

## SWEDEN AND THE WEST

### Neutrality or Co-operation

By Herbert Tingsten

[The following account of the public debate on foreign policy in Sweden, both preceding and resulting from the North Atlantic security pact proposal, has been written by Professor Herbert Tingsten at the request of the "Manchester Guardian." As editor-in-chief of "Dagens Nyheter," a Liberal newspaper with the biggest circulation of any Swedish daily, Professor Tingsten has consistently advocated closer collaboration with Western Europe and the United States.]

The debate on a possible reorientation of Sweden's foreign policy, which has been going on for a year now, has produced three main lines of thought. Sweden's traditional policy has been that the country remain outside all alliances and any form of political or military co-operation with other countries: this was the dominating opinion until one year ago. But in May, 1948, the Government proposed that discussions be held with Norway and Denmark concerning a Scandinavian defence pact which would require each one of the three countries to declare war if one of the members of the pact were attacked.

After a series of conferences between representatives of the three countries in January this year, at Karlstad, Copenhagen, and Oslo, this second line broke down. The principal difference of opinion was between Norway and Sweden. All three countries were agreed that a Scandinavian defence pact would necessitate importing arms and other war material from the United States, which should, therefore, be approached on the matter. But while Norway wanted a clear-cut tie-up with the Western Powers—not necessarily through joining the Atlantic Pact but at least through negotiations concerning some form of direct military assistance from the United States—the Swedish Government wanted to keep a Scandinavian alliance outside all such blocks both formally and in reality, and therefore turned down the Norwegian proposal. After this failure to form a Scandinavian alliance the isolated neutrality line has once again become dominant in Swedish policy.

A third line, which has also been in evidence throughout this debate would have Sweden combine Scandinavian alliance with Western co-operation. Those who support this line believe that Sweden should ask the Western Powers for guarantees of help in case of attack while planning and organising the reception of such help in case of war, preferably without the unconditional clause regarding mutual assistance which it is assumed will be included in the Atlantic Pact. The American Senate's Vandenberg Resolution has played an important part in this argument.

#### SCANDINAVIAN ALLIANCE

What are the causes and motives of these divergent viewpoints? First of all, it should be emphasised that, on the one hand, a Scandinavian alliance can be interpreted as a sort of expansion of Sweden's neutrality policy and, on the other, as a step towards co-operation with the Western Powers. As it stands, therefore, such an alliance has been able to win support from all parties, with the exception of the Communists. One group hoped that the Swedish neutrality policy would overcome Norway's tendency towards co-operation with the West, while another group hoped that Norway would succeed in winning Sweden over to the idea of Western orientation. Consequently, it is primarily the case for unconditional neutrality on the one hand and for co-operation with the West on the other which requires analysis.

Sweden's neutral policy clearly has a special historical background. Sweden has not taken part in any war for 130 years; it remained outside both world wars. The main

argument for neutrality is the possibility of being able to remain outside a third war. It is reasoned that if Sweden—or Scandinavia—were to co-operate with the West it would be drawn into a new world conflict the day war was declared. On the other hand, if Sweden were not a member of any block there would be a chance of maintaining the peace, at least for a little while. Even a few weeks of respite might mean that the risk of occupation would be considerably diminished. It is further argued that agreements with the Western Powers would increase the tension between both blocks and might thereby help to precipitate the very war which everyone is trying to avoid.

It is also claimed that if Sweden—or Scandinavia—were attacked by Russia help from the Western Powers would be forthcoming regardless of any agreements, because such help would be in the Western Powers' own interests. Finland also plays an important part in this argument. If Sweden were to give up its neutrality it is possible, if not certain, that Russia would occupy Finland or at least tighten up its hitherto fairly mild policy towards that country.

#### RUSSIA

But Sweden's adherence to the policy of neutrality is not unconditional, for apart from the Communists and a small group of extreme Social Democrats it is clear to everyone that under no circumstances would Sweden become involved in a war on the Russian side, since this would be the same as assisting in the downfall of Swedish freedom. Thus, when the necessity for help from abroad in case of war is brought up, it is help from the Western Powers against a Russian attack which is meant—though it is seldom stated in so many words.

The supporters of a Swedish alliance with the Western Powers use the well-known arguments heard in the international debate on the subject: democratic, humanitarian, peace-loving nations must join forces in order to defend themselves against Russian aggression. This is the way to maintain world peace. The risk of war in Sweden would be reduced considerably this way, while the prospects of Sweden's remaining outside a major world war, should one break out, would be practically nil. Moreover, the danger of a Russian attack on Sweden or Scandinavia as a whole would be reduced if the Russians knew that such an attack would lead to a world war, with effective Western aid promised to those attacked.

