

Chapter 14 : “1950/73 – L’Ancien régime”

When King Gustaf VI took office, he first met the government of Tage Erlander at an extraordinary cabinet meeting October 30, 1950. After his proclamation, he swore an oath of allegiance to the government and the parliament. Then his brother Prince Wilhelm and his son Prince Bertil swore allegiance to himself. The next item was the resignation of the government, but Gustaf VI, as was the custom, ordered it to remain. All bowed and the government swore their oath of allegiance to the king. After further ceremonies in the State Hall before the elected representatives, King Gustaf VI along with Queen Louise stepped out onto the balcony towards Lejonbacken to meet the people. In the background stood Sibylla and CG, automatically now Crown Prince. The crowd cried that “We want to see our king.” Gustaf VI gave a short speech but was interrupted by new cries “We want to see the Crown Prince, we want to see the Crown Prince!” Gustaf VI then lifted CG into his arms and a deafening jubilation burst forth.¹

*

In the beginning, CG was often asked what he had learned about the office of Prince Bertil and King Gustaf VI. Those who asked assumed that some kind of knowledge was handed down generation to generation. CG always denied this. Prince Bertil had his own life and King Gustaf VI was 64 years older and from another age. Until Sigtuna, CG visited his grandfather regularly but never understood what he was talking about. The meetings were so stressful that they gave him headaches.

I really miss my father. There are so many years between me and grandpa. I think you need both father and mother when growing up. Especially when you are to become crown prince. Perhaps I should explain that in more detail. It is such a responsible job, a job I want to give my best. In my grandfather I see the ideal king of Sweden. But he had to “train” so many years for his task. I hope to keep him for a long time so that I can do the same.

...

In the past I felt the age difference almost frighteningly large [between me and grandpa]. But somehow it is reduced every year. I think we have a good relationship and I wish to keep it that way for as long as possible.

Nowadays I look him up as often as I have the opportunity and we have a lot to talk about while we play canasta. Not that the game requires any greater depth, but Grandpa is skilled. Mom and Christina are also part of the “canasta gang”, they meet him more often than I, because me attending Sigtuna and now Uppsala.

I have studied at close quarters how grandfather King Gustaf Adolf acts and works. I understand from his example that one should always try to be positive and friendly, that one must give people time to speak, that one should listen to them without interrupting. Grandpa usually says to me: You should do your duty and do your job without taking yourself so desperately seriously. The gift of humour is one of the most wonderful gifts you can have. If you look at life with a glimpse in your eye, everything gets so much easier. I have already had much help of that lesson.²

¹ Svensk Damtidning, 1950:45.

² Allan Beer. Aldrig har kronprinsen talat så öppet. Allers, 1969:2.

It was believed that that there was a father-son relationship between Gustaf VI and CG. CG's response to this was: "He was more than a father to me, he was the king!"³ But CG didn't think he could copy his grandfather straight off: "I have to adapt to the 70s to become a kind of salesman of Sweden Inc. The sales methods today are different than 50 years ago." It is not enough just to exist.⁴

Regarding Prince Bertil, CG believed he had influenced him to do his military service in the Navy but otherwise, like King Gustaf VI, had mostly provided him with moral support and inspiration:

In that group that was to plan my education, no guidelines were drawn up for such a thing [tutoring in the art of being king]. I do not recall Bertil ever giving me any concrete advice on the task of being king. He didn't say: do so or do so. It was always learning by doing. It was moral support, not supervision.⁵

Prince Bertil's greatest contribution was allegedly to instruct CG in appearing in public. At first he found it difficult. For example, CG insisted, despite his word blindness, on reading his speeches from the manuscript; there could be embarrassing errors. CG also admired Prince Bertil's social talents, which he copied as far as possible.

* In what way has Prince Bertil served as a role model?

