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SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN WELFARE CAPITALISM--
STRUCTURAL EROSION AND WELFARE BACKLASH?

Walter Korpi

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON

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ABSTRACT

Sweden is taken as a test case for postwar social science theories predicting that changes in class, stratification, and community structures accompanying industrialization will gradually erode the base for socialist voting and make the mobilization of the electorate by the socialist parties more difficult. It is further predicted that the maturation of the welfare state generates a "welfare backlash" against the social democratic parties. An analysis of long-term changes in social structure and socialist voting in Sweden does not support these hypotheses. An alternative interpretation is suggested in which the shape and changes in the power structure in society is taken as the starting point for the analysis of the possibilities and limitations for social democratic policies in advanced capitalist society.

Social Democracy in Welfare Capitalism--
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During the postwar period, the development of socialist voting in the western nations has been an important area of interest for political sociologists. The socialist vote has been seen as an indicator of the extent of inner conflicts in the advanced capitalist societies, and thus as a reflection of the nature of this society and of its changes. As the discussion among the scholars has addressed itself largely to the electoral difficulties experienced by the socialist parties in the post-war years, it has tended to project a rather bleak future for socialism under advanced capitalism.

The difficulties encountered by the socialist parties have often been seen as reflections of structural changes accompanying the development of industrialism. This line of thinking has been embedded in the body of thought often referred to as "pluralistic industrialism," which has dominated postwar social science and is more or less closely associated with writers and works such as Aron (1967), Bell (1960, 1972), Dahrendorf (1959), Galbraith (1967), Kerr, Dunlop, Harbinson, and Meyers (1973), Lipset (1960), Moore (1957), and Parsons (1966). In this body of thought, industrial technology is seen as the prime mover of societal change and as imposing a "logic of industrialization" on industrializing societies by making requirements on its labour force, for instance in terms of relatively high levels of education and skill. As industrialism advances, the stratification patterns of society are therefore expected to change: occupations will become more diversified, the middle strata will expand, and class lines

will become blurred. The structural basis of socialist voting is thus seen as being gradually eroded. In addition, increasing affluence is seen as leading to an "embourgeoisement" of the working class, which decreases its propensity for socialist voting (for a discussion of this thesis, see Goldthorpe, Beckhofer and Platt, 1968).

A basic assumption, often left implicit in this line of thinking, has been that "the middle mass"--the better-off workers and the middle socioeconomic strata--is not attracted to socialist or social democratic parties. These voters are also assumed to view negatively the costs and consequences of "welfare state" policies of a redistributive nature. It has been proposed that where they have been in power for a longer period, social democratic parties may therefore be subject to a "welfare backlash" (e.g., Wilensky, 1976; Hibbs, 1976). In the discussions of the reactions of voters to the policies of social democratic governments, however, relatively little attention has been given to the actual content and consequences of these policies for the voters.[1] Nor has much attention been paid to the conditions under which these policies have been shaped, especially not to the limitations on the policies of social democratic governments set by the structure of power prevailing in capitalist society. The policies of social democratic governments have, instead, generally been assumed to be redistributive and egalitarian, and as flowing more or less directly from the socialistic programs of these parties. The consequences for socialist voting of the possibility that social democratic governments may have been unable to carry out these types of policies and may even have found it necessary to assume responsibility for policies deviating from their programs, have thus not received much attention.

The present paper is focused on the development of socialist voting in what can perhaps be described as the leading "welfare state"--Sweden. The defeat in the 1976 elections of its Social Democratic government after a 44-year tenure has been taken by many as a confirmation of the theories envisaging a dispiriting future for socialist policies in the advanced western nations. Sweden therefore provides an interesting case, if not a strategic research site, for attempts at empirical testing of theories concerning the development and conditions of socialist voting in advanced capitalist nations.

1. CLASS, STRATIFICATION, AND VOTING

In the debate on the development of socialist voting in industrial, capitalist societies, it has generally been assumed that voting is largely a rational action, reflecting primarily the voter's perception of his self-interests and the relative utility to him of the policies the parties stand for.[2] The interests of the voters are assumed to be related to the stratification patterns in society. Since the political parties often reflect the stratification system along a left-right continuum, voting tends to become associated with occupational status. I will here assume that support for socialist parties can be seen as the political dimension of the class struggle in democratic capitalist nations, the economic dimension of which is carried out on the labour market and involves the labour unions.

Influential theories on democracy have assumed that the policies of the political parties are determined primarily by their competition for votes. This is assumed to bring their policies relatively close to each

other and close to the political center of gravity in the electorate (Downs, 1957). Such a theory, however, cannot explain why the political center of gravity varies along the left-right continuum between countries. Thus, for instance, the center of gravity in the electorate appears to be considerably further to the right in the United States and Canada than in Britain and France, where it in turn appears to be further to the right than in Sweden and Norway.

To explain such differences we have to consider the distribution of power resources in society. The competition between the parties starts from a baseline largely determined by the prevailing power structure in the society. The main sources of power in capitalist industrial societies are on the one hand, control over capital, and on the other hand, the number of wage-earners. The resources inherent in the number of wage-earners can be channelled through organizations for collective action, primarily unions and political parties. The extent to which collective action among the wage-earners takes place, however, is problematic. Power in society is mediated partly through the ideological systems, which influence the social consciousness of the citizens and thus are important for collective action and voting. The dominant value systems in capitalist society can be assumed to be supportive of its basic economic organization (e.g., Parkin, 1971).

