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## Interview: Hans Ericson

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# 'The opposition to Palme is growing'

*Hans Ericson, former head of Sweden's Transport Workers Union and president of the Road Section of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), is the best known trade union leader Sweden has ever had. He was a tough negotiator who got very good contracts for his workers, and was also highly respected by the employers. He was forced into both retirement and personal bankruptcy by Prime Minister Olof Palme's machine and mass media. But he has never stopped fighting. Under the title, "Only an Alliance with the West can Save Sweden," he is appearing at rallies with European Labor Party (EAP) chairman Kerstin Tegin-Gaddy and the leader of the Social Democratic opposition to Palme, Dr. Alf Enerström, in cities throughout Sweden this summer. The following interview was conducted after the highly successful late July rally in Almedalen on the island of Gotland.*

**Q:** First of all, why were you forced out of your posts?

**A:** The real reason was that I was against the wave of "neo-socialism," as I call it, which was gaining hegemony in the Swedish Social Democracy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I am an old-time Social Democrat, of a kind you may find only in Sweden. I started as a taxi driver and always worked in the trade union to get better wages and working conditions for myself and my fellow-workers.

As an old-time Social Democrat I was always in favor of growth and technological innovations, like nuclear power. I was always in favor of a strong defense. I was against the idea of "politicizing" the trade unions, since that was only a cover to introduce Marxism. That is why I was against these academics who were taking over the party and the trade union leadership in Stockholm.

But the real reason they kicked me out was my open campaign against the so-called "wage-earner funds" that Palme's government imposed on Sweden last year.

**Q:** Can you explain what wage-earner funds are?

**A:** Wage-earner funds were introduced as a means of socializing private companies in Sweden during the wave of radicalization in the late 1960s. Every company is forced by law to take a certain percentage of its payroll, as well as a certain tax on the company's profit, and put this money aside

in a fund. This fund is owned and managed by the trade unions, who will use the money to "invest" in companies—in other words, to buy shares in the private companies. Within a period of five to ten years, the wage earner funds will have taken over full control of Swedish business and industry.

This is exactly what is happening now in Sweden. Since the vote in parliament last fall, eight of these funds have been created on a regional basis and they are now beginning to buy up the companies. According to the law, no company can prohibit them from buying up any company they want, and thereby taking it over.

As a result, what is happening now is that Swedish businessmen—entrepreneurs—are leaving Sweden by the thousands. The reason I have been and still am against this, is that it is just another way of turning Sweden into a totalitarian state like the East bloc countries. Under this fund system, the owners and the employees will be identical—they are the same people. Labor unions will no longer be an instrument for fighting for higher wages and better living standards, but a vast bureaucracy.

I know what this means, because I have seen the trade unions in the Communist countries. I used to travel there when I was headed the IMT Road Section, and we went there as a part of the ILO [International Labor Organization]. In the beginning I never knew if I was talking to a representative of the workers or of the state. It was all the same, and I soon realized that I was talking only to a representative of the state. The workers have no representatives.

**Q:** When did you first voice opposition to these funds?

**A:** My first big speech against the funds was in 1975 in Göteborg at a big trade union congress. At that time I had cleared my speech by talking to the head of the Swedish Trade Union Federation, Gunnar Nilsson. He told me that he totally agreed, and in fact most trade union leaders were against the funds. So, I made my speech. I said that the funds would lead to a system similar to the Soviet system and that we, as trade unionists, should not accept this kind of creeping socialization. Two weeks later Nilsson had changed his opinion. He was now for the funds and the campaign against me started full swing.

**Q:** How was this campaign conducted?

**A:** Well, it was never a debate on policy, but the neo-socialists in the media worked together with the almighty tax authorities, who accused me of irregularities. In Sweden, nobody stands a chance against the tax authorities. In fact, what I was accused of is an ordinary procedure among all parliamentarians, all trade union leaders, and many other categories of people in Sweden. I have not been convicted of anything yet, but am still in the process of trials, supplementary taxation, appeals, etc. But in the process, I was forced out of the union leadership and into personal bankruptcy.

