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Neo-Nazism in a Welfare State: The Example of Sweden

1. Introduction

The Berlin wall fell in November 1989 signifying the end of the Cold War and Soviet political domination of a number of states in Central and Eastern Europe. Less than two years later the Soviet Union itself collapsed under the pressure of internal tensions and structural contradictions. World leaders expressed the hope that the end of the European East-West divide would lead to a positive and fruitful internationalism, economic development, lasting peace, prosperity, tolerance and solidarity. These hopes were soon frustrated. The transition to democracy and market economy in former Communist run states proved to be considerably more difficult than first anticipated. Some former Communist leaders clung to power by exploiting ethnic and national loyalties. As we know exceptionally grim wars followed in former Yugoslavia as well as in the Caucasus. A few years into the 1990s Western states faced a serious downturn of the economy, which with Thatcherism and Reaganomics led to a revaluation of the methods of the welfare state. Another unanticipated development was an outburst of political violence on the far right. Reports about indiscriminate attacks on refugee camps in Germany made headlines. Similar attacks followed in Sweden. What was worse, this violence from groups sympathising with the far right proved to be more than just a passing phase. In fact it escalated for a number of years as various networks and organizations on the far right grew in strength. Attacks on persons of immigrant origin, their homes, businesses and property have continued in Sweden, but after the first phase they no longer make headlines. Somehow the political power changes in the 1989–91 period had unexpected reverberations down into the soil of common people's perceptions and ideas of the world, into their belief systems and attributions of what makes things tick. On the international scene Communism finally proved its inability to provide welfare and freedom for the masses. When the far left lost out, the far right swiftly occupied the extremism niche, so to say, and made significant moves to consolidate their position. What surprised many at the time was that activists responsible for the most violent attacks on refugee reception centres and immigrant property justified their actions in terms of Nazi ideology. In this article I will review the Swedish case.

2. Far right violence

In the spring of 1990 a number of refugee camps were attacked with firebombs. Some were burnt down to the ground. At the time these events were real sensations in the media. The possibility cannot be ruled out that youngsters may have copied some attacks stimulated by the attention that was given to the crimes. However, gradually the media interest dwindled although the attacks on refugee camps continued for many years. Jewish cemeteries have repeatedly been desecrated and in 1993 a mosque in the town of Trollhättan was burnt down in an act of arson. Riots and fighting between skinheads and anti-racists in conjunction with the annual commemoration of king Charles XII (who died in battle 1719) also attracted the attention of the media in the early 1990s.

As a result of these events, skinheads increasingly became associated with Nazi ideology. In principle the traditional Nazi organizations were opposed to heavy drinking and the rowdy delinquent behaviour of the skinheads. However, skinhead culture proved to be a new useful source for recruiting members, but perhaps more important, through skinhead culture traditional moss-grown Nazi organizations linked up with rock-music, a strand of which developed into „white noise", the most powerful propaganda instrument the Nazis possess. While Swedes in general distanced themselves from the violent methods of the far right—arson, street-fighting etc.—many were becoming critical of the immigration and integration policies (Lange/Westin 1993) and could express in public that the anti-immigration criticism of the far right was essentially correct. People in general were horrified by two particularly brutal murders on racist grounds in 1995. In one case a young boy John Hron, whose father was an immigrant from Czechoslovakia, was tortured and murdered by a gang of skinheads because he stood up against Nazi ideology. In the other case an African asylum-seeker, Gerhard Gbeyo, was stabbed in the back in the centre of a small town. The perpetrator was a skinhead. No one intervened. Nobody called an ambulance. The victim's dead body was found in some bushes a few days later just by the scene of the crime.

Despite the escalation of racialized violence, the consolidation of neo-Nazi organizations and the build-up of an increasingly efficient and professionalized Nazi propaganda, the general public was not particularly affected or impressed, and certainly not committed to the Nazi ideals. The principal targets of Nazi violence were marginalized groups—asylum seekers, migrants in particular of non-European origin,

Jews and, above all, homosexual men. These are not social groups with whom the general public immediately will identify. Thus racist crimes committed by activists associated with neo-Nazi organizations were still compatible with the view held by the general public that these crimes basically boiled down to boyish pranks, and besides, some of the raised criticism was regarded as justified on the whole.

Three acts of right-wing violence in 1999, however, really served to move the general public to realize the threat to society by the activities of young Nazis committed to the cause. In June 1999 two policemen—Olle Borén and Robert Karlström—were shot to death at close range. Three bank robbers belonging to a neo-Nazi organization committed the crime. In fact, the prosecutor regarded it as a sheer execution. The bank robbery was undertaken to secure money for their organization. A few weeks later a journalist—Peter Karlsson—and his son were seriously wounded when their car was bombed. Peter Karlsson had written a number of articles in which he exposed the links between neo-Nazi organizations and organized crime. The perpetrators have not yet been identified and tried. In October 1999 three neo-Nazi activists assassinated a trade union member—Björn Söderberg—in his home. The alleged reason for his assassination was that he had revealed that a young man elected to represent the trade union at the workshop was a neo-Nazi activist and leader. The Nazi immediately lost his position and was, moreover, fired by the employer.[1] The assassination of Björn Söderberg led to a nation-wide manifestation against political violence and racism. An important point was that the manifestation was organized by the trade unions, thus effectively becoming known to all working people.