I will assume here that the voters' perceptions of what policies a party stands for are formed to a large extent through their experiences of the policies the parties have become associated with in government position. This implies that there is an interactive relationship between the exercise of political power, the distribution of power resources in

society, and the political center of gravity in the electorate. For instance in countries like Sweden, where a social democratic party based on organizations for the mobilization of the wage-earners is in power, under certain circumstances the government may be able to carry out policies that facilitate the mobilization of the wage-earners. Consequently, it can gradually push the political center of gravity toward the left and make it necessary for the competing parties to adopt some of its policies in order to remain competetive.

Broadly speaking, the above processes appear to explain the gradual leftward shift in the political climate in Sweden since the 1930s. Somewhat paradoxically, they can also explain why the political wing of the labour movement has never been able to win much more than 50% of the electorate, whereas the unions have been able to organize the great majority of all workers and other wage-earners. The political parties reflect and are acting in relation to the stratification system in society. They can therefore adjust their policies and programs to attract new groups in order to remain competetive when the center of gravity in the electorate shifts along the left-right continuum. The unions, however, operate along the most important class dimension in capitalist society, encompassing the sellers and buyers of labour power. The lines of conflict based on class structure are relatively fixed and do not leave room for competetive adjustments.

2. THE SOCIALIST VOTE, 1911-1976

After gradual extensions of suffrage to men in the decade before World War I, in 1918 a coalition government of Liberals and Social

Democrats introduced universal suffrage for men and women, effective in the elections to the Riksdag in 1921. When looking at the changes in the socialist vote since this period, it is helpful to distinguish between the socialist proportion of the two-block vote and the mobilization by the socialist parties of the electorate, measured in terms of the proportion of all enfranchized citizens voting for the socialist parties.[3] Since the party split in 1917, the Social Democrats have had at least one small communist party to their left.

During the 1920s, the socialist parties were not able to markedly increase their share of the vote or the mobilization of the electorate (see Table 1). The three short lived Social Democratic minority governments in these years had neither the programs nor the political power to attack the main problem during this decade, the persistingly high levels of unemployment. In 1928, however, came an election of a type that could be called a "mobilizing election," which since then has characterized Swedish political development. In a mobilizing election, alternative policy packages are pitted against each other, the majority in the electorate is at stake, voting participation jumps, and is later maintained at this higher level.

The breakthrough for the Social Democrats, however, did not come until 1932, when they had developed a new program to combat the high level of unemployment during the Great Depression. This program was based on state intervention in the economy through expansive economic policies directed toward creating jobs and increasing the demand in the economy. With 50% of the vote given to the socialist parties, the Social Democrats this time were able to form a relatively strong government,

Table 1

Voting in Elections to the Riksdag in Sweden, 1911-1976
and in Communal Elections, 1954-1966
(in percentages)

Election Year	Voting Participation	Proportion of Enfranchised Citizens Voting for Socialist Bloc	Bourgeois Bloc	Socialist Proportion of Two-bloc vote
1911	57.0	16.2	40.5	28.5
1914	66.2	23.9	41.4	36.4
1917	65.8	25.6	39.8	39.2
1921	54.2	23.8	30.0	44.0
1924	53.0	24.4	28.5	46.2
1928	67.4	29.3	38.0	43.4
1932	67.6	33.7	33.2	50.0
1936	74.5	39.8	33.3	53.6
1940	70.3	40.1	29.4	58.0
1944	71.6	40.7	30.4	57.2
1948	83.0	43.2	39.1	52.4
1952	79.5	39.7	39.0	50.3
1954				52.2
1956	79.8	39.4	40.0	49.6
1958				50.8
1960	85.9	44.7	40.7	52.3
1962				54.3
1964	83.9	43.7	38.1	53.4
1966				48.6
1968	89.3	47.1	40.2	53.9
1970	88.3	44.2	42.0	51.2
1973	90.8	44.3	44.3	50.0
1976	91.8	43.4	46.4	48.4

and after a political deal with the Agrarians, to carry out their new program with considerable success. This increased their political following. In 1936 came a new mobilizing election that increased the socialist share of the electorate. Since the second chamber of the Riksdag reflected an older electoral opinion, however, there was no socialist majority in the Riksdag before World War II. In 1936, the Social Democrats formed a coalition government with the Agrarians.

During World War II, Sweden had a four-party coalition government under Social Democratic leadership. In the wartime elections, the Social Democratic Party markedly increased its share of the vote. In fact, it has not received as high a proportion of the vote since then. At the end of the World War the Social Democrats fought for a program intended to establish extensive welfare state measures, including enlarged social insurance programs and economic policies aimed toward full employment. In 1948 came a new mobilizing election, in which the bourgeois parties were nearly successful in unseating the Social Democratic government. During the 1950s, with the strong international tensions and difficult problems of economic stability, the Social Democrats were weakened. In 1951 they included the Agrarians into a coalition government.

Toward the end of the 1950s, however, the Social Democrats could again take the political initiative when their proposal for a supplementary pensions scheme developed into a major political struggle. The coalition with the Agrarians broke up in 1957. In the following struggles, the Social Democratic Party was again able to increase its support, especially in the mobilizing election in 1960. From several points of view, the 1960s became a successful decade for the Social Democrats. In the communal

elections in 1962, for the first time in the postwar period, the party received over 50% of the vote. Since the 1950s, however, the Swedish electorate appears to have become more volatile. Already in the 1966 communal elections, the party received its lowest share of votes so far in the postwar period. In 1968, only two years later, however, came a new mobilizing election, which the Social Democrats fought on the themes of full employment and increased equality. The Social Democrats again received over 50% of the vote and the highest proportion ever of the electorate. In the elections in 1970, 1973, and 1976, however, the party suffered three consecutive defeats.[4] After a stalemate between the two blocs in 1973, the bourgeois parties were able to unseat the Social Democratic government three years later.

