

The Social Democrats and the Communist Movement during and after World War II

The text will give an account of the ideological development of the communists in Sweden during and after World War II. During this time, the peaceful transition to socialism was introduced and the party revised its attitude towards Social Democracy and the bourgeois state, which have had long-term effects on the workers' movement in Sweden. The role of the Social Democrats will also be analyzed and commented upon, so as to dispel myths and misconceptions concerning them.

After the war, the Social Democrats had taken command of Swedish capitalism and strengthened its ties with the Swedish capitalists and imperialists. Unfortunately, it is not possible to paint a complete picture of the developments during this time, as it would require much more work, but we want to highlight certain aspects of the period, so as to draw some conclusions.

The economic and political policy of the Social Democrats

The real wages of the workers had plummeted during the war – in fact, the government had introduced a freeze to the wages in 1942. Because of the constant attacks on the wages of the workers, the wages had been frozen on an already low level, which left a lot of workers frustrated and fueled demands for increases in wages. At the same time, the level of exploitation of the workers had increased through increases in the intensity of the work.

These factors allowed the communists to organize and lead 130 000 metal workers in a strike for wage increases. The strike lasted five months, and even though only small direct gains could be made, the strike put an end to the lowering of the workers' wages.

In 1944, the Social Democrats had agreed upon and put forward a programme for the workers' movement in the post-war years. Through this programme, they advocated for the nationalisation of key industries, as well as an expanded welfare-state. Even though they quickly abandoned this programme, as their co-operation with the bourgeoisie and capitalists deepened, some of the demands were carried out – in fact, against the background of the militancy of the workers', the influence of the communist party and the victory of the Soviet Union, they *had* to be carried out. The real wages of the workers began to increase and certain benefits, such as pensions and healthcare were made available to the workers.

In 1948, the Swedish government, headed by the Social Democrats, began receiving aid within the framework of the Marshall Plan. All in all, Sweden received 107 million USD in aid, which was less than Denmark and Norway, but it still served to bind Sweden closer to US-American imperialism and helped open Scandinavia to an influx of American capital. In this context, it is also important to note that Sweden, almost directly after the Second World War, had begun developing economic ties with the Soviet Union, and had begun exporting goods to them. The adherence of Sweden to the Marshall Plan ended this relationship.

In contrast to the Social Democratic programme of 1944, the policy around 1950 was openly in favor of capital. Price control on basic goods was dropped, allowing for an increase of the price of foodstuff, and in the beginning of the 1950's, rationing, which had previously guaranteed workers a basic amount of foodstuff was abolished. At the same time, the government and the state took a more active stance in the development of the economy. Large amounts were invested in agriculture, which was soon mechanized, and new investments allowed for a renewal of the machine parks of the industries.

The Swedish state came to play a much more important role in the economic development during the post-war years than before. Nationalizations were carried out, mainly in sectors with low profitability that were essential to the smooth running of Swedish capitalism. These measures were directed at public transportations, postal and telecommunication services, the supplying of electricity and the construction of houses.

In brief, we would also like to highlight the role of the Swedish welfare state in the expansion of Swedish monopoly capital. With the development of the productive forces, new needs for the expansion of industry arose. Workers needed to be concentrated and moved to where the industry was, creating a need for public housing. The solution was the building of millions of new homes, propelling, amongst others, the construction company Skanska, into a position as one of the world's largest construction companies.

For the working class, this meant a move from their homes in the countryside, which they had owned themselves, into the cities, where they received rental apartments, both municipal and private. This meant that the wages of the workers in some part was channeled back into the system, tying the workers even more closely to the machinery of wage slavery. Even though the standard was improved through these projects, it is not comparable to what would have been possible, had another system existed.

The welfare state developed primarily as a need for developed capitalism to expand further and to better correspond to the need of the productive forces, but the impact of a well-organized workers' movement could push parts of the welfare further than would have been necessary for the needs of the productive forces. Such an example is the introduction of a generalized scheme of childbenefits.

The state also intervened in the planning of the economy. This could take the form of the direction of workers from "stagnating" areas to areas with a lack of workers. In this way, the state could effectivize production and raise profitability for the capitalists. Another way of doing this was the implementation of the so called MTM-method. Carried out by the state and advocated by the Social Democrats, officials started monitoring the workers, mapping their every move in order to find more effective ways of doing the work.

Even though this is far from a complete picture of the period, we would like to draw to basic conclusions, before we move on the analysis of the development of the Communist Party of Sweden.

