

Chapter 80 : King (IV) (1951-1972) – "Cold War".

The depiction of King Gusty necessarily follows several tracks: He took office at the age of 68 and therefore put a lot of effort into proving his vitality. His relations with his sons and his German daughter-in-law Sibylla, were strained, but downplayed. Until the very end he tried to pursue an increasingly outdated dynastic policy based on his children & grandchildren. During the holidays he continued to do archaeology, horticulture and fishing. Instead of chairing his associations, he became patron of them. In his office he focused on national tours, state visits, audiences, study visits, inaugurations, medals, Orders and scholarships, "cultural policy", good relations with officials, politicians, press & the public and to stay informed about government work. It was claimed that he, like King Gustaf V, was his "advisers adviser", but there is no evidence that his views had any impact. He had a reputation for impulsive and ill-considered whims. For the government he was rather to be circumvented. "[At his accession] he expressed the wish to receive a special briefing from the Prime Minister before the Councils in order to be better able to follow the list of cases. This was rejected. The counterproposal was a somewhat longer briefing at the cabinet meeting."¹ - Later, a routine was established for Erlander & Gusty to conduct quite extensive conversations about current government issues. Erlander informed him on what was going on. Gusty asked for clarifications and provided comments (=life experience). The two most notable issues were the (unsuccessful) probes by King Gusty about a unity government in 1957 and the investigation process that in 1970 led to the Torekov compromise. Gusty was so remarkably passive that a press campaign was started to support him: Gusty's inaction was later said to have rescued the monarchy. He was "reliable."

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Many of the family conflicts concerned the royal marriages and official image. Gusty was perceived as a "family police officer" and increasingly out of step with time. No one has afterwards supported his actions. However, it is not clear from the reports of his harassment of his brother Wilhelm (not remarried), sons Sigvard (m. 1934), Carl Johan (m. 1946) & Bertil (m. 1976), grandson Carl Gustaf (m. 1976), nephew Lennart (m. 1932) and cousins Folke (m. 1928) & Carl jr (m. 1937) if he acted on his own or his father's/mother's behalf. The further away in the line of succession and the later in the day, the less consequences anyway. The princesses were also under pressure, especially the granddaughter Margaretha (m. 1964).

In this chapter I restrict myself to what the nephew Lennart, the sons and their wives had to say about the family relationships. Lennart has written his memoirs.² Likewise the sons and their wives.³ Bertil's memoirs were criticized for being too selective. When asked why he did not write "real" memoirs, Bertil replied that he would then need to address topics on which he did not wish to comment. However, there are interviews with him⁴ and a biography.⁵

Since the eldest brother Edmund married Sibylla of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who according to Almanac de Gotha was considered royal, posterity has assumed that it was the princes' own choice to marry into the bourgeois. This does not appear to have been the case. During World

¹ Ruin 1986: s. 247.

² Bernadotte 1966; Bernadotte 1995.

³ Bernadotte 1975; Bernadotte 1976; Bernadotte 1983; prins Bertil 1983; Bernadotte 1986; prinsessan Lilian 2000.

⁴ de Sánchez 1962: ss. 7-12; Fjellman 1973: ss. 91-106.

⁵ af Peterséns 1992.

War I, they were isolated in Sweden, also during World War II, and neither Gustaf V nor Gustaf VI showed any interest in pairing them off with someone. They seem to have thought that the matter would sort itself out. Edmund's choice of an approved bride must be attributed to his sister Ingrid, who during this time moved in English high society and served as his matchmaker. She herself married Crown Prince Frederick (IX) of Denmark, a frequent guest at Sofiero. The rest married somebody from their bourgeois circle of acquaintances.

The harassment took place in the manner that Gusty, in his capacity as the father's right-hand man, was instructed to appeal to the children's & grand children's sense of duty, warn them of the financial consequences and malign the women and their families. Gusty's Marshal of the court Nils Rudebeck (1877-1964; employed 1916-1950) was tasked with searching scandals. Rudebeck was not so successful in this - what he found was trifles - but of course it is unpleasant to be slandered by the royal house. When persuasion did not work, Gustaf V in person tried to prevent the marriages by not giving his permission. This meant that it had to be arranged abroad, which Gustaf V tried to prevent by withdrawing the women's passports. He also asked the princes to postpone their decision and/or sent them abroad in the hope that time and separation would do their thing. The information about what was going on spread and caused widespread unease. Lennart afterwards thought Gusty had behaved like a blackguard, the sons felt that he had both failed as a father and overreacted. af Peterséns suggest that Bertil had been bribed to refrain from marrying his Lilian - his appanage was unusually generous - but this seems to be a misinterpretation. More likely is that after all the defections Bertil was in a good negotiating position.

