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# FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND POLITICS

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**Proportional Representation in Sweden.** Fifteen years ago the principle of majority elections became applicable to all phases of public life in Sweden; and along with the movement for democratization there developed the idea of proportional representation. This principle was urged especially by Conservatives, who feared that if elections to *Andra Kammaren* (the Lower House) should be based upon universal suffrage with the retention of the majority system, the Conservative party would be completely annihilated. The Liberals replied (this was the time when the opposition between Conservatives and Liberals dominated Swedish politics) that the Conservatives had sufficient influence through their position in *Första Kammaren* (the Upper House); their partiality for the majority system was also due to their sympathy with English parliamentarism.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, a small group of Liberals was won over to proportional representation, and by combining with this group the Conservatives in 1907 introduced both universal suffrage and the proportional system in elections to the Lower House. The Conservatives gained the support of the Liberals, however, on the condition that there should be a thorough democratization of the Upper House and that the proportional system should apply also in elections to that body.<sup>2</sup> Since the Upper House was elected by certain local bodies (*Landsting* or provincial assemblies, and the representatives of the communes), it was necessary to have these bodies also chosen by the proportional system, otherwise proportionality for the Upper House would have been mere empty form. The reform of 1907 brought about, then, the inauguration of proportional representation in elections to both the

<sup>1</sup> This view was presented especially by Staafl, at that time the leader of the Liberal party. After his death (1915) was published his great work, *Det demokratiska statsskicket (Democratic Government)*, 2 vols., Stockholm, 1917, dealing particularly with the constitutions of England, the United States, France, and Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> Wallengren, *Förstakammar frågan inför svenska riksdagen efter 1866* (The Question of the Upper House in the Swedish Riksdag after 1866), Lund, 1916.

Upper and Lower Houses of the Riksdag (Parliament), and also in large measure in communal elections.

This reform, which became definitively effective in 1909, was gradually applied, first to the elections for the Lower House in 1911. It is not, however, the system of 1907 that is now in force, for from that time to the present there have been a number of changes in the regulations concerning the general elections. In the first place, political and communal life has become considerably more democratic, particularly through the abolition in 1918 of plural voting in communal elections (together with an important change in the composition of the Upper House), and through the adoption of woman suffrage in 1919. In the second place, proportional representation has been more widely applied, especially in that in 1918 the autonomous popular assemblies in the rural communes (*kommunalstämorna*) throughout the larger part of the country were supplanted by representative assemblies (*kommunalfullmäktige*) chosen according to the principle of proportional representation. The public life of Sweden has therefore become thoroughly "proportionalized." Thirdly, the regulations adopted in 1907 were found to be technically unsatisfactory, and so various changes have been made in the method of election and particularly in the technical aspects of the system. In the main, the same principles apply to all elections, and what is said in the following about the conduct of elections to the Lower House will in essentials apply to the Upper House and to the communal assemblies.

For the purpose of elections to the Lower House, the country is divided into 28 election districts, which coincide, as a general rule, with the provinces or local administrative districts. The number of representatives from each district is based upon population, and at present is from 3 to 16. The result of the election is determined within each district for itself, and hence there is no method, as in some other countries, for adjusting the seats according to the total vote in the country as a whole.

Voting is by ballot, on which appears first the party designation (the party name or some other distinctive label), and thereafter the names of the candidates.<sup>3</sup> There are three steps in the counting of the

<sup>3</sup> At elections for the Lower House, a few names may also appear under the party designation (in accordance with a change adopted this year), labeled either as "minority" or as "factional" candidates. The purpose of this is to facilitate coöperation at elections between groups and parties that are closely in sympathy, but that still do not care to give up their independent position. For the sake of

ballots. In the first place, the ballots are arranged according to the party designation. Secondly, the order in which candidates within each party are to be considered for office is determined, according to their absolute numerical order.<sup>4</sup> If the names of A, B, and C are checked on the ballot in that order, then the ballot is not counted for B until A has been elected, nor for C until both A and B have been elected, and so on. If the party as a whole has used the same list, the arrangement of names on this list is the determining factor. If there are different groupings, as often happens, the lists of these respective groups compete with one another, so to speak, within the party, according to their respective electoral strength.<sup>5</sup> In the third place, the seats are distributed among the parties as units, even though split into factions, the d'Hondt plan being followed in this distribution. The votes are counted for each seat separately, and seats are then allotted in turn to the party which, at each count, shows the largest comparative vote. This comparative vote is the total party vote so long as the party has not been allotted a seat; after that it is determined each time by dividing the total party vote by the number of seats allotted plus one.<sup>6</sup> The seats assigned to a party are distributed among its candidates in the order described above.

simplicity, the regulations concerning this matter will be disregarded in this paper, and the party designation will be assumed to be changed finally.

