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## The Crisis of Consensus in Postwar Sweden

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GÖRAN ROSENBERG

### Introduction

It is said that Swedes are a conflict-avoiding species. This of course is a generalization, but it is not without some empirical foundation. The Swedish ethnologist Åke Daun explicitly includes “conflict avoidance” among the traits of the “Swedish mentality,”<sup>1</sup> and recent studies of Swedish politics in the twentieth century have found that the element of conflict has been greatly exaggerated “and most particularly so if one looks at the contents of what the parties actually have proposed in parliament.”<sup>2</sup>

Conflict avoidance is defined by Daun as “a tendency to avoid direct conflict with people with whom you deeply disagree.” He continues: “Many Swedes typically avoid topics of conversation with a strong emotional charge and on which there are strongly diverging views. In conversations among people in the workplace or at a dinner party, Swedes will typically try to change the subject of conversation, come up with an evasive answer or even relinquish their own view on the matter, in order to avoid a deeper controversy.”<sup>3</sup> Case studies in the 1980s by another Swedish ethnologist, Billy Ehn, detail the culture of conflict avoidance in a factory and a day-care center. In the factory, foreign workers “in a Swedish manner” avoid bringing up their conflicts and differences: “The striving for non-conflict is the rule.” In the day-care center notions of conflict, aggression, and violence are almost nonexistent. Conflict avoidance is the norm in all relations between personnel and children, as well as between personnel and parents. Ehn concludes: “Conflict avoidance can perhaps be regarded as a form of Swedish ‘self-understanding’, a symbolic construction of one’s own cultural identity.”<sup>4</sup> In

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1969 Susan Sontag characterized the Swedish culture of conflict avoidance as “little short of pathological” and the Swedish version of the generally admirable quality of reasonableness as “deeply defective, owing far too much to inhibition and anxiety and emotional dissociation.”<sup>5</sup>

Any observation of this nature undoubtedly reflects a time-bound social and political context, and indeed cultural constructs are usually most clearly visible when they are about to crumble (the owl of Minerva flies at dusk). Nonetheless the signs of habitual conflict avoidance pop up in ever new forms and circumstances. One of them is the tendency in postwar Sweden to avoid having losers in public conflicts, or, rather, to arrange matters so that failure has few or no consequences for the persons involved. Swedish ministers and high public officials rarely resign or get sacked—even when defeat or failure is manifest. The differences in a conflict—if ever made public—are consciously played down, and a decorum of consensus is carefully nurtured. A rhetoric of common interests and understanding quickly disperses whatever gun smoke there may have been.

In December 1998 the Swedish Minister of Defense, Björn von Sydow, resoundingly lost an open conflict with Prime Minister Göran Persson regarding the size of the defense budget. The differences of opinion were clear-cut, the outcome of the struggle unambiguous. The defense appropriations publicly approved of by Mr. von Sydow were publicly retracted by the Finance and Prime ministers (making a difference of nine billion Swedish crowns over three years). In addition, the Swedish Chief of Staff, General Owe Wictorin, a former fighter pilot who quite extraordinarily voiced his dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of the issue, was officially reprimanded.<sup>6</sup>

One would have expected that the two losers in such a grandiose public struggle would either offer their resignations or be discharged from their jobs. That, at least, is what regularly happens in other democracies, but rarely in Sweden, and evidently not in this case. Instead, the core issue of the conflict (what defense at what cost) was quickly and thoroughly muddled by a complicated budgetary maneuver involving short-term internal borrowing from existing military appropriations, thus converting funds for future expenditure into cash for immediate use. Any evaluation of the effects on actual defense programs was carefully postponed. Thus the double illusion could be created that the defense program was carried out as previously agreed—and that it was not. Each side of the conflict could claim victory, no-one had to concede defeat, and seemingly deep differences about goals could be reduced to a technical squabble about means. “What is true and false in this conflict is impossible to judge,” complained a Social Democratic editorial.<sup>7</sup> Hard decisions about weapon procurements, the future of the draft system, and Sweden’s defense needs were temporarily buried in technical seminars and negotiations as if the whole thing had only been a matter of different calcu-

lations or insufficient knowledge. It seemed as if both sides had been merely engaged in the common pursuit of the same rational goal.

But this conflict—about the future size and needs of Swedish defense—is, in fact, not a conflict between different means to achieve the same good but arguably a conflict between different goods—i.e., a conflict of values. One side, most explicitly Vänsterpartiet (the Left Party) and Miljöpartiet (the Greens), who provided the necessary parliamentary votes for the government’s “reductionist” position, is ideologically convinced that disarmament makes for a better world. The other side, represented by the Minister of Defense (and the liberal-conservative opposition), believes that a strong military defense is a necessary public good. These two convictions are not easily reconcilable. In a newspaper article (and a speech in Riksdagen—the Swedish parliament) Mr. von Sydow made it perfectly clear that he saw no possibility of a defense policy based on cooperation with parties who basically wished to do away with military defense altogether.<sup>8</sup> A conflict of values and goals has no technical solution, no formula by which it can be converted into a conflict of means. Nevertheless, this was attempted. It led to yet another unresolved public conflict, to yet another public defeat with no personal consequences.

Swedish public figures might be pressed to resign if caught committing a “crime,” such as using a government credit card for private expenses or vices,<sup>9</sup> or more seriously, abusing constitutional powers for private police operations.<sup>10</sup> Political failures or professional mismanagement, however, have rarely been a cause for dethronement. In the case of Inga-Britt Ahlenius, the director general of the Swedish National Audit Office, *Riksrevisionsverket*, who was fired by the government in September 1999, a very important and principled conflict between Ahlenius and the government concerning the constitutional independence of the auditing institution (Ahlenius arguing for more independence) was made into an issue of personal misbehavior on the part of Ahlenius. In a moment of pique she had made an unsubstantiated public allegation against the Minister of Finance, Bo Ringholm, for conspiring to lie in public. This came as a response to previous allegations by the Finance Minister that Ahlenius was only seeking to promote her own career.<sup>11</sup>

### **A Culture of Consensus—and Its Crisis**

The notion of consensus, frequently attached to “the Swedish Model,” is by no means unambiguously defined or interpreted. It may on the one hand indicate a genuine lack of conflict and broad agreement over existing values and goals. Such a notion of consensus will eventually approach the notion of conflict avoidance, since deeper conflicts of value will be regarded as anom-

alous and undesirable. A national mythology interacting with this particular notion of consensus might for instance develop the belief that public conflicts can and should be kept “within the family,” that the nation in fact is a large family, a people’s home. This notion of consensus implies the ultimate resolution of conflicts by rationalization rather than a never-ending compromise between inevitable differences of values and goals.

A very different notion of consensus implies the latter process; consensus as a temporary agreement based on acknowledged differences and on mutual forfeitures for the sake of peaceful coexistence. This is consensus as compromise rather than resolution. Both notions lead to a “common understanding,” but they do so from very different points of departure, making for very different cultural and institutional constructs. The Swedish word for common understanding, *samförstånd*, tends to obfuscate the distinction between consensus and compromise. A spirit of common understanding, *samförstånd-sanda*, is often expressed as a spirit of compromise, *kompromissanda*, while actually referring to a spirit of conflict avoidance or conflict absorption; agreement by rationalization rather than agreement by give and take.

Consensus is arguably the *modus operandi* of any democratic society under the rule of law, the peaceful *modus vivendi*, if one prefers, of incessantly conflicting opinions and values. But the assumptions behind the culture of consensus differ from society to society. A belief that conflicts are unavoidable and must be recognized will shape a society different from that shaped by the belief that conflicts are irrational and must be done away with. One society will develop a culture of compromise based on a value-laden, *political* conception of consensus, the other a culture of conflict avoidance based on a value-free, *institutional* conception of consensus. The former will regard consensus as the possible outcome of political deliberations, the latter as the necessary foundation of its political institutions. The Swedish culture of consensus is arguably institutional in character—as it is in a family.

The imagery of Sweden as a large family and a people’s home is mostly associated with the ascent to power of the Social Democrats in the early 1930s. However, as Nina Witoszek has shown, a similar imagery can be traced to a specific Christian impulse within the Scandinavian national movements in the nineteenth century, movements that “require to be re-read through the prism of Christian values.”<sup>12</sup> This unique Scandinavian version of the Christian Enlightenment, Witoszek argues, not only proved itself to be immune against the excesses of Romantic reaction, but also constituted the cultural setting for a national reconstruction imbued with the ideals of restrained reason and religious humanitarianism. At a time when “nineteenth-century Europe was romancing the North as a Gothic Utopia, the North was turning to the future—and to the South—in its search for Apollonian clarity and simplicity.”<sup>13</sup> The Christian Enlightenment “inspired and constrained generations of Scandinavian writers and politicians both on the Left

and on the Right,” and the national images it created were assimilated and cultivated beyond the decline of Christian influence. A rationalism originally inspired and tempered by Christian values was incorporated into an explicitly secular model of self-representation. A largely religious imagery of “the family” as a source of community and consensus (“goodwill and cordiality, happy kindness and understanding”) was assimilated into the national and social rhetoric of the times.

