

Chapter 10 : Swedish legacy (II) – “First of His Lineage & Peace Bringer”.

Contemporary polemics

In 1823-1824, academician Hans Järta (1774-1847) published a conservative journal *Odalmannen*. Two of the articles¹ were answered by Charles John in his “privately funded“ newspaper *Allmänna Journalen* with Per Adam Wallmark (1777-1858) as publisher.² The controversy is difficult to parse. Järta's articles seem, to me at least, to be an attack on Charles John's royal “style“. He complains that small-minded self-interest in the vein of yesteryear's Age of Liberty has yet again risen to smother the national government. This people born to glory and heroics was now led by a mediocre non-com-soul & statistics chewer. In the past, the king was loved and revered. Now he was just another nitpicking economist. The state was something more & higher than its budget. It was the country's heart (i.e. ideological centre). Wallmark had difficulty understanding the issue, engaged in disparaging remarks, ridicule & sidetracking - Charles John's Swedish position must be interpreted as an example of Hobbes, Lockes & Montesquieu's contract theory. You get what you bargain for. It is difficult to convey the soul-numbing boredom of Wallmark's reply. It is understandable that his paper did not have so many readers. However, as a ‘semi-official’ publication, it is supposed to have played an important role in forming public opinion.³

In 1834, the theatre man Anders Lindeberg (1789-1849) was charged with *Lèse majesté* and sentenced to be beheaded, which however was converted to three years in prison, later reduced to one year. In 1834, the former Charles John-admirer and confidant Magnus Crusenstolpe (1795-1865) published two volumes “Today's inner history“ on less flattering elements of Charles John's reign, which in 1838 rendered him too a beheading converted to three years in prison. There were riots of sympathy.

In 1836 and 1839, Samuel Laing, a Scot of Norwegian ancestry, published two scathing treaties on the political and moral condition of Sweden-Norway. In 1838, Philippe Le Bas published a similar but more positive account. Laing's accusations were 1840 answered in an “official“ pamphlet by the Swedish minister in London Magnus Björnstierna with a reply by Laing in 1842. It is difficult to summarize Laing's criticism, but most everything was Charles John's fault. And if it wasn't Charles John's fault, it was at least his problem - especially the consequences of the widespread alcohol abuse that he seemed completely indifferent to.

In 1839, Anders Lindeberg, now released, published a pamphlet on the state of the kingdom, “Contribution to Swedish history after 5 November 1810“, about the 1812 policy & Charles John's political repression with death penalty & prison for trifles. This was answered a couple of years later by the “German“ Fr. Schmidt (pseudonym of J Fredrik af Lundblad in Charles John's French propaganda centre) with a counter book about the opposition's ingratitude & the following year Wallmark published a further response that was almost an official economic white paper, “Historical-Statistical review of Sweden's external and internal conditions during the last thirty years“ (1843). Wallmark, as usual, tried to ignore all critique of Charles John for which he himself was duly criticised. In the 2nd edition, however, he inserted some sentences about Charles John's political repression, that “the end justifies the means“, and that the end had turned out well enough for everybody to be satisfied. By then the critique all encompassing though:

¹ Hans Järta. *Om statistik*. *Odalmannen* 1823: ss. 35-75; *Om allmänna undsättningsanstalter*. *Ibid*: ss. 76-106.

² Wallmark 1823.

³ Rosengren 2006.

That Charles John with his lack of good manners, education, knowledge & private morals gave the Swedish royal house a bad reputation; that he surrounded himself with a court of unctuous boot lickers; that his appointments were based on loyalty, not competence, and that he thereby damaged the kingdom; that the Parliament & the constitutions had been sidelines; that he was incapable of politics, but that violence was his right element; that his only loyalty was to himself; that through his diplomatic incompetence & lack of spine he had lost Finland & made the Union ungovernable; that his misguided attempts to control the exchange rate had caused great harm to the country; that it didn't bother him one bit if the Swedes beat each other to death, drank themselves to death or fornicated out of wedlock; that his lack of even elementary knowledge of diplomatic practice caused a multitude of unnecessary crises; that all Swedish good was originally Norwegian; that his shadow-fear of the deposed monarch, his son and the heir to the throne, and the most incredible conspiracies made him ridiculous; that his way of prosecuting any form of criticism, be it of himself or his government, as *Lèse majesté* was unlawful; that since the death sentences were never carried out, the country had introduced a new form of punishment - sham executions.⁴

The controversies continued until all parties were dead. In 1858, Wallmark published a last defence of the 1812 policy etc., prompted by the response to Bernt von Schinkel's tome "Memories of Sweden's Newer History", Charles John's posthumous ghost-written memoirs. All this and more could, however, not dispel a certain confusion about Charles John's actions or lack of such. As Höjer remarked on: Charles John had always said one thing, thought something different & implemented the third - which the secrecy allowed him to claim had been his goal from the beginning.

