História Unicap
ISSN 2359-2370

The controversy around agricultural rationalization and rural communities in post Second World War Sweden

A controvérsia em torno da racionalização agrícola e das comunidades rurais na Suécia após a Segunda Guerra Mundial

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Abstract:

This paper explores explanations, interpretations, perceptions and valuations of post war agricultural rationalization and the interlinked rural transformation and urbanization processes in Sweden. Both political and market driven factors are considered. Specifically, the local government reforms of the 1950s and 1960s are highlighted as they tended to put an end to the autonomy of rural communities. Political protests against these developments, driven by the Peasant/Center party are studied using all issues of the party's monthly political magazine 1960-1980. The paper ends in a reflection on the rural and agricultural side of the major, sometimes open, sometimes latent political-ideological conflict in Sweden in much of the 20th century, between the Peasant/Center party and the Social Democrats.

Key words:

Agricultural rationalization; urbanization; political protests.

Resumo:

Este artigo explora explicações, interpretações, percepções e avaliações da racionalização agrícola da pós-guerra e os processos ligados de trasformação rural e urbanização em Suècia. Vão ser considerados fatores políticos e económicos. Em concreto, as reformas do governo local de 1950 e 1960 são destacadas por procurar o fim da autonomia das comunidades rurais. Os protestos políticos contra esses desenvolvimentos, conduzidos pelo Partido Camponês/ Centro, são estudadas usando todas as edições da revista política mensal do partido 1960-1980. O artigo termina com uma reflexão sobre a banda rural e agrícola do conflito político-ideológico maior, por vezes aberto, por vezes latente, na Suècia, no século XX, por grande parte do Partido Camponês/Centro e os social-democratas.

Palavras-chave:

Racionalização agrarian; urbanização; protestos politicos.

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Introduction

The era 1870 to 1945 covered the basics of the transition of Sweden from an agricultural society to an industrialized nation. It covered the expansion of commercial dairy production, following the 'grain invasion'. It covered the smallholding expansion in the early 1900s, the depressive interwar years, and the celebrated crisis agreement between the Peasant party (*Bondeförbundet*) and the Social Democrats, which secured agricultural price regulation, state sponsored farm support and expansionary labor market policy. It covered the growth and dominance of a centrally governed cooperative distribution and processing apparatus and the emergence of a strong farmers' interest organization, *Riksförbundet Landsbygdens Folk,* RLF (lit: The Association of Rural People). It involved early phases of mechanization and an accelerating rural exodus of young landless laborers and farm family members, in particular women. But in one respect this era represented standstill: The number of farms and the farm size structure changed only marginally. [1]

By the beginning of the postwar period, the flight from agriculture was accentuated and by 1980 two thirds of the 1950 agricultural labor force had disappeared. In 1950 circa two thirds of all farms were smallholdings with maximum 10 hectares and they used one third of all farmland. By the 1980s they accounted for merely a third of all farms and tilled only 10 percent of the arable. Instead the share of land used by large estates or farms of 100 hectares or more increased strongly. The total number of independent farms fell from close to 300,000 in 1950 to 115,000 in 1980. The disappearing farms were either shut down or merged with other farms of the through leasing arrangements. The structural change was quickest between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s: 44 percent of the independent farms existing in 1956 had disappeared by 1971. Thus, entire farm families left farming in this period.[2]

Often the disappearing smallholdings had been run by families, where the men worked seasonally in forestry or industry, while the women carried out the lion's part of farm work. The postwar change implied that these households or their descendants left farming for full time support from industrial or service sector jobs. On larger family farms, remaining farmhands disappeared. In many cases the women took part time work in the expanding public service sector, while the men, seasonally supported by women carried out the bulk of farm work. Thus, the postwar farm restructuring dramatically changed the inner life of many rural (or ex-rural) households. Typically, the changes were connected to generational change and farm successions.[3]

This article explores explanations of this process. One set of causes is found in impersonal and blind 'market forces' which, particularly through changed relative prices seem to be drivers for such processes. Another set of causes is sought for in politics. Policy could hasten and support, the abovementioned market driven process, but it could also counteract it. Once 'modernization' is set in motion there are losers on the ground, people's way of life and welfare is affected, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. This inevitably leads to some kind of popular response, resistance or protest (passive or active) to the changes. This response can take many forms and in turn adapt to previously

[1] Morell (2011a).
[2] Morell, Gadd and Myrdal (2011); Statistics Sweden (WWW.SCB.se)
[3] Morell (2001), p. 59-61; Flygare & Isacson (2003), p. 142

expressed political-ideological standpoints and, if the response is strong, affect the actual processes through some form of political action.[4]

Urbanization, rural depopulation and local government reform

Urbanization was strong throughout the 20th century. By mid-century 50 percent of the total Swedish population lived in towns and cities. As many lived in the countryside, some of them in small agglomerations (often founded around extractive industries, old iron works or around railway hubs). A third of the population lived in sparsely populated 'genuinely' rural areas. By 1980 the population share living in this genuine countryside was down at 18 percent. In 1940, 75 percent of the people in genuinely rural areas lived in agricultural households, 31 percent of these people were adults gainfully employed in agriculture. By 1980 only 15 percent of those living in such areas were gainfully employed in agriculture.[5] This reflects the increased prevalence of industry and service employments, but foremost commuting.

