Swedish oligarchy. Ortmark interviewed 70 highly placed people within the government, opposition parties, civil service and big business, and drew up a list of 250 "men of power." The Wallenberg family were singled out for particular attention as they control 55 per cent of the Stockholm Enskilda Bank, have major shareholdings in Sweden's top three investment companies and have substantial interests in at least seven of Sweden's largest international corporations: SKF, ASEA, SAAB, Alfa Laval, L. M. Ericsson, Atlas Copco and Swedish Match. The Wallenberg empire of banking and industry has a

billion pound turnover and more than 200,000 employees. Through their representation on policy making organisations, the Wallenbergs and their representatives exercise a great deal of influence on government strategy. Something of a major breakthrough in public enterprise, however, was achieved in recent years when, against Wallenberg opposition, the social democrats established a state investment bank. Eventually, it is hoped, the bank will become the largest single source of finance in the country and, through its ability to draw on the huge state pension fund, command holdings of around £5 billion by 1980. In the main, however, the state restricts its activity to a few special sectors such as iron ore mining, public utilities and transportation.

The delicate alliance between government and business has been characterised as "Harpseud democracy" (Harpseud being the Swedish Chequers); by those who claim, not without reason, that the real decisions are being made outside parliament and the public presented with a *fait accompli*.

The celebrated economist, Professor Gunnar Myrdal, author of *The American dilemma* and a former social democratic minister, has written that; "technological and administrative advance is diluting the basis of popular participation, once the very essence of the welfare state . . . Power is more and more expropriated by the hierarchies in the organisations, the various branches of administration and the political parties." Myrdal enquires whether the extraordinary power of the hierarchies of these two organisations and the close relations between them might not open the way to collusion and corruption; but puts his faith in watchful publicity and the force of tradition to prevent this happening. He does acknowledge the fact, however, that; "the top echelons tend to perpetuate themselves in power and select their own recruits." He also reveals that, "highly developed public relations activity on the part of the big organisations, labour and employer's, is directed towards the membership with a view to increasing the satisfaction of the members with their organisations." Thus,

concludes Myrdal; "the actual citizen is becoming more and more distant from the actual pursuance of government and things are taken care of for him by a 'topside,' based on merit but fairly independent of the constituencies."

Even Zetterberg admits that in recent times the old concept of freedom of association has undergone a subtle change. The associations have become centralised and their national headquarters are not only pressure groups but actual shareholders of power. As a result, large organisations command deference and respect while wielding power for special, and potentially selfish, ends. At present there exists a stalemate in which no big organisation is strong enough to shatter any other. The only way national issues can be resolved in this situation is through the efforts of coalitions which shift from issue to issue. At present, Swedish business is frustrated because it has not been able to overcome the coalition of unions, co-operatives and agrarians in making economic policy. Nevertheless, the big corporations are gaining momentum. How long the relatively open market situation for organised interests will prevail is difficult to forecast.

political parties

The number of voters in Sweden "whose judgment is fettered by enrolment in a political party" is large, and among the rest a change of party is as rare as a change of profession. A politician attempting to forecast the long term trend of the party vote, will be concerned with statistical data on the increasing ratio of white collar to manual labour rather than with government policies or opposition platforms. The reservoir of potential voters who do not go to the polls is rapidly dwindling. The partisan struggle assumes the character of dugout warfare. Voting participation in Sweden has increased considerably since the beginning of the bicameral period. In 1872 less than one fifth of all eligible voters participated in the lower chamber elections; not until 1905 did the level of electoral participation pass the 50 per cent mark.

In Sweden, as in the United States, there is a temporary decline of voter interest in off year elections. The turnout at the polls in the lower chamber elections (which since 1924 have come every leap year) has generally been from 5 per cent to 10 per cent higher than that in the preceding local elections at mid-term. As in many other countries, electoral turnout in Sweden has been greater among men than among women, greater in the cities than in rural areas; middle aged voters (between 35 and 55) have shown greater interest than either the young or the aged; married persons have voted more regularly than either unmarried, widowed or divorced persons; and persons of higher social status have participated more regularly than members of the working class. Nevertheless, many of these differentials, especially the ones between the sexes and between the various social classes, are tending to diminish.

All five of today's political parties have a relatively stable and well defined social base. The Conservatives are a party of the upper and upper middle classes, they appeal strongly to the higher age and income groups, and have their main strongholds in the south of the country and in the large cities; however, they receive some support from the higher paid workers. The Liberal Party, although built around a strong middle class core, is the only major party to receive substantial support from all three social classes. It appeals to both urban agnostics and rural nonconformists, and to farmers as well as to small merchants; its strongholds are in the north and in the cities. The Centre (Agrarian) Party is almost exclusively a countryside party of small farmers; it is strongest in the southern rather than northern agricultural districts. The Social Democratic Party is predominately a working class party with support from both industrial and agricultural workers; it appeals more successfully to young people than to old, and to married couples (especially to the wives) than to single persons. The Communist Party derives its main support from workers of all income groups; it is strongest in the far north and the two largest cities (Stockholm and Gothenburg).

Figures compiled by Maurice Duverger (in *Political parties*) show that among the European social democratic parties, the Swedes, since the first world war, have had one of the highest membership ratios. After the second world war, Sweden, together with the Danes, showed by far the highest figures, followed at some distance by the Norwegians and the Swiss. This data tends to support the conclusion that in few, if any other, democratic countries is party organisation as inclusive as in Sweden. This is despite Professor Hastad's interesting view that the Swedish proportion of party affiliated voters "is not particularly high" so that "there is still much virgin soil to be brought under the parties' plough."

Over 1.3 million Swedes belong to a political party. The Swedish statistical year book of 1970 lists membership figures as follows: social democrats (867,613), conservatives (193,352), centre (agrarian) (116,133), liberals (89,489), communists (22,987). The Swedish Institute of Public Opinion estimates that 18 per cent of the population over twelve years of age is a member of some political organisation. Among Centre Party supporters over 21 years of age 71 per cent were members, compared with 32 per cent of the conservatives, 23 per cent of the social democrats and 14 per cent of the liberals.

