

Chapter 35 : Dead man walking

*Even good families
don't last three oaks.*
Medieval Proverb.

The empires, monarchies and kinglets of the Vienna Congress are now gone or are museum pieces. Until 1918, 31 monarchies were abolished, until the birth of King Carl Gustaf in 1946 19 monarchies, until his accession in 1973 58 monarchies and during his 40 years on the throne another 15 monarchies. The fact that there are so many is due to the fact that the states of the German Empire, the kinglets of Yemen and the states of the Commonwealth are usually considered separate monarchies. That does not include 700 Indian petty principalities or the African petty kingdoms. The clock is probably also ticking for the Swedish monarchy, although its function is by now so diffuse, that no one can determine whether it has outstayed its welcome or not. This last chapter is therefore tentative: (1) The the Age of Liberty (1718-1772) when the decline started. (2) The monarchy's modern *raison d'être*. (3) The monarchist ideology. (4) The non-political monarchy. (5) The future of the monarchy.

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The Monarchy of the Age of Liberty (1718-1772)

The historian Jonas Nordin's final words in his book "The Monarchy of the Age of Liberty" also fit this book, which is in practice a continuation:

When I started working on this book, I wanted to get an answer to the question whether and to what extent the King was or was considered an important political actor. Coming to the end of the inquiry, I have quickly come to the conclusion that the question has been wrongly asked. The king was a natural, self-evident and therefore, as pointed out many times in the previous, indispensable figure in the politics and social view of the time. His obvious position could not be overestimated or questioned, hardly even considered. It should be recalled that the 1809 form of government was the first to explicitly state that Sweden was a monarchy. In all previous constitutional documents, this relationship had been taken for granted.

The question whether the king, despite his relative impotence, had any role to play must be answered in the affirmative. The significance was partly symbolic, as explained in the previous investigations, and partly real political. Due to the monarchy's well-established position, the king always had a potential political influence. Not least the king's vanguard role meant that his position and views could never be ignored. The monarchy also possessed a legitimacy that no other form of government came close to. Through practical experience, it was slowly dawning on ever broader layers of society that a representative parliamentary power promised greater political influence, yet the relative gains achieved in this way were still no greater than the fact that, whenever an opportunity was offered, people were voluntarily allowed to be lured back into the secure embrace of monarchism. This was the case in 1772, so it happened again in 1789, and still in 1809 the significance of royal power in social thought was so fundamental that it was given a necessary balancing role among the government authorities. No matter how many bad kings you had experience with, the alternatives always scared even more. This must also have been due to the deeply ingrained spirit of corporate interests. Politics, it was believed,

could never be anything but a zero-sum game in which some groups lost what others won. Royal power was the only institution above this ever-continuing conflict of interests.¹

Which in my view misrepresents the political landscape, but refuting it would demand another book. I myself emphasize the functional challenges to run a kingdom. Nordin emphasizes ideology & free choice.

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The modern *raison d'être* of the Monarchy

The introduction argues that the monarchy was an appropriate form of government for a conglomerate state with large regional differences, where the inhabitants wanted to manage their own affairs, but as the empire dwindled, communications improved and the increased political activity was no longer appropriate. Its history after 1905 is to look for a new *raison d'être*.

- Supporters of the monarchy claim it now protects the two novelties of the 19th century - the nation state & democracy: With the king as a symbol common to the population, the monarchy would protect the nation state, and thereby also protect democracy, because democracy can only exist within the framework of the nation state.² Alternatively, the monarchy, by blocking the introduction of a strong president, guarantees the current division of powers between the head of state and the parliament, which de facto is the Swedish democracy.³
- The alternative interpretation is that the Swedish system changes 1809, 1865 & 1918 were poorly anchored. As in England, they were revolutions from above and resulted in hybrid regimes. These were launched both as monarchies and as "disguised" republics. According to the Republicans, the 1974 symbolic monarchy is yet another such political compromise, hybrid, chimera or however to express it & the double dealing erodes the legitimacy of democracy. Democracy has made itself dependent on the support of monarchy.
- A 3rd interpretation is that the non-political activities of the monarchy are sufficient to explain its existence. The monarchy as an upholder of tradition and an easy-to-understand symbol of the state is perceived - regardless of all reservations - as an asset.
- There is even a 4th interpretation. That democracy requires dissension. Everything that increases dissension - modernity, *kulturkampf*, immigration, monarchy-republic, etc. - increases democracy. With enough dissension nobody can win but is forced to cooperate.

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¹ Nordin 2009: ss. 276.

² Åse 2009; m fl.

³ Gudrun Schyman m fl (vänsterpartiet). Motion 2000/01:K257. Införande av republikanskt statsskick.

