



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE  
HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



# Social Movements in 1980s Sweden

Contention in the Welfare State

*Edited by*  
Helena Hill  
Andrés Brink Pinto

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# Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements

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Around the world, social movements have become legitimate, yet contested, actors in local, national and global politics and civil society, yet we still know relatively little about their longer histories and the trajectories of their development. This series seeks to promote innovative historical research on the history of social movements in the modern period since around 1750. We bring together conceptually-informed studies that analyse labour movements, new social movements and other forms of protest from early modernity to the present. We conceive of ‘social movements’ in the broadest possible sense, encompassing social formations that lie between formal organisations and mere protest events. We also offer a home for studies that systematically explore the political, social, economic and cultural conditions in which social movements can emerge. We are especially interested in transnational and global perspectives on the history of social movements, and in studies that engage critically and creatively with political, social and sociological theories in order to make historically grounded arguments about social movements. This new series seeks to offer innovative historical work on social movements, while also helping to historicise the concept of ‘social movement’. It hopes to revitalise the conversation between historians and historical sociologists in analysing what Charles Tilly has called the ‘dynamics of contention’.

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# Social Movements in 1980s Sweden

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## SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Around the world, social movements have become legitimate, yet contested, actors in local, national and global politics and civil society, yet we still know relatively little about their longer histories and the trajectories of their development. Our series reacts to what can be described as a recent boom in the history of social movements. We can observe a development from the crisis of labour history in the 1980s to the boom in research on social movements in the 2000s. The rise of historical interests in the development of civil society and the role of strong civil societies as well as non-governmental organisations in stabilizing democratically constituted polities has strengthened the interest in social movements as a constituent element of civil societies.

In different parts of the world, social movements continue to have a strong influence on contemporary politics. In Latin America, trade unions, labour parties and various left-of-centre civil society organisations have succeeded in supporting left-of-centre governments. In Europe, peace movements, ecological movements and alliances intent on campaigning against poverty and racial discrimination and discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation have been able to set important political agendas for decades. In other parts of the world, including Africa, India and South East Asia, social movements have played a significant role in various forms of community building and community politics. The contemporary political relevance of social movements has undoubtedly contributed to a growing historical interest in the topic.

Contemporary historians are not only beginning to historicise these relatively recent political developments; they are also trying to relate them to a longer history of social movements, including traditional labour organisations, such as working-class parties and trade unions. In the *longue durée*, we recognise that social movements are by no means a recent phenomenon and are not even an exclusively modern phenomenon, although we realise that the onset of modernity emanating from Europe and North America across the wider world from the eighteenth century onwards marks an important departure point for the development of civil societies and social movements.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the dominance of national history over all other forms of history writing led to a thorough nationalisation of the historical sciences. Hence social movements have been examined traditionally within the framework of the nation state. Only during the last two decades have historians begun to question the validity of such methodological nationalism and to explore the development of social movements in comparative, connective and transnational perspective taking into account processes of transfer, reception and adaptation. While our book series does not preclude work that is still being carried out within national frameworks (for, clearly, there is a place for such studies, given the historical importance of the nation state in history), it hopes to encourage comparative and transnational histories on social movements.

At the same time as historians have begun to research the history of those movements, a range of social theorists, from Jürgen Habermas to Pierre Bourdieu and from Slavoj Žižek to Alain Badiou as well as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to Miguel Abensour, to name but a few, have attempted to provide philosophical-cum-theoretical frameworks in which to place and contextualise the development of social movements. History has arguably been the most empirical of all the social and human sciences, but it will be necessary for historians to explore further to what extent these social theories can be helpful in guiding and framing the empirical work of the historian in making sense of the historical development of social movements. Hence the current series is also hoping to make a contribution to the ongoing dialogue between social theory and the history of social movements.

This series seeks to promote innovative historical research on the history of social movements in the modern period since around 1750. We bring together conceptually-informed studies that analyse labour movements, new social movements and other forms of protest from early

modernity to the present. With this series, we seek to revive, within the context of historiographical developments since the 1970s, a conversation between historians on the one hand and sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists on the other.

Unlike most of the concepts and theories developed by social scientists, we do not see social movements as directly linked, a priori, to processes of social and cultural change and therefore do not adhere to a view that distinguishes between old (labour) and new (middle-class) social movements. Instead, we want to establish the concept 'social movement' as a heuristic device that allows historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to investigate social and political protests in novel settings. Our aim is to historicise notions of social and political activism in order to highlight different notions of political and social protest on both left and right.

Hence, we conceive of 'social movements' in the broadest possible sense, encompassing social formations that lie between formal organisations and mere protest events. But we also include processes of social and cultural change more generally in our understanding of social movements: this goes back to nineteenth-century understandings of 'social movement' as processes of social and cultural change more generally. We also offer a home for studies that systematically explore the political, social, economic and cultural conditions in which social movements can emerge. We are especially interested in transnational and global perspectives on the history of social movements, and in studies that engage critically and creatively with political, social and sociological theories in order to make historically grounded arguments about social movements. In short, this series seeks to offer innovative historical work on social movements, while also helping to historicise the concept of 'social movement'. It also hopes to revitalise the conversation between historians and historical sociologists in analysing what Charles Tilly has called the 'dynamics of contention'.

Helena Hill's and Andrés Brink Pinto's edited collection entitled *Social Movements in 1980s Sweden: Contention in the Welfare State* features a whole range of protest movements that organised against changes to the welfare state as well as mobilizing opposition to neoliberalism and right-wing politics. It ranges widely across squatter movements, environmental movements, anarchist movements, punk movements, and movements organizing rent strikes. While its focus is on 1980s Sweden, it manages successfully to contextualise developments in the model Social Democratic country of Scandinavia in wider European developments. The



volume effectively challenges the notion of the 1980s as a decade in which neoliberalism drove everything before it. Instead it highlights the manifold forms of opposition provided by a wide variety of social movements that had originated in the 1960s and 1970s and were often changing their repertoires of contention in reply to the neoliberal challenges of the 1980s.

The volume also very effectively challenges the widespread notion that social movement protests in Sweden were far less contentious and especially far less violent than in other continental European countries, although several contributions also point out how keeping up a sense of respectability and 'worthiness' did help several social movements in Sweden to get their voice heard and mobilise widely in Swedish society. There was, however, as the editors argue in their introduction, no Swedish exceptionalism in the history of contentious politics in Europe since the 1980s. If there was no conflict-free consensual relationship between social movements and the Swedish state, the question arises how the social movements since the 1980s related to previous movements in Sweden and to contemporary movements elsewhere in Europe. Many of the contributions of this volume shed considerable light of these important questions of chronological (dis)continuity and of transnational exchanges and connections. In doing so they provide a more nuanced and complex picture of the role and positioning of social movements in 1980s Sweden than is prevalent in the existing literature to date.

As the long Social Democratic hegemony drew to an end in the 1980s and as Social Democracy came to accept some of the key neoliberal premises losing its earlier, more radical touch, associated, above all, with the failed Meidner Plan, social movements also began to challenge Social Democracy from the left providing an important forum for mobilising in favour of aims and policies that were previously represented through Swedish Social Democracy. The volume thus, for example, demonstrates very well how the social movements analysed in this book were extremely important for the formation of an autonomous Left and a militant anti-fascism in 1980s Sweden. On the other hand we also see very clearly, how some social movements, in particular the environmental and the peace movement, influenced the mainstream left, in the form of Swedish Social Democracy, to adopt 'greener' policies and policies geared more towards armament controls and disarmament. This points to broader issues of looking at the intersectionality of social movements with a range of more formal political organisations, such as political parties or trade unions

that often shared similar concerns to those advanced by specific social movements.

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Stockholm/Lund  
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Helena Hill  
Andrés Brink Pinto

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book contains research that highlights social movements in 1980s Sweden and their protests against the welfare state, right-wing politics and neoliberalism from different perspectives. The anthology is a contribution to international historical research of 1980s social movements, to Swedish historical research, and to the understanding of the development of social movements and new forms of protest. It is also a contribution to the history of opposition to political parliamentary development in Sweden, as well as opposition to the increasingly influential right-wing politics during the vibrant 1980s. The history about social movements in the 1980s has so far not been researched to any great extent. The book contains chapters dealing with the rise, emergence and development of social movements such as squatter movements, environmental movements and peace movements. It further deals with anarchism and punk as well as rent strikes during the decade. Finally, it is an important contribution to and sheds light on related developments in Europe and places the development in Sweden in a European context.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

*Helena Hill and Andrés Brink Pinto*

In this edited volume the authors examine and analyse the emergence and development, and in some cases also the disappearance, of social movements and activism in the Swedish 1980s. The 1980s have often been described as a decade when the radical social movements of the 1960s and 1970s lost their influence in society and instead, right-wing politics and neoliberalism gained increasingly more impact in many parts of the world. However, the description of the 1980s as dominated by right-wing politics and neoliberal ideas needs to be problematized, since the decade encompassed so much more, and a number of social movements that opposed the political development and protested against neoliberal

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and conservative politics also emerged.<sup>1</sup> The new social movements often used new forms of protest and resistance, and organized themselves in new ways compared to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In recent years, these movements have increasingly become the subject of research. In Europe, research shows that there were several waves of protests during the 1980s against right-wing politics, conservatism, neoliberalism and the state. Protest movements emerged for example in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Denmark and in cities such as Berlin, Zurich and Amsterdam confrontations with the authorities and the police occasionally became both contentious and violent.<sup>2</sup>

Sweden has, together with other Scandinavian countries, been described as distinct from the rest of Europe. Development in Sweden is often considered the product of consensus between the state and society, and Sweden is seen as a country where few major conflicts took place.<sup>3</sup> However, the argument can also be made for a contentious Scandinavian political history, where contentious performances and social movements played an important part in the democratization of Scandinavian societies

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Davies, *The Global 1980s: People, Power and Profit* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Bradford Martin, *The other eighties: A Secret History of America in the age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010); Stephen Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, eds., *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze, *The City is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present* (Oakland: Pm Press, 2014); Joachim C. Häberlen and Jakep Smith, "Struggling for Feelings. The politics of Emotions in the Radical new Left in West-Germany, c 1968–1984," *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 4 (2014): 616–637; Claudio Cattaneo and Miguel A. Martínez, eds., *The Squatters' Movement in Europe: Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014); Squatting Europe Collective, eds., *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013); Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox, eds., *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggle, Anti-austerity Protest* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2012), 434; Bo Rothstein and Lars Trägårdh, "The State and Civil Society in a Historical Perspective. The Swedish Case," in *State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model Reconsidered*, ed. Lars Trägårdh, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

during the last 150 years.<sup>4</sup> Looking back on the last four decades there are numerous examples of social movements that have opposed the prevalent political order. Protests have been directed against the state, the welfare society, Social Democrats and against the growing influence of right-wing politics and neoliberalism. There is still a significant lack of research on social movements in Sweden during the 1980s. The research that has been done shows that protests in Sweden seldom became as violent, spectacular or contentious as in some other European cities, and the protests often lacked the most spectacular instances of conflict between militant social movements and the state that could be seen in other parts of Europe. Although the protests in Sweden were rarely as contentious as in some other places, confrontations between activists and national and local authorities could be both contentious and violent, and the confrontations increased during the decade. At the end of the 1980s, confrontations between the police and squatters, for example, became increasingly more contentious.<sup>5</sup> As Peterson et al. show, most social movements in Sweden have oscillated between two poles in how to engage with the welfare state, to local and national authorities, and to the police force. On the one hand the infrastructure of the welfare state—particularly on a local level—often played a crucial part in enabling organization and activity possible for the movements, and movements were at times met with a benevolent attitude from governmental actors in general and the police in particular. On the other hand, protests were often directed against the welfare state

<sup>4</sup> Flemming Mikkelsen and Stefan Nyzell, “Introduction,” in *Popular struggle and democracy in Scandinavia: 1700–present*, eds. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Dominika V. Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the welfare state: Squatting in Sweden* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Dominika V Polanska and Mattias Wäg, eds., *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer 1968–2018* (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019); Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom, “Why Did it Not Happen Here? The Gradual Radicalization of the Anarchist Movement in Sweden 190–1990,” in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, eds. Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Martin Ericsson, “Ockuperat område. Striden om brandstationen i Jönköping 1982,” in *Politik underifrån: Kollektiva konfrontationer under Sveriges 1900-tal*, eds. Andrés Brink Pinto and Martin Ericsson (Lund: Arkiv förlag 2016); Johan Pries and Karin Zackari, “Här slutar Sverige.’ Ockupationen av Ringgatan i Malmö 10,” in *Politik underifrån: Kollektiva konfrontationer under Sveriges 1900-tal*, eds. Andrés Brink Pinto and Martin Ericsson (Lund: Arkiv förlag 2016).

and local authorities.<sup>6</sup> This complex relationship is discernible in many of this volume's contributions but perhaps most clearly visible in Fredrik Egefur's article about the Swedish anarchists at the *Winter Palace*. Thus, in contrast to the more militant movements in many European cities, the development in Sweden seems to have had a contentious repertoire with relatively more aspects of consensus and negotiation.<sup>7</sup>

However, one main argument of this volume is that we shouldn't take this historical narrative as evidence of an all-encompassing Swedish exceptionalism devoid of contentious social movements. As we hope the contributions will show, struggle, resistance and protests played a greater role in political development in the 1980s Sweden than hitherto has been shown. As put forward by Bart van der Steen in the concluding chapter, we would argue that social movement scholars and historians should be wary of a history that focuses on the most spectacular, contentious or militant expressions of social movements, as this runs the risk of shrouding more commonplace instances of negotiation and navigation within existing political structures. Thus, Sweden is an interesting example of how resistance and conflict have been influenced by violent and contentious movements, as well as by a long tradition of consensus and negotiation, something that this edited volume aims to explore and discuss. We therefore argue that the idea of a Swedish exceptionalism of peaceful cooperation (and perhaps co-optation) between social movements and the state, based upon a national or historical Swedish spirit of consensus (*samförstånd*), needs to be nuanced since it runs the risk of naturalizing a political and social state of phenomena, which should be the focus of research.

The aim of this edited volume is to present new research that analyses social movements and contention in 1980s Sweden in order to challenge and nuance the idea of a conflict-free Scandinavian model where political development has occurred peacefully and in consensus. With the anthology, we want to show social movements with outward and more

<sup>6</sup> Abby Peterson, Håkan Thörn and Mattias Wahlström, "Sweden 1950–2015: Contentious Politics and Social Movements between Confrontation and Conditioned Cooperation," in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia: 1700–Present*, eds. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 103–110. See also Erik Hannerz, *Performing Punk: Subcultural Authentications and the Positioning of the Mainstream*. Diss. (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Polanska, *Contentious Politics in the Welfare State*; Polanska and Wåg, *Ockuperat!; Jämtne and Sörbom, "Why Did it Not Happen Here?"*

militant repertoires, as well as movements that were not as contentious. By showing a variety of social movements and their different protest repertoires against the state, the welfare society and right-wing politics, we want to illustrate the diversity within a complex and multifaceted Swedish 1980s, and the different movements and ideas that existed side by side. The questions examined in the volume are: what social movements arose during the decade, what issues did these pursue, and what did the protests look like? Furthermore, the movements' relations to other social movements in Sweden and the rest of Europe, as well as relations to both earlier and later social movements, are also discussed.

The idea of a Swedish exceptionalism has been increasingly questioned and problematized by scholars. Previous research on social movements and protests in Sweden has shown that popular struggle and collective actions by social movement actors have played an important role in Swedish political history.<sup>8</sup> Social movements that have been studied include, for example, the squatting movement.<sup>9</sup> Håkan Thörn has studied squatting in Gothenburg and Copenhagen during the decade in several publications and has also covered the solidarity movement, for example the movement to support the ANC.<sup>10</sup> However, we still see a lack of studies of social movements and political protest specifically focused on the Swedish 1980s, for example different feminist movements, as well as studies with a synthesizing approach or studies of relations to movements in earlier or later periods.

This edited volume intends to fill part of that research gap. We see the social movements of the 1980s as important to the political development

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Polanska, *Contentious Politics in the Welfare State*; Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjelstadi and Stefan Nyzell, eds., *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia: 1700-present* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Andrés Brink Pinto and Martin Ericsson, eds., *Politik underifrån: Kollektiva konfrontationer under Sveriges 1900-tal* (Lund: Arkiv, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Polanska, *Contentious Politics in the Welfare State*; Polanska and Wåg, *Ockuperat!*; Håkan Thörn, *Solidaritetsens betydelse: Kampen mot apartheid i Sydafrika och framväxten av det globala civilsamhället* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2010); Håkan Thörn, *Stad i rörelse. Stadsomvandlingen och striderna i Haga och Christiania* (Stockholm: Atlas akademi, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Thörn, *Solidaritetsens betydelse* (Stockholm; Håkan Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*); Håkan Thörn, Catrin Wasshede and Tomas Nilson, eds., *Space for Urban Alternatives? Christiania 1971–2011* (Möklinta: Gidlunds Förlag, 2011).



during the decade but also as forerunners to the more radical social movements of the 1990s and onwards. Accordingly, the history of the social movements of the 1980s and the issues that these movements fought for, such as the climate issue, the nuclear issue, identity politics, the rights of minorities, and growing social and economic gaps around the world, are highly topical today.

The chapters included in this volume have been selected because they contain current and new research on social movements in the 1980s Sweden. However, the anthology does not claim to be comprehensive or in any way depict all the social movements, protests, resistance and political struggles that took place in the 1980s; instead, we want to highlight and put forward a selection of different social movements, protesting against different issues during the decade. There are thus a number of different social movements that have not been included here.

In the following, we first describe why we think it is important to discuss historical periodization and why periodization runs the risk of homogenizing history. This is followed by a section on political development during the 1980s, both internationally and in Sweden, and what new social movements occurred during the decade. After that, we describe key concepts and theories in research on social movements that some or all contributions engage with. Finally, the common thread in the anthology's contributions and their main content is described.

## PERIODIZATION IN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

One purpose of this anthology is to discuss historiography and epoch divisions. History is often described in terms such as “waves” (e.g. “the right-wing wave”) or “turns” (e.g. “the linguistic turn”). As described above, we want to nuance and problematize the image of the 1980s right-wing wave by pointing to a number of different social movements that emerged during the decade, partly as protests against the welfare state, right-wing politics and neoliberalism. We do not intend to deny that there was a shift towards right-wing politics in many countries, but we want to highlight that this shift does not mean that there were no simultaneous series of protests and social movements opposing this development.

Clare Hemmings has problematized the use of concepts as epochs, turns and waves. Hemmings believes that events and movements are often fixed to certain decades and historical narratives, and when historical development is described as waves or turns, history runs the risk of being

homogenized and simplified, thereby obscuring all the opposite expressions, currents and political ideologies and opinions that exist in parallel. A number of different and significant events, movements and protests thereby run the risk of becoming invisible.<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Laughlin et al. believe that the wave metaphor can help to identify the specific issues that were highlighted and received attention at a particular time, and that it can help identify historical changes. At the same time, they believe that the wave metaphor also contributes to simplifications, and that the more everyday activism of social movements is at risk of being made invisible. The use of the wave metaphor also implies that events have a clear beginning and end, and thus overemphasizes change.<sup>12</sup> We should therefore be careful with *how* we use the wave metaphor. Contradicting ideologies are dependent on each other and right-wing politics would probably not have become so strong during the decade if opposition to it had not also been so strong. In order to avoid simplifying and homogenizing historiographies, we therefore should problematize historical periodization and the use of terms as “turns” and “waves”, and understand history as a series of events that replace each other and examine the dynamics and all the different links and relationships between movements and different time periods, and how they are related to each other.<sup>13</sup> In this volume the authors try to do precisely that.

In the volume we want to understand history pluralistically, and study the dynamics of different events, movements and times, as well as how they are interrelated. The point of departure in the 1980s is therefore not a way to fix certain movements and events to a specific decade, but rather to show the complexity and variety of the decade. It also means that we examine both links and connections to various contemporary political movements and events, as well as to movements and events both before and after the 1980s. The social movements we describe here are not

<sup>11</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist political ambivalence and the imaginative archive* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2018); Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011); Hemmings, Clare. “Telling feminist stories,” *Feminist Theory* 6 no 2 (2005); see also Wendy Brown, *Politics out of history* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 100–102.

<sup>12</sup> Kathleen, A. Laughlin et al. “Is it time to jump ship? Historians Rethinking the Waves Metaphor”, *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>13</sup> Hemmings, “Telling feminist stories”.

specific to the 1980s, although the specific political contexts of the 1980s are of course of importance for the movements' development. Nor do we intend to establish a new hegemonic picture of the 1980s. The purpose is instead to illustrate the 1980s as a multifaceted decade where contradictory political and social movements arose and sometimes clashed. The ambition is to discuss how different political movements and ideologies are constantly evolving through opposition and conflict and in relation to each other. Several chapters in the anthology therefore discuss relations to previous and later movements, and how the movements in the 1980s can be understood as both successors to earlier movements and predecessors to movements in later periods.

### 1980S EUROPE

The 1980s can be described in many ways. As already described above, the decade has been characterized by emerging right-wing politics. Another way to describe it is to talk about the long 1980s. The starting point then is the changes that took place in the late 1970s in several countries around the world, for example the many political revolutions and ideological changes that led to the increasing impact of right-wing politics and neoliberalism.<sup>14</sup> From the end of the 1970s, right-wing and neoliberal political values gained increasing influence around the world. Although many neoliberal political reforms were not implemented until the 1990s in Sweden, it was in the 1980s that neoliberal values started to really have an impact. Strong political representatives, such as Ronald Reagan (President of the United States 1981–1989) and Margaret Thatcher (British Prime Minister 1979–1990), and their long tenure of power is often taken as symbolic of the international impact of right-wing politics during the decade. The neoliberal ideas of the 1980s, which gained influence in several different ideological political parties, from Social Democrats to Conservatives, thereby helped to turn the political map far to the right.<sup>15</sup>

Although many anti-democratic regimes remained in power during the 1980s, for example in South Korea, South Africa, Poland or East Germany, the 1980s saw a growing movement of opposition and a

<sup>14</sup> Davies, *The Global 1980s*, 237.

<sup>15</sup> Davies, *The Global 1980s*; Martin, *The Other Eighties*.

number of new social movements emerged around the world, fighting for democracy and freedom. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many dictatorships fell as the result of collective action and social movement struggles; this happened in, for example, South Africa, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990 and ANC won the election in 1994. The long 1980s are usually considered to have ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In Poland, the freedom movement Solidarity led to Lech Walesa becoming president in 1990. Perhaps the most symbolic event for the democracy and solidarity movements of the 1980s was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With that, the Cold War, which had marked world development for over 50 years, was thought to have ended.<sup>16</sup>

The countries of Europe were, of course, strongly influenced by the conservative and neoliberal ideas of the 1980s, but also by the movements for freedom and the movements that led to the fall of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s. The social movements that emerged in 1980s Europe took on the new issues that had become topical. New radical social movements protested against conservative politics and neoliberalism, against housing and youth politics and against the growing economic divisions that increased in several countries. Resistance against nuclear weapons, nuclear power and environmental pollution were other current issues that were brought to attention. In several large cities around Europe, waves of violent riots and confrontations between different political factions arose, and here squatting and protests against prevailing housing policies were central issues that created conflict and contradiction.<sup>17</sup>

Other social movements continued their earlier struggles but often in new arenas and forms, such as the new women's liberation movement. Older movements, such as anarchism, got a boost during the decade and with the punk wave came a new "anti-establishment attitude that became widespread."<sup>18</sup> Markus Lundström's chapter "When anarchism met Punk

<sup>16</sup> Davies, *The Global 1980s*, 240ff.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Andresen and van der Steen, *A European Youth Revolt*; van der Steen, Katzeff and van Hoogenhuijze, *The City is Ours*.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Matthew Worley, "Punk, Politics and British (fan)zines, 1976–84: 'While the World was Dying, did you Wonder why?'" in *History Journal Workshop* 79 (2015): 76–106; Ryan Moore and Michael Roberts, "Do-it-yourself Mobilization: Punk and Social movements," *Mobilization* 14, no. 3 (2009): 273–291; Brian Cogan, "Do They Owe us a Living? Of Course They Do!" Crass, Throbbing Gristle, and Anarchy and

in this volume discusses how the meeting between anarchism and punk revitalized the anarchist movement and contributed to new forms of protest and resistance.

The movements that emerged in Europe were largely transnational and activists in different countries exchanged contacts and travelled between different protest events. At the same time, Bart van der Steen and Knut Andresen stress that the protest movements that emerged in Europe during the 1980s should not be seen as homogeneous. The movements differed in the content of ideas, in who was active, in what political repertoires were used, and in their relation to the state and authorities.<sup>19</sup> The contributions in this volume, which deal with social movements in Sweden, highlight the movements' relationship to and influence from various other social movements in Europe but also show that the diversity of the social movements that arose in Sweden, just as in Europe, was vast.

### THE SWEDISH MODEL AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC HEGEMONY

Swedish social democracy shaped Swedish society from the end of the Second World War to the fall of the Berlin wall. During these decades, the Social Democrats typically polled around 45% of votes in general elections, and in 1968 even got more than 50% of votes. Further, the unions saw high rates of membership, often exceeding 80% of the workforce as a whole, and in practice enacted closed shops in some central export-oriented industries such as the auto industry. This was in part closely connected to the historical compromise between labour and capital, where the state left most of the workings of the labour market to be regulated through collective bargaining on the national level. Within this so-called Swedish model, the state took on responsibilities for the reproductive sector and secured social levelling and social security through a growing welfare state.<sup>20</sup>

Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock," *Journal for study of Radicalism* 1, no. 2 (2008): 77–90.

<sup>19</sup> Andresen and van der Steen, *A European Youth Revolt*.

<sup>20</sup> Klas Åmark, *Hundra år av välfärdspolitik: välfärdsstatens framväxt i Norge och Sverige*, 1st ed., (Boréa: Umeå, 2005).

In many ways, the 1980s can be said to have been the pinnacle of the social democratic economic and welfare regime. In 1980, economic equality was at an all-time high. Further, the labour market saw low unemployment rates. For instance, the highpoint of 3.5% in 1983 was described as a sure sign of economic recession and mass unemployment. This was paired with a large public sector, a large welfare state, and generous systems of transference, such as unemployment benefits and social security.<sup>21</sup>

One way of showcasing the hegemonic position of social democracy is to point towards the fact that some of the perhaps most emblematic welfare reforms, such as a widespread expansion of universally available municipal child care and a significant expansion of the amount of paid maternal/paternal leave (in practice this turned out to be mostly maternal) was enacted by centre-right parties that governed from 1976 to 1982. Another way of illustrating social democratic hegemony can be the absence of a militant or street oriented new left post-1968—such as the *spontis* in Germany—in Sweden. Instead, the leading tendency within the new left, the Maoist Swedish Communist Party SKP (formerly KFML), stressed respectability and work within the traditionally social democratic “old” social movements, such as the unions and the tenants’ movement.<sup>22</sup>

Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström argue that the so-called Swedish model was firmly rooted in the political culture of the old social movements (*folkrörelserna*), and that the social democratic government had close ties to and employed an inclusive strategy towards social movements throughout the post-war decades up to the 1990s. From the 1950s onwards, the Swedish welfare state also took an increasing interest in supporting organizations within civil society. As the traditional social movements, that is the labour movement, the agrarian movement and the free churches, saw falling levels of membership and engagement, the spectre of youth lacking membership in an association (so-called

<sup>21</sup> Jesper Roine and Daniel Waldenström. “Top Incomes in Sweden over the Twentieth Century,” in *Top Incomes: A Global Perspective*, eds. Anthony B. Atkinson, and Thomas Piketty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Erik Bengtsson, *Världens jämlikaste land?* (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Anne Hedén, *Röd stjärna över Sverige, Folkrepubliken Kina som resurs i den svenska vänsterradikaliseringen under 1960- och 1970-talen* (Lund: Sekel, 2008); Helena Hill, *Revolutionärer: kön, klass och kvinnokamp i svensk 1970-talsvänster* (Makadam, Göteborg, 2017); Kjell Östberg, *1968—när allt var i rörelse: sextiotalsradikaliseringen och de sociala rörelserna* (Stockholm: Prisma, 2002).

*föreningslös ungdom*) was put forward as a worrying sign of increasing alienation in a modern society. During the post-war decades, state public inquiries pointed out that membership of any kind of civil society association or social movement correlated with higher levels of political engagement and even better health.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, civil society as a whole was given increasingly generous support from governmental agencies as well as local municipalities. In 1985, membership in youth organizations peaked. In the same year, the state and municipalities supported civil society organizations with substantial sums of money (about 3 billion SEK from the state, and an additional 600 million SEK from the municipalities). Furthermore, social movements could often count on generous—often rent-free—arrangements when an association wanted to use municipal locales, as well as support from the local municipal bureaucracy with how to apply for financial support and in general how to run an association in accordance with older Swedish social movement tradition, that is with formal membership, statutes and representative democracy.<sup>24</sup>

This state support potentially included radical new social movements, at least as long as they adhered to formal democratic internal structures that mirrored established forms of movement, as shown by Fredrik Egefur in this volume. Indeed, the argument can be made that, by international comparison, the generous and inclusive Swedish system also functioned as a form of repressive tolerance or regulatory technique that accepted and incorporated contentious issues and movements—thus leading to a lesser prevalence of street-based militancy or direct confrontations between social movements and the state.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Anders Kassman and Johan Vanstad, “Historiska förändringar av ungdomars engagemang i civilsamhället—en demokratifråga?” *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 124, no. 2 (2022); Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015”.

<sup>24</sup> Kassman and Vanstad, “Historiska förändringar av ungdomars engagemang i civilsamhället”; *Sverige 1986 års folkrörelseutredning* (SOU 1987:33). Ju mer vi är tillsammans betänkande. [D. 1] [Ett förslag som öppnar vägen för utökad föreningsmedverkan i kommuner och landsting]. Stockholm: Allmänna förl., 1987), 55–58.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom, “Why did it not happen here”; Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015”.

## THE SWEDISH 1980S

During the 1980s, neoliberal and right-wing ideas also began to gain ground in Sweden. The neoliberal and right-wing political currents had taken hold in society, and throughout the 1980s a series of discursive political changes took place that led politics to the right.<sup>26</sup> In Sweden, the Social Democrats' 40-years in government was broken in 1976 when the three centre-right parties won the election and formed an alliance government. The Social Democratic party did, however, regain power in 1982 and continued to rule until 1991. There was also a shift to the right within the Social Democrats. The welfare system was increasingly examined and criticized in the public debate. Kjell Östberg and Jenny Anderson conclude that parties from “the right to the left”<sup>27</sup> came to accept many of the neoliberal demands made during the period and by the end of the 1980s both “the Swedish model” and the welfare society had “been thoroughly questioned and criticized”.<sup>28</sup>

Neoliberal politics that became more influential during the 1980s, was the belief in greater economic and individual freedom, the belief that the state would make as little intervention as possible in the lives of individuals, and the praising of the free market.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, the welfare state was criticized and challenged to an increasing degree, often from the right as shown by Katrin Uba and Jenny Jansson in this volume.<sup>30</sup> In

<sup>26</sup> Kristina Boréus, *Högervåg: nyliberalismen och kampen om språket i svensk debatt 1969–1989* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1994); Kristina Boréus, “The shift to the right: Neoliberalism in argumentation and language in the Swedish public debate since 1969,” *European Journal of Political Research* 31, no. 3 (1997): 257–286.

<sup>27</sup> Kjell Östberg and Jenny Andersson, *Sveriges historia 1965–2012* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2013), 302.

<sup>28</sup> Östberg and Andersson, *Sveriges historia 1965–2012*, 302. See also Lars Trägårdh, “The ‘Civil Society’ Debate in Sweden. The Welfare State Challenged,” in *State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model Reconsidered*. ed. Lars Trägårdh (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Carl-Michael Edenborg, “Nyliberalismen från vaggan till graven,” in *Sekelslut: Idéhistoriska perspektiv på 1980- och 1990-talen*, eds. Anders Burman and Lena Lennerhed (Stockholm: Atlas akademi, 2011); Torbjörn Nilsson, *Moderaterna, marknaden och makten: svensk högerpolitik under avregleringens tid, 1976–1991* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola 2003); Martin Wiklund, *I det modernas landskap: Historisk orientering och kritiska berättelser om det moderna Sverige mellan 1960 och 1990* (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposium, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> See also Nilsson, *Moderaterna, marknaden och makten*; Wiklund, *I det modernas landskap*.



1978, the right-wing influential think tank and book publisher Timbro was created, which became a strong channel for the Swedish Employers' Association (SAF) and its neoliberal message during the 1980s. Another symbolic event that marked the turn towards right-wing politics and neoliberalism was the demonstration against wage earners funds in October 1983, which gathered 75,000 demonstrators, one of the largest demonstrations in Sweden ever.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is important to note that most institutional and policy changes that we can describe as neoliberal were enacted later in Sweden. For instance, the cutbacks and austerity measures enacted towards unemployment benefits, the privatization of telecommunications and the construction of a voucher system and a pseudo-market in primary education all were enacted during the 1990s. Further, disciplinary and regulatory biopolitical regimes towards welfare recipients and the shifting of primary care responsibilities towards civil society and/or families belong primarily to the 2000s. Even though the 1980s saw a change in political discourse and deregulations of the financial market, as a whole Swedish society still remained a social democratic welfare regime with comparatively generous systems and a high degree of decommodification.<sup>32</sup> This is especially clear in contrast to the early wave of neoliberal politics in the Anglo-American world, as well as in comparison to austerity politics in other western European countries.

When the 1970s turned into the 1980s, many of the previously influential radical left movements in Sweden had disappeared, changed or lost their influence in society and as described above, neoliberal and conservative currents were progressing. This development took place in a number of different western countries. Despite, or perhaps because of, the impact of neoliberalism and right-wing politics, opposition and resistance did not subside and opposition to neoliberalism and right-wing politics remained strong during the decade, although it was often performed in new forms and new arenas, as many of the chapters in this volume show. For instance, the 1980s saw a growth and entrenchment of the prominent peace movement and environmental movement, with a national organizational framework that reached most municipalities. The national

<sup>31</sup> Edenberg, "Nyliberalismen från vaggan till graven", 34.

<sup>32</sup> Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

referendum on nuclear power, and its somewhat inconclusive result, made these issues highly topical during the decade. As Anton Öhman shows in his contribution, the question of peace and disarmament was closely intertwined with nuclear weapons and civilian nuclear power. Monica Quirico discusses in her chapter how parts of the environmental movement were radicalized during the decade, while other parts were institutionalized.

Other social movements that arose or developed from previous movements were the solidarity movement where, for example, support for the ANC in South Africa was strong throughout the decade, and the squatting movement. The relationship between squatters and the police was initially relatively good, but developed over the decade to become increasingly confrontational. Other social movements that continued their activities but in other forms included the women's movement. On the one hand, many activists continued within the women's shelter movement and on the other hand, many women got involved in universities and worked to create new spaces such as forums for women's research.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned, research on these movements is still lacking but this anthology examines, highlights and discusses some of these movements.

## HISTORICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES

What is, and isn't, to be counted as a social movement, and exactly where the boundaries should be drawn is a recurring discussion within social movement studies. A minimal definition that is often used, could be that a social movement has some degree of organization, some degree of continuity over time and some use of extra-institutional forms of action.<sup>34</sup> Snow, Soule and Kriesi state that:

...social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant

<sup>33</sup> Ulla Manns, "På två ben i akademien. Om den tidiga kvinnoforskningens projekt," in *Blad till Bladb: en vänbok till Christine våren 2006*, eds. Monica Einarsson, Robert Sandberg, Kekke Stadin, and Martin Wottle (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2006), 107–116; Kerstin Norlander and Kristina Larsson, eds., *Kvinnohus nu! Dagbok från Kvinnohusockupationen i Umeå 13* (Umeå: H:ström akademi 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Doug McAdam and David A. Snow, *Readings on Social Movements: Origins, Dynamics and Outcomes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture or world order, of which they are part.<sup>35</sup>

One central intersection in social movements theories is the relationships between “old” and “new” social movements. The established grand narrative in social movement studies typically makes a distinction between social movements that were formed in the late nineteenth century, in Sweden characterized by the triad of the so-called people’s movements of the (social democratic) labour movement, the free churches and the temperance movement, and the new social movements that erupted post-1968. Whereas the old movements are often described as hierarchical, with formal decision structures and an engagement with the parliamentary political system, the new movements are often described as horizontal, direct democratic and extra-parliamentary. A characterization of old movements as class-based and new as post-material identity-driven can be added to this overarching narrative.<sup>36</sup>

However, once we read this grand narrative in a specific geographical and historical context, such as the Swedish 1980s, and in relation to specific movements, the boundaries become blurred. Alberto Melucci, who was one of those who introduced the theory of new social movements (NSM), has in retrospect played down the distinction between new and old movements and believes that the qualitative difference isn’t so significant.<sup>37</sup> As the authors of the individual chapters in this edited volume clearly demonstrate, the interconnectedness of old and new social movements is clear.

Further, social movements have mainly been associated with various forms of organized and outward-looking, often contentious, forms of protest and resistance.<sup>38</sup> The field of Contentious Politics Studies (CPS)

<sup>35</sup> David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi, “Mapping the Terrain,” in *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi [Electronic resource] (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Claus Offe, “New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics,” *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985); Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements*.

<sup>37</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Nomader i nuet: Sociala rörelser och individuella behov i dagens samhälle* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> See Charles Tilly and Siney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2007); Magnus Wennerhag, *Global rörelse: den globala rättviserörelsen och modernitetens omvandlingar* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2008); Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements*.

is one influential way of analysing social movements. Studies within CPS are often centred on relations between social movement organizations (SMOs) and the state, that either is the direct recipient of claims or a mediator between different collective actors in conflict.<sup>39</sup> The contributions of this edited volume engage with one or more of the analytical concepts from this tradition, such as repertoires of contention, political opportunity structures and collective action. Tilly points towards claim-making performances as a central part of contentious politics, i.e. when people come together in collective actions in order to make a claim directed at an opposing entity (most often the state, but employers or other social movements can also be targets for the claim). These claim-making performances can, on aggregate, be understood as part of a repertoire of contention. The idea here is that contentious performances are defined not only through what people do when in conflict but also through a shared cultural and collective knowledge of what to do in certain conflicts, as well as what is expected of other actors. On a purely descriptive level, there is a historical importance to map out and describe the evolution of repertoires of contention, especially as contention hasn't been part of a historical narrative on the Swedish 1980s. By identifying performances and by tracing the contours of repertoires of contention it is also possible to connect to the two overarching problem complexes of this volume: if (and if so, how) repertoires of contention evolved in Sweden can be compared to a broader European context. The contribution by Katrin Uba and Jenny Jansson identifies some of the most prevalent forms of contention in relation to the welfare state and makes it possible to discern how the welfare state impacted and shaped repertoires of contention in Sweden during the 1980s.

Another cornerstone of Tilly's original concept of the social movement is that social movements tend to mold collective performances to signal worthiness, unity, commitment and numbers (WUNC).<sup>40</sup> The ideal of worthiness seems to correspond to the social democratic ideal of respectability (*skötsamhet*) that formed a central ideal within the

<sup>39</sup> Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 4–16, 45–67; Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2008), 1–30; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, Cambridge university press 2001), 14–24; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge, Cambridge university press 2011), 16–34.

<sup>40</sup> Tilly, *Contentious Performances*.

Swedish labour movement.<sup>41</sup> As shown by most contributions in this volume, worthiness played an important part in social movements of 1980s Sweden and this seems to have included self-styled radicals who in other contexts perhaps would have been less predisposed to manifest respectability in the social democratic tradition. This can partly be understood in relation to the political opportunity structure.<sup>42</sup> Social movements could count on quite substantial support on both a national and municipal level as long as they acted within the rules of the political system. Lastly, some participating authors engage with the concept of frames and framing in relation to social movements. Framing allows the study of how meaning is ascribed to certain events, as well as the study of how social movements engage in a discursive conflict around how the movement should be understood.<sup>43</sup>

While the CPS field is clearly productive in the historical study of collective performances and repertoires, we would argue that cultural or social history with a focus on moral cosmologies adds an important aspect to the historical study of social movements. Social movements should not be reduced to contentious performances and visible protests, and we strive to also bring forward emphasized collective identification, relationships and the processes that lead to the movement's growth. It should be noted that the late Tilly argued for a processual approach in which the cultural aspects of repertoires of contention are brought to the forefront.<sup>44</sup> Other scholars have pinpointed that social movements contain a series of different and varying forms of protest and resistance, and that outwarded protests and activities are only part of the movement. Social movements consist of different groups, networks and their relations and daily practices, and are described as "actions of collective actors" aiming

<sup>41</sup> Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren. Idéer och ideal i ett norrländskt sågverksamhälle 1880–1930* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1988).

<sup>42</sup> McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 14–24; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 16–34.

<sup>43</sup> David A. Snow, Rens Vliegthart and Pauline Ketelaars, "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements. Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (second ed.). eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, "Strands of Classical Theory in the Study of Social Movements," in *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory* [electronic resource], eds. Seth Abrutyn and Omar Lizardo (Springer, 2021), 480.

at social change.<sup>45</sup> Melucci believes that this forms the basis of social movements and therefore it is important to study the many everyday practices and actions that are performed and how they are part of different networks.<sup>46</sup> As Della Porta and Diani have pointed out, collective identification and feelings of community and belonging are important for social movements' ability to attract members and create action.<sup>47</sup>

In this edited volume we adhere to a broad understanding of social movement where organizations can be part of, but never solely consist of, social movements. In practice the formal organization—especially in a political context dominated by the Social Democrats gives an obvious inroad to the study of social movements. Many of the cases in this volume have a clear social movement organization as a focus for the study, and most of the cases consist of collective actors posing claims, often aimed at the state, and would thus fall into the definition of contentious politics posed by Tilly.<sup>48</sup> However, some of the cases studied don't sit as clearly in these categories, and study groups and networks without a formal organizations or common outward claims, but which at the same time are obviously part of a larger social movement context. For example, the self-styled anarchists studied by Fredrik Egefur primarily forged a shared collective identity through cultural politics. At the same time, they worked in close cooperation with the municipality and formed a formal association with spotless bureaucratic acumen in the forms of statutes and protocols.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the tenants' association, with roots in the old labour movement and part of a broad family of social movements associated with the Social Democrats, was revitalized by the new left during the 1970s and revived forms of collective contentious action from the inter-war period, such as the rent strike. As shown by Hannes Rolf in his chapter, the decline of the rent strike as performance can be understood within a wider decline of the new left during the 1980s.

Furthermore, as van der Steen stresses in his concluding chapter, it is important to not equate the collective actions of social movement with

<sup>45</sup> Melucci, *Nomader i nuet*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Melucci, *Nomader i nuet*; Håkan Thörn, *Globaliseringens dimensioner: Nationalstat, världssambälle, demokrati och sociala rörelser* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 105–113.

<sup>48</sup> Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Ericsson, "Ockuperat område".

militant or violent forms of action or contention. Indeed, one of our ambitions with this edited volume is to do away with a dichotomy of radical and co-opted social movements. Instead, we aim to situate the studied social movements in a historical context in order to show how they employed a variety of forms of collective actions in navigating their relations to a strong welfare state.

## PARTICIPATING CHAPTERS

The contributors in this volume discuss social movements from different perspectives and the chapters deal with and discuss relations with the state, the welfare society, right-wing politics and neoliberalism, as well as temporal aspects of the movements. Questions about continuity and change, relations to previous movements (for example the 68 left or the labour movement) and the significance of the movement for later movements are also discussed. The chapters presented here also have in common that they discuss the movements' relations to movements in other European countries, problematize and relate to the specific time frame (1980s), and discuss the movements in relation to earlier and later movements. Some of the movements discussed have long historical roots while others arose during the 1980s. While some movements can be understood as predecessors to later more outward-looking and contentious movements, others evolved in an opposite direction and more or less disappeared, or were taken over by new, more radical forms of protest during the decade. Common to all chapters is a wish to highlight some of the different social movements and protests that existed during the decade but that so far have been more or less unexplored, and discuss them in the light of social and political movements in both Sweden and Europe.

The first two chapters after this chapter Introduction, provide an overarching, long-term perspective of protests and squatting during the 1980s. In Chapter 2, Katrin Uba and Jenny Jansson take as their starting point the 1980s protests against the welfare state. They have mapped various protest events, examining the actors behind them and these actors' relationships to social movements, describing patterns in significant actors and examining whether these patterns changed during the decade. The results show, among other things, that actors were more diverse than supposed by previous research. In the third chapter, Dominika Polanska

shows that the 1980s saw a peak of squatting events, and that the character of squatting at the same time partly changed, which has so far only been studied fragmentarily. Squatting in Sweden is based on a tradition of respectability, but, according to Polanska, by the end of the 1980s, squatting events became more confrontative and violent. How can we understand the conflicting ideals of respectability and violence?

Chapters 4 and 5 consist of case studies of movements influenced by punk, anarchism and the emerging and increasingly contentious squatting movement described above. The results of these studies also indicate that these events were important for the formation of later movements, such as militant anti-fascism and the autonomous left. In Chapter 4, Markus Lundström discusses anarchism and how it was revitalized during the decade, partly with influences from the new and emerging punk scene. Lundström shows that anarchism in the 1980s, in its encounter with punk, developed new forms of protest, but also that the legacy from the long history of anarchism was very much alive and shaped the anarchist struggle of the 1980s. In Chapter 5, the anarchist theme is followed up in Fredrik Egefur's study of the alternative environment in Malmö. Egefur discusses activities at the social centre "the Winter Palace" in relation to radical social movements and the squatting movement. The anarchists in the Winter Palace were inspired by European squatters but rented their own house from the city. Egefur finds that the activists he studies both identified with a contentious ideal of European anarchists and squatters, but also with a Swedish historical tradition of conscientiousness.

Chapters 6 and 7 consider two radical social movements; the environmental movement and the anti-nuclear peace movement are examined, both of which had a peak of activity during the 1980s. Monica Quirico's chapter examines how the environmental movement in Sweden, formed during the 1970s, and then developed and changed during the 1980s. The chapter shows how environmental issues were incorporated early on by the Social Democratic Party, and how the referendum against nuclear power in 1980 renewed commitment to various environmental movements. During the 1980s, environmental movements vacillated between trying to gain parliamentary influence and waging a more radical extra-parliamentary struggle. In Chapter 7, Öhman revisits the early 1980s uproar of popular peace and anti-nuclear resistance, in light of how the peace movement collective actions were framed in concurrence with mainstream media. Drawing on material from daily newspapers the mediated conceptions and debates of the movement and events are analysed.



Hereby, conceptions of the movements' tactics in relation to international and popular framing in "reproductions of peace-movement identity", internally and externally, are problematized.

The subsequent Chapter 8 takes a slightly different approach to social movements, instead discussing how the legacy of previous social movements was managed during the 1980s. In this chapter, Hannes Rolf shows how the 1980s seems to have ended a long tradition of rent strikes in Sweden, and he discusses various explanations for this. One partial explanation is that the tenants' association was radicalized in the early 1980s, and that many of the more radical rent strikes turned instead into squatting events. In the final concluding Chapter 9, Bart van der Steen reflects on the Swedish development in a broader European context. van der Steen believes that it is important not to overemphasize differences between Sweden and the rest of Europe, since such a view can easily lead to distortions and a downplaying of Swedish radicalism, and an overemphasis on militancy in the rest of Europe. A balanced discussion of similarities and differences creates a better understanding of developments in Sweden, as well as those in the rest of Europe.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Actors Behind Contention Over the Welfare State in the 1980s

*Jenny Jansson*  and *Katrin Uba* 

### INTRODUCTION

The 1980s have often been described as the ‘neoliberal decade’ and as an era characterised by a new societal analysis advocated by politicians such as Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US. Originating from liberal theorists such as Milton Friedman, criticism against Keynesianism and Social Democracy entered the public debate even in Sweden, a country famous for its strong labour movement.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Kristina Boréus, *Högervåg: Nyliberalismen Och Kampen Om Språket I Svensk Debatt 1969–1989* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1994).

