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Erik Söderman



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Erik Söderman

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

Abstract: Sweden’s dismantling of its semi-constitutional monarchy as a form of government was protracted and messy but not overly violent. The process started c.1718 and ended c.1974. Monarchy was not abolished, however, but sidelined. Its political-cum-administrative function was effectively folded into parliamentary democracy; its symbolic properties, its “true nature,” proved harder to manage. Among monarchists there were two lines of thought on the subject: emphasizing tradition or emphasizing modernity. The solution of choice was to “repurpose” it as protection for the two novelties of the nineteenth century—the nation state and democracy. With the King as a common symbol for the population, monarchy would be protection for the nation state and thereby also protection for democracy, because democracy can only exist within the framework of the nation state. The political-cum-administrative dismantling of monarchy took place 1848-1918, but the cultural wrangle about monarchy’s “true nature” took longer to resolve. Expanding on existing scholarship, this study demonstrates how Swedish monarchy, keeping some traditional veneer, has under the reign of Carl XVI Gustaf been reinterpreted from feudal remain to national symbol and a central part of modern democracy. Being this malleable I would venture that monarchy has no inherent properties, political or otherwise, but rather adapts to circumstances.

Keywords: Sweden; monarchy; republic; democracy



Figure 1. King Carl XVI Gustaf (b. Bernadotte). Monday 15 September 2003, Stockholm castle. Celebrating 30 years in office. Photo: Henrik Montgomery / TT.

2023 marks the quincentenary of Sweden’s hereditary monarchy and also the Golden jubilee of King Carl XVI Gustaf of the Bernadotte lineage. Most European monarchies are now long gone, but the Bernadottes endure. The purpose of this study is therefore to discuss the how and why of the Swedish monarchy’s functionality, societal effects, and staying power. Since Sweden’s republicans have been the drivers of the debate on the subject, it is also a discussion of Swedish republicanism. In this article I emphasize how the Swedish monarchy has changed over time. The effect of modern industrialization and democracy has been pervasive, and the Swedish monarchy has adapted—but at a price. The study’s contribution to the field of royal studies—as defined by Elena Woodacre in her essay “Understanding the mechanisms of monarchy”¹—is to treat monarchy as political science transitioning to culture. In this sense I aim to analyse the transition, and to examine how the Bernadottes have legitimized themselves against the

¹ Elena Woodacre, “Understanding the mechanisms of monarchy,” in Elena Woodacre, Lucinda H. S. Dean, Chris Jones, Russel E. Martin, and Zita Eva Rohr, ed., *The Routledge History of Monarchy* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1–15.

backdrop of these varying circumstances. The main problem with this approach is the *metaphysics* or “true nature” of monarchy, meaning that the physical reality and the definitions might vary, however that the label stays the same implies that it refers to some fixed concept—if not in this world, then in Plato’s world of ideas. It begs the old Marxian question: when does a change in quantity imply a change in quality?²

Access to the source material required for this analysis is significantly restricted. Virtually all the references I have found on the subject regret the lack or rather the bias in monarchy research. There are an enormous number of biographies and histories, but few studies of monarchy as a form of government or depictions from within. There is a growing scholarship on modern monarchies in general, but a dearth of research on the post-World War One Swedish monarchy (and the republican efforts to dismantle it) specifically. Writing biographies on royalty has devolved into a journalistic cottage industry. There is extensive journalism on Gustaf V and two biographies in the same vein, an unsatisfying biography on Gustaf VI Adolf by Roger Älmeberg, and further journalism about Carl XVI Gustaf, his family and reign.³ On the subject of the republican movement there is a 1982 history by Sten Sjöberg and Erik Åsard of the Swedish Republican Club.⁴ In political science there is some scholarship, mainly from Torbjörn Bergman, Cecilia Åse, Mikael Svanberg, and Mikael Holmqvist, all trying (and failing) to discern some overarching plan for the future role of the Swedish monarchy.⁵

The limitations of Älmeberg’s biography on Gustaf VI Adolf are emblematic of the research area. The situation is both by necessity and by royal design. A king’s biography is usually compiled from interviews, but neither Gustaf V nor Gustaf VI Adolf gave any, and

² Robert L. Carneiro, “The transition from quantity to quality: A neglected causal mechanism in accounting for social evolution,” *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*, 97.23 (7 November 2000): 12926-12931.

³ Gustaf von Platen, *Bakom den gyllene fasaden* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 2002); Stig Hadenius, *Gustaf V: En biografi* (Lund: Historiska media, 2007); Roger Älmeberg, *Gustaf VI Adolf: Regenten som räddade monarkin* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2017).

⁴ Sten Sjöberg and Erik Åsard, *Med monarkin i lasten: En bok om Bernadotternas republikaner* (Stockholm: Latina-förlaget, 1982).

⁵ Torbjörn Bergman, “Multiple Goals and Constitutional Design: How the Swedish King Lost His Formal Powers,” *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 3 (1992): 209–233; Cecilia Åse, “Vi är överens: Om monarki och demokrati,” in Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén, ed., *Sverigebilder. Det nationellas betydelse i politik och vardag* (Stockholm: Institutet för framtidsstudier, 2008), 49–65; Cecilia Åse, *Monarkins makt: Nationell gemenskap i svensk demokrati* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2009); Cecilia Åse, “Monarchical Manoeuvres: Gender, Nation and the Boundary Problem in Post-War Swedish Constitutional Development,” *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 21.3 (2013): 172–186; Mikael Svanberg, *Partierna och demokratin under författningsdebatten 1965-1980* (Göteborg: Diadolos AB, 2020); Mikael Holmqvist, *Kungen: Sveriges ledare* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2023).

Gustaf V had his personal archive burned. Aside from relying on court bulletins, anecdotes, and incidental findings, Älmeberg did have access to the Bernadotte archives. However, Gustaf VI Adolf's archive is partitioned, material about private issues is sealed until 2035, and Gustaf Adolf considered almost everything related to the Royal Family, those living or dead, to be private. Älmeberg suggests a lot of information is missing about the late King's time as Crown Prince, and no researchers seem to have been granted access to any archives from his actual reign. His grandson and successor, Carl XVI Gustaf, has shown little inclination to provide access to these documents, or to more recent archives, and so new biographies are forced to rehash old information. Consequently, current original research on monarchy is mostly focused on pre-Bernadotte eras and is thus outside the scope of this study.⁶ The lack of academic research has forced this author into a drawn-out hunt for additional information to try to elucidate the position and workings of the current monarchy, attempting to extract what is relevant and organise it as evidence, using the *observable* parts to estimate the *unobservable* whole.⁷ This has been handled by hermeneutics, implying a stepwise iterative approach both to describe and to analyze.⁸ Primary sources are added until the description stabilizes. Secondary sources are added until the analysis stabilizes. In the interest of simplicity, the many false starts are not belaboured.

Debate about the Bernadotte dynasty's symbolic properties or "true nature" seems to have started at the time of Jean Bernadotte's coronation as King Karl XIV Johan in 1818. During this period the King of Sweden was popularly understood as being a guarantor of the political and social structure of the Estates of the Realm.⁹ By 1974, the monarchy was rather seen as instrumental to the peaceful transition between the estate society and democracy. Further, the majority considered it necessary for social stability and the nation's self-image even after the transition. The republican minority did not believe in

⁶ For some exceptions see, Nils Ekedahl, ed., *En dynasti blir till: Medier, myter och makt kring Karl XIV Johan och familjen Bernadotte* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2010); Per Sandin, *Ett kungahus i tiden. Den bernadottska dynastins möte med medborgarsamhället c:a 1810-1860* (Uppsala universitet: Historiska institutionen, PhD thesis, 2011); Fabian Persson, *Survival and Revival in Sweden's Court and Monarchy, 1718-1930* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁷ The data may be found at the authors website. <http://thebernadotteproject.eriksoderman.se/>

⁸ Hermeneutics "refers to the idea that one's understanding of the text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts and one's understanding of each individual part is established by reference to the whole. The [hermeneutic] circle is a metaphor for the procedure of transforming one's understanding of the part and the whole through iterative recontextualization." Wikipedia, "Hermeneutic Circle," accessed 8 November 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutic_circle.

⁹ Kekke Stadin, *Stånd och genus i stormaktstidens Sverige* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2004).

this change of heart, considering the monarchy untrustworthy-cum-obsolete even in this new guise.¹⁰ Analysing the diverse ideologies, ideas, mentality, and culture that both drove and resulted from the 200-year transition from feudalism to modernity, from constitutional to symbolic monarchy, from Estates of the Realm to democracy is complex even when restricted to the Swedish case. This study attempts to elucidate the transition by navigating between differing scientific frameworks and the vantage points-cum-class interests associated with Monarchy, Republic, and Parliamentary democracy.

The older scientific framework now out of favour is the dialectical method associated with Hegel and Marx. Thesis + Anti-thesis → Synthesis. The main two dialectics relevant for this study are Feudalism + Enlightenment → Modernity, and Monarchy + Republic → Parliamentary democracy. This should not be construed as linear progress, the one replacing the other, but as them fusing. Marxists' call remains "contradictions;" Conservatives call them "traditions." The newer scientific framework in the same vein is building databases of historical régimes for cross-sectional or time-series analysis of the existence or efficacy of different forms of government. This has been used for validating older studies of Montesquieu and others: the autocrat brings status quo, both political and economic.¹¹ The enlightened monarch tries to modernize.¹² There is also a cultural transition framework as in monarchy "evolving" from absolute to enlightened to constitutional to symbolic, and the royals following suit. In the Swedish case "evolving" meant compromise, the royals adapting to liberalism and then social democracy, and trying to prove themselves innocuous and/or useful in an ever-changing political environment. The republicans mistrusted their agenda, after 1933 even comparing them to Nazis, tyranny being monarchy's "true nature." There is a large body of literature on Sweden's resulting

¹⁰ Cecilia Åse, *Monarkins makt: Nationell gemenskap i svensk demokrati* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2009).

¹¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Political Modernization of Traditional Monarchies," *Daedalus*, 95.3 (1966): 763–788; Andrej Kokkonen and Anders Sundell, "Delivering Stability – Primogeniture and Autocratic Survival in European Monarchies 1000–1800," *American Political Science Review*, 108.2 (2014): 438–453; Carsten Anckar, "Constitutional monarchies and semi-constitutional monarchies: a global historical study, 1800–2017," *Contemporary Politics*, 27.1 (2021); John Gerring, Tore Wig, Wouter Veenendaal, Daniel Weitzel, Jan Teorell, and Kyosuke Kikuta, "Why Monarchy? The Rise and Demise of a Regime Type," *Comparative Political Studies*, 54.3–4 (2020).

¹² François Bluche, *Le despotisme éclairé* (Paris: Fayard, 1968); H M. Scott, ed., *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

social harmony, it being the “middle way.”¹³ The republicans, meanwhile, consider it a sham.¹⁴

Other frameworks exist. The republican framework seems to be that modernity is equivalent to the enlightenment and must be accepted as a package, thus excluding monarchy as a feudal remain. This limits the research and the debate to what is in essence conspiracy theories, different parties supporting monarchy for their own nefarious reasons or misguided goals. In the name of progress, the old world must die. The origin of this line of thought is obscure. Possibly it has something to do with the German *sonderweg* debate: Prussia mixing the modern with the backward, supposedly leading up to World War One and the Nazis.¹⁵ The monarchic framework seems rather to be systems theory, implying that society consists of interconnected parts, where changes in one part percolate through the system until a new equilibrium is reached. Monarchy therefore adapts to changing circumstances, rather than dying off. This can be analysed within the framework of, for instance, Talcott Parsons’ theory of Structural functionalism.¹⁶ The parliamentary framework, favoured by the Swedish political scientists, is the supposedly neutral “decision theory” in which two parties face off, and the arguments assembled and weighed. Payoffs are noted and compromises are made until both are satisfied. The big name here is political scientist Leif Lewin.¹⁷

Neither of the approaches above are “functional” in the sense that they factor into day-to-day royal business. Rather they apply to tradition, symbolism, “true nature,” etc., and are better understood as public discourses. The following study tracks these discourses-cum-narratives c.1718-2023, and their reception, emphasizing the Bernadotte period (1818-2023). The overarching narrative that emerges is a feudal monarchy out of step with time, and the attempts to modernize, dismantle, or repurpose it. The study treats this as three partly overlapping processes: 1) the functional critique of the estate-based

¹³ Marquis W. Childs, *Sweden: the middle way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936); Josiah R. Baker, *Constructing the People’s Home: The Political and Economic Origins and Early Development of the “Swedish Model” (1879-1976)* (The Catholic University of America: Department of Politics, PhD thesis, 2011).

