

Chapter 13 : Democracy

The monarch may consider that he has God over him, hell under him and a people all around him.
Henrik Bernhard Palmaer (1801-1854)

The 1866 constitution gave (with some exceptions) the right to vote in the 2nd chamber to all adult men with a certain minimum wealth. Initially, this represented 5.6 percent of the population (≈250 thousand people). In 1866-1908, the proportion of voters due to wage increases, inflation and increased assessed property values rose to 10 percent. In 1911 (when the financial requirements were abolished) the proportion rose to 20 percent. In 1920 (when universal suffrage was introduced in its first version) it rose to 55 percent. Since then, the proportion of voters by lowering the age of majority and fewer exceptions has slowly increased to 75 percent of the population.

Another change was that in 1876, in accordance with the Norwegian model, Sweden introduced a special prime minister who in consultation with the king appointed the rest & led the government in its daily work. In 1917, this provision was supplemented by the fact that the person should be elected from the party with the greatest support in the Parliament.

* * *

”The democratic breakthrough”

Democracy means universal suffrage & parliamentary government in accordance with above. Since Swedish democracy started from such a low level, mere insignificance was initially perceived as progress. According to the Polity IV scale (Appendix 1: Figure 5) Swedish democracy 1809-1905 increased six steps from -10 (=absolute monarchy) to -4 (=elite rule; constitutional monarchy). The loss of Norway accelerated the process. Between 1905 and 1917, democracy increased 14 steps to +10 (=full parliamentary democracy). However, the increase from 55 percent to 75 percent of those entitled to vote has not made any impact on the democratic estimate.

There are several theories about what caused the change 1905-1917: (1) Population growth necessitated a more effective governance. (2) A ”ketchup effect” of the previously slow pace. (3) The Russian and German Revolutions. (4) The long-term dismantling of traditional ideas that finally had an effect (the Enlightenment) (5) An equally long-term effect of Sweden's development as a nation state. (6) An effect of better living conditions, changing class structure & better education (modernization). (7) An effect of an indigenous democratic tradition (the historical school).

- Over the years, the Bernadotte have been positive to the Nation State Theory (5), the Modernization Theory (6) and the Historical School (7), but negative to the others.
- Theory 1 & 2 would imply that Sweden under the Bernadotte regime did not modernize at a sufficient pace. Perhaps even mismanaged. Theory 4 that the traditional legitimacy of the monarchy is incompatible with modern society is also a subject of conflict (see chapter 21).

- Theory 3: Since the Swedish Social Democracy was initially a revolutionary movement, it was by definition hostile to both monarchy and democracy. This led to some unrest, but few successes. In 1911, the revolutionary faction of the Social Democrats (the one that later formed the Communist Party) included a demand for republic into the party program that still exists. In 1917, after the split, King Gustaf V of Sweden graciously supported the reformist part of the Social Democracy, as long as it did not insist on its republican demands. He stopped short of recognizing its "Constitutional spirit", however. The Liberals were more reliable.

For the description of the Swedish case, the American Dankwarth Rustow's new-old theory of a gradual transition has been very influential. According to him democracy could not be introduced by a defined act, but had to emerge through a process: (1) The formation of a nation state. (2) Competition between old and new elites. (3) Agreement on the rules of democracy. (4) Habituation. Sweden was a textbook example of successful development.¹ The criticism of the theory has been that a historical case study is difficult to generalize. There may be other ways.

Premfors (2003) presents some alternative theories of democratization that emphasize the importance of modernization, social structure & political stability. In the Scandinavian case he believes that current theories underestimate the stabilizing role of the state bureaucracy.

Early democracy research was heavily influenced by the fall of the Weimar Republic & assumed that it would have been better to leave the monarchy in place, at least in name, as in Sweden & later also in Japan (see chapter 21). The later research focused on which social group would take the credit for democratization: The bourgeoisie or the working class. As democratization was supposed to be the product of capitalism, the peasants were largely ignored. Not so realistic in the Swedish case.