These acts of Nazi violence may prove to be a turning point. The victims were ordinary, ethnic Swedes who became victims of Nazi aggression in their professional capacities. The two policemen, the journalist and his son and the trade-union member were persons with whom the public in general can identify. Moreover, indications are that some militant neo-Nazi groups are falling apart as a result of internal conflict. Some leading persons have defected. The tide may turn. The police and the judicial authorities now take neo-Nazi threats seriously. Actions taken by members and sympathisers of neo-Nazi organizations are understood as acts of political terrorism and not as boyish pranks as the

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[1] The three young Nazis who have been sentenced for the murder of Björn Söderberg are suspected of the car bombing against Peter Karlsson.

police were inclined to see it in the early 1990s.

The aim of this paper is to have a closer look at various factors and conditions that may explain the rise of this far-right political terrorism in Sweden, a country with a long democratic tradition. What are the views of public opinion and how do they show up in election results?

3. Election results and public opinion

In some Western countries national front parties or right wing protest parties made significant electoral gains during the 1990s. Notorious examples are found in France, Belgium, Austria and Italy. Even in Denmark and Norway protest parties have played an important role for a long time achieving between 10 and 20 percent of the votes. In Sweden on the other hand this kind of party has on the whole not been able to establish itself. The exception is the brief episode of *Ny demokrati* (New Democracy), a protest party mainly criticising bureaucracy and the establishment, but also playing on people's criticism of refugee policies. In the 1991 elections this party managed to muster enough support (6 percent of the votes) to get parliamentary representation. In parliament the party put on a poor show and lost all its seats in the following 1994 election. An outcome of New Democracy's brief but intensive sojourn in parliament was to lure the traditional and established parties into a more restrictive stand on immigration. Some critics contend that the Centre Party, the Conservative Party and the Social Democrats more or less adjusted their ideas on refugee policy to positions that were close to those of New Democracy.

Some other protest parties have had quite good results in local elections but not in national elections. Parties on the far right or representing extreme nationalism, and there are several such parties, have together at the most attracted 1.5 percent of the electorate. *Sverige-demokraterna* (the Sweden Democrats), a neo-Nazi party and the most "successful" one on the far right attracted approximately 19,000 votes in the 1998 election (Blomgren 1999). One explanation why national front parties have not been successful in Sweden is that no charismatic leaders such as Jean-Marie Le Pen or Jörg Haider have appeared on the scene. Another explanation may be that the established parties have more or less already occupied the nationalistic niche. A third explanation may be that the ideas of the far right actually do not appeal to the vast majority of Swedes. Democracy is deeply rooted in Swedish society, and although people in general may be critical of immigration policies etc., they instinctively dislike undemocratic solutions.

One of the first projects in the field of Swedish immigration research, carried out in 1969, was a survey of the public opinion's views on immigrants, based on a national sample (Trankell 1974). Studies of public opinion are studies of general trends and developments with regard to attitudes, values and beliefs. Attitudes and opinions have a social distribution. They are linked up with living conditions and experiences of different social strata. Generally speaking one usually runs into differences in the distribution of attitudes in relation to a number of crucial variables such as age, sex, education, profession, socio-economic status (social class), region and the urban/rural division. Five background variables in the 1969 survey were found to correlate with the attitude variables. Education and social class were the most significant explanatory variables. Negative attitudes to immigrants were prevalent among people with little formal education and among the working class. A negative attitude toward immigrants was also common among the elderly, among those who had little contact with immigrants, and among people with little personal experience of other countries.

This study was replicated in 1981, 1987 and 1993. Parts of the questionnaire were also used in a youth survey in 1990. The 1981 survey confirmed the findings from 1969 (Westin 1984). Age was a particularly significant factor. Young people held a positive attitude whereas the elderly did not. Contrary to expectations, however, the study proved that Swedes in general had become a lot more positive in their attitude toward immigrants than in 1969. This shift of opinion was primarily explained by inclusion of the youngest and most positive cohort in the 1981 study replacing the oldest and most negative cohort in the 1969 study. The 1987 follow-up (Westin 1987) supported the results of the two previous surveys. However, this time the youngest cohort no longer represented the most positive attitude, which was a first indication of a turn to more critical attitudes. This came out even more clearly in the 1990 youth study (Lange/Westin 1991). The 1993 national survey, which was the most comprehensive of these studies, showed that xenophobic and racist attitudes as such were not actually gaining ground, but it did show that public opinion was more critical than ever before of the immigration and refugee policies (Lange/Westin 1993). People were not as willing as before for Sweden to accept refugees, which in effect mirrored the policies of the time. Later attitude surveys within this series have not been carried out.

