

Chapter 41 : “40 years in office”

CG celebrated his 25th anniversary of accession on September 15, 1973, on the national day of June 6, 1998, to avoid so as not to interfere with the general election. At 18 o'clock he went in motorcade from the Castle to Skansen. Large parts of the government were waiting there, headed by Prime Minister Göran Persson, the rest of the party leaders, police officials, military leaders and a large number of ambassadors. The spokesperson of the Parliament Birgitta Dahl, in honour of the day dressed in a folk costume from Häverö in Uppland, welcomed him: “We rejoice to this year commemorate the 25th anniversary of His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf as Head of State.” Maybe a little lame. Afterwards there was a buffet for 1,800 people at the castle - five people from each municipality. Guests were spread over 21 rooms and had to start eating before CG arrived:

The buffet consisted of several different salads on brackish fresh salmon, chicken, etc. After the salads, more salmon was served more salmon - both cooked and marinated. In addition anchovy rolls, old man's mix, fish and chicken pâté. The Norrland cuisine was represented by cones of cold smoked reindeer steak filled with horseradish cream. From Gotland it was lamb steak. As a closure was served, Småland cheese cake with cloudberry jam. The rooms were decorated with beautiful grand flower sets in white and yellow, including gillyflower, baby's breath and white carnations.¹

The present from the government and parliament was a newly decorated working room. He was interviewed by TV4. CG was most pleased that he had managed to gain acceptance for the royal traditions. Especially the old-fashioned etiquette. Everything was in our time - but with a 100 years delay. Annette Kullenberg found the socialist choir of praise extremely embarrassing and made sure that Vilhelm Moberg “Therefore I am a Republican” (1966) was re-issued. The message was timely. The following year, a new version of the Republican Club, the Republican Association, was founded.

The 30th anniversary of CG's accession on September 15, 2003, was a rather subdued event. Swedish Minister Anna Lindh had a few days before been stabbed to death at NK. CG was satisfied with a commemorative concert in the Hall of State and afterwards lunch in Vita havet for some 60 people: The Prime Minister, the Speaker, several ministers, the party chairmen, the Supreme Commander, some governors etc. According to all available information, this day was the high point of CG's life. He looked tired. They asked him why: “30 years is a long time. And it's not over yet.” In November 2011 SVT Rapport broadcast a series of reports which ended with a longer interview. CG did its best to answer the questions. - Is the king concerned that the monarchy will soon disappear? - Not worried but that's not something I want. The monarchy is my life, my history, my tradition. It is Sweden, it is the country, it's what I live for.

Then things started to go wrong. This conclusion is based on the SOM Institute's opinion polls (Institute for Society, Opinion and Media at the University of Gothenburg). The institute conducts annual national opinion polls based on 6000 people. Confidence in the royal house measured as a balance measure (percentage positive minus percentage negative) declined in the period 1995-2013 from 46 percent to 1 percent (Appendix 1: Table 2) as well as CG's personal popularity (Appendix 1: Table 1). In the meantime, support for the monarchy as a form of government remained at about two thirds of the population (Appendix 1: Table 4).

¹ Karl Viktor Olsson, Ulla Tillgren & Knut Kainz Rognerud. Många tusen hyllade kungens 25 år på tronen. TT, 1998-06-06.

The fact that CG's scandals did not impact the monarchy as a system is believed to be due to Silvia's popularity and that Crown Princess Victoria is seen as a capable "co-regent". From 1999 to 2002, CG, Silvia & Crown Princess Victoria were more or less equally popular.² In 2011, Crown Princess Victoria was the 1st (most popular), Silvia probably the 2nd & CG 3rd (about as popular as Prime Minister Reinfeldt).³ The figures on the crown princess' popularity is difficult to interpret. It seems due to a combination of monarchism and feminism: She is most popular among Christian Democrats and Liberals, least popular among Left Democrats and Sweden Democrats. The percentage of people who support the monarchy unconditionally has declined. Just as people switch political parties, people switch between supporting monarchy - republic.

