

Introduction 2 : The Republic

During the Enlightenment, a republic could mean any state at all, an ideal state free from oppression, or a society that separated politics, business, and private life. The government could be monarchy (autocracy), aristocracy (minority rule), or democracy (majority rule). The ideal was a mixed form of governance similar to the American: a president or monarch (autocracy) + senate (minority rule) + House of Representatives (majority rule). From 1789, the definition included that a republic be governed by an elected president.

The most influential republican writing was, paradoxically, the monarchic tome “The Spirit of Law“ (Montesquieu 1748-57), which contained a reasoning about the differences between Monarchy, Republic & despotism. A Monarchy presupposed hierarchies and self-interest. A Republic presupposed civic virtues. Despotism was arbitrary rule. The claim of M that a Republic was a “nobler“ form of governance than Monarchy had a tremendous impact. Contrary to the monarchist, the republican was said to love both freedom and his homeland, which in particular was well received by the Americans. (See, for example, Aron 1973, del I: ss. 22-26).

The Republican debate up to 1789 is unfortunately so difficult to grasp that I must refrain from referring to it. The rub seems to be that the Ancient Republic had few similarities with its modern successors, who were more like the Italian city states. However, the research in this area is not yet complete.¹ M himself downplays the English experience of the Glorious Revolution. One can only surmise that the 1649 execution of Charles I and the 1649-1660 English Republic, in 1660 ending with the restoration of Charles II, a dry run for the French version of 1789-1814, was an embarrassment rather than a model. Perhaps it influenced the Swedish governance by committee of 1718-1772, perhaps not.

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The development of the French Revolution from constitutional monarchy (1791-1792) to republic/reign of terror (1792-1804) and empire (1804-1814) was so dissuasive that the Swedish republican discussions for a long time ceased. What was discussed was a gradual shift towards parliamentarianism. In 1838, however, the theatre man etc. Anders Lindeberg (1789-1849) published a pamphlet “Revolution and Republic“. This was a list of the monarchy's disadvantages & some of the republic's advantages: The main advantage was that you could choose a new president if the old misbehaved; that the person was probably more active during his limited period of office than a monarch who was in office for life; that you avoided the costly royal court and that the country's inhabitants became citizens instead of subjects. However, the system required a minimum of class conflict so that it did not end up as in France.

It remained difficult, however, to find attractive models:

- The United States was dismissed as a slave state led by a monarchic president.
- The experiences of the South American republics such as Argentina, Venezuela and later Mexico were difficult to adapt to Swedish conditions. They also dissociated themselves from the behaviour of the Republican Juarez, who after the 1867 military defeat of Maximilian I had ordered him executed. Gladly a republic, but not at any price.

¹ Wright 2007.

- The Polish “Noble democracy“ of 1659-1791 (the Age of Golden Liberty) with its liberum veto (individual veto) had a solid bad reputation for political paralysis. The corresponding Swedish “parliamentary republic” of 1718-1772 (the Age of Liberty) did not have an undivided good reputation either.
- The Communist Manifesto of 1847 considered Republic to be a non-issue. The Head of State, regardless of the form of government, was always the tool of the ruling class. “The modern government is just a committee that manages the affairs of the bourgeoisie.“
- The people were not mature either, or at least not convinced. This became abundantly clear when the Second French Republic (1848-1852) also abolished itself and was replaced by an empire.

According to Victor Lundberg (2005) 1848 was, however, the start of the Swedish republican movement, identified with politicians such as August Blanche (1811-1868), Julius Mankell (1828-1897) & Adolf Hedin (1834-1905). After the 1865 reform, a republic was discussed as an alternative to the constitutional monarchy. Here may also be mentioned Isidor Kjellberg (1841-1895) & Alexander Nilsson (1840-1893) of the Scandinavian Movement. Kjellberg published a short-lived republican newspaper “Skandinaven“. Nilsson published several books on the history of the monarchy. Until 1918, however, the alternative of a republic lost ground to parliamentary democracy. For example, the Paris Commune in 1871 did not receive a Swedish equivalent or even expression of solidarity. It seems to have thoroughly intimidated the Swedish establish-ment from right to left with its blood curling rhetoric. Gladly a republic, but not at any price. I refer to a newspaper article:

[Some Hungarian agitators exchanged letters with the Paris Commune and were urged] “to overthrow the legitimate government of Hungary, in its place to establish a so-called “people's state“. ... Among the principles of a people's state was stated: All property to be put under joint management; the nobility, priesthood and the prosperous middle class to be exterminated; one proclamation even states that “God Himself shall be deprived of his throne”.²

Magnus Olofsson wants however to grant the Swedish republicans (in their capacity as as neo-liberals; to distinguish them from old time liberalism of the Whig-variety) a greater influence on the Swedish democracy project than is normally the case. I quote:

