

Social Justice as a Remedy for International Security

Is There Still a Swedish Model in Foreign Politics?

Two leading social democrats, former Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson and former Education Minister Carl Tham are discussing the middle way in a polemical article in the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* (2001). "Those who do not understand the connection between economic misery, class divisions and violence have learned nothing from the history of the 20th century," according to Carlsson and Tham.

Historical Background

The Nordic model was initially a reaction against economic destitution of the interwar period, which in many countries became a breeding ground for fascism and communism. This development convinced political parties and voluntary organizations in Sweden, Denmark and Norway to make efforts that would increase social justice and remove class distinctions.

In a relatively short time, social reforms together with democracy and market economy made these three countries not only among the richest but also among the most equal societies in the world. This is remarkable since at the beginning of the 20th century they belonged to the poorest in Europe. What originally caused the transfer of responsibility for education, health and social welfare to the state in the Nordic countries was, according to Stein Kuhnle (1998), "a forced merger of church and state following the Reformation, which helped to strengthen and legitimate the central government."

The Nordic model has in our time been connected to the acknowledge of international law, the resolution of conflict by peaceful means, and the protection of weaker nations against aggression by more powerful nations. For Sweden, that has implied a foreign policy built on neutrality and independence. This view was supported by famous Swedes like Dag Hammarskjöld, Alva Myrdal and Olof Palme.

According to Al Burke (2001), Sweden's traditional attitude to global matters has recently "suffered steady erosion" mainly because of three

factors, which are: first, the country's entry into the European Union (EU) in 1995; second, "the 'ideological collapse' of social democracy;" and third, "Prime Minister Persson, whose knowledge and understanding of foreign policy issues are [...] quite limited." One example of this "loss of bearings" is that Swedish troops, as a part of an EU engagement, have served in Kosovo under Nato command. Burke also points to the fact that former Foreign Minister, Sten Andersson, another veteran of the Palme era, has expressed displeasure with "Persson's tilt toward Israel in conformity with U.S. policy."

In a leader of *Le Monde* (1999), Ignacio Ramonet explains the effect of left-wing support for Nato bombings: "Thus socialism, one of the great unifying myths of mankind, has once again been betrayed by the social democrat leaders of Europe." The intervention without any UN mandate received harsh criticism from Persson's predecessor Ingvar Carlsson, who (together with Shridath Ramphal) asked himself in an article in *The Guardian* (1999): "What if, in virtuous rage, China invades Taiwan, or the US bombs Cuba, or Spain annexes Gibraltar? Will there be another set of norms that condemns these wrongs?"

Situation Today

In Carlsson and Tham's view, it is as much urgent today as it was in the postwar era to understand the connection between social injustice and escalated violence. No one could avoid the fact that the criminal fanatics who attacked USA September 11 "in a way that is beyond humanity and rational thinking" did this as a manifestation of strong antagonisms in the global society.

"The world is still carrying the evil heritage from colonialism and the cold war," the article writers establish. European colonial powers in the 20th century often went against oppressed states' independence, while USA, as a component of cold war strategy, supported dictatorships around the world. The result of this policy now can be seen in many poor territories of the world, among them the Middle East. For that reason, the Western World still is associated with oppression and racism by many people.

"The antagonisms have an inevitable connection to global economic development," Carlsson and Tham argue. During the last 25 years, growth in the global market has been dominated by Western Europe and USA, which have molded the world in a capitalistic way at the sacrifice of justice and solidarity in poor countries. We all have to realize that this is not only unfair but also implies a danger to our own welfare. The Bush administration has up to now built its policy on forcible means and only cooperates with other nations when it benefits its own purposes. This approach will never be a practicable way to deal with international

terrorism.

A serious problem is that USA in reality doesn't want to cooperate with UN. The Security Council did give general support for a fight against terrorism, but this may not be interpreted as a go-ahead for massive retaliation. Besides, USA still has not paid its huge debts to the organization, which therefore has to deal with economic problems, as well.

Another strong voice in the debate is the president of the Swedish National Press Club, Jan Guillou who, in an article in Sweden's largest daily, *Aftonbladet*, writes that we should "regard U.S. wars on terror through the same moral prism as we do Muslim terrorism." This was apparently not the opinion of the Conservative Party leader Bo Lundgren, who in *Dagens Nyheter* criticized the Swedish Archbishop, K. G. Hammar, for his confusion of religion and politics when in national television he asserted that it would be an act of humanity to stop the Afghanistan bombings directly. In a written reply to Lundgren, Hammar says that this kind of standpoint is not a question of party politics. Statements like these caused some rancorous debate.

Toward a Solution

Carlsson and Tham propose four solutions as a remedy against global injustice, which would reduce insecurity and thereby the risk of new terrorist attacks:

- First, USA has to pay its debts to UN.
- Second, USA should accept the founding of an international court for war crimes. The American Congress has, on the contrary, passed a law that, if ratified, would sever economic and military cooperation with countries having joined the tribunal.
- Third, there must be support for a peace process based on economic principles for the Middle East and other areas of conflict. This implies a dramatic increase in the rich world's aid to poor countries.
- Finally, we have to stand united in the struggle against prejudices against other cultures and religions.

Bibliography

Burke, Al. "Collateral Damage: Sweden's Legacy of Peace." Nordic News Network (www.nnn.se), November 25, 2001. 10 pp.

Carlsson, Ingvar & Ramphal, Shridath. "Might is not right," *The Guardian*

(www.guardian.co.uk), April 2, 1999.

Carlsson, Ingvar & Tham, Carl. "USA styr med maktens arrogans," *Dagens Nyheter* (www.dn.se), September 22, 2001.

Guillou, Jan. "Vi blev tvångskommenderade att bli amerikaner," *Aftonbladet* (www.aftonbladet.se), September 17, 2001.

Hammar, K. G. "Kyrkan ska blanda sig i politiken," *Dagens Nyheter* (www.dn.se), December 5, 2001.

Kuhnle, Stein. "The Nordic Approach to General Welfare." Nordic News Network (www.nnn.se), November 25, 2001 (1998). 5 pp.

Lundgren, Bo. "Sluta som ärkebiskop," *Dagens Nyheter* (www.dn.se), November 28, 2001.

Ramonet, Ignacio. "Social democracy betrayed," *Le Monde diplomatique* (www.en.monde.diplomatique.fr), April 1, 1999.

© *Torgny Lilja (2001)*