

Chapter 30 : "Why I am a Republican"

Those who imagine that a politician would make a better figurehead than a hereditary monarch might perhaps make the acquaintance of more politicians.

Baroness Margaret Thatcher, November 1995.

The Republican movement has an uphill struggle. I describe the debate, criticism, stagnation and schisms.

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A. WHY I AM A REPUBLICAN

In 1954, political scientist Herbert Tingsten published a longer article about the state of the Swedish monarchy. In conclusion, it was unnecessary, probably harmless, but still questionable:

"[There is] a tradition in our country according to which the king should or at least take office in matters of state through individual presentations and other deliberations, [which] has been maintained even under parliamentarianism. Because of the special social status of the Sovereign, this implies a real influence on secondary matters, a tendency for the ministers and administrators to take account of or abide by his opinions."¹

The following year, writer Vilhelm Moberg published his book "Why I am a Republican" where he derived the monarchy from shamanism, magic & superstition. The court etiquette was a special hate object, which he considered revealed the monarchy's true nature of personality cult & boot licking:

"Monarchy evokes and develops some of man's most humiliating qualities: the desire to be favoured by the high-born, the eagerness to fraternize, the willingness to be of service, to bend the knee before authority. The royalty makes the subjects humiliate themselves even if it is not their intention. The king and his court is inseparable from the lackey, and monarchy has always produced lackey souls or what we call the courtier mentality: These cringing cowards, who serve their ruler whatever they are asked to do."²

The problem of the state was thus not the monarchy as such, but the misguided reverence of the people and their elected representatives, the notorious so called "subject-mentality" (see also chapter 27). This rendered the debate sterile. When the problem lay with the people rather than with the authorities the form of government - republic or monarchy - played no part. I exemplify with two public debates:

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¹ Tingsten 1954; Dagens Nyheter, 1954-01-25, s. 2.

² Moberg 1955.

April 18, 1955, Moberg & Ivar Harrie, the editor-in-chief of Express, met for a public debate at Medborgarhuset (the Citizens' House). It was afterwards difficult to say what the debate was about, but the atmosphere was at least pleasant:

"Monarchy debate

Moberg began with a religious-historical exposé of the kingdom's supposed divine origin - an exposé that Ivar Harrie, who spent much of his youth studying the very history of religion in Lund, with great gentleness called "dizzying". Vilhelm Moberg wanted to do away with was servility, the subject-mentality.

He has himself seen prominent, highly educated men totally lose their bearings when meeting royals. How far this can go, how dangerous the consequences, he felt fully proved by the whole Haijby affair. When, for more than 15 years, public officials out of politeness and cowering before the monarch, concealed a crime that later rendered the culprit six years of hard labour, then serving the king has put the rule of law out of action.

Republic does not exclude servility

Ivar Harrie stressed that the introduction of the Republic does not provide any guarantee that such servility would disappear. One cowers not only before kings. Moberg's examples of cringe-worthy court journalism, can be matched by equally cringe-worthy Harpsund journalism [the official country retreat of Swedish PMs]. He cited some embarrassing examples.

No, said Harrie, the rituals of representation encourage the ridiculous. The royals can handle it. Politicians can not. In other words: For such tasks it is most practical to have people who inherit the job and are specially trained for it.

So the debate landed in who was best fitted to inaugurate bridges and exhibitions, an heir king or an elected president."³

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February 20, 1956, Tingsten & the right-wing party leader Jarl Hjalmarson met in a similar debate at the Concert Hall. Even this had difficulty deciding what it was really about:

"Mr. Hjalmarson initially agreed with Tingsten that the Parliament could be opened by someone other than the king and indeed the Nobel Prize could be sent by postal service. [What he] primarily appreciated was the mood, the festive atmosphere and the traditions that go with monarchy, he appreciated the irrational, and he considered it a great loss if representation was abolished. The royal tradition was worth keeping. Most people support it.

[Tingsten also objected to the whole concept of politicized ceremonies. It was dangerous to build up irrational reverence for an institution] which, under certain conditions, could possibly end democracy. He denounced the propaganda without counter-propaganda that a royal house, precisely because of its powerlessness, had the time and energy to devote itself to. The representatives of the royal houses were the only permanently-serving publicity agents who had no other task than to preserve themselves. The absence of counter-publicity gave the royal houses a special status,

³ Jolo. Monarkidebatt. Dagens Nyheter, 1955-04-19, ss. 1,40.

and the danger was that the man without political views for a number of people would be precisely the man who should rule the kingdom. The result could be such incidents as Gustaf V's abdication threat [during the midsummer crisis].