¹⁴ Edda Manga, “Kungligt begär: Den undertryckta konflikten mellan monarki och demokrati,” in Anders Burman and Shamal Kaveh, ed., *Demokratien och det politiska : Essäer om samtidens politiska tillstånd* (Södertörn: Södertörns högskola, Södertörn Studies in Intellectual and Cultural History 2, 2020), 116.

¹⁵ Jürgen Kocka, “German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German *Sonderweg*,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23.1 (January 1988): 3–16; Svante Nordin, *Världsandens partisaner: Filosoferna, Tredje riket och den liberala demokratin*, (Stockholm: Fri tanke, 2023).

¹⁶ Talcott Parsons, *The structure of social action: a study in social theory with special reference to a group of recent European writers* (New York: McGraw-Hill publications in sociology, 1937).

¹⁷ Leif Lewin, *Ideologi och strategi: svensk politik under 100 år* (Stockholm: Norstedts juridik, 1992), 119–162.

society, 2) the republican critique of the bourgeois monarchy, and 3) the mythological-cum-philosophical discourse of tradition and “true nature” that legitimises Swedish monarchy, and by implication preserves the status quo. I keep these three processes separate until the accession of Carl XVI Gustaf, who has had to deal with the fallout.

The political history of the 1809 and 1974 Swedish monarchy: the 1809 Constitution and the Beginning of the Bernadotte Monarchy

In 1718 Karl XII (r. 1697-1718), the last of the Swedish “warrior kings,” died in battle. Sweden had a parliament based on the Estates of the Realm, the Riksdag of the Estates, dating from 1435, and including nobility, priests, burghers, and peasants. Karl XII had sidelined it, but now it was convened. The heir to the throne was Karl XII’s sister, Ulrika Eleanora (r.1718-1720) who, when the Estates refused her terms, ceded her position to her German husband who was elected as Fredrik I (r. 1720-1751). Under a new constitution, sanctioned by the Estates and not by royal decree, government would be conducted by a Council of State, chaired by the king but dominated by the nobility. When peace was brokered between Russia and Sweden in 1721, Fredrik I was forced to accept Sweden’s loss of its Baltic provinces, while Russia promised not to interfere in Swedish affairs, but rather to serve as guarantor of the 1720 constitution. Between 1740-1743, 1789-1790 and 1808-1809, Sweden tried repeatedly to regain its lost provinces. Following the first attempt, the Russians forced the Swedes to elect the German Adolf Fredrik (r. 1751-1771) as heir to the throne, leading to Sweden’s last peasant rebellion. The second attempt ended in a draw. Following the third attempt, coinciding with the Napoleonic wars, Sweden also lost Finland.

The period 1771-1809 under Gustav III (r. 1771-1792) and his son Gustav IV Adolf (r. 1792-1809) was one of constitutional disarray. In 1772 and 1789 Gustav tried to resurrect the Carolingian autocracy of 1693, supposedly to strengthen the country. The Estates were sidelined but occasionally convened in order to ratify some decision. The nobles lost out in the subsequent politicking, and in 1789 their economic and political privileges were abolished in order for Gustav to garner support from the other three estates. In 1792, then, Sweden was in an anomalous situation in which the sidelined nobility favored a republic while the other three estates favored monarchy. This stalemate ended with Gustav being assassinated by a disgruntled noble. His son was then still a minor and, until he came of age in 1800, his uncle Karl was acting regent. In 1809, however, the loss of Finland catalyzed an aristocratic coup leading to Gustav Adolf’s dethronement and his entire family, including his son and heir, being exiled. Gustav Adolf was yet again replaced by his uncle, this time

as King Karl XIII (r. 1809-1818), provided the uncle accepted a new constitution severely limiting monarchical powers, which he did. Gustav Adolf was under the impression that he was protected by divine right, but losing a war often meant losing your crown as well.¹⁸ The 1809 Constitution is best understood as a revival of the 1772 constitution but with a number of safeguards against an ambitious King. It was also an attempt to preserve the Swedish estate-society. Since it was revised no less than 389 times, however, it is difficult to make a general statement about it.¹⁹ The political scientist and republican Herbert Tingsten described it as autocracy by proxy, just waiting to revert back to the real thing.²⁰

As Karl XIII, now a sexagenarian in poor health, had no surviving children, a new heir was elected for the King to adopt as Crown Prince. In 1810, following the death of the first choice, the Danish prince Christian August, from a stroke, the Frenchman Jean Bernadotte was adopted as Crown Prince Karl Johan. From his arrival in Sweden that year Karl Johan took a leading role, acting as regent for his declining adoptive father, the King. Having risen to prominence as a soldier under Napoleon in France, the new Crown Prince was a charismatic and successful martial leader. He was expected to win Finland back, but instead opened diplomatic relations with the Tsar, joined Napoleon's enemies, and accepted Norway as a replacement for Finland.

As part of the Kalmar Union, Norway had been a de facto province of Denmark since the fourteenth century, and as Denmark was allied with Napoleonic France, the Danes were forced to cede Norway to Sweden as part of peace negotiations. The initial idea had been to incorporate Norway into Sweden as another province, but the Norwegians resurrected their own historic kingdom, elected a Danish king, fast-tracked a constitution, and started a war of liberation against Sweden, which they promptly lost. However, the agreement of the 1814 Convention of Moss to end the war recognised Norway as a separate Kingdom with its own parliament, who then elected Karl XIII as their new King forming a hereditary personal union of the Swedish and Norwegian crowns.²¹ The Swedes also mostly accepted

¹⁸ Cathleen Sarti, *Deposing Monarchs. Domestic Conflict and State Formation, 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 2023).

¹⁹ Margareta Brundin and Magnus Isberg, ed., *Maktbalans och kontrollmakt: 1809 års händelser, idéer och författningsverk i ett tvåhundraårigt perspektiv* (Stockholm: Sveriges riksdag, 2009); Anders Sundin, *1809: Statskuppen och regeringsformens tillkomst som tolkningsprocess* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, historiska institutionen, PhD thesis, 2006, 227).

²⁰ Herbert Tingsten, "Monarkin i kristid," *Tiden* (1943), 398–412.

²¹ The Norwegian numbering of its Swedish kings 1814-1905 differs from the Swedish numbering: Karl XIII of Sweden (Karl II of Norway), Karl XIV Johan of Sweden (Karl III Johan of Norway) and Karl XV of Sweden (Karl IV of Norway). To avoid confusion the Swedish (official) numbering is used throughout.

the new Norwegian (Eidsvoll) Constitution, which General Magnus Björnstierna, who led the Swedish Moss-negotiations, described thus:

This “masterly production” is, with a few modifications, a translation of the Constitution framed at Cadiz in 1812 by the Spanish Cortes, renewed in 1820, and of which we know the deplorable history and the still more painful end [1812-1813, 1820-1823]: whereas this Spanish constitution is itself a copy of the French constitution of the year 1791, which led, in the short time of two years, to that of the National Convention and of the Comité du Salut Public. To this groundwork was added whatever the Swedish Constitution of 1809 contained restrictive of the power of the crown. This may explain how “this production of a mastermind” could be framed in the rather short time of four days.²²

With its martial dignity at least in part restored, Sweden opted for peace. The political lesson for the future was rammed home in Bernadotte’s inaugural speech as King Karl XIV Johan (r.1818-1844) in 1818 and has been Swedish policy ever since:

Yes gentlemen, peace is the only honourable goal of a wise and enlightened government. It is not the extent of a state, which constitutes its strength and independence; It is its laws, its trade, its industry and above all its national sentiment. Sweden has certainly suffered great losses, but Sweden’s honour has not suffered the slightest ... let us accept our fate. It has left us land sufficient for our needs and the iron to defend us!²³

Inching Towards Parliamentary Democracy (1809-1974)

Until 1809 Swedish national history was considered the history of its kings, who were themselves understood as part of the estate society or traditional feudal system, similar to other monarchies across Europe. By the late eighteenth century this was crumbling. Sweden never adopted a true feudal system, implying serfs working the nobility’s *latifundia* (large scale farming), but its nearest equivalent, the estate society, was not abolished until 1865. Concomitant traditions lingered. Right up to c.1974 Sweden was permeated by its “feudal heritage” implying recognition of mutual duties and obligations, loyalty oaths,

²² Magnus Björnstierna, *On the moral state and political union of Sweden and Norway in answer to Mr S. Laings statement* (London, 1840), 5.

²³ Karl XIV Johan, “Bernadottes tal inför ständerna. Stockholm 5 November 1810,” in Arvid Ahnfeldt and J. P. van Suchtelen, *Två krönte rivaler: Bernadotteminnen, del 1-2 (1810-1811)* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1887), 191.

influential nobility, and a centralised executive bureaucracy, as well as a sense of both historical traditions and *Folkhemmet* (the notion of society as a family with a paternalistic role for both the social democrats and the Royal Family).

The first three Bernadotte-kings Karl XIV Johan, Oscar I (r. 1844-1859), and Karl XV (r. 1859-1872) had political influence through the Estates. Operating in this system the monarchy had difficulty modernising, especially under Karl XIV Johan. Eighteenth-century “corporate patriarchy” was entrenched both economically and politically, the King administering the country as his private fief; consequently, everything lagged.²⁴ For example, no license to build railways was granted until after Karl Johan’s death. State-funded Swedish trunk railways were not initiated by Parliament until 1854 under Oscar I and not completed until 1892 under Oscar II. There were a number of reasons for this, including Karl Johan’s mercantilist beliefs that the iron should be exported to help the balance of trade rather than be used within the realm, desire to protect competing revenue interests such as Gota Canal (across southern Sweden), and general wariness about the effects of modernization. Sweden was an agrarian society that feared the social consequences of industrialization. The country got by, but there was no economic progress. Swedish GNP per capita remained practically constant between 1809 and 1865. Meanwhile population growth created a large group of landless people, by 1865 making up over 50 percent of the population. Lacking options many of these emigrated, mostly to America, which has always been seen as a failure of Swedish society, and thus its monarchy. Sweden’s industrialization only started in earnest after the estate society was abolished.

Under Karl XV the estate-based parliament was on its last legs. Two-thirds of the (male) population lacked political representation: landless rural dwellers (crofters, soldiers, farmhands, tenants), agricultural and industrial labor, and large parts of the non-noble middle class (officials, teachers, doctors, industrialists proper, publicists, and officers). Proposals to augment the old estates, maybe even by creating additional estates, were deemed just a way of postponing the inevitable. In 1865 minister of Justice Louis de Geer (de facto prime minister) managed to push through an acceptable replacement, a two-chamber parliament of the French 1814-model based on income and property, but still a monarchy.

²⁴ Lars Petterson, “Forskning om svensk politisk historia 1809-1865,” in Britta Lövgren, Tommy Möller, Torbjörn Nilsson, and Lars Petterson, *Svensk politisk historia: en kommenterad litteraturöversikt* (Stockholm: Humanistisk-Samhällsvetenskapliga forskningsrådet, Brytpunkt, 1993), 7–64.

As De Geer's political system initially only guaranteed the richest 5-6 percent of the population political influence, you may be forgiven for thinking that the socialists in retrospect would be negative towards it. In social democratic history, however, it was initially regarded as progressive because according to Marxist theory, the bourgeois class society was a precursor to the coming proletarian people's state. As the first "bourgeois king" of Sweden, Karl XV was very popular. In his memoirs De Geer stated that his system did not alter the King's position in society, arguing that:

strength or weakness of kingship does not depend on the form of representation; and in a country where the kingship has such deep and secure roots as ours, it seems to have more to gain than to lose, from bringing the form of representation closer to its purpose, which is to form as true an expression of the people's opinion as possible.²⁵

Between 1866 and 1974 De Geer's form of government was gradually reworked to fit the requirements of party based parliamentary democracy and the franchise extended to 75 percent. As a precursor of modern day parliamentarism De Geer's form of government today has a positive but undeserved reputation. In the four-chamber Riksdag of the Estates passage of legislation required a majority of three estates. In De Geer's two-chamber Riksdag, legislation had to pass both chambers, thus each one had an absolute veto, requiring royal intervention or compromise in the committees. Prior to the establishment of political parties voting was at personal discretion and contentious legislation such as taxes and the military draft took decades to pass. Oscar II (r. 1872-1907) and Gustaf V (r. 1907-1950) lacked the political influence over parliament of their predecessors but got by. Author and political journalist, August Strindberg, described their modus operandi such:

The constitutional monarch, in theory an autocrat, in reality a political nonentity, has sought new ways for exerting influence. As he appoints all senior officials, civil, ecclesiastical and military, the regent has an enormous indirect influence, partly by appointing and partly by passing over. ... The kings formal powers ... are now zero, but he retains *influence* through doling out social prestige ...²⁶

²⁵ Torgny T. Segerstedt, *Svenska Akademien i sin samtid: en idéhistorisk studie. Del 2, 1844-1886* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1986), 133-134.