Out of this developed a particular Scandinavian—or at least Swedish—path to national construction and social modernization. And perhaps there also developed, as the sociologist Hans Zetterberg has remarked, a specific Swedish brand of rationality, distinct from its French, German, and British counterparts, “marked more by moderation than by logic driven to its final conclusion. Its key word is the (untranslatable) *lagom*, which means both ‘reasonable’ and ‘middle-of-the road.’”<sup>14</sup> This peculiar form of rationalism, writes Zetterberg, “permeates the content of radio and television programs and the editorial and opinion pages of the large newspapers. Political discourse often resembles seminars on economics, political science, and sociology. Political debate in Sweden deals primarily with technical questions.”<sup>15</sup> Quoting Herbert Tingsten’s characterization of the Swedish debate in the 1950s as being mainly about differences in economic and technical assumptions,<sup>16</sup> Zetterberg points out that a democratic debate of this nature “is a debate among rational experts, and the solutions proposed have the appearance of applied social science. Gone are the rabble-rousing, folksy, electioneering politicians; enter the technocrat with his [sic!] briefcase of statistics and research reports and his academic degree.”<sup>17</sup>

This particular form of rationality might of course be attributed to a genuine, albeit extraordinary, confluence of values, in a nation characterized by a remarkable degree of continuity and homogeneity. But a more likely explanation is the existence of well-entrenched institutions culturally programmed to transform existing conflicts of value into conflicts of facts. Such institutions seem in any case to have preceded both the Social Democratic corporatist welfare state and the comparatively peaceful political and social transformations that took place during the Oscarian era of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Their seeds were sown by the forceful creation in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—during the reigns of Charles IX, Gustavus Adolphus, and Christina—of a strong and centralized state bureaucracy. The central power of the royal court in Stockholm needed to be consolidated after a protracted era of conflict between competing centers of power. Strong civil service departments, *ämbetsverk*, were created to run and control the affairs of state. A distinctive feature of these new departments was their collegiate leadership. Decisions were taken by a group of men, a collegium, not by single individuals, creating over time a specific culture of bureaucratic independence and self-importance. While these *kollegier* became efficient tools in the forging of a

centralized Swedish state and undoubtedly strengthened the king's control of the country, they also restricted his autocratic prerogatives. Most royal initiatives henceforth had to be examined through the cool prism of an independent state bureaucracy, and to have their merits weighed against new standards of reason and rationality.<sup>19</sup> A language of matter-of-factness began to cloak and disarm potential conflicts between king and administration.

This specific culture of administrative independence and impartiality, *åmbetsmannakulturen*, was further strengthened in the early decades of the seventeenth century by a large influx of young, educated, and expediently ennobled commoners into the services of the rapidly expanding and incessantly warring Swedish state. Thus was created an extensive class of "lower" nobility, promoted on the basis of education and administrative skill rather than the traditional aristocratic virtues and prerogatives. In Sweden, unlike many other countries, no official positions could be sold or bought. This contributed to exceptional social mobility in Swedish society at the time, so that the step from yeoman to nobleman was not only feasible but sometimes quite rapid. Towards the end of the seventeenth century Sweden had five times more noblemen than during any year of the preceding century. This actual and potential social mobility created, as Eva Österberg has pointed out, a communicative link between separate strata of the Swedish population. The Swedish yeomen had not only formal representation in the assembly of estates (*ståndsriksdagen*, making them the *fourth* estate, *bondeståndet*), but also a real influence on the way rulers and ruled came to look upon each other.

The Swedish yeomen's estate was not as manipulated and subjugated by higher estates as has previously been assumed. In fact, it managed to develop an independent tradition of successful claims and demands that in time created a level of respect, trust, and dialogue between rulers and ruled. King Gustavus Adolphus came to value consultation and open debate "as a rational part of decision-making" and consciously strove for *concordia* in his policymaking, as did his successor, Queen Christina. This rhetoric of *concordia*, argues Österberg, was not just a tactical device, but the expression of a deeper view of "the common good" in which political negotiation came to be seen as a legitimate means to common and unified decisions. The mental universe of Swedish yeomen was thus formed in a specific sphere of "facts and representations," creating, among other elements, a preference for common solutions "in a *spirit of consensus*."<sup>20</sup>

In a recent critical discussion of the Swedish tradition of consensus, Leif Lewin takes his point of departure from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the turbulent decades of democratic demands and labor organization that he defines as "the Oscanian legacy."<sup>21</sup> This legacy, Lewin maintains, perpetuates a strong aversion to conflict. The conservative elite of the Oscanian period regarded public discord as disturbing and unwarranted. It maintained that a government had to remain free of political "party con-

siderations,” that its task was “by way of compromise to even out remaining differences and reach decisions that are beneficial, not only to one single party but to the nation as a whole.”<sup>22</sup> Decisions of the government should be based on “truth and justice,” without a need “for that kind of arguments which are the mere expression of restrictive party discipline.”<sup>23</sup> Lewin’s main point is to show that the Oscanian legacy still permeates Swedish society, making for “a cooperative democracy” (*samarbetsdemokrati*) characterized by the ideals of “cooperation, consensus, compromise, to make odds even, to leave no one outside.” This form of democracy, according to Lewin, is distinct from “majoritarian democracy” (*majoritetsdemokrati*), which is built on the idea of an acknowledged contradistinction between a government of the majority and an opposition of the minority.<sup>24</sup>

Irrespective of the terminology or the genealogy or the polemical intent of Lewin’s analysis of Sweden’s present-day “co-operative democracy,” recent research seems to bear out the essence of his argument. The ideal of cooperation between classes and strata of Swedish society was not an invention of the Social Democrats in their effort to create a “people’s home” in the 1930s. Rather, it came out of already existing institutions and arrangements founded on the basically conservative notion of a value-free, rational, “truth-seeking,” class-transcending, corporatist, consensus-striving, national state. Emil Uddhammar has pointed to the practically uncontested decisions—by strictly conservative governments—to introduce progressive taxes on income and capital (1902 and 1910), to socialize the northern mine fields (1907), to implement the first public pension scheme (1913), to propose a new law for planning and construction (1917). These were all decisions that enhanced the prerogatives of the state and they were all taken by consensus.<sup>25</sup> Bo Rothstein has shown that the first and decisive steps towards the corporatist and interventionist state of the 1930s (associated with Social Democratic rule and symbolized by the “spirit of Saltsjöbaden” (*Saltsjöbadsandan*), were taken by a liberal government with the support of a conservative majority in the Riksdagen—initially against the votes of the Social Democrats. Rothstein concludes that “a collectivist view of democracy” was prevalent at the time among all major parties in Sweden.<sup>26</sup> Uddhammar also highlights the broad unity between the leading political economists of the right and the left, Gösta Bagge, Bertil Ohlin, and Gunnar Myrdal, with regard to the need for a Keynesian, demand-boosting policy of state expenditure, and the utility of public works as a means to combat unemployment.<sup>27</sup>

The government of national unity during the war years must naturally be regarded as an extraordinary arrangement for extreme conditions. However, as Alf W. Johansson has argued in analyzing the fundamental values underlying Sweden’s war policy of neutrality and national unity, rigidity in pursuing these policies eventually went far beyond the demands of the situation. National unity became the pretext for detachment from outer events, for a

value-free stance towards the outcome of war (expressed in March 1941 by Defense Minister Per-Edvin Sköld, who declared that Sweden could have no “interest in the victory of any of the belligerent countries”).<sup>28</sup> Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson insisted to the very end on the non-ideological nature of Sweden’s posture, failing to acknowledge that actions which during the war were defended “as skillful Realpolitik” were later perceived as “running errands for a tyrannical butcher.”<sup>29</sup> Alf W. Johansson terms Swedish war policy “small-state realism,” a policy that subordinated the ideological and moral considerations of the war to the overarching goal of keeping Sweden out of it. It is further documented that Per Albin Hansson was intent on retaining a government of national unity after the war, and that a similar arrangement was initially contemplated by Bertil Ohlin, the leader of the Liberal Party.<sup>30</sup> The potentially harsh social conflicts and confrontations of the 1930s and 1940s were thus moderated by a class-transcending spirit of reason and rationality, and successfully defused within an institutionalized system of central dealings and decision-making.

Hugh Heclø and Henrik Madsen find basically the same system at work when they explore Swedish politics in the 1980s: “To enter the world of Swedish politics and policy is to enter a small, ingrown realm of group decision-making, in which a professional class of politicians, administrators, and interest group functionaries must constantly expect to keep dealing with one another.”<sup>31</sup> They quote approvingly another contemporary study<sup>32</sup> showing “Swedish politicians and administrators to be distinguished from their counterparts in other countries by the considerable emphasis they place on the social skills of getting along with others—not pushing advantages too far, encouraging the co-operation of others, avoiding outright confrontation, and not casting anyone in the role of permanent loser.”<sup>33</sup> Heclø and Madsen eventually conclude that the apparent “coziness” of Swedish policymaking, a system of “principled pragmatism” based on a largely hegemonic (Social Democratic) perception of society, has grown out of “divisiveness, rather than monolithic power.” It is a system “for absorbing internal dissent” and disciplining the diverse constituencies of the labor movement, as well as a system for stemming the growth of any effective opposition.<sup>34</sup>

A more or less consensus-based conception of Swedish society thus seems to have survived into the 1980s, still successfully appealing to the ideal of common reason and rationality to bolster a unified vision of the good society, or at least a vision that no political opposition could effectively manage to challenge. It was a system bent on absorbing internal dissent and disciplining potential adversaries into a sphere of tacit or formal agreement and consensus. This was largely achieved through a well-entrenched administrative culture imbued with the ideals of matter-of-factness (*saklighet*), objectivity, legal security (*rättssäkerhet*) and loyalty to established goals.<sup>35</sup> It created a state apparatus with a special knack for transforming conflicts of goal into



conflicts of means. A particularly effective instrument for the neutralization of potential or actual conflicts of goal was the old institution of public commissions of inquiry and investigation, *Statens offentliga utredningar*, a traditional cornerstone of the Swedish system of governance, yearly producing tomes of facts, figures, and policy recommendations on every conceivable subject. This scholarly output, with its claims to objectivity, not only generated a widespread perception that political problems or conflicts could be solved or absorbed by rational inquiry and investigation, but it also generated a working political consensus among parliamentarians taking part in the public committees and subsequently within the political community as a whole. Open and formal opposition to the recommendations of a public committee was rare and mostly peripheral in character.<sup>36</sup> There was not, then, as in many other democracies, a common understanding based on compromise between open and acknowledged conflicts of value, i.e., different conceptions of good and evil, but a common understanding based on a hegemonic, “value-neutral” definition of the problems of society. Those who were privileged to formulate problems (*problemformuleringsprivilegiet*, to use the adroit expression of Swedish writer Lars Gustafsson) also decided which hidden value-premises had any validity, i.e., which kind of opposition was reasonable—and which was not.

