

## Chapter 51 : “Jan Mårtensson”

After the accession, CG slowly reorganized his court. Palmstierna and Egnell were replaced in 1975-1979 by the head of the Foreign Office's Information Bureau - diplomat Jan Mårtensson (1933-). Mårtensson continued Ramel's press policy: There would be complete transparency in everything. Journalists would be respected as professionals and would be assisted within reasonable limits. In return, journalists would respect CG's privacy. The court's press department would operate in the spirit of Oscar Wilde: “There are no indiscreet questions, only indiscreet answers.” There was an idea that through availability, the royalty would be “demystified”, viz. given a human face. There was an inherent conflict in the objective. The “gossip press”, which actually devoted itself professionally to demystification, would nevertheless be thwarted. However, the engagement between CG and Silvia, the premiere of the new press policy, was very successful.

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The wedding a little later came to be a new experience for the press detail of the court. Ulf Björkman, head of the Swedish Air Force information department, was on loan as a reinforcement. However, neither Mårtensson's diplomatic training nor Björkman's officer training was a suitable background for dealing with the onslaught:

Another peculiarity [at the wedding] was to suddenly become incredibly popular. I have never before or since received so many invitations to small lunches with mainly women's reporters.

An editor-in-chief of such a paper offered one of his most beautiful journalists for a whole evening. The editor-in-chief emphasized all the qualities of the poor girl, both journalistic and otherwise, in a way similar to cattle auctions in Svalöv. She concluded by mentioning, as in passing, that the reporter was the mistress of a famous American actor.

In that moment I understood that I was playing in the wrong division and referred her kindly but firmly to the boss - Jan Mårtensson.

- I've already talked to him. But he said something about hypocrisy being the tribute vice pays to virtue. Frankly, I did not understand what he meant. Is he overworked?

What then, did they want to know, that was worth these efforts?

Everything, and I mean everything. The wedding dress was high on the list, of course. The destination of the honeymoon. The guests. The food. The music. Bridesmaids and Maids of honour.

- Today they have reached an all time low, I said one day to Jan. One lunatic wants to know if Silvia uses a brassiere and another if the king has passed a fertility test.

- There are no stupid questions, just stupid answers, Jan said. What did you answer?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ulf Björkman. Kungens adjutant. BNL förlag AB, 1987

Mårtensson took office on September 1, 1975. His early days were dominated by turf battles with 1<sup>st</sup> Marshal of the Court Björn von der Esch and Marshal of the Court Bengt Colliander who both wanted to keep the press, but especially Jan Mårtensson, on a short rein. Responsibility for the press contacts during the incoming state visits was transferred to the Foreign Office's press detail. Neither did Mårtensson have any responsibility for the press contacts of the outgoing state visits which according to the practice was the recipient country's responsibility. The responsibility for the other official visits within and outside the country were shared by Mårtensson, Esch & Colliander. This did not work very well during the official visit to America before the wedding, nor during the state visits to the Netherlands and Belgium after the wedding. Both CG and Esch are said to have been rude and even to have come to blows with the journalists. The rudeness seems mainly to have been due to the fact that Esch with his background as naval officer, farmer & doctoral degree in economics completely lacked political finesse or even a sense of self-preservation. Everyone other than himself - especially elderly upper class ladies interested in weeklies and royal gossip - were idiots.<sup>2</sup> Colliander seems to have had a corresponding if downplayed attitude. In the Netherlands, the journalist Erik Fichtelius was led out of the premises by two aides when he insisted on asking Silvia what she thought of Prince Bernhard's involvement in the Lockheed scandal. That particular episode ended with a "clear the air meeting" and that Mårtensson was instructed to organize future press contacts.<sup>3</sup> Esch also wanted to keep the King and Queen away from inappropriate environments but not even CG agreed to that.

The last major conflict with the Swedish press under Mårtensson's rule took place during the 1978 Brazilian tour which CG perceived as a completely private visit to Silvia's relatives but which due to the press coverage got a kind of semi-official character:

Certainly, King Carl Gustaf is right in a way that there is a big difference between his official visits abroad and his private trips. But the media must follow their own criteria. Some visits abroad (hunting parties in Austria and West Germany, etc.) are of little news value and are therefore not monitored.

When the King and Queen visit Brazil, however, the readers (large sections of the Swedish people) are interested.

It is bordering on moral misconduct if somebody imagined the King and Queen (and thus the Swedish government) would go unnoticed on such a visit.

The King is angry that the trip was not entirely private and therefore indirectly caused trouble for the government, although this aspect should not be exaggerated.

Another matter is that some irritations could be avoided if the King, Queen and media from the start agreed to a compromise. For example, that the king and queen accepted interviews and photography, on some fixed occasions and that the mass media in return refrained from following the king and queen for the rest of the time.

A pious wish? Yes, perhaps, but the fact is that on some occasions such compromises were reached and largely worked. Everything would be better if the mass media found a way to hold all press representatives to such an agreement and if King Carl XVI Gustaf shows a somewhat more flexible public attitude than hitherto, regardless of his true feelings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Erik Fichtelius. Björn von der Esch. Fokus, 2010-03-26.

<sup>3</sup> Per Gudmundsson. Om Jan Mårtensson. Kvällsposten, 1979-03-19.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Jägerblom. Kungaparets brasilienresa: Var går kungens "privata sektor"? Vecko Journalen, 1978:3.

The reason for the conflict seems to have been that CG and Silvia wanted to minimize security problems by keeping the program secret. “The King and Queen's firm opinion can be expressed in a single sentence: the fewer details are dispensed, the better; the fewer persons involved, the easier to improvise and manage personal security.”<sup>5</sup>

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The conflicts with von der Esch & Colliander were very tiring and led to Mårtensson's 1979 resignation in favour of a posting as Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations. The fact that CG allowed these conflicts to continue indicates that he had difficulties handling the issue. Silvia gave Mårtensson a well-formulated farewell speech though: “Now Jan has engaged, married and baptized us. There is nothing left [to do].” But of course there was.

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<sup>5</sup> Kungaparets privatbesök i Brasilien 1977/78. Utrikesdepartementet, protokollet, 1977-11-23.