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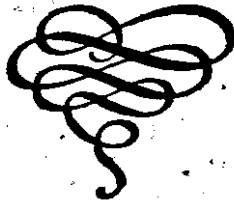
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SWEDEN

The
Middle Way

BY

Marquis W. Childs



YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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of a controlled capitalism that works

"The best political news in years".

Lewis Gannett in New York Herald Tribune

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The economic events of the last years have led a good many people to the conclusion that the ultimate choice of our ways of living together in the modern world is a choice between two poles—collectivism and individualism. They have forgotten that for a long time the countries of the Scandinavian peninsula have been living under a compromise system that perhaps more than any other lets man indulge himself in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Sweden, for example, has muzzled the rapacity of big business, has provided excellent cheap housing, decent living conditions for the working population, and first-rate products—chiefly by organizing the consumer. Utility rates there are the lowest in Europe, and utility services are provided for by a combination of government and private ownership that exploits no one. And all these obvious benefits are part of an intellectual renaissance. In this book Mr. Childs gives an excellent and complete picture of the adjustments that the Scandinavian countries have made to the machine age. He shows how a people can solve their economic problems by an exercise of common sense and reason as well as by revolt and terror. Here is an account of a system of government that worked and is still working, a system that enables men to produce and distribute goods for the general welfare, and at the same time has a high and proud place for human dignity.

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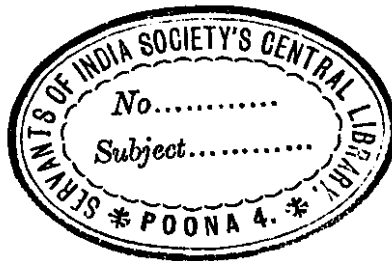


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SWEDEN

THE MIDDLE WAY

BY MARQUIS W. CHILDS



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TO
MY MOTHER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THERE has long been a considerable literature on Denmark in English, particularly about the folk schools. I have found this very useful. Olive D. Campbell's The Danish Folk School is an excellent history of the development of this unique institution.

Now a literature on Sweden has begun to accumulate. Within the past two years not only a general study but several books treating particular phases of Swedish life have appeared. The general reader will find Agnes Rothery's Sweden: The Land and the People bright and informative. Professor G. J. Ratzlaff is the author of The Scandinavian Unemployment Relief Program. Professor Walter Thompson has done The Control of Liquor in Sweden. Other American students are now at work in Sweden. The development of the trade unions deserves a separate book, as does the state power system. An extended treatment of the state monopolies would be valuable.

My debt to individuals is far greater than my debt to books. Inadequate as this expression of gratitude necessarily is, I must thank Victor Proetz for my original interest in Sweden; Tage Palm for making my first visit to Scandinavia possible, and for a keen and continuing interest in this book from its inception, which has resulted in invaluable aid; Carl Milles for his warm hospitality in Stockholm; Per Wijkman for sage advice and counsel. Without the assistance of Naboth Hedin, who has made of the American-Swedish News Exchange an authentic medium of international understanding, I should not have been able to complete the book on this side of the Atlantic; I am deeply in his debt not only for the aid that was a part of his office as director of the Exchange in New York but for consideration and kindness far beyond that. Likewise Mr. Nils Horney, the Stockholm representative of the Exchange, gave me great help, simplifying my approach to Sweden. My wife has assisted me with the preparation of this book at every step and I can never thank her adequately nor express my appreciation of her keen critical sense and her constant devotion.

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INTRODUCTION ✓

THE worship of bigness, particularly in the United States where it had become almost an official religion, has been subjected during the bitter years of the collapse to profound searching. There is a more general recognition of the bearing that geography may have upon economics and political science; a realization that political and economic theories may have spatial limitations. In the United States the grave dangers and difficulties of remote control, of Federalism, of government from a single city on the seaboard of a vast continent, are increasingly apparent; the inevitable outgrowth, it should scarcely be necessary to add, of the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few men in another city on the same seaboard. Likewise in Russia the trials and hardships entailed in the rule of diverse peoples scattered over an enormous area have become plain.