...

Hjalmarson: It is said that there can be risks if a monarch acquires affection and sympathy. But exactly the same can happen in a republic. Of course we can have an inappropriate monarch. But surely the thought should not be alien to retire a king. The same issue may arise in a republic. Look at Hindenburg. The arguments used against kings can also be used against presidents.⁴

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The interest in the debates subsequently rapidly declined. Already in 1958 it was difficult to find monarchists who were willing to participate & the audience did not come. The debate was neither informative, entertaining or even political. The message seems to have been reduced to the fact that the anti-monarchism of 1911 was not yet dead. There is a SSU-motion 1955:87 (below) that describes the situation:

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B. MOTION 1955:87

The 1955 SSU Congress, motion 87, described the unwillingness of the Social Democratic Party to pursue the Republic issue. I quote:

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Motion No 87.

The formation of the Republican Club in Stockholm in 1955 has raised the issue of the introduction of Republic.

The Republican organization, whose purpose was probably to bring about public opinion for a republic, has been received with some reservation by our party people. Some have considered that the demand for Republic is social democratic property, a point of reference, which must not be taken up by any other interest group in our country. (The item should only be found in SAP's political program, to complete the picture of the party's general conception of democracy and government). Others have again fearfully backed off against such a brazen act - imagine that there are people who want the king [Gustaf VI] out, that there are people who dare to express something so blasphemous. Most, and unfortunately those who dominate within the party, adopt purely party-political views on the issue of the Republic. Within the large group, the question is: How do voters react to a proposal to abolish the royal house? The answer the question themselves. The popularity that the royal house has managed to gain through skilful *advertising* in newspaper and the weekly press is too great for SAP to dare to update the demand for Republic. The perception is that the revival of the Republican demands in a political election would mean a crushing political defeat of a magnitude which SAP has never before experienced.

⁴ Debatt om monarkin fyllde konserthuset. Dagens Nyheter, 1956-02-14, ss. 1,9.

The consequence of this official view within SAP of the almost classic program-point has been that leading Social Democrats contribute both locally and nationally and with other methods to daily *strengthen* the royal house's position.

Under such conditions, it is not so strange that there is a reaction among our culture fighters. The fact that our republican demands now are voiced in a forum of the nature of the Republican club is also understandable. A purely social democratic organization would probably mean that the action in favour of a republic would die for purely party-political reasons.

SSU's attitude to the Republican club is also *lukewarm*. It is true that the President of SSU has not entirely disassociated himself from it but SSU has been too much influenced by the party's official view. Is it absolutely impossible for SSU, to have a different opinion on certain political issues than the red-green [stop-go] view, which today characterizes SAP. After all, youth is tantamount to opposition. It should be permissible for young people to hold their own views, even if they may not be very *practical*.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, I propose to the Congress,

- that* the Association establishes close cooperation with the Republican Club;
- that* the A-press is presented with a request to cease publishing articles about Swedish and foreign royal houses;
- that* the space previously occupied by such articles is used for Republican propaganda;
- that* at all party meetings of a public nature, e. g. May 1 demonstrations, Youth League meetings, etc. include demands for a Republic.

Clemensnäs, May 22, 1955.

Arne O. L. Bäckman.

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The SSU Federal Board agreed that the Republican Club was an appropriately independent forum. Over time, however, so many social democrats joined it that the formally independent club nevertheless became dependent on Social Democratic tactics, which had its consequences (see below).

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C. HISTORY

The Republican Club in its various incarnations existed for almost 50 years: The Republican Club (1955-1967), the Republican League (1956-1990) & the Republican Foundation (1990-2004). At most, there were about 2,000 members in 18 clubs. 1974 about 1000 members. In 1990 it was "double-digit". The club wrote motions and many members were journalists & party officials who got to meet like-minded & listen to lectures. Prior to the royal wedding in 1976 and the 20 year anniversary in 1993, Sten Sjöberg was interviewed about the activities:

1976: The wedding

Since 1973, the Republican League has been in decline. "The parliamentary equilibrium that then arose made it virtually impossible for us to act on the issue of the

abolition of the monarchy. Instead, we chose to cocoon,” explains Sten Sjöberg, who emphasizes that you crawl out of the cocoon as soon as the equilibrium situation ends. ”We do not want to be blamed for a social democratic election defeat,” says the trade union leader for 5,000 teleworkers in Stockholm.