As regards the state, it is important to note that the basic role of the bourgeois state is to support the smooth running of the capitalist machinery. The nationalizations carried out were not carried out for the benefit of the people, but they corresponded to the needs of capital – in order for an economic expansion to be possible, it was imperative that the transportation networks were expanded, and in order to increase the profits of the construction companies, as well as to concentrate the workers to the industrial cities, the building of new homes for the workers became interesting for monopoly capital.

Even though it would be wrong to view the welfare of the workers as simply an effect of the development of capitalism – the workers struggled and sacrificed alot in order to achieve their gains – it is equally wrong to ignore this aspect of the building of the welfare state.

As regards Social Democracy as a phenomena, the role that they played (and play) in Sweden is one which entails the pacifying of the workers and the tying of them to capitalism. Without Social Democracy, it would have been impossible for the bourgeoisie to effectively combat the communists

– the influence that the Social Democrats had in the union movement and in the workers' movement became the most effective weapon that capital could use in their struggle against the communists.

After the war, the Social Democrats became excellent administrators of the capitalist system, ensuring the expansion of Swedish capitalism through effective and detailed managing, as well as through the work they did in pacifying the workers' movement.

Overview: the ideological development of the SKP during and after World War II

As in a lot of other communist parties at the time, the tactics of the SKP were focused on political unity with the Social Democrats and other "progressive" forces. Central to the ideological changes was an almost naïve optimism, which led leading cadres to believe that a peaceful transition to socialism was possible, and that this could be achieved through the creation of a united Marxist Workers' Party.

This tendency can be traced back to the recommendation made by Dimitrov in 1935, where he claimed that "[t]he interests of the class struggle of the proletariat and the success of the proletarian revolution make it imperative that there be a *single party of the proletariat* in each country."¹

As we will see, the conditions for the unity of the workers' parties that Dimitrov posed, was significantly watered down by the SKP and even led to accusation of liquidatory tendencies from the cadre of the party.

In the forming of the post-war policy of the SKP, a lot of different factors came into play. The previous repression that the movement was subjected to, in combination with the suspension of the Comintern and the ensuing free reins to form a national policy, the quantitative growth of the party in the last year of the war and the ideological heritage of popular and united fronts merged and gave birth to a new kind of policy.

As a response to the dissolution of the Comintern, a political commission had been launched by the Central Committee.² Consisting of several prominent members, it was to lead the forming of a new party programme, aimed to replace the old Comintern programme. Four weeks later, in the summer of 1943, at a national conference of the party, the commission presented its work.

The suggestion was that as a basis for discussion, the party should use the Social Democratic programme of 1920, which had been inspired by the German Erfurt Programme. The reason for this was that the "programme was seen by hundreds of thousands of workers as directive."³ The party chairman, Sven Linderot, pointed out that the reason for the adoption of the programme of 1920 was tactical, not ideological – it was seen as a way to strengthen the left within the Social Democrats, at a time when there were serious political contradictions within the Social Democratic Party.⁴

At the same conference, Nils Holmberg meant that the struggle for Soviets in Sweden was inadvisable – instead, the goal was to "conquer and put in the service of the working class the old, historically developed, national organs for peoples' power: city and municipal councils, as well as the national parliament."⁵

¹ https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm#s20

² Hermansson, Jörgen, *Kommunism på svenska*, Uppsala Universitet: 1984, p. 45.

³ Hilding Hagberg, quoted in Hermansson 1984, p. 46.

⁴ Lindkvist, Kent, *Program och parti*, Arkiv: 1982, p. 51.

⁵ Nils Holmberg, quoted in Lindkvist 1982, p. 51.

The conference approved of the suggestion of the political commission and adopted the programme of 1920 as a basis for discussion, although it sharpened its terminology.⁶ At the same time, the conference appointed a programme commission, charged with creating a new programme.

In February of 1944, the programme commission presented its proposal for a new party programme, which would be put to the vote of the members on the congress later that year. In the programme, vital ideological aspects, such as the dictatorship of the proletariat, the explicit mention of the revolution and the struggle for a Soviet-Sweden had been removed.⁷ It was also noted that the conditions were ripe for a transition to socialism, due to the fact that monopoly capitalism had transformed into state monopoly capitalism.⁸ In a comment on the proposal, Linderot said that since the goal of the party was the creation of a unified Workers' Party, the programme of the SKP had to be one that could just as well be used for such a united party.⁹