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Memoires d'Outre-Tombe

In 1838, Charles John's adjutant Bernt von Schinkel (1794-1882) handed over his private archives of letters, transcripts, drafts etc. to his nephew Carl Wilhelm Bergman (1820-1857). Bergman summarized these in 1852-1856 in eight volumes of "Memories of Sweden's Newer History" encompassing the years 1771-1815. Further authors continued until 1844. Volume Six, published in 1855, about Charles John's Crown Prince tenure 1810-1812 stirred a debate about his legacy. Newspaper man Johan Johansson (1792-1860; "The whale fish") had much to say that he had kept quiet about in order not to risk the death penalty or prison.⁵ The criticism was sprawling in the extreme. I limit myself to three issues:

- Johansson was most upset by Charles John never having any intention of recovering Finland and even according to the draft Treaty of Turku in 1812 supported Russia's annexation of large areas of Germany and Austria. And in exchange? "This »family treaty« implies, as one learns from Mr. Bergman-Schinkel, that Russia's guaranteed Charles John and his dynasty the Swedish Crown in perpetuity, including a force of 12,000 à 15,000 Russian troops to ensure it. Possibly Alexander also supported Charles John's plans for the French crown." This was not Realpolitik for the good of Sweden, but concessions to secure his own interests.

⁴ Crusenstolpe 1837a & 1837b; Lindeberg 1839; Laing 1836, 1839 & 1842. [Sammandrag.]

⁵ Svedelius 1864.

- The court nobility, “the Gustavian League“, “our inner Russia“ or whatever you like to call it, had in common with Charles John that they both loathed Napoleon and both wanted extended royal powers. According to Johansson, there was a proposal for a five-year “dictatorship“ that was to be presented at the Örebro Riksdag in 1812 - it seems to have been a proposal to invoke martial law and provide Charles John with extraordinary powers. Others have mentioned an untabled bill (RF2). Now it ended with a gutted Freedom of the Press Act & pushing the envelope of the Constitution to the limit.
- Neither did Johansson think that one should underestimate the effect of Charles John's weather wane-politics, political paranoia, secret police and persecution of real & imagined opponents. It poisoned domestic politics, distorted appointments which were not made according to competence but as political rewards and nothing was accomplished. Contrary to what one might think, Charles John lacked the knowledge & political courage required for political coherence. He reacted rather than acted. There were concessions, prevarications and ad hoc decisions all the way. He had all the strength and determination of a quivering leaf.

Aftonbladet's posthumous attacks aroused a lot of attention. I quote an October 25, 1855, posting in Malmö Snällpost:

Aftonbladet continues its long series of articles on Carl Johan, in a way that can only arouse the resentment of every reader, who loves truth discernment. These articles do not honour its author, nor do they honour the moral responsibility of its publisher. They contain a mass of inappropriate accusations, of which not one is accompanied by any evidence; they lack all inner contexts and bear only witness to a form of frantic anger, which is despicable in all circumstances, but even more when the object is no more among the living. You do not write the history of a dead man in this way. Death is the equalizer and should be the end of this unnatural enmity. To give those readers who have not had the stamina to pursue these articles unto the end, I will comment on the two latest instalments and the authors way of expressing his rancour. The reader may infer the rest. Charles John is accused of being indissolute, habitually suspicious, unreasonably fearful, vacillating, (which word occurs seven times and sometimes is expressed as “irresolute”), fear-induced indecisiveness, habitual indecisiveness, exalted passion, passionate exaltation, self-serving, profiteering, capricious, lax, arbitrary, erratic, blustery, imprudent, scared, faint-hearted, contempt for the laws, grave digger of society, promoter of disintegration and anarchy!!

... That Charles John had his human weaknesses, as well as everybody, no one would deny, but his great and excellent qualities so outweighed them, that it behoves only to a small number of mortals, to possess them. ... His contemporaries recognized what history will confirm, that Sweden has Charles John to thank for the fact that this kingdom still exists and that under his spire the country has developed in all directions and in undisturbed peace, and thus his memory will live through the ages as both respected and blessed.⁶

The fact that Johansson's articles were not prosecuted has been linked to Oskar I's reorientation of Sweden's foreign policy in the western direction at the time. This involved spreading unfavourable information about the 1812 policy & about how the father betrayed

⁶ Boëthius 1906: ss. 20-21.

Sweden's interests for his own benefit. Another such account, diplomat Gustaf Lallerstedt's "Scandinavia, its fears and hopes", was published in 1856 in French, English & Swedish. According to Holmberg⁷, the book was originally intended to be published as an anonymous English pamphlet, with Crown Prince Charles (XV) as a fictional author, but Lallerstedt's ambitions grew. The semi-official nature of the book, many cock-sure but unverifiable claims & lack of citation meant that it was considered partisan - unclear, however, what party.