When it became clear that it would be a royal wedding, Sjöberg could not act through his cocooned organization but instead chose his trade union - section 4001 of the Swedish National Employees' Union. His motion was adopted without reservations and among other things the following will be trumpeted in the beautiful June weather from the LO-congress just in time for the king and Silvia's wedding:⁵

- That the Swedish monarchy is insignificant, peculiar and very costly.
- It is absurd that 5.9 million should be allocated to the king's courtiers because the money could be used for much more sensible purposes.
- That it is a small hard core conservative group of politicians who together with an upper class who deem it appropriate for the king as a symbol for privileges to be inherited.
- Surrounding this royalist core are a large number of emotionally affected people.
- The fact that many of those who stop to catch a glimpse of the king on his national tours among have little idea about how a democracy works.

Sten Sjöberg celebrated the royal wedding by clearing weeds in the garden outside his house on Rådmanö in the archipelago which he claimed was a symbolic act. He admitted to watching TV even when the king was in the picture ”a sham event but interesting as a phenomenon”.⁶ (My own impression is that Sjöberg perceived the wedding as a mating ritual between two brightly coloured beetles.)

The court's press spokesman Sten Egnell summarized the situation in 1976 as ”The Republican hopes were there but they were dashed by the fact that the king quickly acquired a profile. People need tradition. The politicians attempts at death by a thousand cuts has no support. In addition, we have the help of the weekly press.”⁷ [Aftonbladet, on the other hand, printed a talon where one could notify his or her exit from the monarchy.]

1993: The 20th anniversary of the accession to the throne

Ardent republicans soon recognized Queen Silvia as a formidable adversary. ”It is due to her that we were transformed [into a foundation],” says Sten Sjöberg. He is former chairman of the Republican Club. An organization that two years ago [1990] converted into a modest foundation. Under the pressure of the Queen's popularity. Demands for a Republic are in decline. But Sten Sjöberg points out that the uncles have not completely closed shop. ”Young people say that the issue is not important. But that is because no one talks about the consequences. That the royal house costs us 24 million kronor each year. The ”state propaganda”, he calls it. The newspaper articles consolidate their. Like the fact that they have not committed any serious error. At least not Queen Silvia.⁸

⁵ Jacob Wennerberg. Kungahusets fiende nr ett! Göteborgs Tidningen, 1976-04-11.

⁶ Svenska Dagbladet, 1976-06-20.

⁷ Intervju med Sten Egnell. Kvällsposten, 1976-04-12.

⁸ Tom Hansson. Bröllopet blev dödsstöten för republikanerna. Svenska Dagbladet, 1993-12-19.

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D. PRESENT

In 1999, interest in the Republic again increased. Possibly because of the referendum in Australia that year. The Republican successors were the Republican Society (1999-), the Parliament's Republican network (2003-) and Young Republicans (2010-). As in the past, the organization was prepared to run its arguments into the tiles, but the opinion corridor was wider. With over 10,000 members, it was difficult to maintain the old discipline. The members were divided into four (?) overlapping factions:

- The activists: Those who believed that the mass media society had given what remained of the monarchy new opportunities to spread its outdated message. The monarchy was more dangerous than ever.
- Pragmatists: Those who believed that the new constitution had so weakened the monarchy that Sweden was now a de facto republic. In due time the people would tire of the circus & what was left would go the way of the nobility & the state church.
- The structuralists: Those who believed that the monarchy is a cultural complex, a way to relate to & perceive the world, a social & intellectual structure. If you wanted to get rid of monarchy, you must also abolish its secondary institutions, history, monuments & traditions.
- The enlightenment radicals: Those who wanted to pass on selected parts of the Enlightenment, mainly revolution, meritocracy & atheism, but consider the monarchy itself as less of a problem than the apathy of the people.

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The activists

"Down with sperm democracy"
Ulf Bergström, RepF (2019)

The activists are happy to justify their position on the basis of "democratic" principles in the spirit of the French Revolution. They are perplexed that the majority of the Swedish people support the current form of government. Their interpretation has been that the Swedish inherited monarchy is not as powerless or harmless as it appears, but that it still has considerable influence through the media. This influence is believed to be used in self-defence & to defend the interests of the upper class. There are two parliamentary motions in this spirit. One from 1979 by Lars Werner et. al. (vpk; communist) & one from 2002 by Birgitta Ohlsson (fp; liberal) (founder of the Parliament's Republican Society):

LW: "The monarchy is of great importance to the upper class of Sweden. It is an important means of the upper class' ideological domination. With the help of the monarchy, the bourgeois ideology apparatus spreads the notions of inequality, ritual bullshit, fawning for the upper class, passive subservience. Nowadays it is also used to inculcate and idealize an old-fashioned women's role and conservative family values. If the monarchy were not of such great political and ideological value to the upper

class as it is today, it would not live on and enjoy such tremendous propaganda backing as it does now.”⁹