The proposal was accepted on the party congress in May 1944. In contrast to the earlier programmes of the parties, that of 1921 and that of the Comintern in 1928, explicit mentions of the road to socialism were omitted – in fact, the road to socialism was not mentioned at all.¹⁰ This omission of the violent revolution was not an explicit position in favor of a peaceful transition, but it opened the gates for such interpretations. On the same congress, both Hilding Hagberg and Fritjof Lager, members of the Political Bureau, claimed that a peaceful transition was "possible" and "could not be ruled out."¹¹

However, it took yet another year – until the meeting of the Central Committee in March 1945 – for the peaceful transition to socialism to take more concrete shape. During this meeting, Set Persson, was charged with the task of explaining the political situation and the tasks of the party. He explained that

[w]e give our support to the aspirations to achieve progress through normal democratic ways [...] and on a peaceful road and we acknowledge that this road can be passable.¹²

Apart from the adoption of the new party programme, the congress of 1944 adopted the so-called "Post-War Programme" of the Social Democrats as its programme of action.

Both of these programmes were adopted with the aim of strengthening the political unity of the working class, as well as to strengthen the left-wing within the social democratic party. In a famous comment on the Post-War Programme, Linderot claimed that it "decapitated the shadow of capitalism."¹³

The reasoning of the SKP and Linderot was as follows: the programme would not be realizable within the framework of capitalism, but since this was not the aim of the Social Democrats, it would only serve to decapitate the shadow of capitalism. Linderot claimed that the most important aspect of this programme was its demand for full employment. This demand, along with others, could not be

⁶ Hirdman, Yvonne, *Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti 1939-1945*, Allmänna Förlaget: 1974, p. 229.

⁷ Hirdman 1974, p. 229.

⁸ Hermansson 1984, p. 49.

⁹ Lindkvist 1982, p. 52.

¹⁰ Sparring, Åke, *Från Höglund till Hermansson*, Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1967, p. 52.

¹¹ Sparring 1967, p. 52.

¹² Set Persson, quoted in Hirdman 1974, p. 242.

¹³ Sven Linderot, quoted in Hermansson 1984, p. 63.

fulfilled within the framework of capitalism – if the SKP was successful in forcing the trade unions and the Social Democrats to keep the programme, this would become apparent for them.¹⁴

By adopting a party programme built on an old social democratic one, as well as adopting the social democratic programme of action, the party had achieved one of the basic conditions for unity: the subordination of the Social Democrats under the programme of the communist party. The paradox, however, was that the communists had already adopted a social democratic programme, even though they sharpened the terminology – this meant, in essence, that the Social Democrats would be subordinate to a radical social democratic programme.

During the war, Sweden had been governed by a coalition of all parties except the communist party. To counter this, and to try to break loose the Social Democrats from co-operation with the bourgeoisie, the SKP launched the slogan of a "Left Government". Consisting of the communists, the Social Democrats, as well as "progressives from bourgeois parties", it would "draw a clear line against the forces of fascism, reaction and big finance."¹⁵

The slogan of a "Left Government" was abandoned in October 1945, when the Social Democrats had assumed power and replaced the coalition government. To continue with the old slogan would imply that the communists wanted to assume state power by themselves.¹⁶

When we leave the year 1945, there has been a significant shift in the analyses and tactical considerations taken by the communist party. Parts of the ideology, which were previously considered pillars of marxism-leninism, such as the dictatorship of the proletariat and the revolutionary assumption of power, had been left out. First, it had been replaced by vague and open formulations, and then later, through the interpretation of the Central Committee, the road to the peaceful transition to socialism had been opened.

The peaceful road to socialism was central to the analysis of the communists in Sweden at this time, and it was adopted almost unanimously. Some protests and discontent could be heard from the various party cells and local organizations, but the opposition was never united, nor coherent in their critique.

The peaceful road to socialism

In order to understand the shift towards the peaceful transition, it is important to understand the material conditions that communists faced during this time.

During the war, Sweden had been governed by a coalition of all the "democratic" parties because of the special situation that developed across Europe. The communists had been labeled violent and extremists, and by the bourgeoisie, they were judged as undemocratic and thus excluded from the national coalition.

The repression against the communists

Instead, they were persecuted as never before. Culminating with the Finnish Winter War, the Social Democrats and the bourgeoisie unleashed furious attacks against the communists, including terrorist attacks, internment camps, as well as several attempts to silence the communist press.

¹⁴ Hermansson 1984, p. 63.

¹⁵ Olsson, Tom, "SKPs politiska utveckling 1943-1950", in *Från SKP till VPK*, Zenit: 1976, p. 184-85.

¹⁶ Hirdman 1974, p. 237.

