

## Chapter 67 : Post-war (IX) (1945-1950).

*Better a live dog,  
than a dead lion.*  
Arabic Proverb

After the war, Gustaf was criticized for not doing more to improve relations with Norway. Both royal houses apparently felt insulted. Gustaf for 1905. King Haakon VII for all the empty promises of 1939. Norway later joined NATO which they believed more in than in Sweden. Nor did it become a Nordic customs union, but a common state airline.

During the last two years Gustaf suffered from arteriosclerosis in the heart muscle and a growing weakness. He could neither stand nor move, but still sit. His last moose hunt took place in Hunneberg September 1948. He was 90 years old, had energy for two days, and shot a 16-pointer. In 1949, he was no longer able to play croquet or bridge, but rummy with the ladies.<sup>1</sup> There is a last picture in 1949 where he poses in a garden chair with a shotgun. He looks extraordinarily tired. In the last year he was carried to the cabinet meetings in a wheelchair. Quensel: "On Friday 27 October 1950, we had a cabinet at Drottningholm. It was the king's last. For the first time he could not follow the proceedings, and when the reports were finished, the king showed no sign of having perceived that it was over. The Prime Minister had to point out to him that the list was finished. Two days later King Gustaf ended his days."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that Gustaf despite his general weakness was allowed to continue until the end has been explained by the Prime Minister Tage Erlander finding it convenient with a semi-senile regent - almost a name stamp, because Gustaf could no longer understand what was being decided; on the one hand he considered it to be Gustaf's own responsibility to choose the time of his departure; on the other hand, he was concerned about how a forced sick leave would be perceived by the voters, since even during the Cold War Gustaf, whatever his mental state, was considered a guarantor of Sweden's neutrality.<sup>3</sup> The decision paralysis of the parties gave rise to a number of rumours in which the monarchy seemed both unnecessary and ridiculous.

\*

During the war there had already been a discussion about Gustaf's independent actions. This continued after the end of the war:

The role of the Swedish monarch during the war years has in some places been exaggerated, the king has even been presented as an inspiration and guarantor of government policy. In other countries, too, the power of the King has come to the forefront much more than before because of the conditions attached to the war. The problem of monarchy and democracy has taken on new topicality.

The struggle for the people's government has largely been a struggle against the personal royal power. From a democratic point of view, nothing has been more unreasonable than the inheritance of political power. Attempts to rationally defend an effective monarchy are among the most unsuccessful in the history of political

<sup>1</sup> Lewenhaupt 1963: ss. 254-255.

<sup>2</sup> Quensel 1973: s. 291.

<sup>3</sup> Almeberg 2017: ss. 279-280; Erlander 1950-09-08.

ideologies of mystery and madness. The experience showed too clearly that poor monarchs could run forth from the oldest and proudest dynasties and that the most limited personal and dynastic interests, not to speak of whims and delusions, could be the determinant of royal action. - - -

Parliamentarianism was seen as the way to unite monarchy and democracy. The King's powers were effectively transferred to the representative government. The monarch's practical task - in contrast to serving as a sort of national emblem on feast days - was to direct changes of government. This was generally assumed to be easy, since the starting point of parliamentarianism was a political system with clearly changing majorities and minorities. Even a person appointed by the coincidence of the inheritance must be capable of being entrusted the mission.

In reality, parliamentarianism was not as straightforward, and the role of the monarch not as simple and insignificant as had been envisaged. - - -

The relationship is also complicated by the tremendous publicity, of which the royal family, regardless of any achievement, is surrounded ... Probably the royal authority is anchored mainly within two completely different groups: some officials and officers with a traditional and unreflective attachment to the monarchy, and some members of a group recruited from all social classes. With undeveloped intellect, little knowledge and a sense of cheap romance - it is these empty and stupid faces that garnish the streets at parades and fill the churches at finer funerals. But it is up to the democratic politician to enlighten these masses, not to detain them in the dark so that they could lead them with the monarch as a decoy.<sup>4</sup>

The Republican debate has continued in the same political science vein & and anyone who thinks differently than Tingsten is considered an idiot. The last book in this spirit is Sjöberg & Åsard (1982) "Med monarkin i lasten" (With monarchy in the cargo hold).

\*

Meanwhile, Gustaf was put in a poison cabinet. Nils Holm's summary in the Swedish biographical dictionary (1967) is typical in his cautious beating around the bush:

To clarify in detail and historically value G's personal contributions from the Norwegian impeachment crisis of 1884 until the end of World War II and after does not yet seem possible. Whatever influence he had, it did not last, he lacked both power and personality. He did not bother forging political alliances and often did not seem to care to an extent that even irritated his more ambitious consort. But at critical moments G has intervened, and with growing experience from time to time acted as "his advisers adviser".

...

G possessed the necessary preconditions of world experience, personal knowledge and sense of tact to fulfil the representative duties of a modern monarch. In the political game, he already in his youth showed sound judgment and cold-blooded calm - "one cannot frighten him". He was able to see clearly the essentials of an issue and he quickly - perhaps too quickly - made up his mind. In his personal appearance he was simple and straight forward.

\*

---

<sup>4</sup> [Herbert Tingsten.] Monarken som lockfågel. Dagens nyheter, 1946-06-25.

What is not usually discussed in the legacies is Gustaf V's dynastic responsibility. After 1918, the Bernadotte dynasty through its bourgeois marriages was about to abolish itself. After the death of the heir prince Gustaf Adolf ("Edmund"; 1906-1947), only two legal heirs remained: Edmund's brother Prince Bertil (1912-1997) & his son Carl Gustaf (1946-). That it could go so bad must be blamed on Gustaf V who does not seem to have been capable to arrange suitable marriages for his nephews & give them a meaningful existence. From a dynastic point of view, Gustaf V was a disaster.