Urbanization, and raised local government responsibilities for social services, health and old age care and schooling, gave arguments for local government reform. The civil local governments established in 1862 were either based on towns or countryside church parishes. Some of the parish-communes (*kommuner*) were very small comprising just a few hundred people. By a reform in 1952, the 2,281 parish based local governments were merged into 816 communal districts. The local governing of towns was left untouched. Another, concentration reform was attempted following a parliamentary decision in 1962. This time, planners resorted to modern economic-geographical theories, according to which there should be a municipality, an agglomerated center, in each commune. Each commune should have a large enough population to be able to provide schooling and all basic services and there should be varied workplaces for the population within each commune. Thus, several small rural communities were to be merged together, often involving a small town or even a city. This reform implied that the formal distinction between countryside and towns was eradicated. By 1971 the reform was made compulsory and by the mid-1970s around 220 communes resulted.[6]

Not only did the local government reforms wipe away the political self-governance of the rural communities, they also implied that the voting power of farmers, mostly supporting the Peasant party/Center party or the Conservatives became balanced by Social Democratic votes from people employed in industries of the towns the rural areas were merged with, so that local majorities for the parties dominating the rural areas were wiped out.[7]

[4] Cf. considerations in Scott (1985).
[5] SCB Historical Statistics of Sweden 1, tables 4, 14, 23-24, FOB 1970: 8, FOB 1980: 5.1-6.2; WWW.SCB.SE
[6] Gustafsson (1980); SOU 1944:37; SOU 1961:9.
[7] This can be shown by comparing the *actual* voting results in small communes in 1962, before the reform of 1971, with the contra factual election result for the same year for a merged commune would have been had these communes already merged by 1962. For example, in 1962 the local government election in two rural districts Dingtuna and Kungsåra adjacent to the major industrial town Västerås, resulted in a non-socialist majority. Conservatives, the Center party and the Liberals together reached 62 % in Dingtuna and 52 % in Kungsåra, while Social Democrats and Communists reached 38 % and 48 % in the two localities. If these constituencies had been merged with Västerås already by 1962 (they were by 1971), the inhabitants of them would have been governed by a 62-38 % socialist majority. In fact the Social Democrats, very strong in Västerås town, would alone have reached 59 % in Västerås, including Dingtuna and Kungsåra, and all other rural districts added to the town-commune by 1971 (SOS *Valstatistik, Kommunala valen* 1919-1966, *Kommunala valen* 1962:II).

The mergers transformed the rural communities into dependent parts of larger entities. Many schools were closed, local club branches were merged and even the church services were sometimes distributed between the parishes belonging to the same enlarged municipality. The old rural parishes simply retained less and less specific concerns of their own. As more and more people living in them switched to jobs in nearby towns and as secondary school children were bussed to town schools, daily rural-urban contacts emerged on another scale than before, and although people retained a rural identity they more and more became – as indeed was the plan – parts of larger functional communities.

The multitude of economic and civic associations in the countryside, which had emerged in the aftermath of the success of the crisis agreement of 1933 and the regulation of agriculture, dwindled in the post-war era. There, had been local branches of cooperatives, thresher associations and cooperative freezers for food storage, sauna associations and cooperative washhouses, to name a few. The temperance movement had been influential and had held libraries and community halls. Church related activities had also been important, either through dissident evangelist churches or via the state Lutheran church. Local branches of the RLF as well as of the Peasant party had been set up in many localities. The youth organization of the same party, SLU (The Swedish Rural Youth) was particularly important. SLU organized a multitude of social, sport and education activities. Similarly, the non-political JUF (Association of Agricultural Youth) and the 4H movement focused on education and farm-related entrepreneurship. Many women were engaged in the Peasant party women´s organization, SLKF, (The Swedish Rural Women's Association). It fostered a strong rural woman identity and campaigned for housewife vacations and in due course childcare provisions.[8]

Such civic organizations had secured the social capital of the countryside and some of them contributed a shield against the waves of urbanization. Some of them nurtured a particular rural habitus. This tendency was also manifested in national and regional farmers' exhibitions, which were gradually transformed from informative meetings into massive manifestations largely directed towards the non-farm public. Here, a growing cult of the (mythological) archetypical peasant farm, inherited over several generations was fostered. Farmers who could prove such legacy were awarded. Thus, alongside the professionalization and modernization trends, discourses of cultural ruralism had been fostered.[9]

With on-going urbanization, secularization, improved communications deliberate administrative restructuring, such manifestations faded away during the post-war period.