Regardless of his declining popularity, CG is well known. In the reference population to a facial recognition test 2010, the degree of recognition was: CG (100 percent), Silvia (100 percent), Crown Princess Victoria (100 percent), Prince Carl Philip (99.3 percent), Gustav V (97 percent), Princess Lilian (95.6 percent), Princess Madeleine (91.9 percent), Princess Birgitta (87.4 percent) and Sigvard Bernadotte (27.4 percent).⁴

The most likely reason for CG's declining popularity is that he avoids personal interviews. He is increasingly anonymous. It is striking how little media contacts CG has. In a couple of years after Brunei actually none at all. One guess is that through his personal relations with Sweden's power elite he believes he has made himself independent of the support from the press. The court's website and video recordings is thought to further reduce this dependence. There are many accounts of how he avoids interviews by laughing off the questions. He has a funny whining laugh that prevents it from looking rude. CG has obviously forgotten the fundamentals: That the relationship between a monarch and his people is personal and that it requires work and a modicum of generosity to maintain. Since the deterioration has been the greatest during Marshal of the realm Ingemar Eliasson's service in 2003-2009, one can assume that he has a share in it. He has actively worked to pacify the court. Not so good with the Republicans on the march.

In 2005, the Norwegian monarchy expert Carl-Erik Grimstad conducted a survey showing that there were 15 percent more monarchists in Sweden than in Norway, but that supporters in both countries had the same social background. The main difference between monarchists and republicans was that the latter could be categorized as "postmodern materialists". The concept is not entirely clear, but seems to imply a more crass, down-to-earth view of existence. The monarchists would then espouse a more aesthetic, idealistic philosophy. Linking up with business may not be such a good idea for CG after all.⁵

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CG's 60th birthday was celebrated for three days straight. Neither the tabloids nor the weeklies received interviews and the morning papers were dispatched with inane answers to lame questions. DN made a half hearted attempt. CG explained that he was in it for life and avoided answering the rest of the questions.⁶ TT was granted an interview where CG talked

² Sifo. Vem tycker du bäst om i kungafamiljen. 1999, 2001 & 2002.

³ Kungahuset 2011. SOM-institutet, 2012.

⁴ Tina Tötterman & Karolina Wibling. Att känna igen och benämna kända personer. Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för Neurovetenskap, enheten för logopedi. 2010:36.

⁵ Carl-Erik Grimstad. Det svenska kungahuset ur norsk synvinkel. Mats Ögren (red). För Sverige – Nuförtiden. En antologi om Carl XIV Gustaf. Bokförlaget DN, 2006.

⁶ Cecilia Jacobsson & Paul Hansen. Monark med hög växel. Dagens Nyheter, 2006-04-23.

about his upbringing on Haga, the meat breeding on Stenhammar and his personal faith. He compared a life without philosophy to believing in Donald Duck. He claimed to be a Christian or almost - but that is probably an exaggeration. "When the last day comes you are alone"⁷ was as far as he wanted to go. By SR, he was asked what it felt like to turn 60.⁸ CG was in his most philosophical mood: "I guess you just have to accept that, that's it. Life goes on and that's the beauty of it. There are those who seclude themselves, they find it embarrassing, you are supposed to be a success, The family is too large, you feel old, etc. But I try to see it as an opportunity to say thank you for having me over and for the experience of being king. That's how I see it turning 60." Was he afraid to die? "I guess we're all afraid of dying, but personally I don't have time." He also asked how he felt about his age. CG responded: "We are all getting older, but we never grow up."⁹ (The entire Bernadotte family claims to be "late bloomers" with their humour and zest intact to the end.)