²⁶ August Strindberg, "Hov-stat," *Afton-Tidningen*, 25 May 1910, in Harry Järv, *Strindbergsfejden: 465 debattinlägg och kommentarer, del 1* (Staffanstorps: Cavefors, 1968), 29; "Heder och Karakter i Den konstitutionella Monarkien," *Social-Demokraten*, 31 August 1910, in Harry Järv, *del 2*, 618.

This is, however, debated, with others suggesting that Oscar predominantly succeeded in blocking the Liberal-majority second chamber with the help of the Conservative-majority first chamber, a tactic Gustaf V was able to continue until the landmark 1919 general election.²⁷

Straddling old and new, Oscar II and Gustaf V were controversial figures. During their reigns the government officials' responsibilities increased and monarchical control declined. Their advisers became ministers with specialist expertise that no king could match. Reigning meant relinquishing rule to those the king trusted. By the end of World War One, Gustaf V's role—in practice, if not in law—was reduced to chairing the decision-making council and countersigning the government's decisions. But since his constitutional role was to legitimize these decisions, his importance was exaggerated. He was refashioned as his “advisor's advisor” and as a safeguard against ministerial abuse of power, but this was all theatrics.²⁸ He had no influence on the agenda or the outcome, hammering through 700-800 decisions a week. This continued under Gustaf VI Adolf (r. 1950-1973). Besides the rubber-stamping, Gustaf Adolf had weekly meetings with the social democratic PM, now Tage Erlander. Erlander explained government policy, and in return received what King's wisdom there was on the subject:

I do not believe that there is any such trusting and unconventional cooperation between the Head of State and the Prime Minister ... characterized by the greatest openness and ... a pleasant mixture of seriousness and jokes. Anyone [believing] the king lacks humour—you hear this sometimes—does not know him ... [he] has a healthy and utterly liberating sense of humour. He often ... [demonstrates] a distinct ability to see and grasp the incongruous aspects of things ... The king's humour has certainly been a valuable contribution to the collaboration.²⁹

In 1954, a twenty-year process began to revise the constitution in line with political reality. This was done in two stages: the 1954-1963 non-political “Inquiry” to determine current praxis, and the 1966-1972 party-political “Preparation,” to outline the new form of government. As regards monarchy's role in government the “Inquiry” opted for the status quo:

²⁷ Simon Johannes Boëthius, *Sveriges historia till våra dagar, del 13: Oscar II* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1925), 260–261.

²⁸ Gunnar Heckscher, *Trygga folkstyret!: ett inlägg i författningsdebatten* (Uppsala: Medborgarskolan, 1963), 28–29.

²⁹ Stig Ramel, *Minnen: Pojken i dörren* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1994), 176–177.

The fact that a country is very large, that different peoples are brought together within a state, that there are strong divisions within the population are some of the circumstances, which can be invoked as a reason for the Head of State to be given special duties as political leader or as arbitrator between conflicting interests. As to Sweden, on the other hand, applies that our country is a small unitary state with comparatively very moderate regional differences, that the country has a population that is unusually homogeneous in terms of descent, language, culture and religion and that therefore the minority problems mentioned above do not exist and follows that political life and the societal organizations are characterized by uniformity and a remarkable degree of undisturbed operation. Against this background, it is difficult to argue that there is a need to add any extensive powers to the Head of State. Therefore, in view of this investigation, the specific tasks of the Head of State, other than those of a representative and ceremonial nature, should be limited to those of the functioning of the parliamentary system. In relation to the current form of government, this means a strong limitation of the powers of the King. *However, in the light of current constitutional practice, the proposal of the inquiry on this point can essentially be regarded as a codification and clarification of how it actually operates.*³⁰

Fearing a deadlock, the party-political draft committee avoided the monarchical issue for as long as it could, but in the end sidelined it. Responsibility for forming a government was transferred to the Riksdag Speaker and the Head of State would no longer chair its meetings. Representation and some honorary duties remained. The implementation was delayed until the enacting of the 1974 constitution, apparently because PM Tage Erlander had promised Gustaf VI Adolf that the monarchy would remain unchanged during his lifetime.³¹

This so-called Torekov-compromise of August 1971 was in the debate described as the death knell of the Swedish monarchy. According to a social democratic MP it had been reduced to “an exclusively heraldic phenomenon;” the responsible conservative MP was even nicknamed “king-slayer.”³² Monarchy was expected to languish, lose popular support, and be removed in a subsequent referendum. A recurring republican debate during Carl

³⁰ Författningsutredningen. *Författningsutredningen, del 6. Sveriges statsskick, del 2: Motiv – förslag till regeringsform* (Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet, SOU 1963:17), 137–138.

³¹ Författningsutredningen. *Författningsutredningen, del 6. Sveriges statsskick, del 2; Grundlagberedningen. Ny regeringsform, ny riksdagsordning: betänkande avgivet av Grundlagberedningen* (Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet, SOU 1972:15).

³² Arne Gadd, social democratic politician, interviewed c.1974; Jan Mårtensson, *Att kyssa ett träd. Memoarer* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2000), 201.

Gustaf's first fifty years (1973-2023) has been about why this did not happen.³³ This study is an attempt to make sense of “a supposedly modern people hanging on to its feudal past”³⁴ and feelings that “Sweden without a monarchy is no longer Sweden.”³⁵

Table 1. The joint activities of King Carl Gustaf and Queen Silvia 1997-2011. Annual averages of number of activities. N=4358 during 15 years. One activity ≤ 1 day. The numbers are rounded to the nearest integer. (Source: The Royal Court's annual report of external activities. The author's coding of a diary.)

	N _{CG}	N _{Silvia}
Torekov		
Parliamentary meeting	2	2
Cabinet meeting	4	
Foreign Affairs Committee	6	
Politicians (Swedish)	10	5
Politicians (foreign)	16	5
State visits	16	16
Diplomats	38	6
Protection		
World Scout Foundation	14	3
World Life Fund WWF	5	
Royal Academies	20	9
Others	10	5
Representation		
National Day Celebration	3	3
Inaugerations	16	7
County and Municipal visits	5	3
Foreign travel	8	6
Sports	10	5
Swedish Armed Forces	8	1
Church	8	8
Hunting	4	1
Family	8	8
Scholarships and Medals	24	9
Royal Colloquium	4	1
Others	51	6

³³ Sten Sjöberg and Erik Åsard, *Med monarkin i lasten: En bok om Bernadotternas republikaner* (Stockholm: Latina-förlaget, 1982); Lena Rainer, *För Sverige - Carl XVI Gustaf i tiden* (Malmö: Sydsvenskan, 1996); Mats Ögren ed., *För Sverige - Nuförtiden. En antologi om Carl XIV Gustaf* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget DN, 2006); Cecilia Åse, *Monarkins makt: Nationell gemenskap i svensk demokrati* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2009).

³⁴ Vilhelm Moberg, *Därför är jag republikan* (Stockholm: Folket i Bild, 1955, new edition 1966).

³⁵ Bo Setterlind, *Därför är jag monarkist* (Stockholm: Medéns, 1955); Sven Svensson, “Därför är jag monarkist: ett debattinlägg till Vilhelm Mobergs skrift ‘Därför är jag republikan’,” *Utblick från en byggd*, 1 (1967).

Table 2. Queen Silvia’s own activities 1997-2011. Annual averages of number of activities. N=1214 during 15 years. One activity ≤ 1 day. The numbers are rounded to the nearest integer. (Source: The Royal Court’s annual report of external activities. The author’s coding of a diary.)

	N _{Silvia}
Protection	
Silviahemmet	11
Mentor Foundation	9
World Childhood	15
Other	6
Representation	
Scholarships	2
Women's Associations	2
Others	44

The Swedish Republicans

The main reason for the Swedish monarchy’s resilience seems to have been the lack of an alternative to replace it. Sweden’s “Age of Liberty” (1719-1772) saw much discussion about the virtues of republics, but no actual politics to implement one. Elective monarchy (when there is no heir) or a semi-republic (regency during a royal minority) was the nearest thing. There was no equivalent of Cromwell’s English republic or the Polish republic of nobles. In the late-1700s, though, an alternative concept of the Swedish polity to that based on its “feudal heritage” began to emerge as a people’s history of freedom-loving smallholders, most likely inspired by the American Revolution. Gustav III was a keen admirer of French culture and enlightenment philosophy and, possibly because of this, or maybe just to get them out of Sweden to avoid further parliamentary strife, he encouraged his nobles to enlist in the French expeditionary to fight in the American War of Independence (1775-1783), the rationale being that the freedom-loving Swedes had much in common with their American compatriots. Hundreds of Swedes fought with distinction against the English and returned with firsthand experience of a modern enlightenment republic.³⁶ Previously the concept of republic had been rather hazy, applicable to any state at all; an ideal state free from oppression; or a society that separated politics, business, and private life. Its

³⁶ Adolph B. Benson, *Sweden and the American Revolution* (New York, 1926); H Arnold Barton, *Scandinavia in the Revolutionary Era, 1760-1815* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 107–125 (chapter 5).

government could be monarchy (autocracy), aristocracy (minority rule), or democracy (majority rule). The ideal was a mixed form. From 1787 the concept included an elected president in the American manner. The impact on Swedish politics of the French and American republics seems to have been limited, however. Possibly the bloodshed, especially in France, as well as American slavery, was dissuasive; certainly, Swedish republican discourse ceased for some time.³⁷ Enlightenment philosophy was pervasive though, it being common for Swedish nobles to study, or at least spend time, in Paris, and Swedes became known as “the Frenchmen of the North.”³⁸

The year 1848 witnessed a series of political upheavals across Europe: “The Springtime of the People.” In Sweden this was a fairly minor affair. Workers’ associations and newspapers were persecuted but just hundreds rather than thousands were wounded in the unrest, and only eighteen killed. The lasting effect was a republican youth movement, later identified with politicians such as August Blanche (1811-1868), Julius Mankell (1828-1897), and Adolf Hedin (1834-1905).³⁹ Hedin is mostly known for his *Fifteen Letters from a Democrat* (1868), in which he attacked the monarchy as no longer having any purpose, merely being theatre for the masses:

There was a time, when the kingdom, so to speak, was society and progress depended on it; this was due both to the nature of the style of government and to the great personalities. But times have changed enormously. Now, if the citizens obey the law, if taxes are paid, if the public spirit is encouraged to make great efforts for patriotic ends, in a word, if society holds together and moves forward, no one can now say that in a constitutional monarchy this is due to the personality of the monarch, which without any particular inconvenience to the country can be very insignificant; nor is the form of monarchy of any importance. Under such circumstances, it seems to me most correct that the royals do not seek to maintain an external facade, which is not matched by internal content.⁴⁰

³⁷ Anders Lindeberg, *Revolution och republik* (Stockholm, 1838).

³⁸ Frans Michael Franzén, “Dagbok 1795,” in Henrik Schück and Karl Warburg *Illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria del 4: Gustavianska tiden* (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers förlag, 1928), 561.

³⁹ Victor Lundberg, “‘Den siste af de typiske 1848 års män i Sverige.’ Anteckningar om Julius Mankell och den svenska demokratins förhistoria,” *Historisk Tidskrift*, 3 (2005): 421–440.

⁴⁰ Adolf Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar af den nya representationen: femton bref från en demokrat till svenska riksdagens medlemmar* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1868), 64; [Possibly Hedin had read the political journalist Walter Bagehot's essay *The English Constitution*, published in 1867. There are similarities in the arguments.]

This critique was ongoing. Monarchy was considered incompatible with bourgeois modernity. Historian Magnus Olofsson has recently argued that this “neo-liberal republicanism” (as opposed to the more generic Europe-wide “liberalism”) played a far more important role in the transition than it has been given credit for, in a clear parallel with similar “misremembering” elsewhere.⁴¹ Here may be mentioned Isidor Kjellberg (1841-1895) and Alexander Nilsson (1840-1893) of the Scandinavian Movement. Kjellberg published a short-lived republican newspaper “Skandinaven” (1881-1883), and Nilsson published several books on the history of monarchy and republic as forms of government.⁴²

By 1889, the rise of socialism and working-class politics complicated things further. The 1889 republicans were an unstable, extra-parliamentary motley left—radical liberals, social democrats, communists, and syndicalists—and party-formation was not complete until 1917. Gustaf V’s first decade (1907-1917) was a continuous constitutional battle which ended in a “disguised” republic aka parliamentary democracy. The two most distinguished republicans were the liberal party leader, Karl Staaff (1860-1915), and the social democratic (formerly liberal) party leader, Hjalmar Branting (1860-1925). Branting initially wanted to abolish monarchy, but ultimately opted for Staaff’s liberal parliamentary democracy along English lines, with a symbolic Head of State. This was internally criticised and, from 1911, demand for a republic was inscribed in the party program. The demand was however ignored amidst the parliamentary disorder following the 1917-1921 introduction of universal suffrage. Although the liberal Nils Edén (1917-1920) led a majority government, the next thirteen were minority governments or made up of non-party officials.

