

## Chapter 67 : “The Monarchy”

These final three chapters may well be seen as a summary of CG's reign: to make the Torekov compromise work. The chapters are sprawling but so are the sources. Obviously it is all about establishing practice and anchoring the “new monarchy” in the public mind so that it does not appear dysfunctional. In 2002, Dagens Nyheter published an editorial about Sweden's system of government as undemocratic and outdated. At the 60th anniversary of 2006, Finnish historian Henrik Meinander published a kind of rebuttal: a long comparative article about the Swedish and Finnish government. The bottom line was that Sweden had a strong prime minister and a weak “president” and this was probably for the good.<sup>1,2</sup> Since then the constitutional discussion has been dead in the water. It has all been about Crown Princess Victoria being a better or at least less controversial regent than her father.

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Anyone who is against CG and the Swedish monarchy has problems: According to the “Economist Intelligence Unit” of 2006<sup>3</sup>, Sweden was the world's most democratic country (9.88 on a scale 0-10) and the Republic of North Korea the world's least democratic country (1.03 on a scale 0-10). In 2008 North Korea had even fallen to 0.86. The annoying tenths that are lacking for Sweden to be a perfect democracy have something to do with the political culture: That two thirds of the population support the monarchy, that the separation church-state is incomplete or a Swedish preference for technocratic expert rule. Unclear what. Of 30 fully democratic countries (8-10 points in 2006), 12 were constitutional monarchies. Out of 51 authoritarian regimes (<4 points in 2006), 21 were republics. Bo Setterlind obviously had a point. Republic is no guarantee of anything. A similar measurement is made by the Reputation Institute (RI). According to RI's 2010 measurements<sup>4</sup>, Sweden was the world's most respected country in a number of aspects: Good governance, Advanced economy and Appealing nature. Sweden was also, according to EU, the world leader in integrating its immigrants. Break that track record if you can!

As a symbol of Sweden's leading position, CG is very popular. Throughout his tenure, the support for the monarchy, however measured and counted, has been compact. The question, then, is why this persistent struggle for a republic? The most popular interpretation seems to be that Swedish radicalism has lost its momentum. It re-fights its old battles instead of seeking new ones. Since the radicals are now part of the establishment they once fought, current fighting is rather symbolic. The hope seems to be that the monarchy, i.e. the CG, will moulder away by itself and leave room for a republic without anyone risking their political hide. Former Prime Minister Göran Persson put it this way in 2004:

EF: This goes like a red thread in our conversations. When I ask about the Royal House, you will come back to the [Torekov] compromise. And you have been consistent there, as I recall from our conversations, but why is this compromise so important?

GP: because it's good. It is good for both sides, each of which has a strong ideological conviction on this issue. It is a compromise that one can live with. On the one hand,

<sup>1</sup> Monarki + demokrati = osant. Dagens Nyheter, 2002-11-04.

<sup>2</sup> Henrik Meinander. Kungen - för Sverige i framtiden? Svenska Dagbladet, 2006-04-29.

<sup>3</sup> Laxa Kekic. The world in 2007. The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy [2006].

<sup>4</sup> Sweden is the Most Respected Country in the World. Reputation Institute, Pressrelease, 2010-09-27.

we have the royalists, who think that the kingdom itself is something to protect and who, of course, would also have liked to have seen the king have some political power, an opportunity to govern and to influence. On the other hand, there are those of us who believe that Sweden should be a republic, with an elected head of state who could exercise a certain political influence. The compromise that the king no longer has any political power, but only representative functions, internally and externally, has been a success. He performs his tasks excellently. So, having got there, we do not need to have the form of government as an upsetting domestic policy issue. We should remember that the moment some of us are wrong or too far away from this issue, a minority in Parliament triggers a referendum on the form of government, and then we have a paralysing, overriding domestic policy issue for a long time. I do not think that the disadvantages of the system we now have is such that it is worth the sacrifice of paralysing day to day politics . And that has been the pragmatic approach that Social Democracy has taken since 1917, I think, when in practical terms we dropped the demand for a republic.

EF: Who would win such a referendum today?

GP: I definitely believe that those who represent the current regime would win. But I do not think that anyone could press a referendum campaign for the king to have political power, that would not work, nor do we have any interest in going the other way. It could possibly be that we removed the King as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Council [which duplicates the consultations in the Foreign Affairs Committee and the EU Council], that would be logical given the constitution's form. But that also requires us, who are behind the compromise, to agree on such a thing, and I doubt we will.

EF: If you are playing with the idea that the whole anti-royalist apparatus got under way and social democracy clearly argued for a democratic system of government and so on, would it not be possible to turn this opinion around?

GP: I don't know, that's possible, but why waste a year of political battle on this when we have so awfully many other issues that are more important for people to get solved in the near future? That is actually the very practical political argument. Then some may find it suffocating to live under a monarchy, while others may find it unreasonable that we do not have the tradition we have had since 1523, with a monarch who has some influence, but they are a vanishingly small minority.<sup>5</sup>

There are two research reports from the time of Crown Princess Victoria's wedding *The power of the Monarchy : National community in Swedish democracy* by political scientist Cecilia Åse 2009 and *From the Heart of Sweden : Reproduction of contemporary monarchy* by ethnologist Mattias Frihammar 2010 (Cecilia Åse as co-supervisor) depicting this equilibrium. Åse argues that the monarchy, through its combination of popular support, political powerlessness and as a national symbol, has become impossible to criticize. Frihammar argues that one must distinguish between the king as person and the king as symbol. The monarchy as we know it has nothing to do with the king's person. It has everything to do with how we are brought up. None of them believes that the Swedish

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<sup>5</sup> Erik Fichtelius. Aldrig ensam, alltid ensam. Samtalen med Göran Persson 1996-2006. Norstedts, 2007, s 411-424.

monarchy will ever disappear.<sup>6</sup> This political science debate on the the pros and cons of the (Swedish) monarchy as a political system is described in part 3.

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<sup>6</sup> Mattias Frihammar & Cecilia Åse intervjuas i Gomorron Sverige 2010-06-09 kl 7:46.