It has been maintained that the peak of Social Democratic strength in the electorate came in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and that the party since then has been on a continuous decline resulting from structural changes in Swedish society, related especially to community structures and stratification patterns (Lindhagen, 1976). Such an interpretation is a close parallel to the hypotheses suggested by the "pluralistic industrialism" body of thought and the "embourgeoisement" thesis. In my opinion, however, this interpretation appears doubtful. Participation in the wartime elections was relatively low. The outcomes appear to reflect largely the personal popularity of the Social Democratic prime minister and the tense wartime situation, when Sweden was surrounded by the Nazi armies. I would like to suggest the alternative interpretation that the Social Democratic peak so far came in the 1960s, when the party mobilized its highest proportion of the electorate and twice received over 50% of

the vote. What becomes problematic from this latter point of view is the volatility of the election outcomes in the 1960s and the decline of Social Democratic support since 1968. In the following we will look at empirical data bearing on these two interpretations.

3. STRUCTURAL EROSION?

Let us now analyse to what extent we can explain changes in socialist voting in terms of changes in Swedish society of class, stratification, and community structures. In Sweden, industrialization started relatively late, in the 1870s. The changes in the composition of the economically active population can be traced in the censuses[5] (see Table 2). As in all industrializing countries, the most drastic change during this century in the occupational composition of the population is the decline of the agricultural population. In the 1970s, the Swedish farm population has declined almost to the level found in the United States and Britain. The proportion of entrepreneurs has remained small and relatively stable during the century. The salaried employees, however, have expanded, especially since the 1930s. The proportion of workers has remained relatively constant, somewhat above 50% throughout the century. Their composition, however, has changed as the decline of the farm workers has been compensated by an increase of workers in the secondary and tertiary sectors. In the late 1960s, the growth of the number of workers in manufacturing stagnated and even showed a slight reversal. Another change of significance in this context is that in recent years, married women have entered the labour market on a massive scale. The proportion of working married

Table 2

Distribution of the Economically Active Population in Sweden, 1870-1960 (in percentages)

Census Year	Occupational Category: Farmers and coworking family members	Other entrepreneurs	Salaried employees	Farm workers	Other workers	Total
1870	35.0	3.9	3.9	35.9	21.3	100
1880	33.7	4.4	4.4	31.7	25.8	100
1890	33.1	5.1	5.2	29.2	27.4	100
1900	31.3	5.7	6.1	24.2	32.7	100
1910	28.8	6.2	8.8	19.2	37.0	100
1920	23.4	5.4	11.8	16.8	42.6	100
1930	21.0	7.3	13.5	13.5	44.7	100
1940	18.2	8.2	20.4	8.6	44.6	100
1950	13.0	7.8	27.6	5.4	46.2	100
1960	8.7	6.6	34.9	2.7	47.1	100

women thus increased from 14% in 1950 to 23% in 1960 and to 58% in 1975. The previously large category of women in domestic services has all but disappeared. The increase in female employment has come primarily in the public sector.

The process of industrialization has also been one of urbanization. In the postwar period, the rural areas, especially those in the northern part of the country, have suffered a marked population decline. The cities have expanded with high-rise, multifamily housing at the outskirts of the older inner-city areas.

The structural changes described above have had varying and sometimes opposite consequences for the basis of socialist voting and for possibilities to mobilize the wage-earners into collective action. What is often forgotten in the discussions of the political effects of structural changes accompanying industrialization is that the most dramatic structural change in the western nations--the marked decline or near-disappearance of the farm population--has changed the class structure of society in a way that has widened the base for socialist voting. The decline of the farmers has made the wage-earners the overwhelming majority among the voters. In the 1970s, the wage-earners thus constituted about 90% of the Swedish electorate. Since they are wage-earners, the salaried employees constitute a potential base for socialist voting. In Sweden they have tended to support the socialist parties to a considerably greater extent than the farmers have.

Contrary to what is often assumed, the relative size of the working class in Sweden has remained fairly stable during this century (for a detailed analysis, see Therborn, 1976). The recent tendency toward a

stagnation and possible decline of the labour force in manufacturing industry, however, may contribute to making mobilization by the socialist parties more difficult. The most important single change in the postwar period that has made socialist mobilization more difficult is probably that the proportion of immigrant workers has increased. In the mid-1970s, the immigrant workers constitute somewhat more than 10% of the manual labour force.[6] The decrease in the proportion of housewives among married women as well as the increase of female employment outside domestic services, however, can be assumed to have facilitated socialist mobilization.

In the debate on the working class in the advanced capitalist societies, much attention has been paid to changes in the community contexts in which the workers are living (e.g., Goldthorpe et al., 1968). Stable working-class dominated communities and housing areas have been assumed to isolate the workers from the "bourgeois hegemony" in the wider society and to provide an important precondition for collective action and socialist voting. These hypotheses have also been seen as highly relevant in the Swedish context (Lindhagen and Nilsson, 1971). At least in Sweden, however, there appears to be little empirical evidence to support these hypotheses. In Sweden, the socialist labour movement had its breakthrough in the larger cities, which have a relatively mixed labour force composition. It met some difficulties in traditionally the most strongly working-class dominated communities--the one-plant company towns, usually built up around a relatively large steel or paper mill, where the workers are highly dependent on the dominant employer in the community and where patriarchal traditions prevail. Although there are some regional differences in voting patterns in Sweden, these patterns largely reflect differences

in the occupational composition of the electorate (Janson, 1961; Gustafsson, 1974). The rural areas and the small towns have not provided particularly favorable contexts for socialist mobilization. Although the postwar changes in community structures probably have worked in partly opposite directions, taken as a whole it appears that the process of urbanization has widened rather than narrowed structural possibilities for socialist mobilization.

4. UNIONISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

As indicated above, socialist voting is seen here as the political dimension of the collective actions of the wage-earners in the class struggle in democratic capitalist societies. Another, closely related aspect of the collective actions of the wage-earners is unionization. In a discussion of the consequences of structural changes for the potential for collective action among the wage-earners in the political arena, it is therefore also of interest to look at changes in the level and pattern of unionization, the second "dependent variable" in this context.

Among the manual workers, unionism had a relatively rapid breakthrough (see Table 3). The Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, the LO, was formed already in 1898. By 1906, about one-third of the male manual workers in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy were unionized. The disastrous general strike in 1909, however, halved the membership of the unions. Since then unionization has increased reaching a level of more than 90% in the 1960s. Among the female workers in the secondary and tertiary sectors, unionism accelerated in the 1930s and has now reached almost the same level as that among the men. In the postwar period, the

Table 3

Unionization among Different Categories of Wage-earners in Sweden, 1890 to 1975 (approximate percentages)

Year	Workers in the Secondary and Tertiary Sectors		Salaried employees
	Men	Women	
1890	2		
1900	14		
1906	35		
1910	18	4	
1920	45	14	
1930	63	15	
1940	82	48	25
1950	90	76	45
1960	95	94	50
1965	95	95	55
1975	95	95	70

principle of industrial unionism has come to completely dominate in the LO. The LO unions have increasingly begun to act unitedly, as a class organization under a centralized leadership.

By international standards, the unions among the salaried employees developed relatively early in Sweden. Legislation initiated by the Social Democrats in 1936, facilitated unionization in the white-collar sector. In the 1940s, the two main confederations of white-collar unions were formed: the large TCO, based on the principle of industrial or "vertical" unionism; and its smaller break-away organization, the SACO, a confederation of associations of professionals with academic education. The formation of the SACO can be seen as a reaction against the more egalitarian, vertical unionism in the TCO. In 1966 and 1971, the SACO was involved in large strikes in the public sector, intended to protect the relatively privileged position of its members. The second strike clearly failed. Since the 1960s, the LO and the TCO have been cooperating increasingly closely. In the wage-rounds of 1976, the white-collar and blue-collar unions in the private sector formed a bargaining coalition against the Swedish Employers' Confederation for the first time. Since the mid-1960s, unionization among the salaried employees has increased sharply. The membership of the white-collar unions has more than doubled and the level of organization has increased to about 70%.

Contrary to the predictions by social scientists of gradually decreasing levels of unionization and an increasingly fragmented union movement, becoming based on occupation rather than class (e.g., Kerr et al., 1973, p. 274; Galbraith, 1967, p. 224; Shorter and Tilly, 1974, pp. 151-154), the development and pattern of unions in Sweden shows no indications that

the structural conditions for collective action among the wage-earners have deteriorated. We find instead that toward the end of the 1970s, about 80% of the labour force is unionized and about 80% of the union members belong to industrial or vertical unions. In recent years, the unions have also been acting more and more as one coalition of wage-earners rather than as internally competing interest groups. The increasing stress in the TCO as well as in the LO on a "solidaristic wage policy," giving priority to wage increases for the lowest-paid employees, provides further indications that in Sweden, the competition between the wage-earners is now gradually being abolished.

5. OCCUPATION, CLASS, AND SOCIALIST VOTING

In analyses of changes in socialist voting, it is of interest to see how the voting patterns in different occupational groups have changed over time. The difference in left voting between manual and nonmanual groups is of special interest and is often referred to as an index of class voting (Alford, 1963). Since the nonmanual or middle class categories are highly heterogenous, however, this term is partly misleading. Surveys carried out since 1956 by the Central Bureau of Statistics in connection with the elections to the Riksdag provide a good data base for analyses of the changes in occupational or class voting in Sweden (Petersson, 1977, Chap. 2).

Summary indices of class voting, the Alford index and the Gini index (Korpi, 1972), show some decline in this period (see Table 4). A close inspection of Table 4, however, reveals interesting differences in the

changes in manual and nonmanual voting for the socialist parties from the period of socialist increase, 1956-68, to the period of socialist decrease with three consecutive defeats in the elections 1970-1976. The growth of the socialist vote up to 1968 was based on an increase in the nonmanual category. Among the manual workers, socialist voting in these elections remained relatively stable. The decline in socialist voting since 1968, however, has come primarily among the manual voters. In the nonmanual categories, the decline has been less pronounced.

The above shifts in the pattern of voting between different occupational groups are also reflected in the proportions of socialist voters in different age groups in manual and nonmanual categories. Since the 1960s, the younger nonmanuals tend to vote with the socialist parties considerably more often than the older ones, whereas we find a weaker tendency in the opposite direction among the manual groups (Petersson, 1977, Chap. 2; Korpi, 1978, pp. 278-80).