<sup>4</sup> The regulations governing this so-called d'Hondt plan were worked out by the Swedish mathematician, Phragmén. They are found in the laws concerning elections to the Riksdag, sec. 19. Cf. *Proportionsvalsakknungas betänkande, II* (Stockholm, 1921), which is the basis for the rules now in force. For the manner in which these regulations work, see especially Von Heidenstam, *Några iakttagelser från 1921 års riksdagsmannaval* (*Some Observations on the Election of Members of the Riksdag in 1921*), Stockholm, 1922.

<sup>5</sup> In the case of minority or factional designations, the result is that these "factionals" in their contests with other "factionals," become important because of their united strength, regardless of the final results within these factional lists.

<sup>6</sup> For example, if the Conservatives cast 10,000 votes, the Agrarians 8,000, the Independents 4,000, and the Social Democrats 21,000, with 7 seats to be distributed, the result would be as follows:

- (1) Social Democrats (comparative vote = 21,000)
- (2) Social Democrats (comparative vote = 10,500)
- (3) Conservatives (comparative vote = 10,000)
- (4) Agrarians (comparative vote = 8,000)
- (5) Social Democrats (comparative vote = 7,000)
- (6) Social Democrats (comparative vote = 5,250)
- (7) Conservatives (comparative vote = 5,000)

In estimating the system of proportional representation in Sweden, several considerations are especially worthy of mention. It has often been alleged in public discussion that proportional representation has strengthened the influence of parties and weakened that of personalities, that it has, in a word, mechanized political and communal life. It is not difficult to understand how this view has arisen, for it is a fact that political life, and also to a certain extent communal life, changed more and more during the last decades from contests between personalities to tests of strength between parties. Twenty-five years ago the party system was still in its beginning. At that time there had already developed to some extent united parties in the Riksdag (parliament), which placed their stamp on the work of that body, and naturally these opposing elements were manifest also at the elections. But the campaigns were not conducted or directed by party organizations embracing the entire country, and communal life was affected even less.

Now the situation is quite otherwise. There are well-developed party organizations, not by any means as effective as those in the United States, to be sure, nor so autocratically organized, but rather depending in great measure upon the intelligent local opinion. However, the parties do appear under all circumstances as units, and what particular persons are elected is of less interest than the number of seats secured by each party. The work of the Riksdag, also, often depends more upon allegiance to a party than upon individual judgments. These are phenomena which are well-known in other countries, and which in general (and this should be emphasized) have not yet become so conspicuous in Sweden as in many other places.<sup>7</sup> They are, nevertheless, regretted very much by those who favor the older ideal of a highly intelligent, free and independent representative assembly, acting on its own best judgment; and hence there is much talk, in these quarters, about a regime of party and boss rule.

It is easy to understand also that people from various quarters should look upon these changes as the result of proportional representation, and a few have for this reason favored a return to the majority system, or at least some modification of the proportional system that would make the elections less partisan.<sup>8</sup> It seems clear to me, however, that greater partisanship would have developed, even though the majority system had been retained. In fact, it does not seem improbable that

<sup>7</sup> The members of the Swedish Riksdag have, on the whole, a very high reputation.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. especially *Proportionsvalssakkunigas, op. cit.*, note 4.

this phenomenon would have been even more marked, had not proportional representation been introduced. Parties are unavoidable, and the majority system requires of the voter a firmer discipline during elections than does the proportional system; for under the rules used in Sweden the individual is permitted to follow his own desires in the choice of persons, without thereby injuring the common interests of the party. It should be noted that the changes in election methods, which have taken place since 1907, were intended to increase individual freedom of choice within the party.<sup>9</sup> It seems clear, therefore, that the strengthening of party ties, which has taken place since 1907, is the result of democratization rather than of proportional representation.

