

Chapter 50 : “The Court's Press Service”

Gustaf V's press contacts were until 1946 managed by his 1st court marshal Reinhold Rudbeck (1871-1957) who was known to treat the court-journalists as if they were crofters at his family estate. Permission to write about the court was a sign of favour that was only awarded to the specially deserving. The court-journalists appeared hat in hand to be informed of appropriate angles of approach. A large number of depictions of discretion and courteous boot licking are found. The court's suspicion of these potential traitors was compact. The hirelings tended to protest the restrictions. According to Gustav von Platen, the court “tried to build a wall around the royals as if they had been mental patients”.¹ Probably he thought of the restrictions around Gustaf V's last time in hospital. The press was kept at such a distance that they were forced to use binoculars, and Gustaf V's doctor informed them via proxy that the king was ill - that the king was worse - that the king was dead. Not easy to write anything on those premises.² The person responsible at the time was Rudbeck's successor baron Carl-Reinhold von Essen.

King Gustaf VI tried to make better use of the press for the benefit of the royal house. His own press contacts were handled by his Marshal of the Realm, 1st Marshal of the Court, Personal Secretary and from 1962 also by a joint press spokesman with Sibylla.

Upon Gustaf V's death baron von Essen was appointed Sibylla's Marshal of the Court and was 1951-1959 responsible for her press contacts. The children's press contacts 1946-1958 were usually managed by Sibylla's Chief lady-in-waiting Brita Cederström (1904-1993), a delightful old lady of the old tribe with outdated views on most everything.

Prince Bertil managed his own press contacts but also Gustaf VI & Sibylla were very active. The royal house and the journalists came in this way to live in an unhealthy symbiosis:

But with the help of the court, we created imaginary people with no or little connection to reality. Princess Margaretha was shy and tormented by the public, Birgitta was a sex bomb, Desirée virtuous but dull and Christina chubby, charming and intelligent. King Gustaf Adolf was learned, pedantic and dry and Prince Berra a guy whose interests in life were limited to sports, food and cars. Lennart Bernadotte was a little crazy and the little prince Carl Gustaf had a hard time spelling.³

Gustaf von Platen was the editor-in-chief of Vecko Journalen 1951-1965 so he can well be called to account for the reporting about CG during his school years, hardly a golden age for insightful articles.

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After having experienced her daughter's love affair with Robin Douglas-Home 1956-1958, Sibylla tried to get Gustaf VI to hire a regular press spokesman, but he for a long time refused. For her part, Sibylla appointed two members of the Youth Council: Her chamberlain Gösta Lewenhaupt and Captain Harald Smith. Smith seems to have taken the opportunity to launch his son Carl Johan as CG's best friend. There are a lot of pictures and stories about the two from this time.

¹ Gustaf von Platen. Resa till det förflutna : minnen. Del 2. 1994.

² Michael Jägerblom. Publicistklubben, 1974-10-04.

³ Gustaf von Platen. Resa till det förflutna : minnen. Del 2. 1994.

In 1962 Gustaf VI employed the editor Sten Egnell (1907-1998) who was organizationally placed under the Marshal of the Realm. Egnell was a retired editor-in-chief of Nerikes Allehanda and after his retirement worked at the Swedish employers' association with the trade journal *Läder och skor*. He held a reception at the castle two hours two mornings each week, but one could also call home to him at home. His main job was to convey press releases to TT and the like. Carl-Fredrik Palmstierna (1903-1993) handled urgent matters. At major events, the court was assisted by the Foreign Office's press service and, if necessary, also by the military press service, traditionally the navy's press service. There were discussions about a full-time press ombudsman, a kind of "propaganda minister", but this did not take place during Gustaf VI's lifetime.

1973-1974 there existed a "media council" for discussions about CG's public image. This included SVT producer Gert Engström, responsible for broadcasting royal events, editor-in-chief Sven Broman from *Året Runt* - at the time publishing director of *Åhlén & Åkerlund's* weeklies - and journalist Bengt Nordin from *Aftonbladet*. The Council discussed trifles and was dissolved after four meetings following allegations in the weeklies about CG's sexlife (see chapter 54). A few years later, Engström was commissioned to write Silvia's disability manifesto "Come on!".

