

Chapter 18 : Power, influence, etc.

In 1918, the Republican position was that the monarchy was impossible to reform. It was contrary to human nature that the person who held the country's highest social position would, voluntarily, withdraw to private life (see also chapter 29). The development under Carl Gustaf confirmed this with a vengeance. Carl Gustaf considered it his duty to contribute to the development of society in the areas he traditionally perceived as "his": The Royal Academies, Scholarships & Medals, Industry Delegations, Nature & Environment, Youth & Leadership. Until 1989, this was uncontroversial, as the activities of the royal house were considered unimportant. The research project Politics as rational decision making (1975-1985); the two investigations Maktutredningen (The investigation of power; 1985-1990) & Demokratiutredningen (The investigation of democracy; 1997-2000); the furore surrounding Carl Gustaf's criticism of the Norwegian seal hunt (1989) & the Brunei debate (2004) changed all that. Everything that had a media impact was now interpreted as lobbying (for himself or for others) or as politics and thus a violation of the Torekov-compromise. There was an earlier journalistic tradition in this direction, dating to Åke Ortmark's book (1969) about Sweden's conservative activists ranging from old boys networks & "the deep state" to Freemasons, Rotary & Illuminati, where the royal house was considered an influential force.

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Politics as rational decision making

The summary of the research project Politics as rational decision making (Lewin 1992) has over time become something of a Swedish political science bible. The book is an application of game theory and a tribute to fact based politics & the will to compromise. There are three chapters relevant to this book on the customs-dispute/popular-will, the right to vote, parliamentarianism + a separate article on the Torekov-compromise (Bergman 1992). However, since the monarchy conflict after 1974 is rather politics of ideas - a struggles for the "soul" of the state - it has been difficult to apply Lewin's view of politics as a matter of profit, loss & compromise. The economic reasoning in chapter 16 may be an attempt in this direction, but is perceived by both monarchists and republicans as trivializing the conflict. A battle about the form of government is almost by necessity fought with weaponized political science arguments & as a zero-sum game. Winner takes all.

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The investigation of power

As the 1974 Constitution formalized a democratic reform dating from 1918, there was some uncertainty as to whether the hopes had been fulfilled. The investigation (1985-1990) took a comprehensive approach to the inquiry. I list some results [MU] & and the corresponding republican comments [RepF]:

- MU: The inquiry recognizes three methods of exercising power: coercion, rewards & symbols.

RepF: [The Royal House no longer has any power of coercion, few opportunities to reward, but exercises influence through symbol politics, mass media & personal contacts.]

- MU: At present, Sweden has only two power elites: economic & political. Both date from the 1865 system change & coexist since 1918. "The new economic elite could not in any profound way experience loss and bitterness over the loss of a political power which they or their [bourgeois] ancestors had never in any real sense possessed. Their experiences the following years must have been mainly positive: a huge growth in personal economic power. No more vigorous activity to reverse the political clock can be traced."¹ (However, there have been subsequent conflicts: The Employee-funds, the Health and Safety Act and the Co-determination Act are attempts by politics to take over the economical sphere. "New public management" and other reforms are attempts by the economical sphere to take over politics; former politicians being hired by business is also considered democratically dangerous.)

RepF: [The elites of Estate society - the nobility, the church, the military and the officials - are gone, but the royal house remains, albeit in a truncated state. King Carl Gustaf is documented bitter about the development & supported in this by over half the population.]

- MU: The investigation of power included a report "The Network of Power" which described which parties the government office had almost daily contact with. The report concluded that "pure" parliamentarianism (according to the 1974 Constitution) had been superseded by the government offices' close contacts with loci of power outside the Parliament. The Government lived in symbiosis with opinion formers, business loci and the state apparatus.²

RepF: [One of these anonymous (sic!) opinion formers-lobbyists-power mongers is King Carl Gustaf.]