Another question arises concerning the effect of proportional representation upon the party groupings themselves. It is well-known that the majority system has a tendency to hinder the growth of a large number of smaller parties and groups, in that it does not permit them to gain power; and, on the other hand, that the proportional system is unfavorable to the large party organizations of the English or American type. A glance at the political situation in Sweden reveals the fact that the number of parties has grown during recent years until at the present time there are six. Of these the principal parties are the Social Democrats (104 in the Lower House) and the Conservatives (65). In addition there are Communists (5), Independents (23), and Liberals (4), who together make up the remnants of the former dominant Liberal party; and, finally, the Agrarian party (23). The value of proportional representation in producing this result is doubtless in its advantage to the party rather than in promoting party unity. There is no doubt that the method of election used in Sweden secures representation for even comparatively small groups, and it follows that a voter, who desires his vote to count, need not adhere to either of the two larger parties in his district. It may happen, to be sure, as has often been the experience in Sweden, that the stronger parties will be to a certain extent over-represented, but it is not possible, particularly since the election districts were given eight representatives, for the larger parties to swallow up the smaller ones completely.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> It was not until 1921 that the "absolute numerical order" was introduced. Before that time a dominant group might, without intending it, completely overturn the expectations of the party leadership, and bring about a meaningless election result. There was, therefore, a strong tendency to avoid such dominance.

<sup>10</sup> The election districts were smaller before 1921. For the general elections in Sweden from 1911 to 1921, see a comprehensive statistical study by Grönlund, in *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 1924, pp. 214-257.

In view of these characteristic features of the system of proportional representation, it is a question whether the development might not have been otherwise if the majority system had been retained. It is a question whether the development might not then have led to less splitting of the representative groups, with the result that a few parties would have become so strong that each might have striven for majority control. This possibility need not be disputed, but one must remember that the development of the party system is not determined solely by the method of election, but also by other circumstances.

The party system in Sweden has always been, to a certain extent, a reflection of the natural division into classes and interests. In order that a few parties should continue to hold a dominant position, despite these divisions in the community, it would be necessary either that these class divisions correspond roughly to party lines, or else that each of the parties be able to arouse confidence and win support independently of class and interest. Neither of these assumptions is entirely warranted in Sweden. There is, to be sure, one class, the industrial workers, which is sufficiently numerous to form the foundation for a party structure of some consequence, namely, the Social Democratic party. But, on the other hand, there is no unified bourgeois group, but rather, as in most countries, a number of diverse classes and interests. Consequently, the natural groupings within the community are not of such a nature as to furnish the foundation for large parties. If the nonsocialist parties should, in fact, become more unified ("bourgeois union" is now often suggested), there would then be a two-party system based upon social distinctions, and therefore not subject to the influence of changing opinions, which in England gave power now to the Tories, now to the Whigs. Such a system would not at all come up to the ideal that was in the minds of opponents of proportional representation several decades ago.

The other possibility is that the parties might win support, to a certain extent, independently of the natural divisions within the community, through the overwhelming power of their principles. It is, in fact, something of this sort that was thought to be possible under the majority system. It was assumed that these principles would bring about party alignments which would not appeal to the interests of any particular class, but which would—as did the Tories and Whigs of the classical parliamentary period—appear as real national parties, seek-



ing by their programs to compromise the conflicting interests of the classes, which must be done somehow.

It does not seem likely that the majority system would have operated in this way, had it been continued. Even in the countries of its origin, the two-party system has now developed a tendency to split up, and class divisions are more and more evident. In Sweden this tendency would doubtless be more marked, even under the majority system, since large parties based upon important national principles have never actually existed in Swedish history. There are in Sweden no political traditions which would hold together the large party organizations and check the natural tendency to split up into smaller groups. It should be remembered that in Sweden, a country where political liberty has existed at all times as in England, this liberty has pertained more particularly to the various groups in the community, such as the nobility, the clergy, the burghers, and the peasants. The "class Riksdag," made up of these four groups, which existed for more than two centuries before it was replaced by the two-house system in 1865, was a sort of class representation; and during that time it became ingrained into Swedish consciousness that the Riksdag should properly reflect to a certain extent the actual organization of the community. It was not at the elections, but in the Riksdag, that the important decisions were made through agreements between the various groups. The political life of the state centered about the four joint committees (of the Riksdag), where the positive results were obtained by compromising between the different views. Such practices became indelibly stamped on the nation's history.