The democratisation of the franchise and the progressive narrowing of differences in Swedish society have left their mark on political leadership. Of the groups active in 19th century Swedish politics only the civil servants, including university professors, have retained their old influence.

The social democrats are the only major party in which professional politicians (journalists, party secretaries and union officials) have played a dominant rôle. Party professionals make up 34 per cent of the members of the *riksdag* (although 66 per cent of this group comprise trade union officials from the Social Democratic Party). Farmers constitute the largest single group within parliament, in fact, up to 23 per cent of the total. Lawyers, doctors and journalists comprise

12 per cent, as do members engaged in industry and commerce. Former public servants make up 8 per cent. The remaining 11 per cent comprise academics, miscellaneous workers and housewives. Many socialist leaders have been editors of party newspapers, and some in this group have been sons of middle class parents (Branting), others of workers (Hansson) and farmers. Teachers also have been active within the party (Erlander), whereas university professors (Gunnar Myrdal) and career civil servants have served in socialist cabinets without penetrating into the party's inner circle. Once installed in office a leader is almost invariably re-elected as long as he desires. Branting and Hansson led their parties for two or three decades, and Tage Erlander was only the third leader in 60 odd years of Social Democratic Party history.

trade unions

Trade unionism, socialism and the co-operatives arrived late in Sweden. They were outgrowths of the belated rise of industrialism. All three at first battled against fierce opposition but later learned to rely more on negotiation and compromise than on conflict. Today, long range, rational planning is the norm and indignant agitation by union leaders for equality and better wages is a thing of the past. The social democrats stimulated the growth of the unions by emphasising class solidarity and by providing organisational and financial support. By 1898, the unions had decided to handle their own affairs and set up a separate central body; the LO or federation of labour.

The following time chart shows important developments within the labour movement since the inception of the LO. 1898, LO established by uniting 32 different labour groups. 1902, SAF (Swedish Employers Federation) established. 1909, nationwide strikes, called by the LO, end in disaster for the unions. 1910 to 1935, period of reconstruction for the LO. 1938, Saltsjöbaden conference and the signing of the basic agreement between the LO

and SAF (concerning collective bargaining and direct negotiation). 1971, LO membership exceeds 1.6 million.

Relations between labour and management were characterised by mutual distrust until the middle of the 'thirties, when both realised that they had either to develop a system to settle disputes on their own or face curtailment of their freedoms through government intervention. In 1936 the LO and the SAF embarked on a series of discussions most of which took place at the Baltic seaside resort of Saltsjöbaden, about 25 miles from Stockholm. A few days before Christmas 1938, the basic agreement was formally signed at Saltsjöbaden, which marked the beginning of an era of understanding and unique co-operation. The Saltsjöbaden negotiations and the basic agreement led to a strengthening of the LO's rôle. Almost from its inception, the SAF was allowed to act independently of its members, whilst the LO could act only with the approval of its members. Even though the prerogatives of the LO have become much greater since then, the SAF still has more extensive rights. When the two giants negotiate the SAF decides the course of action for the employers, while the LO makes preliminary decisions, which cannot become binding until the unions have approved them.

Centralisation is the key feature of wage bargaining in Sweden. Since 1952, the SAF and the LO have met at intervals of one or two years to thrash out the differences of all the LO members who are employed by SAF members, which means more than 800,000 jobs or more than one fifth of the entire labour force. When the negotiating bodies of the SAF and the LO reach some sort of compromise they draw up a recommendation, a preliminary agreement, which acts as a guideline for their affiliated organisations. The national unions and their opposite numbers then sit down to work out detailed industry wide agreements within the framework of the central agreement. If they run into snags, they can refer them to the central federations for mediation. None of the agreements become final, however, until all the negotiations are ready to sign.

Organised labour and the employers complain about the rigidity of central bargaining, but, on the whole, they prefer this system to one where each of the national unions bargains on its own. Many of the employers, however, fear that the system has forced them to make greater concessions than they can afford. They argue that their choice has been either to accept wage agreements that might gradually strangle their business or to resist, which would result in work stoppages for more than 800,000 workers and a crippling of the national economy. Only the Netherlands can match Sweden's low figures for working days lost through labour disputes. Between 1955 and 1964 the number of days lost annually through labour disputes per 1,000 of the population varied between 0.3 and 6.6, while in the United Kingdom they fluctuated between 30 and over 100.

co-operatives

According to Nils Theolin, information chief of the co-operative movement (*Kooperativa Förbundet* or KF), "the Social Democratic Party, the federation of labour and the co-operative movement are three branches off the same trunk . . . The Social Democratic Party gave the working classes a voice, the trade unions strengthened their position on the labour market, and the co-operatives tried to give them the necessities of life at a low price." The ideological and personal ties between the labour movement and the co-operatives have always been strong, but the co-operatives have declared that they are politically neutral and have gone to considerable lengths to avoid political involvements. Indeed, their interests have not always coincided with those of the unions or the Social Democratic Party.

Today the co-operative movement operates like private enterprise with socialist ideals, it is socially most important in the sector of accommodation. More than two thirds of the total number of new houses are built by co-operatives. The co-operative stores, however, sell only about 18 per cent of all consumer goods, although this compares favourably with the British co-ops.

4. Swedish style socialism

The democratic socialist movement came to Sweden in 1881 under the inspiration of August Palm, a tailor, who had lived in Denmark and Germany and established the Swedish Social Democratic Labour Union in Malmo in the 1880's. Palm published the first programme of the union in his paper *Folkviljan* in November 1882. It was based on the Danish Gimle programme of 1876, which itself had been derived from the German Gotha programme of 1875. Palm's general thesis was that the worker is responsible for the wealth in society and is entitled to the profit or surplus. He called for reforms in work, welfare and taxation. The first leader of the Social Democratic Party was Hjalmar Branting, who was elected to parliament in 1896 with Liberal Party assistance. He advocated an evolutionary path to socialism through a strong political movement participating in a democratic parliamentary system. The belief in revolution, in Sweden, has never been widespread. There has always been a strong conviction among most political groups in Sweden that the heavy price in human lives and in civic liberties, which a revolution by necessity carries with it, can hardly ever be justified by any speeding up of material progress, even if such a speeding up were possible.