In these surveys of public opinion the most negative views on immigrants and ethnic minorities were thus found among the elderly,

among rural dwellers and among the lesser educated. It was evident that negative or critical attitudes to immigrants, at least up until the late 1980s, were found in those segments of the population that were not in touch with the multicultural residential areas of the larger cities. The fact that young people held much more positive views of immigrants was an indication of an acceptance of the migrants' presence, of a broader international outlook, and of cultural diversity.

In these surveys of public opinion indicators of xenophobia and racist attitudes did not seem to show any general increase in ethnic intolerance. What these surveys showed was that people were becoming increasingly critical of immigration and refugee policy. It is fairly obvious that people who cherish xenophobic and racist views will on the whole be critical of immigration policies if these policies are understood to enable the immigration of what is perceived as "racially inferior" people. The reverse does not hold true. Being critical of these policies does not necessarily imply a xenophobic or hostile view on immigrants. The far right exploited people's dissatisfaction with immigration policies. They provided explanations pointing to the "racial inferiority" of those who were accepted as immigrants.

A problem when speaking of public opinion in general terms is of course that there is not one monolithic opinion but rather a spectrum of different views. Some opinions are more frequently expressed than others even though they may not be representative of the most commonly held views. It is normally those views that are voiced by moulders of opinion that become reinforced by repeated exposure in the media that come to be regarded as "public opinion".

Public opinion represents, then, a wide spectrum of viewpoints, some of which are totally opposed to each other. Nevertheless, it does make sense to speak about certain tendencies of opinion, gravitational centres if you will, which shift from time to time, partly as a result of direct opinion moulding, partly as a result of people's accommodation to the changing conditions and realities of everyday life. The media play a significant role in the formation of public opinion, more; it seems, as reinforcers of existing movements of opinion than as independent moulders. It goes without saying that changes of opinion are influenced by what goes on beyond the gravitational centre. If public opinion on any specific issue may be conceived of in terms of a continuum of viewpoints, then any change of opinion implies a (slight) shift of centre towards either of the extremes.

Political movements operating at the extremes may not expect to achieve mass support. Nevertheless, the political mobilisation of extremist groups is of importance in affecting public opinion in terms of shifting its gravitational centre, so to say. Beliefs, representations, values, figures of speech, derogatory jokes and stereotypes work themselves in towards the centre, way beyond the circle of committed activists. Words that used not to be acceptable ways of expression, may, if they are catchy, suddenly spread and eventually also become accepted.

The neo-Nazi, xenophobic and right wing organisations have been instrumental in moving and polarising public opinion. Numerous indications point to the fact that the centre of gravity with regard to opinions on immigration and integration has shifted in the direction of more restrictive views and less general acceptance of refugees. But the reactions to far right political violence by those categories that are its victims have also exerted influence upon public opinion. Counter forces have mobilised aiming to regain „lost ground". The moral force of democracy, rational thought and human solidarity is by no means counted out.

It is important to bear in mind that the far right was and still is numerically insignificant. The militant core groups still only consist of some hundred activists. They are surrounded by a larger number of more passive sympathisers and supporters, probably totalling up to a few thousand persons. Larger numbers will go along with many of the critical views expressed by the far right on the refugee and asylum policy, the right to abortion, the acceptance of homosexual partnership, membership of the European Union etc. However, they do not wish to be associated with the Nazis, and above all, they do not accept revolutionary violence. On all accounts the far right is a small minority and does not represent general public opinion.

Summarising the evidence we may conclude, then, that no national front type of party has been successful in exploiting xenophobic attitudes. Xenophobic and racist opinions do exist, but there is no evidence that they have increased significantly on a large scale discernible within the public opinion. A reasonable estimation is that racist and xenophobic views are in the range of some five to six percent of the public opinion, but hardly more. The election results seem to confirm this. On the other hand, there is hard and consistent evidence that neo-Nazis have established several parties, built up their organizations and professionalized their propaganda (Lodenius/Wikström 1997). The police know a few hundred activists, and there may be a few thousand com-

mitted supporters. The 19,000 votes cast for the Sweden Democrats in 1998 indicates that Nazi sympathisers may total up to about 30,000 persons. These numbers are so small that they do not show up in opinion polls or attitude surveys[2]. As mentioned before, in the election results they are totally marginalized. This is not to say that they are without importance. They have proved to be highly skilful in developing propaganda and producing white noise music for domestic use and for export. The neo-Nazi organizations have become a political factor of great concern to the authorities in the towns where they are based. The records show that the number of racist crimes has constantly increased (Karttunen 1998; 1999; 2000). Partly this may be an effect of changing categorizations of crimes in which the racist aspects have been given increased importance. Most likely, however, there is also an actual increase both in the frequency and the gravity of these crimes.

