

Are the Swedish elites planning to topple Olof Palme's government?

by Clifford Gaddy in Stockholm

Are Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and his notorious "Swedish model" of Orwellian socialism finally about to leave the scene? This question has been raised repeatedly in Sweden, and an increasing number of observers here are prepared to answer it with a "yes." Never before in Palme's career has he been under such pressure as this autumn. Internationally, the Swedish welfare state has received an unprecedented barrage of negative publicity on the issue of repression of individual civil rights, while at home the Palme government has been hit by a series of scandals including the resignation of justice minister Ove Rainer, a close Palme associate, for improprieties in his personal tax affairs.

The prospect of Palme's disappearance from a political scene that he has dominated for the better part of 20 years involves a much larger story behind the attacks on Palme than his personal malfeasance or his particular brand of socialist policies. The fact on both these counts have long been known, without incurring the sort of response we see today.

The background to the moves to topple Palme is a geopolitical deal in the works, involving the still-powerful noble families of the kingdom of Sweden, British circles associated with Lord Peter Carrington, and the Soviet Union.

A 'Children's Gulag'

International media attacks on Palme and the system that he had built up over the past 30 years began early this fall. Sweden, previously praised as a social welfare paradise in the liberal press throughout the world, suddenly—and curiously—found itself depicted as a land of technocratic totalitarianism, a "real-life 1984." The interesting aspect was not the content of the attacks as such—most signalled very accurate, if belated, recognition of the real nature of Swedish society under Palme—but that they were being led by some of Palme's greatest admirers in days past.

The West German weekly newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*, is a prime example. This influential publication which had previously been as avid a supporter of Olof Palme as it is of the anti-American peace and environmentalist

Germany, turned against Palme with a viciousness that stunned Swedish circles.

In one lengthy feature in October, *Der Spiegel* portrayed Sweden as no less than a "Children's Gulag," in which state social welfare authorities are engaged in forcibly seizing children from their parents on a massive scale in order to place them in homes or institutions approved by the socialist authorities.

This article was only one of a flood of similar attacks on the "Swedish model" in the West German, Italian, French, and some American publications, which zeroed in on other violations of individual rights in Palme's Sweden.

These attacks from abroad triggered a renewed campaign against Palme at home, though Palme's domestic critics have for the most part been noticeably restrained in their criticism of the Swedish model, since many of them have been complicit in building up the apparatus. Rather, the domestic side of the anti-Palme campaign has tended to focus on Palme's personal instability, arrogance, and mismanagement of national affairs.

Wartime unity?

The most notable feature of the anti-Palme campaign inside Sweden has been its character of a collaborative effort between circles outside and inside his own party. It is this coalition of forces that suggests that the ouster of Palme is designed to make possible a revival of the old wartime alliance between those same groupings: Conservative circles led by the Swedish military and oligarchy, on the one hand, and a conservative, isolationist wing of the Social Democracy, on the other.

During World War II, Sweden avoided being invaded and occupied—the fate of its neighbors Denmark and Norway—thanks to a very elaborate structure of secret deals and counterdeals with both the Nazis and the British. The moral price that Sweden paid for remaining outside the war—specifically, its direct assistance to the Nazi war machine—is something most ordinary Swedes would prefer to forget.

However, there is no doubt that influential aristocratic circles here are prepared to revive that tactic of secret diplomacy in deals with both sides—the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and NATO, on the other—in the hope of guaranteeing the country's survival in circumstances of an impending super-power confrontation.

The nobility apparently concludes that the delicate maneuvering required in such a situation is something that cannot be entrusted to an unstable figure like Olof Palme, although he is a member of their ranks.

Perhaps the strongest direct evidence so far that these considerations, rather than any genuine opposition to Palme's particular brand of 1984 fascism, are the real reason for certain oligarchical circles' participation in the anti-Palme campaign was given in a recent lead editorial in the conservative daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*. In its Nov. 27 issue, the Stockholm daily accused Palme of abusing Swedish military intelligence organs for his own and his party's private benefit.