By 1917 the social democrats had become the largest party in the Swedish parliament, a position they have held ever since, and they formed a coalition government at that time with the liberals. In 1920, King Gustavus V rather touchingly described by one writer as "a deep blue conservative," turned to Hjalmer Branting, who represented the moderate wing of his party, and asked him to form the first entirely social democratic government with the support of only about one third of parliament. The king also laid down certain conditions; no socialism, no extensive disarmament and no measures to transform Sweden into a republic. The Swedish government of 1920 was the first socialist government in the world to rise to power by democratic means.

After Branting's death in 1925, Per Albin Hanson was elected chairman of the party and soon embarked on a pro-

gramme of social reforms (rather than large scale socialisation) and guaranteed greater security to citizens. The party congress of 1928 urged a form of socialist pragmatism, which had become famous as Sweden's middle way between capitalism and socialism. The operation of this middle way may be best viewed by examining four different policy areas; the economy, social welfare, housing and education policy.

economic policy and social welfare

Demands for government ownership were struck out of the Social Democratic Party programme some time ago. "Democratic socialism," the programme now reads, "wants to test, in each individual case, the forms of ownership, business and development that best serve material growth and human welfare." It urges "competition between different companies and kinds of companies" and the combating of trends towards bureaucracy in "privately and co-operatively owned companies." Rather than describe their country as socialist, many Swedes prefer to see it as a relatively humanely managed capitalist country which does not permit too many of its residents to fall below the poverty line.

The real content of the term socialist for the average Swede is the denial of class conflict, or in other words, a maintenance of the *status quo*. The Swedish socialist movement has maintained the goals of socialism, but chosen the means to realise them in a more sophisticated way than by socialising all the means of production. What Swedish socialism has done, and is still doing, is to take away or regulate a number of those functions which the capitalists themselves regulated earlier and still do in many other capitalist societies. There has not been a total socialisation of ownership in Sweden. Rather there has been a selective socialisation of some of the most important functions inside the totality of ownership. A balance of power in the economic sphere has been sought so as to prevent too great a concentration of power in the hands of a few. Conflicts between the desires of private owners and

the demands of society at large have thus been limited. Ownership of housing, for example, has not been completely socialised but owners have been prevented from using their goods in an unsocial or anti-social way.

In building a mixed economy in Sweden, pragmatism (or compromise within the existing economic structure) has taken precedence over ideology. In the field of electricity, for example, government plants produce 45 per cent of total output, local authorities 13 per cent, and the remaining 42 per cent is produced by privately owned plants. The public sector controls 15 per cent of the total production of goods and services and employs close to 20 per cent of the total work force; mainly in educational, medical and social welfare areas. Of the total gross national product, more than 30 per cent is utilised by public consumption and public investment and one third is taken by taxes, social insurance and other welfare costs. The public sector has been of increasing importance during the last three decades. The proportion of the GNP, for instance, utilised by public consumption has increased by 100 per cent. Yet the fact remains that 90 per cent of the means of production in Sweden today remains in the hands of private ownership. Of the 6 per cent which is formally socialised, most consists of public utilities. Few additional government enterprises have been set up since 1932, when the social democrats first came to power.

Discussing relations between the government and private enterprise, one former minister of finance explained; "the social democratic labour movement has chosen other means of guaranteeing itself economic influence than the ownership of a lot of companies." Characteristic of the social democrats and the labour movement is that they have not been doctrinaire in their choice of methods. Rather it has been results which have been their prime objectives. Sweden, rather than "socialist," may well be characterised as "social" in the sense that Swedish people emphasise the importance of social programmes as a distinguishing feature of their way of life.

In Sweden neither the politician nor the citizen any longer argues the basic question of the government's rôle in providing the social insurances and health and welfare programmes. This does not mean that there has always been unanimous support for the social welfare measures.

For instance in 1948, the leader of the Conservative Party in Sweden, while not directly opposing the social programmes, singled out economic growth rather than any social reforms as being the underlying cause of Swedish progress. "As a matter of fact," he said, "it may well be that the successful solution to a number of difficult problems in the 1930's was the result less of superior wisdom or of the excellence of a social system, than of favourable economic conditions." Nevertheless, in 1968 Sweden devoted 32.4 per cent of its gross national product to social programmes as measured by the total taxation and the social security contributions budgeted for these purposes.

The compulsory health insurance programme, which went into operation in 1955, made all hospital treatment free. It also provided that patients who were treated by private practitioners would be refunded three quarters of a fixed fee.

The core of Sweden's health problem is, however, shortage of personnel. With a large number of beds *per capita* (16.2 per 1,000 inhabitants as compared with just over 9 in the United States), there was only one physician per 940 inhabitants as compared with one physician for 690 in the United States. According to Erik Dahmén, Professor of Social Economics at the Stockholm University "the most frightening things can be expected when the number of old, sick, and senile people rapidly increases in a decade or so. We will never be able to plan efficiently for the old who can't take care of themselves."

Although the Swedes are probably entitled to the most extensive network of social benefits in the western world, they are far from content. They are not bothered by a constant and wearing fear of an unexpected disaster, but they have become accustomed to a high standard of living

which they want to protect. One problem, however, which comes under the heading of standard of living and which the social democrats have not been able to solve is the cost and shortage of housing.

housing policy

Undoubtedly, the housing shortage was one of the reasons why the social democrats in 1964 and 1966 suffered their most serious election setbacks in more than 35 years. The shortage is so severe that it often determines whether people get married, have children or seek divorce. It disturbs many of the efforts to rehabilitate social misfits. It makes the starting of a new life difficult for unwed mothers who are unable to accept and enjoy their increased responsibilities. One out of every eight Swedes is believed to be without a place of his own or dissatisfied with his accommodation and unable to do anything about it. The rich can buy houses, which in urban areas start at £10,000 for a simple, small, terraced house in some distant suburb. On the black market, Stockholmers are paying up to £500 to get contracts to rent apartments. These illegal transactions are just to allow the buyers to get a place to live and pay a normal rent.