4. The return of Nazism

When Jewish graveyards first were desecrated and when the attacks on refugee camps started in 1990 the authorities were disinclined to regard these crimes committed by young men in the name of patriotism and racial superiority as anything but boyish pranks. Attacks against refugee reception centres were at best seen as expressions of xenophobia. The antidote was thought to be information. Quite a few perpetrators were younger than eighteen years. Sentences—if there were any—were generally mild. The Nazi organizations could organize themselves without much interference from the authorities. The Swedish constitution has far-reaching liberties with regard to the freedom of the press, and freedom of organization and assembly. It was the responsibility of local authorities to develop strategies to counteract the Nazi organizations. In order to work out counter strategies, however, one needs to have an understanding of the problem and this was often lacking. Strategies based on dissemination of information, or based on the view those young neo-Nazi criminals were indeed misled and misunderstood but still basically ordinary decent young men failed totally (Rundquist 1999).

How do we explain the rise of the new right? How was it that the far right resorted to violence in the early 1990s? Violent means was not part of Swedish political culture.

The questions are fairly obvious and straightforward in view of actions that have taken place and police records of criminal acts. It is more difficult to provide satisfactory answers. First, we are speaking of the activity and radicalization of a small group of people. This means that explanations of their doings will have to be explanations of the exceptional. Explaining deviant behaviour is one of the classical sociological problems tackled among others by Durkheim and Merton. Secondly, the build-up of the Nazi organizations is a process in time. A historical perspective is thus essential. The historian Heléne Lööw (1998) whose analysis I will briefly follow has developed this approach. Thirdly, extremist behaviour is not typical for people in general. It is not representative in the sense of reflecting normal or common behaviour. Nevertheless, it may be indicative of certain trends and undercurrents in society, perhaps of dissatisfaction, perhaps of changing conditions that upset established images of the world and society, or perhaps of distrust in political leadership. Whatever these tendencies may be, it is a demanding theoretical task to establish convincing explanatory links between exceptional behaviour (in this case of neo-Nazi radicalization) and changing societal conditions that affect everyone. Space does not permit a thorough elaboration of the problem. However, generative models of social causality represent a fruitful approach. We need to pinpoint enabling conditions and obstacles for particular developments, instruments that are applied to achieve goals, contexts of values and belief-systems etc. In this article I will sketch some such contexts. I will try to show how they may have interacted with the neo-Nazi revitalization in terms of creating a climate of protest or re-orientation. In other contexts new conceptions and models have been brought out that Nazis have appropriated. Neo-Nazis have also been able to exploit various systemic shortcomings for their own political purposes. First of all, however, we need to establish some elements of the process of the far right radicalization.

In the 1930s a Swedish Nazi party established itself. In national elections it only received a few percent of the votes (Lööw 1990). Since Sweden was not occupied during the war the Swedish Nazis never became a significant political factor as for instance the case was for the Norwegian Nazis during the occupation 1940—45. But neither did the Swedish Nazis have to stand trial for treason or crimes against hu-

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[2] This opinion would be represented by three or four persons in a random sample of 1,000 persons, that is to say less than half a percent.

manity after the war. However, after World War II and the exposure of the genocide Hitler was ultimately responsible for the Swedish Nazis were politically marginalized. They led an isolated existence out of touch with the political realities throughout the Cold War period. A few of the old leaders and sympathisers hibernated in the remnants of some of the pre-war organizations, or in the *Nordiska Rikspartiet*—NRP (The Nordic National Party)—founded in 1956. The NRP was a small organization under the rule of G. A. Oredsson. It had very few members and never really succeeded in recruiting new ones. In fact it lost many of its younger members in the early 1980s. Its historical importance is that it served to bridge the gap between the Nazi movement of the 1930s and the modern race ideological underground movements that mushroomed in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.

The return of Nazism and the rise of neo-Nazi movements started with an organization *Bevara Sverige Svenskt*—BSS (Maintain Sweden Swedish)—that was founded in 1980 in opposition to the immigration and refugee policies. Several of the founding members had links to or were members of Nazi organizations such as NRP. BSS never explicitly gave voice to Nazi ideology. Its importance is that it represented a renewal, abandoning much of the outdated Nazi rhetoric and focusing on a "problem" that was on many people's minds—immigration. It therefore managed to attract followers who were critical of immigration but who did not want to associate themselves with the traditional Nazi organizations. A few years later this organization dissolved and turned into a new political party, *Sverigepartiet* (the Sweden party). However, the party soon split as a result of internal tension. One part of it was renamed *Sverigedemokraterna* (The Sweden Democrats) that has received less than half a percent of the votes in national elections.

During the course of the past fifteen years a number of Nazi organizations have formed. Some have survived and expanded, others have dissolved after a few years. The same people have appeared as leaders time and again. Many traditional Nazi ideas were maintained but new elements imported from the US racist subculture have been incorporated in terms of organization, strategies, mythology, heroes and ideals. An important input to the existing Nazi organizations was the tie with skinhead culture that established during the course of the 1980s. The xenophobic and racist element of skinhead culture was not particularly apparent at first, but gradually it grew stronger. The skinheads introduced a new element into the Nazi underground, namely "fanzines" on

music, and above all "patriotic" music, or white noise (white power music).