- A later study presented the current power elites "wishlist": The old elites military, church and the royal house should have the least power and the citizens, Parliament & and government should have the most. In practise this meant a considerable increase in citizen power at the expense of press|radio|tv och the financial markets. This opinion was the same irrespective of political affiliation, gender and occupation.³

There are also recurring discussions that modernism & social mobility has broken down the class vote so that the political parties are now interest groups without a social base. The members are still supposed to show solidarity with "their origins", but that will probably change. A party with a fixed set of ideas is nowadays a rarity. Everything is adjusted to fit the current situation. Packaging and symbolic politics are the order of the day.⁴ The concept of monarchism stands out for being so well defined. Everything else floats.

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¹ SOU 1990:4, s. 306.

² Petersson 1989; Möller 1989.

³ Göransson 2007a.

⁴ Anton 1969; Bergh & Erlingsson 2009.

The investigation of democracy

The investigation of democracy (1997-2000) was a discussion about Sweden's future form of government. Two interim reports on power sharing & lobbying are relevant to the monarchic system. I list some results [DU] & and the corresponding republican comments [RepF]:

- DU: The report on the separation of powers commented on the weak opposition to the 1974 form of government & included a chapter on Sweden's two "democratic creation stories". Swedish (=germanic) *protodemocracy* was dismissed as a myth. Sweden was a European state like any other including a hereditary nobility & a ditto king. The Swedish county laws, the Alnö charter, etc. were much like the English *Magna Charta* from the same period (1215). The county self rule may have existed, but it was not democratic. It was the nobility that ruled. (Considering how small the Swedish-Finnish-Norwegian nobility was - in Norrland & large parts of Finland-Norway almost nonexistent - this seems doubtful, however.)⁵

RepF: [Real democracy had been created in 1866 by the two-chamber-parliament when the nobility lost its political privileges.]

- DU: The report on lobbying criticized it in particular for not being publicly disclosed, but for being oral, private & informal.⁶

RepF: [It can be assumed that as politics & economics converge, corruption will increase.]

The criticism of the inquiry has been that it had a social democratic agenda. What attracted most attention was that various organizations had set up systems to bypass the Parliament through their lobbying. Under Reinfeld (2006-2014), the royal house was assumed to have gained a corresponding increased influence or freedom of action, which may be seen in the Crown Princess' "power estimates" below (reservation, however, for uncertainty in the methodology).

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The constitutional investigation

The 2004-2008 constitutional investigation had no mandate to change the form of government, but MP Mats Einarsson (v) later suggested that RepF should conduct its own investigation, which was completed in 2012.⁷ This later investigation is presented in chapter 32. It treats the transition from monarchy to republic as a formality, unlike this book, which discusses the functions and legitimacy of the head of state.

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⁵ Dahlkvist & Strandberg 1999.

⁶ SOU 1999:121.

⁷ Einarsson & Svensson 2012.

The Norwegian seal hunt

In 1989 Carl Gustaf commented on the Norwegian seal hunt. The immediate reason was a report by Norwegian Odd F Lindberg "On seals and people"⁸, which showed how seal pups were clubbed to death. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper Expressen, Bo Strömstedt, travelled to Oslo to deliver a personal letter to Gro Harlem Brundtland from Astrid Lindgren and three mail bags containing 48 thousand Swedish protest letters. Brundtland refused to receive him. Carl Gustaf contributed a statement during a state visit to New Zealand in an interview at the Swedish Embassy in Wellington: "If Gro Harlem Brundtland cannot take care of the seal problems, I wonder, how she will be able to take care of the Norwegian people?" This led to widespread criticism in both Sweden and Norway that he was out of line. Lars Werner (vpk) considered it as proof that the monarchy still had political significance. Even if he longer was part of the political system proper. While Carl Gustaf's deep feelings deserved respect, in this case he had violated the Constitution, if not in theory but de facto. Carl Gustaf replied that he did not regret a word of what he had said. The controversy, which spread to the Norwegian Parliament, became internationally known, and thus also the issue of seal hunting. At the end of the year, the Parliament decided that the clubbing of seal pups should be prohibited. As usual, Carl Gustaf's statement led to a debate on how to interpret the Torekov compromise:

* So where is the limit of what the king can and cannot say?