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welfare state stood at the centre of this debate, as the primary neoliberal ideas—namely, the primacy of market forces and individualism—led to the conclusion that the state should withdraw and shrink.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the welfare state became a contested and central arena for anyone advocating or protesting neoliberalism, which was evident in the Swedish ‘neoliberal turn’ in public and political debate in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main proponents of the new societal analysis in Sweden was the Employers’ Organisation (Svensk arbetsgivarförening or SAF). By establishing close contact with the conservative party, the Moderates, SAF obtained an ally that became the primary voice for neoliberal ideas in parliament.<sup>4</sup> These new ideas affected the Social Democrats (SAP) as well. In the 1980s, for the first time, a (small) party faction of SAP led by the Minister of Finance, Kjell-Olof Feldt, claimed that the welfare state had become inefficient and needed reforms: the welfare state should not expand further but should be made more efficient.<sup>5</sup>

These new ideas of welfare state reform were driven by a political elite and had little support among the grassroots. Above all, unsurprisingly, the trade union movement rejected all discussions on cutbacks and privatisation. Among Swedish citizens, the welfare state enjoyed general, strong and stable support in the 1980s. However, citizens had begun to perceive the welfare state as bureaucratic. The public did not necessarily want a smaller welfare state but favoured a welfare state that adjusted its services to meet citizens’ individual needs.<sup>6</sup> Some actors, such as the

<sup>2</sup> Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 38–42.

<sup>3</sup> Boréus, *Högervåg*; Mark Blyth, “The Transformation of the Swedish Model: Economic Ideas, Distributional Conflict, and Institutional Change,” *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Torbjörn Nilsson, “Nyliberalismens Spöke Och Moderaternas Politik,” in *Det Långa 1990-Talet.*, eds. Anders Ivarsson Westerberg, Ylva Waldemarson, and Kjell Östberg (Umeå: Boréa, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Göran Therborn, “Sweden’s Turn to Economic Inequality, 1982–2019,” *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics* 52 (2020). Boréus, *Högervåg*; Blyth, “The Transformation of the Swedish Model.”

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Svallfors, *Klassambällets Kollektiva Medvetande* (Umeå: Boréa, 2004); *Vem Älskar Vålfärdsstaten?: Attityder, Organiserade Intressen Och Svensk Vålfärdsolitik*, Arkiv Avhandlingsserie, 0347-4909; 30 (Lund: Arkiv, 1989). SOU 1990:44, “Demokrati Och Makt I Sverige,” (1990).

Social Democrats' Youth Wing (SSU), suggested reforms to increase citizens' control of welfare state services.<sup>7</sup> These proposals did not include privatisation, which was an often-proposed solution at that time for problems in the welfare state. Instead, they emphasised decentralisation and increased democratic control over the welfare state.

Although the welfare state was contested in the 1980s, actual reforms involving welfare state retrenchment and cutbacks only emerged after the economic crisis in the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> These reforms involved cutbacks in all social insurances and restrictions on municipalities' budgets. While welfare state scholars have thoroughly examined these reforms and noted the remarkable mobilisation of client groups, we argue that gaining a full understanding of the events in the 1990s requires a careful analysis of the contention over the welfare state that was already occurring in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Social movement research has indicated that the perceived threat of a worsening situation in the future can lead to collective action.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we should expect to see mobilisation around welfare state issues before the 1990s. Although such mobilisation has been ignored by prior studies, we contend that analysing the period leading up to the reforms

<sup>7</sup> Bo Bernhardsson, "Uppbrottet Från Den Svenska Modellen," in *Kan(S)Lihushögern: Frälsare Eller Dödgrävare?*, ed. Marika Lindgren Åsbrink (Stockholm: Tiden, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Nadja Grees, *Changing Swedish Sickness Insurance: Policies, Institutions and Outcomes* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2019); Anders Lindbom, "Dismantling the Social Democratic Welfare Model? Has the Swedish Welfare State Lost Its Defining Characteristics?," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 24, no. 3 (2001). Anders Ivarsson Westerberg, Ylva Waldemarson, and Kjell Östberg, *Det Långa 1990-Talet: När Sverige Förändrades* (Umeå: Boréa, 2014). The most prominent reforms in the 1980s were the waiting days in sickness insurance, the deregulation of the financial sector and the credit market, and a tax reform. Peter Englund, "Vad Kan Vi Lära Oss Av Skattereformen?," in *Arbete, Löner Och Politik*, ed. Bertil Holmlund (Stockholm: Publica/Frizes, 1994); Kjell-Olof Feldt, "Hur Liberal Var 80-Talets Kanslihusöger?," in *Kan(S)Lihushögern*, ed. Marika Lindgren Åsbrink (Stockholm: Tiden, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Karen M. Anderson, "The Politics of Retrenchment in a Social Democratic Welfare State: Reform of Swedish Pensions and Unemployment Insurance," *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 9 (2001); Paul Pierson, "The New Politics of the Welfare State," *World Politics* 48, no. 2 (1996); A. Lindbom, "Obfuscating Retrenchment: Swedish Welfare Policy in the 1990s," *Journal of Public Policy* 27, no. 2 (2007); Lindbom, "Dismantling the Social"; Jonas Larsson Taghizadeh and Anders Lindbom, "Protests against Welfare Retrenchment: Healthcare Restructuring in Sweden," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Paul D Almeida, "The Role of Threat in Collective Action," *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell. 2nd (2018).



may shed new light upon the explanations that have been developed to understand resistance against cutbacks.

Drawing from previous research on welfare state protests in the 1990s, we expect at least three groups of actors to have mobilised in the 1980s: client groups, trade unions and proponents of welfare state reform. Whereas the two first actors (i.e. client groups and trade unions) have been emphasised as essential players in protests against cutbacks, the welfare state retrenchment literature has neglected the proponents of welfare state reforms. Although we pay particular attention to these three groups and their claims and strategies, whether dialogue or protests, we do not rule out the possibility that contention over the welfare state involved other actors.

This chapter starts with a description of actors who—according to prior research—are expected to have mobilised concerning welfare-state-related issues in Sweden. This description is then followed by a short overview of how the data used for the analysis was collected. The empirical section provides a general overview of the waves of welfare protests that took place in the 1980s and a detailed analysis of how different actors—namely, the trade union movement, proponents of neoliberal reforms and client groups—mobilised the Swedish welfare-related contention in the 1980s.

### WHO VALUES THE WELFARE STATE?

Considering the lack of welfare state reforms being adopted in the 1980s, the expectation of any significant welfare state protests might seem audacious. However, social movement research has shown that protests can be mobilised in the absence of any proposed or implemented policy changes or experience of objective grievances (e.g. increased unemployment). It has been well established that even the perceived threat of a worsening situation in the future can lead to collective action.<sup>11</sup> Thus, when elite actors such as economists, party leaders and business owners start to publicly discuss problems with the welfare state, it sets a new political agenda. Such a change in discourse can be perceived as a potential threat to the security created by the welfare state. A change in how elites talk about the welfare state can be perceived as a threat to the rights certain

<sup>11</sup> Almeida, “The Role of Threat.”

specific groups have become accustomed to. Mobilisation against a potential erosion of rights or a possible loss of power has been well-documented in other countries, and we expect it to occur in Sweden as well.<sup>12</sup> Considering the widespread public debate, the parties' initiatives to include welfare state reforms in election programmes and the introduction of cuts into the budgets of several municipalities and regions providing a large share of Swedish welfare state services (e.g. elderly care and health care), it is reasonable to expect that some protest mobilisation regarding the issue had already occurred in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> According to previous research on welfare state retrenchment and privatisation, at least three groups are known to mobilise around welfare state issues: trade unions, proponents of the reforms and client groups—that is, the beneficiaries of the welfare state.<sup>14</sup>

The first group we expect to protest is the trade union movement, as studies on the growth of the welfare state emphasise the importance of working-class protests in the development of a welfare state.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, there is compelling evidence that trade unions actively mobilise against retrenchment, privatisation, austerity and other neoliberal reforms.<sup>16</sup> Economic problems such as increased unemployment, increased prices

<sup>12</sup> Kelly Bergstrand, "The Mobilizing Power of Grievances: Applying Loss Aversion and Omission Bias to Social Movements," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2014); Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*, vol. 32 (U of Minnesota Press, 2009); Nella Van Dyke and Marc Dixon, "Activist Human Capital: Skills Acquisition and the Development of Commitment to Social Movement Activism," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Therborn, "Sweden's Turn to Economic Inequality, 1982–2019"; Kjell-Olof Feldt, Berndt Ahlqvist, and Lars Engqvist, *Samtal Med Feldt: Berndt Ahlqvist Och Lars Engqvist Intervjuar Finansministern* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Starke, "The Politics of Welfare State Retrenchment: A Literature Review," *Social Policy & Administration* 40, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>15</sup> Duane H Swank, "Between Incrementalism and Revolution: Group Protest and the Growth of the Welfare State," *American Behavioral Scientist* 26, no. 3 (1983).

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Béland and Patrik Marier, "Protest Avoidance: Labor Mobilization and Social Policy Reform in France," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (2006); Katrin Uba, "Political Protest and Policy Change: The Direct Impacts of Indian Anti-Privatization Mobilizations, 1990–2003," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (2005). Marco Giugni and Maria T Grasso, "How Civil Society Actors Responded to the Economic Crisis: The Interaction of Material Deprivation and Perceptions of Political Opportunity Structures," *Politics & Policy* 44, no. 3 (2016); Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015).

and factory closures are also well known to increase the likelihood of union and worker protests.<sup>17</sup> According to the resource mobilisation theory, trade unions are one of the most likely actors to mobilise in times of threat, because they have many members and a formalised organisational structure.<sup>18</sup> Hence, trade unions may mobilise fierce opposition if and when they perceive that the welfare state is threatened.

On the other hand, social movement theory predicts that the protest mobilisation of trade unions is less likely when their allies form the government, because the situation provides challengers with many different access points of influence, thereby dampening the need for protest.<sup>19</sup> The traditional political ally of the trade union movement in Sweden, the Social Democrats, formed the government in 1982 and ruled throughout the rest of the decade, making mobilisation by trade unions less likely. Prior studies on the Swedish case, however, have shown that tensions between SAP and the Trade Union Confederation grew stronger during the 1980s and culminated in 1986 with massive protests against the government's budget, which contained cutbacks in unemployment insurance.<sup>20</sup> Thus, based on previous research, we already know that unions engaged in some actions, often directed towards the government and the Minister of Finance, Kjell-Olof Feldt. Still, only a systematic protest event analysis will allow us to detect the level and patterns of this mobilisation during the whole decade.

The second group we expect to engage in contention over the welfare state comprises the *proponents of the reforms*. The (perceived) inefficiency of the over-bureaucratised system, high taxes, non-flexibility and a lack of freedom of choice were the most repeated grievances by various actors supporting reforms. The main criticism against the welfare state came (and still comes) from the upper classes and business owners, whereas

<sup>17</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage books, 1979); Paul D. Almeida, "Defensive Mobilization: Popular Movements against Economic Adjustment Policies in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>18</sup> J. Craig Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983).

<sup>19</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi et al., "New Social Movements and Political Opportunities in Western Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 22, no. 2 (1992).

<sup>20</sup> Kjell Östberg, *När Vinden Vände: Olof Palme 1969–1986* (Stockholm: Leopard, 2009), 375–385.

support for the welfare state has always been more substantial within the working class.<sup>21</sup> Even though social movement research usually focuses on weaker societal groups, such as minorities or poor segments of society, studies have examined the pro-business protests mobilised by privileged and wealthy groups.<sup>22</sup> The best-known example of such a movement is the Tea Party movement in the US, which Martin called the ‘rich people’s movement’.<sup>23</sup> Rich people’s movements often opt for ‘quiet mobilisation’—that is, daily meetings and local-level civil society engagement or lobbying, rather than large demonstrations or acts of civil disobedience.<sup>24</sup> However, in regard to tax policies, these groups have also used more disruptive protest repertoires such as marches and demonstrations. In particular, taxes that affect industry are likely to provoke protests.<sup>25</sup> While the changed elite discourse about the Swedish welfare state could be perceived as a threat by labour activists, discussions about the economic crisis and the increasing costs of the public sector, which may require an eventual tax raise or redistribution of wealth, are a potential threat to business interests. Hence, we expect to find pro-business mobilisation over the welfare state.

More specifically, these protests are likely to be mobilised by well-organised actors such as SAF, various business owners and conservative groups. Starting in the 1980s, SAF made strategic investments in developing think-tanks (Timbro), research institutes (Ratio) and research publishers (SNS förlag). SAF also launched a nationwide campaign called ‘invest in yourself’ in 1979, using a number of successful celebrities on the posters for the campaign (e.g. one of the singers from ABBA). Similar to SAF’s other actions, the campaign was meant to make Swedes aware of an

<sup>21</sup> Svallfors, *Klassamhällets Kollektiva; Vem Älskar Välfärdsstaten?*

<sup>22</sup> Isaac William Martin, *Rich People’s Movements: Grassroots Campaigns to Untax the One Percent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Madestam et al., “Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement\*,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Colin Jerolmack and Edward T Walker, “Please in My Backyard: Quiet Mobilization in Support of Fracking in an Appalachian Community,” *American Journal of Sociology* 124, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>25</sup> Isaac William Martin and Nadav Gabay, “Tax Policy and Tax Protest in 20 Rich Democracies, 1980–2010,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 69, no. 3 (2018).

alternative to the social democratic welfare state and to change Swedish public opinion about the state and welfare state services.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the third group likely to react to welfare state policy changes is the so-called ‘clients’. According to the famous study ‘Dismantling the Welfare State’ by Paul Pierson, the welfare state creates groups of beneficiaries of particular welfare state services.<sup>27</sup> These welfare state clients will defend the specific welfare state programme or service they benefit from. While Pierson used retired people (pensioners) as the best example of a client group that has been very successful in preventing cutbacks in the pension system, there are many other client groups, including pupils and parents, patients, organisations representing people with disabilities, the unemployed and other vulnerable groups. Thus, the welfare state creates new interest groups that did not exist before the welfare state, as opposed to the trade union movement, which helped to create the welfare state. The mobilisation of these new groups is mainly motivated by the members’ material interests rather than ideological viewpoints or the general common good. As client groups cut across class borders, they can mobilise large groups of followers and are allegedly more efficient at preventing cutbacks than other societal groups, since they defend a ‘narrow’ interest (e.g. only pensions or only patients’ rights), as opposed to trade unions that usually support the welfare state in general.<sup>28</sup> Whereas the trade union movement has ideological reasons for resisting neoliberal ideas and reforms in general, and while pro-business groups are ideologically against a comprehensive state, the mobilisation of client groups is motivated by the perceived threat of cuts in specific welfare services.<sup>29</sup> Research on client groups has not focused on their mobilisation during periods other than just before proposed policy changes; however, analysing their organising during the time preceding reforms is essential for a better understanding of how client groups eventually succeed in preventing welfare retrenchment.

<sup>26</sup> Nilsson, “Nyliberalismens Spöke.”

<sup>27</sup> Paul Pierson and David Dolowitz, *Dismantling the Welfare State?: Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Pierson and Dolowitz, *Dismantling the Welfare State?*

<sup>29</sup> Magda Bertz Wågström and Jonas Larsson Taghizadeh, “The Welfare State Upholders: Protests against Cuts in Sickness Benefits in Sweden 2006–2019,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 44, no. 3 (2021); Taghizadeh and Lindbom, “Protests Against.”

As other actors could also be involved in the contention over the welfare state, our empirical investigation maps all the groups that mobilised protests over the welfare state in Sweden during the 1980s.

## DEFINING AND MEASURING WELFARE STATE PROTESTS

Our analysis uses data from the Swedish Protest Database (SPD), which is based on protest events reported by Swedish newspapers and newswires.<sup>30</sup> We define protests as collective actions in which three or more individuals make a claim or express a grievance for a collective outcome—that is, on behalf of some organisation or social category (e.g. the poor, pupils or a neighbourhood). In a few specific cases, however, we have included protests mobilised by less than three people—for example, hunger strikes that raised claims for the common good rather than for individual benefit. The coded events, which are the unit of analysis in the dataset, refer to a specific form of action (i.e. demonstration, strike or letter) reported in a particular geographical location (i.e. city or community) and mobilised by the same group on the same day. For example, if two different organisations presented a petition in the same location on the same day, this counts as two events. However, newspapers often do not specify the location and only note that several demonstrations took place. We coded these as a single event with the location ‘whole country’. Hence, it is likely that we generally underestimated the total number of protests. The SPD includes information about events ranging from common strategies such as letter-writing to authorities and newspapers (e.g. letters to the editor) to classical contentious actions such as petitions, demonstrations, manifestations, strikes, acts of civil disobedience and violent attacks.

For the years of interest (1980–1990), the SPD sources of information were microfilm recordings of the two Swedish newspapers: *Dagens Nyheter* (1985–1990) and *Uppsala Nya Tidning* (1980–1985). The first is a newspaper with national coverage, while the second focuses on the Uppsala region and covers events in the eastern part of Sweden (i.e. municipalities such as Uppsala or Enköping). In contrast to many older protest datasets that rely on the newspapers’ Monday issues, SPD uses

<sup>30</sup> The database was constructed in the frame of a research project that aimed to study all kinds of protests events that have taken place in Sweden during the period of 1980–2011. It was financed by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte).

all issues regardless of the day. Unlike many emerging datasets that use automated coding (e.g. the Poldem), SPD is human-coded. This method gives detailed descriptions of the events, including location, organisation, central claims, targets and/or the presence of police. The coders browsed through each daily issue looking for protest events, and found reports were photographed. Another coder then coded the detected events. The team discussed all unclear cases and coded all protest events detected in the two selected newspapers. Thus, SPD includes more protest events than those focusing on the welfare state.

It is also important to note that our data has a clear regional bias; smaller events from northern, western and southern regions are not covered to the same extent as those in the capital (Stockholm) and eastern parts of the country. This regional bias is typical for protest event datasets and results from the media's selection bias—that is, the over-representation of large and violent protests in media reporting.<sup>31</sup> There is also a description bias based on the problem of inaccurate records of protest size and duration in the news media. Scholars often minimise these biases by triangulating data sources, such as by combining different newspapers, but this was not possible for the data covering the current period of interest. Therefore, these biases set an explicit limitation to our results.

Our analysis not only focuses on contentious actions such as demonstrations, strikes or acts of civil disobedience but also includes symbolic actions and quiet verbal protests (i.e. letters to the editors, public statements in the newspapers and petitions).<sup>32</sup> The selection was motivated by our aim to cover all kinds of contention over the welfare state, as any public statement against the welfare state at that time seemed very 'radical'. Furthermore, it is known that, in contrast to many other European countries, the early 1980s in Sweden were not a time of urban riots and

<sup>31</sup> David Ortiz et al., "Where Do We Stand with Newspaper Data?" *Mobilisation: An International Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (2005).

<sup>32</sup> An example of a symbolic action might be a puppet performance that calls attention to the various problems of people with rheumatism ("Dockteatern som informerar om reumatikerns olika problem," UNT, 25/02/1981) or a collective sign-up at the unemployment agency by childcare personnel in protest against the planned re-organising of the social care system at the municipal level ("Indragna tjänster i Trollhättan: Dagispersonal protesterar," DN, 05/09/1985).

squatting.<sup>33</sup> By using a more inclusive approach, we might be able to pick up on early indications of change in the mobilisation strategies. It is also likely that many client groups—such as civil society organisations representing the interests of older people, parents or patients—might opt for less contentious actions rather than protests involving much disruption. More disruptive forms of action are often the repertoire of trade unions and other social movements.

Our definition of *protests over the welfare state* takes as point of departure the redistribution of resources between different groups. What distinguishes welfare states from other forms of state building is the idea that the state should provide services to the citizens. According to Esping-Andersen, the welfare state aims to decrease the risks of losing one's source of income and falling into poverty due to work-related issues (unemployment benefits), parenthood (parental leave, day-care services, etc.), ageing (care services and pensions) and health failure (sickness insurance). Thus, the welfare state has developed social insurance and services to manage these risks through redistribution.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the social insurance that addresses these specific risks, the welfare state comprises a broader set of public services such as the education of new generations of citizens, social services and tax collection for redistribution purposes. Following this, we have defined welfare state protests as those protests that make claims about the following issues: unemployment, labour law, work-environment issues, labour market policies, parental leave (*föräldraförsäkringen*), school, childcare, preschool (*dagis/förskola*), youth-related services (*ungdoms/fritidsgårdar*), pensions and elderly care, sickness-related insurance, healthcare, disability-related services, social services (*socialbidrag/bostadsbidrag*), redistribution and public sector housing. The majority of the welfare protests we look at naturally target the local, regional or national authorities, since these are the providers of welfare state services.

In some contexts, wage setting—for instance, legislation on minimum wages—could be defined as a welfare state policy. However, in Sweden, wage bargaining is done between employers and trade unions without the

<sup>33</sup> Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here? The Gradual Radicalization of the Anarchist Movement in Sweden 1980–90,” in *A European Youth Revolt* (Springer, 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Gösta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).



state's involvement. When looking at protests that target the state, we do not define these actions as welfare state protests. That said, protests related to wage setting in the *public sector* are tightly connected to redistribution policies and the welfare state services produced by the state. The public sector is financed through taxation, and the wages in the public sector are directly linked to the quality of welfare state services.<sup>35</sup> Thus, we have excluded protests related to wage bargaining in the private sector when defining protests over the welfare state, but we included wage-related conflicts in the public sector.

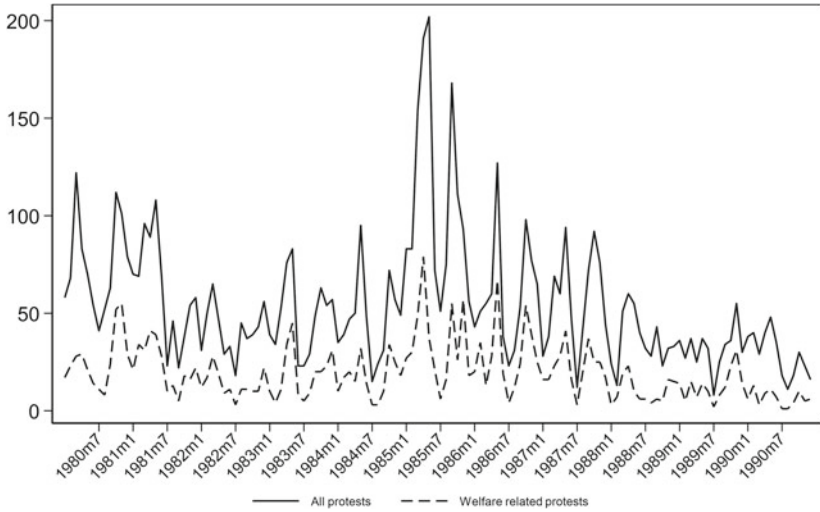
### WAVES OF CONTENTION OVER THE WELFARE STATE IN THE 1980S

Before discussing the actors mobilising welfare state protests in the 1980s, we briefly present an overview of the protest trends during this decade. Figure 2.1 shows the number of protest events (i.e. petitions, demonstrations, strikes and civil disobedience) registered in the SPD and the number of these events that were related to the welfare state.

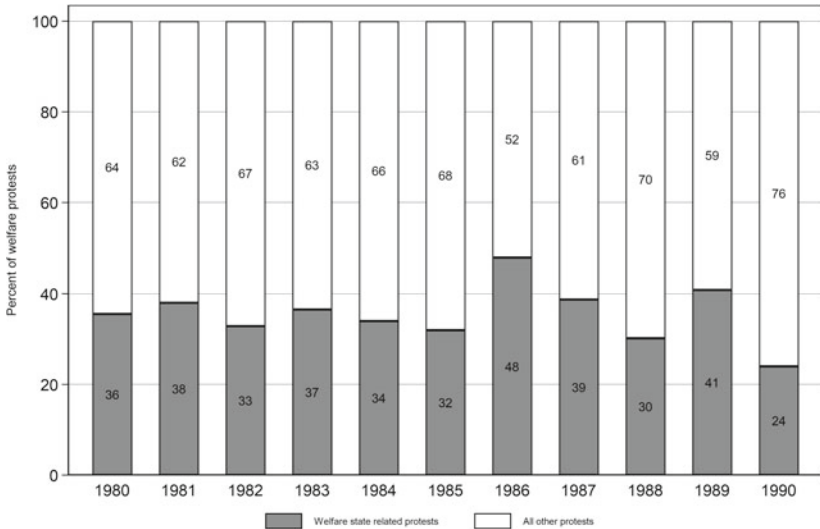
As shown in Fig. 2.1, protests over the welfare state constitute a reasonably large share of the protests registered in the database. The number of these protests increase, along with the total number of protests, after the mid-1980s. Thus, as shown in Fig. 2.2, the total proportion of protests over the welfare state remains relatively stable. On average, 2556 or 36% of the registered 7179 protest events were about welfare state issues, indicating that other issues also resulted in the mobilising of protests (e.g. environmental and energy issues). Compared with other countries, such as Germany or Denmark, Sweden has fewer registered protests for the 1980s; however, if we account for population size, the difference is not significant.<sup>36</sup> The welfare-state-related claims never formed a majority of protest claims, but these sometimes (1986, 1989) covered the largest proportion of protest claims.

<sup>35</sup> Kristin Linderöth, *Kampen Om Vårdförarbetets Värde: Fackligt Aktiva Kommunalarbets Minns Strejken 2003* (Stockholm: Leopard förlag, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Flemming Mikkelsen, "Contention and Social Movements in an International and Transnational Perspective: Denmark 1914–1995," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 2 (1999); Dieter Rucht, "The Changing Role of Political Protest Movements," *West European Politics* 26, no. 4 (2003).



**Fig. 2.1** Welfare state protest events and all protests in Sweden, 1980–1990 (monthly data)



**Fig. 2.2** Proportion of protests related to the welfare state out of all protests in Sweden, 1980–1990 (annual data)

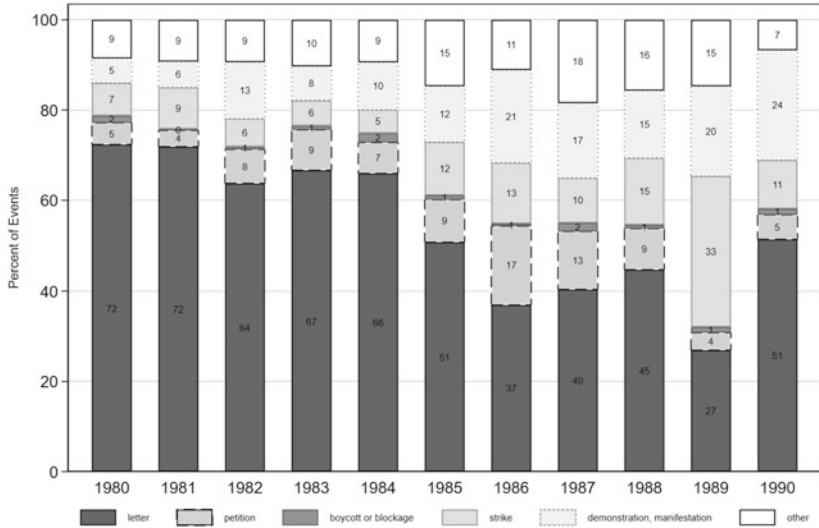
One notable trend in the material is that the size of the protest events—that is, the average number of participants reported in the newspapers—increased over time. The most significant event during the 1980s was not related to welfare but to peace. Peace Week involved a million participants all across Sweden in 1983. Peace Week and the related peace demonstrations were part of an extensive campaign against nuclear weapons and for peace in general, mobilised by various religious groups and the Swedish peace movement. The fact that it lasted for a whole week made it possible for the movements organising the protest to mobilise such a large number of people. The First of May manifestations gathered more than 700 000 participants across Sweden in 1986, which may have been an effect of the murder of Olof Palme earlier that year. The largest protest over the welfare state during the 1980s involved about 600 000 participants: it was a strike for higher salaries and better working conditions for public sector workers in 1986.<sup>37</sup> The second-largest welfare state protest was a petition with about 500 000 signatures against the wage earners' funds in 1983.<sup>38</sup> Still, the average number of participants in the welfare protests was much smaller, about two thousand. The relatively small protest size is a characteristic feature of social movement mobilisation in Sweden.

The typical protest over the welfare state was verbal, a 'quiet mobilisation' in the form of a public letter or announcement (see Fig. 2.3).<sup>39</sup> The increasing proportion of strikes and demonstrations from the mid-1980s onward suggests that mobilisation regarding welfare state issues became stronger, or 'louder', over time. Although several protests during the 1980s involved violence (e.g. protests related to migration and international events), the welfare protests involving violence and property damage emerged during the second half of the decade. Civil disobedience and legal actions are reported as 'other' in Fig. 2.3. Jämte and Sörbom come to similar conclusions in their study focusing on youth-related protests, which often involve squatting. Our dataset includes a few

<sup>37</sup> "620 000 personer dras in lönestriden," DN, 02/10/1986.

<sup>38</sup> "Halv miljon protester till Gadd," UNT, 07/12/1983.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding strikes, it is essential to recall that we exclude purely wage-related events in the private sector, which were very typical in the early 1980s.



**Fig. 2.3** Strategies of protests over the welfare state in Sweden, 1980–1990 (% annual data)

such events, such as the house occupations in Stockholm for more affordable housing in 1985.<sup>40</sup> Chapter 3 in this book gives a more detailed overview of the Swedish squatting movement in the 1980s.

In 1989, there was another example of a disruptive protest. About 10 000 pupils and their parents gathered in Stockholm in reaction to the government’s proposal to significantly cut the budget for primary schools. The event also involved a confrontation between protesters and the police.<sup>41</sup> Thus, even though no noticeable welfare reforms were adopted during the 1980s, the actual budget cutbacks mobilised significant protests.

Policy changes and austerity plans were also referred to in protest claims. The issues most frequently mentioned during that decade were childcare and schools, labour conditions, healthcare and sickness benefits.

<sup>40</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It.”

<sup>41</sup> “Regeringens sparkrav var för mycket. Tiotusen skolelever protesterade,” DN, 12/01/1989.

The activists did not use the term ‘neoliberalism’ very often. Nevertheless, when the chairman of the trade union SKTF, Björn Rosengren, made a public statement against SAF in 1981, he accused SAF of promoting ‘neoliberal’ policies.<sup>42</sup> The proponents of welfare retrenchment reforms—particularly the youth wing of the Moderates (MUF)—described the government’s policy as ‘plan economy’.<sup>43</sup> Thus, concepts that can be directly linked to neoliberalism were explicitly used in some cases.

The typical childcare- and school-related protests targeted local governments that planned to make cutbacks in the budget. At the national level, it was more common for protesters to use petitions addressing the quality of education or the food provided at schools. For example, the organisations for pupils gathered 18,000 signatures for a petition calling for a better quality of school lunches.<sup>44</sup> Healthcare and the rights of people with various disabilities were other vital issues that mobilised protest events, particularly during the early 1980s. However, in these cases, the most commonly used repertoire involved letters to newspaper editors, petitions and statements in the media. Over time, the dominance of school-related protests and even the proportion of health-related issues faded. Other topics, such as labour and infrastructure (e.g. public housing), gained more importance (Fig. 2.4).

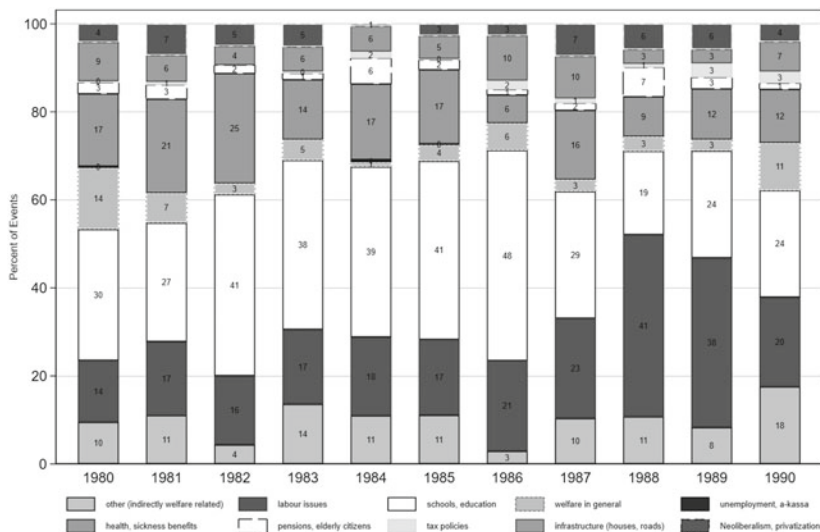
The most extensive labour campaign of the period was the white-collar workers’ conflict (*tjänstemannakonflikten*) in 1986; in 1988 and 1989, most labour protests focused on working conditions and loss of jobs. Unemployment in Sweden was low during the 1980s and decreased rapidly after the mid-1980s. Nevertheless, the loss of jobs mobilised protests—a finding aligns with prior research indicating that unemployment is an issue that people rally around.<sup>45</sup> The most prominent and visible campaign regarding redistribution issues was the so-called Dalauppropet in 1985–1986. This protest movement was formed by local trade unions in the Dalarna region, who criticised both the social democratic government and the Trade Union Confederation (*Landsorganisationen*,

<sup>42</sup> “Privatiseringskampanjen har ett dubbelt syfte: Rosengren till attack mot SAF,” UNT, 21/05/1981.

<sup>43</sup> “Vem avgör?,” UNT, 04/06/1981.

<sup>44</sup> “Elever kräver nylagad mat,” DN 16/01/1986.

<sup>45</sup> Donatella della Porta, “Protest on Unemployment: Forms and Opportunities,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (2008).



**Fig. 2.4** Specific topics of welfare protests in Sweden, 1980–1990 (% , annual data)

LO).<sup>46</sup> In general, Dalaupproret made up only a tiny proportion of all protests over the welfare state during the 1980s.

It is also noticeable that most protests were not against inefficiency or the lack of freedom to choose a welfare service provider. Instead, the issues mentioned by the proponents of welfare reforms focused on cuts and retrenchment. Thus, if the citizens at that time were concerned with the efficiency of the welfare state, as shown by previous studies, it did not motivate them to mobilise protest events.<sup>47</sup>

## ACTORS BEHIND PROTESTS OVER THE WELFARE STATE

We suggested that three distinct groups would likely have mobilised welfare-state-related protests during the 1980s: the trade union movement, the proponents of welfare state reforms and client groups. Our

<sup>46</sup> Kjell Östberg, *Folk I Rörelse: Vår Demokratiska Historia* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Svallfors, *Vem Ålskar Vålfärdsstaten?*

data includes information on the organisations and various societal groups mobilising or participating in the protest events. We divided these groups into the three categories mentioned above and included a fourth category: ‘other’ actors that are not close to any of the trade unions, proponents of welfare state reforms or client groups (see Table 2.1). These include political parties, religious groups, organisations representing migrants and women’s movements.

The category of ‘trade union movement’ includes not only trade unions but also all types of employees that acted as a group, such as ‘workers’ or ‘nurses’. These groups of employees are included in this category because the media did not always report that unions were involved in the protests—even though, in Sweden, it is highly likely to be the case. Some of these groups, such as medical doctors, have professional associations that are not unions per se. Still, such associations would act for the benefit of that group, and the difference between professional organisations and trade unions can be vague. Above all, these groups represent different groups of employees.

As shown in Table 2.1, the trade union movement mobilised the most significant proportion of protests over the welfare state: about 42% of the events. Client groups of welfare services accounted for about 37% of

**Table 2.1** Organisers and main participants of welfare protests, 1980–1990

<i>Actors</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Trade union movement	Trade unions	495	19.4
	Teachers	255	10.0
	Workers	187	7.3
	Doctors, nurses	135	5.3
Client groups	Patients and orgs. for people with disabilities	171	6.7
	Parents	277	10.8
	Pupils, students, youth	344	13.5
	Retired people, senior citizens	49	1.9
	Community groups	126	4.9
Proponents of neoliberal reforms	Interest groups for business	90	3.5
Other	Political parties	188	7.4
	Other (e.g. groups representing migrants)	235	9.2
Total		2552	100

events, and collective contention by proponents of reform was minimal, at about 4% of the protests.

Parents, pupils, students and young people formed the most significant protest groups over welfare issues in the 1980s. Their dominant issues of concern were school, childcare and education. These client groups mainly targeted local governments, which—in contrast to the national government—did propose and implement cuts in their budgets as early as in the 1980s.<sup>48</sup> For example, in the autumn of 1986, many protests including rallies, petitions and theatrical symbolic actions were mobilised against proposed cuts in Stockholm’s childcare sector.<sup>49</sup>

There were also apparent ideological differences among the group we have labelled as ‘clients’. For example, client groups mobilising protests regarding educational issues had different positions regarding the grading system. Although the large pupils’ and students’ organisations such as Elevförbundet and Sveriges Folkhögskoleelevers förbund protested the grading system by boycotting exams in 1980, other client groups disagreed.<sup>50</sup> The main school-related issue mobilising protests was not the right to choose a school (*valfrihet*), which was one argument used in the public debate by advocates of neoliberal reforms. Instead, the most common concern of protests was the closure of specific schools. Although school closures and protests against such decisions became more common in Sweden after the municipalities became responsible for schools’ organisation in 1991, 20% of the protests over school and childcare and 7% of all welfare protests in our sample were about school closures (e.g. the proposed closure of the Norra Real, a secondary school, in Stockholm in 1987 mobilised a great deal of contention).<sup>51</sup> Like most of the studied events, school-related protests mainly used a ‘quiet’ repertoire of letters and petitions. Other client groups were less active than parents and pupils,

<sup>48</sup> According to a general analysis of welfare costs in the municipalities, there was some decline of costs in relation to childcare during the period of 1980–1990, although much larger retrenchment did take place later, in 1990–2000. Per-Lennart Börjesson, “Välfärdsmysteriet? Kommunsektorns Utveckling 1980–2005,” (Stockholm: Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> E.g. “Protestmöte mot sparplanen,” DN, 29/10/1986; “Ockupation i Blå hallen,” DN, 19/09/1986.

<sup>50</sup> “Moderat skolungdom,” UNT, 23/10/1980.

<sup>51</sup> Katrin Uba, ‘Protest Waves in Sweden since the 1980s’, Paper Presented at the Forum for Civil Society and Social Movement Research, Department of Sociology and Work Science, 21 January, 2016.



although individuals representing the interests of patients and people with disabilities mobilised about 7% of the events. Actions by elderly citizens were even fewer; organisations representing the interests of the retired and elderly mobilised only 2% of welfare protests in the 1980s.

As expected, the trade union movement, which in Sweden has the most extensive resources and is well organised, was behind many welfare state protests in the 1980s. According to our dataset, about 20% of the protest events were organised by specified trade unions. Since the media often reported that ‘workers’ or ‘nurses’ were participating in a protest and did not specify if and which union was behind a specific protest event, it is likely that this figure was actually higher. The working-class unions affiliated with the LO organised about 200 protests (41% of all events mobilised by unions). The white-collar trade union confederation (TCO) and its affiliated unions mobilised about 140 protests (28%); 75 (15%) of the protests were mobilised by upper-middle-class unions affiliated with Saco; and a small proportion of events (20 events) were mobilised by unions unrelated to any of the three main confederations (e.g. SAC). Considering that most teachers, doctors and nurses belong to one of the public sector unions affiliated with TCO or Saco, public sector unions were expectedly more active in contention over the welfare state than the private sector unions.

In contrast to the public opinion surveys that reported on the general public’s concern over the bureaucratisation of the welfare state in the 1980s, we observed only a few such protests. Although this issue might have been an indirect trigger for mobilisation, no explicit claims regarding the matter were formulated during the protests under study. The character of welfare services or the lack of a citizen’s perspective, the right to choose a specific service or the inefficiency of the welfare state—all common arguments in the public debate—were not directly mentioned by protesters. These arguments mainly came from the political elite; above all, from business sector representatives. Those who favoured welfare state reforms such as cutbacks and retrenchments mobilised a few quiet yet noteworthy protests using letters and public statements. For example, Industriförbundet announced in 1980 that the growth of the public sector must be stopped, and the youth wing of the Moderates (MUF) complained over the queues and ineffectiveness of the welfare system in May 1981 and

urged for more privatisation.<sup>52</sup> A small proportion of pro-business group protests were directly related to lobbying in favour of private ownership<sup>53</sup> and investments, arguing for example in favour of the Bromma airport, but almost all these actions used a ‘quiet’ repertoire.<sup>54</sup>

The most famous example of a visible protest mobilisation by proponents for neoliberal reforms in Sweden is the Fourth of October demonstrations against the wage earners’ funds.<sup>55</sup> Although the wage earners’ funds did not directly refer to welfare state services or social insurance, they were part of the state’s redistribution policies. Dissatisfied with the proposal to introduce wage earners’ funds in the early 1980s, the Employers’ Organisation mobilised a mass demonstration on October 4, 1983. Some newspapers called it ‘the largest demonstration in Swedish history’, as it involved about 75,000–100,000 participants.<sup>56</sup> The mobilisation against the funds was not surprising, since there was generally high public opposition against the wage earners’ funds, especially among the electorate of the centre-right parties.<sup>57</sup> However, even though the Employers’ Organisation and its supporters had the skills, resources and motivation to mobilise visible protest events in the 1980s, they had seldom done so prior to the Fourth of October demonstrations, nor have they done so since.

Finally, although our three groups of interest mobilised the great majority of the welfare protests in the 1980s, 16.6% of such protests

<sup>52</sup> “Nasbeth: Hejda offentliga sektorns tillväxt,” UNT, 31/03/1980; “Offentliga sidan bör privatiseras,” UNT, 29/05/1981.

<sup>53</sup> It must be acknowledged that even companies with public ownership are coded here as enterprises. Hence, when the municipal company in Lysekil was opposed to the closure of the hospital in that region in 1987, the event is coded as a private actor supporting a public cause (see more about the events in “Landstinget vill lägga ner sjukhuset,” DN, 30/06/1987).

<sup>54</sup> “Företagare vill bevara Bromma,” DN, 22/04/1990.

<sup>55</sup> Jonas Pontusson and Sarosh Kuruvilla, “Swedish Wage-Earner Funds: An Experiment in Economic Democracy,” *ILR Review* 45, no. 4 (1992).

<sup>56</sup> The number differs depending on the source, Per-Olof Edin, Leif Hägg, and Bertil Jonsson, *Så Tänkte Vi På Lo - Och Så Tänker Vi Nu* (Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, 2012); UNT, “Största Manifestation I Svensk Historia: 100 000 I Marsch Mot Fonder,” 05/10/1983.

<sup>57</sup> Mikael Gilljam, *Svenska Folket Och Löntagarfonderna: En Studie I Politisk Åsiktsbildning* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1988).

were organised by other organisations and actors, among which political parties constituted a large share (7.4%). Of the political parties, the youth wing of the conservative party was a force promoting privatisation and neoliberal reforms and opposing the size of the public sector. The youth wings of other political parties were not as active in welfare state protests. Instead, their mobilisation focused primarily on foreign policy issues (i.e. the acknowledgement of Palestine and solidarity with Poland and Afghanistan). During the second half of the decade, the political parties and their youth wings also raised their voices concerning youth and housing policies. For instance, the Swedish Communist Youth League mobilised a demonstration in Uppsala against housing policies in April 1987.<sup>58</sup>

In sum, the trade union movement and client groups mobilised protests related to the welfare state – mainly against reforms and cutbacks. Only rarely did anyone organise protests in favour of decreasing the public sector or privatising it. However, we did not find evidence of cooperation between client groups and trade unions. According to a growing number of studies on anti-austerity protests, trade unions and client groups are expected to seek support from one another while organising protests. Such cross-movement mobilisation and joint actions were widespread after the Great Recession in 2008.<sup>59</sup> Our data shows almost no collaborative efforts across movements and cooperation between different organisations in the 1980s. One explanation could be that these actors (i.e. trade unions and client groups) perceived the threat to the welfare state differently and thus did not find the mutual grounds necessary for joint action.

## CONCLUSION

The 1980s has been described as a time in which there was a ‘neoliberal turn’ in public and political debate. Many of these new ideas focused on the size and organisation of the welfare state. The considerable discussion about the need to reform the welfare state for different reasons—to

<sup>58</sup> “Demonstration utanför bostadsförmedlingen: Ge unga bra bostäder” DN, 11/04/1987.

<sup>59</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi et al., *Contention in Times of Crisis: Recession and Political Protest in Thirty European Countries* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

make it more efficient, to increase citizens' voice or democratise it, and to make it less bureaucratic—resulted in few actual reforms. Still, the change in the political agenda—from a modest critique of the welfare state in the 1970s to open discussions in the 1980s mobilised significant protests over the welfare state during the 1980s. The events described in this chapter did not follow the political debate. The protests did not make any claims about the inefficiency and bureaucracy of the welfare state or the need to privatise and increase individual citizens' power to choose between welfare state services. Instead, most protests were about retrenchment, cutbacks and change. The discrepancy between the political debate about the welfare state and the contentious actions that were taken indicates that collective actors in the field—particularly the unions and client groups—interpreted the debate as a threat to the welfare state and aimed to defend it.

Our finding that trade unions and client groups of the welfare state were particularly active in welfare protests aligns well with research on the retrenchment of the welfare state, which has shown that trade unions and client groups actively oppose cutbacks everywhere. In the Swedish case, we also know that these groups mobilised protests in the 1990s when, after the economic crisis, the government quickly adopted and implemented several welfare state reforms. Still, the mere talk of problems of the welfare state was enough to mobilise protests in the 1980s. Thus, our analysis shows that contention over the welfare state has a much longer history in Sweden than previous studies have acknowledged. Future research should examine how the experiences of the 1980s affected the tactics, claims and eventual outcomes of the mobilisation in the 1990s.

The third group that we hypothesised would mobilise in the 1980s comprised the proponents of neoliberal reforms, such as pro-business groups. This group mobilised few protest events during that decade; however, some of the protest actions that they did organise had a significant influence on Swedish politics. The Fourth of October demonstrations in 1983 were one of the biggest demonstrations organised in Sweden. This finding aligns with previous research on the rich people's movement: these groups seldom choose visible action, but when they do, they have the resources to organise significant and spectacular events.

Among the other groups that mobilised protests—these form about 17% of the welfare-state-related protests—political parties constituted the largest group. Until recently, party protests were given comparably little

attention by researchers. However, our findings indicate that one way towards gaining an understanding of welfare state protests is to further analyse whether and how parties engage in contentious collective action.

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# Legitimizing and Enacting Contradictory Ideals: Squatting in Sweden in the 1980s

Dominika V. Polanska 

## SQUATTING IN SWEDEN

Previous research has shown that respectability<sup>1</sup> and contentious and conflictual approaches have been present in the Swedish history of popular struggles.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines squatting in Sweden in the 1980s and analyzes how the ideals of respectability and confrontative repertoires of direct action were negotiated and communicated through specific types of interactions by the Swedish squatters during this decade. Departing from

<sup>1</sup> Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Mats Berglund, “Sweden 1740–1880: From Peasant Rebellion to Urban Riots—The Long Process of Democratization,” in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia*, ed. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Andrés Brink-Pinto and Martin Ericsson, eds., *Politik underifrån* (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2016); Abby Peterson, Håkan Thörn and Mathias Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015: Contentious Politics and Social Movements Between Confrontation and Conditioned Cooperation,” in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia*, ed. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

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the approach to squatting as a political practice,<sup>3</sup> a form of contentious repertoire, or a “set of performances available to any given actor within a regime”,<sup>4</sup> rather than a social movement, I intend to analyze how the squatters negotiated and legitimized their actions, and in relation to different opponents. Special attention is paid to the contradictions caused by different, and sometimes contradictory, ideals in the communication of the significance of squatting.