The view that help from the West could be counted on in any case is met with two different arguments. In the first place, such help is not certain, for the United States may look upon Sweden as a country whose worried policy of neutrality has banished it from the cultural community of the Western nations, and this might lead to indifference to Sweden's fate. In the second place—and this is more important—assistance that has been organised in advance is an entirely different thing from last-minute assistance. If help is discussed and organised beforehand, it can become effective within a few days or weeks. Otherwise, as pointed out by the military experts, it will take a much longer time. And this difference might well mean that there would be no help at all forthcoming if arrangements had not been made in good time, for the simple reason that the donor might consider such help ineffectual. A Scandinavian alliance having no ties with the West is seen as an unrealistic solution—Sweden cannot contribute satisfactorily to Norway's defence, and still less to Denmark's. Therefore, both these countries are in especially great need of assistance from the Western Powers.

Fear that an orientation toward the

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West would lead to increased Russian aggressiveness in various respects is regarded by this school of thought as exaggerated. If a completely neutral Swedish policy were conceivable, it is argued, there might be cause for worry. But the Russians know very well that such a policy is impossible and that Sweden, if forced to choose, would always take the side of the Western Powers. The fact that the Russians continuously accuse the Swedish Government of secret co-operation with the West and see in the Swedish pattern for a Scandinavian alliance an actual Western alliance is evidence enough of the impossibility of satisfying the Russian leaders except by unconditional acquiescence to their wishes. As for Finland, it is considered that the formation of a strong peace front would discourage Russian plans for its complete occupation. On the other hand, it would be absurd to allow Swedish foreign policy to be directed by Moscow just because Finland appears to be a hostage in the hands of the Soviet Union.

How strong are these various opinions in Sweden? A glance at the Riksdag reports on the subject gives the impression that there is almost complete agreement on the Government's neutral—or isolationist—policy. At the latest debate on February 9 only a few speakers, chiefly members of the liberal People's party, spoke up for Western co-operation. In general the so-called debates have consisted simply of a general statement by the Foreign Minister of his point of view, followed by vague, brief declarations of agreement in principle from the party leaders. The press too is dominated by this viewpoint, with the exception of a few liberal newspapers such as "Dagens Nyheter" and "Expressen" (Stockholm), "Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-Tidning," and several other respected provincial papers.

Critics of Sweden's policy point out, however, that the general agreement with the Government line and the lack of discussion in the debates are dictated to a great extent by tactical considerations. On many occasions both before and during the last war the Riksdag, and to a less extent the press, were inclined to conceal differences of opinion to the advantage of the Government's policy. For example, when Sweden asked Fin-

land in the early nineteen-twenties to give up the Aaland Islands statements in the Riksdag and in the press gave the impression that the whole country was behind the demand, although, as appeared later when the League of Nations turned down Sweden's demand, there were widely divergent views on the matter, and there was no positive public opinion on the question at all.

There are several reasons for this situation, which exists in other countries as well. Among other things, it is looked upon as a duty to support Government policy in relations abroad, and it is considered desirable to keep problems of foreign policy out of party politics. This would seem to be the case to-day. It is an open secret that the alleged unity is to a great extent fictitious and that the real differences of opinion in leading political quarters are not made known to the general public. Parliamentary debates are particularly misleading, because the indisputable fact that Sweden needs and counts on help from the Western Powers in case of attack has, for diplomatic reasons, not been openly and clearly stated. In the opinion of the critics, this subtlety may succeed not only in misleading the Russians, which it is presumably intended to do, but will also confuse the Western nations, on whose active sympathy Sweden's freedom depends.

It is impossible to give a clear picture of Swedish public opinion. The official version, as in similar cases before this, is that the country stands united behind the Government. Gallup polls show that the majority is neither well informed on the problem nor much concerned with it. However, a survey held last November showed that among those who have definite opinions the largest group wanted co-operation both with the Scandinavian countries and with the West. There is no doubt that the Government could get the majority of the people to support an orientation westward if it chose.

Finally, it should be pointed out that all Swedish democrats are united on one decisive point. There is no shadow of defeatism in their discussions. All are agreed that our defences must be strong, that Russian demands which encroach upon our national independence must be repulsed, and that aggression will be met with resistance to the bitter end.