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The business of remembrance

Charles John's memory is cared for by the Charles John-association, the Swedish branch (1848-) & the now defunct Norwegian (1858-1905). This was originally a student association but gradually acquired official standing. The association holds seminars & publishes a journal. As does the Pau Bernadotte Museum (1951-). I would like to quote three tribute speeches:

1864: Political scientist Wilhem Erik Svedelius's speech on the 20th anniversary of Charles John's death began "Charles John is to be remembered threefold: the citizen Bernadotte of the French Republic; the Marshal and Prince of Ponte Corvo of the Napoleonic Kingdom; the King Charles John of Sweden and Norway." But then continues with remarking that Charles John at the outbreak of the revolution was actually 26 years old with 10 years military service behind him. He was by no means a man of the revolution, although it, the marriage into the Napoleonic clan and his own skills made it possible to continue his career. Then Svedelius devoted himself to a 45-page disjointed exposition of Karl John's personal merits "a glimmer of light in the revolutionary darkness".⁸

1906: The political scientist Simon Boëthius also wished bolster Charles John's reputation. Unlike Svedelius, however, his arguments are understandable. Charles John, however conservative his government may have become, was never close to its reactionary counterparts on the continent. He was also one of the few people who had the strength to fulfil the role assigned to the royal power by the Constitution of 1809.⁹

1963: Finally, the judgment of historian Sten Carlsson, which appears to be based on the 1960 judgment of historian Torvald Höjer: In 1810 Charles John was "the right man at the right moment". In 1814, however, his role in international politics was over. There remained the everyday problems of a small state. The nimbus, that still surrounded him, tempted himself and his followers to believe him capable of solving all kinds of tasks. Charles John was by no means free of vanity, and like many other powerful men with eminent skills in their profession of choice, he imagined that his talent sufficed in areas where he was a mere amateur. He greatly valued his economic knowledge. ... His self-assurance led him to reject his advisers' projects and to embark on adventurous monetary policy operations, which became precious for both himself and the kingdom. ... Such mistakes made him a target for

⁷ Carlsson 1963: ss. 108-109; Höjer 1960.

⁸ Johan Johansson, m.fl. Om Minnen ur Sveriges yngre historia del 6-9. Aftonbladet, del 6, 1855-08-21,-22,-23, 1855-09-12,-20,-26, 1855-10-09,-10,-20, del 7, 1855-11-03,09, del 8, 1856-08-16,30, del 9, 1864-10-29.

⁹ Malmö Snällpost, 1855-10-25. I: Post- och Inrikes Tidning, nr 270, 1855-11-05: s. 2.

the liberal opposition, which in the 1820s and 1830s attacked the royal “self rule“ exercised by an ageing monarch, who was no longer considered aligned with new times.¹⁰

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200 years later everyone, including Sweden's Republicans, respects our “Parvenu cum Patriarch“, although there are many question marks. A number of researchers have combed the Bernadotte archive for answers. In 2003, a French research team practically vacuumed it. A number of their articles were published in 2006-2008 in the *Revue d'histoire nordique* but little new came to light.¹¹ The Project manager Jean-Marc Olivier has put his biography on hold. The provisional title was “Bernadotte, le grand rival de Napoléon“. Perhaps that was the case, but it is probably more accurate to call him a dissident. On January 25, 2013, a seminar was held at the Bernadotte Library, entitled Karl XIV Johan as a community builder.¹² Some new facts emerged. The historian Franck Favier considered it likely that Charles John supported Napoleon because of the outcome of the referendums in 1800 (Consulate), -02 (Consul for Life) & -04 (N 1st Consul for 10 years) rather than for personal gain. On May 19, 1804, Charles John was granted a seat in the Senate, which later that year approved Napoleon's coronation to emperor. Maybe not what Charles John had expected, but a harbinger.

In recent years, the Royal Armoury and the National Museum have tried to make likely that Charles John was also interested in literature, art, music, science, civil society, etc. His teacher Per Adam Wallmark has testified that he was at least close acquainted with the French classics, especially Corneille & Molière. Charles John practised patronage in the manner of ordering portraits, busts and statues of himself. Since the military, he played the flute and had a rather good voice. He sometimes showed himself in public. Wallmark became director of the Royal Library and Charles John's cultural “spokesperson“ : Charles John's library bears witness to his one-track mind. He read contemporary history, biographies & newspapers. Everything in the French original or in translation. As a 18th-century person, he favoured French classicism & opposed Romanticism.

¹⁰ Holmberg 1977.

¹¹ Olivier 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c & 2010; Berdah 2008; m fl.

¹² Lagerqvist & Sjöström red. 2013.