King Gustaf VI was kept informed about the newspaper articles about the royal house. Newspapers, magazines and everything else. "The first reaction usually comes at the daily royal lunch where in addition to the personal adjutant of the month some high court officials sit in. If the king has not already had personal contact with the family member who 'has been out galivanting in the columns', he contacts them after lunch."⁴ Module's operandi was "keeping a tight ship":

[Sten Egnell's] office was in one of the wings in the outer courtyard and there he received the press a few hours each week. His responsibility was to stay informed of what took place at the castle (no one was obliged to inform him however) and his main task consisted largely in putting the lid on. "Remember one thing," he said seriously, looking at me. "When a journalist calls and wants to know something, I say that can't possibly interest the editor's readers. If he insists, I will ask him to write a letter and develop the reasoning and explain in more detail what he wants. And then they never come back", he asserts.⁵

As must by now be apparent, King Gustaf VI was the family's moral police. If anything was written about Princess Birgitta in Germany, and it was, she received a phone call from King Gustaf VI in person, where she was asked to explain herself, apologize and promise never to repeat it. Sibylla was also involved in the surveillance. It is difficult to say which of them had the greatest need for control. The subjects could be anything: Marriage concerns, comments about her old homeland, attempts to make some money from her education, a feared holiday romance. Princess Christina sometimes seemed paralysed during the press conferences when she tried to avoid answering questions about the Swedish political model, free love and other things that foreign journalists were interested in. She wished afterwards that she had answered "Free love is not as bad as it sounds." One of King Gustaf VI's hobbyhorses was that royal engagements would come as a bolt from the clear sky. Probably some remnant of the fact that in the past they had been arranged over the heads of the parties and was a surprise even to

⁴ Nils Gustaf Holmqvist. *Allers*, 1972:3.

⁵ Jan Mårtensson. *Att kyssa ett träd*. W & W, 2000, s 206.

themselves. King Gustaf VI drove this in absurdity. Princess Christina and Tord Magnusson were year after year “just friends”. In late 1971, Christina moved to a flat outside the castle. Maybe they had some sex then, maybe not.

Official rebuttals came from the Marshal's Office, unofficial from Sten Egnell, all with the approval of King Gustaf VI. If a newspaper wrote something not true, Egnell would phone and point this out. However, the Court did not allow him to provide the correct information.⁶ This was perceived by many as strange but according to Egnell it was a matter of capacity:

* One question, Your Royal Highness! Has the time not come to abolish a seemingly obsolete and anything but fair practice, namely that a royal person is not allowed to defend himself or provide correct information? Not even in the case of pure lies or outright preposterous claims.

- No, I [Princess Sibylla] still don't think so. I have discussed this matter with the King. We have agreed to remain silent even in quite appalling cases. Because we know that if we defend ourselves, there will soon be a response, we will also have to answer to the response and then we are in a perhaps increasingly inflamed and unpleasant polemic.⁷

The military element meant that things could get tough. On King Gustaf VI's last state visit to West Germany, Egnell called up an unpleasant editor while the adjutant Ulf Björkman devoted himself to journalist: “Protested against an article that implied the king was old and powerless by taking the journalist by the lapel and in capital letters - so that the neighbours were disturbed - tell me what I thought of his ill-considered attack. The next day's article concluded that the king impressed with 'his stunning vigour and vitality'. Surely it pays to talk to editors.”⁸

Egnell also appears to have conveyed press contacts: “Princess Sibylla is today a lady who, like the rest of the royal family - especially the royal couple and Prince Bertil - carefully reads what is written about the family in the newspapers. For a while, her relationship with the press was quite cool. Nowadays, she has developed her public relations mind and can through various channels let so and so newspapers understand that she wishes a reportage or article about certain sections of the family's life. Some time ago, a large weekly newspaper found out from the princess's court that she would not mind an article about the family's life at Solliden Castle on Öland. Even the journalist the princess would rather see as her guest was carefully clarified...”⁹

In connection with CG's baccalaureate in 1966, the press service was for several years augmented with Commander Bertil Erksammar (1920-2009) from the navy's press detail who came to play an important role for the press contacts until CG's accession in 1973.