To find signs of breakdown in the Swedish apparatus of consensus creation and conflict avoidance, the alleged rapid decline of the system of public committees of inquiry and investigation might be a good starting point. It has been convincingly demonstrated that the system has lost a great deal of authority and that the quality of committee reports has seriously deteriorated. The effectiveness of the system in creating a “rational” basis for common policy decisions has subsequently diminished. Since the early 1980s the committees have been working “within increasingly limited time frames while tending to have ever more binding ties with the Cabinet Office and the Ministries.”<sup>37</sup> A system that for a long period successfully managed to use facts to absorb or disarm potential conflicts, that was fortified by a widespread belief that a thorough investigation would clear any political fog, has thus become a mere instrument for furnishing the government in power with a shallow mixture of facts, figures, and ready-made proposals. Or, as it was expressed by the recent public commission on administrative policy,<sup>38</sup> *Förvaltningspolitiska kommittén*: “The task [of the committees] has been redirected towards the compilation of already existing facts and their rapid transformation into [political] proposals.”<sup>39</sup>

The tradition of creating common facts as a base for common policy has so permeated Swedish society that its current failure to deliver either common facts or consensus is arguably having detrimental effects on Sweden’s overall ability to handle present-day political and social conflicts, many of them involving genuine clashes of goals and values. Institutions built for conflict

avoidance are by definition not particularly effective in coping with conflicts that are unavoidable. The symptoms of a crisis in the Swedish system of political decision-making abound: decisions already made are retracted or reversed (defense policy, social security, taxes); decisions already made are found to be untenable or unfeasible (a new public pension system launched under a strained consensus has turned out to be so full of conflicting interests and complicated claims that the system as a whole could not be made to work on schedule); decisions by one government are now almost habitually reversed by the next (giving a new meaning to the Swedish word *återställ-lare*<sup>40</sup>); binding commitments are unilaterally ignored (Sweden's obligation by treaty to join the European Monetary Union); important decisions are deferred to popular referenda or left to be "decided" by external pressures and developments (the future of nuclear power, the Swedish position vs. NATO, the substance of neutrality). A more profound and systematic manifestation of the demise of the traditional model of decision-making is an ongoing politicization of the state apparatus, substituting bureaucratic interpretation for political deliberation. "Today, civil servants handle the political production of ideology to a great extent," concludes a group of Swedish social scientists.<sup>41</sup> State programs and actions often appear to come out of a no-man's land of Swedish-European political, judicial, and administrative rule-making, blurring not only the distinction between state administration and political representation, but also the constitutional order of political and judicial responsibility.

There are, of course, specific and complex backgrounds to each and every case of disorganized or defective decision-making, but I would argue that what we essentially see at work is a system, deeply rooted in conflict avoidance, trying to cope in a world of open and unavoidable conflicts. What then happens is what often happens to individuals with a similar predisposition in a similar predicament: the defunct mechanisms of conflict avoidance give way to panicky and ill-conceived emergency reactions, often aggravating the conflict instead of tackling it.

### **The Anomalous Nature of Sweden's Conflicts**

To what extent is the Swedish culture of consensus exceptional? And to what extent may Sweden's present-day problems be attributed to the demise of such an exceptional order of things? Clearly some of Sweden's difficulties in adjusting to a world of new and open conflicts of value are shared with other European welfare democracies. Economic globalization and political Europeanization are no easy challenges for any nation-state. I will nevertheless maintain that (1) the Swedish culture of consensus has been exceptional enough to have exceptional consequences, and that (2) as a consequence Sweden is having exceptional problems in dealing with open conflicts of value.

The first point I shall argue no further. I assume the existence of a particularly long and deep Swedish tradition of consensus to be satisfactorily established. It is also reasonably well established that the institutions of consensus began to show serious signs of weakness sometime during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was mainly due to increased internal and external pressures on the political system, which created new, less avoidable conflicts of value. At the point where the exceptional competitive advantages of the undamaged Swedish postwar economy were about to be consummated, the fine print on the contract for national consensus began to show, demanding ever higher worker productivity, pressing for time measuring and piece wages, calling for an increasingly mobile labor force. All of these led not only to a sharp divergence of views on how to proceed with the modernization of Sweden, but to a divergence of values concerning the nature of the good society. A growing discrepancy between the increasing budgetary demands of the welfare state and the decreasing budgetary surpluses, simultaneously limited and strained the political space for consensus. Money could no longer function as the great mediator and absorber of conflicts. The appeal to *common* sense (traditionally and unquestioningly administered by the Social Democrats) made little sense to a growing number of Swedes. These were years when many experienced “a weakened instrumental relationship” and a failing loyalty to the “public systems.” These were also the years when Gunnar Myrdal noted that Sweden had become a nation of *fifflare*, i.e., con-artists and cheats.<sup>42</sup>

The second point, however, needs some further elaboration. Few will deny that Sweden’s political and social system has suffered from a considerable loss of efficiency and legitimacy during the last two decades. The “decline of the welfare state” is not a cliché. One can even argue that the decline has been quite rapid (plunging in merely two decades from number five to number fifteen in the OECD’s league of GDP per head at purchasing-power parity),<sup>43</sup> and that the ability of Swedish society to adjust politically to changing social circumstances has proven especially weak. It is true that a period of strong-hand social democratic rule (1994-1998) managed to pull Sweden back from the brink of financial disaster (e.g., by regaining control over a galloping national debt), but this was mainly achieved by dodging painful long-term political decisions regarding the future nature of the welfare system, and by spending historically amassed political capital. The consequence was the growth of a strong *leftist* opposition to the Social Democratic Party (in the form of the Left Party, i.e., the former and reformed communists), expressing not only popular disappointment with the harsh measures taken to restore financial solvency, but also a nostalgic yearning for a lost Swedish *Sonderweg* in Europe and the world.

This anti-European welfare state nationalism (in both a Green and a Red version) is not the only exceptional feature of Sweden’s post-consensus state of mind. Exceptional too is the apparent inability of existing institutions to



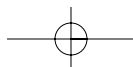
break out of the stalemate in the decision-making process. Political positions in Sweden—regarding labor market reform, taxes, welfare arrangements, social security, etc.—remain rhetorically rigid and polarized. Confidence in politicians and political institutions seems to have declined more rapidly than in most other European countries. In 1986 51 percent of Swedes expressed confidence in parliament. In 1996, the number was down to 19 percent. The proportion of Swedes disagreeing with the statement that “parties are only interested in people’s votes, not in their opinions” dropped from 51 percent in 1968 to 28 percent in 1994.<sup>44</sup>

I will argue here that some of these Swedish “shortcomings” may in part be the exceptional consequences of an exceptionally long and deep-rooted culture of conflict avoidance. There are reasons to think that political institutions bent on transforming conflicts of value into conflicts of fact might become a liability in an environment where conflicts of value are more clearly manifested, and thus harder to avoid or transform. I will further argue that such an inverse relationship between conflict avoidance and conflict resolution can be observed in the way in which some major conflicts of value in the postwar era have been handled—or rather, not handled—by Sweden’s political institutions. My point is that these conflicts more often than not have developed in an *anomalous* manner, dramatically transgressing established institutions of conflict resolution. An anomalous event is capricious, unregulated, and inherently ad hoc. To demonstrate the anomalous nature of major Swedish conflicts is primarily to show that they could not be handled within the existing institutions of consensus, but perhaps also to raise the question of whether these institutions themselves pushed the conflicts into an *anomalous* state—and thereby lost control over them.

### **The Era of Affairs**

During the early postwar period this runaway development of conflicts was mainly manifested in the sphere of foreign and defense policy and assumed the form of “scandals” or “affairs.” These were the result of the strong pressures of consensus emanating from the war period and from the rapidly emerging liturgical character of Swedish neutrality. Neutrality not only remained the dominant feature of Swedish foreign policy after the war, but was transformed from a national necessity to a national “religion,” satisfying among other things a need “to confer legitimacy and moral validity on the country’s wartime policy.”<sup>45</sup> In no other sphere of society were the pressures of consensus more intensely felt, and in no other sphere were the risks of anomalous conflicts larger.

One of these conflicts, the “Hjalmarson affair,” erupted on 27 July 1959, when the Social Democratic government privately decided to exclude the



leader of the Conservative Party (*högerpartiet*), Jarl Hjalmarson, from participation in the Swedish UN delegation. This drastic measure was motivated by the claim that Hjalmarson's strong public anti-Communist and anti-Soviet statements had become a danger to Sweden's policy of neutrality and thereby to its vital security interests. A proper signal had to be sent to the Soviets. Hjalmarson was a long-time critic of what he regarded as a policy of appeasement towards the Soviet regime, especially in connection with the "Catalina affair"<sup>46</sup> and the Korean War. He was also a proponent of alternative security arrangements with Denmark and Norway, which made him the target of severe attacks by Östen Undén, the Swedish Foreign Minister and the architect of Sweden's postwar doctrine of neutrality. Undén accused Hjalmarson of conducting a "personally biased" campaign of defamation against "a neighbor with whom we live in peace after all."<sup>47</sup> This latent conflict of values finally developed into an anomalous affair when Hjalmarson openly and harshly criticized the upcoming state visit to Sweden of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, a visit which, in a speech on 17 July 1959, he deemed "an unfortunate and humiliating propaganda show, where we in words which do not correspond to our feelings shall greet the representative of an inhuman political system and the prime organizer of war threats."<sup>48</sup> When two days later the Soviet leader canceled his visit, citing "hostile campaigns," the Swedish government (Östen Undén) apparently deemed it necessary to "strengthen the credibility of Sweden's policy of neutrality in the eyes of the Soviets"<sup>49</sup> by excluding Hjalmarson from the UN delegation and thus from the official representation of Sweden's foreign and security policy.