The Industrial labor pull factor

Decrease of the agriculture labor force and farm enlargement occurred in most West European countries, but tendencies were stronger in Sweden than elsewhere. One explanation lies in the exceptional growth of the industrial and public service sectors during the 'golden age', from 1950 to 1975. Sweden benefitted from having an intact production apparatus when Europe was to be rebuilt after the war. Energy production, based on extensive hydropower and from the 1970s increasingly on nuclear power was built up, the public sector – concerning health care, education

[8] Flygare & Isacson (2011), 227-231; Waltersson (2005).
[9] Dackling (2013); Morell (2013).

and social services – expanded vigorously. Thus industries, and later the public service sector cried for labor. Additional labor power was recruited from three sources. From the mid-1950s there was considerable labor immigration. Firstly, workers came mainly from Finland, later from Italy Yugoslavia and Turkey. Secondly, married women were recruited to industries and to employments in the public service sector. Finally, young people of both sexes from farm environments were pulled into urban industrial and service jobs.[10]

The growing sectors not only provided higher incomes than smallholders or farm laborers could attain, but contrary to much industrial and forestry work in earlier decades, they provided year-around jobs. Low unemployment levels and improved security nets of the welfare state, with sickness insurance, improved old age pensions and unemployment benefits meant that few needed a smallholding to rely on for what could be called personal insurance reasons.[11]

There was also an industry related factor *pushing* labor from agriculture. The 'green revolution' appeared as part of a symbiosis between industry and agriculture: agricultural machinery, foremost tractors, milking machines and combine harvesters spread widely and became more functional after the war. The entire countryside was electrified and various kinds of new pesticides made manual-mechanic weeding redundant. Machines, artificial fertilizers, other chemical inputs and petroleum fuel got cheaper, particularly compared to labor. Therefore, already from the 1940s, many larger farmers got rid of employed wageworkers. A model emerged, where the male head of farm, became the only person fully employed on the farm, while other family members including the female head of farm (the farm wife), who often had a part-time employment in the public service sector securing regular cash incomes, managed the household and contributed regular farm work in peak seasons.[12]

Thus, a good deal of the explanation of the transformation depended on the work of market forces. But there is another partial explanation which is political and which also was of importance.

The establishing of a structural dirigiste agricultural policy

Up to the late 1930s agricultural policy had rested on two legs: efforts to stimulate the creation of new smallholdings[13], and, from around 1930, to secure farm incomes via governmental regulation of the agricultural product market. Following the depression, and world agricultural trade crisis, prohibitive tariff protection was set up for all goods produced domestically, which had also been imported. Fees on domestic consumption of milk, butter margarine, meat etc. was collected and the proceeds were used to finance export of goods, particularly butter, which were produced in quantities beyond domestic needs.[14]

Such policies appeared reasonable when there was grave industrial unemployment and collapsing incomes for farmers and the ruin for smallholders would have aggravated the situation. But when industrial expansion and rising

[10] Magnusson (2000); Schön (2010).
[11] Bäcklund (1989); Morell (1993)
[12] Morell (1993).
[13] Edling (1996).
[14] Morell (2009).

wages was foreseen, the safeguarding of incomes for large number of farmers, implying food prices above free trade levels and surpluses that had to be sold at loss, they turned – according to a growing new consensus – problematic.

Therefore, in 1942, the Peasant party minister of agriculture in the collective wartime cabinet (including all parliamentary parties except the communists) set up a committee with representation from the cooperative movement leadership, which negotiated the basis of a wholly new agricultural policy proposed in 1946[15]. It rested on three pillars. The *efficiency objective* meant that farming was to be efficient, in the sense that production costs should be kept down. This called for on farm 'rationalization' (mechanization), but also structural 'rationalization' implying the creating of a structure of large enough viable farms. This implied a reduction in the number of small farms, which were believed incapable of becoming fully mechanized and using their labor effectively. When farms were mechanically rationalized the 'farm wife' could leave the productive sector and concentrate on household work; that was believed to stop the flow of young women leaving the farm sector. The *production objective* implied that agriculture should achieve an output just under the domestic national peacetime food requirement (the contingency objective). The *income objective* meant that farms of a certain size, aided with the remaining price subsidies should be economically viable and let its household members receive incomes and living standards equivalent to families gaining their main incomes from industrial labor. Rational operations, it was argued, was only attainable on 'normal farms' of 20-30 hectares, but as the majority of farms was smaller than that, the objective was redefined as to achieve profitability for 'basic farms' of 10-20 hectares. Agroforestry combinations were considered justifiable, but farms whose owners could not attain equality of income with or without a sideline occupation should be closed down. Border protection was considered necessary in order to achieve the production target prompted by the blockade during the war years, because Swedish agriculture exposed to full competition would be partly put out of business in a free market. The parliament accepted most of the proposals presented by the committee in a decision in 1947.[16]