It is not necessary to determine whether this tradition has been for good or for evil; it need only be stated as a fact. From the abolition of the class Riksdag in 1865 to the electoral reform of 1907, the history of Sweden shows no decided tendency toward the growth of large parties in the English or American sense. During that time, as before, the Riksdag was for the most part a heterogeneous body, composed of a relatively large number of varying groups and points of view, through the compromise of which decisions were reached. The most important factor was always the joint committee of the two houses, and there has never been a situation where one party governed alone. The Swedish people are therefore accustomed to the guaranty against abuse and misuse of power, even though inadequate, which consists in the necessity of reconciling the various elements in every problem before the



Riksdag. It is true that the Liberal party, which dominated the Lower House during the period before the reform of 1907, seemed, by virtue of its inclusiveness, to promise a party of the English type. But there is no reason to suppose that this condition, which has now entirely disappeared, would have continued had the majority system been retained.

In brief, large national parties are an unknown element in Sweden, and have no root in Swedish traditions. It is, therefore, not correct to say that proportional representation has killed them. Had not the proportional system been introduced, the very social conditions would have prevented the development of such parties; and they would have had to overcome the opposition which arises out of the fact that the two-party system would have required a reorganization, so to speak, of the whole political mechanism.

This distribution in representation, which therefore is an important element in the Swedish state system, is obviously related to the question of the form of government. The Swedish government, as is well known, is in the main of a decidedly dual character, and has often quite justly been compared with that of the United States.<sup>11</sup> In theory the King selects his advisers freely; but for more than three-quarters of a century the Riksdag has had an important influence in the selection of the government, in part negatively, in that the attitude of the Riksdag has actually forced ministers to resign, and in part positively, in that recently the King has found it necessary to seek his advisers among those who have the confidence of the Riksdag.<sup>12</sup>

It is, of course, clear that a parliament so divided as is the Swedish Riksdag can operate negatively more easily than positively. Since there has rarely been a party which alone controlled a majority in the Lower House (and never one which at the same time controlled both houses), it is not easy to obtain a positive expression of the desires of the Riksdag with respect to the conduct of the government. The situation is the more complicated in that, with respect to the selection of the government, account must be taken of the party situation, not only in the Lower House but also in the Upper. The principle that both houses

<sup>11</sup> Fahlbeck, *Sveriges författning och den moderna parlamentarismen (Sweden's Constitution and Modern Parliamentarism)*, Lund, 1904; Rexius, *Presidentmaktens renässans i Förenta Staterna (The Renaissance of the Presidency in the United States)*, Uppsala, 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Kihlberg, *Den svenska ministären under ståndsriksdag och tvåkammarssystem (Swedish Ministries under the Class-Riksdag and under the Two-House System)*, Uppsala, 1922.

are of equal authority is not mere empty form in Sweden.<sup>13</sup> Every government desires at least to be able to count upon a majority of the total membership of the Riksdag (150 in the Upper House and 230 in the Lower), because in the so-called "joint voting," when the votes of both houses are counted together, budget matters could be decided in spite of the opposition of one house. For several decades, however, it has been the fixed rule that the government should be supported in one way or another by the dominant political group; to this extent it may be proper to call the Swedish system parliamentary. But the rule is very uncertain in its application, and one cannot demand that a party shall have an absolute majority in order to form a government, for that condition, as suggested, has never been realized. The specific situation at each governmental crisis becomes the determining factor, and most often the conditions are such that various solutions are possible.

It is, therefore, in respect to this matter that the most noteworthy consequences result from the party divisions in the Riksdag. A government based upon one majority party has not been seen in the recent history of Sweden. Lindman's Conservative government (1906-1911) had a majority in the Upper House and on joint ballot, but not in the Lower House. Staaff, at the height of his Liberal government (1911-1914), had a strong center party to build upon, and could get support on various questions from the Right or the Left ("jumping parliamentarism"), but he did not have a majority.