It is possible that certain smaller nations may have not only inherently greater powers of survival in a time of crisis but also a greater capacity for real progress. Above all others the Scandinavian countries seem to possess the strength that comes out of an ancient integration, a fundamental coherence. They are but a part, of course, of the delicate structure of international trade; they are not insulated from the shocks that disturb that precarious mechanism. But they have modified their internal economy in such a way that they are insured in part against these shocks. Standards of living that were as high as any in the world, especially in Sweden where industry is richer and more diverse, have been sustained through the grim years of the depression.

The modifications of the capitalist economy that have gone forward gradually in Sweden and Denmark, and to a lesser degree in Norway, during the past thirty years may be more apparent than real; more perceptible to the visitor than to the native. The high order of civilization that one finds in Scandinavia may be due merely to a keen awareness of the difficult place of small nations in the present world economy, height-

ened by proximity to embattled Europe. Or perhaps it may be explained away by certain basic characteristics—patience, intelligence, perseverance, courage—and by the remarkable homogeneity of this people.

But whatever the reason, there has been progress in these northern countries that the world-wide collapse has hindered but not destroyed. Social, political, and economic forms have had an opportunity to evolve apart from the national hatreds that again and again have distorted the face of Europe. For more than a hundred years the Scandinavian peninsula has been at peace; that one fact is sufficient to set Sweden and Norway apart from all the rest of the world. Denmark, considered a part of Scandinavia although actually attached to the continent, has not been able to escape the repercussions of continental rivalries.

Capitalism in the north, it seems to me, has been modified and, in a sense, controlled, the profit motive in many fields drastically curbed or abolished—subjugated might be a better word. To a considerable degree it is true that the domestic economy has been made to serve the greatest good of the greatest number.

A long, long struggle for existence toughened the Scandinavians. For centuries they warred with each other; with half the nations of Europe; and always with a land for the most part bleak and harsh. The sagas of the Vikings are proof that they had, to start with, tenacity, pride, and a fierce kind of bravery.

At a remarkably early period the rude forms of democracy began to evolve, as though they sprang from something inherent in the nature of the people. Men who were bold and shrewd were elected kings of Sweden whatever their birth or rank. The Stures and the Vasas became leaders of the people and then they were chosen to wear the crown. Very early the Riksdag assumed not only the form but something of the authority of a representative governing body. Of even more ancient tradition was the *Kommun*—the town meeting—the seed of democratic government.

As early as 862 the Swedes had made their own Rurik sovereign over the scattered tribes that occupied what is now Russia. They were to fight in later centuries a long line of Rus-

sian kings over the issue of supremacy in the Baltic. At one time dominion was complete—the Swedish flag floated over what is now Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Pomerania. In the never-ending wars of the seventeenth century Sweden, and Denmark, too, played an important part. While these imperialist wars disrupted the finances of the state, they were fought on foreign soil, often by mercenaries. The homeland was rarely invaded. Foreigners were seldom attracted to a rude, northern country where life was harsh and uncertain.

It became possible to identify other characteristics with the people of the north. One of the earliest adjectives of praise was *practical*. Scandinavian heroes had to have common sense as well as courage. To adjust one's self to circumstances shrewdly and practically was one of the highest virtues. The Reformation upset all the German provinces and raged fiercely through northern Europe, but in the Scandinavian peninsula the adjustment came about more or less peacefully, with little bloodshed. While they might imitate the spectacular and the gaudy, these qualities were not native to the Norsemen. Queen Christina found her Swedish countrymen dull, so dull, especially the clergy who surrounded her, that she surrendered the throne of Sweden. And they were not sorry to see this anomalous creature, volatile and unstable, depart.

At the outset of the Napoleonic wars Sweden was forced to retire from the war game. It had become so costly that only the most powerful players could afford the table stakes. And Sweden's finances were exhausted, her colonies entirely gone. She was forced to withdraw to her rocky promontory, thrust out into the cold slate-gray sea, and there order and conserve her resources in such a way that her people might sustain themselves.