The history of urban squatting in Sweden started toward the end of the 1960s and followed a similar trajectory to other European countries where squatting was observed in the same period.<sup>5</sup> During the 1980s, squatting in Europe was lively and advanced to considerable success, for example, in the creation of youth houses in Copenhagen (*Ungdomshuset* 1982), Oslo (*Blitz* 1982), and Zürich (*Jugendzentrum* 1981) and strong squatting movements in some cities in Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>6</sup> The rise of squatting movements was met with attempts at criminalization, repression, and the growth of the extreme-right wing across Europe, not least in Sweden.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dominika V. Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State: Squatting in Sweden* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Anders Corr, *No Trespassing. Squatting, Rent Strikes and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999); Miguel A. Martínez López, *The Urban Politics of Squatters' Movements* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Miguel A. Martínez López, *Squatters in the Capitalist City* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Squatting Europe Kollektive, eds., *The Squatters' Movement in Europe: Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014); Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze, eds., *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Mathias Wåg, “Från allaktivitetshus till sociala center,” in *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer från 1968–2018*, eds. Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> George Katsiaficas, “Preface,” in *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, ed. Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze (Oakland: PM Press, 2014); Martínez López, *The Urban Politics*, 8–10; Avanti Framåt, *Vårt 80-tal. Politisk kamp och punk i Stockholm 1985–1989* (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 2017); Jämte, *Antirasismens många ansikten*; Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State*.

During the 1980s the occupation of buildings peaked in Sweden. It is therefore a period in the history of squatting ripe for further study.<sup>8</sup> This decade was also qualitatively different from previous and following periods of squatting in Sweden due to what has been described by Pries and Zackari as more “militant” character of the actions undertaken in the following decade.<sup>9</sup>

Influences from squatting movements expanding in other European cities at the time: social movements, music, and literature, played an important part in the dissemination of direct-action repertoires and specific ideals among the Swedish squatters. Punk music, militant ideals of the BZ-movement in Copenhagen or the radicalizing squatting scene in Amsterdam or Hamburg, and the squatting symbol introduced by the Dutch *Kraakers*, were all adopted and played an important role in the formation of squatting in Sweden by this period.<sup>10</sup> The growth of the punk scene, as described by Lundström in this volume, revitalized groups to the left and to the right.<sup>11</sup> The connection of squats in different locations across Western Europe was facilitated by a network of independent book shops, “a kind of combined information office, counseling center and alternative bookstore, which opened in many occupied houses”<sup>12</sup> and frequent visits. These connections have by social movement scholars been conceptualized in terms of translocal networks or translocal assemblages<sup>13</sup> stressing social movements’ spatiality and exchange of ideas, knowledge, and resources between sites.

<sup>8</sup> Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State*.

<sup>9</sup> Johan Pries and Karin Zackari, “Här slutar Sverige. Ockupationen på Ringgatan i Malmö 1990,” in *Politik underifrån*, eds. Andrés Brink-Pinto and Martin Ericsson (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2016), 195.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here? The Gradual Radicalization of the Anarchist Movement in Sweden 1980–90,” in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, eds. Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 97–111; Grzegorz Piotrowski and Magnus Wennerhag, “Always Against the State? An Analysis of Polish and Swedish Radical Left-Libertarian Activists’ Interaction with Institutionalized Politics,” *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 8, no. 3 (2015): 845–875.

<sup>11</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?” 3.

<sup>12</sup> Wåg, “Från allaktivitetshus till sociala center,” 36.

<sup>13</sup> Colin McFarlane, “Translocal Assemblages: Space, Power and Social Movements,” *Geoforum* 40, no. 4 (2009): 561–567.

Egefur discusses in this volume the ideals of respectability that emerged among the popular and working-class movements in Sweden in the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> These ideals were also internalized by squatters in different degrees in Sweden from the 1960s until today.<sup>15</sup> Respectability was expressed in a mentality that encouraged self-discipline, cultivation, rational arguments, peacefulness, and schooling (*bildning*) and in practice it could mean that squatters established strict rules and norms in the squatted spaces guiding behaviors, how the squatted spaces should be run, who should be granted access, who to cooperate/negotiate with, among other things.<sup>16</sup> These ideals were put to the test when squatters encountered the authorities where negotiation was often dependent on the approach of the local authorities, ranging from permissive to repressive.

Based on materials produced by squatters and previous literature on the topic, this chapter explores the way that squatters described their objectives and actions, focusing on the tensions caused by contradicting ideals. The anarchist magazine *Brand*, which functioned as the main outlet for the autonomous movement in the country in the 1980s,<sup>17</sup> and other movement-produced publications from this period are the primary material for this study. This includes texts written by squatters and published in national and local newspapers, books published by squatters about particular squats, along with pamphlets, folders, and flyers.<sup>18</sup> The method used is a historical synthesis of previous studies and reports that is of interpretative character. It is a qualitative systematic review of all found forms of information on the topic of squatting in Sweden in the 1980s, using thematic analysis focusing on conflict lines where ideals are articulated. Since these conflicts are often identified in previous studies, but not analyzed and conceptualized in depth, the ambition is to contribute to the understanding of how ideas of peacefulness and orderliness can be

<sup>14</sup> Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren*.

<sup>15</sup> Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State*, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State*.

<sup>17</sup> Jämte, *Antirasismens många ansikten*, 244.

<sup>18</sup> One possible shortcoming is that the texts published in *Brand* are not always written by the squatters themselves, but sometimes by supporters sharing perspectives with squatters. Another potential shortcoming is the observable bias in the material in the greater number of texts written by squatters taking part in occupations that have lasted longer or had a recurrent character.

combined with those of disobedience and skepticism to authorities and different forms of hierarchies in squatting during this period. The analysis poses new questions and re-interprets past findings.<sup>19</sup>

The chapter introduces the reader to the general topic of squatting in Sweden and then focuses on 1980s. In the review of previous studies and publications, ideals and the balancing of contradictory principles are in focus. It is argued that there are several arenas of interaction where squatters communicate their claims reflecting the questions: why, who, how, and what if, used to legitimize squatting and addressing the public, local authorities, local communities, local politicians, landlords/housing companies, and the police. It is when the squatters are explaining why they are squatting, who they are, how they organize, and what can happen in the encounter with power holders or the police, that different ideals are negotiated, communicated, and enacted.

### SQUATTING IN THE 1980S: LOCATIONS AND DIFFERENT IDEALS

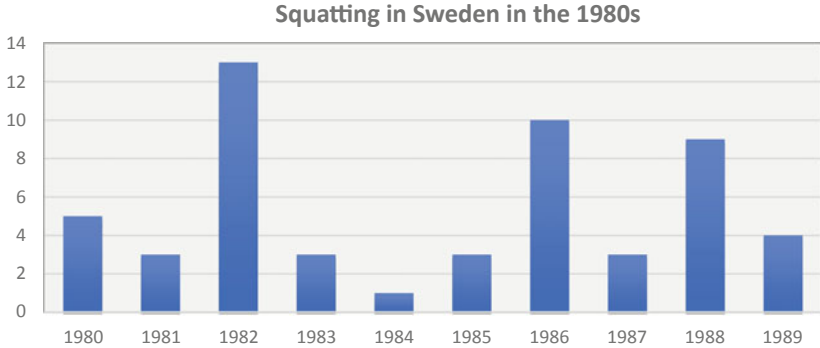
The ambition of this chapter is to cover the decade of the 1980s in a way more systematic than has hitherto been managed in research and to include squatting attempts outside of Stockholm and Gothenburg, thus painting a more nuanced picture of how squatting developed, and which ideals guided squatters during this period.

Three clear peaks in squatting attempts occurred during the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> The first came in 1982 in Jönköping (recurring attempts), Västerås (recurring attempts), Gothenburg, Malmö, Rimbo, Stockholm, and Umeå.<sup>21</sup> The second and third peak came in 1986 and 1988 mainly in Stockholm and Gothenburg. Only open and officially announced occupations, organized collectively, are included in Fig. 3.1 and Table 3.1. Hidden

<sup>19</sup> The use of analyzed data creates both opportunities and problems and has been focused on (1) recontextualization of the squatting cases studied, and on (2) a systematic approach to analyzing and re-interpreting data including specific codes (ideals, conflicts, cooperation, antagonists, etc.) and points of comparison between the included events and above all how they have been described by the squatters.

<sup>20</sup> See Table 1.

<sup>21</sup> See Table 2.



**Fig. 3.1** Squatting waves based on the number of squatting events in Sweden 1980–1989 (Source Author’s calculations<sup>24</sup>)

occupations<sup>22</sup> are not included due to the difficulties in tracing them. Gothenburg and Stockholm were the epicenters of squatting during the 1980s. The significant difference between them was the durability of the squats. In Stockholm, a squat at *Skaraborgsgatan* lasted three months at most, whereas occupations in Gothenburg lasted for years, such as *Kvarteret Sabeln* that lasted almost two years.

### THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-MANAGED SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SPACES

The Swedish cities of Helsingborg, Hässleholm, Jönköping, Malmö, Landskrona, Lund, Ronneby, Sollefteå, Umeå, Uppsala, and Västerås also experienced squatting in the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> In Jönköping, a fire station was

<sup>22</sup> Ann Ighe, “Husen” i bestämd form pluralis,” in *Ockuperat! svenska husockupationer 1968–2018*, eds. Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019), 126; Ann Ighe, “Empty Space, Open Space. Claiming, Reaching and Remembering Common Ground in Urban Squats. Haga in the 1980’s,” *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 13, no. 3 (2020): 1382.

<sup>23</sup> See Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1** Squatting in Sweden in the 1980s, locations and year

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location</i>
1980	Bellmansgatan, Stockholm Götgatan, Stockholm Stora Södergatan, Lund Local church, Ronneby Slottskällans badhus, Uppsala
1981	Heidenstamsskolan, Uppsala Stenhammarskolan, Uppsala Eisers fabrik, Sollefteå
1982	Husargatan, Gothenburg Haga Nygata, Gothenburg Violen/Midsommarkransen, Stockholm Nygatan, Umeå Brandstationen/Kyrkogatan, Jönköping (4) Föreningsgatan, Malmö School building, Rimbo Knutsgatan, Västerås (3)
1983	Gula Villan/Vasagatan, Umeå Villa Skalet, Helsingborg Österportskolan, Landskrona
1984	Gamla mejeriet/Stora Södergatan, Lund
1985	Skaraborgsgatan, Stockholm Drottninggatan, Stockholm Socialstyrelsen, Stockholm
1986	Drottninggatan, Stockholm Borgarskapets Enkehus/Norrtullsgatan, Stockholm Bromstenvillan/Sundbyvägen, Stockholm Luntmakargatan, Stockholm Gula Villan, Gothenburg Järntorget, Gothenburg Mellangatan, Gothenburg Kv. Sabeln/Sprängkullsgatan/Haga Östergata, Gothenburg Kv. Kruttornet/ Sprängkullsgatan, Gothenburg Nygatan, Örebro
1987	Tavastgatan, Stockholm Centralhotellet/Vasagatan, Stockholm Kv. Furiren, Gothenburg
1988	Klevgränd, Stockholm (2) Ultrahuset/Handen/Källvägen, Stockholm Handen/Häggvägen, Stockholm Kindstugatan, Stockholm Sprängkullsgatan, Gothenburg Unknown address, Helsingborg School building, Norrtälje Bäverns gränd, Uppsala

(continued)

<sup>24</sup> Calculations are based on an analysis of previous research, movement-produced publications, media coverage, and information from activists and researchers interested in the topic (see Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State* for further details).

**Table 3.1** (continued)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location</i>
1989	Centralhotellet/Vasagatan, Stockholm Markan/Wendesvägen, Hässleholm Gillberska huset, Uppsala Bondegatan, Västerås

\*If the same address has been recurrently occupied the number of attempts is stated in parenthesis

occupied several times in 1982.<sup>25</sup> Ericsson’s study portrays a conflict between squatters and local politicians, where the politicians demanded the squatters formalize their activity in an association in order to be treated as respectable and legitimate counterparts.<sup>26</sup> The recurrent squatting attempts and demands of the activists in Jönköping for a self-managed space for social and cultural activities resulted in the opening of a cultural space in the city run by local organizations and some representatives of the municipality in 1983. In a publication made by the squatters in 1982, the process was described chronologically, informing readers about the drug-free policy at the fire station and the negotiations, and conflicts (sometimes violent), between the activists and the city representatives and the police that were played out during this period.<sup>27</sup> Lodalen, who took part in the mobilization for a self-managed space, describes the activity:

The summer continued in the same energetic and tireless style. With attentions, new occupations of the fire station, City Hall and the occasional illegal intrusion into pinball and bingo halls. But we also had more quiet activities. We wrote music, printed newspapers and T-shirts, started theater groups that played in the streets and squares, and we performed a twelve-hour support concert...<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ragnar Järhult, *Elden är lös- kampen om Brandstationen Jönköping 1982* (Jönköping: Förlaget Initiativ, 1982); Mian Lodalen, “Elden var lös,” in *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer från 1968–2018*, eds. Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Martin Ericsson, “Ockuperat område. Striden om brandstationen i Jönköping 1982,” in *Politik underifrån*, eds. Andrés Brink-Pinto and Martin Ericsson (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2016), 179.

<sup>27</sup> Järhult, *Elden är lös*.

<sup>28</sup> Lodalen, “Elden var lös,” 102.



Both confrontative repertoires, including direct-action activities and cultural and more conventional political activities like demonstrations, signature collections, distribution of flyers, arranging cultural activities, or reaching out to media, were included in the repertoire of the local activists. Ericsson argues that this case of squatting should be conceptualized as translocal and transnational,<sup>29</sup> referring to Thörn<sup>30</sup> and international studies of squatting during the same period and to the Jönköping activists' use of symbols, demands, and references to the squatting scenes in the rest of Europe. Squatting in Jönköping was characterized by the ideals of non-violence and passive resistance in the meetings with the police, and the explicit statement that the police were not considered an enemy, as opposed to local politicians.<sup>31</sup> Negotiations with the municipality resulted in offers of alternative spaces, which in turn caused internal conflicts of whether to accept or decline the offer resulting in "disarming the more radical demands for direct democracy and self-management" among the activists.<sup>32</sup>

The demands for spaces where the activists could play music in Malmö and Lund are addressed by Håkansson and Lundin.<sup>33</sup> The story here was similar to that in Jönköping: squatting and youth riots in the city centers forced local politicians to consider the need for cultural spaces in both cities leading to the establishment of institutionally run cultural spaces. Similarly, in Landskrona in 1983, a school that was to be demolished was occupied and demands for self-managed cultural spaces were made, and in Västerås, local politicians and the public housing company negotiated with the activists who squatted a building several times with the banner "Live music for a living house".<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ericsson, "Ockuperat område".

<sup>30</sup> Håkan Thörn, *Stad i rörelse: stadsomvandlingen och striderna om Haga och Christiania* (Stockholm: Atlas Akademi, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Järhult, *Elden är lös*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Ericsson, "Ockuperat område," 184.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Håkansson and Johan Lundin, "Rock för ett hus," in *Populärmusik, uppror och samhäll*, eds. Lars Berggren, Mats Greiff and Björn Horgby (Malmö: Malmö högskola, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> VLT, 12 October 2012; Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg, *Ockuperat! Svenska hockupationer från 1968–2018* (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019), 107.

Nilsson has analyzed the squatting event in Landskrona with the focus on the respectability of the actors involved.<sup>35</sup> The author argues that an “identity-political drama” was staged and that the activists, similar to those in Jönköping, initially used traditional methods (demonstration, meetings, and the collection of signatures) emphasizing their objectivity, orderliness and the group being “unspoiled by popular culture”.<sup>36</sup> They pleaded with the local politicians to turn the school building into a space with a “café homework corner, women’s shelter and rehearsal studios for orchestras”.<sup>37</sup> The responsible character of the activists was articulated in the demands for homework activity and the choice of wording to call rehearsal spaces for rock and punk bands “rehearsal studios for orchestras”. When these efforts failed, the activists squatted the building and presented their attempt as drug-free and aiming to promote activity among the passive youth. Similar once again to Jönköping, in Landskrona the activists explained in a statement on 12 July 1982, “For ten years we have done what we could, with the help of public opinion, to change the attitude of politicians”.<sup>38</sup> Even in Jönköping the activists claimed in a manifesto that their “Culture house” could achieve social cohesion between different social groups in the city, equality, activation of the unemployed, and drug addicts to find social community.<sup>39</sup>

Uppsala’s squatting history is reminiscent of that in Jönköping and Landskrona, except that squatting events here were also strategically used to protest the expulsion of school pupils. Squatting in the city started in 1979, flourished in the 1980s, and declined in the 1990s, to return in the 2000s. Spross’ study covers four squatting events between 1979 and 1989, demanding the municipality provide housing and cultural spaces and protesting the expulsion of school pupils (from elementary schools).<sup>40</sup> These events were non-violent, and their purpose was to make

<sup>35</sup> Fredrik Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare och kommunalpampar – iscensättningen av ett identitetskritiskt drama,” in *Mycket mer än bara rock*, eds. Peter Håkansson, Johan A. Lundin and Jonas Bjälesjö (Stockholm: Premiss förlag, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare,” 135.

<sup>37</sup> Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare,” 135.

<sup>38</sup> Järhult, *Elden är lös*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Järhult, *Elden är lös*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Linn Spross, “Att ta plats i politiken,” in *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer från 1968–2018*, eds. Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019).

local politicians react to the housing shortage, the need for spaces for cultural activities and solidarity with immigrant families. Even Umeå's squatting history in the 1980s revolved around issues of cultural spaces and to lesser extent housing issues.<sup>41</sup> The first attempt followed an occupation of a local green area at the end of the 1970s and was described by Persson as a balance between militant and popular (*folkliga*) ideals. During the 1980s Umeå was, like Stockholm, experiencing urban renewal and the demolition of its central districts to give way to offices, parking spaces, and housing. The squatters were partly protesting the demolition but the main driving factor, according to Persson, was to create free spaces for punks and the subcultural youth that were to be run according to direct democratic principles and open to "punks, the new left and other alternative groups".<sup>42</sup> The space was open to others, such as drug addicts and vulnerable groups "as long as alcohol and drugs are not used in the premises",<sup>43</sup> a statement expressing ideals of respectability. The occupation ended after three months when the negotiations with the municipality were concluded and the squatters were offered another space. In 1983, the local feminist movement organized a symbolic separatist weekend occupation of a building, *Gula villan*, which lasted longer than initially planned. On a flyer to the public the activists explained:

The Women's House Association in Umeå has for several years worked to get a house, collected names, written petitions, courted politicians in municipalities and county councils.<sup>44</sup>

The event caused a media debate focusing on the morality and illegality of squatting. The flyer ended with the statement "It is not immoral to occupy - It is immoral to demolish the beautiful house and garden - It is immoral that the Women's House Association does not get

<sup>41</sup> Kerstin Norlander and Kristina Larsson, *Kvinnohus nu! Dagbok från Kvinnohusockupationen i Umeå 1983* (Umeå: H:ström, 2017); Erik Persson, "Bland skogsdungar, gula villor och allhus i Umeå 1972–1990," in *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer från 1968–2018*, eds. Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Persson, "Bland skogsdungar," 168.

<sup>43</sup> Persson, "Bland skogsdungar," 168.

<sup>44</sup> Norlander and Larsson, *Kvinnohus nu!*, 203.

premises”.<sup>45</sup> The squat was evicted after 10 months by police from outside of the city, as local police refused to intervene. It was replaced by an “institutionalized” version that is still in operation today.

### CALMNESS AND OPENNESS IN NEGOTIATIONS

The extent of non-militancy of squatters in the district of Haga in Gothenburg was mixed according to Thörn<sup>46</sup> and influenced from outside of the city and from abroad. In this case, Freetown Christiania (founded in 1971 in Denmark) was an important connection along with the squat of *Mullvaden* (in Stockholm in 1977–1978). In the 1970s and 80s, Christiania and Haga were hubs for social movements, alternative culture, and music movements. Haga was a working-class residential district in central Gothenburg set for demolition, where the activists had found cheap or free meeting spaces. Activists’ claims included criticism of the planned demolition and their actions contributed to the preservation of the area, but they were unable to prevent gentrification later on, Thörn argues.<sup>47</sup> The movement active in the area was divided in the 1970s between those who wanted to carry out direct actions and those who worked with “opinion formation, mobilization and dialogue”.<sup>48</sup>

Over time the squatters in Haga encountered changing attitudes from the local established societal institutions, shifting from negative to positive between the 1970s and 80s and inviting squatters to the “conversation table of the Swedish consensus culture”.<sup>49</sup> Attitudes shifted again in the 1990s to more repressive tactics. Thörn claims that squatters in Haga did not take part in violent clashes with the police, partly due to their order and calmness and partly due to the national tactic to heavily repress squatting initiated later in 1990.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Norlander and Larsson, *Kvinnobus nu!*, 203.

<sup>46</sup> Håkan Thörn, “In Between Social Engineering and Gentrification: Urban Restructuring, Social Movements and the Place Politics of Open Space,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 34, no. 2 (2012): 153–168; Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*.

<sup>47</sup> Thörn, “In Between Social...”.

<sup>48</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 349.

Ighe described the purpose of following occupations in Haga as claiming spaces for social and cultural activities and demanding preservation of the area.<sup>51</sup> The mix of ideas coming from alternative movements (anarchist and libertarian, punk music movements) and the critique of demolitions was quite common during this period and could also be observed in other cities, such as Landskrona, Stockholm, Örebro,<sup>52</sup> or Helsingborg.

The squatters in Gothenburg were by this time referred to as *Husnallarna*, a name that also reflected plans to throw teddy bears at the police instead of fighting and was a word play including words “House”(Hus) and “snatchers”/“bears”(nallarna), and Ighe compared this “silly” name to the more militant Dutch Kraakers or Danish BZ.<sup>53</sup> Thörn remarked on the ambiguity and humorous character of the name Husnallarna that the third generation of squatters took on in the city.<sup>54</sup> The ambiguity demonstrated contradictory statements, from the inspiration coming from the BZ movement in Copenhagen and, at the same time, a will to distance themselves from the violent clashes with the police that the Danish squatters were known for (Picture 3.1).<sup>55</sup>

### BETWEEN WELL-BEHAVED WORKING CLASS AND ANTI-ELITISM

Husnallarna were recognized by the local politicians as a counterpart and the squatters took part in debates with politicians and in public discussions on housing policy. Ighe described how the squatters started a renovation fund of sorts, through monthly fees, and the necessity for electricity contracts, telephone subscriptions, and home insurance for the occupied apartments.<sup>56</sup> In one of the squatted buildings, the squatters tried to buy the building from the owner and formed a cooperative to gain control and be able to stay in the building. The history of squatting in Haga

<sup>51</sup> Ighe, “Husen” i bestämd form pluralis,” 129–130.

<sup>52</sup> *Hem & Hyra*, 17 August 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Ighe, “Empty Space”.

<sup>54</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 350–352.

<sup>55</sup> Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015,” 391.

<sup>56</sup> Ighe, “Husen” i bestämd form pluralis”.



**Picture 3.1** Haga at the end of the 1980s. The poster says “We will not move, of course” (Photo Salka Sandén)

ended in 1990 when *Tullen* was occupied in protest of its planned demolition. The squatters evacuated the building without the involvement of the police (Picture 3.2).

The ideals that punk brought on, anti-elitism and the critique of the principles guiding the working-class, encountered ideals of legitimate political/parliamentary or associational work to achieve change. Martins Holmberg has described a contested picture of ideals among the activists in Haga, where one group represented what the author called “the parliamentary way”, while another, inspired by the squatters in Christiania, wanted to occupy and refused to move.<sup>57</sup>

Despite internal contestations, the peaceful and non-violent ideals were strong among the squatters in Gothenburg in the 1980s, strengthened by the permissive approach of the local authorities. Non-violence was practiced in passive resistance strategies and peaceful sit-ins. Also, the local police seemed to have shared the same ideal, condemning more violent

<sup>57</sup> Ingrid Martins Holmberg, *På stadens yta: Om historiseringen av Haga* (Göteborg: Makadam förlag, 2006), 301–302.



Picture 3.2 Demolition in Haga in the 1980s (Photo Salka Sandén)

police actions in other cities.<sup>58</sup> It was in the 1990s that a more violent tactic came to be used and, among others, culminated in violent clashes in 2001, during an EU summit in the city.<sup>59</sup>

### ESCALATING VIOLENCE BY THE MID-1980S

The history of squatting in Stockholm in the 1980s is best described in the material produced by the activists.<sup>60</sup> There is a clear link between squatting in Swedish cities by that time and the squatting scenes of other European cities. By the end of the 1970s, three important squats had opened in Stockholm, *Mullvaden*, *Oasen*, and *Järnet*, and these were classified by Polanska and Wåg as part of an international wave of squatting that peaked in 1980–1981 with youth houses in Copenhagen, Zürich, and Oslo and flourishing squatting movements in Berlin

<sup>58</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 357.

<sup>59</sup> Mattias Wahlström, “Forestalling Violence: Police Knowledge of Interaction with Political Activists,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2007): 389–402.

<sup>60</sup> See for instance Avanti Framåt, *Vårt 80-tal* or texts published in *Brand*.

and Amsterdam.<sup>61</sup> Swedish squatting in 1985–1986 was according to the authors clearly influenced by anarchism and autonomous ideas, inspired by the Danish BZ-movement, and squatting in Hamburg, Berlin, and Amsterdam.<sup>62</sup> and the issues of fighting racism, neo-Nazism, and fascism were guiding the squatters.<sup>63</sup>

In Stockholm, the case of *Oasen* was especially influenced by the punk music movement spreading throughout the rest of Europe at the time.<sup>64</sup> Also, the squatting of *Ultrahuset* in 1988 demanded self-managed spaces for music activities with a special connection to punk.<sup>65</sup> Stockholm's squatting scene flourished again by 1985–1986 after a break of several years, but the durability of squatting by this time varied locally.<sup>66</sup>

The repression of squatting in Stockholm intensified from 1986. The more numerous the attempts, the quicker the evacuations became. In 1986, at Luntmakargatan, the encounter with the police was prepared for by the squatters in collecting “egg cartons, one-penny rattlesnakes and balloons filled with water on the windowsills”.<sup>67</sup> Even in this case the combination of varying ideals was clear, through the use of playful and rather harmless, more symbolic, “weapons”. The squatters were surprised by the use of teargas by police to make them leave the building despite their self-proclaimed decency and obedience:

Is it really us they are going to shoot at? About 30 decent young people between the ages of 15 and 20 and a middle-aged photographer who obediently pays his rent. Then it suddenly breaks loose. There is banging and bashing, windows are crashing and people are screaming.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Polanska and Wåg, *Ockuperat!*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Jan Jämte, *Antirasismens många ansikten* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2013), 244.

<sup>64</sup> Wåg, “Från allaktivitetshus till sociala center,” 35.

<sup>65</sup> Polanska and Wåg, *Ockuperat!*, 175–185; Michael Forsman, “Ultrahuset - presentation av ett hotat alternativ,” in *Rum och rörelser*, eds. Johan Fornäs and Michael Forsman (Stockholm: Byggeforskningsrådet, 1989).

<sup>66</sup> *Brand* 1988.

<sup>67</sup> Mikael Wahlberg, “Motstånd på Luntmakargatan,” in *Vårt 80-tal: Politisk kamp och punk i Stockholm 1985–1989*, ed. Avanti Framåt (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 2017), 70.

<sup>68</sup> Wahlberg, “Motstånd på Luntmakargatan,” 78.



The squatters were surprised by the level of violence displayed towards them by the police in light of their actions, stressing their obedience in other fields of life and their age and decency. The use of teargas seemed disproportionate to them, expecting a negotiation with the authorities first. The end of the decade was even more dramatic with the eviction of *Borgen* in Malmö in 1990 (Picture 3.3).

The squat of Borgen lasted six months and was followed by a decline in squatting attempts in the country due to more heavy-handed repression, nationally and internationally. It was evicted in a more violent, and military, way functioning as a scare tactic (borrowed from Denmark) to discourage squatting. The violent eviction of a squat on Folkungagatan in Stockholm in the same year has also been pointed out by Thörn as a clear shift in the police methods used to repress squatting in the country.<sup>69</sup> The squat of Borgen was well connected to the squatting scene in Copenhagen, but the local context was also characterized by the non-violent repertoire of local anarchists, further calmed by the presence of a legal meeting space that satisfied the needs of the group.<sup>70</sup>

## NEGOTIATING AND COMMUNICATING IDEALS THROUGH REPERTOIRES OF CONTENTION

In the following I shall focus on the *arenas of interactions*, or fields where contentious actors interact within their own group or movement, with authorities or police forces, that squatters have used to communicate on the significance of their action and, in particular, to which public they have directed their claims.<sup>71</sup> The arenas distinguished here reflect the questions: *why*, *who*, *how*, and *what if* and are used to legitimize squatting and are directed to the general public, local authorities, local communities, local politicians, landlords/housing companies, and the police. It is when the squatters are explaining why they are squatting, an unauthorized action, that legitimization of the action is balanced with arguments

<sup>69</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 349. See also Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015”.

<sup>70</sup> Pries and Zackari, “Här slutar Sverige,” 195.

<sup>71</sup> Eitan Y. Alimi, “Repertoires of Contention,” *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* 410 (2015): 10-1093; Brian Doherty and Graeme Hayes, “Tactics and Strategic Action,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi and Holly J. McCammon (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).



**Picture 3.3** The roof of Borgen 1990 (*Photo* Salka Sandén)

on the locally based need of social and cultural spaces and the bureaucratic procedure resulting in failure that has preceded the squatting action. The development of a new repertoire, squatting, needs an explanation. The other arena of interaction is activated when squatters are describing themselves to the outside world emphasizing that squatted spaces are run according to a set of principles, in this way justifying their existence.

Lastly, the possibility of an encounter with politicians, housing companies, or the police is anticipated and dealt with by the squatters developing routinized tactics<sup>72</sup> to avoid violence and facilitate negotiation.

It has been common among squatters to claim that squatting is legitimate and reasonable when the activists have followed all the formal rules available. There are several examples where squatters have formed associations and used conventional repertoires to influence public opinion on the issue and put pressure on local politicians. Among these examples we have Jönköping, Landskrona,<sup>73</sup> *Kulturmejeriet* in Lund and *Gula villan* in Umeå where the activists formed associations to claim spaces for their activities.

The conventional repertoires among squatters in this period have included: demonstrations, signature collections, distribution of flyers to the public, arrangement of cultural activities, presence at city council meetings, or reaching out to the media. To follow “the parliamentary way” of doing politics was one of the strong ideals, or a sort of strategy (see Egefur’s Chapter 5), found among the squatting activists, side by side with the more confrontative repertoire of direct action by appropriating spaces without authorization. The repertoires of direct action were disseminated through punk music and anarchism prevalent among the social movements in this period,<sup>74</sup> as shown by Lundström in this volume, and direct (through visits) and indirect contacts (through media) with squatting movements abroad.

Several examples have been mentioned in this chapter illustrating the orderliness, respectability, and peacefulness of the squatters in Swedish cities. One such example is the name Husnallarna and the multiple other ways squatters communicated their peaceful character to the outside world. Many squatters declared the action as improving the situation for vulnerable groups: youths, unemployed or drug addicts, by helping these groups find meaningful activities or become drug-free. According to, for instance, the activists in Jönköping their work “begins to yield results. Our cries for a drug-free and more vibrant Jönköping have now even

<sup>72</sup> Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

<sup>73</sup> Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare,” 133.

<sup>74</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?”; Piotrowski and Wennerhag, “Always Against the State?”

penetrated the politicians' wax plugs".<sup>75</sup> The peacefulness of the squatters was often reiterated, either in descriptions of the squatters being inexperienced, afraid, or young, or in their surprise over the violent response of the police to squatting.

The willingness to talk to politicians and negotiate a solution has also been common and used to express the readiness to compromise. Several of the actions covered here show that the squatters worked to disprove the misheld assumption that they wanted spaces for free by paying electricity bills, rent, or taking out insurance policies. In Örebro, for instance, the squatters offered to pay rent for the six days they squatted the building after they were evicted.<sup>76</sup>

Most of the squatted spaces in the 1980s were organized according to the principles of drug-free spaces where everybody contributes according to their ability. Other principles that were connected to the self-management of such spaces were tolerance and prohibition of racism, sexism, and homophobia, among other things. These principles were not always explicit, compared to the rules that prohibited the consumption of alcohol and drugs on the premises.

In Jönköping, the activists claimed that their work could result in the uniting and disciplining of various youth groups in the city through "constructive actions and the belief in the future".<sup>77</sup> The squatters in Jönköping distanced themselves from the "senseless violence" of other youths<sup>78</sup> stressing their non-violent character and struggle for the unification of youth groups in the city. The politicians were warned about the severe social consequences that would follow if the activities at the squat could not continue. The activists argued that if the municipality could provide spaces for the youth to use, they could break the "passivity and drug-addiction" among their participants.<sup>79</sup> A common slogan among community organizers was claiming that meaningful activities and the sense of community created responsible individuals and community members. The distancing from violence and the prohibition of alcohol and drugs that might destroy the orderliness and respectability of the

<sup>75</sup> Järhult, *Elden är lös*, 53.

<sup>76</sup> *Hem & Hyra*, 17 August 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Järhult, *Elden är lös*, 62.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

participants were used as tools to demonstrate the readiness and maturity of the youths claiming the right to run self-managed spaces. Their claims demonstrated an ability to import arguments from social work and civil society organizations, used to convince the authorities and a wider audience.

The likelihood of an encounter with the politicians, housing companies, or the police was anticipated and handled by the squatters developing tactics to avoid violence and facilitate negotiation. Even if these tactics were contested among the community of squatters, the willingness to negotiate and not stage violent confrontations was prevalent during this period. Clear tactics of meeting with the police were developed and passive and non-violent resistance was encouraged in the encounters with police and in case of eviction. The squats could be barricaded or open, but in case of the police entering the building, the squatters were guided by passive resistance when meeting with the police officers face to face. Some resistance was still staged, however, but most often using playful and harmless objects thrown at the police (teddy bears, water balloons, water, or eggs) along with blocked entrances to the building. When the squatters of *Kvarteret Sabeln* staged a traffic blockade outside of the squat, and the police arrived, the situation was described by one of the participants:

If we were to leave the house, the exit would be grand; the fireworks, the headlights and the Fate Symphony at full volume made the police appear small and less dangerous. When the street was empty, we waited for the police to start with us.<sup>80</sup>

Music and fireworks were meant to subdue the police and render them less dangerous. By the end of the 1980s, this repertoire was changing, bricks were thrown at the police and the squatters started to use masks to cover their faces.<sup>81</sup> This repertoire developed in parallel to the escalation in violence by the police during this period,<sup>82</sup> to a larger extent using tear gas, beatings, and riot gear when evicting squatters by the late 1980s.

There are several cases where squatters evicted themselves or moved voluntarily (Haga, for example), having reached an agreement or a point

<sup>80</sup> *TotalBrand* 1988/17.

<sup>81</sup> Avanti Framåt, *Vårt 80-tal*, 157 & 184.

<sup>82</sup> Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, "Sweden 1950–2015".

where their message has been heard by the local planners or other stakeholders. During this period some symbolic occupations of buildings have also been staged by activists wanting to make a political statement, but at the same time avoiding the possibility of violent encounters, by dropping a banner on the building and leaving.<sup>83</sup> Even if most squatters collectively agreed on passive resistance, encounters with the police were always risky as individual activists could ignore the established rules, resulting in violence causing damage to the reputation of the squatters.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the history of squatting in Sweden, the period of the 1980s is a fascinating time when various influences and ideals were combined in squatting actions. While squatters in Sweden were inspired by the squatting movements growing in other European cities, they were developing a contentious repertoire<sup>84</sup> where they deliberately avoided violence and often described themselves as peaceful and orderly. During the 1980s there is a great diversity in how the ideals of peacefulness, respectability, non-violence, popular (*folkliga*) issues, militancy, resistance, anti-authoritarianism, anti-elitism, were negotiated, enacted, and communicated by squatters to the outside world.

Even if squatting in this period could be conceptualized as translocal and transnational,<sup>85</sup> it also had traditional expressions originating from peaceful negotiation, inherited from the labor movement and the repertoires developed by the Swedish popular movements in the democratization of the country in the twentieth century. By combining action repertoires previously developed by social movements and civil society with direct-action repertoires, squatters in Sweden in the 1980s developed a specific form of contentious repertoire through arenas of interaction focusing on avoiding violence and facilitating negotiation.

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<sup>83</sup> For instance, *Centralhotellet* in Stockholm 1987, see more in Avanti Framåt, *Vårt 80-tal*, 183.

<sup>84</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Tilly, *The Politics*.

<sup>85</sup> McFarlane, “Translocal assemblages”; Ericsson, “Ockuperat område”; Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*.

my language in this chapter. Special thanks to the editors and contributors to this volume who have been involved in commenting on previous versions of this chapter, providing new insights into the conceptualization of squatting in Sweden in the 1980s.

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## When Anarchism Met Punk

*Markus Lundström* 

Anarchism in Sweden had been around for nearly a century when the turbulent 1980s arrived. As shown throughout this anthology, the decade was marked by social marginalization, political tension, and cultural exploration. It was a hotbed for social movements, a breeding ground for new forms of activism, perennial growth of recurring contention—and regeneration of politics buried in the social soil, like pyrophile plants sprouting through a wildfire. When anarchism met punk in the Swedish 1980s, certain repertoires of contention became revived and enacted, exhibiting how remembered actions from the *past* can give life to collective action in the *present* and revive the struggle for a desirable *future*. In the vein of social movement literature concerned with the interplay between cultural

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and political mobilizations,<sup>1</sup> this chapter outlines how anarchist *repertoires of contention*, as “inherited forms of collective action”,<sup>2</sup> became regenerated in Sweden when anarchism met punk.

## WHEN ANARCHISM MET PUNK

Anarchism in Sweden grew out of the Social Democrats’ youth organization that, in May 1898, began publishing its own periodical. The name *Brand* underlined its cultural sensibility by paraphrasing a play by Henrik Ibsen.<sup>3</sup> *Brand* has been published regularly ever since and is thereby one of the most long-standing anarchist periodicals in the world.<sup>4</sup> The early anarchist movement was more numerous in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries,<sup>5</sup> and prominent figures like Emma Goldman, Peter Kropotkin, and Rudolf Rocker visited and were part of their international network.<sup>6</sup> *Brand* frequently published translations of international anarchist thinkers, and these inclinations alarmed and finally prompted

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Ryan Moore and Michael Roberts, “Do-It-Yourself Mobilization: Punk and Social Movements,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2009); William Danaher, “Music and Social Movements,” *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 9 (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2015), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Henrik Lång, *Drömmen om det ouppnåeliga: Anarkistiska tankelinjer hos Hinke Berggren, Gustaf Henriksson-Holmberg och Einar Håkansson* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2007), 236; Emma Hilborn, *Världar i Brand: Fiktions, politik och romantik i det tidiga 1900-talets ungsocialistiska press* (Höör: Agering, 2014), 37; Karl Fernström, *Ungsocialismen: En krönika* (Stockholm: Federativ, 1950), 40–42.

<sup>4</sup> Internationally, only a handful of anarchist periodicals have been published since the heyday of anarchism until the present day: *Solidaridad Obrera* in Spain, *La Protesta* in Argentina, *Umanità Nova* in Italy, and *Freedom* in the UK. For studies on the latter, see Rob Ray, *A Beautiful Idea: History of the Freedom Press Anarchists* (London: Freedom Press, 2018); John Quail, *Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Kuhn, “The Nordic Countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden,” in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Anarchism*, ed. Ruth Kinna (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012), 442.

<sup>6</sup> *Arbetaren*, “Den ryska revolutionen belyses av ryska revolutionärer: Fackföreningsrörelsen och syndikalismen och dess framtida problem,” January 7, 1922: 1, 3; Fernström, *Ungsocialismen*, 336–338, 435, 456, 474; Markus Lundström, “Demokrati eller anarki?” *Demokrati100* (2019). [www.demokrati100.se/demokrati-eller-anarki/](http://www.demokrati100.se/demokrati-eller-anarki/).

the Social Democrats to break with its youth organization in 1908.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, in the aftermath of the Swedish general strike in 1909, the anarcho-syndicalist branch of the labour movement created its own union.<sup>8</sup> Whereas workplace struggles were naturally the prime focus of this syndicalist union,<sup>9</sup> *Brand* now became more explicitly anarchist.<sup>10</sup> In 1934, with the birth of Sweden's first anarchist organization,<sup>11</sup> *Brand* accordingly changed its subtitle to become an "anarchist paper" that complemented and struggled "alongside" syndicalism.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1980s, however, the anarchist periodical went through a series of editorial shifts and relaunches. *Brand* closed down in 1979, after having published nearly 1700 issues since its inauguration in 1898,<sup>13</sup> and continued under the name *Basta* for two issues (1980). It was then reinstalled as *Brand* (1982), *Brandfaran* (1983–1984), *Brand* once again (1985), and then merged with a local anarcho-zine named *Total* and became published under the name *Total Brand* (1986–1988). The title

<sup>7</sup> Åsa Linderborg, *Socialdemokraterna skriver historia: Historieskrivning som ideologisk maktresurs 1892–2000* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2014), 113–116, 171–173; Lång, *Drömmen om det ouppnåeliga*, 122–123; Hilborn, *Världar i Brand*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> The Swedish Workers Central Organization [*Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation*] has maintained its political voice in Swedish society up to the present, first through the periodical *Syndikalisterna* (1911–1921) and then its sequel *The Labourer* [*Arbetaren*] (1922–). See Maria Karlsson and Rikard Warlenius, "Ett sekel av syndikalism: Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation 1910–2010," in *Ett sekel av syndikalism: Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation 1910–2010*, ed. SAC (Stockholm: Federativ, 2012); Lennart Persson, "Syndikalisterna: SAC:s tidning 1911–1921," in *Ett sekel av syndikalism: Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation 1910–2010*, ed. SAC (Stockholm: Federativ, 2012); Johan Pries, "PJ Welinder and 'American Syndicalism' in Interwar Sweden," in *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW*, eds. Peter Cole, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 262; Kuhn, "The Nordic Countries," 445.

<sup>9</sup> Lennart Persson, *Syndikalismen i Sverige: 1903–1922* (Göteborg: Göteborgs offsettryckeri, 1975), 154–155, 232–234; Martin Nilsson, "Hundraåringen behöver mer idédebatt!: Anarkism och syndikalism i rörelsen," in *Ett sekel av syndikalism: Sveriges arbetares centralorganisation 1910–2010*, ed. SAC (Stockholm: Federativ, 2012); Lång, *Drömmen om det ouppnåeliga*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Kuhn, "Anarchism, Sweden," in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (Wiley Online Library: Wiley, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Fernström, *Ungsocialismen*, 479–450.

<sup>12</sup> *Brand* no. 1, "Vi vilja: Ingen herre, ingen slav!" (1934): 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Brand* also had a significant publishing break between 1967 and 1972, but the reasons and implications of this intermission fall outside the scope of this chapter.

eventually changed back to *Brand* (1988–) and is at the time of writing still being published under that name.

The durability of *Brand*, as the main vehicle for anarchism in Sweden, makes it a most viable historical source.<sup>14</sup> As I will show, *Brand*'s editorial turbulence in the 1980s reflects anarchism's reorientation towards certain repertoires of contention during this decade. But whereas the broader autonomous movement had grown militant in other European countries already in the early 1980s,<sup>15</sup> anarchism in Sweden took this route later into the decade. Previous research has pointed out the relatively stable economic situation in Sweden, the predominance of social-democratic consensus ideals of democratic dialogue, cooperation, and formal organizing, and the anarchist movement's dedication to non-violence and alternative living, as possible explanations for this comparable delay in militancy.<sup>16</sup> Here scholars have noted, though only in passing, that anarchist repertoires of contention were revived by the politicized branches of the punk scene.<sup>17</sup>

Punk came to Sweden in the spring of 1977. The ignition was a one-day festival lined up with Sex Pistols, The Clash, Ramones, and

<sup>14</sup> The will to cultivate the *Brand*-tradition can be noted for instance in the republications of early history entries, continued aesthetic, and reuse of the recurrent brief-report section "Gnistor" [*Sparks*]. However, two other possible candidates to study Swedish anarchism in the 1980s would be the periodical *Praxis* (1980–1982) and *April* (1982–1987), but these had a more anarcho-sindicalist focus on workplace struggles, quite similar to that of *Arbetaren* (1922–), which makes them less relevant for analyzing anarchism *per se*.

<sup>15</sup> Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, "Introduction: The Last Insurrection? Youth, Revolts and Social Movements in the 1980s," in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, eds. Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); George Katsifas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (London: Humanities Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom, "Why Did It Not Happen Here? The Gradual Radicalization of the Anarchist Movement in Sweden 1980–90," in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, eds. Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 101–105. See also Fredrik Egefur's contribution to this volume.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Jämte, Måns Lundstedt and Magnus Wennerhag, "From Radical Counter-culture to Pragmatic Radicalism? The Collective Identity of Contemporary Radical Left-Libertarian Activism in Sweden," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 14, no. 1 (2020): 9–10; Jämte and Sörbom, "Why Did It Not Happen Here?" 105.

Television.<sup>18</sup> In the years that followed, a flood of punk bands developed a subcultural expression that challenged authorities of every stripe.<sup>19</sup> They energetically produced records and fanzines; bands like Ebba Grön began to make the Swedish headlines and soon became an influential part of the international scene.<sup>20</sup> Punk had originated a few years earlier in UK and USA, spearheaded by the very same bands that made the tour to Stockholm in May 1977,<sup>21</sup> where it immediately became recognized as a youth-driven subculture, characterized by its rebellious defiance of established customs and institutions.<sup>22</sup>

The anarchist course of the Swedish punk scene was set by the pioneering band Ebba Grön's explicit defiance of economic, political, and social hierarchies. Ebba Grön attacked economic exploitation by "refusing to be a machine that works for them".<sup>23</sup> They made a hit by targeting the entanglement between "state and capital".<sup>24</sup> The epitome of hierarchy was by Ebba Grön cynically portrayed as the skill to "lick upwards and kick downwards",<sup>25</sup> a theme typically explored in *Brand*,<sup>26</sup> especially through the periodical's anarcho-punk rebrand in the 1980s.

<sup>18</sup> Benke Carlsson, Peter Johansson and Pär Wickholm, *Svensk punk 1977–81: Varför tror du vi låter som vi låter...* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2004), 19; Erik Hannerz, *Performing Punk: Subcultural Authentications and the Positioning of the Mainstream* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2013), 164–165.

<sup>19</sup> Per Dannefjord and Magnus Eriksson, "Punk, klass och karriär," *Arkiv: Tidskrift för samhällsanalys*, no. 1 (2013): 97–100; Hannerz, *Performing Punk*, 40–43, 193–195.

<sup>20</sup> Erik Hannerz and Mattias Persson, "Punk in Sweden," in *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume XI*, eds. Paolo Prato and David Horn (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017); Peter Kagerland, *Ny väg: Svensk punk / new wave / synth 1977–1982* (Stockholm: Premium Publishing, 2012), 202–207.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3–5; Hannerz, *Performing Punk*, 163–164.

<sup>22</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 26, 102, 116–117.

<sup>23</sup> Ebba Grön, "Sno från de rika," *We're Only in It for the Drugs!* (Mistlur, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Ebba Grön, "Staten och kapitalet," *Ung & kåt / Staten & kapitalet* (Mistlur, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Ebba Grön, "Slicka uppåt, sparka neråt," *Kärlek & uppror* (Mistlur, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> *Brand* no. 19, "Väldet i skolan" (1988).