The Monarchic ideology

Like the national sentiments, monarchism has changed over time. Every 100 years, in step with the political changes, something new is introduced. It is therefore difficult to make a general statement about its "true nature". 1809-1918, the Swedish monarchy was a liberal compromise between the French Revolution and the Russian Empire. Then it was part of Folkhemmet (the Swedish family) & represented security, in the guise of a social-democratic compromise between communism & capitalism. For this reason, unrest is usually interpreted as giving monarchy a lease of life. In 1957, the Republican view on the role of the monarchy was:

"Only in abnormal times can the monarchy function normally. ... It is in view of this eventuality that the king [King Gustaf VI] holds himself with 120 courtiers in degrees from colonel to field marshal. It seems a little over-ambitious."⁴

In this view, a monarchic revival awaits war & disasters. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, such a threat to foreign policy is lacking. The domestic political threats - political Islam, clan rule, organized crime, domestic Nazism & right-wing extremism - has not been able to fill the gap, but the monarchy has become engaged in the related problems of EU & immigration. This has involved a reorientation: from the monarchy as the guarantor of a Swedish unity culture to the monarchy as a cohesive force of a multicultural society. Put differently: The nation state is assumed to have outplayed its role and Sweden has again become a form of multicultural conglomerate state. Such a country cannot be held together by an anonymous government & economic interests. It also needs an ideological centre. The state church is abolished. This leaves two options: The Nation & Democracy. The royal house is considered important for both.

Obviously, many have difficulty accepting the new role of the monarchy. Carl Gustaf has also not been willing, perhaps not even able, to explain it. As always, the "politics" of the royal house is to deny that any such exists. In the void, the question marks grow. The monarchic ideology (or that there even is an ideology) is perceived as so controversial that any attempt by me to get it clarified, by the interviewees is perceived as a provocation. According to the interviewees, the monarchy no longer has any obvious connection with the state, the nation or even history. It seems reduced to a cultural heritage & to opinion polls. The Democracy Report (2000) even compares it to a private religious practice.

The conflict is made clear in the EU integration document (2004): "Integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation between immigrants and residents of Member States." Such a multicultural society is deeply alien to the Swedish majority, but is in fact part of the monarchic tradition. As noted in chapter 6: "The Swedish kings have for 1000 years legitimized their rule through religion, ancient authorities, recent political philosophy, military successes & their brilliant ancestry, but not actually by being Swedish."

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⁴ Hans Haste. Stockholms Republikanska Klubb. Odaterad. Omkring 1957.

The non-political Monarchy

As the 1918-1974 practice to such an extent departed from the constitution, it is misleading to use 1974 as the starting year for the non-political monarchy. It is more correct to view the period 1866-1974 as a transitional period in which in the manner of Bagehot the monarchy legitimises democracy. The development after 1974 is that the monarchy is no longer necessary for that purpose. In the meantime, it is once again looking for its *raison d'être* which it now finds in the cultural heritage.

As for the Torekov-compromise, the more one studies it, the more incomprehensible it becomes. It didn't solve any problems. Just perpetuated a makeshift. Those responsible have found it extremely difficult to justify its implementation. There are a number of *ad hoc* explanations that all boil down to the SSU faction's "Gustaf V-mania": Gustaf V & Queen Victoria would have intrigued to get Sweden to side with Germany in the war, even turning Sweden into a German vassal country. Gustaf V would have had such popular support - exemplified by the peasant train & the tributes to his 85th birthday - that he could put aside democracy & revert to the 1809 constitution. The peasant train was compared to Mussolini's march towards Rome. Gustaf V's reputation was not improved by the Hajby affair. He would, under the protection of his servile court, have led a debauched life: lost large sums of money on gambling, sexually abused employees & had children out of wedlock. The monarchy was a threat to the country's security and reputation. It was imperative to put an end to it.⁵

The conservative support for the Torekov-compromise seems to have been based on a notion of the state utility of the monarchy regardless of its political role. Although the monarchy existed only as a symbol, by marking continuity it would contribute to a stable social climate. It is difficult to verify exactly how it would be done, but it is probably dangerous to dismantle the state. A transition to a republic would also require such major changes in the constitution that all politicians, even the most republican, would hesitate. Palme's talk of "a stroke of pen" is actually nonsense.

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The future of the Monarchy

The most likely reason for the existence of the monarchy is that it, with all its faults, fulfils a function. Democratic parliamentarianism, as has been pointed out, is not ideology but a system of conflict management & resource allocation. To the extent that the Swedes have a common ideology, it is about the historical experience (the Swedish identity). As long as the royal house has a role in forming the Swedish identity, it will remain. No competitor is in sight. In fact, Carl Gustaf's Marshal of the Realm 2003-2010 Ingemar Eliasson seems to have wanted to use the ceremonial for such a purpose:

"The concept of representation must be understood to have a broader meaning than performing ceremonial acts and dinners. Representing the people and being a symbol of the nation should also be given intellectual content. It should include the task of forming and articulating the values upon which Swedish democracy is based. In this sense, the Head of State participates in a continuous formation of opinion without, however, interfering in current political issues. 'He represents more than the State in a legal sense.'"⁶

⁵ Hancock 2015: s. 467.