Direct measures were taken to speed up the shaping of a farm structure consisting of reasonably large, economically viable family farms. The chosen agents were the county agricultural boards (*lantbruksnämnder*) into which the previous boards distributing governmental loans to smallholdings had been reconstituted. They were armed with Land Acquisition Act of 1945 and the 1946 Pre-emption Act. The boards were also endowed with financial support via the land fund, which had previously been set up for providing prospective smallholders with land. Thus empowered the boards were to purchase farmland that was on the market, at the selling price, and then use it to reinforce other farms so they became profitable. The Land Acquisition Act – prompted by the Peasant party and proposed by their war time minister of agriculture[17] –was a follow up of an earlier law prohibiting that corporate bodies both farmland (including forestland) and was intended to keep the land in the hands of the farming class and to prevent inappropriate acquisitions, such as purchases by way of speculation or capital investment. Purchases were to be examined by the agricultural boards. Potentially these were strong measures, but as all enactments included exceptions regarding intra-familiar

[15] Bjärsdal (1992), p. 232.
[16] Morell (2011b). On the gender related issues in the proposals, see Flygare (2008).
[17] Bjärsdal (1992), 248.

purchase and inheritance processes the efficiency was not as high as optimists expected.[18] According to one study of the years between 1951 and 1961 the agricultural boards were involved in 14 percent of farm closures in three studied counties (in many other cases owners retained ownership but leased out the land). A corresponding investigation carried out for the years 1962-75, however, shows the boards to have been involved in 35 percent of merger and farm closure cases.[19]

This increase reflects a radicalization of rationalization policy in the 1960s. The Social Democratic government talked of intensified rationalization. In 1965 they replaced the land acquisition law with a new one, which allowed public (state or local government) authorities or corporate bodies to buy farm land and forest land, and while up to then the family farm had been promoted as the ideal production form, such farms ceased now to be prioritized. Smallholders were denied the premium credits, which for example farm output processing firms or forest companies attained. 'Price pressure policy', i.e. pressed down agricultural prices (prices were still negotiated between the government and the farm organizations) was to squeeze smallholdings to close down and the remaining farmers into further rationalizing. The acreage of arable farmland was to be reduced by up to a third (implying the closing down of many remaining smallholdings deemed 'inefficient') and the total farm output should no longer reach close to the national peacetime food requirement, but only to 80 percent of it. This policy was nailed in a parliamentary decision in 1967, and the goals were to be reached within 10 years.[20]

Furthermore, agricultural policy became, by the 1950s an integral part of the general economic and labor market policy worked out by two economists of the general trade union (LO), which acted in tandem with the Social Democratic government. The new policy aimed at transferring manpower (and capital) from industries, lines of business and firms with low productivity to those with high productivity. The goal was to combine high growth rates and full employment with low inflation to preserve the competitive power on the world market. In order to achieve the objectives, industries should be in a permanent restructuring process. This was to be achieved by use of a solidaristic wage policy, which stipulated that wages for the same type of job should be equal across companies and industries, although the more efficient ones would benefit as they could really pay more. In this way, the least efficient companies (or branches) should be forced out of business, while gains among those more successful, would attract capital and labor and lead to their expansion. This would secure progress, but also create temporary unemployment. 'Active labor market policy', however, with re-schooling and (geographical) mobility incentives stimulating people to move to where the jobs were, was to solve that problem.[21]

Arguably the agricultural sector, which generally showed lower productivity and wages, than manufacturing industries, was the branch strongest affected by this policy. Much effort was set into the relocation allowances, re-schooling programs and severance payments. This contributed to the depopulation of rural areas particularly in Northern Sweden. In the metropolitan centers, a housing problem emerged, triggering the so-called 'million program'

[18] Morell (2011b)
[19] Tiderius (1977).
[20] Flygare & Isacson (2003), 233-235.
[21] See e.g. Ullenhag (1971); Magnusson (2000); Molinder (2017), esp. pp. 37-42.

according to which 1000,000 homes, mostly in suburban large blockhouses should be constructed in ten years. In the depopulation areas, it was obvious that the ongoing outflow of people aggravated the unemployment situation, as schools, local branches of public service institutions, shops and bus lines had to close down, because of lacking pupils, citizens and customers. The situation worsened as a new transport policy from 1963 favored that rail lines should carry their own costs and not be subsidized. This caused closures. Stubborn criticism from the opposition Center party (the previous Peasant party), fearing collapse of northern farm and industrial communities, forced the government to accept, by 1963, a mild switch to a 'localization policy'. Some of the money channeled via the Labor Market Board, AMS (*ArbetsMarknadsStyrelsen)* was hitherto used to subsidize employers and new enterprises in the Northern inland and other crisis regions.[22]