## ANARCHO-PUNK

Although the pioneering punk bands in Sweden were politically informed by the antecedent *progg* culture of the 1970s extra-parliamentarian left,<sup>27</sup> the connections between punk and anarchism became more formalized towards the middle of the 1980s. This political orientation was headed by foreign bands like Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, Poison Girls, Discharge, and Crass.<sup>28</sup> The British band Crass (1977–1984) is generally considered to be the most influential band of *anarcho-punk*, this political subgenre of 1980s punk that aligned with the ideas and actions of anarchism.<sup>29</sup> Crass was not only a punk band but also a farmhouse collective vested in various forms of political art. From this cultural-political position, Crass rampaged against the pop star culture they associated with punk in the late 1970s.<sup>30</sup> It was Crass that would, according to Lohman and Worley, “transform punk’s rhetorical anarchy into a viable political and cultural opposition” by devising a design for life best summarized in their slogan “there is no authority but yourself”.<sup>31</sup>

In the Swedish 1980s, Crass became an ideological catalyst for the disobedient and rebellious stances that had been broadcasted by the pioneering punk band Ebba Grön. *Brand* published in 1987 an article stating that “today’s young anarchists have directly or indirectly been formed by the attitudes of the punk attitudes in general, and the ideas of the band Crass in particular. [...] It was Crass that gave anarchism in

<sup>27</sup> Sverker Hyltén-Cavallius, “Progg: Utopia and Chronotope,” in *Made in Sweden* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Philip Lalander and Jonas Qvarsebo, *Punk i Peking: Motstånd, attityd och mening* (Malmö: Peking studio, 2014), 98, 102; David Andersson, *Du har inte en chans. Ta den!: Råpunk – en narrativ studie av ett annorlunda svenskt 1980-tal* (Linköping: Linköping University (Master’s thesis), 2021), 12–15.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Gasper, *The Day the Country Died: A History of Anarcho Punk* (London: PM Press, 2007), 11–31; Richard Cross, “The Hippies Now Wear Black?: Crass and the Anarcho-Punk Movement, 1977–1984,” *Socialist History* 26 (2004).

<sup>30</sup> Brian Cogan, “‘Do They Owe Us a Living? Of Course They Do!’ Crass, Throbbing Gristle, and Anarchy and Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 2 (2007): 80–81.

<sup>31</sup> Kirsty Lohman and Matthew Worley, “Bloody Revolutions, Fascist Dreams, Anarchy and Peace: Crass, Rondos and the Politics of Punk, 1977–84,” *Britain and the World* 11, no. 1 (2018): 53.



Europe new life in the early 1980s”.<sup>32</sup> A notable example is MOB 47, which along with Anti-Cimex was Sweden’s most influential, and internationally recognized, anarcho-punk band of the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> With lyrics like “rise against authority / dare think for yourself / don’t let yourself be oppressed by the system”,<sup>34</sup> MOB 47 manifested the increasingly formalized connections between anarchism and punk.

As an anarchist periodical, *Brand* had long elaborated a profound critique of hierarchy.<sup>35</sup> With the rebranding into *Total Brand*, in 1986, the periodical’s content and aesthetics were spiced up with the zest of anarcho-punk. As if to underline this positioning, *Brand* launched a three-issue series, called “counterculture”, fully dedicated to the genre.<sup>36</sup> This fusion between punk and anarchism in Sweden is distinguishable from the UK context, where the leading anarchist periodicals frequently ridiculed and eschewed the political aspects of punk.<sup>37</sup> What also happened through this rebranding was that *Brand* henceforth began to self-identify with the “autonomous movement” that now stirred in other parts of Europe and translated the punk rebellion into politics. In 1987, *Brand* published an article describing domestic and international autonomous groups as a “political tendency”, united by “a political tradition [cultivating a] decentralised and non-hierarchical group structure”.<sup>38</sup> Echoing the hit song by Ebba Grön released a decade earlier,<sup>39</sup> *Brand*

<sup>32</sup> *Total Brand* no. 18, “Tunga Prylar: Class War” (1988): 9.

<sup>33</sup> I here focus on MOB 47 and Anti-Cimex since they were frequently mentioned in *Brand*, although the Swedish anarcho-punk scene also included notable bands like *Svart Parad*, *Shitlickers*, *Asocial*, and *Moderat likvidation*. See Glasper, *The Day the Country Died*, 682; Daniel Ekeröth, *Swedish Death Metal* (New York: Bazillion Points Books, 2008), 19–21; Kagerland, *Ny våg*, 94–96; Hannerz and Persson, “Punk in Sweden”.

<sup>34</sup> MOB 47, “Res dig mot överheten,” *Kärnvapenattack* (Röj Records, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> Lång, *Drömmen om det ouppnåeliga*, 233–236.

<sup>36</sup> *Total Brand* no. 4, “Motkultur” (1986); *Total Brand* no. 5 (1986); *Total Brand* no. 6, “Motkultur: Punk Is dead” (1986).

<sup>37</sup> See Jim Donaghey, Will Boisseau and Caroline Kaltefleiter, “Introduction: Smash the System!,” in *Smash the System! Punk Anarchism as a Culture of Resistance*, eds. Jim Donaghey, Will Boisseau and Caroline Kaltefleiter (Active Distribution, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> *Total Brand* no. 16, “De autonoma: En politisk tendens” (1987): 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ebba Grön, “Staten och kapitalet.”

stated in 1988: “Away with all private property. Away with all hierarchical institutions, the state, the parliament, the political parties”.<sup>40</sup> These anarchist expressions of anti-hierarchy, along with punk’s overall uprising against authority, readily translated into the politics of direct action.

## DIRECT-ACTION REPERTOIRES

Renouncing the state entails politics without intermediaries—*direct action*—a political repertoire to acquire freedom from hierarchy by, in the words of David Graeber, “acting as if one is already free”.<sup>41</sup> Direct action differs from indirect actions such as lobbying, rallying, or voting; whereas indirect action demands state-led social change, direct action bypasses the state to implement change directly.<sup>42</sup> A 1986 *Brand* article trademarked this repertoire of contention with a punkish straightforwardness: “Direct action is a cornerstone to anarchy, don’t fucking forget that!”<sup>43</sup> Hence, when anarchism in Sweden forged its connections with the politicized punk scene and the international autonomous movement, direct actions were forcefully enacted through squatting and sabotage actions.

Squatting became increasingly notable in the direct-action repertoires. The Swedish punk scene had from its very start been resisting territorial stigmatization of the metropolitan periphery; the pioneering bands Ebba Grön and KSMB cynically depicted their disadvantaged position of living in marginalized urban areas.<sup>44</sup> They also engaged in occupying the legendary punk hub *Oasen* when threatened with eviction by the Swedish

<sup>40</sup> *Brand* no. 20, “Rösta för fan inte på miljöpartiet” (1988): 5.

<sup>41</sup> David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 203.

<sup>42</sup> Lorenzo Bosi and Lorenzo Zamponi, “Paths Toward the Same Form of Collective Action: Direct Social Action in Times of Crisis in Italy,” *Social Forces* 99, no. 2 (2020); Vicente Ordóñez, “Direct action,” in *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*, eds. Benjamin Franks, Nathan Jun and Leonard Williams (New York: Routledge, 2018), 115–116; Markus Lundström, *The Making of Resistance: Brazil’s Landless Movement and Narrative Enactment* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 115–116.

<sup>43</sup> *Total Brand* no. 6, “Apati!” (1986).

<sup>44</sup> Kagerland, *Ny väg*, 203, 324. See also lyrics to the songs Ebba Grön, “We’re Only in It for the Drugs no. 1,” *We’re Only in It for the Drugs!* (Mistlur, 1979); KSMB, “Förortsbarn,” *Bakverk* 80 (MNW, 1979); KSMB, “Tidens tempo,” *Aktion* (MNW, 1980).

authorities.<sup>45</sup> While the squatting tradition in Sweden dates back at least to the 1960s,<sup>46</sup> the punk movement complemented the squatting-for-residence orientation as they began to claim a cultural space of their own.<sup>47</sup> Hence, when the whirlwind of squatting swept through Sweden in the mid-1980s, the anarchist periodical *Brand* had already reported about such struggles for nearly a decade.<sup>48</sup> But with the punk-influenced remake of *Brand*, in 1986, the anarchist movement increasingly self-identified with the broader autonomous movement and its signatory practice of squatting. Inspired by the West German and Danish BZ movement, which was carefully covered in the journalism of *Total Brand* (1986–1988),<sup>49</sup> around twenty different squats appeared across Sweden during these three years.<sup>50</sup> Squatting was here framed as a political alternative to that of skyrocketing inner-city rents and subsequent displacement of poor people to stigmatized areas in the city periphery. It was a politics to secure the right to housing but also independent cultural development.<sup>51</sup> A notable example was the occupation of *Ultrahuset* in 1988, which resisted the municipal closure of a facility that since the early 1980s had been a focal point for Swedish punk music.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Basta* no. 16–17, “Den sanna historien om Oasen” (1980); See also Dominika Polanska and Mathias Wåg, “De svenska husockupationernas 50-åriga historia,” in *Ockuperat!: Svenska husockupationer 1968–2018*, eds. Dominika Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal, 2019), 22–24.

<sup>46</sup> Dominika Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State: Squatting in Sweden* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 10–16.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Ericsson, “Ockuperat område: Striden om brandstationen i Jönköping 1982,” in *Politik underifrån: Kollektiva konfrontationer under Sveriges 1900-tal*, eds. Andrés Brink Pinto and Martin Ericsson (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2016).

<sup>48</sup> *Brand* no., “Labour vrider tiden bakåt” (1976); *Brand* no. 13–14, “Järnet” (1979); *Basta* no. 16–17, “Odlad mark ska förbli odlad” (1980); *Brand* no. 9–10, “Från utopi till direkt aktion” (1978).

<sup>49</sup> *Total Brand* no. 3, “Nyheter från Västtyskland” (1986); *Total Brand* no. 4, “Enkeltur ‘Enkelhuset’” (1986); *Total Brand* no. 7, “BZ nytt: Köpenhamn” (1986); *Total Brand* no. 18, “Haffenstrasse” (1988).

<sup>50</sup> Polanska, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Total Brand* no. 12, “BZ nytt: Tavastgatan Göteborg” (1987); *Total Brand* no. 17, “BZ nytt: Haga-ockupanter åker ut!!!” (1988).

<sup>52</sup> *Total Brand* no. 22, “Blåsningen” (1988); *Total Brand* no. 21, “Kampen om Ultra” (1988).

The direct-action repertoires also included sabotage of multinational corporations that directly or indirectly supported Apartheid in South Africa. One particular target was Shell, a company that sidestepped the international oil embargo to profit from the racist regime.<sup>53</sup> In 1988–1989, several anarchist groups joined forces with the BZ movement in Holland, West Germany, and Denmark, in a transnational direct action campaign against Shell to force the company to withdraw from its collaboration with Apartheid South Africa.<sup>54</sup> *Brand* had in the preceding year begun reporting positively about sabotage against Shell stations in Denmark,<sup>55</sup> and soon it reported about the first action in Sweden.<sup>56</sup> In 1989, *Brand* published a list of nearly two hundred sabotaged Shell stations across the country and presented this phenomenon in terms of a “new social movement”.<sup>57</sup> This flood of direct actions now synchronized the repertoires of contention with the broader autonomous movement of the time,<sup>58</sup> but also with the political tradition of anarchism. A 1987 *Brand* article explained that “what links different autonomous groups together is to some extent a political tradition, a decentralised and non-hierarchical group structure based on legal and ‘open’ customs but with preparedness for illegal actions”.<sup>59</sup>

The commitment to direct action was furthermore propelled by an anarchist denouncement of parliamentary democracy and disbelief in voting. The first relaunch of *Brand*, in 1982, came as a special issue dedicated to the parliamentary election. It had the sarcastic subtitle “Vote on All Parties” and elaborated the classical anarchist argument about the

<sup>53</sup> See Ishva Minefee and Marcelo Bucheli, “MNC Responses to International NGO Activist Campaigns: Evidence From Royal Dutch/Shell in Apartheid South Africa,” *Journal of International Business Studies* 52, no. 5 (2021).

<sup>54</sup> Flemming Mikkelsen and Rene Karpantschhof, “Youth as a Political Movement: Development of the Squatters’ and Autonomous Movement in Copenhagen,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 3 (2001): 617.

<sup>55</sup> *Total Brand* no. 13, “Solidaritet med Steve Biko: Aktionerna. Reaktionerna. Följderna” (1987).

<sup>56</sup> *Total Brand* no. 14, “Burn Shell to hell” (1987).

<sup>57</sup> *Brand* no. 29, “Den nya folkrörelsen” (1989).

<sup>58</sup> George Katsiaficas, “Preface,” in *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, eds. Bart Van Der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leendert van Hoozenhuijze (Oakland: PM Press, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> *Total Brand* no. 16 (1987): 11.

ballot as an illusion of popular power.<sup>60</sup> Later on, in the election year of 1988, *Brand's* front cover of the September issue had the bolded title “We do not vote!”<sup>61</sup> Punk made the soundtrack to this political stance. The band MOB 47 released in 1985 their provocative song “Refuse to Vote”.<sup>62</sup> The straightforward anti-parliamentarism was accompanied by a fervent call for direct action, an empowering declaration that “we can change the system”, followed by the imperative to “disobey the government’s laws”.<sup>63</sup> This political tradition of vote refusal had long been a signatory to *Brand*.<sup>64</sup> Even before the breakthrough of universal suffrage, Albert Jensen, a long-term editor of *Brand* with notable connections to the international anarchist movement, including the suffrage-critic Emma Goldman, stated in an anti-voting pamphlet that “those who consciously refuse to vote are revolutionaries”.<sup>65</sup> At the historical moment of the first democratic election in Sweden, in the 1920s, *Brand* feverously promoted the anti-parliamentary action of refusing to vote.<sup>66</sup> Six decades later, in the election year of 1988, *Brand* would once again call for that precise politics: “The election is an illusion. Our answer: direct action”.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Brand* no. Valestra, “Rösta på alla partierna” (1982); For a historical analysis of anarchist perspectives on voting, see Markus Lundström, “The Ballot Humbug: Anarchist Women and Women’s Suffrage,” *Moving the Social* 66 (2022).

<sup>61</sup> *Brand* no. 19, “Vi röstar inte!” (1988).

<sup>62</sup> MOB 47, “Vågra rösta!,” *Stockholmsmangel* (n/a, 1985).

<sup>63</sup> MOB 47, “Vi kan,” *Sjuk värld* (Ägg Tapes, 1984).

<sup>64</sup> See for instance *Brand* no. 38, “Antiparlamentarismen går segrande fram” (1920); *Brand* no. 40, “Valmakarna kväka” (1920); *Brand* no. 3, “Varför jag inte röstar” (1963); *Brand* no. 3, “Anarkism och parlamentarism” (1966); See also Lång, *Drömmen om det oppnåeliga*, 227, 239–240; Fernström, *Ungsocialismen* 346.

<sup>65</sup> Albert Jensen, *Politikens orimlighet* (Lysekil: Tryckeri för Vestkusten, 1908), 10.

<sup>66</sup> *Brand* no. 40 (1920); *Brand* no. 40 (1920); *Brand* no. 38 (1921); Jensen’s vote-refusal was also elaborated in the anarcho-syndicalist journal Red Flags: *Röda fanor*, “Ungsocialisternas agitation för valstrejk” (1920); *Röda fanor*, “Böra ungsocialisterna revidera sin åskådning?” (October 1921); *Röda fanor*, “Antiparlamentarismen” (September 1921).

<sup>67</sup> *Brand* no. 22, “Valet är en illusion” (1988).

## STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM

Defiance of hierarchy, and its entailed direct-action repertoire, is in anarchism intimately linked to political struggles for freedom.<sup>68</sup> When anarchism met punk in the Swedish 1980s, the concept of freedom had many layers: freedom from authority, repression, and imprisonment; freedom to self-fulfilment and self-determination; freedom for others—including freedom for animal others. In 1984, the Swedish anarcho-punk band MOB 47 released the song “Animal Liberation”. It raged against scientific vivisection along with an imperative question mark: “how can we stand by and watch as they murder the animals?”<sup>69</sup> In the following summer of 1985, Animal Liberation Front made its first appearance in Sweden: two Beagle dogs were liberated from periodontitis experiments conducted by Malmö University.<sup>70</sup> In October 1987, *Brand* provided instructions about how to perform animal liberation actions, along with a call for reporting these activities to the periodical.<sup>71</sup> Soon thereafter, *Brand* published a three-page article on Animal Liberation Front in Sweden, along with payment instructions to support the struggle.<sup>72</sup> *Brand* henceforth continued to advocate direct action for animal freedom.<sup>73</sup>

The struggles for freedom also targeted human imprisonment. In the most literary sense, *Brand* agitated for prison abolition to liberate people from spending their life behind bars.<sup>74</sup> This struggle included solidarity with “political prisoners” like anti-militarist conscientious objectors and

<sup>68</sup> See Nathan Jun, “Freedom,” in *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*, eds. Benjamin Franks, Nathan Jun and Leonard Williams (New York: Routledge, 2018), 49–56.

<sup>69</sup> MOB 47, “Animal Liberation,” *Kärnvapenattack* (Röj Records, 1984).

<sup>70</sup> Kerstin Jacobsson and Jonas Lindblom, *Animal Rights Activism: A Moral-Sociological Perspective on Social Movements* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 25–26; *Total Brand* no. 17, “Djurens befrielsefront: Organisationen vars målsättning är att inte finnas till” (1988).

<sup>71</sup> *Total Brand* no. 15, “ALF: Animal Liberation Front” (1987).

<sup>72</sup> *Total Brand* no. 17 (1988).

<sup>73</sup> See for instance *Brand* no. 26, “Gnistor” (1989); *Brand* no. 31, “Aktioner” (1989); *Brand* no. 21, “Gnistor” (1988).

<sup>74</sup> *Brand* no. 24 (1988).

militant Shell-saboteurs.<sup>75</sup> In the early 1980s, *Brand* incorporated a recurrent article section entitled “Letters From the Other Side of the Bars”, which functioned as a communication channel between imprisoned people and the *Brand*-readers.<sup>76</sup> The prison-abolitionist position was later embodied in the 1987 startup of a Swedish chapter of the international prisoner support network Anarchist Black Cross.<sup>77</sup>

Freedom from imprisonment also encompassed more subtle forms of restraint. The early issues of *Brand* recurrently challenged the capitalist dictum to work for a living—the wage-labour structure—and argued instead for work refusal as freedom and resistance to capitalist exploitation.<sup>78</sup> *Brand* published in 1983 “The Workshy Manifesto” which, by paraphrasing The Communist Manifesto, agitated for liberation from work and elaborated the understanding that “unemployment is freedom”.<sup>79</sup> This anti-work attitude distinguished anarchism from the overall labour movement, including the Swedish anarcho-syndicalist union’s focus on workplace resistance. The anarchist struggle for collective freedom was complemented by a call for individual freedom. This anti-authoritarian exploration of individuality became noticeably embraced by the punks that went against the mainstream towards new cultural expressions. In the vein of the UK band Crass’ catchphrase “Anarchy, Peace, and Freedom”,<sup>80</sup> Swedish punks explored a plethora of symbolic combinations and fashion outfits,<sup>81</sup> expressing what Erik Hannerz calls “punk as individual freedom from rules”.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Brandfaran* no. 4, “Rebell med brutet gevär” (1983); *Brandfaran* no. 1, “De sanna krigshjältarna...” (1984); *Brand* no. 14, “Även den hårdaste snäcka går att knäcka” (1988).

<sup>76</sup> *Basta* no. 15, “Brev från andra sidan gallret” (1980).

<sup>77</sup> *Total Brand* no. 10, “A-mötet” (1987).

<sup>78</sup> *Basta* no. 16–17, “Överlevnadssamhället: Från den vilda strejken till den allmänna självförvaltningen” (1980); *Brandfaran* no. 2, “A-socialen: Vägra arbete, vägra arbetsplikt” (1984); *Brandfaran* no. 3, “Arbetslösheten och det verkliga eländet” (1984); *Brandfaran* no. 2, “Levande revolution” (1984).

<sup>79</sup> *Brandfaran* no. 3, “De arbetsskyggas manifest” (1984).

<sup>80</sup> Lohman and Worley, *Britain and the World*, 60.

<sup>81</sup> Dannefjord and Eriksson, “Punk, klass och karriär,” 99–100; Lalander and Qvarsebo, *Punk i Peking*, 33–35, 97–99.

<sup>82</sup> Hannerz, *Performing Punk*, 58.

In Sweden as well as internationally, the do-it-yourself dictum characterized the agency of the punk scene.<sup>83</sup> For Crass, as noted by Lohman and Worley, “anarchism was presented as self-taught, drawing from a range of ideas and practices – a DIY anarchism for a DIY culture”,<sup>84</sup> With the arrival of punk to Sweden in 1977, this subculture came to acquire administrative and technical skills to record and distribute music, arrange concerts and festivals, and broadcast radio shows; punks educated themselves in photography and painting to create posters, fanzines, and album covers; they advanced their art of writing to create lyrics, poetry, and journalistic articles.<sup>85</sup> The DIY culture established during these initial years became most vital from 1982 onwards when the established media and music industry had lost its initial fascination with punk. In this context, experiential know-how and collective capability for cultural self-sufficiency became a necessity.<sup>86</sup> *Brand* accordingly paid tribute to Crass as the architects of a politically replenished DIY culture; contrasted against the mere rebellious attitude of previous punk bands, Crass had offered a prefigurative politics that represented “a concrete alternative to status quo”.<sup>87</sup>

## PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

The repertoires of contention deployed by Swedish anarcho-punks were fuelled by a profound belief in self-determination and in the capability to create political, economic, and social alternatives. For the contemporary anarchist movement, punk is indeed a past that continues to shape the present. One illustrative example, as I detail elsewhere, is how anarchist community kitchens today accentuate a striving to develop a vegan cuisine

<sup>83</sup> Matthew Worley, “Punk, Politics and British (Fan) Zines, 1976–84: “While the World Was Dying, Did You Wonder Why?”” *History Workshop Journal* 79, no. 1 (2015); Ian Moran, “Punk: The Do-It-Yourself Subculture,” *Social Sciences Journal* 10, no. 1 (2010); Ryan Moore, “Friends Don’t Let Friends Listen to Corporate Rock: Punk as a Field of Cultural Production,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36, no. 4 (2007); Steven Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 318–329.

<sup>84</sup> Lohman and Worley, *Britain and the World*, 60.

<sup>85</sup> Dannefjord and Eriksson, “Punk, klass och karriär,” 106–108; Lalander and Qvarsebo, *Punk i Peking*, 98–99.

<sup>86</sup> Andersson, *Du har inte en chans*, 12–13.

<sup>87</sup> *Total Brand* no. 6 (1986): 16.



that would, as one of these participants puts it, “show people something different than the classic *punk stew*”.<sup>88</sup> The reference here is the generic dish that was born out of the cook-what-you-have cuisine characterizing the punk scene in the 1980s.<sup>89</sup> The punk stew was part of a “subcultural food system”,<sup>90</sup> one that later travelled into the mobile activist kitchens that became a significant infrastructure of the alter-globalization movement at the turn of the millennium.<sup>91</sup> Anarchist community kitchens in Sweden are now headed by a new generation of vegan gastronomists transgressing “the classic punk stew” to offer delightful food as a pull factor for political veganism.

This oral history example illustrates that the cooking practices developed by the early anarcho-punks are *not dead but alive*. It shows how past political practices can become a breeding ground for new forms of activism. The punk stew is not only a vivid historical reference but also a politico-culinary memorial, one that anarchists now revisit by asserting an ancestral relation to the 1980s anarcho-punks, albeit with a prefigurative aim of exceeding the tradition’s culinary boundaries. The collective memory of these ancestors shapes present-day mobilization, just as anarchists in the 1980s regenerated political repertoires of the preceding tradition while, at the same time, deploying a future-oriented temporality of prefiguration.

*Prefigurative politics* refer to practices that seek to bring a desired future into a desolate present, creating a new world in the shell of the old.<sup>92</sup> Social movement scholars have defined prefigurative politics as “an

<sup>88</sup> Markus Lundström, “Political Imaginations of Community Kitchens in Sweden,” *Critical Sociology* 49, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>89</sup> See for instance *Total Brand* no. 7, “Enkelbiljett genom Sverige: Glädjetåget” (1986): 10.

<sup>90</sup> Dylan Clark, “The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine,” *Ethnology* 43, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Fessenden, “Food Is a Right Not a Privilege: Punk Anarchism, Ephemerality, and Seeding Change in Vancouver,” in *Emergent Spaces: Change and Innovation in Small Urban Spaces*, ed. Petra Kuppinger (Cham: Springer, 2021).

<sup>92</sup> Lara Monticelli, “On the Necessity of Prefigurative Politics,” *Thesis Eleven* 167, no. 1 (2021).

embodied process of reimagining all of society”;<sup>93</sup> which entails a “future-oriented construction of political alternatives”.<sup>94</sup> The DIY culture is but one example of the temporally disobedient operation in that repertoire of contention.

The notion of prefigurative politics complicates the resource mobilization of collective memories and the punk temporality of breaking with preceding generations while declaring, like Sex Pistols, a no-future.<sup>95</sup> The punk youth forwarded a sharp critique against their parents’ generation, which they held responsible for a tedious and miserable situation.<sup>96</sup> The punks rebelled against how the future had been stolen from them. They defied the temporality of short-term employment and residence that characterized their socioeconomic marginalization. They fought to break free from a dragged-out present of boredom and meaninglessness. In 1977, Ebba Grön portrayed a desperate entrapment in a circular time order: “get up – go to work – work – work – eat lunch / same thing tomorrow / work – take the tube back home and do nothing / that’s not a life / that’s slavery / so keep on being a rebel”.<sup>97</sup>

The punk rebellion was an attempt to reclaim the future. The disorderly youth cultivated a subculture that readily made it into the mainstream—and it was fuelled by pure defiance against the no-future assigned to them. The anarcho-punk struggle, against hierarchy and for freedom, was not only about creating an alternative future, not merely a political goal located at the horizon of time, but rather a politics to enact, to prefigure, that future already in the present. This is the disobedient temporality of prefiguration.

<sup>93</sup> Marianne Maeckelbergh, “The Prefigurative Turn: The Time and Place of Social Movement Practice,” in *Social Sciences for an Other Politics: Women Theorizing Without Parachutes*, ed. Ana Cecilia Dinerstein (Cham: Springer, 2016), 122.

<sup>94</sup> Luke Yates, “Prefigurative Politics and Social Movement Strategy: The Roles of Prefiguration in the Reproduction, Mobilisation and Coordination of Movements,” *Political Studies* 69, no. 4 (2020): 1.

<sup>95</sup> Sex Pistols, “God Save the Queen,” *Never Mind the Bollocks. Here’s the Sex Pistols* (Virgin Records, 1977).

<sup>96</sup> Matthew Worley, “Riotous Assembly: British Punk’s Cultural Diaspora in the Summer of 81,” in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, eds. Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen (Cham: Springer, 2016), 220–225.

<sup>97</sup> Ebba Grön, “Vad ska du bli?” *Vad ska du bli? / Häng Gud* (Mistlur, 1979).

There was, however, a conflict between the prefigurative exploration of alternative lifestyles and attempts to organize a broader class struggle for systemic change. For example, the articles in *Brand* sometimes contrasted the explicit anarcho-pacifism of the band Crass with the confrontational politics emphasized by the British anarchist group Class War.<sup>98</sup> This tension highlights a discord in the anarchist repertoires of contention regarding the use of violence, a dissonance propelled by the diverse temporalities of prefiguration and revolution. Whereas prefigurative politics draw a desired future into the desolate present, revolutionary politics aim for a future where alternative lifestyles would be obsolete. These diverse means-end orientations have different implications for the place of violence in the anarchist repertoires of contention.

## VIOLENCE

The issue of violence has rendered an immense discussion throughout the anarchist periodical *Brand*. In the broadest sense, it contains three different positions: non-use of violence through *anti-militarism*; momentary use of violence in *self-defence*, and strategic use of *revolutionary violence* in the struggle for a less violent future.

*Anti-militarism* is the political imperative that state violence must be broken and left unsupported. This categorical renouncement of violence has been something of a leitmotif to *Brand* since its inception. In the early 1900s, when military conscription became compulsory in Sweden, anarchists and peace activists who refused to partake in state violence were considered a threat by the Swedish authorities. The *Brand* editors repeatedly faced charges of disloyalty to the state.<sup>99</sup> Security forces saw anarchists as particularly menacing during the interwar and war periods, precisely due to their fierce resistance to military conscription.<sup>100</sup> Even

<sup>98</sup> *Total Brand* no. 18 (1988); cf. Jim Donaghey, “The “Punk Anarchisms” of Class War and CrimethInc.,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 25, no. 2 (2020): 118–119.

<sup>99</sup> Karin Jonsson, *Fångna i begreppen?: Revolution, tid och politik i svensk socialistisk press 1917–1924* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2017), 86–97; Fernström, *Ungsocialismen* 116–121; Lång, *Drömmen om det ouppnåeliga*, 7–8.

<sup>100</sup> Irene Andersson, “Antimilitaristic Antiwar Committees in Sweden 1934–1936: A Question of Fear and Masculinity,” in *Gender, War and Peace: Breaking Up the Borderlines*, eds. Anders Ahlbäck and Fia Sundevall (Joensuu: University Press of Eastern Finland, 2014).

with the impending threat of the ideologically antagonistic National Socialist Germany, anarchistic anti-militarism persisted; *Brand* published in 1939 a radical-pacifist book by the journal's editor, Carl-Johan Björklund, entitled "I Do Not Believe in Violence".<sup>101</sup>

The 1980s unfolded in the tracks of that legacy. *Brand* regularly published calls for "total refusal" of military conscription,<sup>102</sup> a political statement that is still criminalized in Sweden and in the 1980s frequently resulted in imprisonment. In this anti-militaristic vein, *Brand* agitated for total refusal, rather than the legal option of the conscious objection, and actively supported the anti-militaristic "political prisoners" held captive by the Swedish state.<sup>103</sup> Refusal of military conscription was also a recurrent theme in the early punk entries,<sup>104</sup> and this position continued with anarcho-punk and especially with the band Anti-Cimex's double call for "pacifism" and "anarchy".<sup>105</sup> To the secret police in Sweden, however, the anti-militarism expressed by punks and anarchists was, in the 1980s, no longer considered a threat.<sup>106</sup> The security alarm was re-activated when anarchism became linked to a series of more confrontational direct actions,<sup>107</sup> in which *Total Brand* was pointed out as a lead voice of this "new and militant anarchist movement".<sup>108</sup>

Violence as *self-defence* means that physical force cannot be used proactively, but only as a temporary means to defend an individual or a group that is under attack. In the first half of the 1980s, the police considered anarchists to be fully dedicated to non-violence.<sup>109</sup> But towards the

<sup>101</sup> Carl Johan Björklund, *Jag tror inte på våldet: Ett diskussionsinlägg* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Brand, 1939).

<sup>102</sup> *Brandfaran* no. 3, "Aktiv totalvägran" (1984); *Brandfaran* no. 4 (1983).

<sup>103</sup> *Total Brand* no. 18, "Våga vägra" (1988): 30.

<sup>104</sup> Ebba Grön, "Totalvägra," *We're Only in It for the Drugs!* (Mistlur, 1979); KSMB, "Militärlåten," *Bakverk 80* (MNW, 1979).

<sup>105</sup> Anti-Cimex, "Anti-Cimex," *Anarkist attack EP* (BULLSHIT, 1982).

<sup>106</sup> Magnus Hjort, *Hotet från vänster: Säkerhetstjänsternas övervakning av kommunister, anarkister m.m. 1965–2002* (Stockholm: Fritzes, 2002), 379–380.

<sup>107</sup> Hjort, *Hotet från vänster*, 324–343; SÄPO, *Väldsam politisk extremism: Antidemokratiska grupperingar på yttersta höger- och vänsterkanten* (Stockholm: Säkerhetspolisen, 2009), 11, 42–43; Jämte and Sörbom, "Why Did It Not Happen Here?" 105–107.

<sup>108</sup> SÄPO, quoted in Hjort, 330–331.

<sup>109</sup> Hjort, *Hotet från vänster*, 379–380.

middle of the 1980s, collective self-defence became an increasingly important part of the anarchist repertoires of contention. Squatters began to fight back during police-led evictions. For instance, when the police intervened to break up a squat in the summer of 1986, police officers declared in court to have been attacked with eggs, paint-filled balloons, stones, and smoke grenades.<sup>110</sup> Although the charged squatters claimed that to be misunderstandings and exaggerations,<sup>111</sup> the security police nonetheless started to intensify their surveillance of the anarchist movement.<sup>112</sup> Hence, the anarchist spectre transmuted in the 1980s; the threat was no longer anarchists *refusing* state violence but that anarchists themselves were *using* violence against the state.

However, a full-hearted embrace of *revolutionary violence* was quite a marginal position in *Brand*, used primarily for rhetorical reasons. The weaponized imagery of the social revolution was nonetheless broadcasted through punk, perhaps most notably in Ebba Grön's songs "Shoot a Cop" and "Arm Yourselves".<sup>113</sup> Ebba Grön was originally a code name for a police operation that, in the spring of 1977, targeted a revolutionary group of self-identified anarchists planning to take a Swedish politician hostage to enable freedom for persecuted members of the German Red Army Faction (RAF).<sup>114</sup> The band's name was purposefully chosen to provoke and mock the authorities.<sup>115</sup> The violent-revolutionary prose of Ebba Grön readily found fertile ground in *Brand*. As with the punks, RAF references in *Brand* were mainly rhetorical; depictions of armed violence spiced up the artwork of revolution. But some articles in *Brand* also articulated real support for the RAF's tactics.<sup>116</sup> Vindication of the Marxist-Leninist organization RAF—despite the anarchist movement's emblematic hostility to authoritarian socialism—was propelled by the

<sup>110</sup> Hjort, *Hotet från vänster*, 335–336.

<sup>111</sup> *Total Brand* no. 7, "BZ nytt: Luntmakargatan, Stockholm" (1986).

<sup>112</sup> SÄPO, quoted in Hjort, *Hotet från vänster*, 333.

<sup>113</sup> Ebba Grön, "Skjut en snut," *Onsen* (MNW, 1979); Ebba Grön, "Beväpna er!," *We're Only in It for the Drugs!* (Mistlur, 1979).

<sup>114</sup> Dan Hansén and Jens Nordqvist, *Kommando Holger Meins: Dramat på västtyska ambassaden och Operation Leo* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2005), 277–285.

<sup>115</sup> Staffan Björkman, *Thåström – Stå aldrig still. En bok om Joakim Thåström: Samlade reportage, intervjuer, artiklar och recensioner* (Göteborg: Reverb, 2010), 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Total Brand* no. 12, "Anarki & våld" (1987): 17; *Brand* no. 27–28, "Baader-Meinhof komplexet" (1989).

crackdown against Swedish anarchists in the wake of the Ebba Grön operation in 1977, which led the police to link anarchism with terrorism.<sup>117</sup> The repression triggered solidarity with imprisoned anarchists and defence of their violent tactics.<sup>118</sup> It also prompted rebellion against the state monopoly on violence: “we ourselves decide when we will fight”.<sup>119</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum was the anti-militaristic standpoint that had been the leitmotif of *Brand* since the late 1800s. This positioning was closely related to that of non-violence, not only through the politized refusal to join the military but also by elaborating prefigurative politics that, by inverting the means-end causality, makes violence counterproductive. Disregarding ideological and tactical commitments to non-violence, Swedish authorities have from the late 1980s onwards seen a threat in the anarchist repertoires of squatting, corporate sabotage, and escalating confrontations with the police.<sup>120</sup> The 1980s was the decade that brought the spectre of anarchism back to life.

## PUNK IS DEAD

The anarchist repertoires of contention were revitalized in the Swedish 1980s when anarchism met punk. Direct action came to inform the politics of squatting, sabotage actions, and struggles for freedom for humans and animals alike. The repertoire heritage also brought re-negotiations of violence, where energetic opinions about non-violence, self-defence, and occasionally also armed revolution, clashed against each other; violence was rendered obsolete in prefigurative politics, the enactment of anarchy in the present, but violence was also reclaimed from the state monopoly through a diversity of tactics outlined by the international autonomous and anarchist movements’ self-defence against the police.

The punk-regeneration of anarchism in the 1980s spotlights how past political repertoires came to life, like pyrophile plants sprouting through

<sup>117</sup> Hjort, *Hotet från vänster*, 324.

<sup>118</sup> *Total Brand* no. 18 (1988): 9.

<sup>119</sup> *Total Brand* no. 8–9, “Vårt motstånd var en seger” (1986): 15.

<sup>120</sup> FOI, *Den digitala kampen: Autonoma rörelser på nätet* (Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2018); Olof Petersson, *Demokratis motståndare: Rapport MSB896* (Stockholm: Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap, 2015); CVE, *Den autonoma miljön* (Stockholm: Brottsförebyggande rådet / CVE – Center mot våldsbejakande extremism, 2020).

a wildfire. By reviving remnants of the preceding movement, anarchist ancestors were, in an existential-political sense, kept alive.

In a frontal attack against the commercialization and mainstreaming of a once rebellious youth movement, the UK band Crass polemically declared, in 1978, that “punk is dead”.<sup>121</sup> This premature deadness then revived the punk scene, as it now sought out a political ideology that also had been declared dead: anarchism was crushed under the Franco-regime in late 1930s Spain and then silenced by the ideological polarization of the Cold war.<sup>122</sup> In the Swedish 1980s, however, the anarchist repertoires of contention did not only align with the broader autonomous movement in Europe. They also enacted existential-political means of “being with the dead”, a Heideggerian notion that philosopher Hans Ruin uses to capture how the past “continues to be constituted in and through the involvement of the living with the dead and how the dead shape the space of the living”.<sup>123</sup>

The ubiquitous postulate that “punk is dead” becomes rather telling here. Even if political or cultural ancestry is rendered dead—like classical anarchism and early punk—the heritage lives on by reviving repertoires of contention into the present. In Sweden, the pioneering punk bands set the tone for anarcho-punk and the anarchist periodical *Brand*. Towards the end of the Swedish 1980s, anarchism and punk had become regenerated, I would argue, precisely through this existential being with the dead.

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<sup>121</sup> Crass, “Punk Is Dead,” *The Feeding of the 5000* (Southern Studios, 1978).

<sup>122</sup> The anarchist historiographer George Woodcock made this declaration in 1962 but later revised it while watching the 1968-movement arise. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962); Allan Antliff, “George Woodcock on ‘The Anarchist Critic’,” *Anarchist Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>123</sup> Hans Ruin, *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 111.

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# “The Winter Palace” in Malmö: Subversive Activists, Welfare-State Anarchists, or Just a Slightly Radical Cultural Association?

*Fredrik Egefur*

## SETTING THE SCENE

The Winter Palace (*Vinterpalatset*) was a venue and association within the left-wing alternative environment in Malmö (Sweden’s third biggest city) between 1987 and 1989. The association had premises in the port area and was, by its own definition, an anarchist group. The venue ran a pub and café; arranged concerts, public lectures, and movie screenings; broadcasted radio; published fanzines; and more. The idea was that the proceeds would be used to build a Southern Swedish center for anarchist propaganda and political struggle. However, this idea did not fully realize,

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and the extensive mix of cultural activities is probably better remembered today than the more explicit political activities that were carried out.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the Winter Palace (TWP) claimed to be influenced by various European occupation groups (“squatters”), the venue was let by the city of Malmö on a legal demolition contract. Nevertheless, the association still considered themselves part of the squatter scene and had frequent contact with groups in other cities. Some confrontations with police and other groups did occur, but nowhere near as often as for similar groups in e.g., Copenhagen and Amsterdam. TWP was otherwise very focused on a pacifist, non-violent agenda, with roots in the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s. When the venue’s contract finally expired in 1989, the activists left the premises without resistance, and instead ran the café The Black Cat (*Svarta katten*) for a few years. In the 1990s the emergence of the more violent autonomous scene made the activities at TWP look past one’s prime for the younger activists.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the Winter Palace activist group in Malmö, and to analyze their actions from a “political opportunity structures” framework. This framework is defined by political science researcher Sidney Tarrow as examining “consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors [,] which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements.”<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Tarrow refers to “aspects of the political system that affect the possibilities that challenging groups have to mobilize effectively.” Political opportunities could therefore be summed up as “options for collective action, with chances and risks attached to them, which depend on factors outside the mobilizing group.”<sup>3</sup>

The article builds on three main sources: First and foremost, the Winter Palace’s archive collection, which has never previously been used

<sup>1</sup> Historian Johan Pries devotes one chapter of his master’s thesis to TWP as a background to the birth of the autonomous scene in Malmö and Lund. No other previous research has been found. Johan Pries, *En rörelse blir till: De autonoma i Malmö och Lund 1986–1992*, Lund University (2008, unpublished master’s thesis).

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Tarrow, “States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>3</sup> Marco Giugni, “Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly,” *Swiss Political Science Review* 15, no. 2 (2009): 361.

in research, and contains documents such as meeting minutes, correspondence with authorities, fanzines/pamphlets, posters, and more. Second, articles from contemporary niche magazines, such as *Brand/Total-Brand* and *Magazin April*, which occasionally covered TWP. Third, semi-structured interviews with three of the leading activists, including TWP’s first chairman, and two other activists who regularly wrote in the above-mentioned niche magazines. The interviews were conducted and analyzed in line with today’s scientific standards, bearing in mind that the events took place over 30 years ago.<sup>4</sup>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the early 1980s, several Northern and Western European cities were characterized by an extensive house occupant scene, later known as the “squatters’ movement.” This movement combined political activities with subcultural living, and more or less militant groups in e.g., Amsterdam, Copenhagen, West Berlin, Zurich, and London managed to occupy houses or even entire neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> Bart van der Steen states that even though the 1980s movement shared much of the action repertoire of older groups, especially the mixture of radical politics and alternative culture, a significant shift took place around 1980. New activists, mostly drawn from the middle and working classes, focused less on theory, and more on direct political action. The goal was to create free, alternative zones where a variety of cultural events and political actions could take place. Another defining part of the activist milieu of the mid-1980s was the influence of the punk wave—with its “do-it-yourself” agenda—probably as a counter-reaction to the more dogmatic Marxist-Leninist left of the 1970s (which at the time led to a dwindling existence).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In agreement with the wishes of the interviewees, all three have been referred to by their actual first names.

<sup>5</sup> Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leedert van Hoogenhuijze, “Introduction: Squatting and Autonomous Action in Europe, 1980–2012,” in *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Anonymous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, ed. Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leedert van Hoogenhuijze (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014), 2–11.

<sup>6</sup> See also Marcus Lundström’s contribution to this book.

These conflict repertoires soon spread across Western Europe; certainly not to all cities, but enough to create a clear trend. The squatters' movement incorporated various political questions in their struggle, such as animal rights, peace activism, and anti-racism.<sup>7</sup> Most groups used the occupation of buildings as an infrastructural starting point from which other political actions could be organized. These autonomous social centers generally played a vital role in the city's cultural and political environment by providing a space for underground music and other cultural events, as well as political activities.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, the term "autonomous" came to be more often used to describe this subculture, rather than the formerly used "squatters' movement."<sup>9</sup>

For the Swedish context, an influential example of the European squatters' movement was the Danish group BZ, which emerged during one of Europe's most energetic and extensive occupations, starting in Copenhagen in 1981. The Danish scene involved violent confrontations with police, and frequent street battles, which were later romanticized and used in the movement's own historical writings to strengthen internal morale.<sup>10</sup> In several Swedish cities, more or less ambitious attempts were made to copy the European strategy, especially in Stockholm, and in the long-standing occupation of the Haga quarters in Gothenburg. As Dominika V. Polanska shows in her contribution to this book, occupations also took place in smaller towns. Specifically, groups frequently demanded or claimed, houses for rock band rehearsals and gigs. The more political connection on a macro level was often more implicitly linked to the struggle though, and physical violence was seldom used.<sup>11</sup>

Returning to the occupation of Haga in Gothenburg, sociologist Håkan Thörn shows how the many years of struggle in these quarters

<sup>7</sup> Hans Pruijt, "Squatting in Europe," in *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, ed. The Squatting Europe Kollektive (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 29.

<sup>8</sup> van der Steen et al., "Introduction," 16–17.

<sup>9</sup> van der Steen et al., "Introduction," 3.

<sup>10</sup> See Flemming Mikkelsen and René Karpantschhof, "Youth as a Political Movement: Development of the Squatters' and Autonomous Movement in Copenhagen 1981–95," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 3 (2001): 609–628.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Peter Håkansson and Johan Lundin, "Rock för ett hus': En komparativ undersökning av tillkomsten av musikhus i Malmö och Lund under 1980-talet," in *Populärmusik, uppror och sambälle*, ed. Lars Berggren, Mats Greiff and Björn Horgby (Malmö: Malmö University Press, 2009).

constitute a special case in Sweden. The occupation did not specifically concern venues for political action or cultural events, but rather the wider issue of city planning, i.e., whether or not the buildings should be demolished. Between 1970 and 1990, several different buildings in the Haga district were occupied, and according to Thörn, an “urban alternative culture was established that was unparalleled in any other Swedish city.” Thörn demonstrates how this occupation eventually diverged from the movements of most other European cities by displaying a friendly and positive attitude toward police and other authorities. He also highlights how the image of the occupants changed over time, from being heavily criticized by politicians and the media, to becoming an active party in development negotiations at the “consensus-culture conversation table.”<sup>12</sup>

To explain this multifaceted development, Thörn uses the phrase “welfare-state anarchists” (*folkhemsanarkister*), which he regards as a specifically Swedish phenomenon. Although the Haga occupants displayed an ideological affiliation with BZ, the Danish scene at this time was characterized by violent clashes between activists and police, as well as a reluctance to negotiate with authorities, which was uncommon in Gothenburg. Instead, the Haga activists used humor and self-irony in an, according to Thörn, deliberate attempt to distance themselves from the violent escalation between police and activists in Copenhagen.<sup>13</sup> As we shall see, the “welfare-state anarchist” label is also useful for explaining the contradictions among TWP activists in Malmö.

## THE WINTER PALACE

At the beginning of the 1980s, Malmö, which is located just a short ferry ride away from Copenhagen, had been governed by the Swedish Social Democratic Party for nearly 60 years, since universal suffrage was established in 1921. The party regularly arranged cultural activities for

<sup>12</sup> Håkan Thörn, *Stad i rörelse: Stadsomvandlingen och striderna om Haga och Christiania* (Stockholm: Atlas Akademi, 2013), 12–13.

<sup>13</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 349–350. See also Dominika V. Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State: Squatting in Sweden* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 32–33.

teenagers and the rest of the city through municipal channels,<sup>14</sup> but in the early 1980s, youth groups became more vocal in requesting rehearsal spaces, as well as bigger venues for bands and concerts—demands that can be traced to the impact of the punk scene.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, cultural “all-activity houses” were a big international talking point. Following a series of political actions and debates, a former restaurant in Malmö, Stadt Hamburg, opened as a music venue in 1984. Several local cultural associations (33/44, Huset, Dundret, and KIM Ung) were invited to run the premises in cooperation with the municipal cultural administration. However, the municipal youth association, which was supposed to act as the coordinator, was soon taken over by left-wing activists,<sup>16</sup> forming a core group of young people who were interested in both politics and culture. They introduced a new association, S.O.T, whose statute wrote: to “stand as a cultural support organization for the anarchist movement” through “mainly cultural events.”<sup>17</sup>

Another important development for TWP took place during the summer of 1986, when a group of anarchists from Southern and Central Sweden banded together to organize a touring festival called The Joy Train (*Glädjetåget*). The festival was influenced by the hippie events of the 1970s, as well as the concurrent revival tours of the Pentecostal movement,<sup>18</sup> and was arranged through the so-called A-network, which aimed to bring anarchist groups in Southern Sweden closer together. The purpose of the tour was primarily to spread the anarchist message, but it also offered concerts, theater performances, and other cultural events. The tour in 1986 visited around ten locations and seems to have been met with mixed interest, but it was of great importance as an identity-forming factor.<sup>19</sup> The Joy Train also led to a rapid inflow of activists from other cities to Malmö, where a new community arose. This community soon

<sup>14</sup> Magnus Gertten, “Fri teater, rockmusik, film, tidskrifter och ungdomskultur,” in *Malmö stads historia, del 7, 1939–1990*, ed. Oscar Bjurling (Malmö: Kira förlag, 1994), 372–384.