Rock music has always had a rebellious side to it. Over the years various artists have exploited this side of it for purposes of image, thus outdoing their predecessors. There is then a development through hard rock, black metal, death metal etc. Somewhere along the line artists introduced and exploited Nazi symbols such as the swastika for "artistic" and commercial purposes because these symbols were offensive, rebellious and shocking. This eventually led on to white noise; a dialectical turn of the tables if you wish in which Nazi organizations exploited the powerful propaganda value and idiom of rock music. The difference between black metal and white noise is that the accompanying texts to the latter are ideologically "correct". *Ultima Thule* was the first Swedish band to take this step.

On another front attacks on the refugee reception centres represented a new stage in the build up of the far right. What appeared to be a sudden increase in far right political violence caught the authorities, social scientists and the lay public by surprise. The political violence of the far right continued through the 1990s becoming more vicious, involving threats, assault, and bank robberies, arson and murder. Ties have developed between organized crime and Nazi militants. *Ariska brödraskapet* (The Aryan Brotherhood) is an inmate organization educating and indoctrinating prisoners in Nazi ideology. This link between callous criminals and Nazi ideology is the making of a terrorist organization as the minister of Justice Laila Freivalds rightly observes. Military supply depots have been burgled repeatedly for arms and ammunition. In one spectacular theft a police station was robbed of its entire arsenal of firearms.

It is possible to follow a course of gradual radicalization and of recruitment of followers to the far right and neo-Nazi movements (Lööw 1998). Lööw is an historian by training and she stresses the organic growth and links with the past, the Nazi organizations of the 1930s and 1940s, the ideas and leaders. Her analysis of the re-activation of the Nazi ideology and organizations in Sweden focuses on the internal development and logic. However, her analysis does not take account of the general societal conditions and developments that play in one way or the other. Virtually nothing is said about the economic development in Sweden, about unemployment, value systems, life styles and politics in a general sense.

As mentioned right wing extremist organisations were numerically small during the 1970s and most of the 1980s. They were politically marginalized, and they lacked financial means. Today these organisations although still small compared to the ordinary political parties and interest organizations have attracted a considerably larger following than before. But most importantly, they have run into big money through the production and sales of white noise CDs, thus providing the organizations with the means to refine and professionalize their propaganda. Explanations for this development must take into account the internal development and dialectics of organization building, but answers must also be sought beyond this in the interactions of a variety of factors and enabling conditions.

There are several settings, which need to be considered in explanations of the rise of neo-Nazism in the 1990s. I will focus on four: Changing values and lifestyles, international political changes after the Cold War, the dismantling of the welfare state and the crises of the party system.

5. The cultural context: Changing values and lifestyles
The first broad setting is related to the position of young people generally in society, in the very life conditions for youth today. The re-awakened Nazi movement has above all attracted young people. Many activists are still only in their teens. For many decades now specific reference groups have existed with which young people compare themselves and identify, seek to emulate and become accepted as members of. Names and markers shift (as do dress and musical preferences) but the psychosocial function these reference groups play is much the same. Today the social identities provided by these groups seem to be more important than they were some decades ago. This is seen in the readiness to defend social identities that are threatened by other groups. These identities are often defined through exclusivity and difference. They acquire meaning through conflict and fighting. This is very evident in the clashes that take place between supporters of different football teams. It is seen in fights between gangs of young Swedish men and gangs of young men belonging to various ethnic groups. The neo-Nazi case is extreme, but basically it follows the same social psychological pattern of ingroup-outgroup formation. It is not a coincidence that links between football hooligans and Neo-Nazis have established.

In the broad perspective the fact that the relatively fleeting peer group identities in general have gained considerable importance in comparison with the situation some decades ago is related to the difficulties and problems of becoming accepted and incorporated into more stable group memberships and identities for young people today than it was for earlier generations. In many European countries, and Sweden is no exception, there exists a very obvious and clear age segregation. Young people may be well into their twenties before they find regular jobs. It takes even longer time to achieve something of a professional identity, and professional identity is a cornerstone of adult life.

There is no return to the past but it might be instructive to see how things were some decades ago. As late as in the 1950s most young people of 14 or 15 years of age were able to find jobs after having completed compulsory schooling. In those days industry still relied on mass employment for production. I am not saying that 15–year olds would have a ready professional identity, but young people of working class background would be enrolled in the company's training programmes. For a year or two they would be apprentices. At a fairly young age they would be incorporated into adult life. They would grow into a professional identity, and certainly in many cases be introduced into union membership and political life. They learned from adults at the workplace, and they regarded themselves more or less as adults despite the fact that majority was not reached until the age of 21.

The social identities provided by peer groups and gangs today substitute to some extent the traditional belonging and cohesion related to the nuclear family. Family researchers point to changing family patterns that have become generally accepted in the last two or three decades. Life long marriage is being substituted for cohabitation for a certain number of years with separations and divorce, new partners and gradually a forging together of different split families into a new unity, the stepfamily. These new family formations are part of a wider pattern of life-styles and attitudes among adults that when they coincide with structural conditions of youth unemployment may delay young people's entry into adult life.