**Q:** Didn't the attacks against you start earlier?

**A:** Yes, the operation is bigger. I have always been, like all traditional Swedish Social Democrats, against communism in any form. At the end of the 1960s, there was a general drive by the Moscow-directed communists to take over the trade unions throughout the West. I, of course, opposed this in my union. This led to a split of the Swedish Transport Workers Union in 1972. The communists had especially infiltrated the dockworkers, and they now formed their own union, which was totally steered by Moscow. The head of the new union was Gunnar Norberg, a high official in the communist party.

**Q:** You already saw it as a plot from Moscow?

**A:** Oh yes, I certainly did. I thought: of course, the Soviets want to control the ports and harbors, of vital significance to them if they want to occupy Sweden. And this I believed they could do, since I had seen what happened to some of our neighbors. Key points, harbors, airfields, and so on, the Soviets want to control.

The communists planned to form a communist trade union federation. This is not their goal anymore, since the Swedish Social Democracy is doing what they had planned at any rate. The communists are steered from Moscow, and the Social Democracy sits in their lap on both domestic and foreign policy. The present government could not rule a day without the communists, since the Social Democrats have no parliamentary majority. Every vote depends on what the communists do.

**Q:** Was Palme key to the party's transformation?

**A:** Undoubtedly. He is very skilled. First, he took the lead in creating a strata of young intellectual radicals in the 1968-72 period. It was the period of occupations and anti-war demonstrations. These youngsters did not become Social Democrats then. Instead, they joined all kinds of small, Moscow-controlled communist grouplets. Then they were given free reign to express themselves in the media. They took over important posts in society. They became journalists, economists, professors, teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats of all kinds. Then, under the "outside" pressure from these groups, the party started to change, and now 10-15 years later, all these radicals, schooled as Marxists, are back in the Social Dem-

ocratic party. They are the party hacks and the trade union leaders now. They are doing the legwork for Palme.

The old-time Social Democrats like myself and Alf Enerström and tens of thousands of others certainly feel that this is not our party anymore. And the trade unions are certainly not what they used to be.

**Q:** Was there no opposition then?

**A:** Most of the members did not notice what was going on. They did not notice the transformation until it was too late. Many of them had a very bad conscience because they thought "socialism" had not been implemented in Sweden. But of course, this was never the intention of the old Social Democracy; that is why it was so successful. The old Social Democracy wanted a free, capitalist society, where the fruits of labor should be used to increase the wealth of the society.

There were some people who protested, but they were out of any power positions inside the party. In fact, it is only now that an opposition is starting to grow. The meetings that we now are holding all over the country are creating a resistance movement where people come together from all different parties. These people want to do something before Sweden has become a complete totalitarian state, but time is running out.

**Q:** Why did you decide to join the ELP campaign to take Sweden into the Western alliance?

**A:** Well, first of all, I accept invitations to speak and answer questions from the public as a matter of principle. As long as people want to hear my point of view, I will be giving it. But more fundamentally, I think this question has to be addressed in a serious way. The present Russian military build-up around us, and in particular, the submarine incursions into Swedish waters, show that we must reconsider whether our neutral position can help us. The problem is that what Sweden has is not an "armed" neutrality any more. Under both the Social Democratic and the former non-socialist governments, Sweden has been disarmed. For instance, there is only one boat patrolling the whole coast line from just north of Stockholm up to the Finnish borders. They are closing down our air force bases for "vacation" and we are not able to stop the submarine incursions. At the same time Palme is turning Sweden towards the Soviets, and the whole parliament has accepted an invitation by the Supreme Soviet to visit them.

I think this must be changed. I am personally in favor of Sweden working together with the Western Alliance, and as a minimum I think this must be discussed as the main item in Sweden. I know the Swedish people and I know they don't want to live under Soviet rule.

I have been informed that the head of the U.S. beam defense program, Gen. James Abrahamson, has offered the neutral countries protection from missiles under the American "beam-weapons umbrella." I'm in favor of Sweden accepting that offer, and I think this might be a way of starting our cooperation with the Alliance.