In default of majority parties, a coalition of parties may naturally serve as a support for a government. Such a situation existed from 1917 to 1920, when Eden relied upon a strong majority of Liberals and Social Democrats in the Lower House, and at the same time controlled the joint voting. Since that time the difficulties have become almost chronic. The present government is the fifth since the spring of 1920, and one of them, resulting from an especially chaotic situation in 1921, was an experiment in unparliamentary government. The other four have been more or less characteristic party governments, supported by minorities and therefore compelled to govern by continual negotiations and agreements with other parties, particularly with the Center parties, which have therefore (like the "wagon tongue") gained an influence out

<sup>13</sup> Before 1918, while the Upper House was still based upon the "census", and the Lower House was thus numerically the most representative of the popular will, the Left parties maintained the principle of "Lower House Parliamentarism." Since both houses are now about equally democratic, it is generally acknowledged that the Upper House should be completely equal in authority to the Lower.

of proportion to their numerical strength. One of these (that of Trygger, 1923–1924) relied upon the Right, as did Hammarskjöld (1914–1917) and Swartz (1917). The other three were Social Democratic (with Branting as premier), and have in each instance had a larger number of votes to rely upon, but not a majority. They have, therefore, in spite of the gradual tendency toward a majority position, been compelled to seek support from other parties, and as a result have each time met greater rather than less difficulties.

There are thus seen to be many tendencies in Sweden at the present time toward weakness in the government. The crux of the situation is clearly in the Riksdag and more particularly in the joint committees (as above described), which at present may be characterized as more powerful than ever before. The situation approaches more nearly “congressionalism” than parliamentarism, and the cause is in the party divisions and in the absence of majority parties. It cannot be denied that this condition is accentuated by proportional representation; but, in view of Swedish political traditions, it seems doubtful, as has already been suggested, whether the Riksdag, if constituted under the majority system, would show so much more of a disposition toward harmony as to serve as a foundation for parliamentarism along the lines of the English system. One may be doubtful on that point, when one considers that the entire history of the Riksdag, extending over centuries, does not show a single instance of a strong government on the parliamentary basis. The whole history of Sweden confirms the well-known theory that it is difficult to build an authoritative government on a democratic foundation.

Proportional representation is still too new in Sweden for one to pass sure judgment on its working and on its prospects for the future. As has been shown, there are various elements that are always critical of it. In spite of criticisms of the manner in which the principles have been applied, and in spite of observations with respect to the serious consequences in important districts, there is no doubt that the people in general are fairly well satisfied with the system itself. No party advocates a return to the majority system; and the best proof that proportional representation is sound is in the fact that its fundamental principle (complete justice to all parties) accords so well with Swedish political traditions. This fundamental idea manifestly has no *a priori*, universal validity. In other countries it is considered quite proper that smaller parties should be completely vanquished, and that the domination of the victor should be complete. That point of view has doubtless much

in its favor under certain circumstances, but is inconsistent with Swedish thinking. There are in Sweden deep-rooted ideas about the right of the different classes, groups, and opinions to share in the government, and the Swedish people are satisfied that proportional representation promotes this just principle.

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**The German Presidential Election.** The recent presidential elections in Germany aroused world-wide interest in spite of the strictly limited constitutional powers of the president. For the first time the German voters were privileged to select the chief executive of the state.<sup>1</sup> The question whether they would turn to some one in sympathy with the pre-war regime or would select an adherent of the Weimar republican constitution was one the answer to which might have important bearings on European politics. Moreover, the personalities of the candidates, especially in the second election, were such as to add to the interest which both Germany's friends and foes felt in the outcome. The election of General Hindenburg, although it probably had less significance than was attached to it in many quarters, must be recognized as one of the major political events of post-war European history.

Shortly after the death of President Ebert on February 28 the party leaders began to make preparations for the coming elections.<sup>2</sup> The parties of the left advocated, not only an early election, but also the passage of a special law providing for a temporary president, on the ground that it was undesirable for the Chancellor to occupy also the presidential office for the period of two or three months.<sup>3</sup> Both these suggestions were accepted by the government. On March 9 the Reichstag set

<sup>14</sup> Translated by Fred Berquist, of the Robert Brookings Graduate School of Economics and Government, and Clarence A. Berdahl, of the University of Illinois.

<sup>1</sup> The first president, Frederick Ebert, who died February 28, was chosen by the Weimar Constituent Assembly in 1919.

<sup>2</sup> According to the German Constitution the president is elected for a full term of seven years. There is no vice president; hence in case of the death of the president an election is ordered at once. In the meanwhile the Chancellor acts as President.

<sup>3</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, March 3, 4-7; *Vossische Zeitung*, March 3. In the issue of March 6 the Democratic leader, Anton Erkelenz has an article in favor of a temporary president.