

**Building a Human Rights Culture**  
South African and  
Swedish Perspectives

Karin Sporre &  
H Russel Botman [eds.]

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**DEMOCRACY  
AND CITIZENSHIP**

## HUMAN RIGHTS, CITIZENSHIP AND WELFARE: THE SWEDISH MODEL<sup>1</sup>

BY LARS PETTERSSON

A central part of the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 asserts the citizen's basic civil rights of freedom of speech, the right to vote and to organize for different purposes, political and other. It is, therefore, important from a human rights' perspective to study the relationships between citizens and the state in order to see how democracy develops. In this article I will mainly focus on the development of the conditions for a more participatory citizenship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but do so from the point of view of the so-called Swedish welfare state, from the 1960's and onwards, so as to trace its roots more than a century back. Throughout the article, different aspects of citizenship will be addressed.

In Sweden, the concept and meaning of citizenship constitute one of the most intensely debated subjects of the political and social discourse. There is a great deal of disagreement as to what should be included in a modern definition of citizenship. Nevertheless, it appears possible to denote a few aspects commonly found throughout the plethora of definitions. Citizenship is delineated primarily as the possibility, as well as the responsibility, of active participation in the democratic structures of the society with the intention of influencing policy outcome.

The extremely high rate of participation of the Swedish electorate, where for a long time, about 90 per cent of the eligible population voted during national elections, has been interpreted popularly as a sign of genuine partnership in policy formation. It is argued that Swedes engage themselves more actively in

1 An earlier version of this paper, with a somewhat different focus, has been published earlier (Pettersson 1998). The text summarizes some of the results of two research projects: "The Functions of the Class Society: The Popular Movements", started in 1965 at the Department of History of the University of Uppsala. The second one, a joint Scandinavian project called "From Associations to Mass Organizations – Social Change and the Origin of the Modern Association Movement Studied in a Comparative Nordic Perspective", which started in 1982. The following studies could be mentioned from these projects: Åberg 1975, Jansson 1982, Jansson 1985, Lundkvist 1977, Pettersson 1992 and Stenius 1987.

their political structures than citizens of other democratic nations. However, it is seldom mentioned that the real participation of the Swede in politics is indirect, i.e. through political organizations, special-interest alliances and lobby groups. Citizens are asked openly for their views only sporadically. Their opinions and aspirations are promoted only as members of a defined aggregate. Consequently, debate in Sweden on the nature of citizenship has concentrated more on collectives than on individual citizens. The collectivist approach to the Swedish analysis of citizenship may be attributed to the historical fact that political, economic and social associations have traditionally been the vanguard of democracy on both the national and local levels. From this circumstance developed the widely held impression of a democratic Sweden synonymous with its social movements – i.e. the organized Sweden. It is generally believed (both in Sweden and elsewhere) that Sweden has had and continues to have unusually active and vigorous social and political movements. However, nowadays such views are being challenged. Furthermore, the conception exists that this attribute has been common throughout the other Nordic countries, though it seems that the role of collectivist organizations in policy formation and application was more pronounced in Sweden than elsewhere in Scandinavia.

The active participation of citizens from all walks of life in organizations and free associations has been suggested as the decisive factor in the evolution of both democracy and the economy in Swedish society. In the case of Sweden, linkage between participatory activity and democracy even in the economic domain can be demonstrated clearly. For instance, few countries anywhere have had a similar policy of centrally establishing wages, encompassing virtually the entire country and resolved almost exclusively through collective bargaining. This phenomenon is explained as the aftermath of the fact that Swedish workers historically, in addition to joining labour unions, were actively interested in shared labour issues. Collective bargaining and a complex systemic obligation to negotiate in order to achieve consensus (together with a legislated right to strike if negotiations failed) has been seen as the crucial components of the economic development of Sweden and its welfare system. It is in this context that collective action has acquired its popular significance as the central element of citizenship.

## **The Swedish Model**

Since the 1960's, what has been called the Swedish model has often been described as "the middle way", something lying between socialism and capitalism yet neither the one nor the other, an efficacious combination of a capitalistic production system and a socialistic welfare system. However, this model, as well as the discourse that we readily associate with it, is of very recent origin. It was only in the early years of the 1960's that Sweden became one of the foremost nations in Europe in the delivery of universal welfare services. In fact, not until the end of that decade did Sweden become a leader in the public provision of social insurance, health and education. These transformations coincided with the first era that saw more than half of the female population employed on the salaried labour market (still not on equal terms with men).

One defining aspect of the Swedish model is the existence of a securely instituted, centralized political apparatus with a high degree of popular legitimacy and the organizational capacity to effect a redistribution of economic and democratic resources. Needless to say, the functional capacity of such a state is predicated on the availability of surplus resources for redistribution.