As mentioned, the government required bicameral support to avoid parliamentary deadlock. This was usually achieved by balancing ministerial posts. Prime Ministers often had to accept non-party ministers. Between 1920 and 1936, Gustaf V helped form these coalitions. In 1936 the Social Democrats, minus its former extreme left, entered coalition with the Farmers’ Union. This was Sweden’s most monarchic party, which meant that the republican demands had to wait another twenty years until 1957, when the coalition, with a hiatus 1945-1951 of Social Democratic one-party rule, broke up.⁴³

⁴¹ Magnus Olofsson, “What do the New Liberals want?” *The forgotten republicanism in Swedish politics, 1867-1872* (Lund: Lund University, Department of Economic History, Lund Papers in Economic History, 2022:234), 22.

⁴² Alexander Nilsson, *Envälde och folkvälde* (Stockholm, 1880); *Republiken och kungadömet* (Stockholm, 1885).

⁴³ Herbert Tingsten, *Den svenska socialdemokratins idéutveckling, del 2* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1941), 121-122; Gunnar Gerdner, *Det svenska regeringsproblemet 1917-1920: Från majoritetskoalition till minoritets-parlamentarism* (Skrifter utgivna av statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala genom Axel Bruswitz XXV, 1946); Elis Håstad, “Konungen och regeringsbildningen,” *Svensk tidskrift*, 34 (1947): 367-373; Gunnar Gerdner, *Parlamentarismens*

Examples from abroad were not encouraging. Finland had become a Republic in 1919, but its president was no hero to the Swedish republicans who considered him both a class enemy and a killer. The 1933 fate of the Weimar-republic further dampened the republican project.⁴⁴ In 1938 even the initiator of the 1911 republican demand, Zeta Höglund, was despondent:

Swedish democracy has, in cooperation with a loyal royal power, probably better endured the past decade than a young Swedish republic would have. ... [Gustaf V,] appear[ing] without superhuman pretensions, without dictatorship manners, is preferable to the modern dictators ... constitutional monarchy is [not] the last word of constitutional development. We remain faithful to our republican ideals, but the issue has lost all topicality in a situation where the monarch himself almost functions as if he were a President of the Republic.⁴⁵

Branting's successor as Social Democratic party leader, Per Albin Hansson (1885-1946), was also rethinking his stance on monarchy, arguing that it was changing in nature:

King Gustaf is a conservative man, but conservatism is an evil only when it lacks the will to understand, adapt and convey ... [Gustaf V's] conservatism ... is steeped in understanding, consideration and tolerance. He is a democratic king—not in his political views but in his personal orientation ... [He has] accepted that the kingdom should be governed by the people's will ... [and] actively worked for majority governments in the spirit of democratic parliamentarianism. Rooted in a time so different from ours, he has grown together with the new society in such a way that it has gained him general popularity.⁴⁶

The republican debate did not restart until after World War Two. Most active was the social democratic youth league (SSU), the non-party-affiliated Republican Club, and the two debaters Vilhelm Moberg (syndicalist) and Herbert Tingsten (social democrat, later liberal). The social democratic party (SAP) thought the Republican demand encroached on SAP's

kris i Sverige vid 1920-talets början (Skrifter utgivna av statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala genom C. A. Hessler, 1954); Riksdagsgrupperna, *Regeringsbildningen: studier* (Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet, SOU 1970:16); Henrik Hermerén, *Regeringsbildningen i flerpartisystem* (Lund: Lund Political Studies, PhD thesis, 1975).

⁴⁴ John Lindgren, *Varför Sverige icke är republik* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1955), 56–57.

⁴⁵ Tingsten, *Den svenska socialdemokratins idéutveckling*, 132–133.

⁴⁶ Per Albin Hansson, "Konungen landsfadern," in Anonymous, ed., *Konung Gustaf V 80 år: 1858-1938* (Stockholm: Åhlén & Åkerlunds förlag, 1938), 8-12. [Abbreviated.]

territory, and in addition that it was unpopular with the voters: “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.”⁴⁷ After Carl XVI Gustaf’s accession, the Republican Club went in decline, a situation summarized in 1976 by the royal court’s press spokesman Sten Egnell: “The Republican hopes were there but they were dashed by the fact that the king quickly acquired a profile. People need tradition ... In addition, we have the help of the weekly press.”⁴⁸

Come 1999 there were but a handful of members left of the old guard, but the Republican Club, now renamed the Republican Association, recovered. What prompted the revival is unclear, but the Association is nowadays less of a lobbying organisation, more of a debating society. Members represent at least four lines of thought: activism (countering the perceived threat of the monarchy with the support of the mass media establishment in spreading its outdated message); pragmatism (belief that the monarchy had become irrelevant under the new constitution leaving Sweden a de facto republic and that eventually it would disappear altogether like other outdated institutions); structuralism (belief that monarchy is a cultural complex, a way to relate to and perceive the world, a social and intellectual structure so abolishing monarchy also means abolishing its secondary institutions, history, monuments, and traditions); and Enlightenment radicalism (promoting selected parts of Enlightenment-thinking, particularly revolution, meritocracy, and atheism, but viewing monarchy itself as less of a problem than the apathy of the people).⁴⁹

The Bernadotte monarchy’s “true nature.”

Since the Swedish hereditary monarchy is now almost 500 years old, its perceived nature has changed considerably, from sanctioned by God to sanctioned by tradition, and, lately, by economic utility. Sweden’s early history is rather hazy, but following a War of Liberation (1521-1523) from the Kalmar Union under the Danish Monarchy, the Swedish leader, Gustav Vasa, was elected King, and in 1544 the Riksdag of the Swedish Estates established a nominally hereditary monarchy for Vasa’s descendants. As Sweden lost what was left of its

⁴⁷ Arne O. L. Bäckman, *SSU-kongress: motion*, 1955:87.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, “Intervju med Sten Egnell,” *Kvällsposten*, 12 April 1976.

⁴⁹ Vilhelm Moberg, *Därför är jag republikan* (Stockholm: Folket i Bild, 1955, new edition 1966); Sten Sjöberg and Erik Åsard, *Med monarkin i lasten: En bok om Bernadotternas republikaner* (Stockholm: Latina-förlaget, 1982); Bengt Hall, *Republik!: om demokratin, kungahuset och vårt framtida statsskick* (Stockholm: Fri Tanke förlag, 2017); The Republican Association's website, <https://www.republikanskaforeningen.se/> c.2010-2020.

empire (Finland in 1809, Norway in 1905) and monarchy received political competition from democracy (Enlightenment, republicanism, revolution abroad, universal suffrage, parliamentary democracy, etc.), it became ever more important to stress the Swedish monarchy's legitimacy as a political system through public discourses and narratives. The list below, based on a multitude of sources,⁵⁰ sum up these claims for legitimacy:

1. As the royal house, being the country's oldest institution, symbolizes the nation, the monarch is assumed to incarnate Sweden, manage "Swedishness," have a role as "father of the country," and in official contexts represent Sweden.
2. The king being "father" of the country, and the queen, "mother," both have a patriarchal legitimacy.
3. Through coronation both sovereign and consort have a religious legitimacy.
4. Since Queen Josephine of Leuchtenberg was related to Gustav Vasa, starting with her son, Karl XV, the Bernadottes have a historical legitimacy.
5. By pledging their allegiance to the constitution and thereby entering into a "contract" with the inhabitants of the country, the king has a legal legitimacy.
6. Through the organic conception of the state, the monarchy has a traditional legitimacy based on Germanic national romantic beliefs. In Gustaf V's formulation: "From times so far back that they are shrouded in the mystery of the fairy tale, the building of this kingdom rests on the foundation of the firm and unshakable trust between king and people."
7. In the twentieth century, the monarchy has sought democratic legitimacy by supporting the government, the current state of affairs and public opinion in word and deed, adapting to the times.
8. In the twenty-first century the royal house has democratic (or at least popular) legitimacy through opinion polls.
9. The Bernadottes also legitimize themselves by their personal image (charisma and publicity), by the staging of their official role (ceremonial), and by their supposed social utility.

⁵⁰ The data may be found at the authors website. <http://thebernadotteproject.eriksoderman.se/>.

Political science literature on legitimacy is vast and impossible to cover in detail; in this study I therefore restrict myself to a sample of widely discussed monarchical issues dating from the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁵¹

The German historical school essentially legitimized monarchy through ancestry instead of religion. This became an issue during the restoration of monarchy following the Napoleonic Wars. As the first of his lineage, Bernadotte didn't fit this model. In his 1818 essay *Feudalism and Republicanism*, Erik Gustav Geijer tried to solve the conundrum by drawing on Adam Müller von Nitterdorf's description of society as two parts—feudal and republic—that interact. This was a good fit for the Swedish estate-society: Nobility and priests (=feudal); Burghers and peasants (=republic). All had existed since time immemorial. Bernadotte was legitimate because a legitimate society had elected him.⁵²

Definitions of feudal political culture have evolved since the eighteenth century when feudalism was synonymous with autocracy. Nineteenth-century thought emphasized feudal relations of personal loyalty and mutual privileges and obligations, feudal modes of production, and the existence of a courteous “knightly” behavioural culture. During the twentieth century, the concept of feudal society as an interdependence between the estates of the realm and a common world view of mutual acceptance of different parties' specificity was introduced. The Swedish feudal state was a politically charged subject in the interwar period: the right-wing position was that Sweden under autocracy was a feudal state of privileges and obligations, because autocracy was imposed with the support of the peasants, not by suppression.⁵³ The left-wing position was the opposite, that the Swedish feudal state in common with the continental version was a tyranny based on peasant oppression.⁵⁴

The issue at stake seems to have been the “soul of modernity.” The “corporate patriarchy” of the nineteenth-century feudal Swedish estate society is set against the

⁵¹ [Swedish criteria for a legitimate régime and exercise of power mostly agree with Max Weber and David Beetham.] Max Weber, *Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft* (Preussische Jahrbücher 187, 1-2, 1922); David Beetham, *The legitimation of power* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991); Peter Sundström, *Den svenska monarkins legitimitet: Institutionens och statschefens förenlighet med tre olika legitimitetsdimensioner* (Örebro universitet: Institutionen för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap, 2013).

⁵² Torgny T. Segerstedt, *Svenska Akademien i sin samtid: en idéhistorisk studie. Del 1, 1786-1844* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1986), 164; Segerstedt, *en idéhistorisk studie. Del 2*, 192; Per Meurling, *Geijer och Marx: studier i Erik Gustaf Geijers sociala filosofi* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1983), 177–179.

⁵³ Simon Boëthius, *Om statslivet* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1916); Simon Boëthius, “Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm: Studier över skedet 1630-1718,” *Svensk Tidskrift* (1938), 126–134.

⁵⁴ Axel Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1937).

individualism of the Enlightenment. Potential resolution can be found in the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel's by now classic *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) which explains the "feudal social and cultural psychology" between Lord and slave as contingent on mutual consent. Once this mutual agreement was reached, however it was reached, their relationship was not maintained by violence, but through conviction, namely loyalty to the Lord.⁵⁵ Under the patriarchal model, disadvantages and restrictions for the slave in this relationship are counterbalanced by a familial "security and affinity" ensured by the Lord in his domain.⁵⁶ In monarchist circles, loyalty to the royals is still common. The republican suspicion is that it means the "subjects" having renounced democracy. However, this does not seem to be the case. The monarchists' loyalty seems to be about something other than politics. Hypothetically, when the monarchy is gutted from both ideology and politics there are only personal qualities left. Monarchists are not loyal to the system. Loyalty is the system.⁵⁷

Another study of Hegel's, *Philosophy of Law* (1821), includes a frequently cited defence of the constitutional monarch as a neutral figure above special interests, thus symbolically representing the nation as a whole, and guaranteeing the rights of the people. Thinkers like Karl Marx critiqued the theory, emphasizing the democratic deficit of the sovereign's position, representing neither the people, nor the nation (made up of the people), but only himself. Others have argued that Hegel was writing about current events, disguised as philosophy: absolute monarchy (=thesis), French revolution (=antithesis), and constitutional monarchy according to the 1791 French constitution (=synthesis).⁵⁸

A Swedish version of Hegel's theory by the philosopher Christopher Boström was, for a long time, mandatory university reading. According to liberal ideology, the state was

⁵⁵ Henning Pleijel, "Patriarkalismens samhällsideologi," *Historisk Tidskrift* (1987), 221–234; Lars Petterson, "Forskning om svensk politisk historia 1809-1865," in Britta Lövgren, Tommy Möller, Torbjörn Nilsson and Lars Petterson, ed., *Svensk politisk historia: en kommenterad litteratur-översikt* (Humanistisk-Samhällsvetenskapliga forskningsrådet: Brytpunkt, 1993), 7–64; Brian Manning Delaney and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Förordet till den svenska översättningen av G.W.F. Hegel Andens fenomenologi* (Stockholm: Thales, 2008).