More Swedes live in flats (about 70 per cent) than any other Europeans except the Swiss. About 8 per cent live in bed sitters while only 42 per cent have flats with two or more bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. Of the total number of housing structures, approximately 55 per cent are being built by local authorities, 23 per cent by co-operative societies, and 22 per cent by private concerns and individuals.

To prevent the "socialisation" of housing, Yngve Holmberg, leader of the Conservative Party, wants the general subsidies abolished, further allowances to needy families, and a return to a free market before lifting the rent controls. At the other end of the political spectrum, C. H. Hermansson, the leader of the Communist Party, wants all housing to be put into the hands of local government or co-operative societies. He wants the

distribution of apartments to be handled entirely by the county or city housing service. He argues that lifting the rent controls does not produce more accommodation, but only lowers the living standards.

education policy

Sweden's comprehensive schools, it has been said, are founded on facts, in contrast to their counterparts in England, which are based simply on faith and hope. Such generalisations often tend to obscure more than they reveal, yet in the Swedish case it can justifiably be claimed that 30 years of experience with comprehensives have provided Sweden with a sound basis for reform and development.

Nevertheless, whilst research has been useful in helping to arrive at the details of reorganisation and lines of development within the Swedish system, the stimulus for the present reforms, covering primary to tertiary levels, has been essentially political. It is not without significance, for example, that the present Prime Minister, Olof Palme, made his mark in politics as the minister of education, from 1967 to 1969, when much of the ground work for the present reforms was laid.

The establishment of the compulsory, nine year comprehensive school (*grundskola*), which will be universal throughout Sweden by the beginning of the 1972/73 academic year, is only one of the steps which are being taken towards a completely integrated and unselective system of education. Unlike the 'sixties when there were sweeping changes in the structure, content, methods and access to education, the 'seventies will be characterised by the development of "rolling reforms" of constant self correction largely generated and directed by forces of change within the system. "One may well ask," suggests Sixten Marklund, the head of the Swedish National Board of Education, "whether the school can ever look forward to long periods of stable, uniform structure. A so called 'dynamic' reform of education seems to be more likely."

Support for the government's education reforms has not, however, been universal. A number of Swedish teachers have fought rearguard actions, first against the comprehensives themselves and later against the move towards unstreamed classes in the final two years of the gymnasium. They have urged a return to early specialisation in subjects, as well as differentiation between students on the basis of ability. Not surprisingly, this group has also opposed the radical overhaul of classroom organisation and teaching methods and the scrapping of examinations. Nevertheless, examinations have now been eliminated from the Swedish school system and students receive final marks showing what line they have followed and which subjects they have read. The expansion of compulsory education has generated a rapidly increasing school population. Some 100,000 students graduated from the nine year primary schools, in 1970, of whom approximately half proceeded to the pre-university gymnasium and professional or continuation schools (*fackskola*), while one third sought vocational education at trade school (*yrkesskola*). From 1971, however, these three different types of schools were merged into a single comprehensive *gymnasieskola*, which provides three years of secondary education in a vast range of subjects.

The latest reforms, at both primary and secondary levels, should be viewed in historical perspective, commencing with the Swedish education commission of 1940, which recommended the establishment of nine year comprehensives. The failure of the education authorities at the time, however, to agree on a syllabus and an administrative structure led to the formation of a number of experimental schools empowered to engage in continuous change and adjustment to the demands of pupils and society at large. In 1957, an educational drafting committee, set up to evaluate the progress of the experimental schools, recommended the establishment of a nation wide system of comprehensives. These recommendations were enshrined in Sweden's first school's act of 1962, which *inter alia* spelt out the individual's right to attend school and

his obligation to complete nine years of full time education. In 1966, a single, municipally administered, comprehensive secondary school (gymnasium) replaced three former types of gymnasia (general, commercial and technical) which had been administered by both central and local authorities.

The 1966 gymnasia provided three years of education in five lines (or curricula); liberal arts (humanities), social sciences, business (economics), natural sciences and technology. Also at this time a new type of secondary institution, the continuation or professional school (*fackskola*) was introduced. It provided vocationally oriented courses along three lines; social, business and technical. Unlike the gymnasium, completion of a course of study at a professional school did not qualify one for tertiary level education; although it did enable one to proceed to the second year of the gymnasium and thereafter to university. Also operating at secondary level, until the end of the 'sixties, were trade schools (*yrkesskola*) established under the first vocational education act of 1918. These schools, based on a 19th century view of society when vocational education was entrusted to private industry, became increasingly anomalous. Hence, in 1955, the government upgraded the trade schools, granting them new subsidies on more favourable terms than they had previously enjoyed and made them a community responsibility equal in esteem to professional and academic schools.

In 1969, the *riksdag* authorised the latest rationalisation, to merge the gymnasia with the professional and trade schools in a totally comprehensive system of secondary education incorporating the five lines of the 1966 gymnasium and the three lines of the professional school in a single institution. Technical courses, formerly taught in the trade school, and numerous special courses, can be taken at both gymnasium and post-gymnasium level. The new gymnasia will provide for some 200,000 students; 60 per cent of Swedish youth between the ages of 16 and 18. Initially, the integration will be pedagogical rather than physical; al-

though in time all students will be organised under one roof, or at least on one campus. Certainly, by the mid-seventies there should be a secondary education system in operation, which will be radically different from anything tried before in Scandinavia.