Significant activity has already taken place through the Marshall's office leaving it to the naval press department to continue to handle contacts between the Crown Prince and the press. Due to a “lack of time, forces and resources”, the Marshall's office was not able to handle the military as well as the civilian side of the contact between the

⁶ Året Runt, 1964:7.

⁷ Margit Fjellman. Intervju med prinsessan Sibylla. Året Runt, 1972:38.

⁸ Ulf Björkman. Kungens adjutant. BNL förlag AB, 1987.

⁹ Året Runt, 1963:40.

Crown Prince and the press. Therefore, 1st Marshal of the court, Admiral Stig H:son Ericson, called the Chief of the Navy, Admiral Åke Lindemalm, well before the Crown Prince's bacculaureate and wondered if the Navy's Press Division could undertake all press activities related to the Crown Prince's upcoming military education.

Admiral Lindemalm passed the bid to the press department's head, Commander Bertil Erkhammar. He accepted the commission. In practice, the entire public relations complex thus fell into extremely well-experienced, effective hands. The Navy's press department is in a way one of our oldest public relations companies, which under varied managers built up the framework around state visits and princess weddings. It is worth mentioning that one of Erkhammar's predecessors - Hans Blenner - is now public relations manager for Volvo.

It is a fact that Bertil Erkhammar automatically also took over the Crown Prince's civil PR when it came to the Stenhammar visit and the Jämtland trip. Erkhammar himself says that he sees nothing strange in this. Wherever the crown prince was officially present in the spring, there have always been a lot of interviews regarding his military training.¹⁰

By the time Erkhammar came into the picture, CG had accepted that he was a public figure and had stopped fighting it. Erkhammar bicycled over to the castle a couple of times a week, sat in on meetings and contributed good advice on how CG should conduct itself to make a good impression. The press releases were written based on information from the Supreme Commander, the Swedish Naval Training School and the heads of the various defence branches. Erkhammar made some attempts to circumvent the journalists but this caused so much controversy that he immediately switched to full transparency.

* How does Bertil Erkhammar personally perceive his role as the Crown Prince's "PR representative" (the quotation marks are important)?

- My private view is that the Crown Prince should be treated like any other Swedish citizen. The barrier of misunderstanding that has been erected around him must be torn down. Many believe that the crown prince is protected by decrees, held prisoner in the castle so to say. That is not the case! Through misguided loyalty, the crown prince's comrades have often tried to protect him by forming a brick wall. This has led the outside world to believe him under guard, as it were a remote controlled drone.

...

* Can Bertil Erkhammar be inspired for his work by his own attitude to the debate about monarchy or republic?

- I am a royalist, but I do not like the word itself. As long as we have a monarchy that works properly, my personal view is that it is for the best of the country. Our country needs the goodwill our royalty gives us abroad. As long as the crown prince is with us in the navy, he is considered an ordinary rookie, later cadet, and treated in the same way as his comrades. If he pulls a stunt, he is locked up!¹¹

* And the crown prince as a person?

- He's easy to deal with. At first, he had some difficulty in mastering the situation and answering the press questions. He was a little shy. He's not the kind of guy who

¹⁰ Jackie Lindeberg. Uppdrag: Operation kronprinsen. Vecko Journalen, 1966:24.

¹¹ Jackie Lindeberg. Uppdrag: Operation kronprinsen. Vecko Journalen, 1966:24.

rushes in and says “here I am.” He is modest. Today he's a little tougher - thanks to all the publicity around him. It has done him good. He has become more open. Carl Gustaf is very proactive. Never waits for others to do the dirty work. And one thing is certain: When Carl Gustaf has decided on a course of action, he gives it his all.¹²

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1967-1971 also Stig Ramel was entrusted to handle certain media contacts:

I was also given responsibility for carefully opening the doors to the mass media. The court's relations with them were strained to say the least. Of course, it was not the king or Prince Bertil who had difficulties, but rather Princess Sibylla. After some traumatic experiences, most recently regarding Princess Margaretha's infatuation with a young Englishman [Robin Douglas-Home], Princess Sibylla regarded journalists as evil beings who tried to harm her and her children. I saw it as an important task to try to resolve this conflict. When I proposed that the Crown Prince should appear at a press conference, this was met by the princess's very articulate protests. I argued for a new policy. The Court must stop seeing the press as an enemy and instead realize that it actually had common interests with it. After an intense discussion up in the princess's apartment, the idea of a press conference was accepted and when the outcome was positive, the start of a new era was taken care of.