⁶ Eliasson 2013: s. 334.

The quote exudes the same form of German national romanticism as the young right during the interwar period (see chapter 14): "The King represented a will of the state transcending the will of the people, "with deeper spiritual roots than the ballot".⁷ Possibly Eliasson envisages a role for the regent as an independent moral authority similar to the role Vaclav Havel had as Czechoslovakian and Czech President 1989-2003. It would then be consistent with ideas that Carl Gustaf & his sympathizers have previously expressed. Being outside politics, he was able to comment on it, most recently his criticism of the government's awkward handling of the Corona-epidemic. Statements of this kind have been widely criticized in the past, but no longer. Perhaps it will be even easier for the Crown Princess, who does not have the same political baggage as her father. The Swedish royal house claims as far as possible Bagehot's three royal rights: To be consulted, encourage & warn.

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"To Infinity and Beyond!"

In March 2019, a conference was held on "The role of monarchy in modern democracy". 25 researchers & functionaries from eight monarchies participated: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, United Kingdom & Spain. From Sweden participated Alex Calissendorff (lawyer; court auditor), Lennart Nilsson (political scientist; opinion polls) & Henrik Wenander (lawyer; public law). The directives were that the contributions would be about the terms and future of the monarchy. It was hoped that it would be possible to update the relevant passages in Walter Bagehot's (1867) "The English Constitution" (see chapter 7). That did not happen. The monarchy was as usual assumed to survive by its combination of political toothlessness, national symbolic value & soap opera qualities - not by fulfilling any essential role. Bagehot's interpretation of monarchism as a secular religion was however highlighted. The conference documentation ended with a word of caution:

- It is vital above all that it undertakes its public duties as neutrally as possible and does not abuse its privileged position.
- The size of the royal family needs to be kept as small as possible, but realistically commensurate with the duties to be fulfilled.
- Care should be taken to prepare heirs for succession through higher education (preferably in more than one country) and a wide range of placements in public, military and diplomatic service.
- It must preserve and develop its unique fusion of symbolic state headship with the spectacle of a living family - the modern shape of former magic.
- It must accept a degree of public accountability and transparency - annual accounts signed off by a state auditor, annual reports, and responsive communications.
- Its special place in a nation needs to express monarchy's unique ability to give attention and value to aspects of people's lives which are not normally the focus of government action. In this sense, monarchy should concentrate on what governments cannot do.⁸

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⁷ Kihlberg & Söderlind 1961: s. 60.

⁸ Hazell & Morris 2020: s. 282.

It is hard to avoid the suspicion that these 25 political scientists, lawyers, historians & functionaries were not particularly suited to the task. If you want to innovate, the monarchy should rather be analysed by Marxists, economists, advertisers, organizational consultants, behavioural scientists & humanists. Above all it seems the royals themselves were not consulted. 2021, however, the podcast "Värvet" published a 75-year interview with King Carl Gustaf where he commented on the modern role of monarchy:

It's not a job. It is a calling. ... we have been given a task in this life, we have been brought up to it, we are proud of it, we take it very seriously, we try to carry on the family tradition, we are Swedish history. How we behave is not our private business. ... You can compare us to a family business – a corporation or a family farm. History, tradition and responsibility are important to us. To pass something on. A memory or something more concrete. We are our own history. We are also Swedish history. We have a responsibility to live up to. We are apolitical, but we are a catalyst. We have influence on society, but remain who we are.

...

I often think about when the Soviet Union collapsed [in 1991] and the Baltic states re-emerged. The first thing they tackled was building up the culture, renovating old houses, cities, and in that way get their history back, which had literally been stolen by the communists. To build a society there must be a base. This base is society's historical heritage, its culture, and on that everything rests. If you destroy the base there is nothing left. It was so tangible right then. The Baltic states have since prospered and there is trust, but everything rests on culture.⁹

Which I interpret to mean that Carl Gustaf considers his most important personal contribution to be in business (see chapter 16). The rest is about monarchy as a cultural heritage. The royal house is part of the national culture. If the national culture disappears, the nation disappears. If the nation disappears, democracy disappears. Which seems to be the current consensus.

⁹ Kristoffer Triumf. Värvet 75-årspecial. Carl XIV Gustaf. <värvet.se> (2021-04-26).

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