Higher education in Sweden has by no means escaped the reformers' zeal. Indeed, of all the recent innovations, those at university level probably have been the most dramatic. Sweden has a long and distinguished tradition of higher learning. The universities of Uppsala (founded in 1447) and Lund (1668), like Oxford and Cambridge in Britain, have for centuries provided the academic and intellectual élite of the nation. Other universities were established at Stockholm and Gothenburg in later years but it is only in recent times that tertiary education has become at all widespread. In the last decade, the northern town of Umeå has gained a university and tertiary level colleges have been set up at Örebro, Växjö, Karlstad and Linköping. Between 1920 and 1960, the number of Swedes holding university degrees doubled approximately every 20 years but, from 1960 to 1980, it is estimated that the number of degree holders will double every ten years. In 1940, only 5 per cent of the population over 19 years of age were engaged in full time studies; by 1970, the number had increased to 30 per cent. 20 years ago the total number of university students was 15,000, today it is over 90,000.

The guiding principle of higher education in Sweden is to allow everyone to follow his own talents and inclinations, subject only to limits imposed by the availability of teaching staff and material resources. However, the demand for training has been far in excess of places available in certain spheres such as medicine and technology. Hence it has been found necessary to impose quotas in many of the professional and technical faculties. As a result, there has been an enormous increase in the number of students enrolling in those faculties exempt from quotas, and the proportion of students in the humanities and social sciences has quintupled during the last ten years.

In 1969, the government proposed the replacement of the principle of free access to the philosophical faculties by a system of fixed lines of study. This reform was designed to rationalise university courses and to speed up the throughput of students, by eliminating those students who consistently obtained unsatisfactory results and by withholding financial assistance from others who failed to maintain a prescribed level of progress. At the post-graduate level, the "licentiate" degree (which approximates to the British master of philosophy degree) was abolished and a new three year doctorate introduced. The significance of the tertiary level reforms lies in the fact that they bring to an end the traditional Swedish phenomenon of leisurely reading for a degree over a number of years with the security of a virtually unlimited government loan. The loan system, under which students may borrow interest free money from the state during their period at university, will continue, but subject to periodic review and assessment. Understandably, many students view these reforms as a threat to the quality of academic life and resent what they see as an attempt by the government to turn universities into "degree granting factories" whose critical function will be undermined by pressures on students to gain their qualifications in minimum time.

It would be misleading not to emphasise that there exists a good deal of uncertainty, if not anxiety, about the future of the educational system as it is presently constituted in Sweden. The 1969 review of Swedish education by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded that; "there is a strong possibility that even the lively pace of ideas and development (now existing) may just barely be adequate for Swedish education to meet the needs of modern society." The rolling reforms of the 'seventies will no doubt have a crucial rôle in determining whether Sweden is able to meet the future education needs of the nation.

All rich countries seem to be on the road to becoming democratic, capitalistic welfare states. The degree of federal plan-

ning is increasing and the chances of turning the tide are remote. The pace may be slowed down and there may be intervals of stagnation, but the general trend will continue. If Sweden's social democrats should be voted out of power, the chances are that non-socialists would modify the course, but they would not re-direct it. Sweden has received special attention abroad because it is some distance ahead of other democratic nations. With its homogeneous population it has provided an excellent laboratory to test ideas. The population is small enough to make it easier to study the effects of change. The Swedish experiences are proving to be an example to other rich nations facing the problems the Swedes are working to solve. Sweden has not always chosen the most successful way to combine the interests of the individual and the nation. There are areas in which individual freedom suffers. The bureaucracy can often be frustrating and in many sectors there is a definite need for more flexibility. Some of the most impressive practical solutions have been carried out by men who have not placed a premium on bureaucracy.

strain lingers on. Loss of American trade, particularly for some of Sweden's largest corporations like Volvo, SKF and Ericssons, would have dire consequences.

policy towards Vietnam

A recent especially controversial feature of Swedish social democracy has been her Vietnam policy. It is this which, from the point of view of the western powers, has marked the transition of Sweden from a reliable to an uncomfortable neutral. In early 1969 Sweden became the first western nation to recognise Hanoi, and she is now actively represented there. This has made relations between Sweden and the United States difficult during the past few years. When Palme accorded full diplomatic recognition to North Vietnam and offered £20 million to Hanoi for post-war reconstruction and development, the United States withdrew Ambassador Heath from Stockholm for "consultations in Washington." It was not until a year later that Nixon sent a replacement to Stockholm. It is claimed that relations between the US and Sweden are now on the mend, especially after Palme managed to gain information about American prisoners of war in North Vietnam, but the

5. the 1970 elections

Scandinavian elections are not usually regarded as the highlight of the European political calendar (least of all by the Scandinavians). The American political scientist, D. A. Rustow, likened the party struggle in Swedish politics to "dugout warfare" and labelled the system "the politics of compromise." Yet on the eve of the 1970 election even the moderate liberal newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* was roused to exclaim in front page banner headlines: "Election becomes a real thriller: a struggle on the knife's edge." Since the 1968 election, when the social democrats won a stunning victory, increasing their vote by 8 per cent, Sweden had passed through a period of unusual domestic turbulence. Wild cat strikes at the government owned iron ore mines in the north undermined the authority of the hitherto all powerful Swedish federation of labour. A substantial balance of payments deficit had persisted since 1969 and rising inflation finally forced the government to intervene with a freeze on food prices.

With the departure at long last of prime minister Tage Erlander from the forefront of the political scene and the elevation of the former crown prince (Olof Palme) to the party leadership, the social democrats took on a more aggressive and youthful image. Palme's open support for North Vietnam and the NLF, together with his outspoken criticism of aspects of US foreign policy, aroused strong antagonism among sections of the Swedish community, notably the banking and business leaders.

At 41 years of age, Olof Palme was 30 years younger than his closest political rival, the Centre Party leader Gunnar Hedlund. Nicknamed the "old fox" of Swedish politics, Hedlund had led his party (formerly the agrarians) since 1948. Palme, by contrast, had only been in parliament since 1963. Before that he served a ten year apprenticeship as personal assistant to Tage Erlander. In his seven years as a member of the government, however, Palme held important ministerial posts in communications and education, and implemented widespread reforms.