In raising this issue, *Svenska Dagbladet* touched on one of the most sensitive matters in the kindgom. Even after the breakdown of the wartime coalition, the right and the social democratic left in Sweden have maintained one particular area in which unity remained sacred: the military and related intelligence sphere. On the other hand, Palme has threatened to violate that unity throughout his career. In the early 1970s, the military tried to cut short a clear social democratic play for power over Swedish intelligence when military-linked circles "blew" a key operation run by the social democrats.

This was the so-called "IB-affair," in which investigative journalists disclosed the existence of a social democratic security service engaged in domestic surveillance of political enemies. The activity of this "information bureau-IB" had been concealed under the rubric of a military intelligence operation. As an attempt to stop social democratic abuse of national intelligence operations, the IB-affair was unsuccessful, owing to major counter-blackmail capabilities by the social democrats. The threat that the social democrats might expose much more vital Swedish intelligence operations on other levels forced the opposition to back off.

This was to remain a constant predicament of the military-oligarchical circles unless they could make a deal with a faction inside the social democracy that would be prepared to help dump Palme and accept a more balanced role to be allotted to the social democratic party under a "national unity" regime.

The *Svenska Dagbladet* editorial was in effect a declaration that such an arrangement has been made. The newspaper states that "The IB affair is not over" for Olof Palme; despite countless investigations by the authorities, commissions and the mass media, "We do not yet know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the IB."

On Dec. 5, *Svenska Dagbladet* successfully launched a new scandal against Palme and his deals with the Russians.

The paper says that during the big "submarine crisis" last

spring, when the "Submarine Commission's" report was published and the navy was chasing a sub, Palme established direct channels with the Soviets, specifically Georgii Arbatov and Gen. Mikhail Milstein, who have been involved with his Palme Commission on Disarmament, while bypassing the ordinary foreign department channels.

Svenska Dagbladet says that Palme, via his former secretary and secretary of the Palme Commission, current Swedish U.N. Ambassador Anders Ferm, let Arbatov know that Sweden would be prepared to drop the whole question of sub violations of Swedish waters in the past if the Soviets would just stop doing it in the future. He also promised to tone down the ongoing sub chase.

Ferm reportedly had meetings with Arbatov and Milstein, and then repeated follow-up meetings with Milstein after Arbatov left the United States.

This story is undoubtedly true, and in a sense is not news. Why is it being brought up now? It closely resembles the so-called "Bahr Affair," when certain members of the Swedish nobility, acting through conservative politician Carl Bildt, leaked documents showing that Egon Bahr had personally written the Swedish government's proposal for a nuclear-free corridor.

The basic issue then was the same: Palme's private diplomacy with the Russians, bypassing the oligarch-controlled Swedish foreign ministry.

The next day, the scandal was picked up by everybody—all the press and TV. Palme appeared on TV and in *Dagens Nyheter* on Dec. 6, saying that he made no promises to Arbatov that the Soviets would be let off the hook on the sub violations, as *Svenska Dagbladet* claims he did.

But this part of the affair seems to be secondary to the question of the relations between Palme and his crowd and the foreign office staff bypassing the normal foreign office channels in reporting to and from Arbatov and Milstein. Now, when the foreign office leaked the contents of Palme's messages to Arbatov, Palme has blasted the foreign office leaks and accused *Svenska Dagbladet* of illegally stealing secret documents. Ferm has called the foreign office staff "blabbermouths" and "gossips." The staff in turn has demanded an apology.

The *Svenska Dagbladet* lead editorial of Dec. 6 defines the scandal as another case of Palme's abuse of Swedish institutions for personal aims. "It is not the individuals Anders Ferm and Olof Palme who are to develop our country's foreign policy in intimate contacts with their friends from the Palme Commission. Foreign policy is formulated by the parliament and the government. Administration of foreign affairs is the province of the foreign office. . . . For Anders Ferm to conduct private foreign policy in consultation with Olof Palme, outside of the foreign office, is absurd. . . ."

"Once again a political scandal develops with the prime minister in a leading role. Half-truths and direct personal exercise of power on the part of the prime minister characterize this affair as well as the preceding ones."