*

The constitutional investigation's description of the Swedish development² agrees with Rustow's description, perhaps not so strange because in connection with his doctoral thesis (1955) he spent some time in Sweden. There is a Swedish discussion about the "democratic potential" of the 1809 constitution, but the meaning is unclear (see chapter 8). The constitutional investigation refers to a Swedish political culture to ignore the constitution when it stands in the way of the will of the people:

"Swedish parliamentarianism, as we now know it, is, however, in the main a result of an actual historical development, which took place alongside the constitution and which in practice led to the gradual abolition of state dualism. The development whereby the 1809 system of government was gradually transformed into a parliamentarian system is well described in the political science literature.⁽¹⁾ A certain cooperation between government representatives and the Parliament has always been necessary for the state machinery to function. What one can follow in this literature is how the King, upon the appointment and dismissal of the cabinet, has increasingly been forced to take into account the opinion of the Parliament, how the governments character of the king's bureaucracy has weakened, how the political elements have

¹ Rustow 1955, 1970 & 1971.

² SOU 1963:17, ss. 132-133.

been strengthened and how the personal power of the king has been replaced by a “government by committee”. This development, which did not go unchallenged and not without temporary returns to the older system, reached an end in 1917. The formation of the Edén's cabinet in the autumn of that year - it consisted of representatives of the Liberal Coalition Party and the Social Democrats - has been widely described as the definitive breakthrough of parliamentary rule. Since then, the parliamentary system of government has not been called into question by any significant movement. For a long time now, to quote a statement by the King at the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the form of government, ”one of the accepted principles, is that the King's Council of State is formed on the basis of the prevailing parliamentary conditions. This principle of parliamentarianism can be said to be of crucial importance to our present democratic system.”⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ See in particular the major overviews of G. Heckscher, King and Minister in the 1809 constitution, and L. Kihlberg, The Swedish government during the Parliament of the Estates and the two-chamber system until the 1905 total change of government, as well as a small survey by O. Nyman, The Swedish Parliamentarism. There are also numerous monographs of various governments and crises.

⁽²⁾ Gustaf VI. A tribute to welfare democracy. Dagens Nyheter, 1959-05-31, s. 12. ”The development that has taken place is in particular based on the thought: that the people themselves should be responsible for their destiny.”

*

The bureaucratic state

The reason why the Swedish style of government could continue as long as it did was that the 1st chamber politicians and the higher officials to man considered it their duty to support his Majesty the King's government when they were asked to do so. It was part of the oath of loyalty. According to political scientist Gunnar Heckscher, they were 1933 still mentally part of the estates society. The “official ideology of the state” was that it was an impartial body, like an impartial court, mediating between private special interests:

”The conservatives were [at the time of the French Revolution] to a man convinced monarchists. And this not only in the sense that they rejected the republican idea and reacted vehemently against the way the revolution dealt with the royal houses of France and a number of other countries, but also that they [in accordance with Montesquieu] wished to preserve an independent power zone for the monarch. In Sweden, this monarchism also benefited the new royal house, despite its revolutionary origin. Well into the 20th century, the Swedish Conservatives rejected both parliamentarism and democracy. On the other hand, this did not in any way mean that they favoured royal autocracy. The form of government they adopted was the constitutional separation of powers between the King and the Parliament, expressed in the 1809 form of government, within which positive results would be achieved through cooperation and mutual consideration without either side giving in. As for the parliamentary system, they throughout the 19th century represented the view that the representation should represent different groups within the people in relation to their importance, not only to their numbers. From these points of view, they could for a long time defend the Estate representation in principle without having to oppose its reconstruction and improvement and then the distinctive character of the 1st Chamber

as well as the equal rights of the 2nd Chamber. They rejected democracy in principle, as long as possible, but in the end they accepted it, without enthusiasm, but also with no thought of retracting their decision. When in the 1930s new winds began to blow in the world, the conservative parties in Sweden and other Western states - but not in Germany - strongly rejected the idea of a dictatorship of the National Socialist type. They perceived this as an outgrowth of modern democracy, not as a return to the old-fashioned state.”³

Marshall McLuhan has an expression for this: “We look at the present through a rear view mirror. We march backwards into the future.”