The Court had ordered an official biography by Herman Lindqvist "Carl XVI Gustaf - Portrait in our time" which sold well but was ignored by the dailies. CG gave several interviews for the book. Silvia was also interviewed. Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg wrote her own chapter in which she emphasized that CG was honest, sincere and Swedish to the core. He also had a sense of humour. At the time of the book release, Lindqvist spoke about his scepticism about the project. You had to take the book for what it was. It was a conversation, not an inquiry. It came quite close to CG relaxing among friends but it was not an evaluation of CG as king. The book is difficult to review. Evasive, nostalgic and self-loving is probably the closest one can get to it. It is obvious that CG's best childhood memories are from Solliden. Not easy though for the invited journalists to say something sensible at the book release:

Recently Herman Lindqvist and Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg presented their book "Carl XVI Gustaf. Portrait in Our Time. This took place at the Goldplated Bernadotte Library at Stockholm Castle [on 17 March]. It was a bizarre affair. A series of lovely women's magazine journalists got the book signed by Tarras and so it was Question Time: How IS the king? How WAS he like talking to? Yeah, he's nice. Open. Nice. Honest. Nice. And "dutiful, like all the Bernadottes" stated Lindqvist, who looks as if he will shortly knightly himself, if no anointed figure takes pity on him.

Another thing was said about the king: He is a Very Talented Photographer. Like all Bernadotte, then. Queen Victoria is often called Very Talented Photographer. The Crown Princess Margaret as well. Among others. Yes, every royalty who has snapped a holiday picture is eventually elevated to a photo genius. The event in the library was deeply nonsensical, but even more sad. The subject was a book about the king. We were at the King's house. Everybody was talking about the king. But the king was not there! And in his absence he became so - pathetic. Like he was a crazy relative, locked up in the attic by his embarrassed family. A fool in a cage. Muzzled. Unaccredited, with Tarras as "spokes woman".

"Hey Baberibas" depiction of the imbecile Family upsets people. But it reflects reality. Glossy upper class types in gilded cages, without power and meaning (albeit with expensive cameras and never ending holidays), are ridiculous. The monarchy is humiliating for all parties.¹⁰

⁷ Christina Magnergård Bjers. Kung Carl Gustaf - 60 år i tiden. TT Nyhetsbanken, 2006-04-21.

⁸ Kung Carl XVI Gustaf 60 år. SR P1, 2006-04-30.

⁹ Mats Nyström: Kung i tiden - Intervju med Carl XIV Gustaf inför 60-årsdagen. SVT1, 2006-04-30, kl 20:15.

¹⁰ Ann-Charlotte Marteus. "Hey Baberiba!" speglar verkligheten. Expressen, 2006-04-20.

TV4 showed a documentary “Profession King” after an idea by journalist Mats Ögren, almost a historical review. Ögren also edited a book of tribute or maybe discussion “For Sweden - Nowadays”. Among the contributors was old school friend and journalist Cecilia Hagen who tried to answer the question she and colleagues had dwelt on over the years: Who was CG really, deep inside, at the core? She complained that in his nowadays interviews he was brief, abrupt and not very informative. Everything he said was platitudes or so elliptical that it wasn't understandable. His acknowledged character traits were humour, shyness, curiosity, stubbornness, sense of duty, temper etc. She wanted something more, unclear what. My own contribution to the solution of the riddle is that CG is like his father, uncle and grandfather. He is a traditional king, a modernist, a dutiful official, an adaptable courtier and a family man – all wrapped up into one package. The present is no longer capable of understanding him. It is usually called royal magic but is rather a journey of discovery into the unknown: CG is like us, but still not. Another contribution was from Professor Stig Strömholm, who appealed for tolerance – the democratic extremists should display an ounce of self-restraint - because... “Recent historical experience shows that an uncompromising religious, moral or political faith, when confronted with opposing views, is in danger of degenerating into fanaticism and that the implementation of even good ideas and values can lead to oppression.”

