

Chapter 19 : Fighting Monarchists

*Preserve the monarchy -
The King in formaldehyde.*
The Anarchists c. 1968

Sweden has two monarchic traditions - one political & one non-political - which are difficult to separate because the current monarchy, although formally non-political, still has a political function by blocking the introduction of an elected head of state. I think I can distinguish four themes in the debate about the monarchy's "social utility":

- It is enough if the Sovereign exists. He or she does not have to accomplish anything.
- The social position of the ruler can be exploited by special interests, not only by the state.
- Political arguments: The non-political role of the Sovereign allows him to represent the nation as a whole.
- Emotional arguments: The hereditary monarchy creates a personal relationship with the royal family based on identification, friendship and "celebrity".

Theme (1) is the position of the politicians. Theme (2) is the position of the Royal Houses and the Establishments. The Royal House tries to spread its commitment between the larger special interests (=national interests) - business, health, school-care, the environmental, etc. Theme (3) emphasizes the monarchy as tradition & is part of a conservative ideology. Theme (4) emphasizes an apolitical "everyday royalism".

Theme (1) & (2) are dealt with in different places in this book, but not here. The remainder of this chapter deals with theme (3) = monarchism as a conservative ideology. The next chapter 20 deals with theme (4) = apolitical "everyday royalism".

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A. MONARCHISM AS A CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY

As noted by the historical writings of the right-wing leader Gunnar Heckscher (see chapters 5 and 14), after 1918 the political monarchy (= Boströmianism) was completely irrelevant. Right-wing politics at the time of the democratic breakthrough of 1917-1921 was not ideological, but a pure policy of interests. In contrast, at least in the middle class, there was a cultural monarchism & general nostalgia, which was expressed in the by republicans so fervently hated weeklies. I describe the development:

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In 1952, the historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) gave a series of lectures on the dangers of utopias "Freedom and It's betrayal".¹ Berlin derived all calamities of the time from the French Revolution and emphasized its opponents - most notably the debaters Edmund Burke (1729-1797) & Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821). The ambitions of the Frenchman de Maistre to reinstate autocracy never took root in Sweden, but the thinking of the Englishman Burke has after World War II had a considerable influence. His book *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was 1982 somewhat belatedly translated into Swedish. Burke

¹ Berlin 2002.

was a traditionalist, a supporter of a stable society based on the throne, church, and property rights, but open to compromise because "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." Such was not the case with de Maistre. Society was given by God & must be defended by all available means. The modern version of the argument is that we do not own a society but only manage it for the benefit of future generations. A kind of old time peasant ideology.

In Sweden, Burke's ideas have become known as "value conservatism" - that the West is based on a classical-Jewish-Christian non-negotiable ethic. The term "value conservatism" was coined by Stig Strömholm in the book "Fighting Conservatism" (1971) as a way to distinguish between a new era's ideological conservatism & an old era's status-quo conservatism with reactionary ambitions. The Christian Democrats are a typical value-conservative party. The old status quo conservatism is now completely marginalized. Supporter as Counts Gustaf C:son Lewenhaupt (1870-1945) & Magnus Stenbock (1911-2007) were during their lifetime reduced to oddities. In 1983, the conservative party adopted a *de facto* Liberal Party program.

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What is important in contemporary middle-class conservatism is political stability & cultural heritage. The monarchy may be part of this cultural heritage, but it has no special status. The monarchists therefore struggle against both Republicans, Conservative pragmatists, and their own lack of arguments. I exemplify with a post by Gunnar Unger (1915-1976) in the above-mentioned book *Fighting Conservatism*:

"I have for quite some time been aware that there are quite good reasons for supporting a republic and that there are many perfectly normal, yes even intelligent people, who are Republicans. But that does not impress me because my royalism - as I am sure, the royalism of the overwhelming majority of the Swedish people - is primarily an emotion and I cannot see what would be wrong with that. One might well call this royalism bunch of prejudices - I have nothing in particular against prejudices, at least not those of the right kind, that is to say those which I myself share - but why not call them wisdom? For, as I see it, it is wisdom to affirm the great emotional values which are contained in the monarchy and which so powerfully appeal to our historical imagination. Reason in all honour, but let us not underestimate our need for romance and in politics the monarchy is the romantic element."²

The above-mentioned argument is still considered valid. For example Roger Lundgren - editor-in-chief of the journals *Queen* (2008-2010) & *Kungliga magasinet* (2012-) - is also a republican in principle "but a monarchist of the heart". The advantage of emotional argument is, of course to avoid being contradicted - 'my truth is mine' as it is called. The drawback is the equivalent difficulty to argue the case. When Tingsten published his criticism of the constitutional investigation *Should the royal power be strengthened?* (1964), the monarchists had nothing to oppose it other than their reverence for tradition.