Under established conditions of consensus, such a signal to the Soviets—and hence the conflict seething beneath it—would have been kept under a tight lid of secrecy and confidence; an informal deal would have been struck between the parties whereby the outer appearance of unity would have been preserved. This, in fact, was initially attempted. As revealed by Ulf Bjereld in his extensive study of the affair, Hjalmarson was to be provided with a trivial excuse not to go to the UN session in New York. Or perhaps he could go at a later date, when the link to the canceled state visit was no longer apparent. The pressure for a compromise was strong on both sides, not least among conservative politicians and opinion makers. They favored a continued formal consensus in the sphere of foreign policy and basically supported the cautious stance of the Social Democratic government.<sup>50</sup>

When the conflict ultimately became public, it immediately went out of control, as had been feared by both Hjalmarson and Tage Erlander, the Prime Minister. What could have remained a tacit, expedient agreement now became an open conflict of values. In a public debate the government could no longer offer trivial reasons for not including Hjalmarson in the UN delegation. Further, it refused to maintain the cover that presupposed continued secrecy. The Hjalmarson affair developed into an inflamed exchange of accu-

sations and declamations, ripping apart the facade of a consensus of Swedish foreign policy—*against the will of the participants themselves*. The “ban” on Hjalmarson remained in force through 1960 and was lifted only in 1961, in the somewhat less conciliatory era of the Berlin Wall. Bjereld argues that the affair prompted a reformulation of the tenets of Swedish neutrality, paving the way for a new Swedish activism in international politics. This was to be a “third way” between the superpowers, leading to independent “moralist” positions on colonial and postcolonial conflicts, a high-pitched critique of U.S. policies in Vietnam, a tough stance against the apartheid regime in South Africa, and more generally hostility to “injustice and oppression” everywhere. Bjereld further argues that, from then on, conflicting opinions on Sweden’s foreign policy could be openly voiced. The demand for consensus had reached “a dead end” and Sweden was moving from “a cautious concept of balancing between powers to the notions of world conscience and international solidarity, from demands of consensus and national consolidation to an open and free debate on foreign policy.”<sup>51</sup> Bjereld actually regards the Hjalmarson affair as the “culmination of a decade-long conflict between the social democrats and the conservatives on how Sweden’s foreign and security policy should be conducted.”<sup>52</sup>

This, however, does not explain why new “affairs” continued to pop up regularly in the sphere of foreign and security policy. After the Hjalmarson affair came several others, based on similar accusations of not carrying the proper flag of neutrality, thus confirming the existence of some areas of conflict where the demands of consensus had not been slackened. Bjereld himself indicates that the Swedish policy of neutrality and nonalignment was never openly questioned during the 1960s or 1970s, either by the Conservatives (*moderaterna*) or the Liberals (*folkpartiet*), or by the opposition press. He could have added that the privilege of formulating what such a policy entailed—and what it did not—was still very much in the hands of a well-entrenched and consensus-craving elite. Underneath the seemingly more open debate on Sweden’s new activist positions on faraway conflicts and high-flying global issues, the pressures for consensus on geopolitically more imminent and vital matters of policy were still unwavering. The institutions of consensus were thus maintained by, on the one hand, deflecting and absorbing genuine conflicts of value (regarding Sweden’s role and position in the world) into a distant internationalist discourse, and, on the other hand, by keeping a continued tight rule on the closer-to-home tenets of neutrality and nonalignment.

Among the “anomalous” conflicts ensuing from this new *modus vivendi*, one could mention the Holmberg affair, the Bodström affair, the Ferm affair, and the Bildt affair, all creating a continuum of sorts, from the 1960s to the mid 1980s. They all developed around the interpretation of neutrality, they all involved moral castigation of persons and positions, and they were all the

unintended and uncontrolled outcome of suppressed, but fundamental, conflicts regarding Sweden's national duties and commitments in the world.

The first Ferm affair (there was to be a second) broke out in December 1983 around the Swedish ambassador to the UN, Anders Ferm (a close friend and associate of Olof Palme), who had been caught pursuing a secret and highly personal channel to two prominent Soviet representatives in New York. Thereby, it was alleged, he had circumvented and undermined a Swedish note to Moscow delivered only a few days earlier, protesting the 1981 intrusion of a Soviet U-134 submarine into the waters of a major Swedish marine base, where it went aground. Ferm was said to have assured the Soviets that the Swedish note, based on the highly critical findings of a public commission on Soviet submarine activities in Swedish waters, *Ubåtskyddskommissionen* (published in April 1983), had been beyond the Prime Minister's control, and should thus tacitly be disregarded. Fearing an embarrassing public debate on being under Soviet pressure, Prime Minister Olof Palme "chose" to make an appearance on prime-time Swedish television and attempted to defuse the affair by publicly reading from Ferm's letter to him on the meetings in New York. The letter seemed to alleviate the worst suspicions of a secret foreign policy and the debate tapered off. In May 1984, however, the daily *Expressen* managed to show that Mr. Palme had read only highlights, or rather lowlights, from the letter, and a second Ferm affair was suddenly on the loose. The Foreign Minister, Lennart Bodström, who had been left in the dark about the secret contacts, was said to be furious, but he did not have long to wait for his own scandal. At an "off the record" dinner with journalists, he questioned the findings of the submarine commission and raised doubts as to whether there really had been any Soviet intrusions into Swedish waters, other than the unfortunate U-134 trying to climb a rock outside Karlskrona.

This semi-submerged debate on the Soviet submarine threat also triggered one of several Bildt affairs during the 1980s. Carl Bildt, foreign policy spokesman of the Conservative party (later party chairman and prime minister), openly met with representatives of U.S. intelligence to discuss the findings of the submarine commission. Olof Palme, finding out about Bildt's U.S. journey, publicly branded him a security risk and a threat to Swedish foreign policy. Again, what could and should have been a debate acknowledging diverging values and ideals was forced into the cramped space of institutional consensus,<sup>53</sup> from where it could escape only as uncontrolled bursts of smear and defamation.<sup>54</sup>

This habit of resorting to "categorical statements about the requirements for upholding the credibility of the policy of neutrality" had already been authoritatively described and criticized in 1973, with the argument that since such requirements were impossible to know with any certainty, neutrality should be treated less as a dogma and more as an ordinary political issue where conflicts of goals were openly acknowledged.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Era of Flip-flops and Deadlocks**

The pressures of institutional consensus are still affecting the debate on Sweden's neutrality and its position in Europe. The radical flip-flop in October 1990 on Sweden's membership in what was about to become the European Union, reversing decades of nay-saying into "an ambition to become a member of the European Community," was characterized by institutional decorum and a conspicuous avoidance of public debate. The proper occasion to have proposed such a radical policy change, and to have it debated, was the Social Democratic party congress in Stockholm in late September 1990, only six weeks before the actual flip-flop. Yet all debate on the issue was explicitly discouraged, most explicitly by the Minister of Foreign Trade, Anita Gradin, who argued that there was no need to debate EC membership before Sweden had concluded its negotiations with the EC on EEA, the European Economic Area.<sup>56</sup> Symptomatically, her intervention at the party congress effectively extinguished whatever sparks of debate there might have been. Thereafter not a single voice was raised for or against EC membership, nor a single question asked. The party congress only stated that the upcoming EEA Treaty "does not exclude future Swedish membership if this should prove possible and desirable."<sup>57</sup>

While by this time the party leadership and Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson must have made up their minds on membership and been basically looking for the right moment and the proper formula, they carefully kept the process within a very small and informal circle of decision-makers, to avoid having party and public opinion backfire on them. The necessary consensus on such a radical departure from earlier positions and ideals would obviously have to be carefully manipulated. So far the arguments *against* membership had been explicitly political and strongly value-laden, referring as they did to Sweden's moral position in the world, its national ethos, its policy of neutrality. The *relevant* arguments *for* membership would have to be equally political and value-laden—substituting one view of Sweden's role in the world for another.

This, however, could not be openly declared by the party and state leadership since it would inevitably have created a deep and genuine conflict of values, particularly within the rank and file of the Social Democratic Party. The membership question was thus transformed from a political and value-laden issue to an economic and value-free one (jobs and welfare). It was made to coincide with a severe crisis in the balance of payments in October 1990. Foreign currency reserves were rapidly melting away, and there was an immediate demand for drastic and unpopular cuts in public spending. The genuine conflict of values anticipated with a decision on membership could thus be neutralized by (1) stating (somewhat prematurely) that the EC was not aiming at a common European defense policy (and therefore it would not



endanger Swedish neutrality) and (2) stating that EC membership would contribute to solving Sweden's economic problems. The second statement was particularly remarkable, since the previous argument for joining the EEA rather than the EC was that Sweden would thereby enjoy all the economic benefits without paying any of the political costs. On Friday 26 October, Sweden's formal declaration of its intent to become a member of the European Community was tucked away in a wide-ranging economic austerity package, not quite literally as a footnote but certainly giving that impression, considering the nature and importance of the matter. Subsequent inquiries into the decision-making process all testify to the conscious efforts made to absorb an apparent conflict of values and goals into a consensus-friendly conflict of means. EC membership was framed as simply a new and better way toward economic growth and job creation. This also explains why the value conflicts of EU membership were never allowed to play themselves out in the Swedish referendum of 1994, and why a great many voters in Sweden were made to believe that EC membership was indeed all about jobs, prices, and growth, and not about a major political reorientation and a radical challenge to the nation's self-image.

Just how powerful an urge for consensus still remained can be gauged from the travails of Carl Bildt. In a memoir published in 1991,<sup>58</sup> Bildt claimed that in 1987 he had already made up his mind on EC membership, but he apparently forgot to tell his voters about it until the Spring of 1990. In the meantime he had made public statements to the contrary. In July 1989 he still publicly regarded neutrality as an obstacle to membership.<sup>59</sup> What would have happened if he had dared to publicly voice his opinion in 1987? What were the invisible pressures at work?