The interest in the book release was unusually large. In place of the usual 5-8 journalists present at the release of non-fiction books came 40. The journalist Björn af Kleen summarized his review by saying that it was amazing that so many respected writers, politicians and high-ranking officials gave the royal house their brainless support.¹¹ The Finnish historian Henrik Meinander had an explanation: “Having read through this stimulating, friendly and in part polemical festschrift, I am even more convinced that the monarchy is a phenomena in the margins of Swedish democracy. One might almost think that the elite consciously encourage it as a distraction in order to avoid the really big question regarding Swedish democracy: the iron grip of the government and indeed the prime minister on the Parliament and the civil service.”¹²

In 2009, political scientist Cecilia Åse published her book “The Power of the Monarchy - National Community and Swedish Democracy” where she claimed that no new Swedish democratic Torekov monarchy existed. It was the same undemocratic misery as before, but “extracted” from the political system. Others objected to that interpretation. In 2010, the double opinion piece “Yes, the Monarchies best time is now” – “No, The Monarchy has never been more dangerous than now” was published by journalists P J Anders Linder & Per Svensson. In addition to the usual arguments for and against, there were three arguments about “the new monarchy”: (1) That it had hijacked its noble roots and was now part of the bourgeoisie. (2) That it was now a cultural phenomenon: “a virtual symbol in the cultural struggle between retro-romantics and metromodernists”. (3) the fact that the alliance with the celebrity culture of the television age has prolonged its death struggle.

On his 65th anniversary, CG actually gave a personal interview to TT. There was no question of retiring now either: “It is expected that the monarch works as long as he is in his right mind.” He praised himself for keeping the royal traditions alive. He was pleased not to have been marginalized by the EU and the immigration, but to have become a unifying figure of “above the cultures”. He complained about the intense but at the same time mendacious media coverage that not only affected himself, but his family as well. But you had to marshal your

¹¹ Björn af Kleen. Björn af Kleen läser om monarkin. SydSvenskan, 2006-04-28.

¹² Henrik Meinander. Kungen – för Sverige i framtiden? Svenska Dagbladet, 2006-04-29.

sense of humour and keep going. What he regretted was that he had not listened more to advice. He blamed it on his shyness. "There was a period of hovering in between, when one was neither young enough to use it as an excuse, nor sufficiently old and experienced."¹³

Afterwards the journalist was asked: What are you most satisfied with from the interview? His answer was: I'm glad I got him talking about his shyness. It was otherwise difficult to get personal answers. He wanted rather to talk in general terms, and much rather talk shop about his tours of the country and what he had learned from them.¹⁴ The journalist and scandal monger Thomas Sjöberg thought the interview was a marvel of meekness. A couple of counter questions hadn't hurt. Despite all the talk of putting the new era royals on the stand they were as sacrosanct as of old.

In 2013, CG visited all 21 counties to celebrate his 40 years in office. As usual the spectators flocked to see and celebrate him. There was no evidence whatsoever that the monarchy was an anachronistic remnant. The Republican Association listed 24 points why it should be scrapped anyway. Item 18 breathed hatred of gala dresses & flag-waving school choirs: "Emotional blackmail such as weddings and jubilees is the triumph and main power of the monarchy." CG published a memorial album "My 40 years for Sweden", where he personally provided the pictures and subtitles. In its total lack of points, the book is difficult to describe. Sampling the business is probably the best description. Göteborgs Posten commented: "Whoever sums up his years in the family business will find that Carl Gustaf is probably the most socially active, indeed versatile king the country has ever had."¹⁵ CG was interviewed by SVT1 without anything new emerging. It had been a fun 40 years but unclear if he had done something lasting. It was like drawing in sand. The most fun would have been the state visits and "opening doors". The most important thing was that he was still up to it. But the enthusiasm was completely gone: "You can't pause for thought, you have to keep going, look towards the horizon! Don't think!" Dagens Nyheter commented: "Even the most inveterate royalist must feel uneasy [by the interview]. It is filled with bitterness and misguided irony - and he doesn't regret 'a thing', and he clearly says 'if you want to get rid of me you have to carry me out!'"¹⁶ CG was also interviewed by Dagens Eko. It was a few days later and he was in a better mood. CG thought the cooperation with the government & parliament had worked well over the years. Sometimes he might even have been able to give the occasional MP a piece of advice or an opinion. He looked to the future with confidence. Sweden was a good country to live in.