- The King's rights to speak are regulated in the constitution. There is really nothing in it that the king may not speak politically, but in the comment to the bill there are vague limitations that are difficult to interpret says Sven-Olof Hedengren, Head of staff at the Swedish Marshal's Office.

- The King should, for example, [in his capacity as king] avoid expressing his opinion on controversial domestic issues, but may of course have private opinions like everyone else in Sweden.

* Do you think the king has kept within this framework with the statement in New Zealand?

- I am not taking a position on that, but I can only observe that the issue is not really that controversial. Who wants to kill seal pups?⁹

There was an aftermath. In June 1992, 17 Norwegian seal-hunters demanded an apology from Carl Gustaf through their lawyer. The reason was that Brundtland's committee of inquiry into their hunting methods had shown that everything had been according to regulations. Carl Gustaf withdrew his accusations via a letter from the Marshal of the Realm: "Since the information in both the press and TV was consistent and related to a particularly important conservation issue, it was natural for His Majesty to speak on the matter. This was done on the basis of information that has now subsequently proved to be not entirely accurate. The statement was not directed against any individual seal-hunter." The letter was then used in damages claims against the Norwegian media.¹⁰)

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⁸ Odd Flinderg. Om sälar och människor. Bo Lindin, miljödredaktionen i Karlstad, TV2, 1989-02-11, kl 21:15.

⁹ Helena Thorfinn. Kungen kritiserar säljakten och norska statsministern. Svenska Dagbladet, 1989-02-16.

¹⁰ Peter Svensson. Säljägare utnyttjar kungen i domstol. Expressen, 1992-08-12.

The Brunei debate

2004, Carl Gustaf visited the Sultanate of Brunei, in an interview spoke kindly about the Sultan, whereupon a heated debate erupted about the appropriateness of the wording. I skip the details, but the criticism was so fierce that Carl Gustaf & Prime Minister Persson afterwards had a private meeting to sort out what he actually meant. Five professors spoke about the incident:

- Political scientist Leif Lewin interpreted the incident as meaning that the interview had been over-interpreted: "I believe that the misconception concerns the word 'open' and the concept of 'open society'. For many politically interested, the concept of an open society is synonymous with a democratic society. Karl Popper's book *The Open Society and its Enemies*. When the king was asked that question, he probably had no deeper thought of Karl Popper's theory of science, says Leif Lewin, who believes that the king instead thought of the sultan's parties and the concept of "open house". - As host, the sultan is apparently open in the sense that he invites 20,000 guests."¹¹
- The former rector of Uppsala University etc, Professor Stig Strömholm, pointed out that Carl Gustaf was actually a product of the much-acclaimed Torekov-compromise. Just as ignorant of the realities of politics as the Constitution wanted him: "The mistake is that the 1974 form of government keeps him so far from all important affairs of state that he risks being ignorant of situations where anything but half baked comments would be better – why not silence."¹²
- Political scientist Olof Petersson got the incident to "Brunei crisis is the beginning of the end for the Swedish monarchy": "The King's competence has been questioned after the trip to Brunei. It may seem rude even heartless, but paying attention to the knowledge and judgment of the Head of State is an inevitable consequence of our present system of government. Our constitution does not permit a royal faux pas of this kind, writes Professor Olof Petersson. Both the King and Göran Persson have broken the dictum that the Head of State must always consult the Prime Minister prior to a state visit. Persson has lightly dismissed that paragraph. It shows that the constitutional crisis is deeper than I thought, writes Petersson."¹³
- Political scientists Olof Ruin & Jörgen Westerståhl, thought the reactions somewhat exaggerated. However, if Carl Gustaf repeated such gaffes, it was, of course, serious.

Afterwards, an analysis was made of the Brunei articles in *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen*, which were summarized as follows:

"Although the three newspapers are considered republican, it became clear that there is only a comparatively small debate about the Swedish state, and that it is not unusual for a writer to speak out against the Brunei affair, but still see no reason to exchange the monarchy for a republic. However, this is often not explained.