- Well, he is extremely spontaneous and pleasant and can adapt to any context. He's good at lightening the mood. It has to do with his upbringing, of course. If you do not have strong convictions, you do not dare improvise in the manner he does. In America, in particular, that went down very well. Older Americans remember him.⁶

The head of the Swedish Industrial Federation 1957-1977 Axel Iveroth agreed: It is "his immediate sense of what each individual situation requires" that makes him such an effective public relations man for the Kingdom of Sweden, not his ancestry. "He always says exactly what suits the moment, he is spontaneous and almost never formal. If he finds that the program does not strike a cord, he will gladly deviate from it."⁷

CG and Prince Bertil also shared many family traits: They both suffered from dyslexia, were demonstratively unintellectual, interested in sports and cars, married outside the royal houses of Europe and have made their main contribution as door openers for Swedish industry abroad. Prince Bertil was also good at cooking and taught CG how to cook sauces etc. when he was visiting. Over time, CG mastered most anything in that vein, from ordinary home cooking to complicated stews and oriental specialities. Also Gustaf VI was known to visit the kitchen to put the final touches on a dish.

Gustaf VI's handling of his sons' bourgeois love affairs was obviously a wake-up call for CG. Princes Sigvard and Carl Johan were deprived of their titles, their orders, their appanage and were refused access to the royal court. The same thing happened to their cousin Lennart. Prince Bertil was subjected to such pressure that he sacrificed his first two relationships. The court pretended for long time that his third to be, Lilian Craig, did not exist. CG met her only

³ SE, 1973:38.

⁴ Sten Hedman. Gustaf VIs sjuktid och död. SE, 1973:35.

⁵ Fabian af Petersens. Prins Bertil : Ett liv. Bokförlaget T Fischer & Co, 1992.

⁶ Fabian af Petersens. Prins Bertil : Ett liv. Bokförlaget T Fischer & Co, 1992.

⁷ Prins Bertil på turné lär bort nubbevisor. SE, 1967:16.

after graduation when he and sister Christina in August 1966 were invited to Prince Bertil's villa Maxime on the French Riviera. What they thought of the cloak and dagger is not known. His sister Margaretha's relationship with Robin Douglas-Home was thwarted until the couple gave up. CG was determined never to let Gustaf VI or anyone else, for that matter, control his private life. There he was apparently supported by Prince Bertil.

Gustaf VI's old-fashioned views about what was appropriate for the royal house and not, was towards the end of his life perceived as troublesome. Prince Bertil was not allowed to make a cameo role as himself in a film about the Monte Carlo Rally. Princess Christina had to inaugurate a nightclub at Sälens High Mountain Hotel while it was still daylight. She was not allowed to spend midsummer or take a holiday with her future husband. Nor going to a party without him. CG would preferably be married to a Windsor and Gustaf VI therefore arranged for him to meet Princess Anne as often as possible. It was embarrassing for them both. Queen Elisabeth and Prince Philip are however said to have been in favour of CG as son-in-law. Unlike other candidates, CG was both rich, pleasant and royal.

*

In the absence of concrete advice, CG seems to have copied Gustaf VI's practice as far as possible:

Just as the king repeated the phrase "Sweden's relationship with foreign powers is good" every year in his speech from the throne, he could equally justifiably have stated that "my relationship with the Swedish government is good". His unflinching allegiance to the demands of a democratic monarchy manifested itself in the same loyalty in his dealings with the government and its individual members. Obviously, he was not always able to fully agree with the decisions he had to take. However, there was never any criticism of the government or the decisions of the cabinet or other bodies. He felt as one of them and shouldered his responsibilities. It was no use criticising him for legitimizing social democratic policy. Either he rebuked such critique or demonstrated his disapproval by pretending not to hear it.

...

The cooperation between the various court managers and representatives from universities, learned societies, heads of government, industrialists and financiers, popular movements, exhibitions etc. was very stimulating. The schedule of the court employees was a mixture of jubilees, study visits, new ways, orientations, rewards and so on. The activities of the royal court was a cross-cooperation across large parts of society's different fields of activity and helped to create new contacts.

...