Transparency was necessary. In some quarters, the policy of the closed door was used to spread rumours that the crown prince was almost moronic and for that reason was hidden away by the court. There was no doubt that this whispering campaign had political objectives. The rumours also reached Åke Ortmark, who at this time was in the process of writing his book about the power relations in Sweden, and he called me and read a section about the Crown Prince's mediocre gifts of understanding which, if published, would seriously damage his the position. I decided to immediately take the bull by the horns and arranged [on 21 April 1969 at 12 o'clock] a lunch for four in a chambre séparée at Ulriksdal's Wårdshus. Åke had at this time the reputation of being a no holds barred hatchet man, and the idea of having him directly confront the Crown Prince could appear to be a dangerous gamble. The lunch was held and passed off well. Afterwards Åke exclaimed: “But he's a normal guy”, and made important changes to his manuscript.¹³

[Åke Ortmark: “The Crown Prince has not thought and read as much as Ramel, and will probably never do so, but the thoughts and feelings, the sympathies and antipathies, which are found in Ramel and in other persons in the Crown Prince's surroundings, and which in some cases are articulated so clearly and with such commitment, are naturally found at most points also in the Crown Prince, though in more blurred form. A position that Ramel is able to express with multiple words and with historical associations becomes a brief emotional break of low intensity in the eyes of the Crown Prince or Prince Bertil, a radical judge would speak of it as a prejudice that is cast off its linguistic embellishments. It is not easy to penetrate into the feelings and thoughts of a king or a prince; to do so it becomes important to study their libraries, their subscription lists and, above all, their friends and employees; The ideas, the

¹² Bo Axelsson. Carl Gustafs lärare om Carl Gustaf. Kvällsposten, 1968-04-03.

¹³ Stig Ramel. Minnen: Pojken i dörren : I kronprinsens tjänst. Atlantis, 1994, s 175-181.

feelings, the motives, the objectives must be assumed to be very much the same.

On one point, it seems that Ramel has made a somewhat innovative contribution to the court; He has managed to bring down, to a large extent, some of the barriers that have traditionally been built up between royalty and the mass media. He understands that the media should not be discouraged but used and that a certain amount of accidents can be tolerated in the process.”^{14]}

October 20, 1969, Ramel organized a television interview, in order for CG to demonstrate his intellectual faculties. It is perhaps not so strange that later in life CG deeply distrusted Ortmark and his ilk. Ortmark later wrote a piece about Olof Palme's relations with the press that also applies to CG:

Probably [he] perceives a large part of the world as hostile. Studies from different cultures and epochs have shown that those in power with increasing age suffer from increasing bitterness at the lack of love and appreciation. Those who examine a prince believe that he should be happy and proud of his successes. But he himself is anxiously counting the defeats and seeking culprit. It is as if the prince is essentially immature, as if he is demanding total harmony, as if he had not learned to live with conflict, as if he were experiencing a discussion of a matter of fact as a threat to his position of power, as if he is expecting friendship and admiration at puberty level instead of the rational alliance or coalition he can reach.

Over the years, the prince recruits a group of loyal supporters. Together with them - in the sacred community of group thinking - he can then devote himself to distrust scientists and journalists, unruly people, who review, comment and analyse, often without [he himself] understanding the extent of the problems that are at issue.¹⁵

¹⁴ Åke Ortmark. De okända makthavarna : de kungliga, militärerna, journalisterna. W & W, 1969.

¹⁵ Åke Ortmark. Maktens människor : möten och konfrontationer. 1985.