The data from the 1976 election survey also contain information that enables us to analyse changes in the relationship between intergenerational social mobility and socialist voting (Petersson, 1977, Chap. 2). As Table 5 indicates, the socially stable working-class individuals (whose fathers were in manual occupations and who themselves have manual occupations) vote with the socialist parties to a very high extent. Among them, no major differences are found between age groups. It would thus appear that the decline in socialist voting in recent years has not to any significant extent been based on desertions by the core of the working-class voters from the socialist parties. This finding therefore speaks against the interpretation that a dissolution of working-class communities

Table 4

Percent Socialist Vote Among Manual and Nonmanual Categories and Indices of Class Voting in Elections to the Swedish Riksdag, 1956-1976

	Election Year						
Occupation	1956	1960	1964	1968	1970	1973	1976
Manual	76	80	77	76	72	73	68
Nonmanual	23	25	30	34	32	29	32
Difference	53	55	47	42	39	44	36
Gini index (x100)	67	66	56	53	49	51	

Table 5

Percentage Socialist Voting in 1976 Elections to the Swedish Riksdag by Age, Intergenerational Social Mobility, and Present Class Position

	Age, years						
	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	Total
Stable working class	79	80	83	80	85	80	81
Downwardly mobile, working class	39	40	54	55	60	64	51
Upwardly mobile, middle class	44	49	54	42	44	32	46
Stable middle class	38	23	23	21	21	13	24
All	54	46	52	48	52	47	50

and neighborhoods has been a major factor behind the difficulties encountered in recent years by the Social Democratic Party.

Among the downwardly mobile working-class persons (whose fathers held middle-class occupations) we find a decrease in socialist voting with age. This trend, however, need not herald a generational shift. As I have shown elsewhere, downwardly mobile manual workers show a marked increase in the socialist voting after having been exposed for a decade or so to the work-related "socialist subculture" prevailing among manual workers at the workplaces in Swedish industry (Korpi, 1978, pp. 292-300).

Among the upwardly mobile middle-class voters (whose fathers were in manual occupations) we find an almost curvilinear relationship between age and socialist voting and a relatively large socialist vote. In contrast, for instance, to the Labour Party in Britain the Social Democratic Party has received stronger support from the middle-class groups. As we have seen this support is increasing. In the stable middle-class category, the younger persons tend to vote socialistic markedly more often than the older ones. This increase in left voting among the younger middle-class individuals appears to indicate a generational change and the rise of what might be called middle-class radicalism. This radicalization would also appear to be reflected in the fact that the level of unionization among the white-collar groups has expanded rapidly since the mid-1960s.

This middle-class radicalism is probably a reflection of several factors. The expansion of the white-collar occupations has probably changed the composition of the salaried employees, decreasing the relative

share of persons among them who participate in the exercise of managerial authority. The expansion of the white-collar occupations has also made the wages of the salaried employees an increasingly important cost factor for the employers, which, together with rapid inflation, has made the salaried employees more dependent upon collective efforts and thus on the unions. As Åberg (1977) has shown, the younger salaried employees have also experienced unemployment much more often than the older ones, among whom the threat of unemployment was a rare experience. The radicalization of the cultural climate in Sweden in connection with the protest movement against the American war in Vietnam probably acted as a catalyst in the process of middle-class radicalization.

The effects of the increase of middle-class radicalism have been especially noticeable in the Communist Party, where the marked dominance of working-class voters has declined and new categories of well-educated, younger salaried employees have entered. The radicalization of the middle-class has also drastically decreased the previously strong support from upper-middle-class groups for the Conservative Party. The rise of middle-class radicalism throws further doubts on the hypotheses that predict that basic structural changes in Swedish society are undermining the potential for socialist voting.

6. THE HISTORICAL COMPROMISE AND THE NEW CONFLICT STRATEGY

The foregoing analysis gives little support to the hypotheses that structural changes related to class, stratification, communities and neighbourhoods have gradually eroded the base for socialist voting and made it more difficult for the socialist parties to mobilize their voters.

On the contrary, the structural changes would, on the whole, appear to have widened rather than narrowed the base for socialist voting in Sweden. This interpretation is congruent with the hypothesis advanced above that the Social Democratic Party experienced its greatest electoral victories as late as in the 1960s. Since structural changes of the type discussed here usually occur slowly and do not tend to oscillate in direction, such changes apparently cannot account for the increasing volatility of the Swedish electorate in recent decades.

To explain the political problems experienced by the Swedish Social Democratic Party in the postwar period, it is necessary to consider also the actual policies it has been associated with as well as the conditions under which these policies have been shaped. The relative success of the 1932 Social Democratic government in carrying out its program to combat unemployment in the Great Depression increased electoral support for the party to the point that it could establish itself as a more or less permanent governmental party. This implied a drastic change in the power structure of Swedish society. From having been in the hands of a bourgeois government more or less closely allied with the holders of economic power, political power had now been separated from economic power and was controlled by a government closely allied with the union movement. Yet there was no overall socialist parliamentary majority before World War II. The relatively backward state of Swedish society, which still had a large agricultural and rural sector, made it unlikely that in the foreseeable future, the socialist parties could win a decisive majority in support for socialistic measures directly attacking the power of capital and the private enterprises. Against the background of a darkening international situation and some

danger of an increase of Naxi forces within the country, in the latter half of the 1930s the Social Democratic Party and the LO gradually entered into what might be called a "historical compromise" between labour and capital, which changed the strategies of conflict of the two opposed classes.