Gustaf VI Adolf's contacts with the country and people took many different forms. These include frequent trips in various parts of the country, study visits and meetings with the elderly and young, receptions of various kinds, press meetings, films, TV. It was of the utmost importance that these contacts were extended in every way possible. As far as a comparison with foreign heads of state is possible, the activities and contacts of the Swedish king appear to have been on a high level. New methods of communicating with the people of Sweden, with different parts and different professions were continually tried out. Only in this way can a king gradually be identified and recognized as the representative of the entire Swedish people. King

Gustaf Adolf was fully aware of this and during his time did what was in his power and ability.⁸

King Gustaf VI's Marshal of the Realm Stig H:son Ericson speculated after his resignation on the advantages of a monarchy over a republic. Some of its advantages would be:

- The Sovereign has a role to play simply by being a shared symbol.
- By his upbringing and social position, he is better suited to a symbolic role than a president who is probably a former politician.
- The monarch has a broader symbolic register than a president. He can represent the country's religion, national peculiarities, family traditions and what else.
- The monarch always attracts more attention than a president because he sits longer and thus becomes better known.
- By not pursuing a personal party policy, the monarch can, without being suspected of hidden motives, promote national and international politics.
- The ceremonies associated with the monarchy with its historical references is far more figurative and “printable” than that of a newly created presidential office.
- The attention paid to a monarch can be used during state visits, industrial delegations and various events to spread information about Sweden and to get in touch with important decision-makers.
- The more political power is placed in the hands of the government, the more important it becomes with a monarch who, through his position as “Head of State”, is a symbol of a certain degree of stability, continuity and tradition. The fact that the kingdom by now is traditional rather than real is certainly not a reason for abolishing it.

Contemporary criticism of the monarchy dwelt a great deal on the theories of the Englishman Walter Bagehot:⁹

Bagehot has first of all the important view, which is later found in Tingsten, that the development towards ever less political influence of the monarch can in fact give him ever greater non-political influence outside the usual political channels. In a parliamentary democracy as it was conceived in England around the mid-19th century, the monarch is consistently given a status of non-political, impartial, exalted over party battles; because alongside this development the monarch becomes a symbol, a so-called shared figure, a representative of both the nation (=people) and the state (=government). This leads to an increase in the monarch's potential power. If he or she ever intervenes and invests his or her prestige, the result is all the more enormous. No politician in a position of responsibility can then afford to enter into an open conflict with the monarch. ...

Bagehot lists four reasons why the monarch, though theoretically powerless, gains this strength within a parliamentary democracy. 1) Easy-to-understand symbol of the nation. 2) Royal Mystery. 3) Top of the social pyramid. 4) Embodies an ideal.¹⁰

In 1966, on the occasion of Prince Charles's 18th birthday, the BBC presented a program called “The Monarchy and Its Future”. In 1969, producer Jeremy Murray-Brown edited a volume of essays of the same name describing the debate about the future of the English

⁸ Stig H:son-Ericson. Memoarer: Vita havet. Segling i kungliga farvatten. Bonniers, 1976.

⁹ Walter Bagehot. The English Constitution. Fontana Library 1963. (1sta upplagan 1867.)

¹⁰ Pär-Erik Back & Gunnar Fredriksson. Republiken Sverige. Prisma 1966.

monarchy. A reading shows that the corresponding Swedish debate borrowed its arguments from that source. It consists of historical exposés but also some advice to Elisabeth II. The most important point is that the monarchy should not consider itself a social relic but should operate in the society that exists. The role model is the Vatican. A later BBC documentary “The Monarchy and the Media - A Dangerous Connection” from 1997 considered today's English monarchy debate as a result of the fanciful rewriting of Elisabeth II as a cohesive force for the Commonwealth. At the coronation, a third of the British population even believed that she had been appointed by God. Of course, even her family should represent a perfect never before seen ideal: Never have sex before marriage, never marry a divorcee, never have a relationship outside of marriage, never speak ill of his or her mother-in-law, never divorce, never complain. Here too, the Swedish monarchy has borrowed ideals: A royal house of pillar saints. With (fictional) traditions but without history.