The 1970 campaign was fought with unusual bitterness, the main target of which was Olof Palme. The low keyed debates of the past were succeeded by direct confrontations, such as the radio debate between Hedlund and Palme a few days before the elections, when the Centre Party leader almost lost his temper with the new prime minister. Adding to the antipathy towards Palme was a book published on election eve by Gosta Bohman, a former conservative leader in the upper house, which accused Palme of "playing on the young." Even *Dagens Nyheter* charged Palme with arrogance. The election was fought, however, chiefly on economic issues. Four items stole the headlines: taxes, rents, regional planning and road traffic. Hence it was not surprising to find that the name of finance minister Gunnar Strang was constantly before the public. Strang had been Palme's chief rival for Erlander's vacant post at the 1969 party conference. In the end, however, he declined to stand for office and was reported as confiding to a friend that he was content with his present position, since "he who holds the purse strings, governs the nation." In their pre-election advertising, the social democrats constantly displayed a photograph of Strang walking by the side of Palme, as if to remind voters that the elder statesman was on hand to keep the new boy in check.

Olof Palme has not found it easy to win support from sections of the community for which he might have been expected to have had a direct appeal. Despite his championing of the North Vietnamese cause, many radical youth have preferred the KFML (the Marxist/Leninist Communist League) which is to the left of the Swedish Communist Party. More importantly, the workers (traditionally the backbone of the Social Democratic Party) have found it difficult wholeheartedly to accept Palme, an intellectual with an upper class background.

Carl-Henrik Hermansson was probably the party leader who was happiest with the outcome of the election. The Swedish Communist Party obtained a 2 per cent increase in support which, whilst by no means startling, did save them from

political extinction under the new 4 per cent minimum rule, and put them in a balancing position on the political scene. Another group which was happy with the election results was the Swedish Institute of Public Opinion (SIFO) whose forecast of a loss of support for the social democrats was fulfilled.

The constitutional reforms which operated in these elections deserve some comment. Previously there were two chambers in the *riksdag*; the first elected indirectly through local government, the second elected directly by the voters in each constituency. The government could remain in office provided that it had a majority in the two houses voting together. However, since only one eighth of the upper house was elected each year, its composition could be changed only gradually. The establishment of a single house, whose members are all elected at the same time, should make it easier for voters to effect a change of government in a general election. The system of election is proportional representation, and in order to qualify for representation in the *riksdag*, a party must secure 4 per cent of the national vote or 12 per cent in any one constituency. This is designed to safeguard against a proliferation of small parties in parliament and would have resulted in the demise of the Swedish Communist Party had it not been for their sudden increase in electoral support.

The operation of proportional representation has, in times past, made it difficult for any one party to gain a clear majority. Thus the socialists have found themselves in coalition with the liberals (1936-39) and with the Centre Party (1951-57). In the late 'fifties, as well as before the second world war, the socialists were able to remain in office only because of communist support. The 1970 win was their narrowest victory for many years. The liberals, although they obtained a 1 per cent increase in support, failed to regain their former position as second party to the socialists. Under the shrewd guidance of Gunnar Hedlund, the Centre Party strengthened its claim to leadership on the right with a 4 per cent increase; the largest gain by any party in the election.

THE FLUCTUATING FORTUNES OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TABLE I

	1966 (upper house)	1968 (lower house)	1970 (combined house)
conservatives	16	14	11
centre party	16	16	20
liberal party	18	15	16
social democrats	42	50	46
communists	6	3	5
other	2	2	2

Following the 1968 election, one Swedish weekly had asked the three non-socialist party leaders whether organised collaboration among their parties was desirable or possible. The conservative leader answered that it was desirable and perhaps possible. The liberal leader said that the formation of a non-socialist bloc was the best help the socialists could receive, because the liberals and centrists would be suspected of condoning the sins of the conservatives. The Centre Party leader agreed that unification was unrealistic, and would assist the socialists. In contrast to the other leaders, the socialist, Tage Erlander, strongly supported the formation of a united anti-socialist party. Such a development, he said, "would give Swedish politics a firmer contour . . . and possibly make it easier for the socialists to convince the electorate of our political advantages." The former prime minister further advised that "if they (the non-socialists) are aiming at taking over the government, then they had better (soon) work out a unanimous programme."

The sharpened tones of the 1970 election in Sweden tempt one to forecast an increasing degree of divisiveness in a party system hitherto renowned for qualities of compromise and consensus. In this, the rôle of the communists in the next few years could be crucial, though such influence as they manage to exercise will probably be on social and economic policy on behalf of the low paid; which will hardly threaten Sweden's security or alter her system of democratic socialism.

6. the way ahead

In startling parallel to Britain, Sweden enters the 'seventies with labour relations problems which rival the 'thirties in their severity. The Industrial Relations Act may be the most radical attempt by a British government this century to regulate the conduct of negotiations between employers and trade unions, but the decision by the Swedish government to ban strikes altogether was even more dramatic. Under emergency legislation, which was approved by King Gustav, all strikes and lockouts were banned for about six weeks. This was the first case in Swedish history of direct government intervention in a labour dispute. It marked a desperate move by the social democratic government, led by Olof Palme, to end the country's most serious post war industrial conflict, involving 47,000 civil servants in a series of strikes and lockouts.

The labour troubles in Sweden affected the railways, schools, universities, the social welfare service, the law courts, and even the armed forces. The principal unions involved in dispute with the government, the federation of professional associations (SACO) and the national federation of government employees (SR) demanded salary increases of from 18 to 23 per cent for their members. The government offered 7 per cent. The dispute was called the "bosses strike," by some observers, for the average annual salary of SACO members is over £3000.

The most spectacular aspect of the strike was the threatened lockout of the country's military officers. This could have been a world's first for Sweden. Only in Israel do military men share with their Swedish counterparts the right to strike, and the Israelis are not likely to follow a similar course of action for the present. The Swedish officers are members of the SR, which closed down the railways by withdrawing 600 officials who were manning switching stations. The government threatened to retaliate by locking out 3,000 of the country's 5,000 military officers, but when the supreme commander of the Swedish armed forces, General Synnergren, counter threatened to send 30,000 of the army's 45,000 conscripts home, the government withdrew.