The politicized protests

At first the farmer community at large welcomed the Agricultural Boards as helpful experts. They assisted with advice and could generate loans for beneficial modernization that eased life for many farm families. As time went and more and more inflicting and radical measures were used, however, the boards came to be hated. On the local level this was primarily because they could determine which farm, and farm family was to attain premium modernization loans and help to get more land, and which farm and farm family was denied such support, but rather got 'help' to dismantle their farm, be re-schooled to industrial jobs and advised to move (supported by governmental relocation allowances) to suburbs around Stockholm or Gothenburg. In the competitive environment, when farm subsidies were related to output levels and farm gate prices were squeezed, the choices of the boards, in many instances meant life or death for a farm and it created tension and suspiciousness within farm communities. The critique was intensified when the farm price pressure for rationalization was intensified in the 1960s. The farmers' union, RLF) protested vigorously in the press and with demonstrations against the reduction of output levels and the forest planting of large tracts of arable land in many areas.[23]

By then, the opposition against the agricultural boards melted together with an emerging critique against the 'centralistic' industrial development, which left Northern Sweden empty and concentrated population to industrial centers in the south. The acronym AMS was spelled out All Must go South and the theme of the structural rationalization and the activities of the agricultural boards, was used in a popular TV-series, 'Home to the hamlet', *Hem till byn*, which was broadcasted first in 1971-76, and later throughout the 1990s and up to 2006. It mirrored experiences of people in rural communities, but also experiences of many of those who had left the countryside already and ended up in a new-built suburb.[24] This became integrated with an aspiring, post-Rachel Carson environmentalism, emerging critique of a society centered around eternal economic growth and a kind of anti-civilizationist, 'green wave', 'counter culture' promoting holism and returning to the countryside, fed by the 1972 'Limits to Growth' report commissioned by the Rome Club. Vaguely one can possibly establish links to the post-1968 New Left and even to the hippie movement, all

[22] Cf. Magnusson (2000); Molinder et al (2017).
[23] Cf. Flygare & Isacson (2003), 232, 235-237.
[24] Holmberg (1998), pp. 9-15, There were other, similar cultural manifestations.

'alternative movements' in various ways reflecting a crisis of the established industrial capitalist Western Society.[25] One special aspect was the anti-nuclear power movement[26].

Several themes mentioned here were international trends formulated in the 1960s and early 1970s, but in Sweden they were captured and driven more clearly than in other places by a major anti-socialist political party, the Center party, originally the Peasant party. Increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s the Center party framed the conflict as being between 'centralistic', large scale industry-loving socialistic Social Democrats and themselves promoting a 'decentralized' society, with self-governing regions and communes.[27]

This is increasingly evident from the party programs from 1959, 1970 and 1981,[28] but even more so from the editorials of the 258 issues of the Party monthly paper *Svensk Politik* (Swedish Politics) published 1960-1980. The thematic development of the editorials is revealing. 24 percent of the issues had editorials discussing regional policy. The party and the paper attacked the 'geographical mobility' that was a cornerstone of the Social Democratic labor market policy. Not only did it aggravate, it was argued, marked-induced depopulation in inland areas, it also caused congestion problems, housing problems, social misery, and, what could be described in Marxian terms (they never used) as alienation, in the expanding metropolitan areas. Such articles were particularly common from the early 1960s – when the Center party actually forced the government to propose some mild regional 'localization' measures – until the mid-1970s when the Center party formed government. Apart from tax deduction and subsidies for establishments in depopulating areas, the proposed measures included a kind of obligatory licensing for larger employing establishments in Metropolitan Stockholm, which the party meant grew too fast. Such articles reemerged in 1979 and 1980 following an internal crisis for the Center led government. Often the articles acknowledged that the Social Democrats had come to understand that regional localization policy was necessary but that they acted to reluctantly and in the end stressed the 'geographical mobility'.[29]

On a similar theme but more ideologically outspoken were editorials (in ten percent of all issues) formulating a 'decentralist' policy, and visions of a 'local society'. This became increasingly common in the second half of the 1970s. In 1976 for example every second issue had an editorial discussing 'decentralization'. Some young party ideologists went further and spoke of a decentralist middle way between liberal free market-force capitalism in the west and 'state capitalism' in the east, promoting cooperative firms and underlining that the current cooperation between the Center party and the other non-socialist parties, was a parenthesis, and that the natural collaborator of the Center party was the Social Democrats. But they were fiercely contested.[30]

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[25] See further Reich (1971); Roszak (1973); Jonsson (1983), 123-129. The popular weekly paper *Land,* published by the merged RLF and central cooperative movement from 1971 engaged heavily in the green wave movement. Cf. Holmberg (1998), 59.
[26] Anselm (2000), chapters 3-4
[27] Holmberg (1998).
[28] Party programs for the Centerpartiet 1959, 1970, 1981, *Svensk datatjänst*.
[29] *Svensk Politik*, 1960-1980. On the critique of the metropolitan development, cf. Holmberg (1998), 45-57, 60-66. The writings of Norwegian anthropologist Ottar Brox on the conflicts between central bureaucracy and local livelihoods in northernmost Norway, was an important inspiration (Brox 1969).
[30] See the debate in issues 3, 5 and 8 of 1978 between the 'Center radical', Håkan Larsson, and 'traditionalists' who stressed the strong non-socialist tradition of the party. Cf. concerning the radicalized youth organization of the Center party (CUF) Holmberg (1998), 24-26, 141-161.