In the beginning, the communist newspaper *Ny Dag* [*New Day*] was in the center of their attacks. By first recalling all the newspaper's loans, then forcing newspaper venues to stop selling the newspaper and then forcing advertisers to withdraw their advertisements through threats against them, they tried to silence the press. By mobilizing members and sympathizers, the attempts to strike at the economy of the party was unsuccessful.

The next step was to involve the judiciary. It had been made illegal to "damage relationships to foreign powers" and this was frequently used to charge the communist press with criminal behaviour. Often, previous volunteers to the International Brigades signed articles and agreed to be formal editors of the newspapers. Since they returned from Spain, they had been blacklisted, and a couple of months in prison solved the issue of food and roof for them. The longest punishment handed out was five months of hard labor against an old volunteer to Spain because of an article that criticized the government's support of the reactionary forces in Finland.

When it became apparent that this tactic would not work, they sharpened the repression. In 1940, parliament unanimously (apart from the communist MPs and one liberal) approved a law that would make it possible to outlaw the communist party. The law was never used – its approval meant that the party was constantly faced with the threat of illegalization. Due to the threats, the party chairman, Sven Linderot, was often absent from meetings, because the party feared his arrest. Almost at the same time, the police conducted searches in all of the party offices around the country, and in the houses of communists, as well as in communist-dominated labor unions.

Within the labor unions and the workers' movement, the Social Democrats attempted to attack the communist by in some unions (such as the Metal Workers' Union) simply ban communists from having a membership or being elected. In their newspapers, the Social Democrats called for "the extinction" of the communists, claimed that "all sentimentality has to be disregarded concerning the communists" and that communists "are not people in an ordinary sense."

At the same time, the government decided to forbid the transportation of communist newspapers on Swedish railways and through the Swedish post. Distribution was therefore organized by party members, who personally traveled across the country to deliver the newspaper.

The atmosphere was thick with anti-communism, and as a natural development, attacks were prepared and carried out. The office of *Ny Dag* in Stockholm was raided by armed right-wing youths – luckily, veterans from the Spanish Civil War were present and could easily disarm them. Party members and veterans took turns guarding the party offices, defending them from attackers.

In the north of Sweden, they were not so lucky as in Stockholm. On the 3rd of March, the local police and representatives of the liberal party, as well as local right-wing journalists planned and carried out a bombing of the offices of the communist paper *Norrskensflamman* [*Flame of the Northern Lights*], resulting in the death of five persons, including two children. One of the casualties was Arthur Hellberg, member of the central committee of the party, as well as editor of the *Norrskensflamman*. The perpetrators were given symbolic punishments and let out shortly thereafter. This is the worst terrorist attack ever to take place in Sweden.

Simultaneously, thousand of communist cadres, many of whom had been called in to the army because of the threat of war, were interned in camps around Sweden, most of them in the north. They were kept there, cut off from the outside, not knowing whether or not they would be executed or not. One of the men inside lost his wife and child during the attack against the *Norrskensflamman*, but was refused leave.

The first internment camp was established in 1939, and they were reinforced and expanded as long as Nazi-Germany was on the offensive in the Soviet Union. As soon as the tide of war changed, they began dismantling the camps. Apart from the internment camps where they held young communists during the war, concentration camps were set up under the Social Democratic government, where foreign communists fleeing from Nazi occupation were placed.

This summary of the repression against the Swedish communists during World War II serves as one factor, which influenced the ideological development within the Swedish communist movement. As a consequence of the repression, the party became more cautious and it became more and more important to portray the party as democratic, so as to gain acceptance by other parties and non-revolutionary workers. In combination with other factors described below, it serves as the material basis, from which the ideological development of the party gained traction.

The attacks on communists in the post-war years

After the war, the repression against the communists took other forms than before. It was no longer possible to continue on the same path, partly due to the prestige of the Soviet Union, and partly due to the growth of the communist movement (in the elections to parliament in 1944, the communists managed to gather more than 10%). Instead, the attacks against the communists within the labor movement intensified. In 1948, the social democratic prime minister, Tage Erlander, said that "the workplaces are a battlefield against communism".

In 1941, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) was centralized, which meant that the decisions concerning strikes had to be taken by the central leadership. This gathered the power of the union in the hands of the leading social democrats, who at the same time were building a powerful organization of tens of thousands of union representatives, which after the war were used against the communists.