## **The Start of the Welfare Project**

However, an intriguing point remains regarding the dating of the origins of the Swedish welfare project. It seems to me correct that we should begin the chronology of the welfare project in the mid-1800's. If, as many argue, the origin of the welfare state should be dated to the 1930's (that is, as an aftermath of the collapse of stock markets and the spread of global recession), then the explicit role played by the popular and social mass movements the 19th century is negligently ignored. I believe that the commencement of the effort to create a national social system in Sweden coincided with the publication of a small pamphlet authored by a German historian, Ernst Moritz Arndt: *Några ord om Skandinavien och dess förhållanden* (trans: *A Few Words on Scandinavia and Its Conditions*) (Arndt 1844). Arndt described Sweden as a land that could successfully compete with other European nations only if it secured the necessary numbers of stone workers, charcoal producers, wood choppers, etc., sufficient to support an expanding population.

In less than a hundred years, the conversion of Sweden from an agrarian to an industrial society was induced. Arguably, it was during the 1840's that the foundation of the Swedish welfare model was established. Stone, minerals and

forests that had once been impediments to the production of food were now exploitable resources in a slowly industrializing Sweden. The introduction of a national judicial system, with equal rights in town and country in 1845, and the promulgation of a new poor law in 1847, were vital steps in the transformation of the Swedish working population. The year 1846 saw legislation standardizing commercial regulations – the Manufacturers and Tradesman’s Ordinance (*Fabriks- och hantverksförordning*), another decisive advance.

Between 1840 and 1870, many of the institutions that had persisted from Sweden’s earlier age of superpower prominence were dismantled. The pillars on which the modern Swedish state was to rest, such as industrial production, a market economy and a parliament-controlled bureaucracy, were successively created during the 1840–70 period. During this time, Sweden also absorbed the tenets of political liberalism that swept Europe. The abolition of the guild system, the clearest evidence of the advance of liberalism, paved the way for nascent industrialization. Furthermore, by the mid-1840’s, there still existed far too few industries to absorb the workers made redundant by progressive economic liberalization and innovations in agricultural production. Comparable to the experience of Great Britain a century earlier, a new rural proletariat had come into existence in Sweden, and a discernible market for capital and consumer goods was evolving. Although the comprehensive abolition of trade and economic restrictions, and the subsequent enactment of liberal legislation, were not consummated until after the decade, we can state with certainty that the genesis of the Swedish welfare project can be discerned in the momentous years of the 1840’s.

### Changes in Women’s Conditions

The decades between 1840 and 1890 were also crucial for the emancipation of Swedish women. The rigidly patriarchal control of women and their resources began a slow but steady dissolution during this period, especially between 1842–84, although the most encompassing legislation was not to be enacted for nearly a century. In 1845, women belonging to the nobility and land-owning farmer classes were given equal rights of inheritance. A result of political, economic and social class adjustments in the aftermath of the French Revolution, this reform was exceedingly important, directly affecting nearly 90% of the Swedish population. Since they were now permitted for the first time to inherit on an equal basis with their male siblings, women were now also required

to be able to actively manage property, which in turn necessitated additional liberalization in the economic and political status of women. The progression in women's emancipation that began with the granting of limited property rights and concluded with universal suffrage was inaugurated in the pioneering efforts initiated between the 1840's and 1870's.<sup>2</sup> In 1862, widows and unmarried women were enfranchized for local elections, provided that they, like men, satisfied income and property requirements. Limited voting rights for married women were extended in 1908, while laws granting universal suffrage and electoral eligibility for national and local elections were enacted in the 1920's.

In 1846, the Manufacturer's and Tradesman's Ordinance gave women the right to gainful employment as entrepreneurs in commerce and the crafts. The independent participation of women in a considerable portion of the urban economy had begun in earnest. In 1858, unmarried women were granted legal economic autonomy, after application to and approval by the legal system. The application requirement was eliminated in 1863. In 1874, married women were declared legally competent to control the disposition of their personal income, and to administer their property, if so stipulated in the marriage contract.

In the early 1850's, the teaching profession was formally opened to women, though only at the primary-school level. The universities were opened to women in 1873, with the exception of the faculties of theology and law. Matriculation gave no right to professional employment however, although it was only a matter of time and continued agitation before women would be granted that privilege. An additional obstacle was legislation defining and regulating pauperism; these laws prohibited the free movement of persons without property and thereby severely restricted labour mobility. The 1847 restrictions on indigents remained unchanged for many years, but the denial of the right to move freely from one administrative district (parish) to another was effectively abolished.

### Other Factors

In addition to political/legislative reform, there were other factors that facilitated the growth of industrialization and the transformation of Sweden from an unenlightened agricultural backwater into a leading industrial nation. For

2 The (limited) right to abortion granted in 1938, the prohibition of dismissal from employment on the grounds of marriage and childbirth (1939), and the right to equal pay for equal work, were further major advances in the struggle for fuller emancipation.

instance, there existed an untapped, expansive potential in those Swedish companies already practising timber and coal extraction, and iron manufacture. Another agent of considerable importance was that the Swedish banking system began issuing long-term business credits; a favourable market for timber exports during the Crimean war (1854–1856) was a catalyst for the reorganization of the banking system.