The lack of a major debate on the monarchy-republic issue in the press therefore seems to be due to a kind of vicious circle in which the people and the press influence each other. The majority of Swedes want to retain the monarchy, and therefore there

¹¹ Göran Persson mötte kungen på Slottet. *Expressen*, 2004-02-12, s. 5.

¹² Stig Strömholm. Låt kungen utöva makt. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2004-02-19, s. 5.

¹³ Olof Petersson. "Kungens kompetens måste ifrågasättas." *Dagens Nyheter*, 2004-02-17, s. 4.

will be no major debate about the state system in the press. At the same time, the reason why so many Swedes want to retain the monarchy may be that there is not much opportunity for opinion forming in the press.”¹⁴

An alternative view is that the Swedish shared leadership automatically leads to such incidents because: (1) The Social Democrats have been feuding with the monarchy since 1889. (2) For this reason, when the Social Democrats are in power, the Head of State & the Prime Minister barely communicate (once a quarter!!!). (3) It would be gratifying if the Social Democrats ever accepted their own constitution.

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Addressing the nation

The republican anger is easier to understand if you listen to Carl Gustaf addressing the nation (his Christmas speech). There is an analysis covering 2000-2007. Whatever he says, it is wrong:

”The King advocates the European Union and believes that it is an important institution for securing peace in Europe. The Head of State thinks that the family is an important social building block in Swedish society. Carl XVI Gustaf also advocates a multicultural Sweden and whitewashes the Swedish monarchy as something worth preserving. From different perspectives, these statements are definitely political. Some of the statements made by the Head of State should also be seen as party political, as there are different views on these issues among Swedish parliamentary parties and other parties. This is where most of all Carl XVI Gustaf’s positive view of the EU, the Swedish monarchy and multiculturalism can be seen. The King’s positive EU view goes against the scepticism of the Left Party and the Green Party towards EU membership. The positive view of the monarchy goes against the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Green Party’s demands for the abolition of the Swedish monarchy in the respective party’s party programs. The king’s whitewashing of multiculturalism goes against the Sweden Democrats’ party program where a desirable immigration policy rather is assimilation. Although Carl XVI Gustaf speaks both politically and politically, the statements he makes are not recognized as such and can therefore not be seen as controversial. This is probably because what the king says is, after all, based on a strong community of values and national unity in the matter.”¹⁵

A similar criticism has been directed at the ambition to make the castle a centre of monarchic culture. In the Stockholm Castle there are Husgerådskammaren (storage), Livrustkammaren (museum) & the Bernadotte Library. The activities include palace tours, exhibitions, seminars, lectures & concerts. Researchers can access the Bernadotte Archives upon application. Since 1848 there is a support association ”Charles John’s League” for the care of his memory & since 1935 in Pau, Charles John’s birthplace, a museum.

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¹⁴ Schüle 2006.

¹⁵ Pettersson 2008: s. 33.

”Kingpin”

Gustaf V & VI used to discuss matters with Per Albin Hansson and Tage Erlander before the councils. Carl Gustaf does not have this opportunity, but sometimes speaks in public on various issues. Sometimes this is reported (seal hunting, tsunami), sometimes not. The criticism of this has often been harsh. Carl Gustaf's answer has been that it would seem strange if he at all times kept quiet about his views. Even if he does not have a political role, people need to know who he is:

- It would be wrong for me to speak on political matters. Then I take a position and offend large groups in society. ... But I say what I think. Perhaps not always in public. However, I think it is almost self-evident that I should do this on general issues. I stand by what I say, stresses the king. ... By the way, you can turn it around. Since my task is being 110 percent objective, I should be able to say what I think. I have no party background or other affiliation.¹⁶

- The Court Information Department: “It is not written anywhere that the king may not speak. However, he does not usually express himself on issues that allow him to be identified with a particular political group.”¹⁷

- It is permissible for a king to have his own opinions. Even if I have no executive power, I can lobby for something. When I lobby, I never say what I think but it does come out anyway. If I say that something is difficult to understand, it is the same as that I do not like it.¹⁸

- He does not interfere in an ongoing debate but if asked, he gives a personal emotional answer. It is the media that is responsible for the criticism of these his proposals, not the Parliament. The propositions require “Fingerspitzgefühl” and the limits of what he can say are ultimately determined by the public.¹⁹

* Which type of decision does The King find most difficult?