In 1945, a big survey was commissioned by the union leadership (social democrats) in order to map the balance of power between the communists and the social democrats within the union movement. The survey showed that one in ten of the representative bodies of the unions (FCO – these were later abolished) were in the hands of the communists, which enabled them to lead the Metal Workers' Strike in 1945 (see below). The mapping of the communists was also done in cooperation with the secret police, and in other forms continued at least into the 70's. All in all, hundreds of thousands of communists, peace activists, labour organizers and others were registered by the secret police, in cooperation with the Social Democrats.

On the basis of the survey, it was possible to effectivize the attacks against the communists. The elected union representatives connected to the Social Democrats received education in combating the communists. Hired agitators were sent to districts dominated by communists and similar actions were taken.

In this way, it was possible for the social democrats to slowly undermine the support that the communists had within the labor movement.

Apart from the repression, other factors influenced the ideological developments. One bourgeois commentator formulates it as follows:

Both the programme and the commentaries [from the central committee] were formed under the impression of the contemporary events in Europe [...] The progress of the Red Army, the collapse of the

old states, the resistance in the still occupied countries and the radicalization of the continental Social Democracy together with the psychological situation in Sweden gave room to significant optimism.¹⁷

To these factors, we must add both the ideological heritage stemming from the seventh congress of the Comintern and the appeals to form united workers' parties, as well as to work in a popular and united fronts, as well as the repression suffered by the communists, who "in defence of the legality of their press and the party increasingly were driven onto the road of principal democracy."¹⁸ It is important to note that the intention of the party was never class-collaborationist or reformist, but its aim was socialism – in hindsight, we can be critical of the outcome and their analysis, but we must acknowledge that their intentions were honest.

Against this background of both optimism and caution (it is wrong to call it fear, especially after what the communists had endured), the shifts in the road to socialism must be seen. Some key factors, which the party had identified, led them to support the idea of a peaceful transition.

The most important factors were these:

- In general, power had been shifted to the benefit of the working class, and anticipation was big that it would continue, because this shift had gone further in the rest of Europe.¹⁹ This power was built on the fact that "[t]he working class had been able to achieve some positions within the state apparatus."²⁰
- The power of the working class took the following expressions: a strong and united Trade Union Confederation (LO), there was a workers' majority in parliament, in some regional assemblies and in a large number of municipal assemblies.²¹
- The size of the working class had grown and now encompassed more than 60% of the people, while the bourgeoisie was both economically and politically divided.²²
- Especially inspiring was the growth of the peoples' democracies in Eastern Europe. This topic was given a lot of room in the theoretical discussions of the party, and the establishment of a peoples' democracy in Sweden was seen as feasible.²³

Within the framework of the peaceful transition to socialism, there are three main ideological shifts, all of them occurring simultaneously and fuelling each other.

On one level, the peaceful transition is built upon a change in focus. Whereas traditional marxism-leninism builds upon the scientific identification of the basic contradiction between capital and labor, the basic contradiction within the framework of the peaceful transition builds upon the contradiction between democracy and reaction. Connected to this is also the weakening of democratic centralism and the transition to a mass party.

The shift in contradiction is at the same time fuelled by the shift in the analysis of Social Democracy: if the basic contradiction is that between democracy and reaction, it follows that all democratic forces are allies in the struggle against reaction – this includes the Social Democrats, who in the context of the contradiction between capital and labor were seen as enemies, as they guaranteed stability to capitalism.

¹⁷ Sparring 1967, p. 49.

¹⁸ Hirdman 1974, p. 240.

¹⁹ Hermansson 1984, p. 65.

²⁰ Carl-Henrik Hermansson, quoted in Hermansson 1984, p. 69.

²¹ Olsson 1976, p. 192.

²² Hermansson 1984, p. 66.

²³ Holmberg, Håkan, *Folkmakt, folkfront, folkdemokrati*, Uppsala Universitet 1982, p. 33.

Connected to both these tendencies, the view of the bourgeois state changed. The defence of the party against attacks made the keeping and deepening of bourgeois democracy, in combination with the "objective factors" in support of the peaceful transition that the party had identified, let a revision in terms of how the bourgeois state was analyzed. Instead of fighting to establish soviets, the party had to "conquer and place in the service of the working class the old, historically developed, national organs for peoples' power: the city and municipal assemblies, and the national parliament."²⁴

In the following, we will paint a picture of the each of these basic tendencies, as they are central to the understanding of the peaceful transition to socialism, as it was developed by the Communist Party of Sweden during this time.

A shift in focus: from "capital-labor" to "democracy-reaction"

The basic contradiction within capitalist and imperialist society is that between capital and labor. One class exploits the other, and appropriates the surplus value created by the other class. This contradiction is to be found in the economic basis of capitalist society: it is the pillar, on which it is built.