Yet another vital factor in the transformation of Sweden was the quality of the Swedish labour force. The early insistence of the Swedish Lutheran Church that all members be fluent in its canon (i.e. be able to read and recite the catechism and Bible passages, subject to review by parish officials) had transformed Sweden by the 1840's into one of the most literate countries in the world. Moreover, the harsh demands of self-subsistence survival in rural Sweden, requiring utilitarian skills in woodworking, metalworking, iron and other metal production for local use, etc., supplied a large cohort of practical, competent, able-bodied workers suited for immediate integration into modern industry and manufacturing.

### **The Swedish Model – three aspects**

The term "Swedish model" has various connotations.<sup>3</sup> In a narrow sense, it refers to relations between labour and industry, specifically the regulation of conflict between labour and capital. Additionally, the term refers to the tradition of mutual understanding between employee and employer. Collective bargaining agreements and labour courts have regulated the Swedish labour market since 1928, and have been refined by trade unions as coercive instruments of persuasion with regard to wages and working conditions. For industry, the consensual concord ensured by collective bargaining is the most important part of the relationship. Once an agreement has been reached, the labour unions are bound by law not to resort to strike action until the next round of negotiations has reached an impasse. The "Swedish model" also refers to the concrete measures to be taken, when necessary, by the state and/or by the trade unions either to restructure a deficient sector or to stimulate a sluggish economy. Most

3 The term model can have varying meanings. For instance, it can be used to describe an ordering, a manner of organization intended to address certain social issues. Yet another model is an archetype, i.e. a general response that requires case-by-case adjustment before application. A third meaning of model is a kind of prototype that requires additional development before full-scale application. In modern history Sweden has been a "model" in all three meanings: as a specific social system, as an archetypal pattern, and as a full-scale experiment.

famously, perhaps, the expression “Swedish model” also refers to the welfare system financed and administered by central and local public authorities.

The Swedish debate about the determinants of democracy and social welfare emphasizes the elements of collective mobilization and popular participation. As it is conceived, democracy is not limited to the mere existence of liberal political freedoms such as universal suffrage, but extends also to the establishment of the social and cultural conditions indispensable to active popular participation in political life, for example, by providing comprehensive education or by the disposition of work. Political parties in Sweden cannot be fixed merely in their ideological membership, for that would not suffice to mobilize voters during an election. Active support and participation between elections from both party members and sympathizers is also necessary for the pragmatic details essential to a functioning democracy.

### **Popular Movements**

A characteristic feature of Swedish society today is the existence of an extensive variety of voluntary associations. Scandinavian social historians and sociologists have adopted the category, *popular movement* as a common label for this complex of organizations, many with their roots in the reforms of the 19th century. To give an example of their rapid expansion the following brief descriptions regarding the three main ones: the labour movement, the free churches and the temperance movement, can be mentioned. The labour movement, organized as far back as the 1880's reached a membership in excess of 200,000 members by 1908 and emerged as one of an abundant number of popular associations inaugurated in the latter part of the 19th century. In addition to the labour movement, the most important ones were the evangelical or the free-church movement, which had been legalized and passed the 200,000 membership mark by 1910, and the temperance movement, rejuvenated in the 1880's and numbering 300,000 members by 1910. Both the latter movements split up into multiple distinct organizations. Diverse political theories and models have emphasized the importance of these affiliations, making clear that the social mobilization brought about by the growth of popular movements was an important precondition for the triumph of universal suffrage and the democratization of political institutions. From a comparative historical perspective, Sweden seems to constitute an exceptional case in this respect. Although voluntarily organized popular movements certainly exist elsewhere in Europe, especi-

ally in the Nordic countries, the influence of these organizations on collective self-awareness is arguably greater in Sweden than anywhere else, greater even than is commonly acknowledged.

Before considering the functions of the popular movements and their relevance to the defining of citizenship in the Swedish debate, it is necessary to make certain qualifications. The term "popular movement" usually encompasses the three primary mass movements that emerged in 19th century Sweden: the religious revivalist movement and/or the free-church movement, the temperance movement, and the labour movement (trade unions, commercial co-operatives, and the Social Democratic Labour Party). They all embraced a number of common features that continue to imbue Swedish politics. All have endeavoured to mobilize, organize and educate, and to transform people and society. "Movement" in this sense denotes a dynamic, collective and tightly woven organization. The term also implies exertion: action, participation, commitment, and activity are key concepts characterizing such a coalition. Another attribute, their popular character, indicates that they are expressions of protest from below, i.e. from groups or classes that are in some manner repressed, exploited and/or disrespected. In sociological theory, the movement has a mediating function between the individual and aggregate society. The organization ultimately binds the individual to the societal entirety by socializing and transmitting predominant values, while in return, collective action more strongly asserts the special interests of adherents vis-à-vis competing organizations and/or political/economic systems.