- Turn it around: the hardest part of my role? That is being an apolitical and constantly objective person. It is difficult to express oneself without becoming political. It feels hard and it's complicated. Whatever I say, there is a risk of misunderstanding. The environment likes to interpret whatever I say politically.²⁰

A selection of statements - mostly embarrassments & quips - were published in 1988 in the monthly magazine Z under the headline ”The King's Little Blue Yellow”. Another collection dates from 2014. For some time it was journalist sport to publish out of context quotes.²¹

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¹⁶ Solveig Alpzén. Monarki och demokrati ger stabilitet åt landet. Svenska Dagbladet, 1986-04-28.

¹⁷ Intervju av Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg. Expressen, 1990-10-05.

¹⁸ Kerstin Danielsson m fl. Kungen, drottningen och barnen 1990. SVT1, 1990-12-31; Inger Nildén. Kungafamiljen 2004. SVT1, 2005-01-06.

¹⁹ Inger Nildén m fl. Året med kungafamiljen 2000. SVT2, 2001-01-01.

²⁰ Henrik Frenkel. Jag som chef. Tidningen Chef, 2007:4, s 40-50.

²¹ Sommerholt 1988; Törnqvist 2014.

Power, influence, etc.

According to Carl Gustaf, his entire social position depends on the attention he attracts. It was then a question of staying in the background so that the journalists wrote about the subject and not about himself. It is difficult to put figures on the matter, but some have tried:

In 1992, a Sifo survey was conducted on Carl Gustaf's "power". He was regarded as the country's third most influential person after Carl Bildt & Pehr Gyllenhammar. Since 2007, the newspaper Fokus has annually appointed Sweden's 100 most powerful people. The criteria were to both act and be noticed. Carl Gustav 2007-2013 placed x-x-70-37-66-59-70 where "x" indicates that he did not come among the top 100. Crown Princess Victoria's during the same period placed 95-60-23-17-29-25-41. Queen Silvia has not been included, but in 2004 Forbes magazine placed her 68th on its list of the world's most powerful women. On similar lists of Göteborgsposten and Aftonbladet 2005-2009 with the main criterion to be noticed, King Carl Gustaf placed 7-12-13-15-33, Crown Princess Victoria 90-43-29-21-10 and Queen Silvia 97-x-96-x-x.

There is also a study from 2001²² where groups from the Swedish power elite rank each other according to the criterion how much "say" they have on a scale 1-10. The royal house is estimated to have the least say with the score 2.69 – unclear however that it means in practice - for example, the Church of Sweden is second to last with the score 2.92, but still has considerable influence. A 2019 survey of the royal family ranks them low in terms of "social utility" (place 28 of 30 public agencies), but relatively high in terms of "quality of service delivered" (place 8).²³ Whichever question is asked, the answer is that the royal family does its best, but that their best is not very impressive.

There have been attempts to force Carl Gustaf into politics. One such attempt was in connection with the submarine hunt off Karlskrona February 9-29, 1984. The navy dropped 22 dive bombs. At a royal dinner, party leader Ulf Adelsohn (m) tried to get him to emphasize the seriousness of the situation: "King's dinner. The king summoned me and asked about the defence issue. I advised him to call for the party leaders to inform himself. But he was and wanted to be very careful. I understand that, but still think it would be appreciated if he called us and listened to how we saw the situation."²⁴

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The later development is unclear, but given Carl Gustaf's age & how demoralized he seems from the writings about his business (see chapter 34) he is probably no longer as active. On the other hand, his support in the Parliament has increased (see Appendix 1: Figure 3). Chapter 35 attempts to present the current "politics" of the royal house.

²² Göransson 2007a.

²³ Tove Keldsen. Här är de offentliga organisationer som svenskarna föredrar. <youngov.se> (2019-12-02).

²⁴ Adelsohn 1987.

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