Perhaps the oddest aspect of the strike was the spectacle of a lockout against ministers of the Swedish state church. As civil servants and members of SACO, the churchmen were involved in the situation since, in addition to their pastoral duties, they are responsible for maintaining records of births and deaths in their parish. Since every Swede, at birth, is a member of the state church, the parish rolls are full even if the pews are not. The strike highlighted growing disagreement between church and state over their duties and obligations one to another.

The factors which underlay the dispute are complex, and must be viewed against the background of earlier troubles within the Swedish federation of labour (LO). The LO has dominated the Swedish industrial relations scene (as a result of its immense size and close association with the Social Democratic Party) since the 'thirties. It has traditionally concentrated its efforts on behalf of the lower paid workers, allowing wage drift and competition for labour to take care of those in the hitherto booming metal and engineering industries. The widely publicised strikes at the government owned LKAB iron ore mines at Kiruna, in northern Sweden, during 1970 marked a crisis of confidence for the LO. These were wild cat strikes which contravened the hitherto almost sacrosanct co-operative relationship between the LO and the Swedish employers' federation (SAF) which was symbolised by the so called "general agreement" of 1938.

Following the Kiruna troubles, widespread unofficial or wild cat strikes were experienced throughout Scandinavia. In Sweden alone there were 136 such strikes. Within the rank and file membership of the LO there was criticism of the leadership for failing to keep in touch with the grass roots of the movement. Since that time there have been considerable changes within the leadership of the *landsorganisation*, with many of the old guard going into retirement or moving to other positions. Even the LO chairman, who was singled out by the Kiruna miners for employing fascist methods of criticism," is reported to be considering an early

retirement. At 61 years of age, however, Geiger is still an active and important MP, and may have his eye on other political posts, including Olof Palme's present job.

Clearly the recent conflict has political significance for the whole of the Swedish trade union movement as well as for the government. The two white collar unions, SACO and SR, defied the wishes of Geiger and the LO, and challenged their position as sole bargaining agent with the SAF. They also attempted to thwart the LO's goal of industrial unionism, whereby all unions would amalgamate under the aegis of the LO. A similar case in 1946, when communist led metal workers struck for higher wages without the authority of the LO, ended when the metal workers union became crippled through lack of funds after three months.

In the 1971 strike, the two white collar unions, whose members had seen their differentials steadily eroded by concessions gained by the LO in the blue collar sector, decided to go it alone against both the LO and the government. As well as a substantial wage increase, the unions sought decentralised bargaining machinery and an end to the present system of agreements, through which the LO had been able to maintain its supremacy. Little wonder that one of the most vocal critics of the present strike was LO chairman, Arne Geiger, who accused his brother unionists of "attempting a stranglehold on society." The chairman of SACO criticised the inadequacies of the government's economic and industrial relations policies, but admitted that the current situation is "a new and baffling type of conflict" and that the path ahead is unclear. "When we strike conflict in Sweden," said he prophetically, "it goes on for a long time."

foreign affairs

Whilst industrial relations is Sweden's most immediate problem, international relations (in particular the future of its policy of armed neutrality and non-alignment policies) is the most critical long term issue which the Swedish government faces. It was once said in a

statement by the ruling Social Democratic Party; "in today's situation there are no normal rules for small states to put their strength or resources at the disposal of one or the other side." This means that Sweden's non-alliance and neutrality do not bind her to ideological neutrality. Even if she has freedom of action toward the west as well as the east, she is well aware of her firm commitment to western democratic ideals.

Since 1864 Sweden's foreign policy has been governed by the idea of securing peace for the country through a defensive military attitude and non-interference in great power policy. All alliances and diplomatic engagements (even within a Scandinavian framework) have been regarded as adventurous. Confronted by the first world war, the whole nation was unanimous in wanting to keep the country out of it at any price, without regard to the lively, but divided sympathies for the central European or allied powers. When the second world war broke out, Sweden again took up the hedgehog like position of armed neutrality. Along with the other Nordic countries, she proclaimed neutrality. Not even the German occupation of Denmark and Norway in 1940 caused her to deviate from this position.

Public opinion, which in a democracy cannot be left unconsidered by government policy, turned with intensity against the former Nazi Germany as well as against Stalin's communist régime in the Soviet Union. Later on, in addition, came the new European idea of the western powers, and this raised for Sweden the question whether it would be in accordance with her non-alliance and neutrality to say "yes" to Europe. Sweden made a pragmatic decision. Briefly, she combined the idea of neutrality with non-alliance. In contrast to Austria and Switzerland, whose neutrality is based on international treaties, agreements, or their own constitutions, Swedish non-alliance is dependent only on current sovereign decisions made by the responsible political bodies; the political parties, parliament, and the government. These decisions are made on the basis of those political guidelines, which alter from time

to time, aiming to safeguard Sweden's vital interests.

The characteristics of Swedish neutrality, however, are no longer unquestioned at home or abroad. This does not mean that the fact of her neutrality is in doubt; but recent developments have forced people to ask what is the essence of Swedish neutrality. On what does it depend? At what point would it become infringed? The first of these developments has been the complex and confused debate on Sweden's relationship with the European Economic Community (EEC). Until recently, when the government ruled out the possibility of full membership, it had never been clear exactly what the Swedes were seeking in their approaches to Brussels. Even now some crucial questions remain, but their essential interests have always been apparent; open access to all the economic activities of the common market without compromising their neutrality. The economic attractions of the common market have acted as a magnet to Swedish bankers and businessmen, and they are particularly concerned that trade barriers between the Nordic countries, which have been eliminated within the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), should not be built up once again. Yet that is just what would happen if Denmark and Norway join the EEC and Sweden stays out.

Not everything about the Swedish position is yet clear. They want to participate in the customs union and to have special institutional arrangements between themselves and the community; but it is hard to believe that there could be a settlement along these lines which could be both satisfactory for Sweden and acceptable to the EEC. It looks rather as if the practical question is what sort of free trade arrangement the community would be prepared to offer Sweden if Britain, Denmark and Norway become members. Complete free trade would suit Swedish interests perfectly well. The difficulty would come if free trade were offered for only a limited range of items. That would mean that some tariffs would have to be put up again between Denmark and Norway on the one hand, and Sweden and Finland on the other.