Previous scholarship has mostly understood the New Liberals as [generic] liberals, in line with a long tradition of European scholarship that has a ‘tendency to see liberals everywhere’, as historian Sudhir Hazareesingh once said regarding French historical scholarship.⁸⁶ The New Liberals were certainly strongly influenced by liberalism. But the New Liberals were a complex and heterogeneous political movement that can be characterized as liberal, Christian (protestant, anti-Catholic, anti-clerical), nationalistic and internationalistic, populist – and republican. The argument here is that republicanism played a far more important role in the New Liberal political project than it has been given credit for, in a clear parallel with similar misremembering of the historiography of other countries. This understatement of the party’s republicanism has led to a misunderstanding of the foundations of their democratic project. This is a fate that they share with the nineteenth-century republicans that preceded them in Sweden, whose history is little known. Historical scholarship in Sweden has thus both misremembered and misconstrued the political landscape on the left during the

² Stockholms Dagblad 1871-12-18: s. 6.

nineteenth century. This inability to distinguish republicanism from liberalism (and 'radicalism') is disabling for our understanding of Swedish nineteenth-century political history and possibly also the history of Sweden's (late) democratization. An important strand of radical ideas has been excluded; the role of liberalism as a democratic force has been overstated. This is a challenge for future research on Swedish nineteenth-century political life.³

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In 1883, a book of debate was published by the doctor etc. Max Nordau (1849-1923), "The Conventional Lies of Our Civilization" (in Swedish 1884), which gained great influence. It was followed by "Degeneration" (1892) & "Paradoxes" (1896). Nordau's all-encompassing criticism makes him difficult to quote, but time was out of joint & the upper classes had outstayed their welcome. The books also criticized monarchy: The monarchy legitimized itself by religion (now in decline) but survived through an advanced scam about its merits. The Liberal constitutional monarchy was a stillborn attempt to combine two inherently antagonistic systems. In practice, you had to choose between people and autocracy. In the spirit of the French Revolution, the monarchy and all its traditions must be rooted out and destroyed in order to build a new society. A compromise was impossible.

As it should be, the monarchy debate was at its height in 1889, the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. Oscar II had refused to allow Sweden to participate in the Paris festivities & the subsequent monarchic rejoicing justified some form of social democratic reaction. January 25, 1889, on the occasion of Oscar II's 60th birthday, the Social Democratic League organized a mass meeting against the monarchy in Lill-Jans in Stockholm. The meeting began with the Marseillaise and ended with the Sons of Labour. Three speeches were made: Hjalmar Branting considered the king in feudal times still on the side of the people against the nobility but now he was the bourgeoisie's instrument of oppression. August Palm exemplified this oppression with Oscar II's recent approval of both the "socialist laws" and the 700-crown marker for voting rights. The agitator A. H. Janhekt concluded with stating that all who were still in favour of monarchy only proved they were idiots and slave minds. A resolution was passed calling for the abolition of the monarchy.

Branting's speech was not very original, but summed up the position of the Social Democracy at the time. I quote the political scientist Herbert Tingsten:

Branting described the monarchy as "a slap in the face for all advocates of equality", as the country's epicentre of demoralization, fawning and corruption. The Kingdoms of Europe originated from the people, they had emerged from the collapse of the feudal system and had broad popular support, "who no longer would suffer their many petty tyrants". But then the kings themselves had become oppressors. With the rise of the bourgeoisie to the ruling class, the monarchy had "become the agent of the bourgeoisie, its most distinguished puppet, which is carried about and shown to the people on solemn occasions". But even if the king had become an "upper class puppet", he was not completely insignificant. "He still has power - rarely or never to do good, his upbringing protects him from that, also his surroundings and position - but he can do evil; he can slow down progress, stifle freedom and demoralize the people ... Thus, from two points of view, we Social Democrats must be sworn enemies of monarchy - whatever be its name; because it is obsolete, because it is a holdover

³ Olofsson 2022: s. 22.

from long-past stages of development, and because in our time it is nothing but the chief representative of the bourgeoisie, the upper class rule, which is our goal to eradicate.“⁴

Then Branting was voted an MP & found it expedient to change his position to “popular vote first - republic later“. However, the issue refused to die. It came up at the 1905 party congress where Branting countered that everyone in the party were “heart and soul Republicans“ but that the issue was outdated. At the 1908 party congress, the young socialist Z Höglund read out parts of Branting's 1889 speech that aroused great enthusiasm. Branting protested that a republic would be a pseudo-reform: A bourgeois conservative republic was hardly better than a bourgeois conservative monarchy. The republic was rejected by a narrow majority. In 1911, however, Höglund received a majority for his proposal. The party program was expanded with a short passage on Republic as a desirable form of government.