<sup>15</sup> Håkansson and Lundin, “Rock för ett hus”.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim, 2021–05–13.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Stadgar för föreningen S.O.T.’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp F. Arbetarrörelsens arkiv i Skåne (ARA).

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Karin, 2021–09–02.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Karin.



**Picture 5.1** The Winter Palace’ in Malmö (Photo The Labour Movements’s Archive in Skåne)

mixed with activists from Stadt Hamburg/S.O.T. and local syndicalists, laying the foundations for the Winter Palace association.<sup>20</sup>

In 1987, the group signed a so-called demolition contract in the Malmö port area, renting the premises of a former docking company. The area was dilapidated, and major restoration of the entire neighborhood was due to start soon. The contract started on March 27, 1987, for the price of 60 000 SEK per year,<sup>21</sup> and allowed the premises to be used for “exhibition and printing operations,” which came to be interpreted in a much broader sense over the next few years.<sup>22</sup> An additional clause specified that the building would be demolished in the near future and that the tenants would not be able to make claims for a replacement venue, nor financial compensation<sup>23</sup> (Picture 5.1).

<sup>20</sup> “Gäck in uti arken, du och hela ditt hus,” *Kalla fakta: Nyheter från Vinterpalatset* no. 1 (1989): 16; Interview with Lasse and Tim.

<sup>21</sup> Around 12,500 Euros in today’s value.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Hyresavtal Malmö kommuns fastighetskontor’, *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp E. ARA.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Bilaga till hyresavtal’, *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp E. ARA.

The location on Winter Street gave rise to the name “the Winter Palace,” in the spirit of traditional European activism.<sup>24</sup> However, it was hardly a palace. Though relatively large (350 square meters), it was almost empty, and in urgent need of renovations. Some early investments included materials and equipment for the printing, later followed by a darkroom, a workshop, and a café/pub, where a stage was also built.<sup>25</sup> The range of possibilities for different activities shows the international influence of all-activity houses and the departure from the “music house” format which was typical of Southern Swedish cities in the 1980s.

### PURPOSE AND PRACTICE

In the first article mentioning TWP, published by *Magazin April* in the spring of 1987, an unnamed activist shares the story behind the all-activity house:

As usual, we sat and talked about our dreams and ambitions, you know, like you do. Suddenly, someone started talking about having a place to do everything. Everything we had always dreamed of but hadn't been able to realize. A place where we're not dependent on associations or government grants, but where we ourselves must take responsibility, and would be able to develop our abilities and ideas.<sup>26</sup>

Although the goal was to be independent, a formal association was needed in order to obtain a contract for, and run a business in, the dilapidated house. On March 7, 1987, the association held a constituent meeting, where a board was elected, signatories were appointed, and the membership fee was set to 50 SEK per year. One of the activists has subsequently expressed how unbearably boring all these formalities were,<sup>27</sup> but in view of the impeccable documents that were left behind, the participants were not unfamiliar with board meetings. The documents also declared the formal statutes of TWP:

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

<sup>25</sup> “Gack in uti arken, du och hela ditt hus,” 16.

<sup>26</sup> Karin Mex, “Vinterpalatset: kontrollerat kaos,” *Magazin April* no. 1–2 (1987): 57.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Karin.

To be a political force with the aim of promoting alternative and libertarian ideas, of supporting and promoting anti-authoritarian ideas. To promote the formation of cooperatives. To work to undermine the structures of capitalist society through media, information, mediation, cultural activities, and through practical examples, showing that change is possible in the prevailing social system.<sup>28</sup>

At the time of this constituent meeting, the association had 120 members, but the collected membership fees were barely enough to pay the first rent. At a later meeting, it was calculated that TWP would need at least 10 000 SEK a month to keep their activities going.<sup>29</sup> According to a more ambitious calculation, income from printing, editorial work, exhibitions, tours, and other projects, would be able to cover the entire operating cost within six months. In the short term, however, the majority of the running costs would have to be collected through “support events/parties.” It is unclear exactly how many of these were held, but at the beginning of May 1987, the first attempts were summed up in a kind of commentary protocol, showing that the group had already made around 7000 SEK (although it “should” have been 9300 SEK if people hadn’t nicked some of the beer).<sup>30</sup>

In July and August 1987, new meetings were held to discuss possible sources of income. The solution was a “big party.”<sup>31</sup> By this time, party arrangements had become quite standardized: Usually, 30 crates of beer were ordered, and the chairman was appointed to apply for a formal alcohol license from the municipality.<sup>32</sup> Arranging illegal parties, or even selling beer illegally, does not seem to have been considered. The Swedish alcohol policy was very strict at this time, differing greatly from the situation in Denmark. Thus, in other contexts, cheap beer smuggled in from Denmark was very common in Malmö, but TWP does not seem to have engaged in this kind of activity, at least not to sell.

Toward the end of 1987, TWP shifted its focus outwards, beginning the publication of the pamphlet *The Winter Palace*, which listed a

<sup>28</sup> ‘Stadgar antagna vid konstituerandet av föreningen’ (7 March 1987) *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>29</sup> Over 2,000 Euros in today’s value.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Möte den 7–5–87’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>31</sup> ‘VP-möte 4 aug 87’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Möte 9–7–87’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

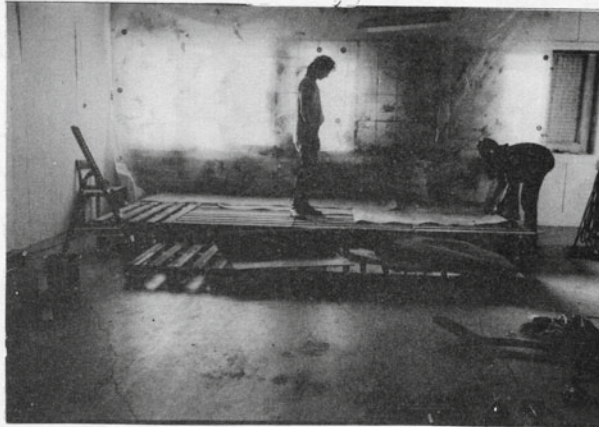


individuell fråga som var och en enbart kan ställa till sig själva. Det viktiga är att man gör något satt i ett kollektivt sammanhang. Vilket sammanhang man sedan väljer, beror på vilken grundläggande människosyn, deologi och vilka ambitioner man har

Så det jag frågar mig bland är just om det jag nu gör är det som är det åtta förstunden, eller om det finns något annat att göra som vore vettigare. Bland har jag inget bra svar på den frågan. Då får man fråga igen lite senare, gå tillbaka i tankarna, analysera, utvärdera och

-Hur blir det nu då? Har ni hittat en ny lokal?

-Jo vi hittade tillslut ett ställe som verkar passa oss perfekt. Det är lokal där vi både ka



**Picture 5.2** The Winter Palace' in Malmö—building a stage (Photo The Labour Movements's Archive in Skåne)

wealth of public events, such as concerts, poetry readings, film screenings, and lectures. Roughly one Saturday a month, a “special party” was also arranged for members only, which usually involved a concert with a slightly more well-known band.<sup>33</sup> A recurring point in the rhapsodic discussion protocols relates to exactly who was welcome at these events; to attend, you had to be a member, but each member could also bring a friend. It is possible that this issue reflected arbitrary practices<sup>34</sup> (Picture 5.2).

At the start of 1988, a printing plant, a photo lab, and a garage opened at TWP. The photo lab is known to have been run as a study circle, which was the classic way to arrange popular education in the Swedish labor movement, as well as in other popular movements, during the twentieth century. The same spring, the association discussed whether to create false

<sup>33</sup> See ‘Vinterpalatset februari/mars’88’; ‘Vinterpalatset april/maj’88’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>34</sup> See ‘Möte 9-7-87’; ‘Vinterpalatset februari/mars’88’; ‘Vinterpalatset april/maj’88’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

membership lists for their study circles as a way to raise money, but found that this was not necessary due to the amount of genuine activity.<sup>35</sup>

In connection with the association’s first annual meeting, on March 12, 1988, two interesting documents were compiled: a standard annual report by the first chairman, accompanied by formal annual meeting minutes; and a detailed summary by the secretary, where he discusses specific subjects in more detail. In the annual report, the chairman states that the association arranged a “fair mix of cultural and political activities” during the year. He mentions some examples of political events, such as demonstrations and situationist actions, but mainly refers to cultural activities.<sup>36</sup> However, the secretary also highlights a discussion of the association’s ideology and objectives during the meeting, focusing primarily on whether they had succeeded in becoming “a kind of anarchist liaison center,” or whether they gave the impression of simply being “a slightly radical cultural association.” Following this discussion, some important conclusions were drawn for TWP’s future goals:

The activities at TWP must be such that we can act as a liaison center/information agency, in collaboration with other anarchist and alternative groups in Skåne and the rest of Sweden, so that the actions carried out to improve our society can be well-coordinated and well-substantiated with knowledge. In order for this to be implemented, the ‘ground service’ must work. [...] Cultural events also have their rightful place within TWP: if nothing else, ‘culture shock therapy’ is an effective form of action.<sup>37</sup>

According to these guidelines, the political activity would form the core of TWP, while the various activities offered in the building would function as a “ground service,” i.e., a way to keep the association running. The role of culture within the association thus became more ambiguous: should its “given place” be as a ground service, as a form of action, or as something else in its own right? Although this question was never answered, TWP continued to arrange concerts, parties, lectures, plays, poetry readings, film screenings, etc. during their final year. They also launched their own local radio channel, which broadcasted twice a week,

<sup>35</sup> ‘Leifs anteckningar från årsmötet 88.03.12’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Verksamhetsberättelse 1987/88’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Leifs anteckningar från årsmötet 88.03.12’.

and *The Winter Palace* pamphlet evolved into more of a regular magazine. From this point onwards, the meeting minutes, or rather meeting notes, continued to mostly revolve around practical tasks, e.g., how the pub should be staffed, who would do the cleaning, whether there were functioning fire safety measures, and so on.

These public cultural events probably bore the main responsibility for TWP becoming a well-known name in Malmö, but they also involved certain issues, which were debated by the activists: Was it politically sound to put so much effort into providing cheap beer for people, and did TWP offer enough political activities in relation to all these cultural events? There was ambiguity in what “supporting anarchist issues” really entailed: To hold a free zone for creativity and culture, free from a world of capitalism, racism, and sexism; or to perform public political activities, such as demonstrations? These debates were never concluded. The last party, however, took place in February 1989, under the name “TOTAL PARTY – one last clearing party!”, before TWP was demolished<sup>38</sup> (Picture 5.3).

It’s easy to highlight the many cultural activities that TWP arranged, due to preserved protocols and programs, but it is more difficult to point to their explicitly political activities. Apparently, TWP collaborated extensively with other associations and networks, both within Sweden and across Europe. Solidarity actions were arranged for occupied houses in Norway and Denmark, and TWP were responsible for some actions with great impact in Malmö, e.g., when the former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, visited Malmö to participate in a seminar, and demonstrations forced him to leave through the back door.

It is also probable that many TWP activists took part in actions that they did not wish to put in writing. In an interview with two members of TWP’s inner circle, Lasse and Tim, they admit that this was certainly the case for them, not least because they were very active in hiding refugees who were threatened with deportation.

We had a group that only hid refugees, more or less. But it wasn’t something you could put in writing; it was more word of mouth.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> ‘TOTALFEST’ (1989) *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp A. ARA.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.



**Picture 5.3** Flyer from ‘The Winter Palace’ in Malmö (*Photo* The Labour Movements’s Archive in Skåne)

Other issues also required quiet action:

At that time, there were anti-Shell campaigns, campaigns against Israel, a lot that happened that could never be addressed in meetings.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, it is not entirely fair to assume that cultural activities took all the focus of TWP during their years of activity.

## RELATION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Where should we place the Winter Palace community politically? According to their own minutes and interviews, they were an anarchist association. But they also had close connections with the syndicalists in Malmö. During TWP’s final year, the association’s later magazine

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

*The Phantom of the Palace* was published in cooperation with the Malmö Syndicalist Association's members' magazine. At the same time, TWP seems to have had a fairly open and welcoming attitude toward newcomers and visitors, as long as they shared their basic values. In 1987, a TWP activist interviewed in *Magazin April* stated:

We are deeply political, without being either party politicians or -ism preachers. -ism preaching always creates contradictions on unnecessary grounds. You stare blindly at your own -ism and reject everything else with a one-sidedness that makes collaboration on individual issues completely impossible, because you are stuck in discussions about Marx, Bakunin, and what would happen after the revolution. What do you mean "after the revolution"? It's about the here and now.<sup>41</sup>

However, the ideological framework is hardly the only reason why people get involved in an association. One of the interviewed activists, Karin, describes the climate in Malmö's anarchist/left-wing alternative circles as different to Stockholm, which to her was characterized by a conflict-seeking macho culture: "Those I met in Malmö were much softer and much nicer." According to Karin, TWP was, during its years of existence, the core of Malmö's activist/leftist scene.<sup>42</sup> In this way, the collective identity within TWP was very much dependent on political ideas, as well as its connection to an international social movement, although it may not have been restricted to anarchists.

Lasse and Tim similarly describe the Winter Palace community as heterogeneous; a place where hippies, anarchists, and culture aficionados mingled: "Many of us were clear-cut anarchists, but you definitely shouldn't think that everyone was." Rather, they describe two major groupings: one that wished to drop politics altogether and just arrange parties and concerts, and another that wanted to increase TWP's political activities. "Both groups remained until the end. I think, in retrospect, that one of the great things [about TWP] was that acceptance was so high."<sup>43</sup>

Karin agrees, but points to the common direction that still lay at the foundation of the association:

<sup>41</sup> Mex,"Vinterpalatset," 57.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Karin.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

We were libertarian socialists. [...] We did not have concerts because we wanted concerts, but to build an environment that was dynamic and exciting and attractive. We wanted to do that so that people would get involved in the basic issues, such as anti-racism ...<sup>44</sup>

These common values were shared with several other groups, both within and outside Sweden. There was also extensive contact with these groups, despite the logistical problems of correspondence in the 1980s. As one of the interviewees states, there was only regular post and telephone.<sup>45</sup> Forming the A-network in Sweden was one way of facilitating this correspondence. But physical encounters were also important. Regular bus trips were arranged to Germany and the Netherlands, and it was also common for activists to travel on their own. Karin shares how the squatters’ movement had an informal system of welcoming each other:

When we traveled around, people never stayed in hostels or anything like that, we always lived in the occupied houses. The whole of Europe was full of occupied houses at that time. It was enough to show up looking like we did, and you had a ticket in.<sup>46</sup>

Due to Malmö’s proximity to Copenhagen, there was also lasting contact with BZ. Several TWP activists were involved in the more notorious conflicts in Copenhagen, where police entered and forcibly removed people from occupied buildings. One activist described the anarchist scene in Malmö, with certain exceptions, as “a pure support troupe for the BZ movement in Copenhagen,”<sup>47</sup> although this image is not shared by the three activists interviewed here. Nevertheless, BZ did come to Malmö, gave lectures on their methods, and on at least one occasion, acted as extra security at TWP when it was rumored that neo-Nazis would attack the house during a party.<sup>48</sup>

Overall, there was a persistent threat against TWP from the emerging neo-Nazi movement. Lasse and Tim describe several occasions when street fights broke out outside the house and one occasion when someone

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Karin.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Karin.

<sup>47</sup> Pries, *En rörelse blir till*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Pries *En rörelse blir till*, 39.

fired a gun into the building.<sup>49</sup> Karin also mentions broken windows and spraypainted swastikas. She says that they knew the neo-Nazis were dangerous, and definitely took them seriously, but did not really consider them a constant threat. Lasse, Tim, and Karin describe how TWP had regular contact with the police, who emphasized that they were allowed to use self-defense if needed, and a recurring lecturer/visitor called “Bosse the Policeman” also sympathized with them on political issues.<sup>50</sup>

According to the interviewees, interactions with the police were relatively frictionless, although there were exceptions, e.g., when syndicalists considered themselves to have been attacked by police on their way to TWP after a May Day demonstration.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the general approach for dealing with authorities was to cooperate, perhaps in an attempt to slip under the radar. TWP applied for permits when selling beer, demonstrating, broadcasting on local radio, and so on. The operations were characterized by a wish to be independent; to be left alone so that they could build a free cultural zone. This agenda also meant that they refused to apply for money from the municipality for cultural and other events, despite the fact that they were most likely entitled to it. This point was even made in TWP’s statutes.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, independence was more important than having to compromise. As a result, TWP had to find other ways of funding rent and operations. In order to maintain reasonable membership fees, they relied mainly on regular support parties, as well as bar sales. Lasse and Tim linger on this issue during the interview.

We made a mistake, and that was that we ended up in this— that you had to sell beer to run the business. We haven’t talked much about that, but it has destroyed a lot of our comrades.<sup>53</sup>

This point relates to the previously discussed meeting minutes from 1988, and the question of whether it was really a positive thing to attract young people with beer and parties. In a 1989 interview in *Brand*, just after

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

<sup>51</sup> Öppet brev till polismyndigheterna” (890,502) *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp B. ARA.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Stadgar antagna vid konstituerandet av föreningen’ (1987).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

TWP had closed its operations, Karin expressed relief at some aspects of the activities shutting down:

Parties are fun in themselves, but sometimes we’ve felt like a service organ for Malmö’s worst beer drinkers. When you’ve spent a whole evening mopping up vomit, your view of humanity can become quite cynical... In other words, it felt perfectly OK when we received the eviction letter.<sup>54</sup>

## CLOSING AND AFTERMATH

The letter to which Karin is referring arrived in the winter of 1989 when TWP had operated under its demolition contract for almost two years. Meanwhile, extensive occupations in Copenhagen had become widely known in Sweden, not least in Malmö. It is possible that the authorities feared similar developments in Malmö, prompting the termination of the contract. As mentioned earlier, the contract stated that the association could not make demands for either a replacement venue or financial compensation, when they were asked to move out. However, TWP was also part of a European wave of house occupations, and several members of the association had visited or participated in house occupations in e.g., Copenhagen and Amsterdam. They also had close contact with the Haga occupiers in Gothenburg, and actions had been organized in support of the occupied house Blitz in Oslo.<sup>55</sup> The possibility of occupation was therefore not entirely off the table. In the 1989 *Brand* interview, Karin states:

We have seriously discussed the possibility. We can’t say that we’ve put it on the shelf for good. Occupation is a good way to draw attention to housing and urban planning policy [...]. But we don’t think it’s a good solution to our problem right now. Apart from Haga, no occupation in Sweden in recent years has been allowed to last longer than 10 hours. Maybe you would succeed in keeping the house if you as a group were really tight, and if defense of the house was well-planned before you stepped in. Even so, we still don’t really think it’s a long-term solution. And that’s exactly what we want to talk about right now: the long term.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Karin Mex, “Vinterpalatset fortsätter,” *Brand* no. 27–28 (1989): 52.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Flyer’. *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp F. ARA.

<sup>56</sup> Mex, “Vinterpalatset fortsätter”.



In the long term, Karin was referring to the new premises that the group had managed to obtain. The Black Cat café (*Svarta katten*) opened in the spring of 1989 and was situated in the old working-class neighborhood Möllevångstorget in Malmö. The ground floor functioned as a café, information center, and lecture hall, while printing and photo operations continued from the basement. A sense of relief is noticeable in both past and present interviews regarding the move from the Winter Palace to the Black Cat.<sup>57</sup>

But how could the group afford this? According to several interviews in *Brand*, as well as Pries' study, and my own interviews, the association received a large sum of money from the city of Malmö to move peacefully, without attempting to occupy the premises. The sum mentioned varies between 70 000 SEK and 200 000 SEK.<sup>58</sup> The background, according to Lasse and Tim, was that after a period of ignoring the eviction letter, someone sharp enough simply went and "talked to the bureaucrats," and that was that.<sup>59</sup> This is a difficult claim to validate, but in any case, there was suddenly a large amount of money to invest in the new café.

The activities held at the Black Cat were scaled down, and somewhat different from those at TWP, as the premises were much smaller, and did not sell alcohol. The café was also more popular with audiences beyond the anarchist movement, offering a vegetarian restaurant, and several study circles. As before, concerts and lectures also were arranged.<sup>60</sup> These activities continued until the spring of 1991, when the Black Cat closed its doors.

In the aftermath of TWP and the Black Cat, a debate took place in *Brand* in 1992–1993. An extended interview with an unknown number of people told the story of a new activist group, that tried to re-start autonomous activism in Malmö. The new group was firm in its criticism of TWP and the Black Cat: they had become a "lifestyle ghetto" that no longer focused on political action, but instead wished to "depoliticize" their activities not to drive people away.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim; Interview with Karin.

<sup>58</sup> Pries, *En rörelse blir till*, 36–37; Interview with Lasse and Tim.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim; Interview with Karin.

<sup>60</sup> 'Stadgar antagna vid konstituerandet av föreningen Svarta katten 891,205' (1989) *Vinterpalatsets arkiv*, vol. 1, mapp F, ARA.

<sup>61</sup> *Brand*, "(Sagan om) Rödluvan i Malmö," no. 5 (1991): 27–28.

The article was not well-received by the old Winter Palace activists, and received replies from both Karin and Tim, with Karin focusing on different ways of working politically:

The Winter Palace/The Black Cat was not a militant organization, and did not intend to be one. Some individuals within TWP/TBC stood for militant expression and acted on that basis. Others had different opinions on how to act politically: Running a printing house; holding women's and men's discussion groups; organizing seminars, debates, and demonstrations; broadcasting radio; putting up posters; printing and distributing leaflets; and taking direct action against various imperialist companies, and the burgeoning fascist movement in Malmö. All of these activities were ways in which most people within TWP/TBC chose to be politically active.<sup>62</sup>

Tim gave the following response to the criticism that TWP was vague in its political orientation:

The Winter Palace was an anarchist association with clearly formulated statutes regarding goals and activities. Political activity was the basis of the association.<sup>63</sup>

Nearly 30 years later, Tim also states, dryly, that the members of the new activist group were too young during the Winter Palace period to be told about the undisclosed political actions that were happening at the time.<sup>64</sup>

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Winter Palace was founded by a group of anarchist-influenced political activists, who met through an anarchist network ("the A-network"), and made further connections through the Joy Train festival in 1986. Several of those who moved to Malmö had many years of experience of political activism elsewhere. Although there had been many left-wing campaigns in Malmö before, TWP contributed extensively to the city's extra-parliamentary left. Both the Joy Train, with its finale at Gärdet in

<sup>62</sup> Karin Mex, "Jaha, Rödluvan...", *Brand* no. 1 (1993): 31.

<sup>63</sup> Tim Lindqvist, "Rödluvan igen," *Brand* no. 2 (1993): 30.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Lasse and Tim.

Stockholm (famous for political and cultural manifestations in the 1970s), and the group's focus on self-organization, indicate extensive influence from the 1970s left wave. At the same time, TWP acted in the middle of a European trend of autonomous all-activity houses, which could be found in several cities on the continent. The anarchist veterans who, together with younger activists, founded TWP had no problem incorporating these new trends; a self-governing all-activity house, with both progressive culture and progressive politics on the agenda, did not constitute a significant break from previous activism. However, the group did reject the macro-political struggle that had been a big part of the 1970s political scene. Instead, they focused on direct action in the present.

Was the overarching goal then to create an alternative and isolated universe at TWP, with space only for creative projects and new friendships, or was the venue a means of pursuing a more outspoken political agenda? According to both the statutes of the association and interviews with the activists, political activity was meant to stand at the center of TWP. But even during its active years, it was clear that focus was often placed on cultural activities and parties. At their first annual meeting, the community even asked themselves whether they really were the anarchist propaganda center they set out to be, or just "a slightly radical cultural association."

A few years after TWP, and its successor the Black Cat, had been put to rest, debate arose regarding their legacy. A number of young activists, now claiming the new label of "autonomous," criticized the inner circle of TWP for exaggerating the importance of the venue as a cultural free zone since it had come at the expense of more explicit political activism. This generational conflict reflects differences in the incorporation of new political strategies from Europe: The new generation was less interested in isolation and flight from society, and more interested in direct action and confrontation. For example, they wanted to escalate the lines of conflict that already existed in TWP, e.g., by providing support for, or participating in, the more violent house occupations in Denmark, the anti-Shell campaign, anti-fascism, and the new feminist movement.<sup>65</sup> From this perspective, the group who ran TWP (many of whom were close to 30 years of age) could be seen as a bridge between the progressive movements of the 1970s, and the younger, more aggressive, autonomous scene that evolved in the 1990s.

<sup>65</sup> See Pries, *En rörelse blir till*, 42, for further discussion of generational differences.

## THE PURPOSE OF TWP

So, what is the purpose of an anarchist or autonomous association like TWP? Is it to provide a free zone from capitalist society, offering opportunities for culture, education, and self-organization? Or is it to confront the extreme right in the streets, standing up against e.g., racism, sexism, the oil industry, or the meat industry, through various political actions? Many of the Winter Palace activists would probably say, “both.” But it is clear that time and resources were a key issue in terms of the actual outcome. At TWP, a free zone was created for various activities, and during its short and hectic life, an impressive series of concerts, lectures, poetry readings, and parties were arranged—many of which are still remembered in Malmö, even outside left-wing activist circles.

Many TWP members formed lasting friendships, and it is obvious that the interviewed activists are still proud of what they achieved: a free zone for culture and creativity and a non-hierarchical community. However, their purely political activities have left fewer traces behind. To some extent, this is probably due to the fact that many actions were not suitable for print. For example, according to Tim and Lasse, one group worked almost exclusively with hiding refugees. All three interviewees also describe altercations with neo-Nazis, which probably involved the use of force, even by the non-violent TWP. In addition, several TWP members were frequent visitors to, and participants in, the more violent house occupations that took place in Copenhagen during the same period. However, when the eviction letter arrived in 1989, they were not prepared to use the same methods to preserve their own venue. It seemed like the Winter Palace had run its course. In line with Tarrow’s thought of political opportunities structures, the framework for an aggressive occupation of the venue wasn’t in place.

## WELFARE-STATE ANARCHISTS

What conclusions can we draw from the history of the Winter Palace association? We can start by drawing a parallel to the long-standing occupation movement in Haga, Gothenburg. According to Thörn, the Haga movement was characterized by increased inclusion in the municipality’s actions. From being questioned and opposed by both the press and the authorities, the occupants eventually found themselves involved in negotiations, and over time, began to receive relatively positive coverage

for their sometimes drastic (but mostly non-violent) actions.<sup>66</sup> This differed from occupant tactics in bigger European cities like Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and West Berlin. TWP employed a similar approach as in Haga. The association generally maintained good relations with police and other authorities, dutifully applying for alcohol permits, broadcasting permits, demonstration permits, and so on. Crucially, they also paid their rent. At the same time, TWP stressed the importance of independence from the state, to the extent that their statutes prohibited them from accepting municipal grants.

If one did not wish to occupy a house, however, rent had to come from somewhere, and TWP concluded that they had limited options, short of throwing support parties, arranging concerts, and selling a lot of beer. In the preserved minutes, as well as recent interviews, there is clear ambivalence about this issue. Tim and Lasse go as far as to say that selling alcohol to preserve their independence was “basically the most important wrongful decision” made by TWP, when they could have received grants from the city instead.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, TWP practiced various and somehow contradicting ideals, they wanted to be free from the state but applied for permits and had friendly relations to the authorities, they participated in occupations in Copenhagen and considered themselves a part of an international squatting scene but paid rent and finally left the venue without causing trouble (but managed to get some money for new projects out of the negotiations). This multifaceted agenda could in my view, and in line with the local political opportunities structures, be summed up as “welfare-state anarchism.”<sup>68</sup>

Here I would like to underline the connection with older social movements, which had operated in Sweden since the late nineteenth century, as well as government and municipal structures. In the 1980s, there was still a general tendency to support youth movements within sports, politics, and culture. As long as TWP did not cause trouble, and lived up to the formal demands of an association, they would be left mostly to themselves. Notably, however, most of them still considered themselves

<sup>66</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 12–13.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Tim and Lasse.

<sup>68</sup> Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 349–350.

anarchists. Practicing certain anarchist values was probably in itself considered a protest against both bourgeois politics, and the more repressive elements of the welfare state.

The Winter Palace clearly identified themselves as part of an international squatting trend, but their chosen protest repertoire was also influenced by national political praxis, which may have differed from other countries. Since the Swedish welfare state was founded on bargaining and negotiating, TWP were schooled in this tradition, and quite good at the latter, as evidenced by their successful negotiation for a considerable amount of money at the end of their demolition contract. Additionally, TWP were also well-versed in writing meeting minutes and other documents; they knew how to apply for permits; and they knew how study circles worked (and how to cheat when reporting them). They were, simply put, familiar with the traditions of the Swedish labor movement. However, they were also part of an influential European social trend.<sup>69</sup> Thus, they could not compromise on independence, but they could cooperate. This ambivalence is important for how I define welfare-state anarchism. Connected to the political opportunity structures mentioned above, TWP used whatever possibilities they had to mobilize effectively. Working inside a consensus-based welfare state system, they tried to navigate the various factors outside the mobilizing group to reach their goals. TWP cared about its relationship with the municipality but did not wish to be dependent upon it. They wanted to be left in peace, free to carry out their activities, without risking the loss of their premises due to misbehavior. When they eventually were evicted, a great deal of effort was put in place to signal that they left on their own initiative. This compromise demonstrates how TWP tried to bridge the gap between traditional Swedish labor politics and the new wave of autonomous activism in Europe.

<sup>69</sup> For further reading, see *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, ed. The Squatting Europe Collective (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013); Johan Pries and Karin Zackari, “Här slutar Sverige. Ockupationen på Ringgatan i Malmö 1990,” in *Politik underifrån: Kollektiva konfrontationer under Sveriges 1900-tal*, Andrés Brink Pinto and Martin Ericsson (Lund: Arkiv, 2016); Dominika V. Polanska and Mathias Wåg, *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer 1968–2018* (Stockholm: Verbal förlag, 2019).

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Karin, 2021–09–02.

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# The Environmental Movement Between Institutionalization and Conflict

*Monica Quirico*

## ENVIRONMENTALISM IN SWEDEN: NATIONAL PECULIARITIES AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS

Between the 1960s and 1970s, Sweden established itself as a prominent, even pioneering, actor in international environmental politics. The country was the first to pass comprehensive environmental protection legislation (1968) and hosted the United Nation's first Conference on the Environment in Stockholm (1972).<sup>1</sup> The early protagonism of the Swedish government in this field and the long tradition of incorporation of social movements' claims in the state apparatus fuelled a trope in most related research: the early institutionalization of the Swedish

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Marklund, "Double Loyalties? Small-State Solidarity and the Debates on New International Economic Order in Sweden During the Long 1970s," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 45, no. 3 (2020): 384–406.

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environmental movement, which began in the 1970s and affected developments in the following decade.<sup>2</sup> However, other scholars have stressed that around 1970 a new generation of activists came forward; whereas the previous ones had conceived environmentalism as engaging in observing and studying nature, these young people increasingly devoted themselves to social criticism and direct action. This shift marked the emergence, in Sweden and more generally in western countries, of the “modern” environmental movement.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter aims to explore the development of this movement in Sweden in the 1980s, i.e. in that “middle-earth” between the formative period of a renewed environmental movement (1960s–1970s) and the completion of its institutionalization at the global level in the 1990s. Theories of political opportunities structure have overlooked that the relation between the political arena and the complex galaxy of environmental groups was far from being uncomplicated. The chapter focuses precisely on this multifaceted interplay, which is studied through two cases of bottom-up mobilization, one at the national level, the anti-nuclear campaign, and the other at the local level, the struggle against the Scandinavian Link. In this way, this study aims to show that motives and means of environmental protection can be very different according to context. How were institutions regarded by these activists? How did they experience the relationship between representative and direct democracy, both in principle and in concrete terms (dialogue/confrontation with institutional representatives)? By addressing these issues, this chapter aims to contribute to research on social movements with a more nuanced understanding of their oscillation between the institutional and the confrontational level.

Previous research has highlighted that in Sweden, as well as in Norway and Finland, two quite different forms of activism have confronted each other: one has been given an outstanding role within the corporatist decision-making process, while the other has been generally openly intransigent in its demands, resulting from a well-established tradition of “anti-modern naturalism”.<sup>4</sup> The first unequivocally anti-establishment

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jamison and Magnus Ring, “Sweden,” in *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, ed. Christopher Rootes (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 217–218.

<sup>3</sup> David Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn in Postwar Sweden: A New History of Knowledge* (Lund: University Press, 2021), 144–145.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Jamison and Magnus Ring, “Sweden,” 219.

stance within Swedish environmentalism can be traced back to this cultural legacy. On the occasion of the first United Nation's Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, an alternative conference was organized by Alternative City (*Alternativ Stad*), the Stockholm branch of Friends of the Earth, founded in 1969 and Nature & Youth Sweden (*Fältbiologerna*), the youth organization of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC, *Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen*, founded in 1909), which became established in 1948. The latter contested the institutionalist strategy of its mother organization and pressed for direct action and radical democracy.<sup>5</sup> The ambivalence of environmental activism is somehow echoed in the oscillation of research on social movements between the appreciation for those that emerged between 1960s–1970s because of their ability to successfully challenge the institutional constraints of formal organizations, and later claims that the institutionalization is to some extent inherent to political mobilization in itself.<sup>6</sup> In order to enhance more nuanced theoretical frameworks, this chapter makes use of Manuel Castell, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly's theories, which point out that beneath the surface of even institutionalized social movements, there may be collective forms of mobilization that are, at least in part, contentious. Together with studies bringing into research the way social movements interact with institutions and other movements, these theories will highlight how different components of a social movement may relate in varied forms to institutions, depending on the historical and political context.<sup>7</sup>

The sources are, besides secondary literature, bulletins and publications of the groups and associations involved in the two campaigns examined in this chapter, as well as related media articles.

<sup>5</sup> Abby Peterson, Håkan Thörn and Mattias Wahlströmet, "Sweden 1950–2015," in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia. 1700–Present*, ed. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018), 418.

<sup>6</sup> Ørnulf Seippel, "From Mobilization to Institutionalization? The Case of Norwegian Environmentalism," *Acta Sociologica* 44, no. 2 (2001): 123–137.

<sup>7</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Hans Peter Kriesi et al., "Political Context and Opportunity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hans Peter Kriesi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 67–90; Craig J. Jenkins and Bert Klandermans, eds., *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspective on States and Social Movements* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

The notion that nuclear power was environmentally friendly was well established in late 1960s Sweden. Ever since the 1950s, nature-conservation bodies had hoped that the new technology would preserve untouched wilderness from the advance of civilization.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1970s, the anti-nuclear power movement spread through different political coalitions in Europe and North America and played a pivotal role in the rise of a transnational environmental movement.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the New Left, it was fuelled by the peace movement; focusing, from the late 1970s, on opposition to nuclear weapons, it went hand in hand with the development of campaigns against the civil uses of nuclear energy.<sup>10</sup>

In some countries—the United States, West Germany, France and Sweden—the dispute over nuclear power reached an unprecedented intensity. However, the outcome of the mobilization varied considerably, depending on political input structures: where they were not responsive, as in France and West Germany, governments stuck to their original policy choice; where they were open to protest, as in Sweden and the United States, a reorientation towards new policies was triggered.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1973, Sweden's ambitious nuclear energy program became far more controversial than in most other countries. The positions of the parties on this issue challenged the standard Socialist–Nonsocialist cleavage. While long-time enemies such as the Social Democrats on one hand, and the Moderates and the Liberal Party on the other hand, stood

<sup>8</sup> Heidenblad, "The Environmental Turn," 144–145.

<sup>9</sup> Astrid Mignon Kirchhof and Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Global Protest Against Nuclear Power: Transfer and Transnational Exchange in the 1970s and 1980s," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 39, no. 1 (2014): 165–190.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Rootes, "The Transformation of Environmental Activism: An Introduction," in *Environmental Protest*, 1–19. See also, in this volume, Anton Öhman, "Peace Actions and Mainstream Media: Framing Nuclear Disarmament Protests in Welfare Sweden".

<sup>11</sup> Herbert P. Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-nuclear Movements in Four Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (1986): 57–85.

up for nuclear energy, the Left Party—the Communists and the Centre Party joined the anti-nuclear front between 1973 and 1975.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1976 election, the nuclear issue played a crucial role. The leader of the Centre Party, Thorbjörn Fälldin, became the first non-Social Democratic Prime Minister after 44 years. However, once in power, he had to compromise with his allies, i.e. the other two pro-nuclear centre-right parties; although some success was achieved, the nuclear program was far from being dismantled. This situation damaged the Centre Party's credibility with anti-nuclear groups. After the Three Mile Island incident in March 1979, the nuclear debate changed radically in Sweden; the Social Democratic leadership announced a more cautious approach to nuclear power and agreed to hold a referendum on this issue, thus meeting an old request of the Centre Party and the Left Party—the Communists.<sup>13</sup>

The referendum was held on 23 March 1980, with three options to choose from. Line 1 and Line 2 stated that nuclear power would be phased out as fast as possible and no further nuclear plants would be constructed. Briefly, both options did not propose a rapid phase-out. The Moderates were behind Line 1, while the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party supported Line 2. Line 3, supported by the Centre Party, the Left Party—the Communists and the Christian Democrats required nuclear power to be phased out within 10 years. Reactors not yet loaded were not to be commissioned, and continued expansion was to be stopped immediately.

The line between pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear positions in the referendum was fine, as they all aimed at a gradual phase-out of nuclear power plants; what differed was the speed at which this process was to go. It was the Line 2 option that prevailed in the end. In brief, the outcome of the referendum was to allow the construction of the already planned reactors and to phase out nuclear energy by 2010.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hans Peter Kriesi, "Political Context and Opportunity," in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hans Peter Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 83.

<sup>13</sup> Evert Vedung, "Sweden: The Miljöpartiet de Gröna," in *New Politics in Western Europe: The Rise and Success of Green Parties and Alternative Lists*, ed. Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Arne Kaijser, "Redirecting Power: Swedish Nuclear Power Policies in Historical Perspectives", *Annual Review of Energy and the Environment*, 17(1992): 452–457.

## THE PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST NUCLEAR POWER

When the referendum was announced, the People's Campaign NO to Nuclear Power (*Folkkampanjen NEJ till kärnkraft*) was started; it was not a new organization as it had been active since the year before under the name of People's Campaign Against Atomic Energy (*Folkkampanjen mot atomkraft*). The initiative to create a bipartisan umbrella organization stemmed from the Environment Coalition (*Miljöförbundet*), founded in 1976.<sup>15</sup> About 40 organizations joined the People's Campaign, from traditional environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth (*Jordens Vänner*), to church communities, peace activists and feminist movements, small Socialist and Communist parties not represented in Parliament, as well as the Centre Party and the Left Party—the Communists. In addition, two dissident groups of pro-nuclear parties took part in the campaign: the Social Democratic Work Group for an Alternative Energy Policy (SAFE) and the Liberals for Energy Alternative (LIFE). The main spokespeople of the campaign were the president Lennart Daléus (activist of Friends of the Earth) and two political representatives: the Minister of Social Affairs Karin Söder (Centre Party) and the former leader of the Left Party—the Communists, Carl-Henrik Hermansson. Another prominent figure was the former Social Democratic Minister, Ulla Lindström. Local committees were established throughout the country. Interestingly, in the final phase of the referendum campaign, while the supporters of Line 1 arranged their main event at the sober Berwald Hall in Stockholm (March 16) and those of Line 2 showed their popular roots through a meeting at the People House (*Folkets hus*) also in the capital (March 10), the People's Campaign NO to Nuclear Power chose the streets, consistent with its character of mass movement. The national demonstration on March 15 took place in more than 100 municipalities, gathering around 100,000 people.<sup>16</sup>

Although after the referendum the Swedish government officially took the magnitude of public opposition into account and ordered no new

<sup>15</sup> Fredrik Sjöberg, *På maktens tröskel. Miljörörelsen i det sena 1980-talet* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Soren Holmberg and Kent Asp, *Kampen om kärnkraften: en bok om väljare, massmedier och folkomröstningen 1980* (Stockholm: Liber, 1984), 97–101.

plants,<sup>17</sup> it became clear that the supporters of nuclear power (the Moderates as well as the Social Democrats) had no intention of giving up.<sup>18</sup> And neither did the People's Campaign. Whereas in countries such as the USA and West Germany the anti-nuclear power movement was replaced by disarmament movements in the early 1980s,<sup>19</sup> in Sweden (as well as in Italy)<sup>20</sup> the mobilization went on and, if anything, was enriched by the synergy with the peace movement.

Not even the choice of institutional engagement from some of the leadership of the People's Campaign (in particular, Per Gahrton, a former member of the Liberal Party, who had become a key founder of the Swedish Green Party in 1981)<sup>21</sup> affected the bottom-up campaign. Significant initiatives were the so-called "Barsebäckmarscher", protest marches against the boiling water nuclear power plant located 20 kilometres from Copenhagen (the Danish government pressed for its closure during the entirety of its operating lifetime).<sup>22</sup> A dozen marches were organized by different environmental organizations between 1976 and 1986.<sup>23</sup>

However, there were other forms of struggle, which often took the form of protests against soil surveys intended to verify whether the rock was suitable to accommodate a nuclear waste dump, for instance in Ovanåker (where in February 1981 some of the inhabitants taking part in the boycott were sentenced to daily penalty payments),<sup>24</sup> Kynnefjäll,

<sup>17</sup> Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures," 57–85.

<sup>18</sup> Lennart Daléus, "Det förnuftiga avvecklingen," *Jordvännen*, no. 6 (1984): 7.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Joppke, "Social Movements During Cycles of Issue Attention: The Decline of the Anti-Nuclear Energy Movements in West Germany and the USA," *The British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 1 (1991): 43–60.

<sup>20</sup> Dominic Standish, "Nuclear Power and Environmentalism in Italy," *Energy & Environment* 20, no. 6 (2009): 949–960.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson, Thörn, and Wahlströmet, "Sweden 1950–2015," 418.

<sup>22</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "To Trust or Not to Trust? Structures, Practices and Discourses of Transboundary Trust Around the Swedish Nuclear Power plant Barsebäck near Copenhagen," *Journal of Risk Research* 25, no. 5 (2022): 562–565.

<sup>23</sup> The march on 10 September 1977 was the most successful demonstration ever held in the Nordic countries against nuclear power, with 20,000 participants according to the organizers, mostly from Sweden and Denmark but also from Norway and Finland; Anne Jalakas, "«Barsebäck väck!»," *Arbetet*, September 11, 1977, Del 2.

<sup>24</sup> Birgitta Ohlsson, "Demokrati i kärnkraftssamhället," *Medsols*, no. 5 (1981): 2–3.

Voxnadalen, Godmark, Kiruna (where Sami, too, protested) and Tränningen. In all these places an intense activity of study of nuclear waste began and the results disseminated in crowded public assemblies. That was not enough, however; the activists patrolled the roads leading to the areas selected for the surveys. Numerous committees “Save...” (followed by the name of the municipality) were founded wherever such tests were announced. “Rädda Tränningen” was founded in April 1981; in three months hundreds of activists guarded the six roads leading to the woodland 24 hours a day. In the spring of 1981, the People’s Campaign decided to establish a Waste Cycle Committee, which sent a letter with questions to all the members of Parliament and the executive committees of political parties.<sup>25</sup>

Women’s contribution to the anti-nuclear movement was noteworthy from the early steps of the referendum campaign<sup>26</sup>; it appeared as a natural development of women’s care for life and was consolidated over the following years.<sup>27</sup>

In 1981, the People’s Campaign, together with several environmental, feminist, solidarity and peace groups and associations, among them the Environment Coalition, Future in our Hands (*Framtiden i våra händer*), Friends of the Earth, Women’s Struggle for Peace (*Kvinnokamp för fred*), The Swedish Society Against Painful Experiments On Animals (*Nordiska samfundet mot plågsamma djurförsök*), The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (*Svenska freds- och skiljedomsföreningen*), started Alternative Campaign (*Alternativkampanjen*). The ambition was to carry on the push that emerged after the referendum to point to “positive alternatives, which flow from a holistic view of human beings in their responsible mutual interplay and in their relationship with nature”.<sup>28</sup> The underlying belief is relevant with regard both to Inglehart’s value change

<sup>25</sup> Birgitta Ohlsson, “Birgitta berättar om de lokala kampen,” *Medsols*, no. 2 (1982): 9–10.

<sup>26</sup> Ursula Brottman, “Från kvinnohus till folkkampani. IV. Folkkampanjen,” *Medsols*, no. 2 (1989): 10–11.

<sup>27</sup> Ursula Brottman, “Från kvinnohus till folkkampani. III. Marschen,” no. 1 (1989): 14. In 1987, the group “Mothers’ struggle against nuclear power” was created; it distributed across the country a leaflet with messages written by prominent representatives of the anti-nuclear front; *Medsols*, “Mödrarnas kamp mot kärnkraft,” no. 1 (1989): 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Jordvännen*, “Alternativkampanjen – självtillit, solidaritet, resursbevarande,” no. 5 (1981): 6–9.



theory and the relation with politics: “an increasing number of people have started questioning the dominant values in contemporary society. These are materialistic values, which are – often – based on short-sighted economic thinking. And these are the ones which govern our behaviour. For instance, the political parties all aim for growth [...]”.<sup>29</sup> What did “positive alternatives” mean practically? And how did the struggle have to be performed? The answers were different, of course. According to Friends of the Earth, limited sabotage actions were not enough: as the social development was destructive in itself, what was needed was the creation of self-contained unities able to convert production and distribution so as to meet actual human needs, at the same time as society as a whole was challenged.<sup>30</sup>

There was also some significant defection, however. While the activists of Friends of the Earth made it clear from the beginning that they did not mean to restrain themselves to environmental issues but rather place them in the more general societal context,<sup>31</sup> Nature and Youth Sweden decided not to join the campaign as its activists preferred to focus on environmental issues without intertwining them with peace and social problems.<sup>32</sup>

The link between environment and peace, under the joint opposition to civil and military nuclear power, was highlighted from the beginning<sup>33</sup>; the People’s campaign took part in large peace demonstrations, e.g. the Peace Meeting in Gothenburg, on 15 May 1981.<sup>34</sup> However, the activists of the People’s Campaign had different opinions about the relationship between the two movements. Whereas some of them were not inclined to give up the focus on nuclear energy,<sup>35</sup> others considered it necessary to shift to an anti-imperialistic stance.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Jordvännen*, “Varför Alternativkampanj?” no. 1 (1982): 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Monö, “Ekologiskt Manifest,” *Jordvännen*, no. 5 (1980): 10–14.

<sup>32</sup> Björn Risinger and Magdalena Agenstam, “En åsikt,” *Fältbiologen*, no. 2 (1982): 22.

<sup>33</sup> Stig broqvist, “FMK tar kamp mot kärnvapen,” *Medsols*, no. 4 (1981): 8–9.

<sup>34</sup> “*Medsols*, Freden bröt ut på Ullevi 15 maj!,” no. 4 (1982): 4–6. See also Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ledare, “FMK och fredsrörelsen,” *Medsols*, no. 4 (1982): 2.

<sup>36</sup> Bengt Jändel and Pablo Wiking-Faria, “Olika åsikter i fredsfrågan,” *Medsols*, no. 4 (1982): 13.