⁵⁶ Börje Harnesk, "Patriarkalism och lönearbete: teori och praktik under 1700- och 1800-talen," *Historisk Tidskrift* (1986), 328; Börje Harnesk, "Den föränderliga patriarkalismen," *Historisk Tidskrift* (1987), 235–238; Hilding Pleijel, "Patriarkalismens samhällsideologi," *Historisk Tidskrift* (1987), 221–234.

⁵⁷ Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 116–119.

⁵⁸ Stephen C. Bosworth, *Hegel's Political Philosophy: The Test Case of Constitutional Monarchy* (London: Routledge, 1991); Eli Diamond, "Hegel's Defence Of Constitutional Monarchy And Its Relevance Within The Post-National State," *Animus*, 9 (2004): 105–130; P. J. Kain, "Hegel on Sovereignty and Monarchy," *Idealistic Studies*, 45 (2015): 265–277; Milkan Znoj, "Political Will and Public Opinion: On Hegel's Theory of Representation," *Filosofický časopis*, 1 (2017): 17–40.

the people. According to Boström, the state and the people were two separate entities. Accordingly, he distinguished between public and private interests. State interests (public) were defined by the constitution; everything else was special (private) interests. The special interests of the people were represented through their associations (estates, guilds, professions), and so corporative-politics pursued only special interests. The state was, by definition, both immutable and impartial. In practice, this made the King the trustee of the state, the highest official of the country, and responsible for foreign policy, a public interest, while the government, as officials under the king represented the King and the state, rather than the people, making them too impartial while in office.⁵⁹ Boström's philosophy led him to support the estate-based parliament over the new 2-chamber parliament which he believed was based on pure self-interest and therefore contributed to the disintegration of society. Today nobody adheres to Boström's theory of state, but his official philosophy is part of the contemporary Swedish state's self-image, and Carl XIV Gustaf is still positioned as "the first servant of the state" rather than autonomous ruler.⁶⁰ Boström's political philosophy also influences the standards expected of today's politicians in considering wider national interests, not merely the special interests of their specific electorate.

Attempts were made to develop a specifically monarchic political science. (Political) neo-monarchism is a collective name for a number of such twentieth-century monarchic ideologies. Best known is the Frenchman Charles Maurras (1868-1952), leader of the far-right movement Action Française. Like the Swedish-"new-ultraists" Harald Hjärne and Rudolf Kjellén, Maurras had an organic view of the state and emphasized tradition as a way to strengthen national cohesion. The Swedish political scientist Herbert Tingsten described Maurras' monarchist ideology as "conditioned by hatred of democracy," and explained it thus:

Democracy, which thrives on discussion and party formation, stimulates discontent, antagonism, special interests and internal conflict. Politicians and their followers forget what unites and only emphasize what divides. In essence, therefore, democracy

⁵⁹ Christopher Jacob Boström, *Samlade verk, del 2* (Upsala: Akademiska boktryckeriet, 1883), 311-410; Boström, *del 3*, 157-163.

⁶⁰ Martin Sunnqvist, "Under konungens enskilda styrelse": *Statschefen, kungahuset, hovet och ordensväsendet i konstitutionellt och rättshistoriskt perspektiv* (Stockholm: Förtjänstutredningen, SOU 2021:74, Bilaga, 116-117); Carl Gustaf's oath at his formal accession 19 September 1973: to abide by the parliament's decisions and the laws; Inger Nildén and others, "Kungafamiljen genom åren," *Sveriges Television kanal 1*, 30 December 1999. [A compilation of interviews.]

is only one stage on the road to anarchy, to a war of all against all. The salvation is in a hierarchical order, crowned by a monarch with great, if not absolute power. It is in his interest to bring the peoples together, to promote unity and a sense of whole, because through his position he identifies himself with the state.⁶¹

In Sweden, this played out as “national mysticism.” In 1910 the political scientist and member of parliament Rudolf Kjellén made a speech about “The Swedish Heart-land:”

Sweden’s body is *the kingdom*, surrounding us in all directions, waiting for spring, the large kingdom with its beauty, its treasures and even poverty, the people’s home since times immemorial.

Sweden’s soul is *the nation*, inherited from generation to generation, the national character with its inherent virtues and errors, its small conspicuous errors and its great deep virtues.

Sweden’s spirit is *its culture* in sagas and songs, science and art, society, church and state. The combined longings, thoughts and experiences of generations’ since the beginning.

Sweden’s *heart* is all this and yet something else. The kingdom would be fallow land and the people a society of drifters [if it lacked heart.]⁶²

The problem with this approach has been that the existence of social conflicts was contrary to self-perception. In Kjellén’s world view, class struggle and democracy were signs of degeneration. The monarchy existed as a solve-all solution, “represent[ing] a will of the state transcending the will of the people, ‘with deeper spiritual roots than the ballot.’”⁶³

Sweden as an economic and political success story has also served to legitimize its monarchy. The best-known version of this thinking is Dankwart Rustow’s theory of gradual transition to democracy. Rather than introduced via a defined act, the transition to democracy is four-step: formation of a nation state, competition between old and new elites, agreement on the rules of democracy, and, finally, habituation.⁶⁴ According to Rustow, Sweden was a textbook example. Some Swedish political scientists begged to differ:

⁶¹ Herbert Tingsten, “Patriot eller förrädare: Charles Maurras,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 February 1947.

⁶² Rudolf Kjellén, *Staten som livsform* (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers förlag, 1914), 198.

⁶³ Mats Kilhlberg and Donald Söderlind, *Två studier i svensk konservatism 1916-1922*, Skrifter utgivna av Statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala (Uppsala: Appelberg, 1961), 60; Kjellén, *Staten som livsform*, 200, 202.

⁶⁴ Dankwart A. Rustow, *The Politics of Compromise: A Study of Parties and Cabinet Government in Sweden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy. Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics*, 2.2 (April 1970): 337–363; Rustow, “Sweden’s Transition to Democracy: Some Notes Toward a Genetic Theory,” *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 6 (1971): 9–26.

Rune Premfors (2003) argued that in the Scandinavian case the theory underestimated the stabilizing role of the state bureaucracy,⁶⁵ while Gunnar Heckscher (1947) even suggested that the pre-World War Two state bureaucracy was mentally still part of the estates society, hence the importance of Gustaf V supporting the transition.⁶⁶ Rustow's study later became the basis of *transitologi* emphasizing the importance of economic liberalism to pave the way for democracy, but those hoping for a quick fix have been disappointed.⁶⁷

Since 1995 the semi-official SOM Institute has included the monarchy in their annual opinion polls. Precise questions have varied but essentially pursue three (republican) angles: "Are you for or against the monarchy?" "Do you want to replace the monarchy with an elected president?" and "Do you trust the royal house?"

Other opinion-institutes have followed suit, also polling the popularity of individual royals. The polls are problematic to interpret. The general public does not (in the manner of the Republican Association) distinguish between the monarchy as a system, and the royals within it. Everything is personal and the data thus volatile. Some conclusions are, however, possible. Support for monarchy declined from the mid-1990s (Figures 1 and 2), likely in tandem with Carl Gustaf's deteriorating relationship with the media and the leftist elite. Denied access, they have reciprocated in kind, with journalists becoming progressively more negative. In contrast, parliamentarians have become more positive. The monarchy's popular support hovers around 55 percent. Full-blown republicanism, desiring to replace monarchy with an elected president, sits at around 15 percent. In 1945, popular support for the monarchy was 84 percent, and republicanism just six percent, so clearly war is good for the monarchy.⁶⁸ Demographic breakdown of support for the monarchy between 2009 and 2020 demonstrates greatest support among right-wingers, business people, and the old, and lowest among left-wingers, city dwellers, and the young.⁶⁹ Passing scandals may damage the reputation of individual royals, but the monarchy as a

⁶⁵ Rune Premfors, *Democratization in Scandinavia: The Case of Sweden* (Stockholm: Stockholm Center for Organizational Research [SCORE], Score Report 2003:8).

⁶⁶ Gunnar Heckscher, *Konservatism* (Historielärarnas förenings årsbok, 1947), 13–20.

⁶⁷ Thomas Carothers, "The end of the transition paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, 13.1 (January 2002): 5–21.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, "Kung efter Gustaf V," *Dagens Nyheter*, 13 January 1944.

⁶⁹ Ulrika Andersson and Elisabeth Falk, ed., *Svenska monarkitrender* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet: SOM-institutet, 2021).

whole has proven resilient.⁷⁰ Several “power estimates” have been made, where Carl XVI Gustaf 1992-2013 ranks 3-70 in the Swedish power elite.⁷¹

So why the support? I would say that there is a fundamental ambiguity in Swedish political culture. People want democracy, but without the politics. Approximately half the population is apolitical or negative to politics.⁷² In an emergency they are even willing to dispense with the democracy.⁷³ Hypothetically, they are monarchists in the sense that they prefer a neutral state that administers the country rather than the state as an arena for resolving conflicts (a ruler contract, rather than a social contract). Or to put it more bluntly: business people, the elderly and those politically affiliated with the right are no strangers to hierarchical organizations, even considering them preferable.

⁷⁰ For more detailed analysis see Lennart Nilsson, “The legitimacy of the Swedish monarchy: The different perceptions of parliamentarians, journalists and the people,” in Robert Hazell and Bob Morris, ed., *The role of monarchy in modern democracy: European monarchies compared* (Oxford: Hart, 2020), 235–255.

⁷¹ The power estimates must be treated with caution. Criteria differ: coercion, rewards & symbols. Sources are: Sifo 1992, Anita Göransson 2001, Focus 2007-2013, Göteborgsposten & Aftonbladet 2005-2009.

⁷² Erik Amnå, Mats Ekstrand and Håkan Stattin, *Ungdomars politiska utveckling: slutrapport från ett forskningsprogram* (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, 2016:12), 94.

⁷³ Sten Widmalm and Thomas Persson, “Det här är svenskarna beredda att pausa demokratin för,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 Mars 2023. [Forskningsprojektet “Det öppna samhället” & SOM.]

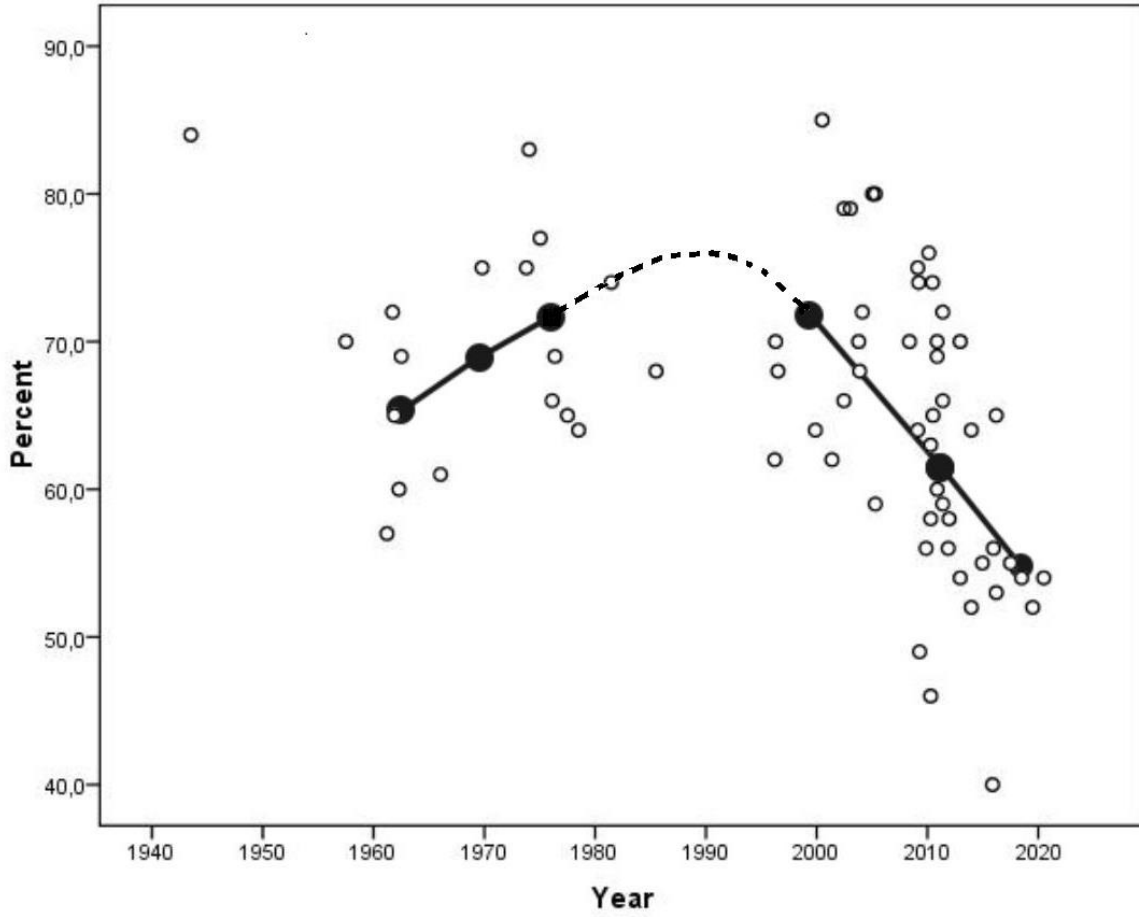


Figure 1. *Opinion polls 1943-2020 with either the question* "Are you for or against the monarchy" or "Do you want to replace the monarchy with an elected president." Percent that supports the monarchy. Large, filled circle marks 10-year averages (1960±5 years etc.) (Sources: 66 opinion polls from Demoscope, FSI, Ipsos, Consumer data, Novus Opinion, Sifo, SOM Institute, Svenska Gallup, Svenska Testhuset AB, Synovate, Temo and Testkonsult; n=750-3000.)