It is noticeable in all accounts how Gusty had to take responsibility for what was in fact Gustaf V's initiative. Afterwards, Gusty tried to make amends. When Lennart, Sigvard, Carl Jr & Carl Johan got married, they lost their prince titles and were thus expelled from the nobility. When Gusty ascended the throne all of them were reinstated - Carl Jr became (Belgian) Prince, the other (Luxembourgish) counts of Wisborg. Sigvard believed that Prince Oscar had set a precedent and that he too should be reinstated as Prince. Carl Johan was quite unmoved by the argument and quoted with approval his wife's comment: "You should not cry over spilt milk. Especially if you spilled it yourself."

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Gusty was very concerned over the criticism he received regarding the 1957 formation of government and by the Republican 68 opinion. In the autumn of 1967, when CEO of the Swedish Export Association Stig Ramel was appointed Deputy Head of Crown Prince Carl Gustaf's court, Gusty expressed it such:

The venerable old man spoke with warmth and great seriousness about the importance of my mission. It was not to be mistaken for the king's concern about the threat to succession that he saw in the increasingly pronounced radicalization of social democracy. He feared that the Republican moods would again seriously break out. Work on a new constitution had led to discussions about the monarch's position as head of state. There was reason to believe that the left wing would try to eliminate the king's role in the change of government. He stated that he had followed the rules of the form of government to the letter in connection with the resignation of the Erlander coalition government in 1957. However, the Social Democrats had perceived his probation with the leaders of the bourgeois majority in the Second Chamber as an attempt to wring power out of the hands of the Social Democrats. The King saw

serious tendencies towards authoritarianism within the governing party. Sweden was not allowed to become a one-party state. In short, he was profoundly concerned about the possibility that the crown prince would not become king. He himself was now close to the end of his life, and it was therefore a matter of the next few years vigorously and decisively implementing a training program that strengthened the position of the heir to the throne and made him competent for the task.⁶

Gusty has also been criticized for not doing anything to defend the political position of the monarchy. Given his fear of conflict, that was to be expected. As before, he made himself known as his enemies' friend - in this case the friend of Prime Minister Tage Erlander. He does not seem to have had any advantage from it, however. The alternate interpretation was that Gusty's reign had more teeth than one might think - the royal house entrenched in order to wait for the republican trend to falter. This both angered and worried the Swedish Republicans. Who knew what the monarchy under a younger - not quite so decrepit head - had in it.

In 1966, the sawmill owner Gottfrid Carlsson in Tutaryds parish in Småland felt obliged to do something and in May began receiving expressions of interest for a citizens' march in support of Gustaf VI and express their concern that "The basic pillars of our society, the Christian heritage and the Swedish form of government are discussed in a way that we in Finnveden in Småland as well as in countless other places in our country can not share".⁷ Carlsson expected up 100 thousand participants. King Gustaf VI replied very firmly that he did not want to know of such a thing. The constitution was decided on by investigations and parliamentary decisions, not by the "Parliament of the street". It ended with a small audience.

Since Gusty rarely confided and never gave interviews, his politics has to be pieced together from second-hand information. He was a nationalist and anti-communist. What else can only be guessed at. Prime Minister Tage Erlander dwells in two longer interviews on their common view:

[1971:] Our conversations, the King's and mine, are surely completely unique in the world. I do not believe that there is any such trusting and unconventional cooperation between the Head of State and the Prime Minister. The talks have been characterized by the greatest openness and have been a pleasant mixture of seriousness and jokes. Anyone who claims that the king lacks humour - you hear this sometimes - does not know him. On the contrary, I would argue that the king has a healthy and utterly liberating sense of humour. He often puts into the light a perception that shows that he has a distinct ability to see and grasp the incongruous aspects of things. We have often laughed together and had a lot of fun at our meetings. The king's humour has certainly been a valuable contributions to the collaboration.⁸

[1982:] He fully supported the government's foreign policy. In every detail, one might say, he supported this as it was formed by Östen Undén. Clearly, he was concerned about certain points. He feared that we were overstressing Sweden's financial resources and he was sometimes doubtful that the defence policy we pursued was effective enough to support our policy of neutrality. However, we worked very well

⁶ Ramel 1994; ss. 176-177.

⁷ Gottfrid Carlsson. Svenska Dagbladet, 1966-07-11.