This historical compromise was based on the formula of cooperation between capital and labour in efforts to increase economic growth. The Social Democrats were prepared to grant private enterprise favorable conditions for capital accumulation and investments. The union movement came to largely accept technological changes and other efforts to increase productivity in the firms. Sweden, which up to this period had been one of the most strike-prone countries in the world, now became the country renowned for its industrial peace. This was largely a result of the fact that industrial conflict had lost its central importance as a way to affect the processes of distribution.[7] Besides being directed toward economic growth, however, from the point of view of the labour movement, the new conflict strategy had two additional prongs. It was also seen as a welfare strategy intended to improve the position of the wage-earners by using political power to affect the distribution of the results of increased economic growth and thereby to increase political support for the Social Democrats. Here full employment policies were central and were supported by fiscal, social, and educational policies. The third prong of this strategy was that economic growth would hasten the maturation of Swedish capitalism, thereby improving possibilities to achieve the long-run goals of the reformist socialistic labour movement.

The single most important aspect of the new conflict strategy for the wage-earners was probably the high level of employment it generated. In the inflation-unemployment dilemma faced by most western governments in the postwar period, the Swedish Social Democratic government clearly opted for full employment. This was of crucial importance not only for the living standards of the workers but also for their relative power in society and at the workplaces. The extensive social insurance programs the government inaugurated in the postwar years helped to decrease poverty by providing a safety net below which relatively few came to fall (Korpi, 1975). Income inequality appears to have decreased up to about 1950. Thereafter, however, income inequality among adult men has remained relatively stable.

But the new conflict strategy was a result of a compromise, necessitated by the fact that the labour movement was still weaker than the groups that commanded power resources based on capital. This new strategy therefore also came to have negative consequences for the wage-earners. The intensity of work probably was increased and the quality of work to some extent deteriorated as a result of increased mechanization and rationalization. In the postwar period, the growth strategy accelerated the migration of often reluctant workers and farmers from the countryside to the larger cities. In order to stimulate investments and thereby employment, the Social Democratic government facilitated the accumulation of capital through fiscal and economic policies favoring reinvestment of profits and discouraging dividends. The 1960s saw an increasingly rapid trend toward mergers of firms and an increasing skewness in the distribution of capital. The economic growth strategy was further associated with an increasing

centralization of decision-making procedures within the labour movement and later also in local government. In the 1970s, the Social Democratic commitment to economic growth led the party leadership to support a program for the build-up of nuclear energy, which did not have support in the electorate.

7. WELFARE BACKLASH?

The electoral setbacks for the Social Democratic parties in Scandinavia in the 1970s have been widely interpreted as a "tax-welfare backlash," reflecting that "people are happy to consume government services but are increasingly restive about paying for them" (Wilensky, 1976, p. 8). Decreasing Social Democratic support and the rise of bourgeois "protest parties" associated with the names of Glistrup in Denmark and Lange in Norway have been seen primarily as reflections of the possibility "that a critical threshold had been reached in the level of public expenditure and the burden of taxation" (Hibbs, 1976, p. 39). According to this interpretation, the electoral defeats of the Social Democrats are the result of welfare state policies that have been carried close to their completion and then rejected by the voters.

In Sweden, however, the setbacks for the Social Democrats do not appear to have been based on a "welfare backlash" to any significant extent. On the contrary, when the Conservative Party proposed the withdrawal of some social benefits in the 1960s, it met with rather sharp disapproval from the electorate. Although public opinion polls show relatively large proportions of voters agreeing with general statements to the effect that "the state should reduce rather than increase benefits

and supports" to the citizens (Särlvik, 1977), since the 1960s the bourgeois parties have not judged this to be an issue that would improve their electoral prospects. They have, instead, been anxious not to propose anything the Social Democrats could label as "social disarmament."

Wilensky (1976) seeks the main sources of variation between countries in welfare backlash in more or less nonrational factors, that is, in the degree of visibility of taxation and the extent to which various aspects of a "corporatist democracy" can contain the dissatisfaction with the welfare state. He does not, however, pay much attention to the way in which the citizens actually benefit from the welfare state measures. I would like to suggest that what can be called the degree of inclusiveness of welfare state programs is of central importance to the way in which these programs affect the citizens and therefore the extent to which they are accepted. In some countries, for instance in the United States, welfare programs are focussed primarily on the poorest minority of the population, defined as those below a "poverty line." These programs thus have a low degree of inclusiveness. In Sweden, on the contrary, the welfare state measures cut across the population so that most households benefit from several programs. The high inclusiveness of the Swedish welfare state measures contributes to their relatively broad acceptance. Since these programs do not create a dividing line between a poor minority deriving the benefits from the programs, and the majority carrying their costs, it is difficult to make the welfare state into the focus of political attack.

I would like to advance the hypothesis that the setbacks for the social democratic parties in the past decade do not so much reflect the

"maturation" of the welfare state and the rejection of the voters of social democratic policies when fully realized but are, instead, based on the fact that these parties have been unable to achieve basic parts of their program, primarily those relating to full employment, and have had to rely on policies to maintain economic growth that have been partly rejected by the voters. The world-wide economic depression, which since the late 1960s has combined high unemployment with rapid inflation, hit the Scandinavian countries severely. The Social Democratic as well as the bourgeois governments were largely unable to cope with this "stagflation." To maintain economic growth, the Social Democratic parties in Denmark and Norway decided to seek entry into the European Economic Community. This move brought the issue of national independence into politics. In both countries, it severely split the Social Democratic parties and discredited their leadership, which already was tarnished by its inability to cope with the stagflation. The splits in the Social Democratic parties, in combination with the unsuccessful efforts of the established parties to find viable solutions to the problems connected with stagflation, were crucial conditions for the rise of the bourgeois protest parties.