BO: ”Since the 1970s, the monarch lacks all formal powers, but even though the king has formally lost his former power, residuals remain in the existing system. ... [We believe] that our monarch and his family, by virtue of their office, still possess such great real political power that it can become decisive in difficult political and social crises. The fact that the king lacks formal political power does not mean that he lacks informal power. Even the oft-quoted notion from the royalist side that ”the king is a good representative of Sweden” means that the king would have some kind of personal mandate to represent our country. Such a position is difficult to distinguish from having a position as a very strong opinion maker. Since this power to create public opinion is only the result of the King's position as head of state, we believe that the monarch does not lack political power, no matter what the Constitution says.”¹⁰

It is difficult to say how realistic the claims are. The research I have found places the royal house below the Swedish Church in influence¹¹ but there are some examples of King Carl Gustaf's statements having a disproportionate impact in the mass media, but without any result. In 2013, on the 40th anniversary of his accession to the throne, he himself believed that his greatest concrete contribution was to be able to ”open doors” and to bring people together. The effect of state visits, the national tours, and a large number of ”attendances”, speeches, medals and scholarship awards was hard to know.

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In 2017, the Republican Association published a campaign manual. The section *Why should Sweden become a republic?* can be summarized as:¹²

- As long as the Head of State has an independent position, he is a politician, not a civil servant.
- In a parliamentary democracy, the Head of State must be subordinate to the Parliament. He shall be appointed on merits, in the manner of all other officials. One suggestion is that the Speaker doubles as Head of State.
- The task of the Head of State is to represent the official policy of the Swedish State in accordance with the Parliament's directives.

The campaign manual also contains a comprehensive critique of the ”monarchic picture of reality”. People in general consider it, for example, an honour if they through a medal or a visit are noticed by the King or Queen. The Association criticizes this as a lingering monarchic structure: ”To worship or respect hierarchies is self-harm. Hierarchies belong to a former monarchic upper class society. By freeing oneself from the old mindset, one both liberates oneself & contributes to the democratization of society.” The criticism is consistent with Paulo Freire's ”liberation pedagogy”.¹³ A similar way of arguing also occurs in the field

⁹ Lars Werner m fl. Om övergång till republik. Motion 1979/80:263.

¹⁰ Birgitta Ohlson (fp), m fl. Motion 2002/03: K286. [Något redigerat.]

¹¹ Göransson 2007a.

¹² Wikström 2017.

¹³ Freire 1976.

of history didactics where it is called historic consciousness: "We are all products of our history. Progress is realizing it."

The Association's official stance is anti-monarchic rather than republican, with the justification that the Association would otherwise get bogged down into details. However, that appears to be a pseudo-declaration. Presidential Government & parliamentary democracy are competing systems.

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The pragmatists

*Sweden is a monarchy in name,
but like England a republic in fact.
After Montesquieu (1689-1755)*

No liberal or social-democratic party leader has been a monarchist, but neither have they wished to abolish the monarchy as long as it has the support of the population. In this spirit, they are waiting for it to crumble by itself. Numerous polls have been carried out. Support for the monarchy as a form of government has 1943-2013 averaged 66 percent. The pragmatists have adapted to the situation. However, there are two subgroups:

- Those who, for tactical reasons, accept the monarchy because it is supported by such a large proportion of the population. The royal house and "monarchists" are, however, believed to have an anti-democratic agenda.
- Those who, for strategic reasons, support the monarchy because the royal house supports democracy. The "monarchists" in the electorate are assumed to lack a political agenda.

The conflict between tactics and strategists dates from the interwar period, but now seems superseded. After the Torekov-compromise, the tacticians are in the minority & have had to settle for gestures. The strategists, those who support the royal house as long as they think they get something in return, are in the majority. The interpretation is that the political situation is stable, and that the monarchy has thus gained eternal life (see also chapter 32).

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One proposal to overcome the deadlock has been to merge the Prime Minister & Head of State functions into a Presidential office & downplay the role of the Parliament. During Göran Persson's reign (1996-2006) there was a discussion about an ongoing "presidentialization" which in the future could mean that the post was filled through a direct election of the people or through an electoral assembly & did not represent any party. Trends in such a direction were noted by the increased resources of the PM's staff and the increase in the number of unattached ministers from different backgrounds than the party or parliament. After Persson's resignation, however, this trend seems to have been broken.¹⁴ According to the polls of the SOM Institute, there is a 10-20 percent support for such a "republican" expert government.¹⁵ But if republic means weakening parliamentary democracy, it will be some time before the Parliament introduces it.