A deeply embedded institutional structure of national consensus can probably not be dismantled without painful political sacrifices, and it therefore tends to remain in existence far beyond its political utility and democratic legitimacy. In the case of Sweden, the regime of consensus in the sphere of foreign policy eventually had to involve a considerable amount of secret diplomacy, closed-door negotiations, and political double standards, as well as strong pressures for conformity. The extent of the political double standards practiced has recently been revealed by the release of new archive material and reports. In 1994 the Public Commission on the Policy of Neutrality, *Neutralitetspolitik-kommissionen*, concluded that Prime Minister Tage Erlander, in a speech to Riksdagen in 1959, had "consciously misrepresented" important facts regarding Sweden's security policy, emphatically denying that Sweden had ever taken part in "preparations or consultations" regarding military cooperation with the West. The truth now seems to be that there *was* secret planning of military coordination between Sweden and NATO in the event of a war, including direct and close ties with U.S. military agencies. In 1998 and 1999 Swedish radio and several leading newspapers

published detailed information on a number of fronts: on the planned use of Swedish airbases for Western security operations in the case of war, on secret plans (existing well into the 1980s) to evacuate the Swedish government to Britain in the case of war, on the fact that Sweden's ties to Western security planning were known to the Soviets (and that Sweden knew they were) and that therefore the only ones ultimately to be deceived by the official liturgy of neutrality were the Swedes themselves.

On the tight ship of neutrality, there appear to have been several decks to which most of the people, for the sake of their own good, were denied access, and where those who were let in had to conform to very strict rules of conduct and tacit limits of dissent. In hindsight one might even suspect that the "crime" of Jarl Hjalmarson in 1959 was not that he spoke without knowing the secret biases of Sweden's neutrality, but that he probably knew them all too well, and that he consciously wanted to tear open the veil of consensus on the nature and purpose of Sweden's policy of neutrality.

This veil of consensus, which for almost forty years blocked any real discussion on Sweden's neutrality, in my view also explains why no real discussion has yet taken place. "Neutrality," slightly reformulated, stubbornly remains a tenet of consensus in the political debate, devoid of all practical significance but enjoying a popular resonance that is hard to challenge. Under the institutional pressures of consensus, "neutrality" went from being a chosen position in Sweden's security and foreign policy to becoming a symbol of national identity and purpose. This symbolism is still strong enough to create a virtual political deadlock on issues where Sweden's identity is perceived to be at stake—and where genuine conflicts of value threaten to erupt. These conflicts involve Sweden's role in Europe (do we historically "belong" or not?), Sweden's membership in the EU (still not accepted by almost half the population), Sweden's participation in EMU (the Economic Monetary Union) (not yet supported by the very leaders who signed the Maastricht Treaty), Sweden's position vis-à-vis NATO and WEU (the Western European Union) (where political rhetoric and military practice remain far apart), and, more generally, Sweden's *Sonderweg* in world affairs, where the reflexes of neutralist activism have not yet been moderated by the realities of European collectivism. These are exactly the kinds of conflict purposefully avoided by the still entrenched institutions of consensus, which, not being designed to handle open and genuine conflicts of value, have created a *modus operandi* in Swedish politics where crucial policy choices and decisions are made to happen "by default," by the rule of "circumstances," by the "objectivity" of facts, rather than through open political conflict, deliberation, and choice. Sweden will decide to join the EMU when we *de facto* already have, and probably join NATO or a European defense order at the point when we are already fully militarily integrated.

Flip-flops, deadlocks, and the rule of "circumstances," and the conspicuous degree to which they characterize the current Swedish polity, are

arguably the exceptional and debilitating effects of a long and exceptional rule of institutional consensus.

### The Era of Battles

There have been a few significant instances in Sweden's postwar history where major conflicts of value could not be absorbed or suppressed by the traditional institutions of consensus. In these instances, the conflicts had to be dealt with outside the regular decision-making process, creating comparatively uncontrolled ad hoc "battles" (*strider*). The first was the battle on a public system of wage-related pensions, *ATP-striden*, in 1957, followed by battles on nuclear power and wage-earner funds in the 1970s and 1980s, and by the still raging battle on Europe in the 1990s. Some of these battles have led to popular referendums (an extra-ordinary institution in Swedish politics<sup>60</sup>). They have all featured frustrated political minorities trying to break out of the constraints of institutional consensus, and they have all contained elements of extraordinary drama and anomalous occurrences.

The battle on ATP (*allmän tilläggspension*) focused on the role of the state in organizing a supplementary wage-related pension scheme on top of an already existing but insufficient fixed-sum entitlement (*folkpension*). The apparent conflicts of value involved could not be contained at the negotiating tables of institutional consensus, and were soon formulated into three fiercely combative schemes. The Social Democrats and the Central Trade Union Organization (LO), argued for a mandatory collective system organized and guaranteed by the state. Their coalition partner in the government, the Peasants' Party (*bondeförbundet*) insisted on a wholly individual and voluntary system. The Liberals and the Conservatives, jointly with the Employers' Federation (SAF), proposed that a pension scheme should be worked out through central labor market negotiations.<sup>61</sup> This was a conflict that, in Bo Stråth's analysis of the campaign, pitted notions of "justice" and "security" against "personal unfreedom" and a "state quashing all initiative," a conflict about "important principles and visions."<sup>62</sup> It was a conflict where the strained routines of institutional consensus suddenly burst into a rare frenzy of value-laden attacks and counterattacks.

In her fascinating political diaries, Ulla Lindström, a Social Democratic minister at the time, is struck by the "un-Swedishness" of the parliamentary debate on 15 May 1957, when the terms of the upcoming referendum were discussed and voted on: "The flames of passions went high in a distinctly un-Swedish way. One could witness how Ohlin [the leader of *folkpartiet*] was unable to contain himself during Gunnar Hedlund's [leader of *bondeförbundet* and Minister for Domestic Affairs] intervention, and how arguments were thrown from pulpit to bench, as if in a shouting match between Per and Pål

[figures of Swedish folklore] ... Hjalmarson [the leader of *högerpartiet*] on his part seemed half-choked from indignation during one of his 'rebuttals.'<sup>63</sup> As the conflict escalated, the traditional mechanism of compromise and consensus broke down and the conflicting positions hardened rather than softened.<sup>64</sup> The political deadlock that ensued after the referendum, with the popular vote for the Social Democratic proposal but a parliamentary majority against it, led to extraordinary elections in June 1958, after which the parliamentary deadlock was nonetheless perpetuated. The battle on ATP lasted for three years and was finally decided in a dramatic parliamentary vote on 14 May 1959, with one single Liberal MP, the much castigated Ture Königson, breaking party ranks and thereby tipping the scales towards the Social Democrats.

I will not dwell on the reasons why the mechanisms of consensus did not hold firm in this instance.<sup>65</sup> It is enough to point out that when they finally gave way to a genuine conflict of values, the traditional institutions of consensus and conflict avoidance could neither handle nor control it. The course of the ensuing "battle" became far more antagonistic and unruly than would have been expected in the existing political culture, and the outcome was to a large extent decided by extra-institutional forces and events.

Ten years later another "battle" was fomenting: the battle on wage-earner funds (*löntagarfonder*). Although its outbreak can be dated to the mid 1970s, its roots may be traced to the dramatic upheavals in the Swedish labor market in the late 1960s, in particular the illegal miners' strike of December 1969. This led to increased agitation within the unions and the Social Democratic Party itself (not to mention the radical left), against the spirit of *Saltsjöbaden*, i.e., the symbol of institutional consensus. The consensus began to stand for the "selling out" of workers' interests to the benefit of capitalist profit. This was a period when the human costs of radical modernization and the growing pressures from foreign competition were being increasingly felt. It was a time too of increased use of piece rates and time measurement management, as well as pervasive demands for workers' mobility.<sup>66</sup> "Mobility for safety" (*Rörlighet för trygghet*) was actually adopted as the official policy of the LO, the central trade union, in a 1961 platform for economic policy described at the time as "the gospel of mobility."<sup>67</sup> A belief in radical modernization had by now become the core of institutional consensus in the sphere of economic development, backed by a stream of scientific and other authoritative reports testifying to its undisputed rationality.<sup>68</sup> What took place in the early years of the 1970s was, in fact, a breakdown of the authority and legitimacy of this seemingly value-free interpretation of rational economic action, and the beginnings of an open conflict of values regarding the nature and purpose of "the Swedish model."

What continues to puzzle students of the battle on wage-earner funds is the aggressive radicalism which it suddenly manifested. From being an issue well within the confines of institutional consensus—one actually pursued at

the outset by the *folkpartiet* in an attempt to create a liberal link between Capital and Labor, with the Social Democrats and the LO as slightly indifferent but benevolent bystanders—it soon assumed all the characteristics of a Swedish *casus belli*. In 1975 Rudolf Meidner, a leading economist with the LO, proposed nothing less than a “thorough reformation of society” by making the trade unions owners of industrial capital through collective wage-earner funds: “We wish to deprive the old owners of capital of that power which comes with ownership. All experience shows that influence and control are not enough. Ownership plays a crucial role.”<sup>69</sup> With bold value statements like this, Meidner and his co-writers set the tone for the battle to come.<sup>70</sup>

The system of institutional consensus had so far responded adequately to the challenge: a parliamentary commission, *Löntagarfundsutredningen*, stacked with representatives from every corner of the consensus apparatus, had been charged in January 1975 with the task of digging out “the facts” of the matter, smoothing out the differences and coming up with a broad consensus proposal on how to combine the “solidaristic wage policy” (whereby high earners forgo increases in favor of lower earners) with continued “high rates of capital formation.” As usual, government directives were written with due conflict-avoiding finesse, and in fact in close collaboration between the Social Democratic government and the *Folkpartiet*. This time, however, it did not work. Hardened positions of value had already been allowed to crystallize outside the consensus system. Although the LO had been given a clear say in the formulation of the committee directives, it still continued to pursue its own separate line of inquiry. Meidner’s report from 1975 was elevated from a mere “personal view” to the subject of a wide-ranging study campaign, and finally to the status of official document at the LO congress in September 1976. The LO leadership committed itself to its basic principle: the “democratization of ownership” through the transfer of industrial capital to collectively owned and controlled wage-earner funds. That this would also lead to a transfer of economic power—from an ever-smaller group of private capital owners to democratically-controlled institutions—was quite clearly stated.