In Sweden, the complicated interplay between the positive and negative consequences of the historical compromise and the policies intended to increase economic growth can be traced throughout the postwar period. While the full employment policy and the welfare state measures created the foundation of Social Democratic electoral strength, the policies necessitated by the efforts to maintain economic growth came to partly undermine this foundation. As a result of their policies to stimulate economic growth, the Swedish Social Democrats gradually came to be associated

with a "techno-structure" favouring large-scale enterprise, technical efficiency, centralization, and rapid urbanization. When the destruction of the environment became a political issue in the 1960s, the Social Democrats were placed in a defensive position because of their association with the economic growth efforts.

In the 1960s, the Center Party (up to 1956 the Agrarian Party) was able to successfully expand its base from the rural to the urban areas, primarily by building up a new constituency around the issues of decentralization, opposition to the rapid urbanization, "regional balance" in employment opportunities, and protection of the environment. To the extent that the geographically mobile workers in the new housing areas in the city suburbs have voted for the Center Party, it need not have been a result of the breakup of closely knit working-class communities that exposed them to bourgeois values. It could reflect, instead, that they saw themselves as victims of Social Democratic policies that led to pressures to migrate--high rents and at least temporarily pressing problems in the new, unstable housing areas. In connection with the energy crises in the 1970s, the Social Democrats became identified with a program for the build-up of nuclear reactors, something that the Center party was able to use to its advantage.

In most of the election campaigns in postwar Sweden, the issue of full employment has been central and a basic source of Social Democratic strength. The outcomes of the elections in 1968, 1970, and 1973 would appear largely to reflect the voters' judgements of which government would best be able to maintain a high level of employment. As shown in Table 6, the election victory of the Social Democrats in 1968 was associated

Table 6

Distribution of Preelection Responses to the Question "Which Government Do You Think Is Best Able to Safeguard Full Employment in This Country, a Social Democratic or a Bourgeois Government?" 1968-1976 (in percentages)

Election Year	Social Democratic Government	Bourgeois Government	Difference
1968	48	28	20
1970	29	35	-6
1973	30	40	-10
1976	38	27	11

Note: "Don't know" and "No difference" responses deleted.

Source: SIFO (1976).

with a marked advantage for the party with respect to trust in the electorate concerning the employment issue. The losses in the two following elections, on the contrary, were associated with an advantage for the bourgeois government alternative on this issue. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the proportion of the population having to rely on means-tested social assistance, a sensitive indicator of changes in working-class standards of living, increased drastically (Korpi, 1975). As a reflection of an improved record with regard to full employment, however, the Social Democratic government had a lead on the employment issue before the 1976 elections. This time, however, the election was fought largely on other issues, primarily nuclear energy.

9. THE 1976 SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC DEFEAT

Although the changes in the distribution of votes from the 1973 to the 1976 elections were relatively small, they broke a 44-year period of Social Democratic hold over the government.[8] The small net change, however, was the result of quite dramatic shifts in the electorate in the period between the elections. Pubic opinion polls indicate that after the stalemate between the two blocs in the 1973 election, the Social Democratic Party markedly increased its support. During most of the period 1974-75, the socialist bloc had a 1-2% advantage over the bourgeois bloc. From February to April 1976, however, the support for the Social Democratic Party came down about 5%. This drastic decline coincided in time with an intensive focussing in the mass media on a series of "affairs" within the Social Democratic Party, the unions, and the public bureaucracy.[9]

Measured by international standards, these affairs would not appear to be very serious. In combination, however, they created a widespread uneasiness with the Social Democrats as a ruling party. Presumably, the increasingly centralized forms for decision making in local government and within the labour movement provided an important sounding-board for the campaign on these issues in the mass media.

Two of the most important issues in the election campaign came to be nuclear energy and the new proposal by the LO for the gradual collectivization of profits of private firms into funds under the control of the wage-earners. The opinion polls show that from the very low starting point in the Spring of 1976, the Social Democrats were able to markedly improve their position up to the last weeks before election day. During its last weeks the election campaign focussed almost exclusively on the issues of nuclear energy. The leader of the Center Party, who was the alternative candidate for the position as prime minister, took an extraordinarily firm stand on this issue. He committed himself and his party not to participate in any build-up of nuclear power stations and to stop the existing ones before 1985. The Social Democrats were the only party to defend a limited expansion of nuclear energy to complement the strong Swedish dependence on the import of oil.

A large-scale survey of voting intentions, carried out during the two-week period just before the election day, September 19, gives us the possibility of following the day by day changes in the support for the parties during the crucial final days of the election campaign. When we cumulate the responses on voting intentions among the persons interviewed up to a specific day, and compute the difference between the

predictions arrived at on the basis of this partial set of responses with the predictions arrived at when the whole sample was interviewed, we find that the Social Democrats appear to have suffered a loss of about 3% during the last two weeks of the election campaign, whereas the Center Party appears to have gained about as much (see Table 7).[10] These changes occurred when the debate on nuclear energy was in its most intensive stage and would appear to reflect the reactions by the voters to the standpoints taken by the two main contenders in this debate. The observed changes would not appear to be methodological artifacts, since they were not repeated in the three other surveys carried out in 1976 with identical methods, two before and one after the September elections.