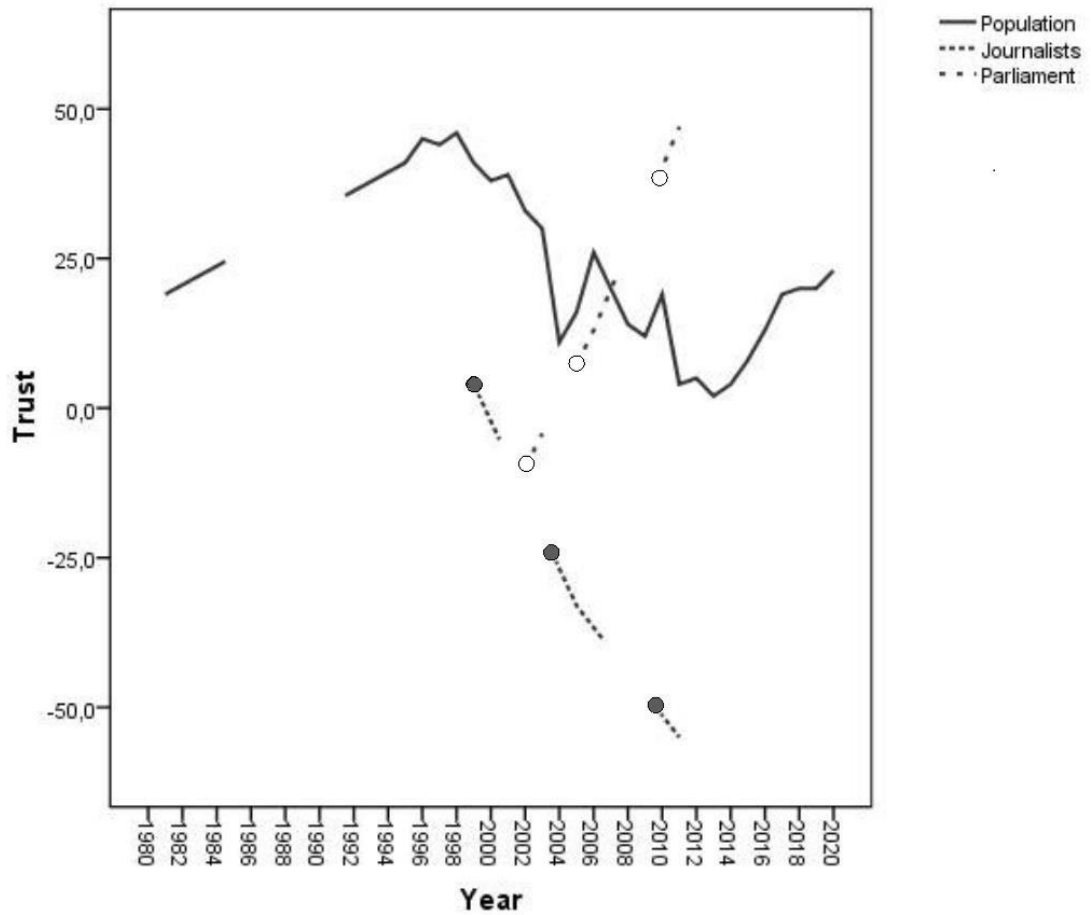


Figure 2. Opinion polls 1981-2020 with the question “Do you trust the royal house.” Trust balance (percent positive minus percent negative). Three groups: Population, Journalists and Parliament (Sources: Sifo 1981; SOM Institute 1995-2020, n≈3000; “Journalist survey,” n≈ 1500; “Parliament survey,” n≈250.)

How King Carl XVI Gustaf navigates the 1974 constitution

Interpretations of the Swedish monarchy's state utility (to be distinguished from its social role) are three-fold, considering the utility of monarchy in general, the utility of a separate "Head of State," and the utility/danger of the Enlightenment ethos. Arguments for the general utility of modern monarchy coalesce around catastrophes (such as war), diplomacy, and guarantor of the status quo. As to diplomacy, the Royal Court's press official Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg argued that since international politics is about "personal relationships," and the King, by upbringing, experience, and social position, "is in the relationship business," he plays a crucial role in the gradual and long-term processes of international relations and global economics.⁷⁴ As to status quo, Swedish monarchists like to quote Edmund Burke (1729-1797), best-known in Sweden for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), arguing that an ideologically driven social transformation must necessarily fail because it will end up with everyone disagreeing on everything. There must therefore be common standards and a state that upholds them.⁷⁵ Burke's influential ideology is the depoliticization of politics, outsourcing it to pressure groups, newspapers, academia, etc. to maintain common institutions (monarchy, parliament, church, and nation) as unifying forces. In addition, all reform should be enacted stepwise, preferably discreetly, to minimise potential conflict. This state of mind is part of Swedish political culture.

There are similar ideological advantages to avoiding politicization of the role of representing the nation by maintaining the monarch as Head of State separate from the elected (but partisan) government. There is also general consensus that representational duties are too time-consuming to be handled by the Prime Minister alone. The Head of State tours the country, addresses citizens, receives diplomats, distributes orders, heads state-visits to foreign countries, and so on. Popular opinion is that he should favor the current political elite at the expense of what remains of the old estate society (table 3).

⁷⁴ Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg and Ulf Nilson, "Debatt mellan Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg & Ulf Nilsson," *P1: Studio ett*, 31 Mars 1994; Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg and Ulf Nilson. "Två öppna brev om kungahuset", *Expressen*, 23 May 1994.

⁷⁵ Edmund Burke (author), and Carl Holm, Carl Johan Ljungberg and Jan Collander (translation), *Reflektioner om franska revolutionen* (Stockholm: Contra, reprint 1982, original edition 1790).

Table 3. What categories of people should the King meet with? Percent. (Source: SVT Studio S and Sifo, April 1978, n≈1000.)

Swedish politicians	63
Foreign Heads of State	50
Foreign Royal Houses	33
Diplomats	32
Foreign politicians	28
Workers, officials, disabled and sick	25
Trade Union Confidants, Business Leaders	24
Active in the popular movements	23
...	
Officials	8
Officers	7
Immigrants	7
Priests	4
Swedish nobility	2
Celebrities	1

Since all the Bernadottes have been some form of enlightened monarchs, they have been keen to make a difference. During the nineteenth century, anti-monarchism was often formulated as criticism of “royal idlers.” Around the turn of the century, there was even a widespread notion that the royal family, due to inbreeding, had degenerated to the point of being good for nothing more than sitting on horses in parades.⁷⁶ Other figures have dedicated specific attention to proving otherwise: Jean Bernadotte publicly advertised goals for his son’s upbringing including an all-round education, becoming Swedish, developing masculine virtues, and, like other citizens, learning a profession, all to demonstrate worthiness and fitness for office.⁷⁷ Later royalty have supported research, development, and industrialization, and also served as figureheads for popular movements.

Sidelining monarchy created problems concerning its legal status.⁷⁸ Was the royal court, like the government, an authority, and therefore ultimately subordinate to the parliament? Yes and no. Rather, it was a so-called administrative agency being both public and private, a *sui generis* authority. The public part (the Order of H.R.H.) was the distribution

⁷⁶ Max Nordau, *Konventionella nutidslögner* (Stockholm: Loström & K, 1884); Ulrike Brand, *Det “nasjonale” kongedømme: en undersøkelse og en antologi* (Oslo: Viking forlag, 1943), 74–75; Michael D Biddiss, *Father of racist ideology: the social and political thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970).

⁷⁷ Crown Prince Karl Johan. “Instruktion,” *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar*, issue 134, 12 November 1812.

⁷⁸ Grundlagsberedningen, *Ny regeringsform. Ny riksdagsordning. Betänkande avgivet av grundlagberedningen* (Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet, SOU 1972:15), 139; Proposition, *Kungl. Maj:ts proposition angående ändrat belöningsystem för statsanställda m. fl.* (Stockholm: Riksdagen, prop 1973:91), 5.

of orders and the like. The remainder (the royal court proper) was private, implying the king has autocratic autonomy in performing his other duties.⁷⁹ Thus the royal court was public because some orders were regarded as belonging to his position as Head of State, but also private because this was not regulated by the constitution, an interpretation that was upheld by the court of appeal in three separate rulings 1999, 2008, and 2011.⁸⁰ The legal status of the royal house is sometimes jokingly summarized as “public when it suits them, private when it suits them better.”⁸¹ From 1997 Carl Gustaf has used this loophole to ignore various inquiries, to the chagrin of journalists, and also that of republicans who desire some form of accountability. Similar lines of reasoning have evidently been extended to everything not mentioned in the constitution; for example, the King’s right to vote in public elections is private business, thus permitted, but does not sit well with his position, and so he doesn’t use it. As Carl Gustaf’s freedom of action, although limited, has caused conflicts, there have been attempts to give him a “job description.”⁸² On the whole, the general feeling is, however, that he does what he is supposed to do.⁸³

Modern Swedish royalists are best described as apolitical. The concomitant Royalist Association is a support organization (founded in 1978) with mainly cultural activities, but leading parliamentarian monarchists have held positions. It has grown through absorption of former groups including the Royalist Society, Friends of the Royal Swedish Monarchy, the Order of the Oscarians, the Neo-Gothic League, the Royalist Club, and the Society for the Conservation of the Monarchy, many of which were formerly student associations and partying societies which do not seem to have taken themselves too seriously. How to name this latest iteration of (cultural) neo-monarchism remains unclear; it has nothing in common with the earlier (political) neo-monarchism. An American expert on the subject, Theodore Harvey, argues that these (cultural) neo-monarchists,

⁷⁹ Fredrik Sterzel, “Kapitel 7: Statschefens ställning,” in *Författning i utveckling: Tjugo studier kring Sveriges författning* (Uppsala: Iustus förlag, Stiftelsen rättsfonden, 2009:41), 150-164. [Chapter 7 was originally published in 1997.]

⁸⁰ Regeringsrätten. *Målnummer 6786-98*. Avgörandedatum 1999-06-24.

⁸¹ “JagHarEnLiten” [Pseudonym], “Den stora skvallertråden om H.M. Kung Carl XVI Gustaf: inlägg 2289,” *Flashback*, 2010-07-16.

⁸² Ingemar Eliasson, *Har lagstiftaren lämnat statschefen i sticket?* (Stockholm: Kungliga vitterhetsakademiens årsbok, 2012), 75-90; Mikael Holmqvist, “Nästa statschef måste styras hårdare av politikerna,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 April 2023.