Long after the industrial revolution had begun to change the face of England and much of the continent, Sweden remained remote and rural. As late as 1830, more than 80 per cent of the people lived off the soil, and by 1870 the population of the rural districts still constituted 72 per cent of the whole. Sparsely distributed over a wide area, the Swedish farmers played a part in a simple economy that retained a great deal out of the distant past, scarcely touched by the vast changes

which had occurred in the world outside. A shift in technique, based upon coal, all but destroyed the ancient Swedish iron industry; and England and the continent were only beginning to draw upon the great Swedish forest reserves for industrial purposes.

Only in a rather limited degree an inventive people, the Swedes, with the rapid development of native industry after 1860, began to borrow social and economic forms from the mainland of Europe and from England. These they adapted and modified to their own practical ends. War, growing out of imperialist expansion, the competitive scramble for colonies, devastated Europe again and again; but to the north it was in many respects as though a vast bell-jar sheltered Sweden and Norway from the violent national jealousies of the continent. Protected from imperialist rivalries by a wide strip of sea, the political and economic life of the Scandinavian countries achieved a slow, careful growth that was impossible on the mainland. Out of this evolutionary growth came a way of life that is characterized by certain fundamental distinctions—of stability, of order, of sanity—which set it quite apart.

Throughout the contemporary world there is evidence of the desperate absolutism, political and economic, to which nations have been driven. The struggle between the regressive forces of an outworn individualism and the new collective order has been overwhelming. A passionate feudalism has been one means of escape from this struggle. If anywhere in modern life a balance has been struck, it seems to me to have been in the Scandinavian peninsula, and particularly in Sweden.

This is hardly to suggest that it is Utopia, or even an approximation of Utopia. But out of an organic growth there has come, or so it appears today, a certain wholeness, a certain health, that is rare in the present period. It is a machine civilization; there are proportionately more telephones, more electrical devices, more automobiles in Stockholm than in any other European city; the rural areas are more completely electrified than anywhere else in the world, unless perhaps it be certain cantons in Switzerland. But the machine is not the master. From the past there has been preserved, if only in symbol, the pledge of man's ancient debt to earth and sea; his dependence

upon elemental forms of production, the fertility of the soil and the fecundity of animals.

It may be merely that the Swedes have made haste slowly; with that deliberate tempo of speech and manner which the world has found a little funny. They have fought shy of the arbitrary advances by which humanity has sought to pull itself up by its bootstraps. Their progress has rarely been marked by dogma.

The Swedes have kept their king, out of tradition, in part, of course; but they are well aware, too, that he serves certain simple human needs—for color, for legend, for symbol of the dignity and permanence of the state. On Walpurgis Eve bonfires on many a hilltop throughout the land blaze up in celebration of the return of the sun, not as the fetish of a newly discovered cult but as an ancient custom in remembrance of things long past. It is good to see the fishermen letting their round nets down into the water before the royal palace; an act that is somehow not "picturesque," not "quaint," in the heart of a modern city, but natural and right.

Capitalism has been controlled, it seems to me, in two ways. First, consumers' coöperation has developed slowly during the past four decades until today approximately one third of all retail trade and more than 10 per cent of wholesale trade and manufacture for domestic consumption are carried on by co-operatives without profit; and the implications of this, in low prices and high quality, reach out to the entire consuming population. Second, the state has competed so efficiently in many fields that private enterprise has been prevented from establishing extortionate monopolies. One must add the fact, the very important fact, of an all-powerful trade union movement. Sweden, because it is far more industrialized than Norway or Denmark, best illustrates these achievements. In Denmark the rural marketing coöperatives and the land system have had a unique development and in Norway the coöperative fisheries are an excellent example of collectivism grown out of an ancient need.

If the test is the good life for the greatest number, and now, here in this immediate present and in the immediate future, not in some distant and debatable tomorrow, then one may

well consider what has happened in these small countries; and without the condescension which in the past we have reserved for small things. For they have achieved a measure of peace and decent living that will serve, and for a long time to come perhaps, as a standard for larger nations.

M. W. C.

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