In the mid-1980s, the People's Campaign showed signs of exhaustion; internal critical voices pointed fingers at the movement's increasing bureaucratization and taming, as well as activists' growing average age.<sup>37</sup> The Chernobyl disaster (first recognized, outside the USSR, by the Swedish nuclear plant in Forsmark) reignited the public debate. Although its resonance varied from country to country in Europe, it fuelled an understanding of modern society as a "risk society".<sup>38</sup> Two years later, the Swedish government decided to anticipate the phase-out and to close one unit in Barsebäck and one in Ringhals in 1995 and 1996 respectively (yet the decision was reversed in 1991). However, the 1988 election was dominated by environmental concerns, but mostly about pollution; the Green Party entered Parliament for the first time,<sup>39</sup> but nuclear power no longer topped the agenda. The internal confrontation on the role and goals of the People's Campaign intensified in that period.<sup>40</sup> Someone even questioned the very existence of the campaign.<sup>41</sup>

In some sort of assessment of the first 10 years of activity, a female activist pointed out that what was once a mass movement named People's Campaign Against Nuclear Power had turned into an organization with approximately 5,000 activists and limited resources, and unlike its origins argued not only against nuclear energy but also nuclear weapons.<sup>42</sup> The controversy over the name issue opened the new decade, the 1990s, opposing those who believed that the one in use was still topical to those who were persuaded that it was time to leave it behind and to adopt one more in line with the purposeful program of the campaign (in short, supporting alternatives energies).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ursula Brottman, "Vi jobbar i en motståndsrörelse!" *Medsols*, no. 3 (1984): 21.

<sup>38</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Ideas, Actors and Political Practices in the Environmental History of Europe," *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe* (online), November 26, 2020, <https://ehne.fr/en/node/21453>.

<sup>39</sup> Vedung, "Sweden," 152.

<sup>40</sup> Redaktion, "Att vara eller inte vara," *Medsols*, no. 1 (1988): 2.

<sup>41</sup> Inga Michaeli, "Folkkampanjen ska leva!" *Medsols*, no. 1 (1988): 1.

<sup>42</sup> Eva Bergström, "Kära Folkkampanj, vart tog du vägen?" no. 3 (1989): 13.

<sup>43</sup> Varlborg Landelius, "Nej till namnbyte!" and Mats Andersson, "Ändrad inriktning/namnbyte viktigaste frågan inför kongressen?" both in *Medsols*, no. 1 (1990): 13; in the same issue, Märta Nilsson, "Märta mot Eva – första rondan" and Lars Lindskog, "Folkkampanjen – Energi för livet," both p. 14.

Interestingly, in the light of the more confrontational climate that would characterize the following decade, the 1989 congress of the People's Campaign passed a resolution committing the activists to support civil disobedience actions as long as they were consistent with lines of actions well under way and not makeshift.<sup>44</sup>

## TOWARDS A NEW EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK

The crisis affecting the People's Campaign went hand in hand with the shift in the environmental movement (not only the Swedish) from nuclear to infrastructure issues. The early 1980s were in fact a turning point in the European debate on future transport and traffic systems. In 1983, the CEO of Volvo, Pehr G. Gyllenhammar, promoted the Round Table of European Industrialists (ERT). Seventeen European businessmen met in the Paris boardroom of Volvo in April. They agreed on the need to create an organization that would be able to convey its stance on the state of the economy to European political leaders. ERT worked at both national and European levels as an advocacy group intended to restore Europe's competitiveness. At the outset, this organization played a crucial role in the planning of the Oresund Bridge between Denmark and Sweden as part of its European Link project aiming to improve the European infrastructure network. Later on, the ERT promoted the earliest projects of the Trans-European Networks such as the Fehmarn Belt Bridge between Denmark and Germany<sup>45</sup> and the High Speed Railways Turin-Lyon.<sup>46</sup> ERT has been, according to some experts, "the hidden force guiding the European Union's agenda"<sup>47</sup>; at the same time, infrastructure planning provided fertile ground for many transnational connections and transboundary issues and protests. For instance, the so-called "Danube Movement" was a case of cross-border environmentalism that emerged in the area between Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest in the fight against

<sup>44</sup> *Medsols*, "Kongress beslut: civil olydnad i organiserade former," no. 2 (1989): 4.

<sup>45</sup> Alfonso Sabatino, "European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT)," *Historical Archives of the European Union*, <https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/543141?item=TENs.B>.

<sup>46</sup> *Tecnocity*, "I progetti della tavola rotonda degli industriali europei: «Priorità assoluta: rinnovare le infrastrutture di trasporto»," no. 2, 1989, 4, [https://www.byterfly.eu/island/ora/object/librib:670223/datastream/PDF/content/librib\\_670223.pdf](https://www.byterfly.eu/island/ora/object/librib:670223/datastream/PDF/content/librib_670223.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Keith Richardson, "Big Business and European Agenda," Sussex European Institute, Working Paper no. 35 (2000), 5.

large-scale dam projects.<sup>48</sup> It was one of the turning points in the development of environmental movements in Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup> In Italy, the first rumours about a high-speed train that would connect Turin and Lyon circulated in the late 1980s, giving rise to one of the most durable and fighting movements (with transnational ties) in the social history of Europe between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.<sup>50</sup>

Although this kind of locally based protest is often stigmatized as the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome, the reasons behind it are to be found in a more general concern about the environment and health damages.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of a fast connection over the Oresund had a long history,<sup>52</sup> but in the mid-1980s it acquired more solidity: the “Scandinavian Link” (Scan Link) project, aiming at connecting Oslo with Hamburg, provided for the building of a bridge between Malmö and Copenhagen and a highway along the western coast of Sweden.<sup>53</sup> The recession that hit the Swedish economy (particularly industries in Malmo) in the mid-1970s, the economic isolation of Copenhagen from the rest of the country, and the poor integration between the Swedish and Danish economies were all arguments put forward to gain support for the project.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Alex Frye, “Environmentalist Groups Prevent the Construction of Danube River dam, Hungary, 1984–1989,” *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, May 18, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/environmentalist-groups-prevent-construction-danube-river-dam-hungary-1984-1989>.

<sup>49</sup> Nick Manning, “Patterns of Environmental Movements in Eastern Europe,” *Environmental Politics* 7, no. 2 (1998): 100–133.

<sup>50</sup> Monica Quirico, “Susadalen säger nej,” *Clarté*, October 17, 2021, <https://clarte.se/clarte-pa-naetet/2-2021/118707-Susadalen-seger-nej-1187>.

<sup>51</sup> Agostino Massa, “Coping with the “Nimby Syndrome”: Political Issues Related to the Building of Big Infrastructures in Liberal Democracy Countries,” Research Paper, *Security and Defence Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2019): 48–62.

<sup>52</sup> Francesco Zavatti, “A Short History of the Oresund Bridge,” *Nordics.info*, April 21, 2020, <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/a-short-history-of-the-oresund-bridge>.

<sup>53</sup> Henrik Undeland, “Design of a Cross Border Motorway Between Sweden and Norway: The Swedish Approach,” Transportation Research Board, June 16, 2008, <https://trid.trb.org/view/862456>.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Maier, “Øresund Bridge. Linking a Region,” *Beyond Plan B*, 2014, [http://beyondplanb.eu/project\\_oresund\\_bridge.html](http://beyondplanb.eu/project_oresund_bridge.html).

Several inquiries were conducted to assess the logistic and economic implications of Scan Link, both in Denmark and Sweden; interestingly, in the mid-1980s, the Swedish (Social Democratic) government felt obliged, because of the status acquired by environmental issues in society, to appoint a commission with the task of estimating specifically its environmental consequences.<sup>55</sup>

## THE MOBILIZATION AGAINST THE SCAN LINK

Due to its huge and long-term impact, the Scan Link was regarded from the beginning by the environmental movement as a crossroad, in the same way that nuclear power had been in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>56</sup> The mobilization against the Link began as early as December 1984 and intensified in 1985, when the government announced the “Uddevalla package of measures” without consultations with civil society. The campaign took the form of study and educational activities, demonstrations and blockades to prevent the start of construction.<sup>57</sup> In April 1985, the committee “Save Bohuslän” (*Rädda Bohuslän*) was established in Ljungskile; at the same time, the women of this municipality founded the group “The Crazy Mothers”, named after a performance by Amnesty International on Argentinian mothers. For years they demonstrated against the Link on Friday afternoons along the E6 motorway.<sup>58</sup> In the region, the Scandinavian Link was one of the hot issues in the 1985 electoral campaign; “Save Bohuslän” organized a heavily attended assembly where local politicians from all parties had to make clear their stance.<sup>59</sup>

On 12 October 1985, the Environmental Coalition promoted the “Counter-Link” (*Motlänken*), i.e. an umbrella organization that gathered together 100 associations, including the youth organizations of all

<sup>55</sup> Karin Åström, “Bro bro breja,” *Fälthologen*, no. 6 (1987): 2–4.

<sup>56</sup> Mikael af Malmborg, “När de stora pojarna lekar,” *Fälthologen*, no. 3 (1986): 2–3.

<sup>57</sup> Anders Dejke, “Förord,” in *Trädskramare inför rätta*, ed. Anders Dejke (Göteborg: Bokskogen, 1989), 5–6.

<sup>58</sup> Inger Melin, “«De kloka kvinnorna» i Ljungskile: - Vi ger inte upp,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungstund*, June 19, 1985, p. 4; Karl-Eric Magnusson, “«Galna mödrarna» i Ljungskile: Motorvägsprotest kan bli avgörande,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, September 16, 1985, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Karl-Eric Magnusson, “Detta är vägvalet,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, August 29, 1985, p. 12.

political parties (with the exception of the Moderates), as well as Christian groups and trade union organizations.<sup>60</sup> Several local committees were established (in Gothenburg, Skania, Uddevalla among others).<sup>61</sup> In the following months, the contacts with the Danish activists against the Link intensified, including through a relay from the Norwegian border to Copenhagen that took place in the spring of 1986.<sup>62</sup> In addition, “Action to stop the bridge!” (*Aktion stoppa bron!*), inspired by the People’s Campaign Against Nuclear Power, organized joint protests in Malmö and Copenhagen. In June 1986, despite the extended mobilization against it, the municipality of Uddevalla approved the project; however, only the Social Democrats and the Liberal Party were in favour.<sup>63</sup> In December, one of the rare direct confrontations between a representative of the national government, the Social Democratic Minister of Communication, Sven Hulterström, and the inhabitants of the area affected by the project, took place.<sup>64</sup>

Although several representatives of the Social Democratic Party (both at the local and national level) were against the Link,<sup>65</sup> on 3 September 1987 the government passed the building of a highway from Stora Höga to Uddevalla. One of the first actions of the environmental activists in the region was to start an “Adopt a tree” campaign.<sup>66</sup> On 2 October at Ödsmål, the activists hugged the trees to prevent the site workers from starting construction.<sup>67</sup> They explained that their source of inspiration was the Tree Huggers of the Chipko movement, a social and ecological movement consisting of rural villagers, mostly women, active

<sup>60</sup> Birgitte Nielsen, “Jag anklagar,” in *Trädkramar*, 74–75.

<sup>61</sup> Mats Dyberg, “Sätt stopp för motorvägen!” *Göteborgs-Posten*, March 17, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Marie Arehag, “Komma nu och protestera, det skulle ni gjort tidigare...,” in *Trädkramar*, 9–18.

<sup>63</sup> Lasse André, “Ja i Uddevalla,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, June 4, 1986, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Lennart Rosqvist, ed., “Hulterström grillades om vägar,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 7, 1986, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Åke Ringberg, “Sydsvenska affärsmän säkra: «Inget kan stoppa bron»,” *Dagens Nyheter*, August 12, 1987, p. 13. Interestingly, Olof Palme declared himself not impressed by the project that the Gyllenhammar Group presented in December 1985. Thomas Kristiansson, “Scan Link Accelererar,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 19, 1985, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Lars Porne, “Träden får vika för betongkoloss,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 16, 1980, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Göteborgs-Tidning*, “Vägverket fick backa,” October 3, 1987, p. 9.

in India in the 1970s. After that, the media labelled the Swedish activists as Tree Huggers, too<sup>68</sup>; whereas in the beginning this nickname was not welcomed, the activists later turned it into a source of pride.<sup>69</sup> From the Chipko movement, the Swedish Tree Huggers took methods of struggle based on three NOs: to violence; to drugs; to relationships with party politics.

The start of the construction site in the Ödsmål valley a few days later (6 October) gave rise to one of the strongest and most prolonged cycles of civil disobedience in Sweden<sup>70</sup>: about 300 people immediately mobilized to stop the work.<sup>71</sup> The “occupation” of the forest went on for one week. For days the activists expected the arrival of the police at any moment, but nobody came; they found out later on that the policemen had no idea about the way they should deal with demonstrators or which law was to be applied to disperse the protesters.<sup>72</sup> Finally, the police evicted the activists on 13 October.<sup>73</sup> Hundreds of people from Ljungskile, Gothenburg and the Ödsmål valley had joined the protest. They had received practical support from the farmers around the area and sent thousands of letters, leaflets and vouchers to those opposing the Link all around the country.<sup>74</sup> On 21 October, about 400 people gathered in Cederlund (in the Ödsmål valley) and then moved to the forest to prevent the building of a road. The police removed Sara Lidman by force, together with about 350 activists.<sup>75</sup> Lidman, a well-known writer

<sup>68</sup> Leif Wilchag, “Med kramen som vapen,” *Aftonbladet*, November 14, 1987, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> About the Swedish precursors of the Tree Huggers movement, see Eva-Lena Neiman, “De första trädkramarna,” in Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen, *90 år ung!* (Stockholm: Naturskyddsföreningen, årsbok, 1999), 48–49.

<sup>70</sup> Skoob Salihi, “Trettio år sedan trädkramarna protesterade,” *Sverigesradio*, April 1, 2017, <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6664905>.

<sup>71</sup> Bengt Besson and Kenneth Karlsson, “Trädkramarna tänker inte ge upp,” *Göteborgs-Tidning*, October 13, 1987, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> Skoob Salihi, “Trettio år”.

<sup>73</sup> Bengt Besson & Kenneth Karlsson, “Polisen får dra åt skogen,” *Göteborgs-Tidning – Bildextra*, October 14, 1987, pp. 10–11.

<sup>74</sup> Anders Dejke, “Rätten är hos oss,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungsund*, October 21, 1987, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Sandberg, “Ny protest hindrade vägbygge,” *Dagens Nyheter*, October 22, 1987, p. 6.

and activist, gave an impromptu but very passionate speech.<sup>76</sup> It was the largest civil disobedience action in Sweden in the post-war period; all participants in the protest were convicted for opposing the construction of the highway by climbing the trees destined to be sacrificed.<sup>77</sup> In October 1987 an initiative consistent with the well-rooted Swedish tradition of popular education was launched: for almost a year, the Ekenäs school in Ödsmål, north of Stenungsund and very close to the planned highway, hosted a People's University; every Sunday people (including entire families) from various municipalities of Bohuslän joined to listen to experts and discuss the impact of the highway on the region, while at the same time enjoying moments of conviviality. A group of mothers from Majorna, a district of Gothenburg, decided to start their own study activity focusing on pollution in their city and its impact on public health.<sup>78</sup>

The struggle continued, with several civil disobedience actions.<sup>79</sup> In December 1987, some members of the Chipko movement took part in a demonstration with about 700 people; the Tree Huggers confronted 20 truck drivers who supported Scan Link and were fed up with the inconvenience to traffic resulting from the ongoing protests.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes the activists reached an agreement with the police to leave willingly<sup>81</sup>; others times they had to face the police's brutal response.<sup>82</sup> On the occasion of the demonstration on 24 February 1988, which—unlike the previous ones—had been announced, the police arrived in advance<sup>83</sup> and set police

<sup>76</sup> Anders Dejke, "Historien om trädkramarna," in *Trädkramare*, 21–24; Björn Alpström, "Sara Lidman hos trädkramarna i morse: Skam-linken måste stoppas," *Göteborgs-Tidning*, October 21, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Peterson et al., *Sweden 1950–2015*, 420.

<sup>78</sup> Lotta Stenberg, "Trädkramarnas FolkUniversitet växer fram," in *Trädkramare*, 31–37.

<sup>79</sup> Roger Jansson, "«Trädkramare» fortsätter protestera," *Svenska Dagbladet*, November 3, 1987, p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Lena Olsson, "700 trädkramare mötte 20 chaufförer," *Aftonbladet*, December 7, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Lasse André, "206 trädkramare togs," *Göteborgs-Posten*, November 3, 1987, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Tomas Berglund, "Onödigt med våld. Öppet brev till Birgitta Dahl från en trädkramare," *Göteborgs-Tidning*, November 24, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Roger Jansson, "Överraskade trädkramare. Polisen var redan på plats," *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 25, 1988, p. 9.



dogs on protesters, leaving some people in need of medical treatment.<sup>84</sup> According to the Tree Huggers, the decision to build the highway, made by the government without any legal basis, and contradicting the right of human beings to preserve their natural environment and their own homes, paved the way to the police's violent handling of the protests. Whereas struggles non-violent at all, legally motivated by a state of necessity, were charged with and prosecuted for "disobedience to Powers that be", police brutality was never sentenced.<sup>85</sup>

In January 1988 the project was officially launched, thus reinforcing concerns about deforestation, which at that time was felt at a European level. For instance, it alarmed many in West Germany, and eventually, the government intervened severely to contain air pollution, which had given rise to international concern since the early 1970s.<sup>86</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS: A MULTIFACETED MOVEMENT

Although the high degree of institutionalization of the environmental movement has become a trope in research on social movements, especially when it comes to the Swedish case, the anti-nuclear movement and the struggle against the Scandinavian Link show that the movement that emerged around 1970 had different forms of expression.<sup>87</sup> On one hand, the activists of these two campaigns, although dedicating most of their energies to direct action, did not refuse in principle to have a dialogue with institutions. On the other hand, research shows that even professional and bureaucratic organizations such as Greenpeace and WWF, as well as the more traditional and country-based Societies for nature conservation, can resort to direct action. This is one of the ways environmental organizations and groups maintain an autonomous relationship with the

<sup>84</sup> Tord Johansson, "Polishundar bet trädkramare," *Dagens Nyheter*, February 25, 1988, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> Tomas Käberger, "Makten över lagen, och lagen över sanningen?" in *Trädkramare*, 43–47.

<sup>86</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Ideas, actors".

<sup>87</sup> Kjell Östberg, *Folk i rörelse. Vår demokratis historia* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2021), 278.

institutional sphere (including the Green parties), which is a requisite for shaping their own identities.<sup>88</sup>

This chapter highlights that direct action was far from being absent from the repertoire of Swedish environmentalism in the 1980s. The underlying reasons must be traced back to the widespread dissatisfaction with the political establishment (starting from the Social Democratic Party)<sup>89</sup> and a critique of the capitalist way of life inherited from the radicalization of the 1970s but which, in the following decade, acquired new nuances that were less ideological and, in the case of the mobilization against the Scan Link, even emotional, due to the inhabitants' strong attachment to the territory affected by the infrastructure. "The issue of the Oresund bridge seems to give raise to a debate about the society we would like to live in, in the same way the issue of nuclear power did".<sup>90</sup> Although focusing on a single issue, the People's Campaign Against Nuclear Power and the mobilization against Scan Link formulated a vision of an alternative society, inspired to peace with Earth and among human beings.

Even if the legacy of the 1970s was clear in the methods of struggle and in the rhetorical repertoire, environmentalism as a challenge to the traditional left-right scale was openly theorized, due to the dependence of both political sides on the growth paradigm.<sup>91</sup> The relationship with all the "isms" (Marxism, socialism, liberalism, capitalism) was interpreted in diverse ways<sup>92</sup> and went hand in hand with the need to rethink the Welfare State.<sup>93</sup> Did "welfare" mean owning cars, boats and summer houses or, rather, a better work environment, jobs for everybody, good-quality housing and communication, no pollution etc.?

The *folkhem* (the vision put forward by the Social Democrats in the late 1920s of a society where the divide between privileged and poor would

<sup>88</sup> Magnus Boström, "Om relationen mellan stat och civilsamhälle - Miljöorganisationers interaktion med statliga och politiska organisationer," SCORE (Stockholms centrum för forskning om offentlig sektor), Rapportserie 2000: 10, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ledare, "Socialdemokraternas besvikelse," *Medsols*, no. 2 (1981): 2-3.

<sup>90</sup> Per Nygren, "Öresundsbron - en fråga om vilket samhälle vi vill leva i," *Göteborgs-Posten*, December 2, 1987, Del 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ralph Monö, "Framtidens miljöarbete?" *Jordvännen*, no. 5 (1980): 20-21.

<sup>92</sup> Lars-Erik Liljelund, "Skapa en ny'ism" and Gabriel Fred, "Socialism för ekologi," both *Fältbiologen*, no. 6 (1985): 2-3.

<sup>93</sup> Ralph Monö, "Välfärd - och sedan?" *Jordvännen*, no. 5 (1980): 15.

be broken by applying the rules of a harmonious family)<sup>94</sup> was no longer seen as the “People’s House” but rather as the “Companies’ House”, to mean that politics (and the Social Democrats were no exception<sup>95</sup>) was subordinated to business and as such not reliable.<sup>96</sup> Even mainstream media noticed that both the national and the local governments were ready to satisfy Volvo’s requirements once the company announced its intention to establish a plant in Uddevalla, in return for the construction of the highway: jobs in exchange for increased hydrocarbon emissions.<sup>97</sup> On the contrary, environmental activists received the Roundtable of European Industrialists’ plan for a network of highways across Europe as a threat not only to the environment but also to labour and social rights.<sup>98</sup> At the same time that these militants mourned the golden age of the Welfare State (yet criticizing its economic prerequisite—growth), the rise of neoliberal ideology and policies was radically undermining its social and political assumptions.<sup>99</sup>

A growing disconnection was felt by activists (especially those mobilizing at a local level) between human beings’ (and nature’s) rights and a democracy that was perceived as “representative” only in theory; its failures could be overcome only by forms of direct democracy.<sup>100</sup> This condemnation motivated the reversal of the link between Law and Justice. A recurring theme developed by the confrontational soul of the environmental movement was that the actions of the government were illegal because they bypassed the ordinary democratic process: in the face of the urgent nature of the work (nuclear power as well as the highway), there

<sup>94</sup> Tim Tilton, *The Political Theory of Swedish Social Democracy. Through the Welfare State to Socialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>95</sup> *Aftonbladet*, “Öresundsbron dödsstöten,” July 16, 1987, p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> Susanne Jacobsson, “Länken – ett beställningsjobb,” *Folket i bild*, no. 11 (1987): 2–3).

<sup>97</sup> Staffan Larsson, “Scan Link: Full rulle från start,” *Göteborgs-Tidning*, December 3, 1985, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> Birgit Nielsen, “Jag anklagar,” in *Trädkramare*, 74–75.

<sup>99</sup> For a history of neoliberalism, see Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> Sara Lidman, “Slutplädering å Tingshuset i Stenungsund den 22 mars 1988,” in *Trädkramarna*, 94.

was no time to accomplish all democratic requirements.<sup>101</sup> The true Law, the activists argued, was on their side: “We who here write our names have been forced by all our consciousness to break consciously the official Swedish Law in order to safeguard our and next generations’ right to a people-friendly environment and to participation in the decision-making process that affects our future. We claim our right to faith in future”.<sup>102</sup>

The gap between the Law’s and the activists’ language was made very clear: “The first is a language which considers itself based on facts and scientific evidence. It keeps feelings and emotions at a distance. Things are not called by their right name. Rather, they are turned into technical expressions, which spirit away the flesh and blood of the very actions. On the contrary, we speak a language in which things such as tree, child, life, love and death are called by their right name. We allow ourselves to show our despair, our joy and our hope. I am not aware of legal terms suited to all of that. I allow myself to doubt that they exist”.<sup>103</sup>

In this light, civil disobedience was regarded as an obvious choice—and a symptom of the crisis of democracy.<sup>104</sup> “A society which punishes persons who want to prevent crimes against the environment to the same extent as the companies which commit such crimes does not deserve to be defended”.<sup>105</sup> Civil society was never given the chance to speak on the building of the highway included in the Scandinavian Link, it was reminded; consequently, the only way to make one’s voice heard was to hinder physically the implementation of the project.<sup>106</sup> As one of the Tree Huggers explained, “From a strictly legal point of view, I might have

<sup>101</sup> Birgitta Ohlsson, *Demokrati*, 2–3; Roger Jansson, “Trädkramarndom överklagas,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 17, 1988, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Calle Bergil, “Ohörsamhet mot vanmakten,” in *Trädkramare*, 89 [my translation].

<sup>103</sup> Amanda Peralta, “Jag bestrider brottet,” *Trädkramare*, 99 [my translation].

<sup>104</sup> Lotta Adin, “På post för naturen. Trädkramarna bevakar vägbygget i ett militärtält,” *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, February 13, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>105</sup> Jan Svensson, quoted in *Trädkramare*, 84 [my translation].

<sup>106</sup> Josef Nagy, “Detta är inte demokrati,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungsund*, November 4, 1987, p. 2; Lasse Andrée, “Trädkramarrättegång i Uddevalla”: «Vi betalar aldrig», *Göteborgs-Posten*, January 20, 1989, p. 10. The allegation of not being democratic not surprisingly blew up in activists’ faces: Sten-Erik Lindvall, “Trädkramarna odemokratiska,” *Göteborgs-Posten – Stenungsund*, October 21, 1987, p. 2.

committed a crime. Yet, from a moral perspective I have not. In the longer term, the positive effects of my act will exceed the negative ones".<sup>107</sup>

However, there was a remarkable decline in the level of civil disobedience events in the late 1980s-early 1990s. In the 1988 election, after a campaign dominated by environmental concerns raised by the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, the Green Party, for the first time, secured representation in the Swedish Parliament with 5.6% of the vote, suddenly becoming one of the largest Green parties in Europe.<sup>108</sup> Although this result was praised by environmentalists, the choice for what was left of the People's Campaign was to maintain its independence from party politics, relying not uniquely on the Green Party but also on candidates elected in the Centre Party and the Left Party—the Communists.<sup>109</sup> In 1991, the tide had turned; the fall of the Soviet empire catalyzed public attention. In the general election, environmental issues didn't top the agenda as had been the case in the previous election. Whereas the classic environmental concerns of the 1970s (industrial pollution and nuclear energy) declined in importance, others, such as animal rights and conservation, gained exposure; infrastructure issues remained a target of protest throughout these two decades.

In Sweden, as in most Western countries, environmental activism underwent changes in the 1990s, both in the methods of struggle and the substance of the claims. In general terms, a relatively autonomous and coherent environmental movement was replaced by a multifaceted and diffuse array of actors and groups promoting quite different items on the environmental agenda, often in the name of sustainable development and focusing primarily on global issues. The landscape of environmentalism polarized between a new generation of activists, performing more flexible, limited and often more radical forms of actions resulting from a more militant understanding of environmentalism,<sup>110</sup> and increased environmental consciousness and professionalization.

<sup>107</sup> Björn Johansson, "Upprorsandan sprider sig," in *Trädkravare*, 121.

<sup>108</sup> Martin Bennulf, "The Green Breakthrough in Sweden," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 165.

<sup>109</sup> Ursula Brottman, "Framåt för gröna blocket," *Medsols*, no. 3 (1988): 2.

<sup>110</sup> Magnus Linton, *Veganerna—en bok om dom som stör* (Stockholm: ATLAS, 2000).

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# Peace Actions and Mainstream Media: Framing Nuclear Disarmament Protests in Welfare Sweden

*Anton Öhman*

In September 1983, *Aftonbladet*, one of Sweden's leading tabloids, reported that the peace movement had been appointed "swede of the year." The item was illustrated with an image of a peace demonstration. The demo was packed with smiling young women carrying banderols with "Unite the superpowers" and "Life, peace, one world" written on them.<sup>1</sup> The following work is an effort to understand how this framing of the antinuclear peace movement as epitomizing "Sweden in 1983" was possible and how it can be located in the wider context of the European peace movement(s) and its relation to mass media. In Sweden, the media framing stands out as overwhelmingly positive compared to media's

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<sup>1</sup> June Roos, "Årets svensk: Fredsrörelsen!" *Aftonbladet* (AB), September 3, 1983. See also: Ulf Nilsson, "PR-slaget om kärnvapen har börjat," *Expressen*, January 6, 1983.

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framing of the peace movement in other European countries and the Freeze movement in the US.<sup>2</sup> In a comparative analysis between British and West German media portrayals of the nuclear disarmament movement, Alexa Robertson finds that the representation of the early 1980s peace movement in the UK was not particularly flattering. While the West German news portrayal of the movements was more balanced, Swedish newspapers texts at large portrayed the peace actions more favorably.<sup>3</sup>

Alice Holmes Cooper regards the West German INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) protests as owing its “phenomenal success” to frame congruence between media and movement. However, Holmes Cooper misses the opportunity to probe the conditions and processes behind this similarity between public action framing and the media representation of it, which was arguably even more prominent in the Swedish context than the West German. Collective actions against nuclear arms were a frequent element of mainstream media representation of “the peace movement.” I aim to see how mass media, being a catalyst factor for the upsurge of protests, relates to, conditions, and constitutes them. The appeal to and conceptions of common sense, how it is defined with regards to the logic of antinuclear protesting is central. How these protest actions were framed in the press is here an issue for further exploration. The framing of antinuclear protest highlights two things: first, the problems of disarmament movement actions, facing the ambiguously abstract and concrete existential threat of nuclear war,<sup>4</sup> and second, the mainstream media’s role in shaping protest in the Swedish 1980s. The claim is that in this case, these should be understood together. Through this,

<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, “Freezing Out the Public: Elite and Media Framing of the U.S. Anti-nuclear Movement,” *Political Communication* 10, no. 2 (1993); Alice Holmes Cooper, “Media Framing and Social Movement Mobilization: German Peace Protest Against INF Missiles, the Gulf War, and NATO Peace Enforcement in Bosnia,” *European Journal of Political Research* 41, no. 1 (2002); Alice Holmes Cooper, “Public-Good Movements and the Dimensions of Political Process: Postwar German Peace Movements,” *Comparative Political Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996); Alexa Robertson, *National Prisms and Perceptions of Dissent: The Euromissile Controversy Reflected in Opinion and the News in the UK and FRG 1980–83* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, *National Prisms and Perceptions of Dissent*, 138.

<sup>4</sup> Casper Sylvest, “Conceptions of the Bomb in the Early Nuclear Age,” in *Non-Nuclear Peace*, ed. Tom Sauer, Jorg Kustermans, and Barbara Segaert (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020); Spencer R. Weart, *The Rise of Nuclear Fear* (Harvard University Press, 2012).

this chapter distinguishes framing characteristics that have implications for the understanding of the Swedish 1980s disarmament movement and examines the interplay between movement and media in the framing of contentious action.

Taken together, this leads to the questions:

- How were early 1980s disarmament collective actions framed in Swedish mainstream newspapers?
- What were the main framing tasks and mechanisms, and how does this connect to the specific Swedish situation?

The concept of framing here offers a theoretical lens through which to analyze the content of the news articles and condense the wealth of different news stories into categories and examples.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, the framing of the following collective action events in media are examined: (1) a peace procession in Stockholm, (2) the Nordic peace marches to Paris and Minsk, (3) “the great peace rally” in Gothenburg, and (4) a demonstration and symbolic collective action of a human chain between the US and Soviet embassies in Stockholm. However, first a brief background of the early 1980s peace movement is in its place.

### THE 1980S PEACE WAVE

In the autumn of 1983 an estimated five million people in Western Europe protested against the Euromissiles. This provides a context for a “nonaligned” antinuclear peace movement and “détente from below,” in which Swedish actors and organizations participated with different approaches. This meant work for increased pressuring of governments and institutions through both formal and more unconventional methods. From UN negotiations, motioning, and establishing Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zones to civil disobedience, peace camps, occupations, protest marches, documenting nuclear arms transports, human chains, study circles, happenings, boycott, and picketing.

By the 1980s, modernity was increasingly questioned in broader groups. Alternative critiques were gradually integrated into society and

<sup>5</sup> Jorg Matthes, “What’s in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World’s Leading Communication Journals, 1990–2005,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (2009).

co-opted by commercial forces over the decade.<sup>6</sup> According to the sociologist Katsuya Kodama, the 1980s peace movement in general terms, in Sweden, not only challenged military policies, but was part of the popularization of a wider development that questioned social structures, ways of thinking, life styles, and values.<sup>7</sup> Peace researcher Jan Øberg has claimed, in contradiction to Kodama's views, that the peace movements in the Nordic countries were protest movements rather than alternative movements, where an inclusive "all" were united against armament insanity.<sup>8</sup> This chapter suggests that the framing was in line with the latter characterization but included elements from the first as well.

Lawrence Wittner portrays the early 1980s disarmament protests as the third of three global disarmament waves. The first corresponded to Hiroshima, the second with the Cuban missile crisis and increased testing combined with the thermonuclear revolution in explosive yields. The 1980s protests concerned a new cold war escalation once the 1970s détente had waned and a re-actualization of the nuclear annihilation threat with the popularization of concepts such as Nuclear winter.<sup>9</sup> The Nato two-track decision of 1979 with the deployment of new intermediate and short-range nuclear forces in western European Nato countries was widely understood as an intensifying event. In combination with the increasing nuclear armament of the eastern bloc and the launch of the Strategic Defense Initiative 1983, it called for action.<sup>10</sup> Sweden, as the other West European nations, with this saw large portions of the public

<sup>6</sup> For 1980s of antinuclear pop culture, see Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon, *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Katsuya Kodama, *The Future of the Peace Movements* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Jan Øberg, "Fredsrörelserna i Norden," in *Livsfarlig ledning: om samhället, miljön och fredsarbetet*, ed. Maria Bergom-Larsson (Göteborg: Bokslogen, 1983), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb. Vol. 3, Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Lorenz M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For an overview of the Swedish security service's perceptions of the peace movement see Magnus Hjort, *Den farliga fredsrörelsen: säkerhetstjänsternas övervakning av fredsorganisationer, värnpliktsvägrare och FNL-grupper 1945–1990: forskarrapport till Säkerhetstjänstkommissionen* (Stockholm: Fritzes offentliga publikationer, 2002).

taking a stand for disarmament, and rising membership in organizations such as the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (SPAS), Swedish Peace Committee (SPC), Swedish Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF/IKFF), and Women for Peace (KFF).<sup>11</sup> These organizations were often internationally oriented, with numerous connections abroad. However, the frames of action differed between varying conditions in national contexts. As we shall see, the Swedish media framing of peace protests was distinct in several instances. Conversely, an elaboration on the framing perspective is made in the following.

### THE FRAMING PERSPECTIVE: MEDIA AND PEACE MOVEMENT CO-FRAMING

To investigate the relationship between peace movement, collective action, and media I use framing as a conceptual tool. Erving Goffman suggests that people operate under the guidance of frames as schemata of interpretation, enabling the individual to orient, locate and comprehend occurrences.<sup>12</sup> Legacy media and mainstream newspapers, which are here investigated, had the power to influence both the political agenda and framing during the early 1980s.<sup>13</sup>

According to social movement scholars Walgrave & Vliegenthart, the agenda is set in the intersection between media, protest, and how representations are interpreted.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation is dependent on framing. Alice Holmes Cooper's work on the media's framing of the West German peace protest is a concrete example of how framing operates. Holmes Cooper utilizes quantitative measures to assess the degree to which collective action frames and media frames converged. She argues that higher

<sup>11</sup> Kim Salomon, *Fred i vår tid: en studie i 80-talets fredsrörelse* (Malmö: LiberFörlag, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: an Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> For media and news framing protest, see Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Erling Sivertsen, and Rolf Werenskjöld, *Media and Revolt: Strategies and Performances from the 1960s to the Present* (New York: Berghahn, 2014). Especially Ch. 4. Baldwin Van Gorp, "Culture and Protest in Media Frames", and Ch. 5. Sigurd Allern, "When Media Frame the News".

<sup>14</sup> Stefaan Walgrave and Rens Vliegenthart, *Protest and Agenda-Setting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).



convergence of frames renders greater chances of success in mobilizing support.

Social movement scholars Snow et al. see frames as mechanisms for articulation, linking various elements to convey a coherent meaning. Frames furthermore focus attention by directing the sensory concentration to the “in-frame” and excluding other things. Frames thus often implement a transformative function on the object, remodeling the “way in which objects of attention are seen or understood relating to other objects and/or to the actor.”<sup>15</sup> These functions generate fertile grounds for qualitative interpretation of how news frames and shapes protests. The analysis is thus done by describing the explicit and implicit framing processes. In these processes, WUNC is a useful elaboration on factors that make protests powerful. Protestors who succeed in framing themselves as worthy, united, numerous, and committed exert more influence in this model. More events with higher turnouts (numbers) of people, displaying dignity (worthiness), a cohesive standpoint (unity), and that they truly care about the issue (commitment) increase the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

It is the interplay between the media framing the peace movement and the movement’s active employment of media (in the WUNC model, media coverage is understood as an intrinsic part of the action) in framing collective action that I call co-framing.<sup>17</sup> If the media and movement framing converged the media representation of movement actions should in some way mirror the core framing tasks of collective action frames, hereby structuring the peace movement framing. These core framing tasks

<sup>15</sup> David A. Snow, Rens Vliegenthart, and Pauline Ketelaars, “The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2017), 17. see also Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes, *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Summarized in Ruud Wouters and Stefaan Walgrave, “What Makes Protest Powerful? Reintroducing and Elaborating Charles Tilly’s WUNC Concept” (unpublished), file:///C:/Users/an2281oh/AppData/Local/Temp/SSRN-id2909740.pdf. [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/paperscfm?abstract\\_id=2909740](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/paperscfm?abstract_id=2909740) retrieved 2023-03-28.

<sup>17</sup> Ruud Wouters and Stefaan Walgrave “What Makes Protest Powerful?” See also Ruud Wouters, “Patterns in Advocacy Group Portrayal: Comparing Attributes of Protest and Non-Protest News Items Across Advocacy Groups,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (2015): 898–914.

are the diagnostic (what is wrong?), prognostic (what should be done?), and motivational tasks (by who and why?), constructing vocabularies that motivate people to partake. Snow, Vliegenthardt, and Ketelaars argue that the *framing practices of media* and *the framing practices of social movements* are not inherently comparable categories. However, in the present analysis of the Swedish 1980s peace movement, I argue that these two framing practices cannot be separated. With this, the answer to the questions is sought by making a qualitative interpretation to understand how such peace movement action and media *co-framing* operated.<sup>18</sup>

Following Holmes Cooper's thesis of media-movement frame convergence, the analysis of co-framing between media and collective actions should be seen in relation to the fact that the framing of protest in mainstream media commonly operates by the "protest paradigm." The protest paradigm implies that protests tend to be framed critically in mainstream media. In its widest conceptualization, McLeod and Hertog state that the protest paradigm combines unfavorable story framing, reliance on officially sanctioned sources and classifications, with pleas to public opinion, showing that the protesters are in the minority. In the case of the early 1980s disarmament movement, Swedish public opinion was essentially against the missiles. As we shall see, this was not the only instance where the protest paradigm was turned around with the Swedish peace protest framings.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Benford has published several papers elaborating on the aspects of the framing processes based on data on the nuclear disarmament movement, as well as a critical assessment of the framing perspective.<sup>20</sup> Benford demonstrates that social movement mobilization, recruitment and participation in the US disarmament movement relies on vocabularies of severity, urgency, efficacy, and propriety. Assuming a degree of

<sup>18</sup> Snow, Vliegenthardt, and Ketelaars, "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements".

<sup>19</sup> Douglas M. McLeod, and James K. Hertog, "Social Control, Social Change and the Mass Media's Role in the Regulation of Protest Groups," in *Mass Media, Social Control, and Social Change: A Macrosocial Perspective*, ed. David Demers and K. Viswanath (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Benford, "You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey': Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1993); Robert D. Benford, "Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement," *Social Forces* 71, no. 3 (1993); Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000).

generality, these vocabularies, if identified in the news reports from protest events, implicate that movement and media framings overlap.

## MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

Corresponding to the aims and questions, the investigation examines news articles on the disarmament movement protests. This material was obtained by searching the general news article database of the Swedish Royal Library, the Swedish Protest Database described by Jansson and Uba in this volume, and Sweden’s most extensive collection of newspaper clippings. First, a distanced reading of the digitalized material was conducted with the aid of keyword search, where the whole content of articles of all major newspapers in the period is searchable.

In the first search, the material/corpus and delimitation ranged from 1975–1995. Figure 7.1 shows yearly mentions of the term *peace movement* (*fredsrörelse*) in Swedish media. It is indicative of a movement “wave” a metaphor also used and generated by the peace movement itself, and in movement historiography.

The search renders a general overview of the term “peace movement” trends, with a peak in 1982–1983. However, not all of these articles talk about protest events. Subsequently, the search was limited between 1979, the Nato two-track decision, and 1987, when the INF treaty went into force, thus delimiting the source material scope. I furthermore added “protest,” “demonstration,” and “disarmament” in all combinations with “peace movement” to achieve some level of saturation. This combined search resulted in 1027 texts from the major newspapers. As a result of this it was possible to go through the whole material. I limited the source material to sections of the newspapers that were not opinion

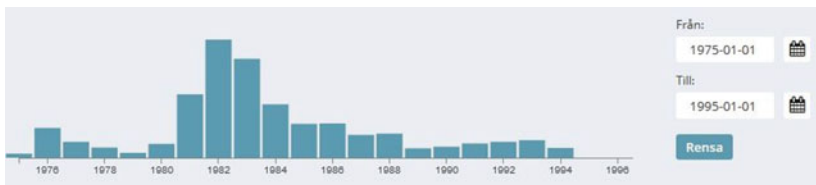


Fig. 7.1 Yearly “peace movement” term search. KB/Swedish Royal Library. [www.tidningar.kb.se](http://www.tidningar.kb.se)

pieces, debating texts, editorials, etc. as to focus on what was represented as news.<sup>21</sup> After this followed a qualitative analysis of the content and form of the texts that reported on collective actions against nuclear missile deployment or for nuclear disarmament. The qualitative examination that follows is structured on illustrative cases of event framing, speaking to general notions of the peace movement framing.

### THE PEACE PROCESSION DECEMBER 12, 1980: WORTHINESS, URGENCY, AND THE WAVE NARRATIVE

On December 6, 1980, a (re)presentation of a collective disarmament action was printed in the *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) newspaper. It was a call to the people of Stockholm to join a collective action in the form of a Peace procession on the 12th of that same month. As such, the call functioned both as a representation of the movement in wider terms and an appeal to participate in it. Hereby, the text converged movement collective action framework with media framing of a peace protest. This convergence of media and movement framing seems at odds with the traditional view on (mainstream) media in society, and the “protest paradigm” of framing protest action.<sup>22</sup> The fact that a major Swedish news outlet, DN, printed a call for action further suggests a relative unanimity regarding the planned action, its goals, and motives. This further marks that the action was not considered extreme and yet seen as a valuable news item.

The author of the text is the DN journalist and Women for Peace (*Kvinnokamp för Fred*, KFF)<sup>23</sup> organizer Birgitta Nyblom. In the paper’s news section, the text calls upon the public to march in a torchlight procession to protest, on the year date of the Nato two-track decision.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Vincent Price and David Tewksbury, “News Values and Public Opinion: A Theoretical Account of Media Priming and Framing,” in *Progress in the Communication Sciences*, ed. George. A. Barnett and Franklin J. Boster (New York: Ablex, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> For elaboration on the protest paradigm, see. Johannes B. Gruber, “*Troublemakers in the Streets? A Framing Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Protest in the UK 1992–2017*” (PhD diss. University of Glasgow, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> KFF was described by Bergom Larsson as a “young and action oriented group.” Interviewed by Annika Hultén, “Kvinnorna som slåss för livet,” *Aftonbladet*, May 23, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> Birgitta Nyblom, “Fackeltåg för fred 12 december,” *Dagens Nyheter*, December 6, 1980. The article is an example. Articles with similar media-movement co-framing of the nuclear disarmers, see: SvD, “Läkare mot kärnvapen,” December 5, 1982; *Arbetet*, “Det

Reports from this event followed in DN.<sup>25</sup> This protest call encompasses several elements of how peace movement actions were launched and framed in Swedish media. For instance, mentioning the numbers of protests and participants across Europe and the date of the procession emphasizing the Nato decision, identifying the superpowers as Other.<sup>26</sup> Statements such as these are what I would describe as *framing cues*, connecting the collective action frame to an assumed previous knowledge and outlook that the newsreader and potential protestors were assumed to care about and understand as a qualified motive to protest.

Further, the media-movement co-framing involves a critical reflection orienting the action toward a general mistrust of the superpower duopoly's deals and promises. The text here frames the reader and potential participant toward an urgency of the situation, and against the aspiration of the superpowers to keep the planned nuclear war in the "European theatre." This call to action thus frames a specific diagnostic comprehension of a danger embedded in the superpower interaction and the non-democratic processes implicated by this, to be protested by the active and *reasonable* citizens of a democratic welfare state, who are at risk of being affected by the *insane* nuclear arms race.

Nyblom, with the call for the peace procession, presents herself as part of the Women for Peace group and calls on the "women of Stockholm" to participate in the planned procession. The women for peace framing is illustrative as, in the early 1980s, peace movement peace was often represented as a gendered issue,<sup>27</sup> underlining certain aspects of womanhood connoting life, and reproduction in connection to the protection of the planet and non-violence (contrasted against masculine techno-militarized

yttersta vansinnet", December 3, 1982; Harald Hamrin, "En folkrörelse mot kärnvapen: Ny maktfaktor i Norge" DN, November 25, 1982 on the Norwegian movement against the armament and lack of democratic process within Nato.; Alva Myrdal, "Alva Myrdal manar till folkrörelse för freden," *Expressen*, August 28, 1983.

<sup>25</sup> DN's Olof Berger, reports from the procession. Olof Berger "Adolfo Perez Esquivel: 'Era facklor är ljus som lyser upp världen'," DN, December 13, 1980. Numbers of protesters at different locations are declared. 8000 in Stockholm, 3000 in Gothenburg, 500 in Malmö, 250 in Östersund, and over 100 in Halmstad and Mora each.

<sup>26</sup> Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb*; Conze, Klimke, and Varon, *Nuclear Threats...*

<sup>27</sup> See Maria Bergom-Larsson, *Låt dig ej förhärddas: fredsarbete på 80-talet* (Stockholm: Författarförl, 1983).

modernity).<sup>28</sup> Groups participating in the action together with Women for Peace were the social democratic women's clubs, and "all the peace organizations."

Nyblom's unproblematic positions as both journalist and activist/organizer are indicative of the relationship between the peace movement and the media establishment as a form of internal anti-establishment. Many prominent peace movement actors represented themselves as outsiders. Still, they had communicative platforms and positions in media, political parties, and academia, forming a counter-establishment close to and overlapping with the "establishment." With this, the disarmament protests were not only framed *by* the media but also with it. The confluence explains to why the movement actions were not framed more in line with the "protest paradigm," in which protest action tends to be framed less favorably. Instead, the media representations were part of the movement's collective action framework as well, represented by committed journalists, peace intellectuals, and writers.<sup>29</sup>

The core framing tasks that Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars<sup>30</sup> describe as the operating functions of collective action frames, are also thus structuring the media framing of these protest actions. First, the *diagnosis* of illegitimate superpower nuclear duopoly and insanity of increased missile tension was clearly expressed, both in the movement organizations and in Swedish mainstream media/news reporting.<sup>31</sup> This highlights the *prognostic* (what should be done) confidence in collective action represented throughout the media-movement event co-framing, as

<sup>28</sup> Emma Rosengren, *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament: Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War* (Stockholm: Department of Economic History and International Relations, Stockholm University, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Example, Maria Bergom Larsson's role in the debate and as a journalist: Maria Bergom Larsson, "Förtalad massörelse: imorgon startar fredsmarchen" *DN*, 21 June, 1981; Maria Bergom Larsson "I tiden före tredje världskriget?" *DN*, December 12, 1981; Hultén, A., "Kvinnorna som slåss för livet," *AB*, May 23, 1983; Maria Bergom Larsson, "Fredsarbete på gräsrotsnivå," *Expressen*, May 25, 1983. See also: *GP*, "Fredsveckorna pågår," April 13, 1983.

