

Chapter 62 : King of Sweden, the Goths and the Wends (IV) (1907-1950).

In the hope of making Gustaf V's reign easier to grasp I have split it into six chapters 62-67: Preamble, pre-war 1907-1914, world war I (1914-1918), interwar (1918-1939), world war II (1939-1945) & post-war (1945-1950).

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Preamble

The depictions of Gustaf's reign exists as in two parallel versions of reality. The official version is chronicles of state visits, travels, representation & family affairs. The political version is special studies on his politics, character & interests. I start with the chronicles:

There are 19 longer biographies, chronicles, diaries & memories of all or part of Gustaf's reign (Lewenhaupt red. 1917; Åsbrink 1918; Hildebrand 1928; Swahn 1930; Åhfeldt 1932; Essén red. 1933a; 1933; Anonymous red. 1938; Setterwall 1938; de Chessin 1938; Swahn 1938; Rudbeck & Lindfors red. 1943; Hildebrand 1945; Söderström red. 1947; Anonymous red. 1950; Lindfors red. 1951; Ohlmarks 1983; von Platen 2002; Carlsson 2006; Hadénus 2007) & 14 short biographies (Jansen 1931; Nerman m.fl. 1952: ss. 364-371; Hagberg 1953: ss. 204-208; Nothin 1955: ss. 302-323; Ohlmarks m.fl. 1956: ss. 512-557; Holm 1967; Elgklou 1978: ss. 107..213; Weibull 1991: ss. 69-84; Zetterberg 1993; Elgklou 1995: ss. 183-262; Skott 1996: ss. 91-122; Lagerqvist 1997: ss. 398-417; Lagerqvist & Åberg 2004: s. 43; Liljegren 2004: ss. 108-109; Lindqvist 2010: ss. 88-96; Norlin 2015: ss. 120-138).

The dramatic highlights have been the Courtyard Crisis (1914) and the Midsummer Crisis (1941) where Gustaf in both cases was able to use his prestige to influence a government decision. There was also a protracted process in which his position as a constitutional monarch under the 1809 form of government was increasingly undermined and 1917 ended in de facto parliamentarianism - that Gustaf's government (formally his adviser) was no longer appointed by himself but by the group leader of the parliamentary majority. Gustaf was however during both the First and Second World Wars, able to act diplomatically outside the parliamentary system, although he rarely did so.

There are also depictions of his personal popularity & reputation. This has varied widely. During the pre-war period 1907-1914 he pursued his opponents (Republicans, Socialists, conscientious objectors, blasphemers & Lese majesty). But during the interwar period 1918-1939 he worked actively to restore his popularity & his tarnished reputation, and during the Second World War he probably became Sweden's most popular regent ever. During the post-war period 1945-1950 and onwards he was, however, by his opponents subjected to an unprecedented smear campaign, where he was portrayed as both Nazi, whoremonger & homosexual. The depictions of Gustaf's sexual orientation & indiscretions are 100 percent rumour and therefore presented in a separate appendix 1.

In addition, Gustaf has been involved in a number of issues, mainly defence and business, and was keen to continue his father's "dynastic" policy through his relatives marrying into the Danish, Norwegian, English, Belgian and Dutch royal houses. Prince Carl Jr's Dutch marriage fell apart though and he & others married commoners Gustaf's opinion on this was like his father's – either royals married royals, or not at all.

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The special studies on Gustaf's politics, character & interests are difficult to interpret. They are more about the constitutional debate than about Gustaf as a person. I've periodized them: Pre-war, World War I, Interwar, World War II & Post-War. Gustaf grows old, becomes the figurehead he loathes, but resists. I follow him in the tracks as best I can. The information is fragmentary. What one should keep in mind is that Gustaf never perceived himself as leader of a monarchic party but as a "tiebreaker", "regulator" or "reserve power"¹.

The position of the King, who is always responsible and conciliatory, has been particularly difficult in recent times, since one has tried to present it as him taking sides in the struggle for or against universal suffrage. This is not so. The King is and should always remain above the parties. It seems that in the debate on voting rights it has been forgotten, that it is not about the question universal suffrage or not, but about the different ways to achieve it. One might well differ about the priority of one or other system, but that does not mean that the battle should take on a sharper character, since everyone, although on different paths, wants to achieve the same goal.

The King always seeks the cooperation of the people, but this important issue must be penetrated in detail before decided in one direction or another. The King's motto "For the Good of Sweden" is a guarantee that the welfare and happiness of the Swedish people are close to his heart. I do not for a moment doubt Sweden's bright and happy future, but it requires cooperation, not only between citizens but also between king and people. Their sorrows are ours as are their joys. My life has but one gaol: Sweden's well being and honour. A toast to the fatherland, to the old Sweden and to its future!²

To put it plainly. In the spirit of 1809, Gustav V was concerned for Sweden's well being but not for democracy. People should have influence, but not power.

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Because Gustaf's life was so long, the judgment varies. The best summary of his foreign policy 1907-1950 was written by Wilhelm Carlgren (1990). Gustaf's foreign policy is described as activities & reactions rather than positions & results. Carlgren also adds a note that in its lack of systematics it is difficult to describe:

This draft should be seen as an attempt to outline the most important foreign policy activities of King Gustaf V during his reign and the importance they may have had. It does not attempt to specify his policy. This would be a tedious undertaking. His reign was very long, he was no friend of written statements, and his oral statements were more often comments than explanations.³

Carlgren's suggestion that Gustaf's foreign policy was a form of occupational therapy is not correct however. A king has a broader political spectrum than a prime minister or president. Gustaf conducted his foreign policy through the Royal Family and its members: state visits, private diplomacy, dynastic marriages, the Swedish Export Association, the image of

¹ Essén 1933b: s. 230.

² Kronprins Gustaf (V). Bankettal i Norrköping 1.6.1906. I: Ohlmarks 1982: ss. 57-58.

³ Carlgren 1990: ss. 54-55.

Sweden abroad & the Red Cross. Like his father, he wanted to protect Sweden's neutrality through a strong military.