The significance of these movements is obvious. Even today a great majority of Swedish citizens are members of several organizations. But it is generally agreed among scholars who have studied the popular movements that these mass organizations played a more crucial role in the past. Then the principles of popular organization did not merely stimulate a democratic process in Sweden, but they also defined – if not generated – the still preponderant notion of a "civil society", and induced the nation to form a new image of itself. Swedish collective identity has been moulded by the association system, a system that from its beginnings was purposeful in its creation of a shared feeling of belonging – a "We". It was no coincidence that former Prime Minister and Social Democratic leader Olof Palme once cited the "study circle" as the model and ideal of Swedish democracy. Participant oriented and organized, collective educational activities in the form of study circles have been a unifying com-

ponent for the independent church movements, the temperance movement, and the labour movement. During their inceptive period, while forming and organizing, popular movements were not only tangible meeting places where specific issues and interests were discussed, they were also forums for examining a broad spectrum of political, cultural, and social questions.

Today the popular movements are aged. With the possible exception of the Social Democratic Labour Party, all of today's popular movements have their historical roots in old affiliations. These mass organizations were and are the successors of the so-called voluntary associations – mostly middle class philanthropic societies of various kinds – that emerged early in the 19th century. Even the youngest of the principal organizations, the Social Democrats, celebrated its centenary in 1989, with a series of solemn, gargantuan commemorations in which practically the whole of the Swedish establishment took part.

It appears that the once vibrant popular movements have languished, atrophied by time and changing circumstances into routine and conservatism. Some have become integral parts of the status quo, agents of the political and economic systems that they once disputed. Many of their original cultural and educational functions have disappeared. The bureaucratization of the organizations is flagrant. The bold egalitarian and humanitarian ideals of the primordial years have given way to the embrace of mundane consumerism. Nevertheless, although maturity has depleted the once resplendent aura of the popular movement, in Sweden the concept is still considered to be quite glorious.

### **Popular movements and social change**

Only by situating the development in its most general meaningful context, that of social change, can the emergence of popular movements in the 19th century be understood. The question must be asked: what were the prevailing conditions in Swedish society that precipitated the development of the popular movement? This is not at all the same thing as proposing a broad history of Swedish democracy. This is not a mere merging of the intentions and goals of the various organizations into a larger adjunct of political participation, nor is it a mere suggestion of a functionalist institutional adjustment to the “new demands of society”. Rather, it is by comprehending the specific movement as a solution to a specific problem existing in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Sweden that we can understand the true significance of mass organizations and their correlation to the institutionalized democracy in present-day Sweden.

A historical aspect of this transformation of Sweden was the redefinition of the fundamental units of society. The social prominence of some intermediate corporative bodies – the Estates, the guilds, and the village communities – declined, while two other social entities – the individual and civil society – gained increasing substance. The importance of these new, mutually reinforcing constructions was strengthened by the gradual degradation of the aggregates mediating between them. Swedish philosophers in the early 19th century frequently referred to “civil society”, attempting to contrast it and the state. The individual and the civil society, often referred to as the nation, were interposing entities. Social theories arose that legitimated them in terms of each other: national success was supposed to depend on competent, committed and dynamic individuals; individual welfare was said to depend on a watchful, active and impersonal state apparatus as the manager of the nation.

### Interpretations of History

Since the 1940's, popular movements and their social and political importance have been a recurrent theme in Swedish historiography. Originally descriptive studies, the historiographical examinations of popular movements in Sweden were characterized by a “Whig interpretation of history”. Such deterministic social history described the advance of the popular movements as an unbroken line of victories and worthy reforms, one in which history was peopled by well-meaning reformers whose admirable efforts led obviously and directly towards the political system of our own era, described variously as “modern”, “democratic”, etc.

In recent decades, the exegetic influence of the Marxist and Weberian models has led to more explicitly explanatory ambitions. A functionalist perspective of modernization has given a character of humanity, rationality, and implacability to these developments. However, the manifest limitation of most studies of the popular movements remains their non-problematized notion of linear development.

### Social changes and movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

The disintegration of the traditional corporative groupings that took place between 1809 and 1865 created a social vacuum, and the loss of familiar forms of solidarity and social identity made the evolving “individual” desperate for new, succouring collectivities. Contemporaries described the dissolution of the

old society's organs for political mobilization and control as an "atomization" of communal entities, which had to be replaced by fresh ones.

Nationalism, as developed in Europe since the French Revolution, was a specifically original form of collective identity. During the overthrow of the traditional orders of a feudal society, the individual was slowly yet forcibly emancipated within a framework of a civil society. During the early phases of this process, immature nationalism could not yet fully satisfy the need for new identifications. For the middle classes, the strengthening of the position of the individual produced civic means of filling the vacuum – the voluntary association, in which like-minded people came together autonomously to pursue matters of mutual interest, whether religious, political, or social. The voluntary associations believed that they represented viable, alternative means of performing vital functions within society, functions that the state could or would not perform any longer. Concurrently, the state recognized in voluntary associations a suitable tool for addressing social problems, especially in situations where the state, according to the political doctrine of the time, should not intervene.

In the 1860's, the integration of the associations and the state attenuated. In the construction of civil society and its conceptualization voluntary associations and the state apparatus developed a mutual dependency. The state needed the voluntary associations' legitimacy and effort, and the associations needed the state to finance significant portions of their activities from public funds. During a mere half century, social formations vacillated from intrinsic coherence to emancipation from the state, only to move again towards integration. The oscillation may be observed in all areas of societal life, as the state was relieved of obligations for which it had been responsible until then.