In contemporary age segregated welfare societies young people lead their lives with comparatively few adults in their immediate vicinity. Outside the closest family most adults with whom young people are in touch are professional educators—teachers, youth leaders, sports

leaders. This vacuum is partly filled with images from the mass media. The media cultivate the myth of eternal youth. It is a youth cult rather than youth culture. We see it daily in the advertising surrounding us. When middle-aged adults have problems of accepting their age, when they try to present a youthful appearance in a number of respects, what have young people to look forward to on the difficult path to a confident and natural adult identity? With whom should they identify?

In many essential respects the Swedish school system has managed to establish an education for democracy. Among young people we do not only run into intolerant views with regard to migrant minorities, we also see a strong commitment against racism and xenophobia. We see compassion, solidarity, knowledge, broad-mindedness and a genuine interest in other cultures. But young people are not naturally a part of the adult world. They partake in a youth oriented and youth inspired culture. On Friday and Saturday evenings they take over the streets in the central part of the cities. Where do they encounter clear and unambiguous boundaries and distinct demands from the adult world? Sometimes a small group of partly delinquent and criminal pupils may completely upset and break down teaching for those pupils who want to study seriously. What is surprising is not that some pupils have a problem with school, but rather that the school lacks the means to deal with disciplinarian problems of this kind. Social identities associated with certain peer groups are important in explanations of ethnic intolerance in general. Social identity and group pressure represent powerful forces in forming young people's views of the world.

Nazi organizations come into the picture because they have been able to provide some young confused (mostly) men with a sense of belonging and identity, with a mission and sense of importance. They have a strong hold on those who have chosen to join. Once having joined an „outlaw" group, it has proved to be very hard to leave it. For a long time the authorities regarded the Nazi organizations as peer groups among others and treated them accordingly. They didn't realize that young activists had been subjected to a consciously planned and well-organized political indoctrination.

6. The post-Cold War context: Changing conceptions of the Other
The broad political scene and the changes we have witnessed over the last decade of the 20th century are a second setting for the rise of neo-Nazism. The political changes in Europe with the end of the Cold War in 1989 indirectly affected the attitude climate in Sweden, as it pro-

bably did in many other Western countries. How are events on the level of international relations mediated to individual life-worlds? Obviously there are numerous ways through which such mediation is channelled. The political changes of the 1989–91 period implied power changes. The Soviet Union abdicated and dissolved. Long suppressed issues of national identity surfaced in East and Central Europe. "New" states appeared. Others fell apart. Power relations structure the conditions in which ethnic, national and cultural groups meet. Inter-group relations are affected when power relations change. In turn this will have reverberations into social perceptions of Self and Other, and thus definitions of group identities, boundaries and priorities. Sweden was not immediately affected by the political changes 1989–91 as Germany, Russia or Yugoslavia. However, like other Western countries Sweden was affected by changing perceptions of the Other.

In Sweden the post-Cold War developments, particularly in the Balkans, interacted with the neo-Nazi build-up in several ways. First, the large intake of refugees from former Yugoslavia during the years 1992—94 (more than 100,000), more than half of whom were Bosnian Muslims, continued to frustrate the anti-immigration opinion. The Nazis were not late to exploit the situation for propaganda purposes. Secondly, the concept of "ethnic cleansing" was adopted by Nazi activists who aimed to "cleanse" various small towns of Muslims and non-European migrants by means of threats, harassment, persecution and damage to the victims' property. In a few small towns—Österbybruk and Vålberg—the strategy "succeeded" in that the Muslim victims of neo-Nazi harassment were forced to flee from their homes. Thirdly, several young men belonging to neo-Nazi organizations served as mercenaries in the Croatian militia[3]. Personal experience of combat is highly prestigious, and in some Nazi circles it is seen as an essential training for the coming racial war. Experience of combat is viewed as important not only for the individual activist but for the organization as a whole. Political changes in the wake of the 1989–91 events thus interacted at various levels with the build-up of the radical right. People in general as well as the democratic parties were slow to comprehend the impact of these changing realities.

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[3] An ex-mercenary has been convicted for the murder of the policemen Olle Borén and Robert Karlström.

7. The economic context: Dismantling the welfare system

The third context of societal change pertains to the welfare state and the mounting problems of financing the complex system of monetary transfers—welfare allowances, social benefits, unemployment compensation, pensions and insurances. Although the rise of neo-Nazism cannot directly be traced and linked to the crisis of the welfare system, the fact that they appear more or less simultaneously may indicate common explanatory factors.