*

The term the bureaucratic state is usually interpreted as civil servants in the administration, but during the latter part of the 19th century also politicians were expected to behave like civil servants. This has a history:

Initially MPs did not represent parties but were, according to both the 1809 & 1866 forms of government, private citizens at liberty to follow their own convictions. This was necessary because the poor communications made it difficult for them during the meetings to connect with their constituencies. They had a kind of diplomatic status – independent, but accountable. Their exact mandate was long time an issue.

During the 19th century, the “Boström” ideal of acting for the good of the kingdom was added. Parties in the modern sense did not exist, but the constituencies were lobby organizations, i.e. regional or social special interests. Like the king, the MPs were expected to stand above such conflicts. This has subsequently been interpreted as a democratic deficit, but was at the time considered to guarantee impartiality. This impartiality later facilitated the transition to parliamentary democracy. The Parliament's conservative MPs were used to acting or not on their own.

* * *

”The Phantom Monarchy”

Since it was the practice that the king only attended the decision-making, not the case-preparation, Gustaf V had little idea of how far individual cases had progressed. In 1914 this led to a conflict with the Liberal Prime Minister Karl Staaff when Gustaf V used his speech to the peasant march to pressure him. I will skip the details, but Staaff took public the criticism as a pretext to resign. The following year he died of a heart attack, but he published a comment on the incident:

”The King should limit his statements so that they did not form the basis for party fighting. He need not be a name-stamp, though. In connection with the English handbooks, Staaff emphasized the possibilities of exercising influence open to a parliamentary monarch. He can form an opinion, develop it for his advisers in whatever manner he wants to. He can also use his personal influence to exert a certain amount of pressure on people, appeal to their loyalty, for example when the government wishes to appoint somebody to a government office. Furthermore, the

³ Heckscher 1947: ss. 16-17.

monarch can appeal to the people even without the support of his advisers, whom he must then let go and replace with new ones, who are prepared to assume responsibility for his action. But it is a very serious matter. The normal thing is that dissolution of the parliament, like other acts of the state, takes place under the sole responsibility of the government. Staaff adds that the king can meanwhile act as mediator between the parties, perform valuable social duties, rub everyone the right way and help out. It is unfortunate, however, if a monarch nowadays claims to take the initiative and come forward and lead. Such a thing should very rarely happen without support from one or another political movement and its men. The advisers are in this case [not the King's men but] individuals, taken from one side or other. They may be trusted friends of the monarch, former legal advisers, courtiers, etc.”⁴

Thus, Staaf's position was that the king-government relationship should be resolved along an English model with a neutral monarch who legitimized the formation of the government but did not interfere in politics itself. King Gustaf V refused to accept such a limited role, but instead followed the 1809 Constitution. In 1917, however, he was forced to relent. After that there is only information about Gustaf V's actions in connection with government formations & foreign policy. Everything else is guesswork. In 1928 when he turned 70, it sounded like this:

”During the reign of King Gustaf, the caseload has grown to a scale [5-700 cases per week] that makes it practically impossible to continue making decisions in the old style. The way in which the King now handles government matters should best fit contemporary conditions. The principle in question that the King and the cooperation of the Council of State applied during the period of the Edén's government [and continued under the social democrats] was thus that the Councils informed the King about all important matters of government. When such matters were pending, the member of the government in question visited the king, explained the substance of the matter and the alternatives. The king's opinion could be obtained beforehand, so that discussions on these matters in the Council need not take place. In these cases, the Council was more or less the registration of decisions which had already been made, and this made it possible to limit the councils to a reasonable number.

...

And here I am dealing with the thorny issue of King Gustaf's real role in the national government. The concept of the king as an empty decorative figure has little basis in reality. King Gustaf takes an interest in all matters presented to him. Of course, there can be no question of bothering the King with a detailed presentation of all the thousands of small matters that pass through the Council. For practical reasons, the procedure must here be more pro forma. But more important matters he follows with attention.

...

In all his actions, the king is strictly constitutional. It does not follow, as some seem to imagine, that his opinions are irrelevant to the decision of matters. Where the relationship between a constitutional monarch and his advisers is sound, reason will ultimately prevail. If the monarch represents the factually best-founded opinion, this will not lack influence on the outcome of the question.