A monarchy of the Swedish vintage of 1973 differed significantly from that of Bagehot's 100 years earlier. Neither CG, Gustaf VI nor H:son Ericson considered the king as the top of the social pyramid a relevant argument in a democratic society with a constitutional monarchy. But they all agreed on the importance of the king as a national symbol above the party battles. The latter was not even their own idea, but was enshrined in the new constitution. (This with being a national symbol, devoid of personal qualities, was for CG easiest to live up to on solemn occasions when the ceremonial dominated and abroad where his person was not as well known. Within the country he represented either the Swedish state or the Swedish royal house. This symbolizing or representing the Swedish people has only worked on occasional emotive occasions like the tsunami speech where together with the audience he confronted a merciless fate.)

Neither CG nor H:son Ericson considered royal mysticism necessary or to embody an ideal. Gustaf VI was however obsessed with this royal mystique and prepared to make his family suffer for it, even prepared to jeopardize the survival of his line. It was also clear that he was Head of State of a country that shared his obsession - an accident rarely comes alone. (The lack of royal mysticism was a clear minus on state visits however. The audience would hardly react to the cortège when the various presidents were transported between the town hall and the castle. Often the audience must be supplemented with military so it did not become embarrassing. Otherwise when Queen Elisabeth was visiting or the Shah of Iran!) Another form of royal mysticism arose from a lack of information. For example, Gustaf VI never gave interviews. The prevailing wisdom was that only his two spouses knew him in depth. In the absence of facts, the ideal picture took over: sober sports interested academic with an orderly home life, which fortunately for him was not too far from the truth.

What would he be like as king? In fact, Gustaf VI Adolf was in a strange way rather anonymous despite his long Crown Prince tenure (since 1907). He was popular but in a different way than the previous monarch. He was known for being an archaeologist and staying sober. At least that's how he was talked about.

At the turn of the century one of the most popular movements was the temperance movement - and it was basically unpolitical. This is the real reason why Gustaf Adolf became sober. In this way, he had an irreproachable contact with people from all social groups and with varying ideological attitudes. It was no sacrifice. He didn't like liquor.

The second major non-political movement was sports. This explains why the crown prince from a very young age devoted himself wholeheartedly to national sports

issues and put in a lot of work. This was also an important contact area outside the court circles.¹¹

Gustaf V had aroused a great deal of political opposition through his defence and foreign policy activities. King Gustaf VI, on the other hand, pursued a policy of consensus in which he sought to secure the survival of the monarchy through political passivity and through personal friendship with influential parties: Politicians, officials, industrialists and what remained of the Swedish nobility. Journalists Herman Lindqvist and Kjell Fridh have a lot of positive things to say about him:

Mr. Lindqvist: "Today most historians agree that no Swedish king has meant so much for the preservation of the monarchy in Sweden as Gustaf VI Adolf. That he succeeded in this is attributed to his personal qualities, his deep knowledge of many subjects and, above all, his simple, natural appearance."¹²

Kjell Fridh: "By contrast, resurrecting the monarchy from the catastrophic low where it was after Gustaf V's adventures on the margins of the Constitution and political practice and his private scandals was a political public relations masterpiece. ... It was during these last years that King Gustaf VI Adolf reached his absolute peak of popularity. One opinion poll after the other had the ageing majesty in the gold spot. A public figure has never been more popular in Sweden than the old king in his last years."¹³

None of the authors provide sources, but a literature search shows that there is only one possible source: Hemmets Journals tribute book to Gustaf VI on his 90th anniversary in 1971. This includes an article by the historian Sten Carlsson:

The political role of King Gustaf VI Adolf as monarch is still little known. Obviously, he has had to concentrate more than any previous Swedish king on his representative and symbolic functions. ... Gustaf VI Adolf's influence over the current government work has been apparently insignificant. The occasional term, that he is "adviser to his advisers", may be justified but lacks support for the time being in informed sources. In the memoirs of former State Councilor Ulla Lindström he appears as a kind old gentleman without real power. ... If the [social democratic] parliamentarians had followed the constitutional ideas enshrined in their party program, the transition to a republic would already have been a fact. The king's personal reputation and great popularity in broad sections of the population have made all plans in that direction politically impossible. The royal power has been curtailed, but the kingdom has resisted all attacks.¹⁴