During the 18th century, these enterprises were undertaken, to a somewhat limited degree, by the upper social classes. From about the beginning of the 19th century, initially in response to a perception of religious decline, the scope of voluntary associations expanded to include other categories of the social hierarchy. Among their most conspicuous accomplishments was the inauguration of a comprehensive educational system in a society experiencing radical demographic change (many more children, especially from the poorer classes, were surviving infancy), and concerted efforts to mitigate the effects of alcohol consumption (again, especially directed at the poorer classes – it was necessary to keep workers sober). Voluntary associations were established to promote

Bible study, schooling, poverty relief, the care of abandoned and orphaned children, and so forth.

Leading circles in Sweden regarded England as a model. In numerous cases, the reformers found their inspiration, and their program's derivation, in Great Britain. During the first decades of the 19th century, England and Scotland had developed into archetypal industrialized countries, and for many of the middle-class social reformers it was clear that Sweden should follow the British model, sometimes even in minute detail without consideration of the social and cultural differences. However, it should not be surprising that representatives of this isolated constitutional monarchy on the Scandinavian peninsula looked towards the British Isles to find solutions to their social and political problems: the solutions undertaken in England were intimately associated with the growth of civil society and the discourse on pauperism.

The development of popular movements – associations and societies

In Sweden, awareness of British voluntary religious movements came primarily from contact with immigrant Scots during the first years of the 19th century. A free distribution of Bibles was started in close co-operation with the British and Foreign Bible Society, and Wesleyan treatises were dispersed through contact with the British Religious Tract Society. The first associations of this nature founded in Sweden were the Evangelical Society (1808) and the Swedish Bible Society (1815). The decisive impulse towards free religious work following British methods was the effort of a Methodist preacher, George Scott, who formed a Methodist congregation in Stockholm in the 1830's and 1840's. He imported, translated and distributed books, pamphlets, tracts and hymnals and, when expelled from Sweden, he placed his library at the disposal of his Swedish associates. Moreover, he made arrangements for continued contact with the London Missionary Society and the British Sunday School Union.

The first religious societies can be seen as the structures generating the free-church cliques established later in the 19th century. Although there were not any formal organizational ties between them, they were the ideological forebears of those later mass organizations (e.g. the Baptist groups formed in the 1850's), providing the core of the successful free-church movements of the latter part of the century. The temperance societies were formed later. On the initiative of the teetotal Crown Prince Oscar, the Swedish Temperance Society was founded in 1837. Very soon it was able to report that about 100,000

Swedes (of the country's 3.5 million) had considerably reduced their alcohol consumption. It must be emphasised that those 100,000 were not "members" in the modern sense – or in the same sense as can be found in the later, more popular, mass temperance movements such as the Swedish branch of the International Order of Good Templars.

With reference to the question of citizenship and the role played by popular movements, it must be noted that the Swedish Temperance Society did not contribute to the national development of self-organization, empowerment or consciousness – at least did not contribute directly. The Swedish Temperance Society was not comprised of many more than 100 dues-paying members when it reached its 100,000 subscriptions. The Board of Directors leading the society consisted of even fewer and more privileged persons than the general membership. It recruited its chairman and other officials from the nobility and from court- and church officials. In the outer circle, physicians and the prosperous elite of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie from in and around Stockholm were represented. While the exclusive inner cadre was responsible almost entirely for decision-making and for the necessary "connections", it was the less exalted that managed accounts and were the source of substantial contributions.

With reference to the question of democratic practice, it must be clear that the aforementioned "subscribers" were not active members of the type encountered universally in the popular movements that appeared later. In the ensuing mass associations it was unimaginable, in Torkel Jansson's words, to "make a pot of coffee or drive in a nail" without having first elected a committee to implement a decision. (Jansson 1985) These elections, by common and equal franchise among male and female members, were of considerable importance. They were organized among obstructed elements of society otherwise excluded from civic undertakings, for instance in municipal affairs, where at that time they were welcome only as taxpayers, not as participants. But the incipient associations had no active membership in that sense. For example, although its actual dues-paying membership was approximately a mere 100 persons, the Swedish Temperance Society could claim 100,000 signed sobriety pledges, mostly from lower class individuals not directly involved in the association. The subscribers were not members in any precise modern sense; they were at most people who – under duress, perhaps – promised to remain sober. They did not attend meetings and were not eligible to participate in the election of the Board of Directors.

## Philanthropic and educational associations

The emergence of philanthropic associations in the 1840's made it possible also for women from the highest bourgeois circles to organize their private charities in a more efficacious manner. The reformulation of personal, benevolent enterprise into voluntary associations must be understood as a deliberately depoliticized tactic for expedient provision of public services at a strategic point midway between private initiative and the state.