This new position of the LO, reversing the existing consensus on the insignificance of ownership (“functional socialism”), or rather, on the benefits of a system where large private corporations worked closely together with a social democratic state, further emphasized the deep conflicts of value involved and thereby drastically narrowed future room for compromise and consensus. The rapidly evolving backyard shouting match between “Per and Pål” (LO and SAF) was soon making a lot more noise than the technical deliberations of the public committee, and political actors were pushed into positions they had not intended to take. The Social Democratic leadership in February 1978 made common cause with the LO and produced a report from which it later had to spend a lot of energy and political capital to extricate itself. SAF in the meantime developed a fierce anti-fund propaganda, using



expressions like “trade union mafia,” “a crime against human rights,” “the demise of democracy,” and “Sweden’s grave.” In the scholarly community the barricades went up as well, pitting one professor against another. Whatever rational “solutions” might have been concocted in the cool and secluded atmosphere of rational negotiations in a public committee or in the corridors of government and parliament, they were effectively undermined by the outbreak of an uncontrolled and “un-Swedish” public conflict of value.

The public commission on wage-earner funds dramatically failed to produce anything more than “a great number of expert studies and a meager final report” during six and a half years of work,<sup>71</sup> and eventually collapsed “with the kind of crash that had not been heard in the Swedish system of public commissions in several years.”<sup>72</sup> The various members of the commission, according to its last chairman, Berndt Öhman, not only disagreed on how the given task should be interpreted, but also on what was actually to be investigated and what goals were to be achieved.<sup>73</sup> This was even more anomalous because the commission had been put together during a period of intensified consensus efforts in other areas of economic policy (symbolized by the consecutive deals at the castle of Haga outside Stockholm, between the Social Democrats and the Liberals), and because wage-earner funds were initially a liberal idea.<sup>74</sup> Berndt Öhman attempted in vain to infuse the conflict with a new rationality by trying to find an “objective” definition of democracy through a “matter-of-fact analysis” by a leading political scientist.<sup>75</sup> In the rising conflict about the scope and purpose of wage-earner funds, however, not only did the veil of common rationality rapidly disappear, but the actors were soon throwing the harshest invectives at one another and seriously questioning each other’s motives. This eventually forced open a deep split within the labor movement itself, between political “realists” and trade union revolutionaries. The split is best conveyed by the self-derogatory rhyme scribbled on a piece of paper by Finance Minister Kjell-Olof Feldt during the final vote of the *Riksdagen* in December 1983 and picked up by an observant photographer’s telescopic lens: “Löntagarfonder är ett jävla skit, men nu har vi baxat dom ända hit.”<sup>76</sup>

In the early stages of the conflict a leading representative of the Employers’ Federation, Erland Waldenström, could still characterize Rudolf Meidner’s initial proposal as “interesting and thought-provoking,” regardless of one’s own “fundamental values,”<sup>77</sup> but the political climate for such conciliatory remarks and consensus-inviting overtures soon vanished. The public debate became increasingly emotional, and the spirit of confidence and consensus dissolved into an atmosphere of conspiracy and suspicion. Proponents of wage-earner funds were accused of planning a transfer of power that practically amounted to a coup d’état, drastically reducing the importance of democratic political institutions.<sup>78</sup> The wage-earner conflict culminated on 4 October 1983, with the first large-scale public rally of Swedish employers in

recent history and an apparent breakdown in the corporatist apparatus of negotiation and consensus. Some of the active participants in the conflict later concluded that its diverging positions were truly irreconcilable, its ideological contradictions fundamental, and its scheme for consensus “still-born.”<sup>79</sup> Åsard still maintains that the system was never given a proper chance to prove itself, that conflicts of *value* (or, as Åsard prefers it, conflicts at the “systemic” level) were allowed to intensify beyond the point where they could be safely dealt with at the “reformistic” or “factual” level (*sakfrågenivån*), i.e., as conflicts of *means*. A system optimized for intimate face-to-face negotiations on *matters of fact* suddenly had to deal with a conflict where no such facts could be put in place. What originally seemed predestined to end in a grand compromise thus ended in “the toughest political confrontation of the postwar era.” When a genuine conflict of value was eventually let out of control, even threatening the unity of the labor movement, the Swedish system simply fractured, exacerbating the conflict instead of contributing to its management. Bo Stråth concludes that the ultimate defeat of LO in the battle on wage-earner funds (the proposal finally voted on by Riksdagen in 1983 had little if anything in common with the visions of 1975 and 1978) would have lasting consequences for the organization, leaving “LO publicly disorientated and without a symbol.”<sup>80</sup>

This disorientation and lack of a symbol would again become apparent ten years later in the conflict on EU membership, a “battle” that again demonstrated Sweden’s difficulties in accepting and dealing with genuine conflicts of value. It left Swedish society with yet another political battle deadlocked by mutual resentment and suspicion. Instead of arriving at new symbols and positions evolved from an open conflict of values, obsolete positions were clung to in an increasingly futile (and inward-looking) attempt to restore the old terms of Social Democratic consensus. As Erik Ringmar has observed, the rhetorical battle over Swedish EU membership was not about whether to change Sweden’s position and role in the world (and hence its self-perception) but about how to *preserve* the past: “The Swedes were in the end convinced to vote in favor since they believed that the membership would allow them to continue to be what they thought they had always been.”<sup>81</sup>

I would argue that the continued symbolic value of “the Swedish Model” for important segments of the population (and for the corresponding institutional structure) has been a crucial and sometimes neglected factor in Sweden’s comparative inability to tackle the societal and constitutional challenges of economic globalization and new technology. The difficulties in negotiating even minor labor market reforms, such as slightly liberalizing the terms of entry and exit, or modifying the wage structure (in order to tackle massive unemployment), seem to indicate that there is a high price to be paid for consensus lost. During state-sponsored central negotiations in the 1990s, recurrent attempts to revive consensus on wage formation and labor market

regulations (starting in 1990 with the “Rehnberg commission”) have gone practically nowhere.<sup>82</sup> The fact that during the same period countries like the Netherlands and Finland have managed to successfully retain and revive their political consensus seems to indicate that their systems have been less linked to a particular image of the nation, less imbued with a particular idea of the “good society,” and more shaped by the pressing need to handle genuine conflicts of value (the Netherlands in particular being an openly multicultural society). The obvious result in any case is that these countries have been able to partially reinvent their social institutions and to negotiate new terms of a common understanding, while Sweden, so far, has not.

### **The Lesson of Nuclear Power**

Perhaps the most instructive failure of Swedish institutions of consensus to absorb and suppress genuine conflicts of value concerns the use of nuclear power. An almost unanimous consensus during the 1950s and 1960s about the usefulness and urgency of nuclear power for energy production (complete with a local uranium supply and a uniquely Swedish reactor design based on heavy water) was ripped apart in the early 1970s by an emerging awareness of the short-term and long-term risks associated with the nuclear fuel cycle, and by new resentments and anxieties associated with increasingly complex, large-scale, and nontransparent technical systems. In 1973 the Center Party, led by the charismatic Thorbjörn Fälldin and guided by the renowned Swedish physicist and Nobel Laureate Hannes Alfvén, drastically reversed its position on nuclear power from an enthusiastic “Yes!” to a resounding “No!”

The controversy quickly permeated the Swedish political scene, where the Center Party and Mr. Fälldin had become instrumental in the opposition’s efforts to put an end to almost half a century of continuous Social Democratic rule. They finally succeeded in 1976 when a non-socialist coalition of both pro- and antinuclear parties was formed, and huge efforts were immediately invested in trying to transform the dispute from a conflict of values into a controversy of facts—in which some ultimate fact would finally decide whether nuclear power was good or bad. Since this was obviously impossible, and since Mr. Fälldin had already stated that no government post would make him compromise with his own conscience, and since this to a great many people was a matter of conscience and not of fact, the first non-socialist majority government in Sweden’s post-war history fell apart in 1978, while new nuclear reactors were still being constructed and charged with nuclear fuel. The ongoing attempts to find a factual formula that would disarm the conflict continued; new government commissions, new laws and regulations, all failed. The controversy on nuclear power was ultimately not about diverging facts but about diverging values. The way we produce our



energy, its impact on the environment and society, and its uses and abuses can never be reduced to pure technical and economic calculations.

In March of 1980, in the wake of the accident at Three Mile Island, the nuclear issue was brought to a popular referendum—and again the genuine conflict of values involved was cunningly suppressed. Although three questions were eventually formulated, none of them openly argued *for* nuclear power. Instead, the Swedes were offered three choices on when and under what conditions to *end* the Swedish nuclear program. Those who in reality were in favor of an open-ended nuclear program (the Conservative Party and the organizations of Swedish industry) tactically concealed their true values in order to entice public opinion into supporting the existing nuclear program, and to better position themselves at the negotiating tables of institutional consensus. Swedish citizens who happened to believe that nuclear power was a collective good that ought to be sustained, further researched, and eventually expanded, were simply given no vote to cast. Not surprisingly, the referendum campaign became an exercise in Orwellian newspeak, where ending the nuclear program meant expanding it from six to twelve reactors, and where the “end” was subject to the “needs of employment and welfare,” to the “lifetime” of existing reactors, and to the development of “alternative” sources of energy. This was also what the referendum eventually “decided.”<sup>83</sup>

Sweden’s nuclear controversy had thus been reduced to the gauging of welfare needs, the estimation of reactor lives, and the economic-scientific evaluation of energy alternatives. This implied that there existed a particular set of facts and measurements upon whose establishment disagreements would finally disappear and a rational energy policy reemerge under the old aegis of institutional consensus. The ensuing administrative lull, during which the issue practically disappeared from public debate (everybody being fed up with yet another committee report, fact or estimate), was dramatically interrupted by the disaster at Chernobyl in early 1986, which had a lasting environmental impact on a number of Swedish regions. Once again the value-based nature of the conflict became apparent, and demands for a beginning to the already decided abandonment of nuclear power became more pronounced.