¹⁴ SOU 2007:42; From 2012.

¹⁵ Nilsson 2013: ss.160-163.

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The structuralists

We Republicans are dealing with dark and mysterious powers, when we argue against the monarchy.

Kai Blomqvist, Republican Association (2010).

The structuralist description of the monarchy - monarchy as a sociological phenomenon, difficult to delimit from the rest of society, rather a common tradition - is especially common in the field of history, mass media and mentality research.¹⁶ In connection with Crown Princess Victoria's wedding in 2010, four researchers with this focus were invited by SVT, the Institute for Future Studies & the Republican Association to comment on the event: Ethnologist Mattias Frihammar, historian Jonas Nordin, mass media researcher Kristina Widestedt & political scientist Cecilia Åse.¹⁷

- Frihammar summarized his research as an attempt to define the "citizen qualities" of the royal house: "People make royalty a magical piece of the puzzle in an otherwise rational world. By acting as if the royals are extraordinary, they are also perceived as such. The attractive royal mystique appears in the encounter between notions of royal ordinariness and royal rarity. Through memories of historical kings and relationships with present and future royal figures, a collective immortality is created." Because Frihammar's description from 2010 almost exactly matches that of the journalist Walter Bagehot from 1867 (see chapter 7), the hypothesis was that nothing had changed since then.
- Nordin was on the defensive, pointing out that there were few convinced monarchic historians & that he was not one of them. Possibly, his research could be interpreted as Carl Gustaf in his position was still important to legitimize the government's decision.
- Widestedt commented on the weekly magazines. The fairy tale approach in the writings began when the power of the royal house faded. The royal family became too unreal to be portrayed realistically.
- Åse summarized her research as the Torekov-compromise had weakened the royal house politically, but strengthened its (non-political) symbolic value. When the royal house was no longer perceived as a political power, its *raison d'être* could no longer be discussed. Modern subservience was to accept the royal house's media image - they are like us - thereby giving the institution your tacit support. In the choice between republic (=conflict) and monarchy (=consensus), the Parliament chose monarchy. When asked how long she thought it would last, she replied that she saw no end to it (and neither did Frihammar).

The structuralists' picture of non-political symbolic value and silent complicity is difficult to verify. During Carl Gustav's term of office, the Royal House has been bombarded with

¹⁶ Jönsson & Lundell red. 2009; Ekedahl red. 2010.

¹⁷ Frihammar 2010; Nordin 2009; Widestedt 2009; Åse 2006, 2008, 2009 & 2013.

republican criticism, and even considered to play an important political role. Fredrik Reinfeldt, 1999 2nd vice President of the Monarchist Association expressed it as: "In this Sweden, where so much has been designed or governed by one and the same political sphere of power, we have a great need for an institution whose independence from party political considerations can never be called into question. ... Here the monarchy immediately appears as an institution which has not been or cannot be owned by social democracy. It makes it frighteningly almost unique as a phenomenon in Sweden."¹⁸ The Royal House itself has, however, been keen to refer to a common heritage of tradition beyond the politics of the day.

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The enlightenment radicals

*"Just because you do not take an interest in politics
doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."*
Pericles (495-429 b.c.)

Ever since the French Revolution, Republicans are revolutionaries, meritocrats & atheists. The rhetoric has always been bloodthirsty: "The best rule is benevolent tyranny combined with political murder." - "It takes nerves of cable steel and breasts of copper-hydrated sheet metal to defy the aversion of time to merit." - "When the last king hanged himself in the bowels of the last priest, then, my friend, only then will the world be happy." The experiences of this have been mixed. What has gained influence in Sweden is a modernist tradition that the will of the people should have an immediate impact in politics: That the bicameral system was abolished, that the election periods were for a time shortened to three years, that certain issues should be decided by referendums, that the ideal government was direct democracy and that this should be introduced in schools, in the defence, in the courts, in the workplaces, etc. A monarch who is immune to the will of the people and represents a state religion, Carl Gustaf cannot be held accountable for anything, really stands out. But as everyone has come to realize over time – continuity, impartiality & consensus are also important.

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E. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

June 19-20, 2010, the Swedish republicans and six other republican associations formed the Alliance of European Republican Movements (AERM). They meet but I have no information on what they discuss. Most probably AERM was a response to "Conférence monarchiste internationale (CMI)" established 2008 with 79 monarchic member-organisations all over the world.

¹⁸ Ögren red. 2006.

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