Afterwards, there were social democratic conspiracy theories. Branting and later Per Albin Hansson & Tage Erlander were somehow suspected of having been seduced by the royal's “discreet charm“. Not that they had become monarchists, but that they had been influenced by the royal world view world view (hierarchy, pomp, high culture, continuity, loyalty) so that the idea of Republic (levelling, popular culture, modernism, class struggle, competition) had become abhorrent to them. The literature abounds with social democratic “dagger in the back theories“, fabricated scandals & speculation about what the royal house could potentially accomplish if it wanted to. Social democratic history is, however, redacted of such unpleasantness.⁵

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In 1912 and 1914, the Social Democrat Carl Lindhagen and others tabled parliamentary motions for a Swedish Republic, but did not pursue the issue actively so as not to offend the Liberals. January 5, 1917, this changed through Lindhagen's “motion of ideas“ 1917:289.⁶ This was, among other things, a proposal to dismantle the monarchy both as a form of government and as a tradition. The motion is difficult to comment - Lindhagen did not want to attack Gustaf V directly, it would have been Lèse-majesté - but targeted the monarchy in general, and with Nordau's arguments: The power & the necessary hypocrisy to keep up the appearance deformed & corrupted everything in the Regent's vicinity: the royal family, the officials, the elected representatives and even the people themselves. It was just as important to dissolve the monarchy's “secondary institutions“ as the monarchy itself:

“The sanctimonious demeanours“, the imaginarium of our past, the sham nobility, the equally sham Orders, the parade uniforms, the “gracious“ of the constitutions, the “submissive“ of the pleadings, the “royal“ in the titles, the parade cour, the cannon shots at birthdays and other toys of this great European kindergarten. All such things cover with slime the Republic's dreams of freedom, fraternity and common sense.“⁷

Other proposers agreed. All evil was due to the monarchy, which was considered impossible to reform:

⁴ Tingsten 1941: del 2, ss. 121-122.

⁵ Arbetarrörelsens arkiv. Socialdemokraterna och republikfrågan. <arbark.se> (2010-06-18).

⁶ Schiller 1980.

⁷ Carl Lindhagen, 2:a kammaren, motion 1917:289; ibid. 1:a kammaren, motion 1933:243. [Något redigerat.]

“The question is actually only whether we should have a king in name only or no king at all. But it is in fact extremely difficult to make a king powerless. It is almost impossible to write a monarchic constitution so that the ruler cannot intervene, if he wants to. It is also contrary to human nature that a person who, by name, has been given the highest power in the country, should completely refrain from exercising it and voluntarily remain a constitutional zero. It may be possible in England, where the people and the royals through long-standing habit have acquired this singular ability, but in Sweden?”⁸

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There was also a “functional“ criticism in the spirit of Thomas Paines & the Communist Manifesto. I refer to a motion from 1924 by the Communist August Spångberg:

“As a remnant of a lesser developed period of mankind's history, the hereditary kingship remains in several states. Like many other institutions, it had a role to play in the past, but like many other institutions, it has not disappeared when its time was over.

It may well be considered, that the monarchy in general and heredity in particular is no longer suited for a time when the public enlightenment has provoked a view, which considers it most natural and correct, that to the holders of important positions othose persons most likely to be qualified for them.

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However, in some countries, including Sweden, they have not been able or willing to follow through. Despite all the political reasons for opposing the hereditary monarchy and the evidence substantiating its unsuitability it remains. It is true that, without formally amending the constitution, attempts have been made in Sweden, with the tacit consent of the monarch himself, in recent years to apply a system of parliamentary government, so that the influence of the king has been reduced, and especially the social democrats have used this as support for the notion of the republic being unnecessary. For our part, we cannot conceive that the inconvenience of the monarchy thus has disappeared as no guarantee is given that not one day a completely substandard person ascends on the throne or someone who seeks in arrogance to assert the right to exercise government power in according to the wording of the constitution. At the moment it can well appear, that the king is but a decorative figure, but in other cases, he has a status and authority which enables him to to exercise his personal power, which could lead to fatal consequences for the Swedish people. History provides several examples of the Bernadotte Kings acting on their own.

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One must also consider the self-evident fact that, because of natural conditions, the monarch always becomes a tool in the hands of big business, the ruling class and the bureaucracy.”⁹

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Despite all the motions, nothing came of it. There is a Social Democratic sigh by Harald Åkerberg in the first chamber 1937-02-03, which is typical of the atmosphere:

⁸ Ivar Vennerström, 2:a kammaren, motion 1919:179.

⁹ August Spångberg m.fl., 2:a kammaren, motion 1924:359.

“We cannot escape, that the monarchy is an anachronism, but the strange thing is, that this anachronism has taken such a strong hold in our democratic time. It even seems that the post-war developments have gone unheeded, that the monarchy has tied its fate to the democratic regime and the democratic countries. I think it has had its advantages for them. We democrats now accept the monarchy. But it would never occur to us to try to justify why we accept it. In any case, we would not succeed in justifying it.”

In 1938 even the initiator of the Republican demand young socialist, now Social Democrat, Z Höglund had resigned:

“The Swedish democracy has, “in cooperation with a loyal royal power“, probably better endured the the past decade than a young Swedish republic would have. The Swedish king [Gustaf V], “who appears without superhuman pretensions, without dictatorship manners“, is preferable to the modern dictators. “We do not claim that the constitutional monarchy is the last word of constitutional development. We remain faithful to our republican ideals, but the issue has lost all topicality in a situation where the monarch himself almost functions as if he were a President of the Republic.“¹⁰

And then the war arrived.

¹⁰ Tingsten 1941: del 2, ss. 132-133.

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