Six percent of the issues held editorials criticizing the local government mergers, promoting the splitting up of merged municipalities and/or promoting expanded regional political autonomy. These were most common up to around 1970 and the strongest complain was that the mergers became obligatory and that populations in the merged communes had no veto.[31]

Eleven percent of the issues had editorials discussing agriculture and agricultural policy. Generally, it was claimed that the Social Democratic government was hostile to farmers and farming. In the early 1960s the editorials attacked what was claimed to be a failure to increase the income levels among smallholders. Throughout, it was claimed that Social Democrats only paid lip service to the formulation in the 1947 decision (repeated in 1959, and 1971) that farm families should be guaranteed the same income standards as families, which were dependent on industrial employments. The paper attacked the new land acquisition law of 1965[32], the hard line 'price pressure' rationalization policy and the efforts to decrease total output down to 80 percent of national food requirements, which had been postulated in the agricultural policy decision of 1967. This reduction caused risks in the event of a new war and blockade and it was allegedly unmoral, as global starvation was believed to be threatening. Finally, the cultural landscape was destroyed when agricultural land was reverted into forest.[33]

Five percent of the issues, evenly spread over the years, had editorials claiming that the Social Democrats favored large-scale industry and squeezed small-scale entrepreneurs particularly by keeping them disadvantaged on the credit market. Some of the articles praised the social benefits of small firms, some argued for diseconomies of scale. Finally, following a parliament interpellation on the risks of nuclear power, established contacts with nuclear power skeptical physician and Nobel Laureate Hannes Alvén and a speech by Alvén at the 1973 Center Party Congress, the party leadership *followed* by its grassroots endorsed a strong antinuclear stance.[34] Anti-nuclear power editorials started to pop up in 1973, and became more and more frequent. From 1977 onwards, regularly more than half the issues each year dealt with nuclear power. The concrete risks of nuclear power was highlighted, but sometimes the big nuclear power plant was used in the decentralization rhetoric, as the ultimate symbol of large scale industry, destructive profit-and-growth-first policy and centralism.[35]

Throughout there were articles accusing Social Democrats for 'socialism', sometimes equated with 'centralism'. Often, particularly in the 1970s, the Social Democratic regime up to 1976 was accused for *dirigisme*. There was, however, a large measure of dirigisme in the Center visions as well. This is evident in the party's alternative 'physical

[31] *Svensk Politik* 1960-1980.
[32] The conflict over the Land acquisition reform and the question concerning who should own the forest had been fiercely discussed already in the 1950s. Social Democrats, backed by forest companies and forest industry trade unions preferred large forest companies (or state ownership of forests) as such owners were thought to guarantee stable supplies of raw material for processing industries. They claimed peasant farmers combining farming with forestry used their forest merely to subsidize farming and delivered wood irregularly. Moreover, peasant ownership was thought incompatible with the swift mechanization of forestry. Farmer's organizations on the other hand expressed how vital the possibility to own forest and work seasonally in forestry was for farmers. See Ivarsson (1977).
[33] *Svensk Politik* 1960-1980.
[34] Schagerholm (1993), 74-78.
[35] *Svensk Politik* 1973-80, in particular issues 7 and 13 1978.

nation plan' according to which the growth of the metropolitan areas should be broken and where they promoted framing goals for the size of population in each county and political means to attain these goals.[36]

Thus, in the 1970s the Center party formulated ideological stances that seemed 'green', sometimes anti-capitalist, clearly anti large-scale industry and sometimes even questioning economic growth and corporate profitability as the golden measure of progress. De facto the party promoted a strong governmental active policy of localization of firms, thus constraining the free mobility of capital. Particularly when it came to the question of nuclear power, the Center party became aligned with non parliamentary leftist activist groupings and in the referendum on nuclear power plants – in which all three alternatives (albeit two more reluctant) talked of dismantling nuclear power plants, the party shared leadership with the Communists.[37]

This is ironic, because this was also the time when the party more clearly than ever before sided together with the other non-socialist parties, the liberals and the conservatives. In the wake of large and heated opinions against nuclear power, which the Center Party (but certainly not the conservatives or the liberals) capitalized on – to the degree that it grew to become the largest, instead of previously the smallest non-socialist party – the three parties ousted the Social Democrats from power for the first time in 40 years in 1976.[38] Although Social democrats returned to power in 1982 and even collaborated briefly with the Center Party after the crisis of the early 1990s, the events of 1976 signaled a decisive change.

The ideological background

One question remains. How was it that the two parties behind the successful compromise in 1933, which according to some interpretations – along with similar agreements in Norway and Denmark – was a major factor blocking the growth of rural fascism in Scandinavia[39], and which returned in coalition in the 1950, became the principal political enemies of the 1960s and 1970s?