During this time, it is possible to see a shift from this view to a view where the main contradiction is seen as that between democracy and reaction. This means that focus has been shifted from the scientific analysis of the material basis of capitalism to the different political expressions that capitalism takes – the focus thus shifted from the basis to the superstructure.

In his speech on the 13th party congress in 1946, Linderot gave this expression a more programmatic expression. He claimed that the "front of struggle is found between democracy and reaction."²⁵ This was not only the case in Sweden, but in the entire world. His speech was accepted by the party congress as directive for the party line.²⁶ The most immediate consequence is that the difference between proletarian and bourgeois democracy is made unclear and the differentiation between the two kinds of democracy is hard to distinguish.²⁷

The formal shift occurred in 1946, but this did not keep the party tactics from being formed by it before. On the tactical level, the shift in focus led to the adoption of the slogan of a "Democratic Bloc", which was meant to gather all bourgeois democratic and progressive forces in the country in the struggle against reaction. This new Bloc replaced the slogan of a "Left Government" and was supposed to be built upon the expansion of the Post-War Programme. This expansion of the Post-War Programme was to be done by the Social Democrats, the LO and the SKP – the idea was that it would constitute a democratic platform, which would draw a clear line against reaction.²⁸

As a further consequence, democratic centralism became more and more of an obstacle. If the objective was to gather as much people as possible in the struggle for democracy, it was counter-productive to keep strict rules and regulation as to who could become a member. Gunnar Öhman, representing the Central Committee, asked the following question:

But what benefits our party the most? The small elite of 100 percent clear communists, isolated from the masses or the big commune, with less clear members but with solid connections to the working class?

²⁴ Nils Holmberg, quoted in Lindkvist 1982, p. 51.

²⁵ Sven Linderot, quoted in Sparring 1967, p. 59.

²⁶ Olsson 1976, p. 188.

²⁷ Hermansson 1984, p. 74.

²⁸ Olsson 1976, p. 188.

He answered it as follows:

Our party is not and cannot be a society for mutual admiration or some kind of sacred society, instead our party is a fighting workers' organization, whose doors are open to all of our class comrades and for everyone who wants to place his or hers powers at the disposal of the working class. The ideal that we must strive for when it comes to the construction of our party is not the elite of the 100 percent clear communists, but the big mass organization of conscious communist fighters.²⁹

On another occasion, Öhman also accused those he called "secterians" (essentially, those who did not approve of the mass line) for not wanting to take the least developed workers into account.³⁰ When this line of reasoning is turned around, its implications are obvious: the "secterians" take into account the most conscious workers, but do not want to shift their focus to the mass of unconscious workers. As opposed to this, Öhman, who spoke on behalf of the Central Committee, wanted to shift focus to the least conscious workers.

As a consequence, the congresses of 1944 and of 1946 eased the demands put on new members, making membership easier to obtain.

As mentioned earlier, Hagberg declared that it was important to adopt the somewhat revised social democratic programme of 1920 because it was seen as directive by hundreds of thousands of workers. This puts the relationship between the party and the masses on its head, and instead of leading the workers, the party follows it: what the workers see as directive, becomes directive to the party as well.

Of course, this tendency weakened the vanguard character of the party, forming a mass party instead of a vanguard party. It goes hand in hand with the shift in focus to democracy-reaction and in the new policy of unity of the party.

Connected to this is the analysis of Social Democracy, to which we will now move on.

The role and function of Social Democracy

Central to the SKP was the political unity of the working class, to be achieved through the unity with Social Democracy. This was the logical conclusion, if one was to see the main line of conflict as that between democracy and fascism.

In accordance with the new analysis and shift in focus, the SKPs short term objective became to strengthen the left within the Social Democrats, as this would make unity easier. Already in 1942, Linderot had, somewhat exaggerated, identified two opposing factions within the social democratic party: the left and the right. He also claimed that the party would sooner or later split along these lines, thereby exaggerating the control the right-wing had in the party, accentuating the need for a strong and fighting left-wing.³¹ Through the adoption of the Post-War Programme, the same goal was achieved: through adopting it, the communists would make it harder for the Social Democrats to abandon it, which would strengthen the left-wing character of the party.

The activity of the party during these years was focused on achieving a constructive communication with the Social Democrats, with the hope of entering into a popular front-government. During the metal workers' strike in 1945, Linderot said that "[i]f one or two industries are striking this winter, it

²⁹ Gunnar Öhman, quoted in Hirdman 1974, p. 251.