Education was a prominent issue for all the early voluntary movements, but some of the emergent semi-official associations, which drew inspiration from British archetypes and were utilitarian in their outlook, made popular education the foremost purpose of their activity. They campaigned for the dissemination of "useful knowledge" to all sectors of society. One example, the Swedish Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, founded in Stockholm in 1833, was patterned after Lord Brougham's famous British organization of the same name. Its paramount activity was the publishing of a quarterly periodical entitled *Reading-matter for the People*, which, according to the precepts of the Society, should "elevate the mind, enhance and enliven the taste for work" among the proletariat. The society sent a flood of these periodicals throughout Sweden, editorializing that the new-sprung factory system was in the process of conferring abundant benefits upon all, and that the interests of capitalists and labourers were, whatever misguided agitators might argue to the contrary, fundamentally the same.

A cardinal example of the efforts of the voluntary associations was the enactment of universal schooling. This new system of education, i.e. formal schooling in publicly financed institutions, was promoted by middle-class voluntary associations from the beginning of the 19th century. The school legislation of the 1840's merely validated this development, as it delegated responsibility for local administration to the parishes and charged the Society for the Promotion of Monitorial Education with the obligation of educating the lower social classes. This early development of school for all children has been followed by a strong and almost all-encompassing public school system in which, today, nine years of schooling is compulsory. No fees exist in schools or universities.

## A collapse of the old social order

A notable backdrop to the rise of the voluntary sector was, in Weber's terms, the ongoing *disenchantment of the World* (*Enzauberung der Welt*), exemplified by heightened disturbance of contractual social relations, functionally segmented administration, and so forth. The rationalization and bureaucratization of the state stimulated (and was in turn stimulated by) the rise of the voluntary sector; associations became symbiotic means of integrating the individual into civil society. However, some associations, not least the religious revivalist movements with their fascination with mysticism, denoted an undisguised revolt against a rational calculation of benefits and losses. They represented a desperate attempt to regenerate society through the restoration of qualitative values that were held to have been undermined by account books and bureaucracy. The ambiguity of the popular movements manifested itself in two very contradictory fractions: one was conservative or even reactionary, while the other was liberal and utopian.

It is not unreasonable to explain the voluntary associations as an expression of a definitive degradation of utopian vision and a triumph for social pragmatism. However, I maintain that the aspirations of the two perceptions coincided, and that an exceptional juxtaposition was forced into being, the result of the collapse of the old order rather than the fulfilment of a novel disposition. It was this institutional breakdown that permitted accord between utopians and pragmatists, which in turn was a prerequisite for the realization, later in the century, of the concept of popular movement.

This peculiar fusion, pragmatic utopianism, found validation in opposite directions on the conceptual spectrum, and has its footing in two circumstances characteristic of the time. One was the disintegration of the collectivist and patriarchal feudal society: the demise of traditional feudal partnerships, the fractured village community, the dissolved state-constitutive Estates, etc.; the second was the discomfiting social mobility that these changes gave rise to, with chaotic, disordered and atomized social groups and ill-defined individual identity. Escalated social transformation, exacerbated by rapid population growth, proletarianization, and pauperism, was common throughout large parts of Europe.

## A new social order

The Utopian element sought social expression for the opportunities opened by the development of new productive forces. People were freed from the static, stable – and what were conceived as unshakeable – bonds they had known for generations, and were transformed into “loose folk” on a road the direction of which had not been definitively staked out. The resulting social chaos seemed to demand guidance and ordering; all variants of opinion in the contemporary social debate appear to be possessed by the concept of “order”. Order, which was alleged to have distinguished the previous social corporation, had to be re-established in some new form of community. Fear and indictment of the mobile and the promiscuous, valid for all casual connections and held responsible for the decay of qualitative bands, characterized conservative reaction. The wandering journeyman, the itinerant peddler, the travelling preacher and the purveyor of sectarian pamphlets personified the fearsome individual, independent of all organic bonds.

That perspective united with an entirely different one: the assertion that a harmonious commonwealth must be based on rational people capable of privately choosing a way of life balanced between selfish aggrandisement and the needs of society at large. There remained but one problem. The lower classes had not yet begun to understand their own “best interests”; they did not perceive that sometimes immediate, personal gratification must be renounced for the profit and progress of the whole. These classes, therefore, whose deeds and motives were incomprehensible and obscure, required edification. They needed to be culturally homogenized and regulated, easy to muster and controllable. The poor should be socialized as individuals and literally integrated into civil society – as the concept had now come to be understood. Private fostering removed from the public eye was regarded as reprehensible and counterproductive. The poor and their conduct had to be illuminated and observable, and consequently their education had to be exposed. Their tutelage had to stand under public, if not state, control, and be oriented towards the procurement of those stolid virtues celebrated by the bourgeoisie.

Under these circumstances, amalgamation was the only viable possibility, an admixture of the different classes into a coalition capable of guaranteeing social stability. Utopians and pragmatists, liberals and conservatives, all shared an apprehensive distrust of the “masses”. The implicit objective of some voluntary

associations was the maintenance of a haughty pre-eminence of the sort that marked this phase in the development of bourgeois society. It was not a specifically coercive authority that was sought. Rather it was a paternalist authority resting upon the inherent acceptance and conformity of the participants in the social contract. It was believed that without this paradoxical subordination no social orderliness could survive.