There is a group of government affairs which King Gustaf follows in detail, namely the foreign affairs, Every dispatch that arrives at the foreign ministry is handed to him, and experience suggests that he studies them in detail. The

⁴ Kihlberg 1962: del 2, s. 336.

government to which I [1917-1919 as a Social Democrat] belonged would also like to testify with gratitude that in many times the Parliament benefited greatly in those troubled times from the king's experience and good judgment in foreign policy matters as well as from his personal relations to the outside world.”⁵

Gustav V continued to play an important role in the formation of the governments. Although Edén 1917-1920 led a majority government, the next 13 were minority governments or made up of non party officials. It was important to have support in both chambers so that they were capable of making decisions. As a rule, this was done by balancing the ministerial posts. Although the prime minister was a Social Democrat, it was not certain that all the ministers were. And vice versa. King Gustaf V 1920-1936 helped form these coalition governments. In 1936, the Social Democrats and the Peasants' Union (Bondeförbundet) managed to form a coalition of their own so that royal help was no longer needed & this lasted until 1957 under Gustaf VI.⁶ A later review of the government formations 1921-36, 1957 & 1961 had nothing to add.⁷

The parliamentary system of 1918 - with the prime minister as the "viceroys" and advisers as party representatives - did not fit well with the ideas of 1809. According to §§ 106 & 107 of the Constitution, the Prime Minister exercised a form of ministerial government infringing on the king's rights. King Gustaf V therefore adopted the odd habit of protesting orally or in writing certain government decisions - formally his own. In 100 years, the king-councillor relationship had been turned upside down. The king had become "adviser to his advisers".

*

During World War II, Gustav V was probably Sweden's most popular king ever.

In connection with Gustaf V's 85th birthday in 1943, an opinion poll was made on what the Swedish people thought of the monarchy as a form of government. 84 percent were in favour. Six percent wanted a president. 10 percent had no opinion. There were some differences. The "higher classes" - especially those in the countryside in Skåne & Mälardalen (=landed gentry) - were most positive. The older men - especially those in the cities & in Norrland (=workers) - were least positive.⁸

The following year, another poll was conducted on "Which living person you admire the most?" which Gustav V won by a wide margin (25 percent). Second came Churchill (10 percent) & third Per Albin Hansson (six percent). The choice of Gustav V was motivated by: The King's "effectiveness" (efforts to keep Sweden out of the war or help neighbouring countries) was mentioned by 36 percent, "character traits" (upright, modest, etc.) of 27 percent, "bodily traits" (supple, vital, stately, etc.) of 26 percent and "attitude, behaviour" (popular, attitude as unifying national symbol) of 13 percent.⁹

* * *

⁵ Värner Rydén. Konungen och hans rådgivare. Dagens Nyheter, 1928-06-10: ss. 2,35.

⁶ Gerdner 1946 & 1954; Håstad 1947: s. 372.

⁷ SOU 1970:16; Hermerén 1975.

⁸ Dagens Nyheter, 1944-01-13, s. 6.

⁹ Dagens Nyheter, 1945-10-04, s. 8.

Tingsten

Political scientist and journalist Herbert Tingsten (1896-1973) was one of Sweden's most influential republicans through his combination of subject knowledge & aggression. In 1933, he summed up the monarchy's then position as being obsolete:

”The monarchy as a form of government in the strict sense, i.e. the non-democratic, absolute or constitutional monarchy, disappeared after the democratization following the Great War. It is no more part of modern culture. Even as a political movement, monarchism plays a very subservient role; It is the principle of dictatorship, not the principle of monarchy, that emerges as the real opponents of democracy. However, monarchist ideology, as it has recently developed, particularly in France, is of interest, particularly because it is impregnated with nationalist anti-democratic tendencies in general. The theocratic and natural law justifications for monarchy have been largely abandoned; the reasoning built on metaphysical arguments has lost its power to convince. Modern monarchism is based on realistic arguments, supposedly supported by experience.”¹⁰

In 1939, Tingsten considered the remaining neo-monarchic currents, especially the *Action Française* as a form of right-wing extremism (see chapter 7). Then World War II arrived. I quote an article from 1943:

”The increased popularity and authority gained by the monarchy in Sweden in recent years, and especially during the world war period, is not an isolated phenomenon. The same applies to the kingdom of several democratic states. The monarchs of northern and western Europe have become more powerful in the public mind as the mouthpiece of the peoples, as symbols of national unity and in some cases as political leaders than they have been for a very long time. This development has been partly contingent on personal and coincidental factors. However, it is not insignificant in that it can be traced to more general trends.