³⁰ Hirdman 1974, p. 251.

³¹ Hirdman 1974, p. 247.

means that they will call from the offices of the Social Democrats and ask if we can't come over for a talk."³²

As mentioned above, the goal was the construction of a "Democratic Bloc" together with the Social Democrats. If this Bloc could be set up, it would mean that the majority of the workers' parties in parliament and other assemblies could have taken significant steps towards first democracy, and then socialism. To further this cause, Hagberg, declared the party to be "benevolently cautious" towards the Social Democrats, and the party declared itself to no longer be in opposition, because the Post-War Programme was the common programme of the entire workers movement.³³

To this end, the Social Democrats were allies in the struggle for socialism, marking a total shift from the rethorics of the party just a decade earlier.

The last major shift that this text will touch upon is the view of the bourgeois state, as it plays a vital role in the peaceful transition to socialism – in the theoretical journal of the party, one could read that the Swedish road to socialism "builds upon the Swedish democracy."³⁴

The state: transform it or smash it?

In the analyses of the Swedish communist during this time, it is clear that the state becomes more and more detached from capitalism and its material basis: the state ceases to be a tool in the hands of the ruling class, intimately connected to it, and instead becomes an almost neutral tool that has been commandeered by the ruling class. This means that it is also possible for the working class to break the domination of the capitalists over it and to use it for their own purposes.

Carl-Henrik Hermansson, member of the Central Committee explained that even though the working class had advanced its positions within the state apparatus, it was still "mainly an organ for the exercise of power for the bourgeoisie."³⁵ In connection with this, he specified the immediate objects of the communist party:

To conquer such position within the state apparatus for the communist party and the workers' movement that a real exercise of power in society becomes possible for the communist party.

This perspective reveals a number of things, but most importantly, it establishes that the power of the bourgeoisie over the state apparatus is temporary and can be broken, while at the same time connecting the wielding of power with the influence over the state – the more influence, the more power can be exercised. In turn, this signifies the start of a shift from non-parliamentary actions to parliamentary politics.

In an attempt to anticipate a critique from the left, Hermansson adds that this approach cannot be compared to that of the Social Democrats. While they officially adhere to the theory of gradual and slow evolution into socialism, which entails passivity from the side of the working class, the strengthening of the communist party in the state apparatus presupposes an increase in the activity of the working class.³⁶ Of course, in hindsight, it is easy to see that the policy of the communists passified the working class as well.

³² Sven Linderot, quoted in Olsson 1976, p. 188.

³³ Hilding Hagberg, quoted in Olsson 1976, p. 193; Sven Linderot, quoted in Hermansson 1984, p. 80-81.

³⁴ Olsson 1976, p. 192.

³⁵ Carl-Henrik Hermansson, quoted in Hermansson 1984, p. 69

³⁶ Carl-Henrik Hermansson, quoted in Hermansson 1984, p. 69.

Hagberg, in his speech on the congress of 1944, claimed that in order for state power to pass into the hands of the working class, a political majority was not enough. For this to happen

[a]ll significant state organs need to pass into the hands of the working class. Through the seizure of these organs of power, and through directing the legislative and executive branches of government against the old capitalist order of production, the seizure of the means of production by society could be ensured.³⁷

Not only Hagberg and Linderot expressed themselves in this vein, but also Nils Holmberg, who we quoted earlier, saying that the struggle for soviets was inadvisable, and that the task of the communist party was to put the old, bourgeois organs for power into the service of the working class. To this, he added that "[y]ou need to transform them, give them another content and other authorities."³⁸

The view that the bourgeois state was not the inevitable tool of the bourgeois was thus firmly established within the party, and it was seen as possible for the communists and the workers to utilize its power to establish socialism.

Within the context of democracy-reaction, the main obstacle to the democratization of the state apparatus was the reactionary parties and the control over the police, military, courts and prisons.³⁹ Thanks to this, they could

[s]low down the tempo of the parliamentary efforts at reform in an oftentimes ludicrous way, which in turn, which in term foments a lack of respect amongst the masses for the national parliament, giving rise to a tendency to view the national parliament as non-independent and weak.⁴⁰

Logically, the new view of the bourgeois state also entailed a different approach to it. Earlier, during the era of the Comintern, the programme explicitly called for the destruction of the bourgeois state, Linderot himself viewed the national, regional and municipal assemblies as arenas for agitation. Now, the communists worked to restore the confidence of the workers in the bourgeois parliament, making a sharp turn from their earlier view of the parliamentary institutions under capitalism.