The answer lies in their principal ideologies.

The Social Democrats was a Marxist party developing with the growth of industrialism, in close collaboration with trade unions organizing industrial workers. The Swedish party was closely related to the German, and the first program was a slightly modified translation of the German party's program. Marxists foresaw the dissolution of peasantries, into capitalist farmers and agricultural laborers. As its German sister party, Swedish Social Democracy had grave problems to develop a consistent agricultural policy at a time, when it seemed small-scale agriculture gained importance.[40] As generalization of voting rights was on the agenda in the early 20th century, it turned out important to attract large masses of landless laborers, some of whom aspired to attain farm plots of their own. Social Democrats pleaded for

[36] *Svensk Politik* issue 2 1962 (dirigisme), issue 11-12 1972 (the national plan*)*.
[37] Holmberg (1998) passim; Anselm (2000), 259-3904; Schagerholm (1993), 104-108
[38] Holmberg & Asp (1984), 39-43; Schagerholm (1993), 86.
[39] Thullberg (1977); Just (2009). Not only the compromises but also the agrarian (and conservative) parties' ability to assimilate and neutralize the right wing sentiments was important Cf. Lindström (1985), 184-186.
[40] On the German Social democracy, cf. Hussain & Tribe (1983); Hussain & Tribe (1984); Alavi & Shanin (1988). Cf. Edling (1996) on relations to the Swedish party

nationalization of land but in 1904 they also started to favor secured tenancy rights for smallholders. Approaching the voting reform of 1909 (that granted second chamber voting right to all *men*, irrespective of incomes and property) Social Democrats expressed themselves more causally on the matter of land-nationalization. It was not a question of expropriating land from smallholders, rather to secure access to land for non-speculating owners. Still, when the party, or the related farm workers' union talked of cooperation, they meant collective farms.

It was apparent, however, that potential smallholders preferred full ownership rights, which was on the liberal agenda, and when the party from 1911 came under the influence of the radical liberal, Carl Lindhagen, it redirected itself to a position defending small holding farmers. It has been claimed that from then on the party hand one (Marxist) policy for industry and another (non Marxist) for agriculture.[41] Others claim the break with previous policies was not clear. Rather the party clarified the formulation of a smallholder policy embarked on since 1904. Still, the party promoted increased public land ownership and smallholdings, which did not exploit wage labor was to bed be protected against exploitation by banks and large estates, towards whom hostility was still expressed.[42]

Re-reading the party programs from the early 20th century up to the 1970s, the continuous, stubborn secularity and clear references to Marxist orthodoxy are striking features.[43] It might be held, though, that the performance of the party in power, pointed elsewhere.

Social Democracy was, however, rarely in a position to pursue its policies without compromises with other forces. Up to 1933 the party stubbornly defended free trade, as that guaranteed low food prices for industrial workers. The compromise with the Peasant party in 1933, sacrificed this, but by securing agricultural incomes it reduced competition on the strained labor market and by the agrarians' acceptance of the expansionist unemployment policy, involving market wages to people engaged in public crisis work, the closely related trade unions received help to control the supply price of labor.[44]

The 1947 agricultural policy was expected to reduce food prices and secure labor recruitment to industry, as was the active labor market policy, including the 'geographical mobility' measures and the solidaristic wage policy. In the end it was to promote industrial progress and secure the position of the industrial workers (and their unions). The land acquisition law of 1945 (made permanent in 1948) was *not* in the interest of the party, since it tended to preserve a potentially inefficient farm sector. In contrast its reformation in 1965, which granted permission or corporate bodies again to buy forest and farm land was in line with their long- term policy. This was true with the radicalization of the 'rationalization policy' of 1967 as well.

The background of the Center party/Peasant party is more complicated. In the late 19th century representatives of landowning peasant farmers dominated the second chamber of the parliament. This was because voting rights were

[41] Tingsten (1941), 220-224; Björlin (1974).
[42] Thörnqvist (1989), 54-57.
[43] Party programs for Socialdemokratiska arbetarepartiet 1905, 1911, 1920, 1944, 1960, 1975, *Svensk Datatjänst*
[44] Cf. Rothstein (1992).

restricted to persons with high income or with some worth of landed property. This fitted the dominating class of Swedish freeholders well. At the time these representatives turned into a very conservative force.[45]

When the voting reforms in 1909 (for women in 1918-21) was on the agenda, the descendants of these politically established groups remained as stubbornly against as they could and in the early 1910s organizational efforts led to the formation of two parties, the Peasant party (*Bondeförbundet*) in 1914 and The National Association of Farmers (*Jordbrukarnas riksförbund*) in 1915 also arguing against the common vote. The latter party was somewhat more conservative and expressed racist formulations in its 1920 program which the Peasant party had lacked up to then. Similarities dominated, both rested firmly on Christian grounds, both were anti-bureaucratic, anti-industrialist, even anti-capitalist as much as trusts, cartels, large companies and not least financial institutions was concerned. First and foremost, they were both anti-socialist, stubbornly defending private – *individual*, non-corporate – ownership. Both were also protectionist, and still throughout the 1920s the Peasant Association, into which the two parties merged in 1921, along with the Conservatives supported the introduction of protectionist measures for domestic agriculture. In short, they appeared as nationalist, antimodernist socially conservative interest parties for peasant farmers and estate owners.[46]