The parliamentary system causes the monarch to lose power but gain in popularity. An independently acting king arouses opposition and bad will in the small or large groups who dislike his actions. A king, who appears to the outside world both as a symbol of unity for the country for various governments, hardly challenges others than professional malcontents. Many people are grateful that he, at least on the face of it has voluntarily ceased to exercise the powers which kings of old are supposed to possess. His position makes him and the entire royal house a centre of interest and appreciation, manifested in idyllic depictions of private life, photographs and gossip. If the monarch has any ability to behave in a popular way - which is usually easy in such an unassailable position - he awakens a personal affection, which does not stem solely from the recognition of successful boot licking but naturally follows from the joy of the social inferior to being recognized by their superior. The politicians, who professionally attack each other and the opposing parties, remain in awe of the king, who, precisely through his political inaction, is left in peace. The popularity gained in this way already brings with it a potential political authority. But what is more, the ambiguity of the ideology that is woven around the parliamentary monarch is designed to strengthen his position. There is talk of the king being impartial, of him being above the parties, of him representing the unity of the nation. In the expression of

¹⁰ Tingsten 1933: s. 79.

parliamentarianism, this means that the king cannot or should not act politically; By emphasizing his impartiality, that is to say, that he must not take a position, and by declaring him to be above the parties, this means that, regardless of his own opinion, he can serve as a constitutional cover for the strongest party or parties. But from this meaning of the usual slogans, it is easy to slip over to the opposite. Is not the most impartial to act, is not that which is exalted over all parties and has only the nation's interest at heart, the best of all political leaders? In fact, the ideal parliamentary monarch is characterized by essentially the same attributes as modern monarchism gives the long-awaited royal leader. In special situations, the propaganda of a neutral monarch, which is a constituent part of parliamentarianism, may become an asset to the independently acting king.”¹¹

*

After the war, Tingsten continued his monarchist criticism. Now as editor-in-chief of Dagens Nyheter:

”The role of the Swedish monarch during the war years has in some quarters been immensely exaggerated, the king has even been presented as an inspiration and guarantor of government policy. In other countries, too, the power of the King has come to the forefront much more than before because of the conditions attached to the war. The problem of monarchy and democracy has taken on new topicality.

The struggle for people's government has largely been a struggle against the personal royal power. From a democratic point of view, nothing has been more unreasonable than the inheritance of political power. Attempts to rationally defend an effective monarchy are among the most unsuccessful in the history of political ideologies of mystery and madness. Experience proved all too clearly that poor monarchs could be born by the oldest and proudest dynasties and that the most limited personal and dynastic interests, not to mention whims and delusions, could determine royal action. - - -

Parliamentarianism was seen as the way to unite monarchy and democracy. The King's powers were effectively transferred to the elected government. The monarch's practical task - in contrast to serving as a sort of national emblem on feast days - was to organize changes of government. This was generally assumed to be an easy task, since the starting point of parliamentarianism was a political system with clearly changing majorities and minorities. Even a person appointed by the coincidence of inheritance must be capable of recognizing the parliament's majority.

In reality, parliamentarianism was not as straightforward, the role of the monarch was not as simple and insignificant as had been envisaged. - - -

The relationship is also connected with the tremendous publicity, of which the royal family, regardless of any achievement, is surrounded ... Probably the royal authority is anchored mainly within two completely different groups: some officials and officers with a traditional and unreflective attachment to the monarchy, and some groups recruited from all social classes, lacking intellect and knowledge, but not a sense of cheap romance. It is these empty and stupid faces that garnish the streets at parades and fill the churches at finer funerals. But it is up to the democratic politician to enlighten these masses, not to keep them in the dark in order to lead them to whatever goal with the monarch as a decoy.”¹²

¹¹ Tingsten 1943: ss. 408-409.