On September 19, the 40th anniversary of the CG's accession, Crown Princess Victoria delivered a tribute speech in the Hall of State before the CG and invited:

Your Majesty,
Dear Dad,

Sweden has been a monarchy for more than a thousand years. The Bernadotte dynasty has managed it and passed on the royal heritage and its traditions for two centuries. Of these, you have been King of Sweden for the past 40 years. When you took office, you were nine years younger than I am today. You were 27 years old and had not had the father figure that I have had the privilege to have in You, Dad.

¹³ Sofia Tanaka. Kungen: Har varit blyg hela mitt liv. TT & Dagens Nyheter, 2011-04-26.

¹⁴ David Stark. TT:s reporter: "Kungen ville bara ändra några språkliga detaljer". Publish, 2011-04-27.

¹⁵ Mikael van Reis. Recension: Mina 40 år för Sverige. Göteborgs Posten, 2013-09-15.

¹⁶ Johan Croneman. Till och med den mest inbitne rojalist... Dagens Nyheter, 2013-09-17.

Forty years is a long time in today's fast and changing society. With your long experience, you have made a unique contribution to our country and to the continuity of our cultural heritage. You have remade monarchy according to the requirements of the new constitution. You have filled your role with meaningful tasks based on your motto *For Sweden - In our time*. By your side, you have had our mother. As queen and wife, she has tirelessly given you her wise and strong support.

Dad, we in the family have seen how tenacious and loyal You have been in working for what you believe in, for the good of Sweden. Your strong drive and commitment are worthy of admiration. Your hard work has led to great appreciation and respect. You and your mother have received a lot of evidence of this, not least in the last year when you crossed the country on national tours, yet again visiting all the counties.

Dear Dad,

You are my beloved father, and a much-loved grandfather. As monarch, you, Your Majesty, are my role model. When the time comes, I will humbly and proudly carry the office forward into the future. Your grandfather's motto *Duty above all* might as well be yours. Serving our country and our people, has always been, and will always be Your clear guiding star.

The reactions to CG's scandals of the 2000s have included either his abdication in favour of Crown Princess Victoria or the abolition of the monarchy. There is difficult to assess second-hand information, that the Crown Princess wishes to have a political decision on what the Torekov compromise means in practice before she agrees to succeed CG. Perhaps an echo of CG's identical concerns: Might he express any thoughts at all? Over the years, the interpretation of the agreement has varied between the monarch not being allowed to speak at all to the monarch being able to speak freely but not to interfere in party politics. Probably she is discouraged by CG's experience manoeuvring the treacherous waters.¹⁷

The Republican Association has presented a proposal to replace the monarch with an elected president and with the Speaker's current mandate.¹⁸ The main advantage would be that with a president you would not have all the historical "rubble" and he can therefore be examined by the Constitutional Committee and the National Audit Office. The presentation of the proposal at a seminar on November 12, 2011, revealed that it meant a powerless Head of State "above the parties" corresponding to CG's current status - but elected by the people. The motive was that such a system suited Sweden's political tradition of popular sovereignty. Problems emerged during the discussion. An elected head of state, he or she could be as unpolitical as a newly born child, still had the people's mandate to act. One therefore has the feeling that this is the reason for the Constitution not being amended. An apolitical president with the ability to act is a loose cannon. You never know where it goes. The Finnish and Russian experience is that it is easy for such an office to get involved in power plays.

¹⁷ Radio 1. Robert Aschberg. Intervju med Camilla Lindberg (fp), 2011-06-23.

¹⁸ [Mats Einarsson & Jesper Svensson] ...bara ett penndrag. Förslag till en republikansk författning för Sverige. Republikanska föreningen, 2012.