⁸ Gierow m.fl. red. 1971: ss. 39-44.

together. There was a certain age difference so no close friendship was possible but we were quite close.⁹

Erlander's War Diaries¹⁰ sounded different. There he complained about Gusty's "blithering mediocrity" and "narrow-minded reflections", but attacking Gusty in public was doomed to failure. The culture of silence (=self-censorship of the mass media) and his jovial appearance saved him from all situations. However, he had help. Journalist Åke Ortmark portrayed Gusty & his court as an intellectually active right wing with the agenda of protecting the monarchy from insight and criticism: "Many consider the court, with its still-existing ancient traditions, as a pleasurable irregularity in an excessively orderly society, as a central point of splendour and festivity in a dingy community. But the role of the court in society is more important than that. In particular, the Court has two functions: service the king and create distance around him. The court and nobility form the protective curtain through which the people should be able to glimpse but normally not clearly see the king and his family. The monarch shall come near to the people so that he may be admired, but at the same time keep such distance that he cannot be judged and analysed."¹¹

The "government work" consisted of signing decisions & endorsing them in the councils.

After breakfast it was time for signatures. At that time [1951-1972], the king would sign a variety of papers. Government bills, constitutions, proxies, etc. All these documents came every day in a large, black and locked bag to the adjutant. The King wanted them arranged by department with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs first and within the departments with propositions and constitutions first and then proxies or other letters. It could sometimes be hundreds. Normally about twenty-thirty. ... The King first read the summary before signing. At some point, he could become extra interested and read the whole text. Then he wrote his characteristic signature.¹²

The councils themselves [1958] usually go very fast - 35, 40 minutes of swinging the gavel - but they have been preceded by a lot of effort also for Mr. Bernadotte's part. All the more important matters he has familiarized himself with in advance; The Prime Minister or the Departmental Head - or both - have presented them to him, for example, on a visit to his reception room or after a Council. And should he discover during the councils that something has passed him by, he will stop the gavel and ask for an orientation; No confusion here.¹³

On the council table stands the collected Swedish constitution. On a table at the window facing slottsbacken a red wine bottle and some glasses. Some people drink wine mixed with water. They pour themselves after a servant uncorking the bottle. Formerly the red wine was specially imported - Chateau Lynch-Bage's vintage 1954, now [1963] it is a simple Burgundy, brand Macon. Clothing is optional but it is customary to dress discreetly. King Gustaf VI sometimes asks about the matters, especially if it concerns higher appointments, but mostly nods. When the Council is over, the king usually stays for a while to deliberate with some or other councillor.

⁹ Lagercrantz 1982: s. 247.

¹⁰ Erlander 1973.

¹¹ Ortmark 1970: ss. 98-99.

¹² Björkman 1987: ss. 16-17.

¹³ Strömstedt, Bo "Han sköter sig mönstergillt." Expressen 1958-12-28.

When he returns from Sofiero or abroad he signs the Minister of Justice's decree that he has retaken the government of the kingdom.¹⁴

The average number of signatures per year was 7,000. Gusty also hosted 3000 guests and protected 200 associations (=attended annual meetings or granted them an audience): military, non-profit, scientific, sporting & artistic.

There are many reports that Gusty through his popularity saved the monarchy. Regarding the claim that Gusty was uniquely popular, it is simply not true. What is probably referred to is Året Runt's Reader Survey 1969 where the monarchy was supported by 95 percent. On the contrary, in the regular opinion polls, the proportion of positive people in favour of the monarchy has never been so low: 57 percent (1961) & 60 percent (1962) to compare with Gustaf Vs 84 percent (1943). Positive results only increased when the young Carl Gustaf and Christina took on a more prominent role: 75 percent (1969) & 75 percent (1973).

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"More Than Meets the Eye"
Credo of the public servant

Gusty's monarchy was primarily a media monarchy, i.e. a cultural construction. His Marshal Stig H:son-Ericson speculated in his memoirs¹⁵ on the merits of such a monarchy:

- The Sovereign has a role to play simply by being a common symbol.
- By raising the monarch to his office, he is better suited to a symbolic role than a president who is probably a former politician.
- The monarch has a broader symbolic register than a president. He can represent the country's religion, national peculiarities, family traditions and what else belongs.
- The monarch always attracts more attention than a president because he sits longer and thus becomes better known.
- By not pursuing a personal party policy, the monarch can, without being suspected of hidden motives, promote national and international politics.
- The ceremonial surrounding a monarch with its historical references is far more figurative and "printable" than that of a newly created presidential office.
- The attention paid to a monarch can be used during state visits, industrial delegations and various events to spread information about Sweden and to get in touch with important decision-makers.
- The more political power is transferred to the government, the more important it becomes with a monarch who, through his position as "Head of State", is a symbol of a certain degree of stability, continuity and tradition. The fact that monarchy is old is certainly not a reason to abolish it.