<sup>30</sup> Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars, "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements".

<sup>31</sup> See: Jesper Grenander, "Ett nytt Europa: En presshistorisk undersökning av fredsorganisationers opinionsbildning angående frågan om kärnvapen och nedrustning 1980–1984" MA thesis (Linneaus University, 2019); Edward Palmer Thompson and Dan Smith, *Protest and Survive* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981).

well as the *motivational* motor of the action, that everybody should act because the imminent threat of nuclear war implicated all.

### FRAMING THE PEACE MARCHES FOR A NORDIC NUCLEAR-WEAPONS-FREE ZONE: FESTIVE AND WOMANHOOD-FRAMED CRITIQUE

In 1981 and 1982, peace organizations in the Nordic countries collectively arranged longer peace marches with women as main protagonists to Paris and Minsk. The goal was to address the urgency of disarmament and grassroots transnational cooperation against the Euromissiles.<sup>32</sup> Anne Stefansson, in DN March 7, 1981, before the first march, stated that the Paris march was established to generate opinion for a Nordic nuclear-weapons-free zone, NNWEZ.<sup>33</sup> Ten women from each of the respective Nordic countries were to march from Copenhagen through Europe to Paris. However, all were welcome to join for longer or shorter intervals. Further, DN frames a far-reaching European popular support for the march. The marchers were joined by English, West- and East-German as well as Italian and other European marches in Paris on August 6, 1981, Hiroshima day, starting an international peace festival.<sup>34</sup>

In correspondence with most of the collective actions investigated here, the peace march was framed as festivities for peace syncretically with the women's movement. One of *Svenska Dagbladet* (*SvD*)'s headlines translates to "Women understand that war threatens them." The popular peace movement is hereby articulated, and the peace marches framed as

<sup>32</sup> See Bergom-Larsson M., *Låt dig ej förhårdas*; Elisabeth Gerle, *Allt är omöjligt, och vi ger oss inte: den stora fredsvresan* (Stockholm: Themis, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Eva Hernbäck, "Kvinnomarch genom Europa mot kärnvapen," DN, July 3, 1981. DN reported continually during the peace marches: Kristina Bohman, "Idag startar marschen: Demonstration för fred," DN, June 22, 1981; "Världskrigens slagfält längs marschvägen," DN, July 4, 1981; Claes Sturm, "Rutin, skavsår och nordtysk förståelse," DN, August 7, 1981; *Skånska Dagbladet* (*SkD*), "Fransmännen om fredsmarschen: Vi är alla rädda för bomben," June 22, 1981; *Expressen*, "Marsch för fred," July 28, 1981; Pia Gadd, "Banderollerna går igen," *Expressen*, October 27, 1981; "Bli ett fredsbud!" *SvD*, June 22, 1981; Leif Svensson, "De marcherar för freden," *Skånska Dagbladet* (*SkD*), June 19, 1981.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Bratt, "Kärnvapenfritt Norden tema för fredsmarsch," DN, May 26, 1981; "Rapport från fredsmarschen," *Stockholmstidningen*, July 26, 1982.

female acts, informed by a gendered reason and motivation.<sup>35</sup> DN in mid-July 1981 reports from the start of the march to Paris and contrasting the somber mission, the representations of the march connects to a general framing of young, pop-festival peace.

## TRANSNATIONAL EUROPEAN PEACE AS FRAME MECHANISM IN 1980S SWEDEN

Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow have defined ‘transnational collective action’ as “coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions.”<sup>36</sup> The anti-INF protests were framed as transnational as they were protesting something beyond national borders and coordinated internationally. Almost every news report from peace events recounted simultaneous action across Europe. The reports demonstrate a key element of the movement actions as being part of a larger international popular movement with a kind of “solidarity in numbers,” with this reinforcing itself and connecting to the peace wave narrative.<sup>37</sup> In transnational activism, contacts across borders are intrinsic: both with frames operating across borders, and with transnationalism as an appealing frame-component. In the cold war context, transnationalism was, however,

<sup>35</sup> *SvD* “Kvinnor förstår att kriget kan hota dem,” June 22, 1981. For another womanhood framed example of symbolic collective action see: Anders Kilner, “Fredsduvor över Tjörnbroarna,” *GP*, May 16, 1983. Central actor in co-ordinating west-Swedish actions is the activist Harriet Otterlo. For further elaboration on gendered ideas of national disarmament policy in Sweden, see: Emma Rosengren, *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament: Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War* (Stockholm: Department of Economic History and International Relations, Stockholm University, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Transnational Protest and Global Activism: People, Passions, and Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). 2f.

<sup>37</sup> For the framing of the movement as a wave see: “Europeisk fredsvåg,” *SvD*, May 3, 1981; “Hiroshima och Fredsrörelsen,” *DN*, August 7, 1982; “Nu växer opinionen mot kärnvapenhotet,” *Arbetet*, May 30, 1981; “Europa behöver en folkrörelse mot kärnvapen,” *DN* October 28, 1981. “Rapport från fredsmarschen,” *Stockholmsstidningen*, July 26, 1982; *DN*, “Minister träffar fredscyklister,” July 29, 1982. Ingmar Lindmark, “Kontinuitet och tradition i den brittiska fredsrörelsen,” *SvD*, November 17, 1981. This is in a series *SvD* of articles presenting “Europe on March”: Ingmar Lindmark, “Västtyskland, gränsen till östblocket: Fredsrörelsen –En politisk kraft”, *SvD*, November 14, 1981.



not obviously favorable.<sup>38</sup> The transnational aspect could have been framed as a liability signaling “foreign influence.”<sup>39</sup> However, in the Swedish media framing, border-crossing practices arguably became favorable framing mechanisms in themselves, as the official Swedish neutrality standpoint converged well with the peace movements disarmament work. On Swedish news pages, antimilitary disarmament action was not represented as a threat. Instead, the framing aligned the protest with a form of healthy, youthful dissent imbricated with internationalist values.<sup>40</sup>

The collective actions against the new missiles and for a Nordic nuclear-weapons-free zone that took place in Sweden were typically framed positively. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions, such as the Nordic peace march to Minsk made in 1982. This march was more ambiguously framed, with some articles suggesting the march would be used as Soviet propaganda. It was hence represented as both suspect and naïve.<sup>41</sup> Here a line was drawn in the framing between common-sense-based and overzealous activism in agreement with the protest paradigm. In the Swedish news reports, this serves as an exception. The reports on the “great peace meeting” in the spring of 1982, before the Minsk March, were optimistic as we shall see in the following.

### CONTENTION FOR ALL: CO-FRAMING COMMON SENSE OF THE “PEACE MAN” AT THE PEACE RALLY IN GOTHENBURG 1982

The “peace movement wave” across Europe, as it was represented in Swedish news media, was characterized as distinctively popular and broad, in line with worthiness-connoting, harmless counter-cultural frameworks of expression. The mainstream media representation of a Swedish peace

<sup>38</sup> Jan Øberg, “De bärs upp av de breda skarorna... men samarbete över gränserna behövs,” *DN*, January 19, 1983. On the need for border-crossing cooperation.

<sup>39</sup> See Andrew Tompkins, “Transnationality as a Liability? The Anti-Nuclear Movement at Malville,” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 89, no. 3–4 (2011).

<sup>40</sup> See: Lars Bjelf, “Lena skriver brev till tennismiljonärerna: Ge pengar till fredsfilm!” *AB*, June 15, 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Bergom-Larsson, *Låt dig ej förhärdas*; “Litar på Sovjetunionens goda vilja,” *SvD*, July 10, 1982; “Fredsmarschen till Sovjet startar: ‘Lokalbefolkningen kommer att sluta upp,’” *DN*, July 13, 1982; “Fredsmarschen: Fredsbudskap nådde inte fram,” *SvD*, July 20, 1982; “Fredsmarschen gagnar knappast freden,” *Dagens Industri*, June 2, 1981.

rally, “the great peace meeting,” on May 15, 1982 underlines how this type of framing operated. The meeting took place in Gothenburg. There the local organization of WILPF (Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Internationella kvinnoförbundet för fred och frihet, IKFF) had an active and radical tradition to build on.<sup>42</sup> In an item on the 12th of May, 1982 of the national daily newspaper SvD “50 000 väntas tåga i största fredsmarchen” 50,000 Expected to Partake in the Greatest Peace Rally—the preparations for the large-scale peace meeting are described, and the action is with this also promoted. The (re)production of the event follows Tilly’s WUNC framing conceptualization rather narrowly, recounting numbers even before the event had taken place.<sup>43</sup> The text furthermore, as the procession appeal above, functions as a call for collective action while reporting the planned event. It is emphasized that no party or individual organization is arranging the event, instead mobilizing by appealing to a multiple, plural, and post-political (as the text represents that the organizers does not consider the action as political) sentiment of peace. A unifying aspect is however, located in the watchwords dictated in the news report by the collective action planners: “nuclear free Europe” and “for a Nordic nuclear free zone”.<sup>44</sup>

As the media represented it, the peace movement was remarkably well organized and disciplined within these mediated worthiness frameworks. Further, the event was represented with interviews with one of its planners, expressing an effort to “Awakening the ones who are not normally involved in these kinds of things”.<sup>45</sup>

1982 on the 16th of May, *Göteborgsposten* (GP) wrote several reports from the march and Gothenburg peace rally, with varying perspectives.

<sup>42</sup> Anna-Lisa Björneberg, “Internationella kvinnoförbundet för fred och frihet. Göteborgskretsen,” in “*Så här kan vi inte ha det!*”: fem kvinnoorganisationer i Göteborg: 100 års ideellt arbete, när sambället svek, *Göteborgskvinnor i rörelser*, ed. Anette Carlsson (Göteborg: KAF, 2019), 75–76.

<sup>43</sup> Reproducing the numbers protesting in different cities is a common feature of the framing.

<sup>44</sup> SvD, “50 000 väntas tåga i största fredsmarchen,” May 12, 1982. Numbers ultimately varied in the press reports: Margareta Artsman, “100 000 i manifestation mot kärnvapen” SvD, May 16, 1982. The great peace meeting was referred to in the reports from the “hot autumn”: Gert Malmberg, “Tusentals på fredsmöte i Göteborg: -Fredsrörelsen har blivit en maktfaktor,” GP, October 23, 1983.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The text “Mäktig demonstration av aktiv fredsvilja” (Powerful Demonstration of an Active Will for Peace)<sup>46</sup> described a “warm feeling in the atmosphere” and that around 70,000 marched through the city. Forty thousand were described as moving into the sports stadium, Ullevi, to demonstrate their nuclear disarmament commitment and support the slogans.<sup>47</sup> The texts represented a festive mode where all were invited. The police reported of a very peaceful day without “intermezzos,” and a mild passion for a general peace concept is framed here. A speaker at the event, the Finnish peace intellectual, and educator Helena Kekkonen highlighted the potential of the mass acting as individuals. She recognized that the general task of the movement should be to create a new human being, the ideal “peace-man” through “peace education,” for a human elevated to feeling responsibility for life and value all people as equals.<sup>48</sup>

GP further reports that the marchers expressed no use in provocative, violent action against the structural anticipated violence of nuclear war as “we are all for peace.” The marchers are described by one protestor as “drunk on each other, the sunshine and nature,” and that “everybody” was participating, “beginner-protestors, old and young, punks and Christians.”<sup>49</sup>

Images and short interviews with people marching for peace illustrate the peace march reports in GP. Significantly, the imagery portrays older people and children as an expression of innocence and diversity, framing “common people” as a moral face of humanity, the framing represented by the following description:

strikingly, many of the participants in the peace march were unorganized. People who felt that here was something they could take part in. Many elders joined in the march. Women, children, and professions for peace, värmlänningar (people from a rural Swedish region, Värmland) for peace and, skövdebor (people from a Swedish township, Skövde) for peace. A priest from Färgelanda, a woman from Dals länget. (Two small Swedish communities).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Sune Örnberg, “Mäktig demonstration av aktiv fredsvilja,” *Göteborgs Posten (GP)*, May 16, 1982.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Madeleine Sahlman, “Bara vi gräsrötter kan göra något,” *GP*, May 16, 1982.

A noteworthy aspect here is that, besides the many professions and places mentioned, women, elderly, and children are often highlighted in the reports from collective action events of the peace movement. These groups are particularly prominent in a kind of peace protest iconography.<sup>51</sup> The peace iconography signaled, as a specification of the worthiness framing, a certain aspect of real-ness and human face contrasted with “political games” and abstract political figures, as well as harmlessness in contrast to protest aggression.

Under what was co-framed by the media and the peace movement as the “hot autumn” of 1983, these elements of inclusive unity and common sense appeal intensified. It meant an urgency-provoking countdown to the deployment and consisted of mediated events and reports in the months approaching the implementation.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Sahlman, M., “Bara vi gräsrötter kan göra något,” *GP*, May 16, 1982; Peter Bratt “Tiotusentals byggde bro för fred: ‘Vår jord har ingen nödutgång,’” *DN*, October 23, 1983; Thorwald Olsson, “*Margit Jonsson, 75: -Alla svenskar borde ställa upp,*” *DN*, October 23, 1983. Hultén, A., “Kvinnorna som slåss för livet,” *AB*, May 23, 1983.

<sup>52</sup> At these locations, women led peace camps were established. Rolf Svensson, “Tre svenska kvinnor i krig mot NATO,” *AB*, November 7, 1983 (*Three Swedish women at war with NATO*). For the “hot autumn” framed in accordance with peace movement actors, see: Gunnar Lahtisanti, “Fredsrörelsen växer” *Aftonbladet*, May 9, 1983; Maj-Britt Theorin, “Den heta hösten,” *AB*, October 18, 1983; “Demonstration i sambatakt avslutade fredsveckan” *SvD*, October 28, 1984; Nils Svensson, “Berusade av varandra, naturen och solskenet,” *GP*, May 16, 1982; “En folklig rörelse med enorm kraft” *AB*, August 18, 1982; Lorenz Berglund, “Tio tusen hand i hand för fred,” *Stockholmstidningen*, October 20, 1982; Lis Landmark, “10 000 bygger fredsbro mellan stormakterna,” *SvD* October 23, 1982; “Hand i hand för freden” *SvD*, October 25, 1982; “Fredlig aktion för fred: Öststaters ambassader blockerade med ickevåld,” *Dagen*, December 20, 1983; “För fredens skull,” *Expressen*, October 22, 1983; *DN* “Mänskligt brobygge,” October 23, 1983 on a reoccurring large hand-holding manifestation to build a “peace bridge” in Stockholm and world metropolises. Maria Nilsson, “Europa behöver inte kärnvapen,” *Ny Dag*, October 27, 1983 on the peace bridge between embassies approximating between 25,000 and 50,000 participants. Blockades directed toward the European embassies were given minimal space compared to the larger protest event. See: Håkan Bergström, “Ambassader blockerade i protest mot raketer,” *SvD*, October 25, 1983. Thorwald Olsson “Icke-väldsmedlemmar spärrar Östambassader,” *DN*, December 20, 1983; Bratt, P. “Tiotusentals byggde bro för fred: ‘Vår jord har ingen nödutgång,’” *DN*, October 23, 1983. *GP*, “Demonstrerar för fred, varje fredag,” December 14, 1983. Magdalena Ribbing, “Freden främst i bägge tågen” *DN*, May 2, 1983.

## THE HOT AUTUMN ENDS WITH A BANG

Artists for Peace (Artister för fred) were pop musicians, show business people, and artists who arranged concerts as public events for peace. As mainstream media framed it, the peace movement had become intertwined with entertainment. During the hot autumn of 1983, Artists for Peace organized a final event before the missile deployment, officially starting on the 23 of October. The peace artists celebrated and performed at *Berns salonger* (a traditional venue and variety institution in Stockholm). The halls were decorated with Peace doves for the 1000-headed crowd. Earlier in the day, the crowd had taken part in a collective action of 80 000 people building a peace chain between the US and Soviet embassies.<sup>53</sup> Olof Palme, who at the time led the Swedish government, held what was presented as an unprompted speech at the demonstration. He was thus represented, in line with his interests in common security, as a figurehead for the wide popular force of the early 1980s peace movement and its position of respectable critique.<sup>54</sup>

These reports from the Swedish actions are combined with coverages of West European and US peace action in October–November 1983, with large-scale demonstrations framed with their number of participants in Bonn, London, Rome, and Paris. The movement actions in Bonn in mid-November 1983 were, in contrast to the Swedish actions, represented as “Full-scale war in the streets”.<sup>55</sup> Foreign movement actions were represented as more contentious and violent, with higher stakes in comparison

<sup>53</sup> Mats Gezelius “Det stora slaget om freden, i natt slutade det med fest i Stockholm,” *Expressen*, October 23, 1983; Ulla-Lene Österholm, “Alva angriper TV: s fredsreportage,” *AB*, October 23, 1983; The symbolic action is framed in: Bratt, P., “Tiotusentals byggde bro för fred: ‘Vår jord har ingen nödutgång,’” *DN*, October 23, 1983; *Expressen*, “För fredens skull,” October 22, 1983; *DN* “Mänskligt brobygge,” October 23, 1983. See also: Theorin, M. B., “Den heta hösten,” *AB*, October 18, 1983, where the leader of the Swedish delegation to the UN Disarmament Commission, Maj Britt Theorin encourages the swedes to take part in the manifestation. Åke Malm and Rolf Svensson, “2 miljoner på march i Europa,” *AB*, October 23, 1983, rendering a positive framing of the INF protest demonstrations across Europe.

<sup>54</sup> Gezelius, M. “Det stora slaget om freden, i natt slutade det med fest i Stockholm,” *Expressen*, October 23, 1983.

<sup>55</sup> Knut Grahnqvist, “Fullt krig på gatorna i morse,” *Expressen*, November 21, 1983; Claes Sturm, “Vattenkanoner vid robotdebatten i Bonn,” *DN*, November 22, 1983. Knut Grahnqvist, “Vi är beredda att offra livet,” *Expressen*, November, 16, 1983 on the arrest of Greenham common blockading protestors, “peace-women”.

to the framing of the Swedish collective actions. However, in the reports on foreign peace movement action, counter to the “protest paradigm,” the news report in Sweden frames the police as acting as aggressors.

However, there were two distinct sides to the newspapers. The news reports most often highlighted positively coded aspects on the news page, with established anti-establishment peace progressives reporting on the action potential and reproducing it as a positive force for disarmament. (The journalists were often of a younger generation, often women). On the other page were “cold warriors” and security professionals questioning this same peace endeavor as naïve, from the mainstream newspapers’ opinion/debating, commenting, and editorial pages.<sup>56</sup> The two positions crystallized on the op-ed pages more than in the news sections. The news described the events almost exclusively as “good news,” in line with the peace movement position, framing itself as post-political or apolitical.<sup>57</sup> The protests framed as (good) news were thus implicitly, although the movement was framed as apolitical, emphasizing political fractures in the ostensibly “homogenous” Swedish welfare state society.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY: FRAMING SWEDISH ANTINUCLEAR PEACE ACTION

The portrayal of the early 1980s disarmament was overwhelmingly positive in Swedish mainstream news reporting. This positive framing stands out vis-a-vis representations of the peace movement in other European countries and the freeze movement in the US.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, the collective actions of the disarmers were less univocally embraced and framed as more “political” and divisive. Entman and Rojecki find “framing judgements” of journalists in the US to be influenced by an underlying

<sup>56</sup> *SvD*, “Den som vill fred,” June 25, 1981. Åke Williams, “Strauss attackerar fredsrörelsen: en armé styrd från Kreml”, *GP*, October 21, 1983.

<sup>57</sup> Knut Grahnuist, “Vinden har vänt för fredsrörelsen,” *Expressen*, October 22, 1981.

<sup>58</sup> Entman and Rojecki, “Freezing Out the Public”; Cooper, “Media Framing and Social Movement Mobilization”; Cooper, “Public-GOOD MOVEMENTS and the Dimensions of Political Process”; Robertson, *National Prisms and Perceptions of Dissent*; Benford, “Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement”. Collective actions against nuclear power and the Swedish military industry was not as favorably portrayed in the press, even though they in some cases overlapped with peace action see: *Göteborgs-Tidningen (GT)*, “En äkta fredsinnsats: befria de fastkedjade,” April 17, 1983.

professional ideology encompassing an ambivalence to public participation and commitment in security politics, supportive of mass participation in theory but nevertheless suspicious when movements organize to exert power. Swedish mass media coverage of the early 1980s peace movement shows less suspicion, and instead the prominence of an idea that public action demonstrated the will of the masses and through this a responsibility of the “active” individual had a place in security politics, extending even beyond the national borders.

Further, the nuclear disarmament movement’s core framing tasks are identified in the texts reporting on peace events, especially since collective action events also were announced and promoted as news items. Generally, the framing tasks were expressed as follows: First, *diagnosing* the missile escalation as being against common sense and second, *prescribing* collective action to affect politicians, promote an NNWFZ, and support the movement organizations in the western European deployment Nato states, in a “respectable” way. Third, *motivating* as many as possible who do not usually participate in protest actions to commit to the cause.

The Swedish mainstream media’s and the movement’s framing with this appear to be converging in several instances. In motivating people to partake and, prescribing action in response to the severity and urgency of the issue, the simultaneity across Europe, and an idea of responsibility to act on the extreme stances of the nuclear alliances. The conclusions can be concentrated into the following points:

First, media and movement isomorphism is identified, meaning that media representation of the movement actions and collective action framework of the peace movement mirrored and overlapped, mutually enforcing each other. This framing, dependent on a counter-establishment asserting a specific position of virtually post-political peace aspirations, co-constitutes a framework of popular common sense based disarmament nationalism, relating to Sweden as a small welfare state with an ostensibly independent security policy vis-a-vis the superpower nuclear duopoly.

Second, the peace movement protests in Sweden were not framed according to the protest paradigm. In some protest events, reporters and journalists took part in and shaped the collective action framework, co-constructing the collective actions as media events. The arena of struggle was not the news reports, and thus an apparent convergence between movement and news framing occurred.

Furthermore, the positive framing of the collective actions was built on WUNC, the unifying nuclear threat, wave narrative transnationalism, gendered peace values, and celebratory connotations. One possible factor in explaining the favorable portrayal of the peace actions is that direct actions primarily concerned either policy that corresponded to the Swedish official foreign position or was directed not at Swedish but mainly nuclear duopoly installations.

The media framing of the early 1980s Swedish peace movement action drew on a cultural frame of consensual, internationally oriented reasonability beyond the superpower duopoly's "armament insanity." This framing in the media completely overshadowed other cultural frames suggested and emphasized as motivators, such as alternative individualist lifestyles or nuclear fear.<sup>59</sup>

The movement events were generally represented as festive and connected to womanhood, both by the level of organizing groups and in how the events were represented. In earlier nuclear protests, gendered aspects of disarmament were less pronounced.<sup>60</sup> The focus on missiles, de-escalation in an already urgently framed present, and transnational solidarity with movements across Europe were central elements for the broad appeal, circumventing conflictual and divisive issues regarding security policy and involvement with either pact. Therefore, even though the issue was deeply divisive, it was not so on the mainstream news pages. Indeed, the mainstream media framings were never the only valid frames of peace protests, as frame disputes are ubiquitous in social movements, as Benford puts it.<sup>61</sup> However, as this chapter highlights, in 1980s Sweden, the strong tendency of co-framing between media representations of events

<sup>59</sup> Katsuya Kodama, *The Future of the Peace Movements*; Holger Nehring, "Peace Movements," in *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective a Survey*, ed. Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017); Conze, Klimke, and Varon, *Nuclear Threats...*; Weart, *The Rise of Nuclear Fear*.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Jonter and Emma Rosengren, "From Nuclear Weapons Acquisition to Nuclear Disarmament: The Swedish Case," *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 30 (2014).

<sup>61</sup> Benford, "Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement"; David A. Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (1986).



and the peace movement can be seen as a beneficial factor of the movements' ability to mobilize and the meaning that its symbolic actions came to have as "Swede of the year" in 1983.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Benford, "You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey": Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement."

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# The End of a Performance? Swedish Rent Strikes in the 1980s

*Hannes Rolf* 

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the rent strikes and protests in Sweden during the first half of the 1980s. During the post-war era, Sweden had a very ambitious housing programme, with a massive increase in rental apartments, especially in the newly built non-profit municipally owned tenements of the so-called “Million Homes Programme”. The internationally strong Swedish tenant’s movement, organising about half a million households, had been an important factor in shaping the new housing regime. However, discontent seems to have been brewing among Swedish tenants, especially in the newly constructed blocks, and contentious episodes occurred in several places in Sweden.

Internationally, several rent strikes and protests happened during the 1970s, in places such as Italy, Germany, England, Northern Ireland and

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the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 1984, perhaps the most widespread rent strikes ever started in South Africa. Eventually, upward of 300,000 tenants would participate, most of them living in and around Johannesburg. Despite heavy and deadly police repression, the refusal to pay rent carried on well into the 1990s and in some areas stayed on after the fall of the apartheid system.<sup>2</sup> Given this, it is interesting to note that Sweden, known for its relatively high housing standards, also saw collective protests over rent and living standards during the same period.

Rent contention has a long history in Sweden. There are accounts of collective rent protests and rent strikes in Stockholm as early as the nineteenth century. As the tenant's movement grew and became more formalised during the first half of the twentieth century, rent protests increasingly came under the control of the tenant's unions, using it as leverage for enforcing collective bargaining.<sup>3</sup> The 1930s saw a high level of tenant militancy, but the level of militant action calmed down during the rent control period from 1942 to 1968, even if it did not cease completely. While several of its founders were syndicalists and communists as well as reformists, the tenant's national union *Hyresgästernas Riksförbund* (HRF) and its member organisations were to become increasingly centralised and politically dominated by the ruling Social Democrats and institutionalised. This was accentuated during the period of direct rent control from 1942 to 1978, when deals with property owners, both for-profit and non-profit, were made in more informal settings in rent tribunals. Thus, just like the labour market, a "culture of negotiation" intent on keeping the conflict level low did appear early on. Rent control gradually evolved into a system based on collective bargaining of rents, based on use-value and with strong security of tenure. This transformation was championed by the leadership of both the tenant's and the

<sup>1</sup> For a summary, see Hannes Rolf, *En fackförening för hemmen- Kollektiv mobilisering, hyresgästorganisation och maktkamp på hyresmarknaden i Stockholm och Göteborg 1875–1942* (Stockholm: Ersta Sköndal Bräcke högskola, 2020), 69–71.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Chaskalson, Karen Jochelson and Jeremy Seekings, "Rent Boycotts, the State, and the Transformation of the Urban Political Economy in South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 40 (1987), 47–64; Anders Corr, *No trespassing!: Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 134–136.

<sup>3</sup> Rolf, *En fackförening för hemmen*.



landlord's organisations.<sup>4</sup> With the easing of rent control, however, came de-centralisations within the movement and increasing dissent. The rent strikes of the 1970s and 1980s in Sweden were similar to the ones during the mid-war period in one way: they tended to take place in newly constructed buildings with high rents and lacking facilities. The rent strikes of the 1970s and 1980s did, however, differ from the ones in the mid-war period in several ways. They mainly took place in non-profit municipally owned properties and were organised outside the established tenant's organisations.

The argument in this article is that even though they can be seen as a continuation of the radical wave of the 1970s, the rent strikes and rent protests of the 1980s are an interesting phenomenon to study on their own, not the least since it appears as if the ties between rent strikes and leftist organisations, in particular Maoists, appear to have been much less clear than during the 1970s. It seems like rent striking had re-emerged as a part of a contentious repertoire during that decade and that the performance, in the 1980s, was enacted in a wide variety of cases. The rent strikes of the 1980s were, however, to signal an end to militant tactics used by organised tenants, a phenomenon that has only been picked up again by tenant activists in Sweden in recent days.

## RENT CONTENTION

The theoretical framework for the study is contentious politics studies (CPS), following a tradition mainly from Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, and the changes to the contentious repertoire of the radical tenants that seem to have occurred during the 1980s will be analysed using this theoretical approach, emphasising institutional changes and changing opportunity structures as explanatory for the changes to a radical social movement. The established tenant's movement's strong ties to the labour movement influenced its organisational logic as well as the *contentious repertoire* from which the contentious tenants would enact their contentious performances. As described in the works of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, a contentious repertoire can be seen as a common norm for how contentious groups act, for example, during a strike, during

<sup>4</sup> Bo Bengtsson, "Sverige – kommunal allmännyttan och korporativa särintressen," in *Varför så olika? Nordisk bostadspolitik i jämförande historiskt ljus*, ed. Bo Bengtsson (Malmö, Égalité, 2013), 119–195. The system, though eroded, is still in place today.

an election campaign or during a political meeting. These ways of acting, *contentious performances*, come from a repertoire but are in turn modified to fit the particular circumstances of the situation.<sup>5</sup>

Most of what Charles Tilly sees as typical elements of a social movement were in place in the Swedish tenant's movement at an early stage.<sup>6</sup> The movement organised a sustained campaign with specific claims on landlords and the government. The tenants also made frequent WUNC displays, that is concerted public representations, such as marches and gatherings, designed to show worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment. They also employed a wide repertoire of performances such as the creation of special-purpose associations, holding of public meetings, petition drives and statements to and in public media. The associational character of Swedish social movements has always been strong, and the tenant's movement was no exception. The establishing and managing of tenant's unions was from the beginning a central part of the movement goals, and these organisations were later to become parts of a wider project of merging The Swedish Union of Tenants, *Hysesgästernas Riksförbund* (HRF).<sup>7</sup> The rise of non-profit housing cooperative organisations and municipal companies also empowered HRF as it could enter into strong alliances with these companies and with the trade unions and consumer cooperatives.<sup>8</sup>

Tilly and Tarrow note that institutional changes and changing opportunity structures often affect movements, but the changes are hard to predict, and thus the historical cases need to be studied as individual examples. The behaviour of a movement may change with institutional changes, which is an interesting factor to consider when studying, for example, organised tenants. In Tarrow and Tilly's system, a political actor

<sup>5</sup> Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics. Second Edition—Fully Revised and Updated* (New York, Oxford University Press 2015), 11–12; Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> Today known simply as *Hysesgästföreningen*, or “The Tenants’ Union”.

<sup>8</sup> Thord Strömberg, “Historien om bostadsmarknadens politisering. Socialdemokraterna och bostadsfrågan,” in *Socialdemokratins sambälle. SAP och Sverige under 100 år*, ed. Villy Bergström, Klaus Misgeld, Karl Molin and Klas Åmark (Stockholm, Tiden, 1989), 145–169.

is called a *member* if they have a secure standing in day-to-day politics and a *challenger* if they lack this but regularly make their presence available.<sup>9</sup>

## SOURCE MATERIAL

The empirical material used in the study is mainly various newspaper articles, a source material often used in historical research on labour conflicts.<sup>10</sup> These come from the daily press, accessed through the press database *Svenska dagstidningar*,<sup>11</sup> and from other movement-related newspapers from the smaller tenant activist networks and groups. Other documents used are biographies and organisational documents such as pamphlets, programmes, meeting protocols and annual reports.

## A CHANGING HOUSING MARKET

The rental contention took place in a Swedish housing market that had changed dramatically during the so-called post-war “record years”. From 1961 to 1975 close to 1,4 million new homes had been constructed. About 476,000 of these were built in single-family houses and 920,000 in apartment blocks.<sup>12</sup> The non-profit municipal housing companies did build a huge housing stock and especially the concrete tenement blocks were to become the most important symbol of the era. The newly constructed homes meant largely improved housing quality and increased living space for families and the increasing number of single households. The period coincided with large demographic changes as people were leaving rural Sweden for the major and medium cities but also smaller mill towns. There was also a move in the cities from the city centres to the new suburbs with their tenement and single-family house blocks.

Bo Bengtsson has noted a shift in the Swedish housing regime beginning in approximately 1975. After decades of focusing on ever-increasing

<sup>9</sup> Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 20–21, 59, 240.

<sup>10</sup> Tobias Karlsson, “Databasen Svenska dagstidningar – mycket text, mindre kontext,” *Historisk tidskrift* 139, no 2 (2019), 410.

<sup>11</sup> Search terms used were rent struggle related ones: hyresstrejk, hyreskamp, hyreskonflikt, hyresbojkott, hyresmasking.

<sup>12</sup> Sonja Widén, “Rekordårens bostäder – en viktig resurs för hållbar utveckling,” in *Miljöprogrammet utveckla eller avveckla*, ed. Birgitta Johansson (Stockholm, Formas 2012), 21–23.

housing construction, the focus now shifted to managing the existing housing stock. The established organisations continued to play an important role and collective bargaining in the rental sector was properly institutionalised in 1978 when a law made the right to establish a bargaining procedure statutory.<sup>13</sup> The early 1980s saw increasing stagflation and unemployment became a political issue. While the population increase and migration were predicted to be minimal, large parts of the housing stock were deemed in need of repairs and reconstruction. This was also seen as a possible way to combat unemployment. A massive programme that renovated and reconstructed the existing housing stock, the ROT programme, was launched in 1983. It had mixed success and the goal of 425,000 units reconstructed or renovated was never reached.<sup>14</sup>

While there now existed a housing surplus, the increasing number of small owner-occupied homes, fiscally favoured by policy-makers, meant that the more well-off in the working class and the middle class increasingly left the tenement-dominated neighbourhoods. The increasing housing segregation was a widely discussed political issue from the second half of the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> In the Swedish public debate, the problem with high rents, especially in the many newly constructed units, was a hot topic. The increased social welfare costs due to families needing help from social services due to high rents were seen as very problematic.<sup>16</sup> In 1979, there were reports of widespread discontent and tenants wanting to buy their municipally owned rented townhouses.<sup>17</sup> The right to buy was implemented in 1981 by the liberal government and tenants were given the right to transform municipally owned properties into semi-cooperative *bostadsrätter*.<sup>18</sup> There were demands from HRF to increase subsidies for the rental sector to make up for the gains that those who owned their

<sup>13</sup> Bengtsson, "Sverige," 158–160.

<sup>14</sup> Bengtsson, "Sverige," 158–160; Boverket, *Bostadspolitiken: svensk politik för boende, planering och byggande under 130 år* (Karlskrona: Boverket, 2007), 82–83.

<sup>15</sup> Boverket, *Bostadspolitiken*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Micael Nilsson *Från barnrikehus till sociala hyreskontrakt: den selektiva bostadspolitikens ursprung och förändring 1933–1994* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2021), ch.8.

<sup>17</sup> *Aftonbladet*, "Tiotusentals lägenheter blir bostadsrätt," February 23, 1979, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Bo Bengtsson, *Organisationerna och bostadspolitiken i Sverige – ett avvikande fall?* (Gävle: Institutet för bostadsforskning, 1995), 56.

own homes had gotten.<sup>19</sup> The division between the owner-occupancies, favoured by the right, and the rented apartments, favoured by the left and fiscally disadvantaged, was never really solved and has continued to this day.

## A CONTENTIOUS PERIOD

In December 1979, a rent strike, or rent stalling, against two separate municipal housing companies with about 450 households participating took place in Southern Järva, north of Stockholm. According to a local tenant's union board member, the protest was arranged through the local contact committees where it had gotten the support of almost two-thirds of the votes.<sup>20</sup> The rent stalling was followed by a protest march against rent hikes on September 28, 1980, with about 150 participants.<sup>21</sup> In Sundbyberg, a municipality close to Järva, a tenant collective deposited their rents after the housing association that they rented from had failed to pay for heating. The tenants were encouraged to participate in the rent strike by the local tenant's union.<sup>22</sup> Tenant contention was also noticeable in the southern Stockholm area. In Södermalm there were calls for protests over rising rents, encouraged by the protests in Järva.<sup>23</sup> In Hägersten a "citizen play" was put together in 1981 by a local theatre group, exploring the militant past of the workers of southern Stockholm, including the militant actions of the local tenant's union during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>24</sup> The tenant's union of the Southern Stockholm suburbs during that period had been one of the most contentious ones, engaging in mass boycott actions against a tram company as well as against

<sup>19</sup> *Aftonbladet*, "Nu blir det hyreskamp i regeringen", February 2, 1980, 18; *Aftonbladet*, "Hyresbasen: Sluta larva dig, Friggebo!" October 26, 1980, 10.

<sup>20</sup> The figure 450 comes from a letter to the editor from one of the tenant activists, see Seppo Sinimaa, "Hyresmaskningen en stor framgång," *Dagens Nyheter* January 31, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, "Höj inte hyrorna på Södra Järva!" October 2, 1980, 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Expressen*, "Hyresstrejk. Rolf och grannarna har tröttnat på misskötseln," August 12, 1981, 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Aftonbladet*, "Massprotest mot hyror på Söder," January 24, 1980, 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Aftonbladet*, "Spelet har inte en utan hundra författare," June 14, 1981, 14; *DN SYD*, "Spelet om Hägersten," October 1, 1981, 15.

landlords.<sup>25</sup> In 1983, miners in Svappavaara, facing cutdowns from state-owned mining company LKAB, made threats of occupying the mine and initiating a rent strike in case salaries were withheld.<sup>26</sup>

These episodes can and should be viewed from a longer perspective. From 1969 onward through the 1970s, rent protests and rent strikes had happened in several places throughout Sweden. In the Stockholm greater area there was agitation and plans for rent strikes in for example Åkersberga, Enskede, Salem, Sundbyberg, Tensta and at the student home Jerum. Throughout the country, several other planned and in some cases realised rent strikes took place in for example Gothenburg, Stockholm, Luleå, Mariestad, Växjö, Eskilstuna, Örebro and Lindesberg. Radical students carried out rent strikes in Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm and Umeå in the early 1970s. Two rent strikes in 1972 became especially notable, a student rent strike in Umeå and a large rent strike in municipally owned tenements in Uddevalla. The Uddevalla rent strike, against rent increases and faulty conditions, seems to have gained more sympathy from established media than the student rent strike in Umeå the same year, but much like the other one, it was carried out without the blessing of the established tenant's union, which had already collectively bargained according to the new rules. The rent strike carried on for two months and the rent strikers paid the rent as it had been before the rent hike, depositing the rest.<sup>27</sup> The Umeå student rent strike, against rent increases, ended in dramatic evictions, where the student tenants had blocked entry in the hallways with bicycles, logs and chicken wire, methods also used by other rent strikers, such as the ones in St. Pancras, London in 1960.<sup>28</sup> This sort of violent eviction didn't occur in any other rent strike during the period but would later be frequently used against squatters.

Rent strikers often deposited their rents at the county administrative board, which had been enabled in the rent law of 1939. It does appear,

<sup>25</sup> Rolf, *En fackförening för hemmen*, ch. 2.3.

<sup>26</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, "Svappavaaras svar till LKAB-ledningen. Vi ockuperar gruvan," January 17, 1983, 5.

<sup>27</sup> See upcoming publication by Hannes Rolf focusing on Swedish rent contention in the 1970s.

<sup>28</sup> Björn Erik Rosin, "Hyresstrejken i Umeå," in *Västerbotten. Det Röda Umeå*, ed. Per Runesson (Umeå: Västerbottens läns hembygdsförening, 2010), 13–21; David Mathieson, *Radical London in the 1950s* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing 2016), ch. 7.

at least judging from the Swedish case, as if newly constructed buildings with frustrated tenants are an especially well-suited breeding ground for a rent strike, even if rent strikes historically have been quite rare. That the majority of rent strikes during the period examined in this chapter took place in municipally owned tenements might simply have to do with the fact that the municipalities were the main contractors for new tenement buildings during this period. Also, the “new left” activists, who seem to have played an important role in several rent conflicts, were probably far more likely to attack Social Democrat-run municipal administrations than the established tenant’s union officials were. That several rent strikes occurred in student homes is perhaps not such a distinctive historical change as one might imagine, since several of the early Swedish rent strikes and other collective tenant actions took place in middle-class districts and were led by middle-class organisers.<sup>29</sup> We can also see interesting parallels to the labour market, where several wildcat strikes took place in the 1970s. Much like this, most of the rent strikes from 1968 to 1985 were “wildcat rent strikes” taking place outside of the established negotiating procedure, which admittedly didn’t allow for rent strikes at all.

In 1984 there were reports of individuals rent striking on their own, as a protest action against perceived injustices.<sup>30</sup> The following year no fewer than three rent strikes took place in Stockholm. In Sköndal, southern Stockholm, a private landlord tried to raise the rent twice in one year, thus going against the standard rent setting model of one annual increase. The tenants were encouraged by the local tenant’s union not to pay the second increase.<sup>31</sup> The last rent strike found in the material took place in Skogås, Huddinge, south of Stockholm in the fall of 1985. According to the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, 23 households started a rent strike with demands of getting two other tenants, accused of disturbances, drug dealing and prostitution, evicted. According to the newspaper reports, the rent strikers appear to have been successful as one of the disturbers of peace left voluntarily and the other one faced eviction.

<sup>29</sup> Rolf, *En fackförening för hemmen*, ch. 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, “Musiker stämmer hyresvärd,” August 25, 1984, 9; *Aftonbladet*, “Grannar spelade stereo dygnet runt,” August 20, 1984, 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, “Hyresstrejk i Sköndal mot dubblerad höjning,” February 28, 14.

By early November, the unwanted neighbours had moved away.<sup>32</sup> After 1985, no reports of planned or carried out rent strikes appeared in the source material.

## NEW LEFTIST GROUPS AND OTHER CHALLENGERS WITHIN THE TENANT'S MOVEMENT

The Leninists, and in particular the Maoist left, appear to have played quite an important role in the rent contention of the 1970s and on. The Maoist *Kommunistiska Förbundet Marxist-Leninisterna* (KFML), from 1973 called *Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti* (SKP)<sup>33</sup> as well as other groups saw the rent struggle as an important arena for mobilising the working class and wresting its organisations from reformist leadership. KFML/SKP, the largest and probably most active of the new organisations, appears to have prioritised the rent struggle and the influence in the tenant's movement as secondary only to influence in the labour unions, and in a 1981 report from the right-wing think-tank Timbro, referring to internal KFML/SKP documents, there was a drive in the party to have its activists move to working-class neighbourhoods and focus on gaining influence in the tenant's unions.<sup>34</sup> In a KFML/SKP pamphlet from 1973, demands for rent reduction were made and calls for turning the tenant's unions into fighting organisations once again. Methods such as mass terminations of contracts, stalling of rent payments, and partial and full rent strikes were discussed and the tenant's union's role as a popular front organisation was emphasised.<sup>35</sup> In a later pamphlet from 1978, the demand was for rent stop rather than rent reduction. A total of eight rent stalling actions, most in the Stockholm area, that had happened "during the last year" were listed, but to what extent party activists had been involved was unclear.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, "Hyresstrejk protest mot busliv," August 1, 1985; "Deras vapen mot bråkiga grannar. Hyresstrejk," August 14, 1985, 2.

<sup>33</sup> The traditional parliamentary communist party SKP had in 1967 switched name to VPK.

<sup>34</sup> Timbro, *SKP avslöjat: Sveriges kommunistiska partis hemliga dokument berättar om enhetsfronter och strejklpolitik* (Stockholm: Timbro, 1981), 71–72.

<sup>35</sup> Sveriges kommunistiska parti, *Sänk hyrorna: för en kämpande hyresgäströrelse*, Report from SKP: Shyresutskott (Gothenburg: Oktober, 1973).

<sup>36</sup> Sveriges kommunistiska parti, *Kamp för hyresstopp* (Gothenburg, Oktober: 1978).



It appears as if KFML/SKP activists were active in several rental conflicts, even if this is a matter that requires more research. On an intellectual level, a book on the history of the tenant's movement by Gösta Hultén from 1973, published at KFML/SKP publishing company Oktoberförlaget, gained some attention and has continuously been cited by scholars.<sup>37</sup> Sven Bergenstråhle, later president of the International Union of Tenants, started as one of these activists and when interviewed in a book by Elisabeth Wredberg from 1988, Bergenstråhle remembers harsh debates and expulsions. While the Social Democratic leadership of the labour unions had dealt with communist opposition for decades, the leaders of the tenant's unions were, according to Bergenstråhle, unprepared for the entry of the vocal and skilled activists of the 1970s. KFML/SKP did however have a lot of internal strife and several important figureheads, including Bergenstråhle, left or were excluded. Many of these were later to gain important positions within HRF.<sup>38</sup> It appears as if KFML/SKP had members or at least sympathisers in central positions in a couple of local tenant's unions in the early 1980s.<sup>39</sup>

The communist movement appears to have influenced the tenant's unions, at least locally, that remained in the early 1980s. Kommunistiska Partiet Marxist-Leninisterna (revolutionärerna) (KPML(r)), a breakaway party from KFML had a relatively strong position in Gothenburg. Unlike KFML/SKP, KPML(r) had taken a stance early on against demands for lowered rents, criticising KFML/SKP for having too much focus on "reformist" demands.<sup>40</sup> This was even though their leader, Frank Baude himself in 1968, while still a member of KFML/SKP, had been trying to organise a rent strike.<sup>41</sup> In the early 1980s, it appears as if KPML(r) had once again switched positions, and in the regional HRF section for Western Sweden, they used their influence to undermine attempts at

<sup>37</sup> Gösta Hultén, *Kris i hyresfrågan* (Gothenburg: Oktober, 1973), referenced in, for example, Strömberg, "Historien".

<sup>38</sup> Elisabeth Wredberg, *I kamp med nuet: Hyresgästföreningen i Stor-Stockholm 70 år* (Stockholm: Hyresgästföreningen, 1987), 136–138.

<sup>39</sup> *Gnistan*, "Rolf Barr delegat på hyresgästkongressen," no. 21, 1980, 4; *Gnistan*, "Barr avsatt som ordförande för hyresgästerna i Örebro," no. 10, 1981, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Helena Hill, *Revolutionärer: Kön, klass och kvinnokamp i svensk 1970-talsvänner* (Göteborg and Stockholm: Makadam, 2017), 85.

<sup>41</sup> Frank Baude, *Mot strömmen i svensk politik i 30 år* (Gothenburg: Kpml(r), 2000), 37–39.

forming local committees for municipal tenants, which Olle Minell from the party saw as a “division” from the important goal of “politicising the rent struggle”, which was necessary for stopping the “plundering of the tenants”. An annual meeting in 1981 had to be postponed due to fractional conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

## RENT CONTENTION IN GOTHENBURG

KPML(r) appears to have had some influence both on a regional level and on the boards of local tenant’s unions. Taken together with KFML/SKP and the traditional communist parliamentary party Left Party-Communist (VPK), this meant that the HRF Social Democrat leadership was far from secure in the local tenant’s unions. In Angered, Gothenburg, the Social Democrats managed to regain control over the local board in 1980, but they were also forced to accept a resolution calling for rent stop and that the local tenant’s union was to mobilise for this rent stop, which would include calling for rent strikes.<sup>43</sup> As the annual rent increases for Gothenburg were announced in June 1980, the local tenant’s union spokesperson warned that the increases could result in rent strikes.<sup>44</sup> A march of, according to KFML/SKP newspaper *Gnistan* 3000 to 5000 tenants marched through central Gothenburg on November 7. *Gnistan* claimed that this was the first protest march arranged by the tenant’s union in Gothenburg in 44 years, which was the year of the famous Olskroken rent strike of 1936–1937.<sup>45</sup> In the 1930s, Gothenburg had a particularly militant tenant’s movement, with several large rent strikes and boycott actions, a tradition that later activists have often looked to for inspiration.