The current strategy of the Republicans appears to be the one introduced by Carl Lidbom, Social Democratic State Councillor 1969-1975 and continued by Birgitta Ohlsson (fp) as chairman of the Republikan Association 2002-2005: The death of the monarchy by a thousand cuts. Ohlsson wanted to start with CG's chairmanship of the foreign policy council and his receiving foreign diplomats. Now it rather seems that his freedom of economic action is under attack. Another suggestion is that the government appoints the Marshal of the Realm who gets powers beyond the economic, viz. *carte blanche* to run the Royal court. With so little of CG's duties specified in the constitution, this is surely a feasible way forward. It does not require constitutional changes, but only administrative decisions. In an interview around 2008, Ohlsson assumed that the monarchy would erode in the manner of the church and the patriarchy without anybody having to do anything. In 2012, however, in her capacity as Minister for European Affairs, she attended Princess Estelle's baptism and took the opportunity to curtsy before Crown Princess Victoria. Maybe in jest, maybe not. The only Councillor of State who did so, it seems. The Republican Association knows too much about the ways of royalty, and sometimes it bites you in the ass.

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The Islamic monarchies have continued to cause CG trouble. Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud made an official visit to Sweden in 2001. Ten years later, Abdulla was king and CG, as honorary president of the World Scout Foundation, would extend the bronze wolf award in recognition of all the money he had donated to the Scout movement, which caused criticism that CG supported a reactionary and blood-tainted regime. Abdulla had supported the project "Messengers of Peace" concerning human rights. The Swedish Scout Council responded: "In the Scouts, we believe in the power of change contained in the encounter between people. It must therefore be possible to interact with those forces that have the ability to change, even if this sometimes means that we have to take difficult decisions. However, this does not mean that we accept undemocratic governance. ... The Saudi Arabian Scout Movement has played an active role in the project and has a long-standing cooperation with the World Scout Movement on peace issues. The Messengers of Peace project represents dialogue, strengthening local scouts and peace. The international Scout movement, of which the Swedish Scout Council is a part, believes that dialogue is the right way to achieve understanding, tolerance and respect between countries, religions and cultures."¹⁹

However, this with respect for other cultures seems mostly to have had a practical side for CG: "It is extremely important that we embrace the different cultures of the countries. That we are looking at how we should behave and how we should handle the business talks. It is extremely sensitive to make mistakes."²⁰ I myself have not found any statement about human rights or the value of other cultures. Possibly with the exception that CG thinks that the immigration to Sweden has helped ease the rigid forms of socializing. He seems to want to make everyone a Swede, including the Saudi Arabs, and in the absence of that not tread them on their toes, at least in vain.

Afterwards, it has emerged that CG actually consulted the Foreign Office in the usual way to get its approval. He did not award the bronze wolf on his own initiative but at the request of the international Scout movement. This has not impressed anyone, however, as CG, as Head of State, is expected to make his own political decisions. If you are a head of state, you cannot

¹⁹ Svenska scoutrådet, 2011-10-03.

²⁰ Jonny Ohlsson. Exklusiv intervju med kung Carl XVI Gustaf. NWT.se, 2010-03-29.

blame your advisers. This was discussed for the umpteenth time on TV4s morning program. The courts CIO, Bertil Ternert, refused to accept CG as an independent entity. The Torekov compromise in his interpretation was that the positions of CG and the government must coincide.²¹

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In 1999, the Republicans of Australia lost a plebiscite to establish a republic with a president elected by parliament. Republicans were in the majority, but the electorate was divided between the different Republican options. In 2008, the monarchy in Nepal was replaced by a republic. In 2010, South African President Jacob Zuma announced the abolition of six of their traditional kingdoms due to their collaboration with the apartheid regime. The clock is ticking.

²¹ Nyhetsmorgon. TV4, 2011-10-04. [Intervju med Bertil Ternert & Lena Mellin.]