The popular description of Gustaf VI's political role kicked off in his answer to the question in 1954 what he would do if Sweden became a republic. "I could always become an assistant at the National Museum" was the answer. This was versified by Karl Gerhard as Gustaf VI being "first museum assistant of our royal democracy" and that "[the trade union] LO hopes to receive him as an honorary member". The political situation was described as that King Gustaf VI had "saved the monarchy - with an everyday face - and a

¹¹ Michael Jägerblom. Han tycker om att vara kung! Vecko Journalen, 1972:45.

¹² Herman Lindqvist & Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg. Carl XVI Gustaf - Porträtt i tiden. Ekerlids förlag, 2006.

¹³ Kjell Fridh. Gamle kungen : Gustaf VI Adolf - En biografi. 1995.

¹⁴ Karl Ragnar Gierow, Nils-Gustaf Holmquist & P.G. Peterson (red.) Gustaf VI Adolf. Hela folkets kung. Hemmets Journal AB, 1971.

convivial smile”. Sweden was “the royal Swedish three-quarter republic” where former revolutionaries and conservatives were now so entangled that there was no detectable difference between them. As the Swedish saying goes: We all become conservatives when we have something to conserve.

The polls tell a slightly different story. At the time of his accession to the throne, being a retired teetotaler and scholar, Gustaf VI was less popular than his father, who had a more “popular” and “accessible” image, was considered “more ambitious” and during the wars (both the first and the second) was considered a guarantee for keeping Sweden neutral. This changed over time. People were thoroughly war-weary. In a 1957 ranking 11 percent preferred Gustav V, 49 percent considered father and son equal and 40 percent preferred Gustaf VI.¹⁵ Two years later 24 percent preferred Gustaf V and 37 percent Gustaf VI. The most obvious trend was the total lack of interest in warrior kings such as Gustaf II Adolf and Charles XII.¹⁶

King Gustaf VI was less popular than his grandson CG. In the opinion polls that were conducted during King Gustaf VI's last year, the proportion of positives for the monarchy has never been as low as then: 57 percent (1961) & 60 percent (1962) to compare with Gustaf Vs 84 percent (1943). Positive results only increased when the youngsters CG and Christina became more prominent: 75 percent (1969) & 75 percent (1973). It should not be forgotten that resistance to the monarchy was at it's the strongest during the reign of King Gustaf VI. CG was bitter afterwards over the passivity of King Gustaf VI and Prince Bertil during the crisis. The alliance between the monarchy and the labour movement was supposed to guarantee the survival of the monarchy but almost killed it off in Torekov August 1971. Gustaf VI's political strategy, mostly consisting of asserting a personal friendship with prime minister Tage Erlander, seems to have had no effect on the course of events. Perhaps what took place was inevitable, perhaps it was caused by Gustaf VI's non-existent political experience. In any case, the State Councilor Nils Quensel writes in his diary: “But nevertheless Gustaf V was a shrewder person than the son who does not understand anything, however hard he studies it.”¹⁷ Even Tage Erlander complained about Gustaf VI's “nagging mediocrity” and “narrow-minded reflections”.¹⁸

*

King Gustaf VI's relationship with his family, mainly because of his treatment of his sons' love affairs, has been widely reported. After his death, Fjellman interviewed the sons for a biography¹⁹ in which their judgment, expressed in various ways, was that Gustaf VI only perceived people as a means to preserve the monarchy. If they complied with his plans, he was friendly. If not, they were axed. The grandchildren suffered the same treatment as everybody else. In the Bernadotte family the patriarch's will was law. I have reported on the experience of Princess Margaretha in this regard. The other sisters absorbed the lesson, married nobility or money and tried to behave as respectably as possible.