⁸³ Sifo, “Opinionsundersökning 6 februari 1986,” *Hänt i Veckan*, 1986:5; Easy Research, “Opinionsundersökning 2004,” *Republik.nu*.

see monarchy as entirely separate from Left/Right political divisions ... [they] range from liberal to moderately conservative, or they may not be very interested in politics at all ... respectful of the religious traditions associated with royalty, they are usually not particularly religious themselves. Neomonarchists are primarily concerned with the support of existing constitutional monarchies ... Many of them enthusiastically follow the lives of contemporary royals, and are inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt when they are criticized. Neomonarchists tend to be socially liberal and so are unlikely to object to nontraditional marital alliances ... [and generally] embrace multiculturalism and see monarchy as a potential unifying figure in Europe's increasingly diverse countries ... They enjoy contemporary popular culture and welcome royals' interactions with it ... [they] have made their peace with modernity and do not see any fundamental conflict between monarchism ... and liberal democratic values. Not especially prone to nostalgia, they are nevertheless often quite fascinated by [royal history] ... sympathizing on a human level with members of autocratic royal families such as Russia's Romanovs while rejecting everything that these royals stood for ideologically.⁸⁴

A broadly similar approach appears to have been adopted by the royals themselves, begging the question as to which group they nowadays belong in the sociological sense. Legislatively prohibited from political and economic activities, they cannot fully belong to the political or the economic elite. Only the cultural elite remains. Economist-cum-sociologist Mikael Holmqvist has argued that Carl Gustaf is the ideological standard-bearer of the business elite.⁸⁵ This has a long backstory starting with King Gustaf V being protector of the Swedish Export Association, and his son, Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf, honorary chairman. Later Gustaf Adolf's son, Prince Bertil, became trade ambassador, from 1946 heading some 100 delegations. He did not close deals, but his rank gave the delegation better access. King Carl Gustaf continues in the same vein, although being king he enjoys even better access. Attempts to detect some economic benefit of this have failed though.⁸⁶ Rather, as Holmqvist concludes, the business elite competes for perceived social or cultural status associated with the "royal touch." Further, he argues the business world has embraced, even "colonized" Carl Gustaf as representative of their own world view and image, adding royal

⁸⁴ Theodore Harvey, "Two Kinds of Monarchists," <http://www.royaltymonarchy.com>, 2003.

⁸⁵ Åke Ortmark, *De okända makthavarna: de kungliga, militärerna, journalisterna* (Stockholm: W & W, 1969); Mikael Holmqvist, *Kungen Sveriges ledare* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2023).

⁸⁶ Jonas Arvidsson, *Mest för syns skull?* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Nationalekonomiska institutionen, D-uppsats, vt 2006); Anna Almquist, *A Royally Good Idea? A Study of the Relationship Between Swedish State Visits and Aggregate Swedish Merchandise Exports* (Lund: Lunds universitet, Institutionen för nationalekonomi. Masters-uppsats, August 2013).

charisma to an ideal combining science, adaptability, the protestant work ethic, and leadership.⁸⁷ I would argue, however, that the king tries to satisfy everybody, not just the business elite.

If the Head of State is not allowed to engage in (party) politics, it remains to concern himself with the nation as a whole. Political scientist Cecilia Åse has concluded that, through the Torekov-compromise, Sweden has an officially sanctioned monarchy which, although based on an older literature, lacks a political context.⁸⁸ However, Åse seems to discern a line of thought:

While the function of Head of State has been regulated in the constitutions in such a way that it has been emptied of political content, it has at the same time been able to be powerful with respect to the nation. These two processes are linked: Creating a political Head of State is a way of making the national symbol strong, it is to enshrine democracy in the nation, to [embed] differences and political conflicts of interest under [a basic unity] where “we” agree. The Head of State’s task is to affirm and bestow national legitimacy on Swedish democracy and parliamentarianism in the name of the nation [and of unity].⁸⁹

Åse further argues that the political consensus on the monarchy establishes it as the fulcrum of Sweden as a national community that transcends both time, individuals, and politics. A cultural imaginarium presently under the care of the Bernadotte dynasty.⁹⁰ This is a mouthful. Carl Gustaf himself apparently considers his most important personal contribution is to simply hang on. In an interview to commemorate his 75th birthday in 2021 he comments 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 ... 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

⁸⁷ Holmqvist, Kapitel 13: Kungen, eliterna och makten. [Summary.]

⁸⁸ Cecilia Åse, “Vi är överens: Om monarki och demokrati,” in Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén, ed., *Sverigebilder. Det nationellas betydelse i politik och vardag* (Stockholm: Institutet för framtidsstudier, 2008); Cecilia Åse, *Monarkins makt: Nationell gemenskap i svensk demokrati* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2009); Cecilia Åse, “Monarchical Manoeuvres: Gender, Nation and the Boundary Problem in Post-War Swedish Constitutional Development,” *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 21.3 (2013): 172–186.

⁸⁹ Åse, “Vi är överens”, 61.

⁹⁰ Åse, “Monarchical Manoeuvres”, 179–180.

history. We have a responsibility to live up to. We are apolitical, but we are a catalyst ... 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 ... everything rests on culture.⁹¹

There has never been a specific policy on how to best use Swedish monarchy to further the country's interests, but there seems to be a tacit consensus to give King Carl Gustaf leeway in interpreting his diplomatic role. Former Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, observed that the monarch, lacking a role in "practical affairs of state," somehow "stand[ing] above them," was hard for non-Swedes to understand when he at the same time was expected to "carry out many duties aimed at maintaining foreign contacts." Gromyko also noted that Carl Gustaf "did not avoid discussing political matters either," concluding "that the limitations placed on the Swedish monarch [faced with the reality of politics] were becoming less rigid—if not constitutionally, then at least *de facto*."⁹² Carl Gustaf's semi-official diplomacy has created trouble, his contacts with remaining Middle- and Far-East monarchies being particularly controversial. In particular, republican journalists worked diligently to inflame public opinion and debate in connection with his 2004 Brunei visit. The Swedish left prefers silent disdain to diplomacy. Consorting with the enemy, or claiming that he or she has redeeming virtues, is treason.

The monarchy's social role hinges on connections (drawn and reiterated, celebrated and implied) to religion, history, and national sentiment. Perhaps most obviously, though superficially, the current monarchy consists of modern people living in old buildings, implying historical continuity. In 1973, law professor, Stig Strömholm suggested that,

Measur[ing] a man's influence on his environment in terms of total influence, not through the weight of individual decisions, it can well be argued, that King Gustaf VI Adolf "meant more" to his contemporaries than more powerful predecessors ... We have a need for permanence—of a bit of duration, a bit of connection between then and now, and between now and a foreseeable future. The monarchy and its symbols are [as opposed to politics] societal factors ... It is in the rhythm of births, weddings and deaths that most people still measure their lives. Our symbols of security must have the quality of us and them sharing destiny. The monarchy provides, disrespectfully put, a whole "family package," inviting us to share and identify with events in their private lives that resemble our own. Politicians cannot fulfil this role, and we

⁹¹ Kristoffer Triumf. "Värvet 75-årsspecial. Carl XIV Gustaf," <http://www.varvet.se>, 2021.

⁹² Andrei Gromyko, *Memories*, (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 218–220.

should be grateful to them for not trying ... They are anonymous and ephemeral and should remain so.⁹³

Swedish republicans have never wanted to engage in such a debate, it being more faith-based than grounded in political science, but there has been much discussion about the monarchy's outreach (representation, ceremonies, rituals, publicity, etc.) being a form of propaganda. Tingsten rejected the idea of politicized ceremonies, considering it "dangerous to build up irrational reverence for an institution which, under certain conditions, could possibly end democracy." Without political business to preoccupy it, and inheriting a life-long role, the royal family "were the only permanently-serving publicity agents who had no other task than to preserve themselves," and lack of "counter-publicity" inflated their influence unchallenged.⁹⁴

In his influential work on rituals, historian David Cannadine argued, however, that they have no fixed meaning, but are interpreted by the audience according to the situation.⁹⁵ They do not make monarchs popular, rather the opposite: rituals are spectacles which require an audience, and unpopular royals will not receive one. This postmodern slant seems to have been part of the academic zeitgeist.⁹⁶ The Swedish ethnologist Mattias Frihammar has applied a similar reasoning to Carl Gustaf's municipality visits. If the King is given the lead role, Frihammar assumes his rank will influence how the visit is interpreted, a de facto legitimization of monarchy, even if the stated aim is something else.⁹⁷ There is also a Swedish tradition of historiography downplaying the importance of the monarchy. The effort does not seem to have been very effective, however. The sociologist Michael Billig is often quoted to explain it: innocuous information often repeated, "banal monarchy," is supposedly as effective as grand opera.⁹⁸

Carl Gustaf's stated goal before accession was to create a modern monarchy. He had been voicing different versions of his motto "For Sweden—In Our time" ever since college.

⁹³ Stig Strömholm, "Reflexioner vid tronskiftet," *Svensk tidskrift*, 10 (1973): 442–450.

⁹⁴ [Herbert Tingsten,] "Debatt om monarkin fyllde konserthuset," *Dagens Nyheter*, 14 February 1956.

⁹⁵ David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c.1820-1977," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 101–164.

⁹⁶ Don Handelman, *Models and mirrors: towards an anthropology of public events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, original 1990, updated 1998), 4 (preface); Tomas Gerholm, "On ritual: a postmodernist view," *Ethnos*, 53 (1988): 190–203.

⁹⁷ Mattias Frihammar, *Ur svenska hjärtans djup: reproduktion av samtida monarki* (Stockholm: Carlsson förlag, PhD thesis, 2010).

⁹⁸ Michael Billig, *Talking of the Royal Family* (London: Routledge, original 1992, updated 1998).

It seems to have been inspired by the contemporary British debate concerning their monarchy's survival not as a social relic, but through operation within the society that now existed. The model was the Vatican.⁹⁹ As King, Carl Gustaf has emphasized the importance of traditions but in moderation, keeping the balance between old and new. In the wake of the 1980 succession law changes, for example, he adapted his style to suit a new social base of bourgeois feminism. Carl Gustaf may not be the people's king, but his heir, Crown Princess Victoria, definitely is the people's princess. Old arguments about women being ill-fitted to monarchy have been consigned to oblivion. Swedish royalty are now also allowed to marry commoners while keeping their station.

A 2003-2004 interview study with court representatives and affiliates, summarizes the motto of the modern monarchy as the five Royal "R"s:¹⁰⁰ modern monarchy must be royal (a state of being, set apart normally via official ceremony and/or constitutional dictate); regal (demonstrating appropriate dignity and manners); relevant (sharing an affinity with prominent and/or diverse stakeholder groups); responsive (evolving with changing times); and respected (since the monarchy is no longer taken for granted it relies on "earning" and keeping the people's respect). Because the court does not conduct its own opinion studies with focus groups, they have limited insight into how to adapt. In 2004 Ingemar Eliasson, Marshal of the Realm, tried to initiate a discussion about how the royal family viewed their roles, how they thought the Swedish people understood them, their strengths and weaknesses. However, it came to nothing.¹⁰¹ The discussion seems to have devolved to numbers rather than any particular message, with focus on promoting the King as a benevolent patriarch for as wide a range of groups as possible.¹⁰²

In Sweden, as in other remaining European kingdoms, relations with, and public relations through the media are central to shaping the monarchy's role in national life. This royal journalism proper began around 1912,¹⁰³ but has, since 1974, been hampered by Carl Gustaf's personal war on journalism, initiated by slander threatening his marriage. The information clampdown has extended to information on his office. Because access to archival material (particularly for recent times) is restricted, and because the public's

⁹⁹ John Grigg, ed., *Is the Monarchy Perfect?* (London: John Calder, 1958); Jeremy Murray-Brown, ed., *The Monarchy and its Future* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

¹⁰⁰ John M. T. Balmer, Stephen A. Greyser and Mats Urde, "Monarchies as Corporate Brands," *Bradford University School of Management*, Working Paper 04/24, August 2004.

¹⁰¹ Barbro Hultman, *I den kungliga kulissen: en hovreporters betraktelser* (Stockholm: Langenskiöld, 2014), 149.

¹⁰² Ingemar Eliasson, *Målbilder för Kungl. Hovstaternas stöd till KFAM*, memo, 1 August 2008.

¹⁰³ Jaya [Eira Hellberg], *Hos de kungliga* (Stockholm & Göteborg: Åhlén & Åkerlund, 1913). [Based on a series of interviews published in *Aftonbladet* 1912.]

relationship with the monarchy is mediated through press coverage, media research on modern monarchy is concerned less with the facts of the royals' activities but rather with these public discourses and narratives.¹⁰⁴ For promoting the longer-term legacy of the Bernadottes there is a support association, "Karl Johans Förbundet," founded in 1848 for the care of his memory, and (since 1935), a museum in his birthplace, Pau. The Royal Court also has its own website, mostly current affairs, and its own information department. The Royal Court's information strategy has been much discussed. General feeling is that they are withholding information. This is certainly true of personal information, but the republicans also assume that the royals have a hidden political agenda.¹⁰⁵

Explanations of the longevity of monarchy oscillate between statecraft, vested interests, and cultural psychology. All three are at play, but here I limit myself to the psychology. There are three British studies that attempt to get to the bottom of what people in general—by which they mean workers and lower-middle class—really think of their royals.¹⁰⁶ The studies have in common a popular interest in the royals' lives, a desire that they set a good example, and a belief that they should not make themselves too important. The old-fashioned rituals are claimed to be an asset, but in reality seem to conflict with more recent demands for social utility and democratic popularity: "It is as if in matters royal [the English] want to 'have their cake and eat it too.' They would like the Queen to be at one and the same time grand and common, extraordinary and ordinary, grave and informal, mysterious and accessible, royal and democratic."¹⁰⁷ In the literature it is often

¹⁰⁴ Mats Jönsson and Patrik Lundell, ed., *Media and Monarchy in Sweden* (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2009); Marie Ericsson & Sofia Lundqvist, *Tills media skiljer oss åt – En studie av fyra tidningars rapportering av svenska kungliga bröllop 1932-2010* (Södertörns högskola, Institutionen för kommunikation, medier & IT, 2010); Freja Andersson and Jessica Rådne, *Hovjournalistik på nyhetsplats – Hur kungahuset bevakas i Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet och Expressen* (Södertörns högskola: Institutionen för kommunikation, medier och it, C-uppsats, vt 2012).