By diffusing and cultivating a spirit of moral and religious devotion to the fundamentals of the existing order this paternalist authority attempted to control the individual's proclivities. But total dominance was never achieved. The masses developed their own perceptions and their own definitions of respectability, and through general education, ironically promoted by the voluntary associations and the experiences of formal equality within them, they learned to organize autonomously. This enlightening experience was decisive for the subsequent pattern of organization in mass associations. The quasi-feudal social hierarchy, where everyone knew his or her proper place, contradicted the modernistic rationality of collective alliance independent of the state.

#### Popular movements, chronology and social change

Some historians in the 1970's saw the emergence of popular movements as a result of modernization (in a functionalist understanding of the word). The basic, and unquestioned, theoretical model adopted by these historians was that the three most extensive social movements – the free churches, the temperance movement, and the labour movement – all had their origins in, and received their specific features from, the social tensions resulting from urbanization and industrialization. In short, they arose from the ascent of their notion of "modern society". Industrialization and urbanization were singled out as the decisive factors behind the upsurge of popular movements.

But it seems to me that these theorists have ignored an evident dilemma of chronology. In fact, the interwoven processes of urbanization and industrialization in Sweden did not start until the end of the 19th century, not in the middle of the century as presupposed. A causality explanation in which the effect precedes the cause by three or four decades is obviously faulty. There has been a widespread and unfortunate historiographical tendency to assign too great and too early an influence to urbanization and industrialization, thereby neglecting the persistent dominance of the agrarian sector lasting until the end of the century.

The free-church and the temperance movements arose in some cases prior to, and in others shortly after, the mid-19th century. As an organized social force the labour movement first achieved prominence in the 1880's. Urbanization and industrialization were quite confined until the end of the century. As late as 1850, only ten percent of the Swedish population lived in cities and towns; Stockholm had less than 100, 000 residents, and more than 75% of the economically active population was still directly engaged in agriculture and related activities. It was not until the 1930's that the rural population accounted for less than half of the population of the nation as a whole. Sweden's very late and, by European standards, protracted urbanization affected the development of popular movements in a very specific way: Swedish popular movements were first and foremost a rural phenomenon, markedly weaker in the urban areas.

Compared to the foremost European countries, the industrialization of Sweden was late but rapid. The Swedish industrial revolution can be said to have taken place between 1870 and 1920. This process of industrialization can roughly be divided into two primary phases: the first, an industrial germination period from 1870–1890, and the second, a maturation period from 1890 to the end of the First World War. Beginning during the first phase, characterized by a short but intensive growth in trade, workers started organizing into trade unions. During the 1880's, they began to centralize into nation-wide organizations and to incorporate socialist doctrines into their programs, coalescing politically in the formation of the Social Democratic Party (SAP) in 1889.

The successful establishment of the socialist labour movement in Sweden must be viewed against the background of earlier types of labour organization. The trade unions were in many respects the successors of older, self-help organizations and unemployment benefit societies formed among journeymen and apprentices, which in turn were the successors of guilds (the guild system did not officially exist after 1846). As early as the 1840's, at a time when no self-aware working class of the ensuing type existed, liberal manufacturers founded workingmen's associations to guide and educate their journeymen and apprentices. Those associations were the final attempt to put forward a liberal alternative to the socialist labour movement.

## A class perspective

The history of mass organization in Sweden must be analysed in terms of class. The political conflicts of the decades preceding the emergence of popular movements and the triumph of liberal democracy were circumscribed by the polarizing influence of three social classes: the peasantry, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. The resultant social conflict created new tensions not only between central authority and local communities, but between the public and the private spheres as well. Of course, class conditions in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Sweden were not static. Changes in the means and methods of production reallocated authority in the workplace and patterned social hierarchies in society at large. Boundaries between and within classes were subject to constant change, and social organization was complicated by those changes. Older forms of social organization could no longer function when the prerequisites of social praxis had changed. People had to be re-educated to adjust to the new premises of industrial, democratic society.

## Conclusion

What was it in Swedish society that the popular movements provided a natural solution to? The answer is probably to be found in the transition of society itself. The earliest phase of the development of mass organizations, an “age of associations”, may be described as a transitional phase between two distinct social formations, i.e., the progression from a feudal mode of production – based on the collection of revenues – to a capitalist one – based on individual appropriation and wage labour. It was in this social context that the first voluntary associations emerged. Furthermore, this period corresponds to a philosophic shift from a patriarchal to a bourgeois ideology, from an overwhelmingly religious rationale to one, technical and utilitarian. In the social arena, the bourgeoisie arises as the ideologically and culturally dominant group, successor to the aristocracy. A collectivistic and particularistic *Gemeinschaft* is metamorphosed socially and nationally into an individualistic *Gesellschaft*. Individualism is the most dominant trait in its conceptual profile. This conversion influenced the society in every sense, and helped to construct the concept of the *individual* (in male clothing).