The Swedish Social Democratic Workers Party, founded in 1892, came into power in the early 1930s and led governments alone or in coalition uninterruptedly until 1976 when a non-socialist government formed for the first time in more than forty years. The party was back in power 1982–91 and from 1994 until present. It used to enjoy election results in the 40–50% range decade after decade. The Social Democrats has been the most important party in 20th century Sweden and the guarantor of the welfare state. Its principal objective was to enable the peaceful transition of a class-structured society into an egalitarian welfare state. This meant reforming the educational system, introducing social security, bringing about a just pension scheme, making hospitals and health care available to all, combating unemployment through state controlled labour market agencies and also improving living standards through urban planning and partial control of the housing market. These reforms represented great costs to the public sector, but as long as the economy was expanding there was no problem of drawing in taxes to cover these costs.

An essential non-parliamentary instrument to achieve consensus within the working classes on important social reforms was played by interest organizations, most notably the trade unions, but also including consumers' organizations (the co-operative movement), tenants' organizations and several other organizations aimed at defending and justifying social transformation. Social Democratic rule was in fact not entirely unsympathetic to corporatist ideas. Although parliament was never directly sidestepped, the government could at times discuss crucial issues directly with interest organizations and take note of the ideas that they presented.

A central agreement in the 1930s to secure the economy was the truce that was signed between the labour unions and the employers' organizations. Differences of opinion would have to be negotiated and not occasion strikes or lockouts. This Swedish model represented a third way between the deep inequalities that were an inevitable result of crude capitalism on the one hand, and the lack of freedom and inefficiency of the Communist planned economy on the other. As such it was admired by many of the new developing countries. As a non-aligned state Sweden also played an important international role well beyond its economic importance.

The system functioned, but only as long as the economy was in order. As a highly industrialized country Sweden grew increasingly dependent upon the world economy for its industrial export products. The post World War II boom continued more or less uninterruptedly into the 1970s. Then a change started to occur. The downturn of the economy in the early 1970s was seriously aggravated by the Arab oil embargo in 1973 and 1974. Sweden wasn't hit more seriously than other industrial states but the system was not prepared for the change that was to come. The global recession led to a reduction in exports at the same time as imports remained at a high level. People weren't prepared to reduce their standard of living just like that. Important industries such as shipbuilding where Sweden had been one of the leading producers were closed down. Industries either moved their production to developing countries or increased the mechanisation of production. In either case, employees were made redundant. Initially the public sector could still provide jobs within the caring sector but as income from exports diminished so did income to the public sector. A temporary solution was achieved in 1982 through a drastic devaluation of the Swedish currency. In the short term of the political election cycle things were back to normal. Basically, however, the structural problems were not solved and in the 1990s the economic consequences of a diminishing industrial sector in terms of employment and an oversized public sector in terms of available resources struck Sweden with full force in conjunction with the recession in the early 1990s. Unemployment figures rose to levels unheard of since the 1930s.

Right through the 1990s efforts were made to stabilize the economy. It took some heavy cutting down of social welfare benefits to which people protested loudly. Cuts in the sick leave allowances were most unpopular. The military defence was cut down drastically, which now could be justified by the changing security situation in Europe. Privatisation of transport systems, hospitals, child-care were complementary solutions to set the economy right. These reforms have been unpopular. Although Sweden has not had to tackle protest parties, people are deeply unsatisfied with these developments.

Various principles and expenses within the public sector have had to be reconsidered. One of the first things to be reassessed was the refugee policy. As early as in December 1989 the government announced that it no longer could grant refugees asylum on general humanitarian grounds. The idea was to dissuade potential asylum seekers who were considering Sweden as a possible target country. The number of asylum seekers decreased somewhat the following years. However, this "message" was also appreciated by factions opposed to immigration and accepted as a token that their ideas had gained support. The new policy was in fact one of the starting points for the new racism that became an essential issue of political debate throughout the 1990s. As mentioned earlier, the protest party New Democracy playing on people's xenophobic sentiments was elected into parliament in the 1991 elections.

The change of policy was partly based on economic assessments. The main problem was however administrative. An ambitious programme for refugee reception had more or less collapsed and the authorities were at a loss how to handle the situation. The programme was a typically Swedish model of social engineering. It was based on dispersing refugees to towns and municipalities throughout the country so as to reduce the "pressure" on the major cities where most refugees wanted to settle. The system could possibly have worked in a situation of low and constant intake of refugees. In a situation where the intake was increasing year by year and going well above the planned quota, the administrative system collapsed.

One of the ideological justifications for the scheme was that by dispersing refugees to various smaller towns and municipalities in the rural areas there would be greater chances of contact, of people of different origins meeting one another. It was thought to be a way of combating xenophobia and racism, because personal acquaintance has proved to be the most efficient antidote to stereotypes and generalised prejudices. What the designers of the plan seemed to have overlooked was the fact that by placing refugees in small towns and providing for them by means of social welfare benefits they were the target of envy. In small country towns where unemployment was a major problem for many Swedes, and where ordinary people found it difficult to make ends meet, the presence of migrants living on state support and with little chances of getting regular jobs was a thorn in the flesh to many people. Various extremist groups exploited these negative attitudes. It is true that there were examples to the contrary as well. In some towns

solidarity movements developed particularly in cases where individual refugee families faced deportation.