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² Unger 1971.

B. THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE MONARCHY

Since there was no Swedish research on the social role of the monarchy in the 20th century, the British arguments were used in the Swedish debate. This causes problems. One has to discuss both British research itself and whether it is relevant to Sweden, which becomes quite space-consuming. The adopted compromise is that purely British matters have been cursory treated:

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1. The British monarchy as a state of mind

The left-wing accounts of the Commonwealth have long pointed out how its early successes preserved an outdated social structure. After the Pyrrhic victories in two world wars and the loss of the colonies, only Gloriana II remained standing, symbolizing all that had been. On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89, a number of republican studies of the stagnation state of Ukania and its monarchy were published.

Best known of these studies is Tom Nairn's (1988) "The Enchanted glass: Britain and its monarchy", in which he explains all evil with Britain's outdated form of government: "... the Third Millennium's single specimen of late-capitalism encased in an early-modern Monarchic Constitution." Another such study was Edgar Wilson's (1989) "The Myth of British Monarchy". Wilson was editor of the republican movements journal Republic & his description of the British monarchy likens it more to a state of mind than a functioning form of government: "The main purpose of this book is to show that there is no good reason why the British monarchy should be as popular as it is and no argument adequate to justify its existence." To which the monarchists replied: "And yet she moves!".

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In 1998, the independent think tank Demos published a list of recommendations for a modern monarchy (Hames & Leonard 1998). The English monarchy was described as a historical hybrid: It both was the state, was above the state & symbolized the state. If it wanted to survive, it would have to choose a path, preferably to symbolize the nation:

- That the institution itself draws its legitimacy not from divine right, historical continuity, constitutional formula or parliamentary permission but popular assent expressed in a public ballot.
- That the monarch should be head of state and thus symbol of the nation but have minimal connection with the executive, legislature, or judiciary.
- That the monarchy should be organised in a fashion that allows for full public accountability. The resources associated with the monarchy should be appropriate to the functions that a modernised monarchy should seek to undertake.
- That a symbol of unity cannot be exclusively associated with any one religion or organised religion at all.
- That the symbolic activities of the monarchy reflect the diversity of contemporary society.

The monarchic debate was much more person centred. There was a criticism of Gloriana's personal "style" & "value for money" that court circles intensely disliked - Malcolm Muggeridge (1955, 1957 & 1961), John Grigg (1957), Willie Hamilton (1975) - but which I here skip. It has since taken the form of a desire for a personal touch - a royal house of people, not monuments.

In fact, the biggest lesson from Diana's experience is that it is the substance, not just the style, that needs to change. Diana showed how a monarchy, when freed from the limitations of its tradition-bound constitutional and religious roles, can become actively involved in the life of a nation and a powerful symbol both at home and abroad. In many ways this is the most important part of her legacy.³

In 2002, Demos published an anthology (Bentley & Wilsdon 2002) that tried to answer the central question: Now that the monarchy as a form of government was outdated, but because of the support of the people could not be abolished, what was its function? 20 years later, that question remains unanswered (see end of chapter 35). It can be assumed, however, that as long as Parliament does not set up an inquiry, everyone is satisfied. It is enough that the royal house exists.

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In 2020, the British stagnation led to Brexit, which would solve the problems without upsetting the status quo. The monarchy was discussed as a historical remnant, but not as a problem in itself. The Swedish relevance of such a development seems to be zero. Sweden's late industrialization meant that it took until the record years 1946-1974 before the country caught up & the record years actually ended with Sweden implementing the constitutional reform that the British had not managed.

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2. Outreach of the Monarchy

The outreach activities of the monarchy (representation, ceremonies, rituals) are often considered as a form of political campaigning. In 2016, the culture analyst Jim McGuigen summarized British research in the field as "The Monarchy: Pomp, Ceremony and Soap Opera". My interpretation of McGuigen's interpretation is that the research he refers to can best be regarded as a form of opinion studies. Below are the three most famous & their Swedish imprints.

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Edward Shils (1953)

In 1951, a book was published that must be regarded as a conservative bible, Talcot Parsons & Edward Shil's book "Toward a General Theory of Action: Theoretical Foundations for the Social Sciences. Shil then moved to England & in 1953 together with sociologist Michael Young published an article "The Meaning of the Coronation" where they interpreted the commotion surrounding the coronation as a manifestation of the affinity between regent & people:

³ Hames & Leonard 1998: s. 20.