I will not dwell on the ensuing political maneuvers to absorb and disarm the conflict; I shall only point to the fact that the lines of battle again remained firmly drawn between contradictory sets of facts rather than between contradictory sets of values. Those who argued for a beginning of the end, i.e., a plan for decommissioning the first reactors, argued that the facts were on their side, that decommissioning would bring a boost to entrepreneurship, welfare, and employment. Those who were against argued that decommissioning amounted to an irrational destruction of capital, a recipe for unemployment, and a step back to the age of woodfire heating. This latter line of argument was pursued with particular vehemence by *Dagens Nyheter*, the liberal daily which in the campaign of 1980 had been a staunch proponent of rapid decommission-

ing (alternative 3), but which in the 1990s radically reversed its position. The debate became particularly heated in the spring of 1997 (seventeen years after the referendum), when the Social Democratic government with the support of the Center Party, declared its intention to close down the first nuclear reactor at Barsebäck. *Dagens Nyheter* basically argued that methods of energy production were a purely technical and economic matter, better decided by relevant experts than by ignorant and populist politicians. "One cannot vote on the physical and chemical properties of matter," stated one characteristic editorial (5 February 1997), implying that the decision to close Barsebäck was based on pure factual ignorance. A similar line of reasoning led Mats Svegfors, editor-in-chief of *Svenska Dagbladet*, to conclude (in a signed editorial) that Göran Persson, the Swedish Prime Minister, by his decision had come "to personify to the whole world the image of fully developed political stupidity" (21 January 1997). Another editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* (10 January 1997) again stressed the distinction between the factual basis of the anti-decommission position and the ideological bias of all others: "On one side there is a group which sees energy production as rather a philosophical or ideological matter, permeated by the idea that the use of nuclear energy is irreconcilable with a responsible human handling of our earthly heritage. On the other side there is a group which does not see nuclear energy as a great risk, but on the contrary believes that nuclear energy is preferable not only to fossil fuels but also to bio fuels."

The conspicuous fact that the editorial does not attach any "ideological" or "philosophical" values to the pro-nuclear position, assuming it to be purely factual in character, testifies to the entrenched mechanisms by which genuine conflicts of value tend to be transformed into never-ending disputes of facts. And, in this case, it also testifies to the dramatic failure of these mechanisms to even temporarily confront and resolve one of Sweden's most prolonged and painful postwar political conflicts. A recent pamphlet by two Swedish scholars attests to the continued influence of a tradition in which consensus is regarded as a matter of fact. The whole matter is very "simple and self-evident," they write. The only thing that needs to be debated is the future energy supply of Sweden in a global perspective. "In such a perspective the issue of nuclear power becomes a secondary one."<sup>84</sup> What they thereby seem to indicate is that "in such a perspective" the mushy values of the antinuclear stance will succumb to the hard facts of energy supply and demand, the treacherous play of politics will give way to the unambiguous recommendations of scientific experts, and the tradition of rational consensus will finally be restored.

### **Wars of History**

Sweden's culture of consensus is a problematic one, not because it has been weakened and compromised in recent years, but because it remains a part of

the Swedish national identity. A culture of consensus can be pragmatic, aiming at handling and resolving recurrent conflicts, and it can be ideological, aiming at doing away with conflicts as such. The current Swedish model of consensus has arguably been of the latter kind, decisively molded in the ideological fervor of the 1930s, when society was reconstructed as a People's Home based on a corporatist model of negotiations and rational (value-free) collective action. Swedish consensus was about finding the "right, factual solution to conflict, not about finding a temporary *modus vivendi* between conflicting values and interests. Few nations define themselves by their genius for consensus and rational action. Sweden to some extent did. The current crisis of consensus in Swedish society is thus less a crisis in the system of organized decision-making (which it undoubtedly also is) than it is a crisis in the national soul. Those who yearn for a return to the Swedish model yearn not only for a return to a previous order of encompassing collective action and decision-making and the "strong government" associated with it, but also for a lost sense of national purpose.

Swedish institutions of consensus cannot be easily replaced, which is why they are still standing, however debilitated and defunct. To devise new institutions and new modes of decision-making, taking into account the reality and the multitude of genuine conflicts of value, will demand no less than a redefinition of what Sweden "is all about." It will call for new historical "foundations" to take the place of *folkhemmet*, the now moribund core of Sweden's postwar identity and the Social Democratic hegemony associated with it. I believe that this process is already taking place in the sphere of Swedish historiography, where a number of "history wars" are now being waged. Long dominant versions of the origins of the Swedish model, of Sweden's social progress during the 1930s, of Sweden's policy of neutrality during the Second World War and the Cold War, have all been severely challenged. The clear-cut image of Sweden as a uniquely monocultural and hegemonic society with few or no real conflicts of value has been interestingly complicated by renewed inquiries into Sweden's hegemonistic policies towards ethnic minorities (*sami*, "tattare", gypsies) and its zealous policies of sterilization towards the "socially unfit."<sup>85</sup> In a similar way, the image of Sweden's policy of neutrality as morally unquestionable and meticulously implemented has been seriously undermined by findings of shady dealings during World War II, secret security arrangements during the Cold War and dubious double standards in the global business of arms trade.

I happen to believe that at the heart of these history wars lies one major conflict of value: between the still mighty appeal of a separate Swedish destiny based on a strong nation-state, wide-ranging state welfare, international neutralism, and institutional consensus, and the increasing push for a new and more "European" foundation based on concepts of subsidiarity, civil society, human rights, cultural pluralism, and conflict-handling. The idea of a Swedish

separate destiny was once—and not too long ago—a uniquely powerful and successful one, and it is hard to see how this conflict can be resolved or even modestly handled without a major crisis in an institutional framework that still largely embodies that special destiny, i.e., operates under the assumption that conflicts of value can be transformed into conflicts of facts, and cannot therefore handle a conflict where deeply diverging values about the good society are pitted against each other. A tradition that does not allow for “irresolvable” conflicts of value, but assumes that one or the other side is not enlightened enough, will have difficulties in finding that precious *modus vivendi* in which conflicting values can communicate, coexist, and mutually evolve.

Like every modern pluralist society, what Sweden needs is not a tradition of institutional consensus but an institutionalized culture of conflict and diversity. Such a culture regards genuine conflicts of value as the most basic fact of modern life and society, and will thus endeavor to create institutions where such conflicts are recognized, confronted, and constitutionally regulated. In such a culture, social conflicts must not be shunned or avoided but must be seen instead as potential sources of human energy and creativity. The art of creating a decent society without resorting to high levels of cultural cohesion and political consensus is certainly a most difficult and challenging one. One could even say that if there were a *decent* way back to the era of *folkhemmet* it might have been preferable. Pluralism is always more complicated than homogeneity. But the way back to consensus and homogeneity from pluralism and diversity is most likely not a decent one at all, for it is prone to involve an all too familiar scenario of violence, exclusion, and coercion. A culture of conflict and diversity is perhaps a demanding way of life but—to paraphrase Churchill—all the others are probably worse.

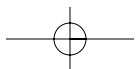
The gist of this essay has been that some societies might have an easier transition to a culture of pluralism and diversity than others, and that Sweden will have greater difficulties than most. The main reason for this is the still existing link between Sweden’s increasingly dysfunctional tradition of institutional consensus and Sweden’s seemingly irreplaceable national mythology. The Swedish transition cannot be merely constitutional or organizational in nature; it will probably have to involve a painful break with past national beliefs and myths. This will not be made easier by the mental and cultural tradition of individual conflict avoidance that made Susan Sontag locate the early problems of the Swedish model not in its welfare institutions but in “a national temperament” going back to “centuries ago” and amounting to “a collective historical tradition of emotional disablement.”<sup>86</sup>

If Susan Sontag is only half right, and I believe she is, then a transformation of Sweden’s culture of consensus will have to involve a deep change in the way individual Swedes emotionally relate to a world where genuine conflict of value is an inescapable part of social life.



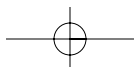
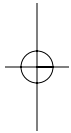
## Notes

1. Åke Daun, *Svensk mentalitet, ett jämförande perspektiv* (Stockholm, 1989, third revised ed. 1998), 102 ff.
2. Emil Uddhammar, *Partierna och den stora staten, en analys av statsteorier och svensk politik under 1900-talet* (Stockholm: City University Press, 1993), 473.
3. Daun, *Svensk mentalitet*, 102.
4. Billy Ehn, *Ska vi leka tiger? Daghemsliv ur kulturell synvinkel* (Lund: Liber förlag, 1983), 145.
5. *Ramparts*, July 1969, 26.
6. This was perhaps the most remarkable case of military insubordination in the postwar era, and of political distrust in the military establishment. "I cannot recall such an open conflict between a minister and a chief-of-staff during the postwar era," stated professor Ulf Bjereld in *Göteborgs-Posten*, 6 December 1998.
7. *Arbetet Nyheterna*, 4 December 1998.
8. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 10 December 1998.
9. In the fall of 1995, Vice Prime Minister Mona Sahlin, a strong candidate at the time to succeed Ingvar Carlsson as leader of the Social Democratic party and Prime Minister, was forced to resign from the government when accusations to this effect were floated in the media. In the fall of 1998 she reentered the government, as did Björn Rosengren, the former chairman of TCO (the white-collar union), who had had to resign his job after being found visiting a strip-tease club in Stockholm.
10. In 1988, Minister of Justice Anna-Greta Leijon had to resign in the face of evidence that she had used her office in support of a private secret investigation into the murder of Olof Palme.
11. The "Ahlenius affair," involving among other things the publication of "private" letters between a top minister and a top civil servant and the playing of false phone messages in public, is an example of a principled conflict of value degenerating into an unprincipled and anomalous media scandal or "affair" due to the inability of existing institutions to handle such conflicts.
12. Nina Witoszek, "The Fugitives from Utopia," in Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (eds.) *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 81.
13. *Ibid.*, 85-86.
14. "The Rational Humanitarians," originally in *Daedalus*, vol. 113, no. 1, 1984, republished in Hans Zetterberg, *Selected Writings* (Stockholm: City University Press, 1997), 329
15. *Ibid.*, 328.
16. Herbert Tingsten, *Demokratins problem* (Stockholm: Aldus/Bonnier, 1971).
17. Zetterberg, "The Rational Humanitarians," 328.
18. "Oscarian" refers to the period that coincided with the reign of Oscar II, 1872-1907.
19. See Nils Runeby's study, *Monarchia mixta: maktfördelningsdebatt i Sverige under den tidigare stormaktstiden* (Uppsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 1962).
20. Eva Österberg, *Folk förr. Historiska essäer* (Atlantis, 1995), 192-194.
21. Leif Lewin, *Bråka inte! Om vår tids demokratisyn* (Stockholm: SNS, 1998).
22. Pontus Fahlbeck, *Engelsk parlamentarism contra svensk* (Stockholm: Gleerups, 1916), 45, 84, quoted in Lewin, *Bråka inte!*
23. Lewin, *Bråka inte!*, 13, quoting Carl Hallendorff, "Parlamentarismen," *Svensk Tidskrift*, 1911.
24. *Ibid.*, 14.
25. Uddhammar, *Partierna och den stora staten*, 432.
26. Bo Rothstein, *Den korporativa staten, intresseorganisationer och statsförvaltning i svensk politik* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1992), 118-119. The "formative moment" (Rothstein) was the decision to put the power of the state in the hands of a private institution, the organization of farmers, legislating their right to intervene against unorganized milk producers, to control and regulate the milk market.
27. Uddhammar, *Partierna och den stora staten*, 432-433.
28. Alf W. Johansson *War Experience, Self Image and National Identity: The Second World War as Myth and History* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1997), 170.