In practical terms, the above meant being visible. Although Gusty was very chipper, he stepped down after turning 75. This was not very noticeable in the newspaper reports, as even insignificance was given much space. The morning newspapers at this time downsized their monarchy coverage - it was considered lacking in news value - and it was mainly the evening and weekly newspapers that wrote about him. There were also many commemorative

¹⁴ Vecko Revyn 1963:26.

¹⁵ H:son Ericson 1976.

writings, features and books of the type "One year with the King", where Gusty smiled his way through a work schedule of state visits, archaeological excavations, horticulture and fishing. Most of it was in pictures. Gusty was known in appearance but not as a person. "Anaemic" and uncontroversial is probably the best description of his image. If you delete the publications for Gusty's 60-, 70-, 80-, 90- & 100-year anniversaries¹⁶ the description of him follows the same template:

A judicious person, who has been close to the Crown Princess family as a whole, collects his impressions of the Exalted Friend in the following characteristic terms: "His greatest quality can really be summed up in the negative - his absolute absence of any trace of fakery. He is honest, true and good, a rock to build on, strong-willed, thorough with great demands on himself. High ideals, friendly and happy without a trace of royal highness. Surely he is the most bourgeois of the entire royal family, but with absolute reverence for what his high position demands of him under the Swedish Constitution."¹⁷

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During the summer residence at Sofiero in 1973, Gusty the night between 17 and 18 August fell ill with bleeding ulcers. He'd had them before and didn't think it was so serious but it was. On the way out to the car, he could still walk, he said he was in good spirits. Then he was driven to Helsingborg's hospital and the court's physician Gunnar Biörck came down from Stockholm. A large group of Sweden's most skilled specialists gathered around his sickbed. August 21 he underwent surgery. The next day, he asked for newspapers to see what was written about him. He gradually got worse. By that time, the family had arrived. When Gusty during a temporary improvement learned that Carl Gustaf was sitting in the middle of the night looking into the wall, he asked Prince Bertil to take him out to the golf course at Båstad. The days passed. Gusty showed signs of improvement that did not last. On September 13, the end seemed near. The 14th the family was several times called to the deathbed but had to turn back. At 17:30 on the 15th, the death struggle began, which lasted until 20:35.

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The Swedish biographical dictionary has not yet dared say anything about him, but Gusty has received a positive American entry:

Unpretentious Monarch

Gustaf VI Adolf became King of Sweden at an age when most men are already in retirement. During his prosperous reign, the lean, scholarly ruler established a reputation as one of the most beloved and unpretentious of Europe's monarchs. ...

King Gustaf was the most democratic of princes. He had a walk-on part in the children's movie "The Wonderful Adventures of Nils" and gave the first audience for the press in the history of Sweden's royal family. On his public birthdays, citizens would send him gingersnaps and homemade socks.

¹⁶ Tigram. [Margit Siwertz.] "Professor kronprinsen." Vecko Journalen 1942:43, ss. 24-25,33,38; Fjellman 1952; Sánchez & Adlercreuz 1962; Gierow m.fl. red. 1971; Holmgren 1972; Fjellman 1973; Holmgren 1982.

¹⁷ Tigram. [Margit Siwertz.] "Professor kronprinsen." Vecko Journalen 1942:43, ss. 24-25,33,38.

Gustaf inherited the royal family's artistic and intellectual gifts. He was a noted sportsman in his youth, an accomplished archeologist and skilled botanist, a connoisseur of Chinese art, a carpenter and a linguist. ...

Concurrent with his academic training, Gustaf rose through the military. He was made first lieutenant in 1903, a colonel in 1918 and a full general in both the infantry and cavalry in 1932. As King he was commander in chief of the defense forces. ...

When he became King, Gustaf chose as his motto "Duty Above All." Though his powers were limited under the constitution, he became a respected counselor to successive governments. He frequently used state occasions to advance progressive ideas in both domestic and world affairs. In 1972, in a speech from the throne, he called on the United States to stop its "merciless" bombing of North Vietnam, echoing the views of the Swedish Government.¹⁸

As to Gustaf's good relations with the Social Democrats in 1971 having saved the monarchy, it seems true as to him not being perceived as a political threat. In 1971, the Republic seems to have failed on the fact that the anti-monarchism of the Social Democratic Party was about the person on the throne, not about the form of government. For example SSU disliked Gustaf V, liked Gustaf VI, dislikes Carl XVI Gustaf & likes Crown Princess Victoria.

¹⁸ Paul L Montgomery. King Gustaf of Sweden is Dead; Heir Becomes Carl XVI Gustaf. The New York Times, 1973-09-16.