

Chapter 54 : “The Publicist's Association & the Ombudsman”

On December 9, 1965, the court's press spokesman Sten Egnell was invited to the Swedish Publicists' Association to give a talk about the court's press service. Egnell noted that his clients were primarily critical of empty talk and gossip. The royal house was vulnerable to such because the principle was never to answer. However, the Royal Family welcomed a factual news coverage. He himself saw as his most important task to be an official channel to which one could turn and obtain accurate information. What he saw as the biggest problem was the demand for equal treatment. If a newspaper or photographer was allowed something, the demand immediately came that everyone else should be allowed too. They didn't have the capacity.

A discussion arose as to whether, in view of Egnell's employment relationship, there was any reason to trust his “accurate information”. The example put forward was CG's visit to Greece at King Constantine's wedding the previous year. CG and Prince Charles were supposed to have swum out and overturned a water bicycle with three photographers so that their equipment ended up in the water. One of the photographers was a Swede. He later published a photograph of CG swimming in their direction.

Mr Hans Hederberg: Just a trifle: Isn't Mr Egnell a PR man? The energy you and the court showed in denying the Athens-incident means that you were scared. I did not think you had much to offer in the form of correct information - just a categorical denial of what the press photographers said. (Mr. Egnell: We presented the facts in the case.) - Mr Egnell in Stockholm took to his heart what the royals told him had happened in Athens and then communicated their version. What was the basis for maintaining that the photographers in question were lying?

Mr. Egnell: If the facts are as they are you can do nothing else. I trust the 1st Marshal of the Court's statement that the Crown Prince was not in the water at the time in question. I like the photographer, but I understand that he does not have an easy task to retract an erroneous statement. Mr. Hederberg's intervention confirms my view that sometimes a sense of proportion is lacking.¹

At the end, the journalists present pointed out that Egnell's obstinacy seemed strange when one could read in foreign newspapers exactly what had happened there in the water and what had happened was definitely not what Egnell claimed had happened.

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On October 7, 1971, Egnell managed to get CG and Princess Christina to attend a meeting of the Association. The meeting was attended by a record 150 people. It would be nice to be able to quote CG's uncensored opinions about how he was knocked about in the press but the condition for him and Christina attending was no direct quotes. According to later recollections, it went like this:

CG started. He had no objections to the press describing his life, even his nightlife, but they had to get the facts right. He found it hard to comprehend all these errors and fantasies. This was particularly true of the “research” articles based on older newspaper clips. While it was amusing to read how the facts year by year were distorted into something unrecognizable, it

¹ Presstjänst på slottet. Publicistklubbens årsbok, 1965, s 124-129.

did not increase his respect for the profession. “Although there often is a core of truth in what they write, they embellish it with so much false information that the whole article becomes useless. They confuse names and dates and if there's a gap in the story, they make something up.”² He was also vexed that out of context information and fictional quotes were published as “interviews”.

Christina continued “We royals play a role that is not like that of other celebrities. We are aware that we are in great need of publicity - the day you stop writing about the Bernadotte family we no longer mean that much - but it is difficult to know what to say when you get questions such as: How do you live? How big is your bed? What kind of food do you like?” She also felt it unwise to “overexpose” herself. She wanted to wait until she had something to say. Both disapproved of what the journalists had written about their mother. Christina was particularly unsympathetic to all the siblings' love problems being blamed on Sibylla. They were perfectly capable of making a mess themselves.

The discussion afterwards was mainly about the journalists defending their actions on the grounds that these were the conditions of the profession. CG stated that he had stopped caring and mostly laughed at the whole thing. “If I reacted to all the writings about my errors and alleged girls, I would become insane!” One of those present was the judge at the Stockholm court of appeal Gustaf Petrén. He pointed out that the publicity about royalty differs on one essential point from any other publicity: “In the case of other people, most of the publicity surrounding them relates to their special efforts in different fields. Politicians talk about political issues, artists about artistic problems etc. Publicity about the personal comes as a supplement. The royals are largely cut off from speaking on all issues, political issues and social problems at all. The publicity surrounding them is only about their person and way of life, therefore the question of the delimitation in this area becomes important.”³

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On August 7, 1974, CG and Sten Egnell appeared on the Association's 100th anniversary, but there is no information about what they said. Possibly it was then that CG announced that he no longer gave individual interviews.⁴ The practice was not quite so drastic but CG stopped granting interviews to weeklies. The exception was *Vecko Journalen*, but it was discontinued in 1980. The 1974 trigger appears to have been the notorious article in *Fib/Aktuellt* about CG's extra marital sex life published at this time.⁵

The handling of the article was later criticized by Annette Kullenberg as another example of the special treatment of the royal family: “Newspaper owners and others who apologized made it clear to the public that you must not hurt the king. Whether you get to hurt other people or not was not mentioned in the context, not even from the Publicist's Association.”⁶

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CG's bull on January 12, 1975, about the ski holiday in Klosters was discussed at the Association on January 12, 1975. Press officers Sten Egnell and Carl-Fredrik Palmstierna participated in the event, claiming that the press coverage of Klosters lacked proportions.