The government played down the significance of the change in refugee policy. The minister of immigration maintained time and again that Sweden still had a generous refugee policy. Asylum-seekers whose reasons were valid would be accepted for permanent residence as before. The hypocrisy of it all just added to people's increasing distrust in politicians.

Summing up, the dismantling of the welfare system represented a political shift to the right. This in turn meant that the far right came slightly closer to the political centre. That is to say, there was a greater acceptance of some of the far right and neo-Nazi criticism of the multicultural society. The dismantling of the welfare system in conjunction with a dispersal policy, the latter justified among other things as a means to mould more accepting attitudes actually led to deterioration of interethnic attitudes. It led to a cementing of negative attitudes and criticism of refugee policies on a national scale. It was not a sheer coincidence that neo-Nazi attacks on refugee camps started in the spring 1990 just after the change of refugee policy.

8. The political context: The crisis of the party system
Societies are complex phenomena to say the least. Developments in one sector affect other parts of society, but often in unanticipated ways. The radicalization of the marginalized far right may be understood partly as a reaction to the increase in immigration of non-European groups. This far right radicalization in turn gives rise to counter movements of various kinds upon which the far right reacts anew. Declarations that Sweden is to become a multicultural society provoke reactions and opposition in some quarters. The far right exploited these reactions. Multiculturalism generated fundamentalism. The idea of cultural mixing brought counter ideas of racial purity.

The fourth context I would like to point to concerns the political system. Although neo-Nazis challenge the democratic system, democracy as such is not in danger. On the contrary, an understanding of democracy has rather increased as a result of the Nazi activities. There is, however, a problem pertaining to the principal actors on the parliamentary scene. In a sense there is a crisis of the party system as such. There is a political rift between the Socialist parties and the non-Socialist parties, but within each of these power blocs traditional balances are shifting. Thus the Social Democrats are losing voters to the Left

Party (the former Communist party) and to a smaller extent to the Green Party. Within the non-Socialist bloc the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats have grown at the expense of the Liberals and the Centre Party (the former Agrarian Party). The crisis of the system is quite visible in the problems of forming coalitions that will hold for government. Minority governments depend on support from other parties leading to problems of efficiency and credibility. The crisis is seen in the drop in electoral participation from around 90% in the 1980s to well below 80% in the most recent national election in 1998, and considerably lower in elections to the European Parliament. It is seen in popular expressions of distrust in politicians. The media have actively participated in creating this negative image of politicians by exposing a few cases of corruption and distortion in which politicians have been involved. These cases are by no means representative of the system as a whole but they have added significantly to discredit politicians. The crisis is also seen in the drop in membership of political parties. This drop is very significant. It has proved hard to recruit young members. This means that issues pertaining to the situation of young people, and essentially then future-directed issues, tend to be given less attention than they need to have.

The crisis of the party system is not a crisis of democracy as such. Parties representing anti-democratic ideologies have as yet been unsuccessful in gaining popular support. There are no indications that these parties will be more successful in the immediate future. It is a crisis of the traditional parties and ideologies, and their inability to address some of the burning future issues—globalization, the withering down of the nation state, post-industrial economy, a more just distribution of common goods, pollution, energy systems, and so on. Parties and politicians are aware of these issues but they are rarely brought to the fore in unprejudiced and unconditional debate. There are always more down to earth practicalities that need to be solved—jobs, social welfare etc.

Some of these future-oriented political issues surfaced in conjunction with the two most recent referenda—nuclear power in 1980 and EU membership in 1994. However, they are avoided in regular political discourse, mainly it seems, because the traditional political parties are divided on them. Maintaining party unity appears to be a more important objective than a renewal of the political debate. Parties follow the opinion polls and are careful not to present proposals that might endanger current ratings. The main actors on the political scene are

parties that were established at the end of the 19th century or early 20th century, that is to say as responses to the transition of the country from an agrarian society to an industrial society. These parties do not seem to be able to adequately address some of the burning issues of post-industrial society.

The rise of Nazism in the 1990s was unexpected. Very few could anticipate that it would grow and continue to attract new followers. Expert commentators who thought it was a passing phase have proven to be wrong. Of course one can never tell, but sooner or later the tide is bound to turn for the Nazis. The horrendous nature of their ideology and the crimes they commit in its name will turn ordinary people against them. Maybe this time has come. As I understand it the ascent of Nazism in the 1990s is symptomatic of the traditional parties' inability to address some of the really burning issues of our times. This, however, is what the Nazis have done. The proposed solutions are totally unacceptable and unrealistic, and not in line with the problems they address. Once the traditional political parties realize that they can't continue to ignore and evade issues pertaining to multiculturalism and social integration, once future-oriented issues of this kind are adequately addressed, I would project that Nazism will lose its attraction. The burning issues thus pertain to segregation in society, not only of race and ethnicity, but also of age, creed, sex and class, along with racism and discrimination. How is segregation to be overcome? How is social cohesion to be achieved in modern multicultural societies?

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