The Gothenburg municipality faced the problem of having costly empty apartments in Angered and Bergsjön. Since several properties in central Gothenburg were in bad shape, tenants who accepted moving to Angered or Bergsjön were promised a 60% rent discount for the first year and 30% for the second year. VPK objected to this and instead called

<sup>42</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten*, “Årsmötet hann inte behandla motionerna,” February 26, 1980, 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten*, “Socialdemokraterna vann hyresgästvalet i Angeredssektionen,” March 6, 1980, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten*, “Hyrorna upp igen. 24 kr mer för trea,” June 13, 1980.

<sup>45</sup> *Gnistan*, “Hyresgästerna mister sitt viktigaste förhandlingsvapen?” no. 46, 1980, 4.

for general rent reductions. Several local inhabitants threatened to move and local tenant activists planned rent strikes in Angered-Bergsjön. While most of the local tenant's union sections were reportedly opposed to the rent discounts and in favour of general rent reductions, the local section of HRF accepted the discounts, causing internal strife.<sup>46</sup> The rent strike plans were widely reported but neither rent strikes nor general rent stops or reductions appear to have taken place. The plans to deposit parts of the rent at the county administrative board were first postponed and then dropped. The "Action Group for Rent Freeze" ultimately started a café where tenants would be able to meet and discuss local issues.<sup>47</sup> Gnistan reported that KPML(r) had chosen not to support the radical fraction at Hisingen, which had resulted in a city-wide majority in the Gothenburg tenant's unions loyal to the reformist central leadership.<sup>48</sup>

Rent contention in Gothenburg did not cease and the idea that rent strike was an available tool for local problems appears to have taken root. When the social services planned to have some of their services in a neighbourhood in Frölunda, Gothenburg, the local tenants signed a petition against these plans and also threatened to initiate a rent strike so that their children wouldn't have to meet "strangers" in their backyard.<sup>49</sup> There were also calls within the local tenant's union section in Frölunda for general rent strikes, but these failed to gain a majority.<sup>50</sup> The high level of contention also affected the annual regional bargaining with the municipally owned housing companies, who appear to have been particularly tough in the bargaining for the annual rents of 1982 and 1983. While HRF called for subsidies and tax reductions for tenements, a majority of the delegates in the regional section of HRF called for a rent freeze and a possible political rent strike to achieve this goal.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten*, "Dämpad argumentering för nya hyresrabatter," May 23, 1981, 19; *GP-nordost*, "Hyresstrejk nästa i Bergsjön?" May 27, 1981; *GT*, "Rabbat på hyran bra idé," July 23, 1981; *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Hyresstrejk mot rabatt åt nyinflyttad," July 21, 1981, 7; "Hyresstrejk förbereds," August 29, 1981, 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten*, "Aktionsgruppskrav: Ström bort," September 4, 1981, 6; *GP-nordost*, "Hyreskamp slutade med kafé," December 3, 1981.

<sup>48</sup> *Gnistan*, "Hyresgästerna mister sitt viktigaste förhandlingsvapen?" no. 46, 1980, 4.

<sup>49</sup> *GT*, "Hyresstrejk ska stoppa socialbyrån," October 21, 1981, 6.

<sup>50</sup> *G-P sydväst*, "HCF i Frölunda: Misstro eller rädsla?" October 14, 1981, 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten*, "Höstens hyresförhandlingar hårdare än på många år," September 13, 1981, 22.

Similar voices were heard in the following year. The Social Democratic leadership didn't support the calls for rent strikes and an apparent rift between different factions within the tenant's unions was obvious during the annual bargaining, where calls for rent strikes against the municipal housing companies were uttered by delegates.<sup>52</sup> The radical fraction appears to have ultimately failed, as rent increases of upwards of 40% were announced without any major rent strikes taking place.<sup>53</sup> The tenant's union leader of the negotiation delegation maintained that rent strikes were for those who wanted "anarchy" and that they were "unsuitable" for a democratic country like Sweden. The rent increases were motivated by rising costs for the housing companies.<sup>54</sup>

### RENT STRIKING STUDENTS

Several, but far from all, of the rent strikes in the 1970s were carried out in student homes around the country. Even though the phenomenon wasn't as widespread during the 1980s in Sweden, a couple of student rent protests did take place. Students in Lund threatened to organise a rent strike against rent increases in 1982.<sup>55</sup> At Lappkärrsberget, close to Stockholm University, students complaining about rent increases in June 1985 threatened to organise a rent strike. The student-owned foundation SSSB had raised the rent by more than 100% over five years and planned additional raise of about five percent. The students, organised in their own student tenant's union SORG, planned to withhold the rent increase and only pay the rent as it was before the raise, and hoped to have at least 1000 of the 3000 students living at Lappkärrsberget joining the rent strike. They were in (their) turn threatened by eviction. The papers reported on the bad financial situation of students and about students who had been evicted after not being able to pay their rent. Students from two other student homes, Pax and Strix in Solna, also threatened

<sup>52</sup> *GT*, "Hyresgästerna i allmännyttan hotar med hyresstrejk," December 2, 1982, 6.

<sup>53</sup> *GT*, "Hyror i Göteborg chockhöjs," December 28, 1982, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Arnold Wittberg, "'Allmännyttans' hyror," *Göteborgs-Posten*, January 10, 1983, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Dagens Nyheter, "Lundastudenter på väg att hyresstrejka," November 21, 1982, 20.

to withhold rent due to grievances over high rents and faulty facilities.<sup>56</sup> Initially, about 200 students from Lappkärrsberget reportedly deposited the rent increase at the county administrative board.<sup>57</sup> As the oil prices dropped, SSSB announced rent cuts for the students. The rent strikers were, however, not satisfied and wanted guarantees against future rent increases. They also called for collective bargaining, which was not in place at the student homes.<sup>58</sup> The rent strike continued well into the fall and there were reports of about 850 to 900 students participating, most of them residing at Lappkärrsberget.<sup>59</sup>

While the student rent strikes of the 1970s in several cases, such as in Umeå, appear to have been dominated by communist organisations, the Stockholm student rent strike of 1985 doesn't necessarily appear to have been dominated by radicals. There was some division within the student organisations, and the SORG board, having previously faced criticism for being run by careerists dependent on SSSB, was replaced at an extraordinary meeting. From the meeting protocol, it appears as if there was a division between hardliners and more moderate students, but the hardliners eventually won. Material from the student rent struggle in Umeå was handed out.<sup>60</sup> Having gained control of the local board, the rent strikers were now in a position to directly negotiate rents with the SSSB at a central level.<sup>61</sup> The last newspaper report found in the archival search reported that about 1000 students were participating in late October and that three rent strikers were to face charges in court.<sup>62</sup> According to the SORG annual report, the legal charges caused division within the SSSB

<sup>56</sup> *Aftonbladet*, "Hyrestrejk på "Lappis"," June 25, 1985, 17; "Betalade sin skuld – då vräktes han från "Lappis"," June 26, 1985, 28; "Fler studenter i hyresstrejk," June 29, 1985, 14; *Expressen*, "Studenterna hotar med hyresstrejk," June 24, 1985, 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, "Hyresbojkott kan bli strejk," July 10, 2; *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Länsstyrelsen anmäls till JO," July 10, 1985, 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, "Nu sänks hyran istället," August 28, 1985, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Expressen*, "Studenterna fortsätter hyresstrejka," August 22, 1985, 12; *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Studenternas hyresstrejk fortsätter," September 6, 1985, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Stockholm City Archives: SORG archives A1:1. Extraordinary meeting September 17, 1985.

<sup>61</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Studenter avsatte bostadsstyrelse," September 19, 1985, 12.

<sup>62</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Hyresprotest till tingsrätten," October 29, 1985, 13.

central board, which eased the way for a settlement. The students won an almost complete victory, with the full rent increase being reimbursed.<sup>63</sup>

In their evaluation of the conflict, the SORG board noted that most of the work during the conflict had been carried out by a small circle of people, sometimes bordering on a single-person operation. To change this, an agreement with the locally established HRF-affiliated tenant's union was made, and they became the main bargaining organisation with SORG having a veto on agreements. The following year, 1987, rents were raised by 6.2% and SORG cancelled their deal with the tenant's union. A new deal was made in 1988 and annual deals of rent increases of about 6% were struck in the years to follow, without any notable action by the student tenants or their organisations.<sup>64</sup> Much like in other rental conflicts, it appears as if a small number of organisers had played an important role and as if contention had been temporary. As people are normally students only for a few years, student homes are generally places where people tend to stay for a short while, thus making sustained organising difficult. In the above-mentioned case, it also appears as if the established tenant's union was called upon to increase predictability and perhaps, even though it wasn't directly mentioned, to decrease the influence of the radicals.

## ORGANISATIONAL DISCONTENT

The divisions within the established tenant's movement continued throughout the 1980s. There were reports of serious conflicts in the local, established tenant's unions, with stormy meetings where "leftist" activists challenged the Social Democratic leaders with demands of more focus on grass-root activities and less focus on centralised negotiations. A local tenant's union in Gislaved had left HRF and instead bargained directly with the local property owners.<sup>65</sup> Another independent tenant's union was formed in central Stockholm in 1984, with the stated intention

<sup>63</sup> Stockholm City Archives: SORG archives A1:1. Proposed annual report for 1985.

<sup>64</sup> Stockholm City Archives: SORG archives A1:1. Proposed annual reports for 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1990.

<sup>65</sup> *Aftonbladet*, "Stormarna i hyresgäströrelsen," October 10, 1979, 14.

of using rent strikes as a method if deemed necessary.<sup>66</sup> While “independent” tenant’s unions have come and gone through the decades, the 1980s certainly appear as a period of serious discontent within the Swedish tenant’s movement.

Tord Jacobssons’s book *Välviljans förtryck* is a case study of a conflict concerning renovations during the previously mentioned ROT programme in the Rosta area of Örebro during the second half of the 1980s. The often-elderly tenants in Rosta faced, according to Jacobssons’s results, unwanted renovations in the municipally owned tenements that they had lived in for decades. As they felt that their interests were not looked after by the established tenant’s union, the tenants of Rosta formed an independent tenant’s union, *Bostadsrådet*, in 1988.<sup>67</sup> While they never did organise a rent strike, the tenants did offer some resistance. In a particularly interesting passage, Jacobsson claims that the ultimate failure of the tenants resulted from the fact that while they did exit and form their organisation, they immediately allowed themselves to be co-opted by the old organisations and were included in the established system of collective bargaining. Jacobsson argues that the tenants could have accomplished something as independent, unpredictable actors, but since the tenants were overly long-standing Social Democratic voters, they had high trust in “their” organisations, including both the tenant’s union and the municipally owned housing company.<sup>68</sup> The case is an interesting parallel to other episodes described in this chapter, where the protestors appeared as challengers not only against the landlords but also against the leadership of HRF and its local branches.

Some, but hardly all of the discontent with the tenant’s movement, can be attributed to the radical left. The rapid decline of leftist groups and KFML/SKP from the mid-1980s and onward coincides with the decline of rent strikes in Sweden. However, from the available source material, there is little evidence of KFML/SKP activists having any crucial role in the rent strikes of the 1980s, even if that claim might not hold up for closer scrutiny. Activists belonging to KFML/SKP and similar groups often got their inspiration from the older labour struggles but

<sup>66</sup> *Aftonbladet*, “Han tar upp kampen om hyresgästerna,” March 5, 1984, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Tord Jacobson, *Välviljans förtryck: en fallstudie av allmännyttig bostadspolitik* (Lund: Arkiv, 1991) ch. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Jacobson, *Välviljans förtryck*, 114–115, 190–193.

new contentious performances were emerging during the same period as the rent struggles studied in this chapter took place. It is possible that the emergence of squatting as a housing activist performance did “outcompete” the rent strike. Squatting in Sweden had emerged during the 1970s as a contentious performance, but there was a surge in squatting and a peak in the 1980s.<sup>69</sup> There were frequent reports of European youth protests and squatting in the Swedish newspapers during the 1980s, and anarchist-leaning squatting emerged. The political, ideological and organisational change probably affected the contentious repertoire, although more research in this area is needed before drawing any conclusions. Squatting, unlike rent strikes, has continued in recent days.<sup>70</sup>

### THE END OF A PERFORMANCE?

From the examples above it is obvious that rent strike as a way of solving housing-related issues was seen as a possible alternative for tenants as late as 1985. After this, however, the newspaper searches yield no results for tenant collective action in Sweden. This is, of course, not evidence of the total absence of rent strikes, but it is an indication of some sort of the change in the contentious repertoire of Swedish tenants. While marches, petitions and other forms of contentious performances over rent issues certainly haven’t been missing in the last four decades, it appears as if the rent strike as a form of contentious performance is no longer seen as a viable alternative. In 1992, the debate TV programme *Striptease* discussed, in light of the then ongoing economic crisis, the rent strike in Uddevalla twenty years earlier and why collective action seemed to have ceased.<sup>71</sup> While the claim that collective action had ceased was an exaggeration, as we have seen, there does appear to have been a change in the contentious repertoire of Swedish tenants sometime during the latter part of the 1980s.

<sup>69</sup> See Dominika Polanska’s chapter “Torn between militant and peaceful ideals: squatting in Sweden in the 1980s” in this volume.

<sup>70</sup> Mathias Wåg, “Från allaktivitetshus till sociala center,” in *Ockuperat! Svenska husockupationer 1968–2018*, ed. Dominika Polanska and Mathias Wåg (Stockholm: Verbal, 2019), 37. Also see the preface list of Swedish Squats in the same volume.

<sup>71</sup> Aired at Swedish Channel 1 20.00 December 9, 1992.



It appears as if the established HRF-affiliated tenant's unions were, by the 1970s and 1980s, clear members in this sense and a part of an increasingly institutionalised corporative housing system. They were, however, challenged by new housing activists, working partially within and partially on the outside of the old social movements. Interestingly enough, these new tenant activists made claims not only on the state but also on the leadership of the labour movement, who had, in their opinion, become too embedded in the capitalist state and incorporative arrangements. Tilly and Tarrow list some important properties of a political regime, including independent power centres within, openness to new actors and instability of current alignments, availability of allies and supporters as well as regime repression and facilitation of collective claim-making.<sup>72</sup> Changes to all of these properties affect a movement's ability to make effective claim-making.

The Swedish housing market changed a lot during the 1970s. As rents were being de-regulated, housing speculation and soaring rents affected tenants. Timothy Blackwell has argued that much of the housing regime changes that are often attributed to the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, such as renovations for rent increases, actually began in the 1970s.<sup>73</sup> As we have seen, there was discontent among Swedish tenants of the period and, coupled with the radicalisation of the period, it appears as if the field was open for new social movement challengers to partake in the collective mobilisation of tenants. In doing so, the new challengers picked up the old methods that the established tenant's movement had used when they had been challengers in the system, including the rent strike.

It is, judging from the material that is presented in this chapter, possible to draw the conclusion that there was a realignment taking place among the actors of the housing market with the deregulation of the rental market and the rise and then a lull of public housing. The new contentious actors could take advantage of the move of the established tenant's organisations from challengers to members and make gains both from discontent with the housing situation and from the influence of the radicalisation wave of the 1970s. Working both inside and outside

<sup>72</sup> Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 59.

<sup>73</sup> Timothy Blackwell, "Power, Production and Disorder: The Decline of Sweden's Housing Industrial Complex and the Origins of the Present Housing Discontents," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 28, no. 4 (2021), 338–352.

the established tenant's unions, the tenant activists seem to have benefited from what Lucia A. Seibert and Peter J. Katzenstein have called *protean power*, which roughly means advantages generated by agility and creativity.<sup>74</sup> Contentious tenants of the 1970s and 1980s could both make use of existing organisations and repertoires and try out new methods and organisational forms. These were relatively short-lived but set a precedent for housing activism that is arguably present in Sweden still today.

Social democracy and the Social Democrats during the period examined in this chapter had a dual role in the housing struggles: firstly as the leaders of the municipal housing companies, and secondly, the tenant's organisations were typically Social Democrats. While the results of the individual rent strikes varied greatly, it appears as if the "old" Social Democratic elite of the labour movement was ultimately able to regain control of the tenant's organisations and again set the rules for the collective mobilisation of tenants. The opportunity structures were such that new challengers weren't able to establish themselves. The labour movement of that time can be seen as a state within the state, the protean power of the challengers was not enough to overcome the control power of the established elite. In the tenant's movement, rent striking had, since the very beginning, been a cause of division between those who looked upon it as excessive and those in favour of using it when the situation called for it. This division had traditionally been between Social Democrats and communists, and this appears to hold for the 1970s and 1980s as well. Thus, the very issue of what performances were valid within the contentious repertoire was a contentious issue within the tenant's movement, and while the challengers of the 1970s and 1980s appear to have been able to re-establish certain performances to such a degree that collective rent strike was seen as a possible collective performance well into the 1980s, it appears as if the performance eventually disappeared. It is, however, an interesting question to ponder to what extent the discontent especially of the municipal landlords of the 1970s and 1980s de-legitimised the social democratic housing policy and helped ease the neoliberal turn in housing policy of the 1990s. This is a question that is worth investigating further.

<sup>74</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein and Lucia A. Seybert, *Protean Power: Exploring the Uncertain and Unexpected in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018), 4–5.

One of the true feats of the Swedish social democracy historically has been its ability to quench outbreaks of radicalisation and to assure the centralisation of social movement organisations. It appears as if this was also the case in the period examined in this chapter. It also appears as if the rental discontent of the 1970s and 1980s was much higher than previously assumed, which is in itself interesting and something that calls for more research. The cases examined here suggest that protests really can inspire other protests, but also that radicalisation, as Kjell Östberg has suggested,<sup>75</sup> tends to come in waves. But it also shows that contentious performances can be reinvented and used in new episodes of collective mobilisation. Housing activism appears to be on the rise both internationally and in Sweden today, taking on new forms and practices.<sup>76</sup> While writing this chapter, there was news of a successful rent strike among students in Lund.<sup>77</sup> If it has been done before, it can probably be done again.

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<sup>75</sup> Kjell Östberg, *1968- När allting var i rörelse* (Johanneshov, Röda Rummet, 2018), 8–12.

<sup>76</sup> Carina Listerborn, Irene Molina and Åse Richard, “Claiming the Right to Dignity: New Organizations for Housing Justice in Neoliberal Sweden,” *Radical Housing Journal* 2, no. 1 (2020), 119–137.

<sup>77</sup> *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, “Efter hyrestrejken mot AF Bostäder – så blir studenternas nya hyror,” November 12, 2021. <https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2021-11-12/efter-hyrestrejken-mot-af-bostader-sa-bliir-studenternas-nya-hyror> (accessed July 17, 2022).

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# Action Without Contention? Contextualizing Social Movements in 1980s Sweden

*Bart van der Steen*

## INTRODUCTION

The start of the 1980s saw a wave of massive protests hitting Western Europe; against the closure of industrial plants, against the installation of mid-range nuclear missiles, against urban decline and housing shortage, and finally against homegrown racism and the foreign South African Apartheid regime. A number of these protests gave way to massive riots, as British miners confronted heavy-duty police, urban youths in France and Britain revolted against marginalization and discrimination, and squatters rioted in the metropolises of the Netherlands, West Germany, Switzerland and Denmark.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, eds., *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Hanno Balz and Jan-Henrik Friedrichs, eds., *'All We Ever Wanted...': Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre* (Berlin: Dietz, 2012).

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In this context, Sweden looked like the odd one out. According to Jämte and Sörbom, ‘confrontations remained a marginal phenomenon in Sweden, at least until the end of the decade’.<sup>2</sup> Although protests in Sweden took massive form, the situation remained relatively calm and interactions between protesters and the authorities were characterized by tolerance, dialogue and negotiation. On the one hand, this could be seen as proof of a healthy and well-functioning democracy, or at least of conditioned cooperation with social movements.<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand, the seeming lack of strife and escalation raised suspicion and irritation, leaving some to wonder: ‘Why did it not happen here?’<sup>4</sup>

A possible explanation for the ‘lack’ of militant contention may lie in the particularity of the Swedish political system, which was characterized by institutionalized and mutually beneficial relations between employers’ and employees’ associations, an extensive network of social welfare provisions and a polity that was open to dialogue and negotiation with extra-parliamentary actors. Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström argue that as the government ‘fostered close ties with some movement groups’, this ‘led to a political culture of consensus, cooperation, dialogue and compromise’.<sup>5</sup> Jämte and Sörbom hold that, as a result, civil society actors ‘promoted consensus-based repertoires of action’.<sup>6</sup> Only when this social democratic form of governance started to show cracks in the late 1980s, and protest movements ‘synchronized’ their tactics with activists abroad, did protest grow more militant and more similar to the rest of Scandinavia and continental Europe.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Jämte and Adrienne Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here? The Gradual Radicalization of the Anarchist Movement in Sweden, 1980–90,” in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s*, ed. Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 97–111, 97.

<sup>3</sup> For a critical discussion of ‘soft repression’ and negotiation with social movements in Sweden, see: Abby Peterson, Håkan Thörn and Mattias Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015: Contentious Politics and Social Movements Between Confrontation and Conditioned Cooperation,” in *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia: 1700–Present*, ed. Flemming Mikkelsen, Knut Kjeldstadli and Stefan Nyzell (Palgrave: London, 2017), 377–432. See also: Grzegorz Piotrowski and Magnus Wennerhag, “Always Against the State? An Analysis of Polish and Swedish Radical Left-Libertarian Activists’ Interaction with Institutionalized Politics,” *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 8, no. 3 (2015), 845–875.

<sup>4</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?”

<sup>5</sup> Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015,” 380.

<sup>6</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?,” 102.

This paper argues that asking what made Sweden different risks disconnecting Swedish protest experiences from the rest of Europe, and that other questions may yield more insight into what was happening in 1980s Sweden, and more generally how images of protest were created, mediated and subsequently informed protest dynamics. To do so, this paper places the collected case studies in a broader European and urban context. It subsequently discusses the mediatization of the image of the militant squatter in Western Europe and Sweden, in order to reflect more generally on research into contention and social movements since the 1960s. Finally, it argues in favour of incorporating expectations and norms of subversive action into social movement research, as a basis for asking new questions and connecting Swedish and European protest experiences in the 1980s.

### *Between Swedish Particularities and European Similarities*

This volume is the first to collect a series of in-depth case studies on social movements and contentious action in Sweden during the 1980s. Together, they provide an overview of what causes mobilized Swedish protesters, what forms their activism took, and to what extent these movements and action repertoires were particularly Swedish. What characterized these movements, and what stands out when we regard them in a broader, European, perspective?

To answer these questions, the Swedish Protest Database on which Jansson and Uba base their contribution can be taken as a starting point. The database reveals that the peace, antinuclear and environmentalist movement mobilized most people, as did protests against welfare reforms. These causes mobilized broad sections of the population, were embraced by significant sections of the elite and employed mostly peaceful repertoires. As such, they did not seem to be very disruptive and could be regarded as typical of the Swedish political system which focused on ‘cooperation, dialogue and compromise’, thus promoting ‘consensus-based repertoires of action’.

At the same time, these movements did not seem to differ very much from related movements in Europe. In West Germany and the Netherlands, too, the peace movement enjoyed broad support, including sections of the establishment, remained largely peaceful and was only

disruptive to a certain extent.<sup>7</sup> There, too, welfare-related protests tended to remain firmly within the bounds of ‘classic’ labour/trade union mobilization and activism. And just like in Sweden, West-German and Dutch authorities prided themselves on their politics of tolerance, dialogue and consensus culture.<sup>8</sup>

A second question raised by these case studies regards the definition of contentious politics. While most case studies build on the conceptual framework of contentious politics, which focuses on non-establishment actors who employ disruptive repertoires to subvert political routines, the exact contents of contentious politics are at times questioned. Jansson and Uba, for example, include ‘quiet verbal protests’ such as letter writing, public statements in newspapers and petitions in their overview of welfare activism. Such public statements reveal important aspects of the debate and political struggle over the future of the welfare state, but if such statements are included, this raises questions about how we define contentious action, and where we place the boundary between contentious and ‘normal’ politics.

Empirically, it is interesting that while the abovementioned movements mobilized most people, more radical movements and subcultures with relatively small mobilizing potential (i.e. anarchism, squatting and punk) seem to attract proportionately the most attention from scholars. Of the seven case studies that make up this volume, three focus on anarchism, squatting and punk. Perhaps it was squatting’s radical, subcultural and spectacular nature that made it seem like a quintessentially ‘1980s’ phenomenon. Images of militant squatters abroad helped to boost this image. Thus, even when it mobilized relatively few, it garnered a great deal of attention, both then and now.

Especially when it comes to squatting, the tension between Swedish particularity and European similarity comes to the fore. While Lundström focuses on Swedish anarchism, a comparison with other countries reveals how similar the Swedish movement of the 1980s was to that of its

<sup>7</sup> Holger Nehring, “Peace Movements,” in Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring, *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 485–513.

<sup>8</sup> Dennis Bos, Maurits Ebben and Henk te Velde, eds., *Harmonie in Holland: Het poldermodel van 1500 tot nu* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007); Andreas Rödter, “Das ‘Modell Deutschland’, Zwischen Erfolgsgeschichte und Verfallsdiagnose,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 54, no. (2006): 345–363.

Scandinavian and European counterparts. There, too, the movement was revitalized by the rise of punk and embraced direct action repertoires.<sup>9</sup> The case of the social-cultural centre Winter Palace in Malmö, which oscillated between toleration from and cooperation with local authorities, is in a similar way reminiscent of how small West-German town and city governments in the 1980s dealt with (demands for) self-managed youth centres. There, too, authorities often responded pragmatically and tolerated and/or supported such centres.<sup>10</sup> Even so, the studies in this volume tend to emphasize how Swedish squatting was ‘less’ than in the rest of Europe: of lesser size, less militant and less radical. Thus, Egefur remarks that confrontations between squatters and police occurred in 1980s Malmö, ‘but nowhere near as many as was standard by similar groups in cities such as Copenhagen and Amsterdam’, while Polanska states that Swedish squatters set themselves apart because they ‘deliberately avoided violence and often described themselves as peaceful and orderly’.

But would it be fair to compare relatively moderate squatter actions in Sweden with some of the most militant squatter conflicts from other European countries? When one compares squatter actions in the Swedish cities Jönköping, Lund or Landskrona to squatter actions in European cities of a similar size such as Hilden (West-Germany) or Leiden (Netherlands) during the 1980s, it becomes clear that they developed in a very similar way. There, too, squatters remained mostly peaceful and faced authorities invested in deescalating squatter conflicts. It should not be forgotten that violent escalations of squatter conflicts in the ‘black triangle’ of 1980s militant squatting (i.e. Amsterdam, West-Berlin and Copenhagen), although spectacular and at times influential, remained exceptional even there.<sup>11</sup> In short, when placing such case studies on a

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> David Templin, *Freizeit ohne Kontrollen: Die Jugendzentrumsbewegung in der Bundesrepublik der 1970er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> The Amsterdam squatter collective Adilkno, for example, remarked in a collective memoir of the 1980s that a significant part of Amsterdam squats was legalized without much conflict and ended unremarkably with “domesticity, lease, residence permit”. Adilkno, *Cracking the Movement: Squatting Beyond the Media* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1994).

measuring line running from Swedish particularity to European similarity, the needle may slant to latter, even though Swedish self-descriptions tend to emphasize the former. How can this be explained?

Sweden's relatively low levels of urbanization, and their influence on protest behaviour, may provide new insights. In 2018, Statistics Sweden stated that while 87% of the population lived in 'urban areas', this term referred to the country's 'largest cities, as well as small areas with just over 200 inhabitants'.<sup>12</sup> In reality, only 32% lived in cities of 100,000 people or more, while the rest lived in smaller cities and towns. In the 1980s, these numbers were even lower. Recently, Schmidt-Lauber has stated that most Europeans live in such mid-sized towns and cities, and that they represent 'a specific type of urbanity', which is characterized by 'a far greater degree of overview/manageability, more direct communication and binding ties, and a smaller sense of openness and anonymity'.<sup>13</sup> This significantly influences protest behaviour. According to Schmidt-Lauber, however, Middletown protests are not simply smaller, more moderate or less radical, but rather take on a specific form. Squatter actions, for instance, are 'not to be interpreted as import or copy from metropolitan squatter scenes, but were shaped by their specific Middletown context'.<sup>14</sup> If we subsequently take into account that Middletown authorities often pride themselves on their moderation, inclination towards consensus and their ability to pacify and negotiate conflicts,<sup>15</sup> one can start to see clear

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Sweden, "There Are 8.9 Million Inhabitants in Urban Areas," October 24, 2019. <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/environment/land-use/localities-and-urban-areas/pong/statistical-news/localities-and-urban-areas-2018/>.

<sup>13</sup> Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, "Urbanes Leben in der Mittelstadt. Kulturwissenschaftliche Annäherungen an ein interdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld," in *Mittelstadt. Urbanes Leben jenseits der Metropole*, ed. Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2010), 11–36, 20. Although Schmidt-Lauber takes cue from the ground-breaking work by Robert and Merrel Lynd in the 1920s and 1930s, her approach varies greatly from that of the Lynd's, who regarded a Middletown as an ideal typical place, a nation's average in almost all aspects and in that sense 'the country in miniature'. Robert Lynd and Merrel Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, 1929); Robert Lynd and Merrel Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, 1937).

<sup>14</sup> Schmidt-Lauber, "Urbanes Leben in der Mittelstadt".

<sup>15</sup> Rolf Lindner, "'Mass und Mitte'. Middletown Revisited," in *Mittelstadt. Urbanes Leben jenseits der Metropole*, ed. Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2010), 37–50.

overlaps with the self-image of the Swedish national polity. One could speculate that Swedish protests were equally influenced by the urban contexts in which they unfolded, as they were by the Swedish polity's particular character. If one, finally, goes a step further and acknowledges that the majority of Europeans live in a Middletown setting, the Swedish case studies may not so much be particular but could resonate with the experiences of a large part of Europe's current population.

### *Negotiating Mediatized Images of Protest*

The sudden surge of large-scale confrontations in Western Europe shocked authorities and the media, especially because the late 1970s had been considered a time of de-politicization, in which especially youths had become politically disengaged. Now, militant youths were suddenly at the forefront of massive societal conflicts.<sup>16</sup> The sudden outburst of activism, or the media attention that militant protest generated, was, however, not the only reasons that these images of rioting protesters gained so much traction. These images also fitted the narratives of various political actors. It provided leverage to protesters; fueled academic analyses of the democratic deficit; provided conservatives with arguments to push their law and order agenda; and reinforced the progressives' criticism of government repression.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of protests in the early 1980s remained peaceful, but the *image* of rioting protesters became a pivotal aspect of protest politics in this era, because the riots were mediatized and subsequently integrated in the narratives of various political actors. The squatters movement, which was particularly militant in this era, illustrates the various ways in which activists and authorities adapted the imagery to their political needs.

Amsterdam squatters invoked the image to bolster their militant reputation and strengthen their negotiating position, stating that the alternative to legalization would be riots. Thus, an Amsterdam squatter graffiti stated that stones thrown at the police were 'attempts to speak in the only language they [the authorities] understand', adding: 'We have

<sup>16</sup> Geert Mak, "De rek is eruit," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, March 6, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> Charlotte van Rooden, Merl Snoep, and Bart van der Steen, "Who Are the Squatters? Challenging Stereotypes Through a Case Study of Squatting in the Dutch City of Leiden, 1970–1980," *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 6 (2020): 1368–1385.

much more to say!<sup>18</sup> The practice and narrative inspired others, including an elderly couple of 68 and 70 years living in Emmen, a city of 3,000 inhabitants some 180 kilometres from Amsterdam. The couple had seen squatter riots on tv and decided to follow suit, occupying a house and stating: ‘They will only be able to evict us with force.’ Apparently, the couple was willing to disregard the large differences between their situation and that of the Amsterdam squatters, and nevertheless used the image of squatter riots as a negotiation tactics in their conflict with the town’s authorities.<sup>19</sup>

Authorities, too, responded to the image, albeit in different ways. In 1985, the mayor of Leiden, fifty kilometres from Amsterdam, prided himself on the fact that, due to his supposed political skills, no squatter riots had occurred in his city.<sup>20</sup> He comfortably overlooked the fact that Amsterdam counted thousands of squatters and Leiden only dozens. Nevertheless, the small Leiden squatter community tried to pressure the authorities to better protect them against aggressive real-estate speculators, stating that otherwise ‘Amsterdam situations’ might occur, thus referring to squatter riots.<sup>21</sup> The mayor of Hilden, a small town in West Germany, on the other hand, had a group of squatters forcefully evicted, claiming that ‘riot-seeking squatters’ from Frankfurt and West Berlin had joined the local group.<sup>22</sup>

Squatters in different cities developed various ways of engaging with mediatic images of militant protest. Leiden squatters, for instance, used newspaper interviews to distance themselves from militant Amsterdam squatters in an attempt to improve their peaceful report with the city’s

<sup>18</sup> Eric Duivenvoorden, *Een voet tussen de deur: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse kraakbeweging, 1964–1999* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Henk de Koning, “Bejaarden kraakten uit liefde voor hun auto,” *De Telegraaf*, 10 May 1980.

<sup>20</sup> John Kroon, “Onbegonnen werk,” *Leidsch Dagblad*, 15 November 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Hilda Passchier, Hilda, “Gastkolom,” *Leidsch Dagblad*, 29 February 1980.

<sup>22</sup> Sebastian Haumann, “Hausbesetzungen 1980–1982 in Hilden: Möglichkeiten der Mikroforschung für die Protestgeschichte,” *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* no. 34 (2005): 155–171; Sebastian Haumann, “Hausbesetzungen in Hilden 1980–1982: Protest im Kontext lokaler Ambitionen und Realität,” in *Mittelstadt. Urbanes Leben jenseits der Metropole*, ed. Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2010), 207–222.

authorities.<sup>23</sup> Activists in other cities, however, wished nothing more than to emulate the Amsterdam squatters' militancy. In 1980, Hamburg activists invited squatters from Amsterdam and Zurich to their city and excitedly announced that: 'The rioters are coming!'<sup>24</sup> When the meeting failed to turn into a successful political action, they called on other Hamburg activists to 'not continuously look to Zurich and Amsterdam but pick up the resistance against the state in Hamburg and create Zurich-Amsterdam-situations here'.<sup>25</sup> Engaging with mediatic images of militant squatters could thus both empower and disempower activists.

What the cases above show, is that the image of squatter militancy gained so much traction because various actors incorporated it into their politics. While some activists tried to live up to the norm, and felt that actions had 'failed' when they did not muster enough muscle to confront authorities, others dismissed the image altogether. But even non-violent squatters had to relate to the image and state explicitly that they were 'different'. Squatters in Sweden during the early 1980s, for example explicitly presented themselves as non-confrontational and non-violent.<sup>26</sup> To signal their non-militant approach, squatters in the city of Haga thus dubbed themselves 'Husnallarna', which could be translated as either 'Teddy bears in the house' or as 'Those who steal houses'.<sup>27</sup>

As the idea settled that 'real' squatter actions were militant and that non-militant squatter actions had either 'failed' or did not count as real squatter actions, militancy became a norm that influenced media-reporting, the actions of protesters and authorities, and academic research into this movement.<sup>28</sup> It has been a core concept behind the often-proclaimed 'death' of the squatter movement, but also of research into

<sup>23</sup> *Nieuwe Leidsche Courant*, "Leidse knokploeg werkt krakers met geweld uit pand," May 1, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> *Große Freiheit*, "Die Krawallmacher kommen!," no. 39, November 1980.

<sup>25</sup> *Große Freiheit*, "Die Konsumenten kamen, die Krawallmacher gingen," no. 40, December 1980.

<sup>26</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, "Why Did It Not Happen Here?," 100.

<sup>27</sup> Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, "Sweden 1950–2015," 391.

<sup>28</sup> The squatters' media politics and their relationships with (mainstream) media is discussed in detail in Adilkno, *Cracking the Movement* and Nazima Kadir, "Myth and Reality in the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement, 1975–2012," in *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, ed. Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), 21–61.



squatting in Sweden. For although squatting did happen in this Scandinavian country, riots did not occur during the 1980s, leaving researchers to ask why this was the case.

*Contention: From Subversion to 'Normal' Politics?*

In the history of squatting, militancy became a norm that influenced squatters, their contemporaries and subsequent researchers. The result was a biased perspective that led activists to wonder if they were militant enough, while research focused mainly on militant metropolitan squatters at the cost of paying less attention to non-violent squatters, non-metropolitan squatters, or—to a lesser extent—the niches and subcultures that the squatters spawned and facilitated. Similar biases, however, can be identified in social movement research more generally.

Overall, social movement scholarship aims to explain when and why people join forces to challenge authorities and the status quo, and what dynamics are set in motion when they do so.<sup>29</sup> Although the definition of a social movement is contested, one authoritative reading holds that they are collective non-institutionalized actors—incorporating individuals, groups and non-governmental organizations—that engage in contentious action to make claims towards those in power. Contentious actions, finally, are defined as actions that subvert political routines, for example by striking, marching, occupying public places, blocking traffic, etc. But is a march or an occupation still contentious if it does not significantly subvert routines? Could contention perhaps be a norm in social movement activism and research, not dissimilar from the norm of squatter militancy? And if so, how should researchers deal with social movements' non-contentious behavior? This question may well lie at the heart of interpreting social movement activism in Sweden. For it is generally acknowledged that although protests in Sweden mobilized many, they upset few.

In 1998, David Meyer and Sydney Tarrow contrasted the student and youth rebellions of the 1960s with the social movement activism of the

<sup>29</sup> Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *The Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

1990s.<sup>30</sup> According to them, the students of the 1960s had been political outcasts with no regular access to power who took refuge to subversive action to make their voices heard. In the 1990s, on the other hand, social movements had become institutionalized and actions such as marching and picketing had lost their subversive potential. Had social movements become a part of ‘normal’ politics, Meyer and Tarrow asked?<sup>31</sup>

Meyer and Tarrow’s partially polemical question illustrates how the norm of subversive or contentious activism has influenced the image of the rebellious 1960s and subsequent research. Contention is traditionally defined as what social movements do: they contend power. However, those in power do not always feel contended by social movement activism, and, more generally, not every action that aims to subvert political routines, succeeds in doing so. Social movements mobilize and demobilize, and oscillate between contention and pacification/institutionalization. Research, however, has often focused on one side of social movement development; namely mobilization, contention and escalation. Most protests in Western Europe during the 1960s and after were, however, peaceful and often seen as non-subversive. This was especially the case in smaller towns, where the distance between protesters and authorities was small.<sup>32</sup> But in large cities, too, authorities soon found peaceful ways to interact with protesters, often after brief but intense periods during which they had struggled to find the right balance between repression and negotiation.<sup>33</sup> If research on the 1960s, however,

<sup>30</sup> David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> A year later, activists protesting the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle ground everyday life in the city to a halt and trailblazed a global wave of contentious activism against neoliberal globalization. See: Janet Thomas, *The Battle in Seattle: The Story Behind and Beyond the WTO Demonstrations* (Fulcrum: Wheat Ridge, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Heike Kempe, ed., *Die ‘andere’ Provinz: Kulturelle Auf- und Ausbrüche im Bodenseeraum seit den 1960er Jahren* (Konstanz: VK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014); Detlef Siegfried, “Urbane Revolten, befreite Zonen: Über die Wiederbelebung der Stadt und die Neuaneignung der Provinz durch die Gegenkultur der 1970er Jahre,” in *Stadt und Kommunikation in bundesrepublikanischen Umbruchszeiten*, ed. Adelheid von Saldern (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 351–365.

<sup>33</sup> Donatella della Porta and Herbert Reiter, eds., *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

focuses on mobilization, contention and escalation, a paradoxical situation emerges: the majority of social movement (non-subversive) activism is either overlooked, neglected or disregarded as ‘not real activism’.

Moreover, the norm of subversive or contentious activism raises new questions for the study of Swedish social movements in a European or even global context. Protesters in 1980s Sweden mobilized on a large scale, for a variety of causes, and engaged in social movement actions such as marches, pickets and occupations.<sup>34</sup> Mirroring Swedish protest activism with an image of mass militant protest can easily lead to a perspective that sees Swedish protest as ‘less’ subversive than others and a highlighting of reasons ‘why it did not happen here’. Finding answers to this question can subsequently lead to an over-emphasis of the things that make the Swedish polity ‘different’. In trying to explain why most protest in Sweden during the 1980s remained peaceful, scholars have pointed out that Sweden had a more extensive system of welfare measures, thus enabling it to ‘outspend’ the economic crisis. Extensive, state-led housing construction precluded a housing crisis, while issues such as nuclear energy and missiles were pacified by a government that dismissed both.<sup>35</sup> The most influence, however, is accorded to the Swedish political system, which was characterized by close interactions between the government and civil society actors, who thus had regular access to those in power.

A potential risk in this line of reasoning, however, lies in the fact that the norm of mass contentious activism did not represent the majority of protest experiences in 1980s continental Europe either. Most protests, even when they mobilized thousands, remained peaceful and were not seen as subversive by the authorities. Furthermore, a focus on Swedish consensus culture may lead one to overlook that welfare measures and political consensus were also central to many other Western European polities. Corporatist industrial relations in combination with an openness towards extra-parliamentary pressure groups were referred to as a ‘typical Dutch’ trait (the *poldermodel*) by politicians and scholars,<sup>36</sup> and

<sup>34</sup> Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015”.

<sup>35</sup> Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?” The Swedish government aborted its nuclear arms program in the mid-1960s, and in 1980 decided not to build any new nuclear power stations and phase out the twelve installations that had already been constructed.

<sup>36</sup> Bos, Ebben and Te Velde, *Harmonic in Holland*.

was at the same time referred to as the ‘characteristic’ Modell Deutschland by political actors and scholars in West Germany. In both cases, consensus was deemed as defining of the two post-war political systems. The large-scale squatter riots of the early 1980s in the Netherlands are often seen as an exception in a polity that was characterized by tolerance and negotiation with protesters and civil society actors. The ‘Swedish model’ of pacifying social strife through dialogue and negotiation may be less particular than is often assumed.<sup>37</sup> Moving beyond the norm of mass contentious action, then, may create opportunities for acknowledging the similarities between Swedish and European protest cultures and, more generally, political developments during the 1980s.

### *Old Cases Leading to New Questions*

The case being made here is not that researchers should discard the norm of mass contentious action altogether and instead focus on ‘what really happened’. Rather, the norm itself should be approached as a historical subject, one that deeply influenced (views of) the 1980s protest wave—both then and now. As the above shows, activists struggled with the norm of rebellious, contentious actions already in the 1960s, choosing either to discard it, to try and live up to it or find other ways of dealing with it. The same happened during the 1980s, both in Sweden and in other countries. Acknowledging this opens up social movement research to an often-overlooked question: How activists negotiated mediatic images and norms of mass contentious protests with their own often much more modest activist experiences. Moreover, the issue did not only influence individual activists and inner movement dynamics, but was also a part of movement politics. The image of mass contention, or even militancy, informed the expectations of fellow-activists, authorities and media. It forced all of them to respond and deal with these expectations, and they did so in different ways. The cases from the history of 1980s squatting show how mediatic images, norms and expectations became part of real-life historical developments, and offer one way in which they can be researched.

<sup>37</sup> Rödder, “Das ‘Modell Deutschland’”.

Just like the norm of contentious activism, the concept of Swedish particularity can be approached as a historical subject in itself. Contributions to this volume illustrate how activists at the time felt that Sweden was ‘different’ and how this notion still affects contemporary research. In his discussion of Swedish peace activism, Öhman reconstructs how Swedish journalists and activists portrayed peace sentiments in Sweden as being more broadly supported by the population, governmental elites and mainstream media. This notion of difference even became part of the dynamics of Swedish peace activism, as activists and news regularly contrasted Sweden’s positive protest experiences with more gloomy reports on confrontations between movements and authorities abroad. Focusing on the interaction between activists and mainstream media, however, Öhman concurs that the Swedish situation was ‘distinct’. The reception of peace actions by the media was ‘overwhelmingly positive’, even resulting in a ‘convergence between movement and media news framing’. As an example of the proximity between movement and media, Öhman takes the example of Birgitta Nyblom, who was both an organizer for Women for Peace (Kvinnokamp för Fred) and a journalist for the liberal Dagens Nyheter (DN) newspaper, and was allowed to write as a journalist on the actions in which she herself was involved as an activist. In case studies of other movements of the 1980s, however, contributors observe more tensions between Swedish activists’ perceptions of difference and the historical realities of international convergence.

In her chapter on the Swedish environmentalist movement, for example, Quirico speaks of a ‘trope’ of Swedish cooperation between institutionalized environmentalist movements and a cooperative Swedish government. According to her, this trope already existed during the 1980s, affected movement-government interactions as well as current historical research, and has ‘obscured’ the more confrontational parts of Sweden’s environmental movement history and created an incomplete picture. Quirico argues not so much to disregard these movement-government interactions, and she acknowledges that the Swedish government was receptive to environmentalist claims and one of the first to adopt comprehensive environmental protection laws. Rather, she states that taking into account moments of polarization and confrontation creates a better understanding of the ‘ambivalence’ of Swedish environmental activists towards the state, and leads to ‘a more nuanced understanding’ of Swedish environmentalism and its institutionalization. Her approach reveals that ‘direct action was far from being absent from the repertoire

of Swedish environmentalism in the 1980s'. Such nuances are crucial for a proper contextualization of Swedish environmentalism in an international setting.

In his study of 1980s rent strikes and rent activism, Rolf also reflects on the question to what extent Sweden was different. To answer this question, he explicitly places Swedish experiences in an international and Middletown context, arguing that Swedish rent activism was part of an international protest wave and to an important extent took shape in places such as 'Luleå, Mariestad, Växjö, Eskilstuna, Örebro and Lindesberg'. Rolf focuses on Sweden and acknowledges that the dominance of Swedish social democracy and its 'ability to quench outbreaks of radicalisation and to assure the centralisation of social movement organisations' heavily influenced Swedish protest experiences. Still, he also sees a number of important similarities. Rent activism in other European countries also mainly occurred in municipally-owned properties, were often organized by activists belonging to the New Left, who generally acted 'outside the established tenant's organisations'. Rolf does not discard Swedish particularity altogether, but contextualizes it by placing Swedish rent strikes in an international context.

The argument here is not that Sweden was *not* different, although probably less different than often assumed, but rather that the notion of being different was embraced (i.e. believed to be true) by historical actors and as a result became a mental force influencing concrete historical developments. Given that this happened in other countries as well, acknowledging this fact opens up opportunities to relate and compare similar self-describing notions in other Western European polities.

Such an argument raises questions on how to research and relate social movements, activism and contention. Manuel Castells has stated that social movement actions can be conceptualized as the tip of an iceberg; beneath the surface lie extensive social networks that can be activated and explain how, when and why people gather and rebel.<sup>38</sup> Charles Tilly, on the other hand, has argued that the act of making claims and contending power is central to social movements and social movement research.<sup>39</sup> His claim that movements contend power via repertoires, drawing from

<sup>38</sup> Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (New York: Polity Press, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), chapter 3.

age-old cultural scripts, however, implicitly leaves the possibility open that an action will not be experienced as subversive (or, even, contentious) by those in power; they, after all, *also* know these scripts. Sidney Tarrow has responded to this by asking specifically when and how contention leads to power.<sup>40</sup>

However, in all these approaches, the relation between social movements, activism and contention remains obscure. It leaves unexplained what social movement participants do when they do not contend power and why they do these things, considering that contending power is seemingly the central purpose of these movements. Possible answers lie in the networks referred to by Castells, in the subcultural character of these movements, or variations of Lenin's claim that every strike action may open the door to revolution.<sup>41</sup> But concrete empirical data linking these concepts are lacking. If 1980s Sweden provides a detailed case study of social movement activism with little or no contention, in the sense of subversive action disrupting political routines, it may serve to clarify both these concepts and their interrelation.

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<sup>40</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.

<sup>41</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "On Strikes," in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), vol. 4, 310–319.

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