² George W Herald. Intervju med kronprinsen. *Hemmets veckotidning*, 1973:17.

³ Var går gränsen. *Publicistklubbens årsbok*, 1971-1972, s 75-77.

⁴ Susanne Haufman. Kungen privat - så nära har ni aldrig mött honom förut! *Vecko Revyn*, 1974:34.

⁵ Hans Bergström. Kungens hemliga kärleksnästen! *Fib/Aktuellt*, 1974:33.

⁶ Annette Kullenberg. *Överklassens statschef: Om exploateringen av kungen. I: Överklassen i Sverige. 1975.*

“The prize for the unbridled journalism of the newspapers is the happiness of two young people. It has been like shooting a sitting duck. The king cannot defend himself. Should the press regain the esteem it lost among the public it must obtain more noble prey as the ministers 'the real powers' but they dare not.”

The editor-in-chief of *Expressen* Per Wrigstad defended himself energetically. “It is depressing that a message from the court is received with such awe by large sections of the press. If the media were to behave as they were urged to do in the communication, this would have devastating consequences for the monarchy. Should the media only take an interest in the King in his official capacity, he would never have 'a place in the heart of the people'. I do not understand how one can dispatch a message that would prevent the king from open contact with the Swedish people. It is also hypocritical to claim that the history of the king and Silvia does not concern the Swedish people. In a monarchy love is state business.”⁷ Also the editor-in-chief of *Svensk Damtidning* Lisa Winnerlid protested: “Is it shameful that the king is in love? No one has revealed any personal details.”

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Similar debates continued at the Publicist's Association during Jan Mårtensson's entire employment. In April/May 1977 there was a debate “Myth or reality concerning the King and Queen” at the Association in Malmö. The audience was 50 old cynics who had seen and heard it all. Mårtensson explained the position of the court and as usual quoted Oscar Wilde: “An opinion is not necessarily correct just because someone is willing to die for it.” What he meant was somewhat unclear. Perhaps he just wanted the congregation to come to their senses before they put the pen to the paper the next time around? On January 12, 1978, there was a debate about “The new monarchy” at the Association in Stockholm and on November 28, a similar debate - Mårtensson's last - at the Association in Norrköping which he ended with the exhortation “The situation must be defused. The monarchy is part of our Swedish constitution. Part of our feast, but also part of our everyday life.”⁸

The Association has since arranged further discussions about court-journalism, but without CG or other court representatives present. For 35 years, neither Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg, Anne-Christine Jernberg nor Nina Eldh took part in any public debates. This appears to have been on the direct orders of CG. When they have promised to come, they haven't. Tarras-Wahlbergs participation in the Brunei-debate was unauthorized and by all accounts a disaster. The kind of loyalty that CG demands of his employees does not sit well in a public context.

Bertil Ternert, on the other hand, has been a frequent debater, which is interpreted as CG accepting the consequences of the changed media climate and starting to defend himself via proxy: When Ternert was interviewed for the 50th anniversary twelve years ago, he “always gave straight answers” as his motto. Anyone who wants to talk about a Ternert effect in the Royal House's communication strategy can see that criticism of the media has developed from being cloudy and sweeping to concrete and precise. But above all, the new head of information is probably the right man in the right place at a time that increasingly feels like wrong for the head of state and his family.”⁹ The criticism of Ternert has been that he lacks journalistic background, subject knowledge and personal knowledge and therefore was CG's

⁷ Ska kungen bestämma vad vi ska skriva? Publicistklubbens årsbok 1975, s 113-114.

⁸ Jan Mårtensson. Att kyssa ett träd. W & W, 2000.

⁹ Karin Eriksson. Hovet på offensiven. Fokus, 2011:21.

megaphone rather than the court's informant. All his statements followed the same template - wresting the arguments from the hands of the opponents - not answering their questions.