The mass organizations presented fresh social perspectives. The principles of association and of mass organization introduced completely novel modes of social interaction in sharp contrast to the hierarchical order that had prevailed in

the corporative society. They permitted mutual and systematic communication, open to every adult, regardless of position in society or social rank. Women played important roles in the mass organizations, and more women than men entered the temperance and the revivalist alliances: for example, membership in Swedish free-church congregations was in general two-thirds, female and one-third, male.

I must stress that the changing perspectives were negations of earlier forms of social organization, and that the new principles could be used for very dissimilar political purposes. It is evident that the popular movements did not represent a unified political philosophy. Yet the success of the concept of mass participation can be seen as a refutation of the individualistic manner of regulating the workers' status on the labour market. Trade unions and strike actions were expressions of a willingness to act as an aggregate and to collectively demand improved conditions, including better wages. By utilizing class-conscious forms of organization the labour movement compelled society – the political regimes, the authorities, the employers and even the workers themselves – to accept the right of the working class to establish organizations of their own, and on their own terms.

### **Continuity and Change**

The primordial associations from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have not yet received appropriate attention from historians – little or no notice is to be found in general handbooks of Swedish history. The opposite can be said of the ensuing mass organizations – sometimes referred to as the “real popular movements”. Whereas there have been few studies assessing the older voluntary associations, there are numerous studies attempting to demonstrate the political importance of the mass organizations, and they are generally described as major factors influencing the democratization of Sweden around the turn of the century. Since the 1940's, as already stated, each generation of Scandinavian historians, especially each generation of Swedish historians, has redefined its own relationship to the major movements and to the functions of the great popular movements – the mass organizations. It has been emphasized in their works that the popular movements also have a history, and that the general specifications for them were set at an early date in accordance with the values of the bourgeoisie. The movements were simultaneously the dynamic force

behind, and the result of, the processes that eventually led to a democratic society in Sweden.

The principal canon of constitutionalism – predictable government, i.e. that laws should bind the state apparatus by means of a defined set of statutes – was augmented in Sweden by the pre-eminent early voluntary associations with legal conditions that bound the average citizens to act predictably. The utilitarian intent was a social education aimed at shaping character in harmony with certain ethical goals which, in turn, were an expression of the predisposition of the human being.

The process by which the bourgeoisie became the dominant political class, in Sweden as elsewhere, was characterized by the establishment of an explicit, codified and formally egalitarian framework of jurisprudence, made possible by the commencement of a representative parliamentary regime. However, the evolution and dissemination of the disciplinary mechanisms necessary for its survival was the counterpart of these processes, one might say “the dark side”. It is a striking paradox that the predecessors of the extolled popular movements contributed more to the development of a coercive milieu than any other social bodies. For the early voluntary associations, which supplemented the ideal of limited state power with a concept of constrained state power, i.e., laws confining the actions of the state, it was predictability that was important. The behaviour of civil society must be constant, and not only in the sense that it was to be law rather than a fickle ruler that steered society. To guarantee that there would be no rule of the masses, no capricious “mob rule”, voluntary associations coveted moderation, sobriety, and predictable action. This inculcation was to take place in the public eye; it could not, as earlier, occur in the “darkness” of the household or in corporative privacy. Although sovereign authority had been concentrated in the state, disciplinary jurisdiction should be omnipresent. In bourgeois society, social control was applied through continuous supervision of individuals of the lower classes (the bourgeoisie by definition required no such supervision), and the normalization of behaviour.

The importance for democratization of the later mass organizations is manifest. In them, the members learned to seek the will of the majority institutionally, to adapt to a resolution, and to conduct the practical affairs of a democratic association. Yet the great significance of the primordial voluntary associations for the creation of the “Swedish model” must not be neglected or underestimated. I would argue that the rise of the voluntary association repre-

sents not only a vital transitional stage between laissez-faire and the intervention of the Welfare State, but a novel form of interweaving the private and the public spheres in 19<sup>th</sup>-century history.

The typical features of Swedish popular movements, i.e., slight militancy but with competent organization and a willingness to negotiate to achieve compromise, are a perpetuation of an even older tradition: the autonomous village communities and parish councils. I have emphasized to some extent in this article the momentousness of the organizational training of a cadre of “respectable citizens” thoroughly prepared to take their responsibility when the need and opportunity arose. It is interesting to note that the self-same classes that were condemned as rough and undisciplined adopted the norms – identifying them as the antithesis of law and order – propagated by the educational associations. What is most remarkable about these norms is not that they survived but that the popular movements embraced them, not least the labour movement. The ideals espoused by the conscientious and respectable workers of the temperance lodges and worker’s communes of the early 20th century were in many ways a direct extension of the mores championed by the educational associations of the first part of the 19th century. It is curious to consider how the same puritan virtues mobilized by the upper and middle classes to isolate themselves from the base, sensual, wicked and uncontrollable masses below were the very virtues the “contemptible” masses adopted as their own.

The development of popular movements is a primary feature of the notion of the “Swedish model”. The meaning and the effect of this evolvement remain, for the most part, still to be investigated. Suggested here are some historical perspectives – a genesis of the phenomenon – and hypotheses on the importance of this development. Whether the Swedish mass organizations of the past represent a potential model for political participation and democratic development today is, largely, a different theme.

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