Specialists in comparative social and political systems are often reluctant to make value judgments about the merits of one country's system against another. They argue that the diversities of environment, customs and history of different societies are too great. Certainly one may produce numerous examples to demonstrate how different, in various aspects, Sweden is from Britain. Nevertheless, the same fundamental problems confront socialists in each society. It has become fashionable in recent times, however, to expose the deficiencies of the Swedish system. In a recent report entitled "Sweden—the fading dream," Anthony Howard in *The New Statesman* (4 June, 1971), noted that many intractable problems remain; "income differentials have become wider and not narrower, social service benefits have not cured poverty (one third of the Swedish working population are living below the poverty line) . . . the cake may have got larger but the powerless at the bottom have gone on being handed the same small slice." On the basis of these observations Anthony Howard concluded that in Sweden he had seen the future (of Tony Crosland's projection for socialism in Britain) and "it does not work."

Like many short term intelligence raids which journalists are apt to use as a basis for making far reaching conclusions, Anthony Howard's observations fail to take account of the gradualism which has characterised the whole development of social democracy in Sweden. It is doubtful whether Olof Palme has, as Mr. Howard suggests, "uprooted the whole placid, complacent basis of Swedish politics . . . (and) shattered the whole dream of solidarity which up to now has been shared by all parties." It is true, nonetheless, that Palme's philosophy is closer to that of Tawney than of Wilson and that his equality strategy is provoking, for perhaps the first time in Sweden, clear cut class antagonism. In the interview which Howard reported with Palme, the Swedish prime minister insisted that the problems confronting the social democrats in Sweden were the same as those facing **the Labour Party in Britain**; "to prevent the poor getting poorer even when a

socialist government is in power." Surely this is sufficient reason to note with care Sweden's efforts in this area.

Sweden's middle way

Gunnar Adler-Karlsson, writing in the mid-'sixties (*Functional socialism*, 1969) described the Swedish middle way as embodying the following elements; a belief in the balance of power, the dislike of violent solutions to social problems, a pragmatic approach to the problem of the free market versus state interference in the economy, and functional socialism. Karlsson noted that Swedish socialists had come to regard ownership as a bundle of discreet functions, rather than as one of concrete reality. "Functional socialism," he argued, "is more practical and more relevant than the sterile dogmatic theorising . . . of formal socialisation." There are signs, however, that the consensus style of Swedish social democracy may be changing. Twice during the period since Palme has come to office, the country has been rocked by severe strikes. Businessmen and others, on the one hand, are beginning to think of emigrating to Australia or elsewhere so that their "initiative and ambition will be more adequately rewarded." Young people and skilled workers, on the other hand, are asking why, after 30 years of social democratic government, Sweden has not yet yielded a society of equals.

The social democrats, however, have not been entirely unresponsive to calls for new initiatives. In May 1970, proposals were introduced for reorganising the retail pharmaceutical trade into a new company with government providing two thirds of the share capital, and the 1969 Social Democratic Party conference decision to place government representatives on the boards of commercial banks is soon to be implemented. None of these measures, however, depart from the traditional preference for moderate reform rather than something more radical. Indeed, Olof Palme himself, is doubtless concerned to preserve the social democrats' reputation for "that mixture of competence and compassion which for

long has been one of the basic revisionists aspirations" (Gyford and Haseler, *Social democracy: beyond revisionism*, Fabian research pamphlet 292, 1971). There is no cause for despair in the fact that Sweden has attained many of the conditions which Tony Crosland, for one, argues are fundamental to the achievement in Britain of even rudimentary social justice (*A social democratic Britain*, Fabian tract 404, 1971), and yet is encountering many new problems. The demonstration, by the Swedes, that social control over the economy can be attained without recourse to revolution or even large scale nationalisation, is not to be scorned. The ability of the social democrats to hold power for three decades and to maintain a constant programme of reform in welfare, education and the economy, is not equalled elsewhere in Europe.

Gyford and Haseler have noted that the "new politics of black power, student power and of spontaneous revolution" has become the pre-occupation of the media and intellectuals, whilst social democracy has become increasingly unfashionable. The temptation, as Gunter Grass observes, is to dismiss "solid, rather colourless social democracy" in favour of "oracles of destiny." It would, however, be a great pity if the "enticements of fashionable libertarianism" did, in fact, deflect attention away from the less dramatic, but ultimately more enduring, aspects of social democracy as practised in Sweden.

The problems of Sweden today may not necessarily be those of Britain tomorrow and Swedish socialists have no monopoly of solutions; but the success of the Social Democratic Party in matters of welfare and the redistribution of material prosperity (albeit only partial) has created a society more amenable to socialist reforms in other fields like housing and education. Certainly the attention of British socialists should be fixed upon the social democrats, in these present times, as the old middle way of consensus and compromise gives way to greater conflicts and confrontation and Olof Palme attempts to introduce "equality now."

young fabian group

the author

The Young Fabian Group exists to give socialists not over 30 years of age an opportunity to carry out research, discussion and propaganda. It aims to help its members publish the results of their research, and so make a more effective contribution to the work of the Labour movement. It therefore welcomes all those who have a thoughtful and radical approach to political matters.

The group is autonomous, electing its own committee. It co-operates closely with the Fabian Society which gives financial and clerical help. But the group is responsible for its own policy and activity, subject to the constitutional rule that it can have no declared political policy beyond that implied by its commitment to democratic socialism.

The group publishes pamphlets written by its members, arranges fortnightly meetings in London, and holds day and weekend schools.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the Secretary, Young Fabian Group, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1H 9BN; telephone 01-930 3077.

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Cover design by Jonathan Green-Armytage. Printed by Civic Press Limited (rU), Civic Street, Glasgow, C4.

SBN 7163 2029 0

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