In this situation, family relationships were not so good. Although Gustaf VI and Sibylla lived in the same building, there is no evidence that they ever socialized. Neither informal visits nor family dinners seem to have taken place, but canasta nights with the rest of the court.

¹⁵ [Hans Zetterberg.] Starkare kungamakt önskar var femte svensk. Sifo-artikel, 1957-02-15.

¹⁶ [Hans Zetterberg.] Historiska krigsbedrifter entusiasmerar ej längre. Sifo-artikel, 1958-12-30.

¹⁷ Nils Quensel. Dagbok. I: Ulf Brandell. Dagbok med DN : ur dagböcker förda 1960-1962. 1976.

¹⁸ Tage Erlander. Dagbok 1940-1949. 1973.

¹⁹ Margit Fjellman. Gustaf VI Adolf: Närbilder av kungen. 1973.

The same thing in the summer. King Gustaf VI and Queen Louise stayed at Sofiero. Sibylla and family stayed at Solliden, Storlien and Ingarö. There are a couple of family photographs from Gustaf V's time when Gustaf (VI) visits Haga Castle. Also one with CG outside Solliden in the 1960s. That is all. The other photographs are all from official or semi-official occasions. When Margaretha and Birgitta moved abroad he would however visit them.

Gustaf VI expected CG to marry Princess Anne dynastically. CG had a long relationship with the French Count's Daughter Milly de Grasset, later describe3d, which was tolerated until he reached the age of 25. Much is unclear, but CG seems to have tried in June 1971 to get Gustaf VI to "approve" the relationship, which he refused. The reason is stated in an interview for Gustaf VI's 90th anniversary:

The decision about who and when Carl Gustaf is to marry is something that he has to make himself. The fact that King Gustaf Adolf hopes that his grandson will choose a princess has nothing whatsoever to do with "class arrogance". On the contrary. As a practical matter, he says, the choice of a royal bride would be the best. Someone who since childhood has become used to the the difficult task of being "first lady", someone who is used to being the centre of it all. - Surely, states His Majesty, not so easy for somebody who grew up in protected anonymity.²⁰

Milly's positive sides such as loyalty, joy of life and naturalness where as nothing in this context. It was a repeat of sister Margaretha's experiences. No one imaginable was good enough.

*

Both CG and Gustaf VI were extremely keen on a respectable façade and that their private lives were of no interest to anyone but themselves. As far as Gustaf VI is concerned, it was not discussed. As for CG, he had some support for this. In a 2010 Sifo poll, 48 percent thought it wrong to investigate CG's private life, 23 percent thought it permissible and 30 percent had no opinion. Subgroups differed: 29 percent of the men thought it permissible, 15 percent of the women. 41 percent of the left-wingers, 6 percent of the Christian Democrats.²¹ The Royal House is largely supported by value-conservative women who do not want their illusions crushed. Perhaps not a news item, but worth emphasizing. CG's logic in this context has not been entirely clear. If he attends the Nobel Party, it is in his capacity as Head of State. If he smokes at the Nobel Party, it is in his personal capacity.

CG likes to talk about his ancestor Jean Baptiste Bernadotte as the great man of the family. Since he was a French immigrant, a native, and even more so, Jacobin, it has been difficult to regard the family as a legitimate representative of an "indigenous" royal house. The fact that it eventually married into a side line of Gustav Vasa has not been taken seriously even by CG himself. To my knowledge, he has never attempted to defend his position genealogically. He thinks his line is no more ancient than any other Swedish citizen's. You are not born king, you are educated to do it and you have your position because of the Constitution. If the Parliament rewrites it, it is over. He has never shown much respect to his predecessors. I have found that during a German state visit in 1993 he laid a wreath on the memorial stone for Gustav II Adolf outside Lützen. That is all. As Henry Ford expressed it: History is bunk.

²⁰ Christer Nyblom. Intervju med Gustaf VI Adolf inför 90-årsdagen. Hemmets veckotidning, 1972:45.

²¹ SVT & Sifo, 2-3 november 2010.