One thread led back to classical 19th century liberalism. According to that view, individuals, not corporate bodies, should own land.[47] In a clash around 1900 between industrial capital and farming interests over the issues of natural resources, foremost forests, both this radical liberal view and a nationalist, conservative, agrarianist view faced up. The issue concerned the right for forest companies to buy farmland with forest in the north.[48]

Representatives of industrial capital defended the companies' right, on the grounds of the free right of contract and with economic arguments. Against this, agrarianists noted that farmers, needed forest for their support, but foremost expressed notions of the (threatened) peasantry being the sound root of the nation, while urbanization and industrialism led to racial degeneration and cultural downfall.[49] Liberal representatives in the parliament instead argued against the companies from the point of view of individual ownership of land as a root of true democracy. In the end industrial capital lost the battle against this unholy coalition, and in 1906 a law was founded, which prohibited the sales of farmland or forestland to companies, within northern Sweden. In the interwar years it was expanded, and this was the embryo of the 1945 land acquisition legislation.[50] These were also the principles so stubbornly defended by the Center party against the 1965 changes of the land acquisition law.

The two agrarian parties of the 1910s endorsed parts of *both* these anti corporation traditions of 1906, although Nils Wohlin, the *very* conservative chief ideologist of the Farmers National Association strongly opposed the liberal opinion.

[45] Carlsson (1954),
[46] Mohlin (1989a), 1-4; 46-73. The early Peasant party and branches of the related RLF, promoted some of the elements of policies of agrarian fascism, as proposed by Fernández-Prieto, Pan-Montojo & Cabo (2014), 21-24. According to Torstendahl (1969), the peasant party(ies) showed anti-bureaucratic (pp. 21-22), peasant-romanticist (23, 28), anti-capitalist (52-55), corporatist (82-86), anti-democratic (105), and nationalist (160-167) tendencies. Anti-socialism and up to the 1930s, racism could be added (see below). The peasant party's relation to fascist inspired rural movements remained for a while dubious. Cf. Morell (2001), 167-169; Mohlin (1989b).
[47] Prawitz (1951), 8-9.
[48] Sörlin (1988).
[49] Mohlin (1989a); Morell (2001), 28-29; Prawitz (1951), 33-39.
[50] Prawitz (1951), 39-41.

He defended (larger) viable, traditional peasant farms, against the, at that time, expanding smallholdings. To see the future in smallholdings was tempting he wrote, but, they were simply too small to be profitable and stable grain producers and more importantly, he meant that the limited conditions of smallholding colonies might fit other races, 'but not the Germanic, and least of all the Swedish national character'. After the two parties merged in 1921, Wohlin remained a major force within in the Peasant party and continued to promote the protection of established, peasant-traditional farms rather than the foundation of new ones. Disregarding the racist content, this line of thought pointed not only towards the formulation of the 1945-land acquisition law, but also towards the agricultural policy of 1947.[51]

Looking at the program of the Peasant party/the Center party from around 1920 to the 1970s, continuity is striking. The racist-biological lines were captured by the party in 1921, after the merger and remained there until 1933, after which they disappeared. The Christian ground was expressed well into the 1970s. The antisocialist and anti-corporate stances as well as the stubborn support for private individual land ownership and small scale (family) enterprises has remained throughout.[52]

It *was* an interest party for farmers, but it is faulty to claim that it was prone for compromise because it lacked ideology. It was a small party with many potential enemies. By forming a pact in 1933 with what appeared as the worst one, the party received secure protection for its principal interest group, farmers, across foreseeable political changes and election results. The two parties have compromised several times since then, but the affinity between them, which is expressed sometimes, manifested in rhetoric about 'workers and peasants' and referring to both of them being rooted in popular movements, have a false ring. Rather they kept to their ideologies, and negotiated to gain support for vital parts of their programs. When circumstances changed, compromises were broken with reference to ideology, as was what indeed happened in the 1960s and 1970s.

[51] Hagård (1976), 338-339 and passim; Prawitz (1951), 87-89. Quote from Wohlin (1910), 105, translated by MM.
[52] Electional program for Jordbrukarnas Riksförbund 1920; Proposed program for Bondeförbundet 1912; Foundational program for Bondeförbundet 1919, 1933, 1946; Program for Centerpartiet 1959, 1970, 1981; Electional program for Bondeförbundet 1917, 1920, 1921, 1924, 1932, 1936. *Svensk Datatjänst*.

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Submissão: 23/10/2019

Aceite: 25/11/2019