29. Ibid., 172.
30. Sven-Erik Larsson, *Bertil Ohlin* (Atlantis, 1998), 182ff.
31. Heclø and Madsen, *Policy and Politics in Sweden: Principled Pragmatism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 21.
32. Thomas Anton, *Administered Politics: Elite Political Cultures in Sweden* (Boston, 1980).
33. Heclø and Madsen, *Policy and Politics in Sweden*, 21.
34. Ibid., 324.
35. These ideals are enumerated in a recent public inquiry about administrative policies, "I medborgarens tjänst. En samlad förvaltningspolitik för staten," Förvaltningspolitiska kommissionen (Stockholm: SOU 1997: 57), 18.
36. Maktutredningen, *Demokrati och makt i Sverige* (Stockholm: Allmänna förlaget, 1990), 186 ff.; Jan Johansson, "Det statliga kommittéväsendet, kunskap, kontroll, konsensus", 1992; "Kommittéerna och bofinken. Kan en kommitté se ut hur som helst?", ESO rapport, Ds 1998, 57, 19 ff.
37. "Kommittéerna och bofinken," 98-99.
38. The difference between a commission and a committee is not fully clear, but the increased use of commissions instead of committees is probably another indication of the decreased status and authority of the public committees.
39. Stockholm: SOU 1997: 57, 99.
40. In popular language a drink you take in the morning to *restore* (*återställa*) yourself from effects of the drinks you had last night. In modern Swedish politics, the decision by a new power constellation to restore legislation to its *status ante*.
41. Bo Rothstein, Lena Somme stad and Lotta Westerhäll, "The Decline of the Strong State," Project description for the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, reg. no. 1998-5125-01.
42. Lars Anell, "Världsordningen och välfärdsstatens kris", Sekretariatet för framtidsstudier, 1979. For further discussion of the end of the Swedish model, see Göran Rosenberg, *Medborgaren som försvann* (Stockholm: Brombergs, 1993), 34-36.
43. *The Economist*, 23 January 1999 (the issue contains a survey of Nordic countries).
44. *The Economist*, 17 July 1999, excerpting a comparative study by Robert Putnam, Susan Farr and Russell Dalton, *What Is Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
45. Johansson, 178.
46. On 13 June 1952 a Swedish military aircraft, a DC 3 with a crew of eight men, disappeared over the Baltic Sea. Three days later a smaller Catalina in search for survivors was shot down by Soviet Mig fighters, creating an acute crisis in Swedish-Soviet relations. In the 1990s, with material from Soviet archives, it has been confirmed that the DC 3 was shot down as well.
47. Östen Undén, 7 March 1956, quoted in Ulf Bjereld, *Hjalmarsonaffären, ett politiskt drama i tre akter* (Nerenius & Santerus, 1997), 11.
48. Quoted in Bjereld, *Hjalmarsonaffären*, 11.
49. Ibid., 114.
50. Ibid., 125ff.
51. Ibid., 149.
52. Ibid., 133.
53. In February 1985, following yet another round of anomalous accusations of endangering Sweden's security, running the errands of that or the other superpower, this author commented on the destructive pattern in foreign policy debate in an open article in *Expressen* (13 February 1985): "While there is a clear need to openly express different opinions about means and methods in Swedish foreign and security policy, there is at the same time a seemingly unavoidable logic which transforms every attempt at such a debate into a conflict of ultimate goals. The temptation to hit the means with the goals seems almost irresistible. The practical consequences are that the government in power is not only charged with representing the goals of Swedish foreign and security policy but is also maintaining a *de facto* monopoly on the formulation of its means."



54. Some scholars have argued that the Swedish Foreign Ministry, in responding to the diversification of the Swedish foreign policy agenda in the 1960s, concentrated on protecting its role as the ultimate authority on the tenets of neutrality: "By claiming to possess unique knowledge on the outer limits of this policy, the Foreign Ministry could successfully defend its position and carve out a role as 'gatekeeper' in Swedish foreign policy." Jakob Gustavsson, *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change, Explaining the Swedish Reorientation on EC Membership* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1998), 91.
55. Kjell Goldmann, "Trovärdighetskravet – onödigt och omöjligt?" *Internationella studier*, no 3, 1973, 97-101.
56. An arrangement that would allow for non-member EFTA-countries to join the inner market of the EC.
57. Congress protocols from September 18, 1990, quoted in Gustavsson, *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change*, 177.
58. Carl Bildt, *Hallänning, svensk, europé* (Stockholm: Bonniers 1991).
59. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 15 July 1989.
60. Only two "advisory" referendums had preceded the ATP referendum in 1957, one in 1922 on the banning of alcohol and one in 1955 on going from lefthand-side to righthand-side traffic. Neither of the results (no to alcohol, yes to righthand-side traffic) was heeded.
61. The fact that the more liberal proposal came from the generally corporatist Peasants' Party, while the ideologically more committed liberals proposed a more corporatist solution, perhaps testifies to the distorting effects of institutional consensus.
62. Bo Stråth, *Mellan två fonder. LO och den svenska modellen* (Atlas, 1998), 56-57, 67.
63. Ulla Lindström, *I regeringen. Ur min politiska dagbok 1954-1959* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1969), 155.
64. Stråth, *Mellan två fonder*, 59.
65. Stråth seems to regard the ATP battle as an attempt by the non-socialist opposition to wrest the "privilege of formulation" [of the tenets of consensus], from the Social Democrats. Their failure to do so in fact firmly established the Social Democratic values as the basis for continued consensus, while conflicting values, like the conservative ideal of small private ownership, were excluded. Stråth, *Mellan två fonder*, 64.
66. Rosenberg, *Medborgaren som försvann*, 20ff.
67. Stråth, *Mellan två fonder*, 75. The report was called *Samordnad näringspolitik*, "coordinated industrial policy," and was written by, among others, Rudolf Meidner, later the father of the wage-earner fund proposal of 1975, the *casus belli* of the ensuing "battle" on *löntagarfonder*.
68. Stråth, *Mellan två fonder*, 78.
69. Rudolf Meidner in the official organ of LO, *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, 1975, 19, 17.
70. Rudolf Meidner, Anna Hedborg, and Gunnar Fond, *Löntagarfonder* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1975).
71. Erik Åsard, *Kampen om löntagarfonderna. Fondutredningen från samtal till sammanbrott* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1985), 19.
72. *Ibid.*, 140.
73. Berndt Öhman, *Om löntagarfondsfrågan och fondutredningen*, Högskolan i Örebro, Skriftserie 26, 1983, 8.
74. The deals at Haga, *Hagauppgårelserna*, the first in the spring of 1974, came about as a consequence of the election results of 1973, when the two political "blocs" in parliament got 50 percent of the mandates each, and blocsplitting proposals had to be decided by ballot.
75. Stråth, *Mellan två fonder*, 162-163.
76. In free translation, "Wage-earner funds are a bloody bill, that we now have carried to the mill."
77. *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, 1975, 27, quoted in Åsard, *Kampen om Löntagarfonderna*, 1985, 103.
78. See, for instance, the pamphlet "Att taga över makten," written by three prominent opponents, Östen Bohlin, Assar Lindbeck, and Erik Anners, 19.
79. Åsard, *Kampen om löntagarfonderna*, 145.
80. Stråth, *Mellan två fonder*, 206.



81. Erik Ringmar, "Re-imagining Sweden, The Rhetorical Battle over EU-membership," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 23, 47.
82. The story of Sweden's failed corporatist negotiations is well told by Tommy Öberg, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 March 1999.
83. Two alternatives (1 and 2) proposing that Sweden at some point phase out the nuclear energy produced by a maximum of twelve reactors, jointly gained 57.8 percent of the vote. Number 3, proposing a rapid shutdown of the six reactors in use at the time, gained a vote of 38.7 percent.
84. Folke Johansson and Jörgen Westerståhl, *Kärnkraftsvecklingen – ett politiskt haveri* (Stockholm: SNS, 1998), 30.
85. Among recent studies see Maija Runcis, *Steriliseringar i folkhemmet* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1998); Gunnar Broberg & Mattias Tydén, *Oönskade i folkhemmet, rashygien och sterilisering i Sverige* (Stockholm: Gidlund, 1991); Ingvar Svanberg and Mattias Tydén, *Sverige och förintelsen, debatt och dokument om Europas judar 1933-1945* (Stockholm: Arena, 1997).
86. *Ramparts*, July 1969, 38.