¹⁰⁵ The drivers of this debate c.1993-2011 were the journalists Annette Kullenberg (Aftonbladet), Ulf Nilson (Expressen), Stina Dabrowski (SVT), and Tom Alandh (SVT), but the details are too involved to be recounted here. Kullenberg was awarded by the Republican Association for her efforts and then fired from Aftonbladet on account of unsubstantiated slander. Thomas Sjöberg (freelancer) had a similar agenda but was an outsider.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Hoggarth, *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working-class life, with special reference to publications and entertainments* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, original 1957, reprinted 1976); J. G. Blumler, J. R. Brown, A. J. Ewbank, and T. J. Nossiter, "Attitudes to the Monarchy: Their Structure and Development during a Ceremonial Occasion," *Political Studies*, 19.2 (1971): 149–171; Michael Billig, *Talking of the Royal Family* (London: Routledge, 1992, updated 1998).

¹⁰⁷ Blumler et al., *Political Studies*, 158; Edward Owens, *The Family Firm: monarchy, mass media and the British public, 1932-53* (University of London Press: Institute of Historical Research, 2018).

described as a conflict between the religious roots of the monarchy, a later-day bourgeois ideal, and a modern celebrity culture. In Sweden, it is rather described as awe giving away to familiarity, and the royals alternating between their different roles trying to satisfy everybody.

Being raised king or queen is a tortuous experience. Besides acquiring a general knowledge of just about everything, you must learn to handle your station without becoming a social oddity. To be a remainder of the estate society marooned in democracy is a recipe for having a troubled upbringing. The mantra is Marcus Aurelius' 2,000-year-old stoicism: "One is born into one's lot. Play the game, because nothing else exists. If you are not royal, you are nothing." According to the republicans, monarchy on top of everything else is therefore state-sanctioned child abuse. Be that as it may, there is also a not-so-hidden republican agenda. If the royals receive a normal upbringing, the monarchy is assumed to unravel at the personal level.

Discussion (or lack thereof)

Compared to other symbolic monarchies, old and new, Sweden's symbolic monarchy is more symbolic than most.¹⁰⁸ The current situation is that the empires, monarchies, and kinglets of the Vienna Congress are now gone or reduced to museum pieces. Until the end of World War One in 1918, thirty-one monarchies were abolished; from 1919 until the birth of King Carl Gustaf in 1946, nineteenth monarchies; from 1946 until his accession in 1973, fifty-eight monarchies; and during his fifty years on the throne, another seventeen monarchies. The count includes the states of the German Empire, the kinglets of Yemen, and the states of the Commonwealth, but not the 700 Indian petty principalities or the African petty kingdoms which also now are history. In March 2019, an English conference was held on "The role of monarchy in modern democracy." Twenty-five researchers and court officials from eight European monarchies (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Great Britain, and Spain) participated. From Sweden, Alex Calissendorff (lawyer; court auditor), Lennart Nilsson (political scientist; opinion studies), and Henrik Wenander (lawyer; public law) participated. The directives were that the contributions should deal with the conditions and future of the monarchy, but the conference documentation does not bear this out. The three Swedes describe an eternal

¹⁰⁸ Declan Quigley, ed., *The Character of Kingship* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005); Jeroen Deploige and Gita Deneckere, ed., *Mystifying the Monarch: Studies on Discourse, Power and History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Elena Woodacre, Lucinda H. S. Dean, Chris Jones, Russel E. Martin, and Zita Eva Rohr, ed., *The Routledge History of Monarchy* (London: Routledge, 2019).

now. Nothing is accomplished, nothing has a cause, nothing has a beginning or even an end. The monarchy is interpreted as secular religion and popular entertainment.¹⁰⁹ The Swedish 2023 jubilee was more of the same: five repeats of the family-saga—one for each national TV channel—and a 300-page non-committal hagiography.¹¹⁰

The “official” response on the subject was rather matter of fact however: the nation state requires a cultural “glue” in which the monarchy has an important role.¹¹¹ I expand on this: the monarchy of Carl XVI Gustaf is supported by approximately 55 percent of the population. Nobody else comes even close. Because of his long tenure, this is even more significant than it seems. Media-wise, Carl Gustaf is Sweden’s best known, and possibly most influential, person. The consensus is that he is seen, heard, and takes initiatives in an exemplary manner, although he perhaps spreads himself a bit thin. In addition, his conflicts with the press have hurt him and after fifty years as Head of State he has run out of ideas. Regardless of this, he has unwavering support from just about every group of consequence.

There have been sporadic attempts to debate the reasons, advantages, and dangers of this unwavering support. Political scientists claim that monarchy is protection for the two novelties of the nineteenth century: the nation state and democracy. With the King as a common symbol for the population, monarchy would be protection for the nation state and thereby also protection for democracy because democracy can only exist within the framework of the nation state.¹¹² Further, some leftist MPs have noted that monarchy, by blocking the introduction of a strong president, guarantees the current distribution of power between Head of State-Head of Government-Parliament, which *de facto* is Swedish democracy.¹¹³ An alternative supposition is that the Swedish system changes in 1809, 1865, and 1918 were poorly anchored. As in England, they were revolutions from above and these resulted in hybrid regimes, launched both as monarchies and as “disguised” republics. According to the republicans, the symbolic monarchy of 1974 is yet another such political compromise or subterfuge, acting to erode democracy’s legitimacy. A third supposition is

¹⁰⁹ Robert Hazell and Bob Morris, ed., *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy: European Monarchies Compared* (Oxford: Hart, 2020).

¹¹⁰ Göran Ellung, *Sveriges sista kungar* (SVT, 2022); Karin af Klintberg, *Kungen* (SVT, 2023); Roger Lundgren, *Kungens innersta krets* (TV3 & Viaplay, 2023); Malin Knave, *Tronen* (TV4, 2023); Åsa Linderborg, *Kungen med två ansikten* (TV5 & Discovery plus, 2023). Roger Lundgren, *Kungen 50 år på tronen: en biografi* (Stockholm: The Book Affair, 2023).

¹¹¹ Andréas Norlén, “KU-ordföranden: ‘Varför laga det som inte är trasigt’”, *SVT nyheter*, 14 June 2017.

¹¹² Cecilia Åse, “Vi är överens: Om monarki och demokrati,” in Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén, ed., *Sverigebilder. Det nationellas betydelser i politik och vardag* (Stockholm: Institutet för framtidsstudier, 2008), 49–66 (chapter 3).

¹¹³ Gudrun Schyman, et al., “Införande av republikanskt statskick,” *Riksdagen: motion 2000/01:K257*.

that the apolitical role of the monarchy is enough to explain its existence. The monarchy as a carrier of tradition and an easy-to-understand symbol of the state is therefore perceived—regardless of all reservations—as an asset. According to the Royalist Association, dismantling monarchy would be tantamount to dismantling democracy.¹¹⁴ This seems an exaggeration, however. The Crown is part of the Swedish establishment (the state administration, the church, the banks, big business, EU, UN, Nato, and so forth). Sweden Inc as it sometimes is called. All the parts add social stability but not necessarily democracy.¹¹⁵

There is, in fact, a fourth supposition that expands on the above issues: that the form of government must be protection from both “the tyranny of the minority and the tyranny of the majority.” Parliamentary democracy is protection from the tyranny of the minority. Everything that increases division—modernity, cultural struggle, immigration, monarchy-republic—increases democracy. With so many conflicting wills, no side can gain the upper hand and so they must cooperate. That is not enough, however. The minority must also be protected from the tyranny of the majority. According to John Stuart Mill’s influential treaty “On Freedom” (1859),¹¹⁶ parliamentary majorities were as great a threat to freedom as absolute monarchy, clerical or noble rule. Mill suggested a non-political Head of State, inviolable rights, and civil disobedience as the solution of choice. According to the latest evaluation Swedish politics is moving in this direction.¹¹⁷

The Republican Association’s interpretation is rather that monarchy belongs to a bygone era and nowadays has no purpose but to perpetuate itself. The most condensed summary of the republican credo can be found in the association’s campaign handbook which argues that as long as the Head of State has an independent position, he or she is not an official but a politician.¹¹⁸ An independent Head of State is not the Swedish way. In a parliamentary democracy, the Head of State must be subordinate to the parliament, and, like other government officials, be appointed according to suitability. His or her task is to represent the Swedish state’s official policy in accordance with the Parliament’s directives.

¹¹⁴ Patrik Åkesson & Leo Pieroni. Replik: Monarkin har folkets stöd. (Royalist Association, <https://Altinget.se>, 8 May 2019).

¹¹⁵ Sören Holmberg & Lennart Weibull, „Förtroendefall?“, in Sören Holmberg & Lennart Weibull, ed. *Land du välsignade* (Göteborg: SOM-rapport nr 26, 2000), 38. [“Table 2. Factor analysis of trust-estimations.”]

¹¹⁶ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Project Gutenberg, 2011, original edition 1859).

¹¹⁷ Thomas Bull, “Från ideal till realitet : regeringsformens rättighetsskydd,” in Tommy Möller, ed., *En författning i tiden: regeringsformen under 50 år* (Stockholm: Medströms bokförlag, 2024), 45–68.

¹¹⁸ Jonas Wikström, *Kampanj- och organisationshandbok: för lokalavdelningar och medlemmar i republikanska föreningen* (Stockholm: Republikanska föreningen, 2017).

One proposal is that the Riksdag Speaker must additionally be Head of State. The campaign manual also contains a comprehensive critique of “monarchic reality.” People in general consider it, for example, an honor to be noticed by the King or Queen through a medal or a visit. The association criticizes this as a lingering monarchic structure: “Worshipping or respecting hierarchies is self-harming behaviour. Hierarchies belong to a bygone monarchic society. By divorcing yourself from the old way of thinking, you both free yourself and contribute to the democratization of society.” To which the monarchic answer is: “Don't meddle with what works! Replacing the King with a political nominee, however qualified, will have far-reaching and most likely undesirable consequences. A symbolic role requires tenure, visibility and silence. You have to be born into it.”¹¹⁹ This appears to be the general consensus; the republican response seems off-track. Addressing the population with anti-monarchic propaganda hoping for a referendum (which they certainly will lose), rather than convincing the establishment of the utility of a republic, has been going on since 1848 and there is no end in sight.¹²⁰ In addition there is a white elephant in the room: as long as the monarchy is tied to the state, parliament has some measure of control. Dismantle it and you may create an independent political organization supported by a majority of voters with a grudge.

Data Accessibility

Table 1-2. The Royal Court's annual report of external activities 1997-2011. These are published online at the Royal Court's website and also obtainable from the Bernadotte library. The authors copies are obtainable on demand from epost@eriksoderman.se.

Figure 1. Opinion polls 1943-2020 with either the question “Are you for or against the monarchy” or “Do you want to replace the monarchy with an elected president”. These have been assembled from a variety of sources. The sources and the data are published online at the author's website.

Figure 2. Opinion polls 1981-2020 with the question “Do you trust the royal house”. Trust balance (percent positive minus percent negative). Three groups: Population,

¹¹⁹ Gunnar Heckscher, *Trygga folkstyret!: ett inlägg i författningsdebatten* (Uppsala: Medborgarskolan, 1963), 28–29; Stig H:son-Ericson, *Memoarer: Vita havet. Segling i kungliga farvatten* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1976), 227–242; P J Anders Lindner, *Ja: monarkins bästa tid är nu* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 2010).

¹²⁰ Republikanska föreningen, *Strategi för republik* (Republikanska föreningen, 2017).

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Journalists and Parliament. These have been assembled from a variety of sources.

The sources and the data are published online at the author's website.

The author's website is “<http://thebernadotteproject.eriksoderman.se/>” → “the kings biography” → “part 10: the kingdom in the polls.”

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