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Serious violations of the Freedom of Press Act are decided in court. Minor infringements may be reported to the Publicist's Ombudsman (PO) where the case is dismissed or submitted to PON (the jury). The first PO was the lawyer Lennart Groll 1969-1979. He contacted the royal family to get them to report infringements. This included some articles about Sibylla's gynaecology. (She had visited a doctor, possibly her gynaecologist Ove Cassmer, who was later accused of tax evasion.¹⁰) But when Sibylla realized that she herself had to take the initiative, she demurred. The same thing happened with a picture montage of a pregnant Crown Princess Victoria in lingerie in the magazine Z 1993:4. CG instead invited the culprit for a personal talk (see the previous chapter). The Royal Household's unwillingness to report matters later led to an almost exact repeat in Hant i Veckan 1997:16 of a photomontage of the Crown Princess and model Victoria Silvestedt in various swimsuits. This time around reported and convicted. It also appears to have been on the PO's initiative that CG was prepared to report Fib/Aktuellt in 1974 for their article about his sex life, but the case dragged on to the point that the publisher Lukas Bonnier had time to send him an apologetic letter and CG let it pass. In 2012, Silvia reported several newspapers to the PO for the publication of a satirical picture of her kneeling and attempting to scrub away a swastika. The newspapers were acquitted. The court also reported claims that Prince Daniel's kidney disease had returned and that he was therefore sterile (PON 2012/9, Se & Hör) and that Crown Princess Victoria had been close to a miscarriage during pregnancy with Princess Estelle (PON 2012/58, Hant Extra). The articles were convicted because they were not sufficiently substantiated.

The Germans had a press council that in 1973 drew up ethical guidelines for the newspaper industry. Neither the Court nor the Embassy seem to have known of the Council or wanted to use it. Probably for the same reason that they did not want to use the PO. For example, in 1974, Jonas Höjjer, the Swedish press attaché at the embassy in Bern, called Bild am Sonntag and protested personally against the newspaper's articles. CG year after year expressed contempt for the Swedish and German gossip press, but did not take any legal action. Instead, Tarras-Wahlberg had to contact the newspapers and, to what effect, convey his complaints. According to one piece of information, the newspapers sometimes printed the correction in some inconspicuous place.

In 2003, the German weekly 7 Tage published an article about the separation of CG and Silvia on account of CG's adultery. The "proof" was a picture of CG with a young woman on a motorboat who was allegedly his mistress. She was a friend of Crown Princess Victoria and Crown Princess Victoria was also in the boat, but she had been redacted. Because this was untrue, it was prosecuted and the newspaper ended up having to print a correction on the front page. A number of similar lies were fabricated, most of them from 2000 to 2004, and resulted in a large sum of EUR 400 000 in damages to Princess Madeleine. (The charges involved some 80 articles with 1,558 documented errors. Probably some kind of record.) CG took most umbrage with the pornography in text and pictures, the images very illusory in these photoshop-times. An example:

- Silvia has a brain tumour and is in hospital. She has only two weeks to live, and Victoria is on her deathbed day and night.

¹⁰ Nils Gustaf Holmqvist. Allers, 1972:3.

- The King is notoriously unfaithful with various young girls and the divorce from Silvia is a fact and the application is already filed. The Queen is in despair.
- The King is not the father of Princess Madeleine. Instead, it is Roger Moore with whom Silvia had a relationship when they met in Italy in 1981.
- Victoria has cancer and will never be able to have children as a result of the disease.

A senior manager describes the way the newspapers worked as follows: “We call it green table journalism. First, you sit around a table and decide what the reality should be. Then you go out and make sure that the reality matches what you decided at the desk. ... We will satisfy millions of readers with interesting articles about interesting people. We create dreams. Modern marrytales, says N.N. and looks palpably satisfied with the pun.”¹¹ Thus not gossip but a form of fiction. An example from Die Neue Frau: “She [Victoria] cried, she screamed, she whined, devastated by her cracked heart. She could no longer hide it. Then her mother came to the rescue, to help her out of this devilish crisis. I don't want to get sick again, she sobbed.”

Swedish gossip press, on the other hand, really contains gossip. Fake news is very rare and is prosecuted internally. For example, Åsa Bönnellyche in Svensk Damtidning managed to put in her blog that Silvia suffered from Alzheimer's disease: “Silvia is seriously ill! ... Crown Princess Victoria has herself told her friends about her mother's condition. Silvia is ill and getting worse at a fast pace. I have just heard this, and I am sorry for our Queen and the whole royal family. How very sad. Silvia has Alzheimer's disease.”¹² The article was taken down already after an hour and a half, Bönnellyche was temporarily reassigned to other duties, the editor-in-chief Karin Lennmor wrangled a personal meeting with Silvia, handed her a flower bouquet and obviously prostrated herself. The Flashback website commented: “Did I get a slight shock when I read the blog post at Svensk Dam by the dwarf Åsa B. Here we have been looking at the subject for ages and found that the German does NOT have Alzheimer's, so a scoop-greedy amateur-»journalist» scampers in and makes news of our discussion. It's embarrassing.”¹³ The following year also Se & Hör and Hänt Extra published invented news. They did not have time to retract it, however, but were reported.