“To sum up: A society is held together by its internal agreement about the sacredness of certain fundamental moral standards. In an inchoate, dimly perceived, and seldom explicit manner, the central authority of an orderly society, whether it be secular or ecclesiastical, is acknowledged to be the avenue of communication with the realm of the sacred values. Within its society, popular constitutional monarchy enjoys almost universal recognition in this capacity, and it is therefore enabled to heighten the moral and civic sensibility of the society and to permeate it with symbols of those values to which the sensitivity responds. Intermittent rituals bring the society or varying sectors of it repeatedly into contact with this vessel of the sacred values. The Coronation provided at one time and for practically the entire society such an intensive contact with the sacred that we believe we are justified in interpreting it as we have done in this essay, as a great act of national communion.”⁴

Contemporary criticism was that the interpretation by a large margin exceeded the available data & that their method of analysis - immersion in the situation – implied that they spoke in their own cause. Some of the article's statements also seemed counter-intuitive: For example, that the popularity of the monarchy would be based on its political weakness (=symbol value only), rather than on its political strength. On the contrary, weakness normally meant contempt.⁵

”The Meaning of the Coronation” was the last in a series of social-psychological interpretations of the ”monarchist mystique”. It was well received in Swedish monarchic circles, but did not lead to any Swedish research. Possibly this was due to the political scientist Herbert Tingsten's total condemnation of the research area.⁶ In 2004 a Swedish article about the interpretation problem itself was published - that the media picture of the coronation had exaggerated the royalist festivities – and that the entire article thus was a misrepresentation of what took place.⁷

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David Cannadine (1983)

In 1983, the historian David Cannadine published a book chapter ”The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977.” He accrues the existence of rituals:

“The first period extending from the 1820s, and before, to the 1870s, is a period of ineptly managed ritual, performed in what was still preponderantly localized, provincial, pre-industrial society. The second, beginning in 1877, when Victoria was made empress of India, and extending until the outbreak of the first World War was, in Britain as in much of Europe, the heyday of “invented tradition”, a time when old ceremonies were staged with an expertise and appeal which had been lacking before, and when new rituals were self-consciously invented to accentuate this development. Then from 1918 until Queen Elisabeth's coronation in 1953 came the period in which the British persuaded themselves that they were good at ceremonial because they

⁴ Shils & Young 1953.

⁵ Birnbaum 1955.

⁶ Tingsten 1958: ss. 67-80; Tingsten 1963: ss. 149-161. [Kapitlet Den maktlöse monarken.]

⁷ Örnebring 2004.

always had been. ... Finally, since 1953, the decline of Britain as a great power, combined with the massive impact of television, suggests that the "meaning" of royal ceremonial has once again changed profoundly."⁸

Cannadine's method of interpreting the meaning attributed to the rituals as being dependent on the situation in which they took place makes an interpretation impossible. He does not even try. However, he interprets the existence of rituals as proof of the royal house's popularity, but created by reasons other than rituals. These are more of spectacles, which need an audience. An unpopular royal house will not get an audience.

The research branch "The invention of tradition" should probably be interpreted as a complement to the research on the "monarchist mysticism". If the monarchy's traditions are fictional, the entire monarchy was a falsification, which was in line with Bagehot's theories (see chapter 7).

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Michael Billig (1995)

It is often assumed that the grander the ceremonies - parties, coronations, weddings, funerals, openings of Parliament, national tours, etc. - the better. The sociologist Michael Billig has reservations. According to him, it is enough to be constantly reminded of the existence of the royal house. It seems that he refers to findings from advertising research. Memories that are refreshed are strengthened. The others fade. Over time, the effects can be quite considerable even with modest stimuli. "Banal religion", "banal nationalism" & "banal monarchism" have become concepts.⁹

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Martin Frihammar (2010)

Cannadine's postmodern notion that rituals have no fixed meaning but must be interpreted in their context seems to have been part of the academic zeitgeist. Handelman (1990 & 1998) has published a whole book in that vein where he quotes Swedish anthropologist Tomas Gerholm (1988) as "first":

"A theory of ritual should tell us about the effects of ritual and be specific both about how ritual works so-to-speak in its own terms - that is, what it achieves according to its own theory - and how it works in ways that may not be recognized by indigenous theory -- that is, how it produces effects in unknown and unanticipated ways..."¹⁰

Swedish ethnologist Mattias Frihammar (2010) has applied this reasoning to King Carl Gustaf's municipality visits. If King Carl Gustaf is given the lead role, Frihammar assumes this has repercussions on how the visit is interpreted. It will *de facto* be a way of legitimizing the monarchy, even if the stated aim is something else.

⁸ Cannadine 1983: s. 108.

⁹ Billig 1995.

¹⁰ Gerholm 1988: s. 197; Handelman 1998: s. 4 (förordet)

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