Conclusions

With this text, we have tried to analyze the development of the Communist Party of Sweden during and after World War II, as well as the role of the Social Democrats, critically. What we have found is this:

- **The programme and ideology of the communist party must remain revolutionary, regardless of whether or not the situation is revolutionary.** The misinterpretation of the leadership of the SKP that non-revolutionary times needed a non-revolutionary programme had serious consequences for the communist movement in Sweden and affects us to this day. The objective of the communists remains revolution, in both revolutionary and non-revolutionary times. Even though the weight of existing socialism in 1945 seemed overwhelming, which produced ideas of a peaceful road to socialism, we now know that this possibility does not exist – the peaceful road to socialism means adapting to capitalism.
- **Revisionism and opportunism do not occur in giant leaps, but through small changes, which in themselves can seem harmless.** It would have been impossible for the SKP in 1945

³⁷ Holmberg 1982, p. 39.

³⁸ Nils Holmberg, quoted in Lindkvist 1982, p. 51.

³⁹ Olsson 1976, p. 189.

⁴⁰ Sven Linderot, quoted in Olsson 1976, p. 189.

to transform into the Left Party Communists of the 1960's in one go – the reaction would have been too strong. Instead, this transformation occurred through small steps, where each step produced a new ideological and political outlook, enabling further steps to be taken. The abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat gives us a clear example. When the SKP abandoned it in 1943, it was not replaced immediately with something concrete, but was simply removed, which opened up different possibilities to interpret the transition to socialism, eventually opening the door to the peaceful transition. One step leads to another, which highlights the importance of never taking that first step.

- **It is not possible to change the class character of the bourgeois state – even though it can be forced to concessions, it remains integrated in the bourgeois class.** The struggle to transform the state from within and to win a certain amount of power in it shifted focus from the building of workers' power within the workers' own organization to the strengthening of the parties parliamentary positions. This led to the weakening of the union work and the revolutionary potential of the party. We have shown the material basis of this belief, but we must be clear: the bourgeois state cannot be transformed or used in socialist construction – it remains the task of the communists to break the confidence of the masses in the state and to reveal its class character. This means that we cannot be fooled by the fact that the bourgeois state has provided a certain measure of welfare to the working class and other exploiter strata of the Swedish population. The provision of this welfare was a by-product of what the Swedish monopolies needed at this certain period of time, but at the same time, the militancy of the workers pushed through other aspects of this welfare, not necessarily connected to the increase in productivity of the monopolies. This served to effectivize the reproduction of the workforce, providing a stable material basis for the expansion of Swedish monopoly capital. The construction of the Swedish welfare state was carried out by monopoly capital on the orders of the state. The building of public housing, to take one example, enabled a significant expansion for the construction companies, laying the foundation for their expansion throughout the world.
- **The united and popular fronts laid the foundations to the conciliatory attitudes towards Social Democracy.** When Dimitrov in 1935 laid out the plans for the united and popular fronts, it meant a shift in the attitude towards Social Democracy. This new view was expanded upon by the Swedish communists and eventually led them to make significant accommodations in relation to the Social Democrats, removing key parts of marxism-leninism in favor of a gradualistic, reformist point of view. The united and popular front introduced another set of contradictions, fascism-democracy, which was further developed by the respective communist parties. In Sweden, the contradiction fascism-democracy was replaced by the contradiction reaction-democracy after the Second World War, which led the party even further away from a scientific analysis of the economic system of capitalism. This shift has affected the communist movement in Sweden until this day, leading many communists to see the struggle against "right-wing politics" or the Sweden Democrats as the top priority. This tendency necessarily means a whitewashing of "left-wing politics" within the framework of capitalism, disregarding the fact that the politics of the Left Party is just as capitalist as that of the right-wing parties.
- **Social Democracy remains an enemy of the working class in the struggle for socialism.** As mentioned above, the popular and united fronts opened the door for a conciliatory stance towards Social Democracy, seeing them as allies in the struggle for socialism. This view of Social Democracy is a key element in the theory of the peaceful transition to socialism and disregards the fact that the function and role of Social Democracy is to keep the workers within the framework of capitalism, channeling their discontent and anger in such a way that

the system itself is not threatened. It is no coincidence that the Social Democrats unleashed the most furious attacks against the communists and together with the secret police spent decades monitoring the activity of the communists. The task of communists in relation to Social Democrats is to break their influence over the workers, exposing the role of Social Democracy in maintaining the capitalist system.