¹² [Herbert Tingsten.] Monarken som lockfågel. Dagens nyheter, 1946-06-25, s. 3.

*

The year before the Republican Club was constituted, it was still the same content in the articles - a mixture of Karl Staaff & Hjalmar Branting:

”[Staaff:] But even if the monarch only seems ”formal and decorative”, the kingdom, Staaf writes, in practice has ”its questionable sides”. He mentions the costliness of the monarchic form of government, its tendency to ”maintain and support” certain persons and groups, to assemble around them a society and thereby counteract ”the desired equalization in the external sense between the layers of society’. This ”generates and cultivates a servile view, contrary to human and personal dignity”. No signs have been seen, Staaf continues, to a reformed kingdom, ”liberated from the court and medieval ceremonies”.

...

[Tingsten:] The rationalization and democratization of the monarchy should also entail the purging of a number of outdated habits, institutions and regulations : the chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the royal involvement figureheads in all kinds of contexts, the system of Orders, the ban on marriages with individual Swedish persons, the succession to the throne limited to men, the ban on princely possession of state offices. Of course, there should be legal means to retire monarchs - as has happened in Holland - and to prevent certifiably unsuitable people from becoming kings.”¹³

The republican criticism continues in part 5 (chapters 29-35).

¹³ Tingsten 1954; Dagens Nyheter, 1954-01-25, s. 2.

Referenser

- *Gerdner, Gunnar. (1946.) Det svenska regeringsproblemet 1917-1920 : Från majoritetskoalition till minoritetsparlamentarism. Skrifter utgivna av statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala genom Axel Brusewitz XXV.
- *Gerdner, Gunnar. (1954.) Parlamentarismens kris i Sverige vid 1920-talets början. Skrifter utgivna av statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala genom C.A. Hessler.
- *Gustaf Adolf, prins. (1930.) Tal i Cambridge 1929 [vid promovering till hedersdoktor].
- *Heckscher, Gunnar. (1947.) Konservatism. Historielärarnas förenings årsbok, 1947: ss. 13-20.
- *Hermerén, Henrik. (1975.) Regeringsbildningen i flerpartisystem. Lund. (Avhandling.)
- *Håstad., Elis. (1947.) Konungen och regeringsbildningen. Svensk tidskrift, 1947 (årgång 34): ss. 367-373.
- *Kihlberg, Leif. (1962.) Karl Staaff, del 1-2 (1962-1963). Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag.
- *Premfors, Rune. (2003.) Democratization in Scandinavia: The Case of Sweden. Stockholm Center for Organizational Research (SCORE). Score Rapportserie 2003:8.
- *Rustow, Dankwart A. (1955.) The Politics of Compromise: A Study of Parties and Cabinet Government in Sweden. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- *Rustow, Dankwart A. (1970.) Transitions to Democracy. Toward a Dynamic Model. Comparative Politics, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 1970, pp. 337-363.
- *Rustow, Dankwart A. (1971.) Sweden's Transition to Democracy: Some Notes Toward a Genetic Theory. Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 6, 1971, pp. 9-26.
- *SOU 1963:17. Förslag till regeringsform. Författningsutredningen : VI. Sveriges statsskick. Del 2. Motiv. Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet. <kb.se> (2020-01-01).
- *SOU 1970:16. Riksdagsgrupperna : Regeringsbildningen : studier. Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet. <kb.se> (2021-01-01).
- *Tingsten, Herbert. (1933.) Demokratiens seger och kris : Den författningspolitiska utvecklingen 1880-1930. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag.
- *Tingsten, Herbert. (1943.) Monarkin i kristid. Tiden, 1943:7, ss. 398-412.
- *Tingsten, Herbert. (1954.) Kungamakten och folket. I: Tingsten 1958: ss. 81-89.
- +Tingsten, Herbert. (1958.) På krigsstigen. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.