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Not surprisingly, there is a pronounced Republican 68-nostalgia. In 1980, Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter's retired columnist Red Top (Lennart Nyblom) delivered a speech at the Publicist's Association where he longed for the good old times when attacking the royal house was not taboo:

Even at Gustav VI Adolf's time, one could demand a republic and even to some extent joke with the king. Whenever this monarch went to Italy to dig among Etruscan shards, he travelled under the name “Count of Gripsholm”. Bo Grandien once referred to him in an article as “The Digger of Gripsholm” [originally in ”Blandaren”; the Swedish version is funnier] without the readers protesting, but the king himself reacted.

With the advent of Queen Silvia, however, the royal house became sacrosanct. When the king and Silvia were about to marry under a big hullabaloo, the wretched lowlife

¹¹ Markus Wilhelmsson. Rapport från lögnfabriken. Expressen, 2003-11-15.

¹² Åsa Bönnellyche. Silvia är svårt sjuk! Svenskdam.se, 2010-03-11.

¹³ Flashback. Den stora skvallertråden om H. M. Drottning Silvia. ”Italienskan”, #519, 2010-03-12.

who writes these lines suggested that non-royal-minded persons should arrange an alternative wedding at Gärdet. It was at the time when it was so popular with alternative music parties, alternative Christmas, alternative accommodation etc. Some humourless people took it seriously and celebrated such under alcohol abuse and blasphemy. I was in France myself at the time, and the French press said almost more about this alternative wedding than about the real one - something I regard as my international breakthrough. When I returned to the newspaper in July, several anonymous letters were lying and waiting - a couple of them wished me and my whole family dead.¹⁴

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Since 1996, Internet publishing has become common. The 1997 yearbook of the Publicist's Association contained an article "Gossip or scoop?" concerning that the old distinction between what was said orally and what was published was about to disappear. In 1997, for example, a Chalmers student posted a copy of a JO report on the internet. It was written by an apparently mentally ill woman who claimed to have seen CG kill her lady friend, drive away with her body in a snowshovel, sink it in a marsh, then raped her and promised her cocaine if she kept quiet, etc. A comrade tipped Aftonbladet about the matter, that allegedly published it as a news item on October 24.¹⁵ I have not been able to find it, though.

In 1998, two students were suspended by the KTH disciplinary board three months as a punishment for posting a song text online about a sexual intercourse between CG and Silvia on a server belonging to KTH and a picture of CG as a naked woman. The suspension was motivated by the fact that the move was a violation of the royal couple's civil rights and a denigration of KTH's reputation.^{16,17} 1999 also featured crude sex pictures of CG with Princess Madeleine on the site "Faked Swedish Celebs by Xenon".¹⁸ The debate became so agitated that the author apologized and removed the pictures voluntarily.

It does not appear that the court surveyed the Internet for infringements, but were tipped by newspapers and individuals.

One effect of the internet was to increase the number of "letters to the editor", in this case "letters to the court". The court had extensive experience of such and both CG and Silvia are said to read everything submitted. The court seems to perceive its letter or email harvest as a counterbalance to the mass media. However, it is not a substitute for regular R&D. CG seems never to have commissioned an opinion poll.

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It is sometimes claimed that the press coverage of the royal house has become more uncompromising. It doesn't look that way. There are more media outlets now, but there is less royal news. All talk about the sanctity of private life seems to have had an effect. The 1967 list of the International Commission of Jurists includes for CG not to suffer:

- Encroachment on private, home and family life

¹⁴ Red Top. Generaltabu. Publicistklubbens årsbok, 1980, s 26-27.

¹⁵ Staffan Wolters. Uppenbart galet tips blev stor nyhet i AB. Journalisten.se, 1998-01-15.

¹⁶ Göteborgs Posten, 1998-06-05.

¹⁷ Andreas Harne & Olof Brundin. Senaste målet för sexterrorn. Aftonbladet, 1998-05-09.

¹⁸ Flashback News Agency, #121, 1999-07-22.

- Attacks on honour and reputation
- False allegations
- Disclosure of irrelevant embarrassing facts in private circumstances
- Exploitation of name, identity or image

CG would like to see analytical articles about the court. His problem is that contemporary royalists are more interested in cultural and personal journalism. This has been the case throughout the post-war period. Analytical articles are written by Republicans.

A new feature is books that mix facts and fiction. These have not so far been prosecuted because the trial itself to prove what is what will be even more intrusive than what is already in the books. Given all the ruckus surrounding “The reluctant monarch”, it would probably have been best to take the unpleasantness while it still had reasonable scope.

As head of state, CG enjoys immunity. The alternative interpretation of why he does not take the defamation to court is supposed to be his sense of fair play - if the opponents are prevented from prosecuting, he should not do so himself. Personally, however, I find it hard to believe that explanation. The official position of CG is that the truth checking should be handed over to posterity. Come 50 years, a scientist is expected to put everything right. He himself neither denies nor confirms.