A panel study with interviews before as well as after the election also indicates that the Social Democrats lost while the Center Party gained during the last weeks of the campaign. Data further indicate that criticism of the Social Democratic position on the issue of nuclear energy increased toward the end of the election campaign (Petersson, 1977, Chap. 4). A survey carried out after the election indicates that nuclear energy became increasingly important for voters, who made their voting decisions close to election day. Among voters saying that they had already made up their minds during the spring or earlier, 23% mentioned nuclear energy as being of "very great importance" for their party choices, a figure that rose to 30% among those who had decided in the summer and early fall, and to 39% among those who made their party decision during the week before election day.[11]

In the last survey, 9% mentioned nuclear energy as being the single decisive issue for their voting decision, whereas 4% mentioned the LO

Table 7

Differences in Voting Intentions Predicted on the Basis of Cumulated Interviews up to a Specific Day during a Two-Week Interviewing Period Preceding the Election September 19, 1976, and in Parallel Surveys in February, April and November 1976

Responses Cumulated Up to Interview Day Number	September 6-18, 1976		February, April and November 1976	
	Social Democrats	Center Party	Social Democrats	Center Party
1-2	3.7	-2.9	0.4	-0.4
3	3.2	-1.4	0.3	-0.5
4	2.2	-1.0	0.1	0.0
5	2.2	-1.2	0.1	0.1
6	1.8	-0.9	0.1	0.2
7	2.0	-1.1	0.0	0.2
8	1.2	-0.6	0.2	0.1
9	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.0
10	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0
11	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0
12-13	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0

proposal on wage-earners' funds. The proposal on the wage-earners' funds tended to polarize the electorate, drawing both support and criticism for the Social Democratic Party; but, on the whole, it hurt the party more than it helped it (Petersson, 1977, Chap. 4 and 5). The importance of this issue, however, was overshadowed by the questions of nuclear energy.

In spite of the election loss and the outburst of negative opinions against the party in early 1976, the Social Democratic Party was not discredited when it assumed the role as a party in opposition. Opinion polls indicate that during the first year of the term of the bourgeois government, the socialist bloc had increased its support in the electorate and had a very marked lead over the new government.

10. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, STRUCTURAL CHANGE, AND POLITICAL ACTION

The Swedish case indicates that the changes taking place in class and occupational structures with the advancement of industrialization need not be detrimental to the base and potential for mobilization of socialist parties. By making wage-earners the overwhelming majority in the electorate, the process of industrialization widens the base of potential support for parties that attempt to channel into political action the conflicts of interest between sellers and buyers of labour power. Although urbanization would appear to generally increase the potential for socialist mobilization, changes in community structures and housing patterns during the postwar period may have had contradictory consequences for this potential. Considerably more significant would appear to be the increasing importance of the mass media on the formation

of the social consciousness of the citizens, and the marked dominance in these media of values supportive of institutions of existing economic organization of production.

The preceding analysis indicates, however, that probably the most important factors affecting the fortunes of the social democratic parties in recent decades have been the outcomes for the wage-earners of the policies these parties have become associated with in government position. The content and effects of these policies, in turn, have been largely determined by the prevailing structure of power in capitalist society, which sets limits to the political choices open to social democratic governments and sets the terms for the compromises these governments have to make. The Swedish Social Democratic government has been successful in strengthening its political support and in moving the political center of gravity in the electorate to the left. Social Democratic policies have drawn support from, and have in turn supported, the development of organizations for collective action among wage-earners, which more and more have come to act as coalitions of wage-earners and are basing their actions on a common class position rather than on sectional or occupational interests. The negative aspects of the strong reliance on economic growth that the Social Democrats have become associated with as a result of the compromise between capital and labour, as well as the increasing political difficulties for welfare policies in the period of stagflation, however, have undercut Social Democratic support in the 1970s.

NOTES

[1]Recently, however, the consequences of social democratic policies have received increased attention (e.g., Hewitt, 1977).

[2]Communist voting, however, has often been seen as nonrational. For a discussion, see Korpi (1971).

[3]Since the 1930s, Swedish politics has been dominated by five parties: the three bourgeois parties--the Conservative Party, the Peoples' Party, and the Agrarian Party (since 1956 the Center Party); and the socialist parties, including the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Parties.

[4]A reform of the constitution, effective in 1970, abolished the bicameral Riksdag, the first chamber of which had been indirectly elected in connection with the communal elections taking place in the mid-terms of the four-year periods of the second chamber of the Riksdag. In its place came a unicameral Riksdag, reelected every third year.

[5]Up to 1965, the censuses have made a distinction between workers and salaried employees. For an analysis of long-term changes of occupational groupings in Sweden, see Carlsson (1966), from which the present data are adapted.

[6]The majority of immigrants are manual workers and come from countries included in the common Nordic labour market, primarily Finland, but a sizable proportion also comes from southern Europe. In the 1970s, the restrictions on immigration have been increased. At the same time efforts have been made to avoid creating a subproletariat of immigrants. In 1976, immigrants with three year residence in Sweden were given the right to

vote in communal and regional elections. The Social Democrats have proposed that immigrants also be given the right to vote in elections to the Riksdag.

[7]For a more detailed discussion of the background to this historical compromise and of its consequences, see Korpi (1978).

[8]In comparison with the 1973 election, the Social Democrats lost 0.9% of the vote.

[9]The most publicized case abroad was probably the ordering by a Stockholm prosecutor of the arrest of Ingemar Bergman on the suspicion that he had used a firm in Switzerland for purposes of tax evasion.

[10]I wish to thank Staffan Sollander of the Central Bureau of Statistics for computing these data for me from the Survey of Party preferences. Figures not given here show no important changes for the other parties during the weeks before the election. The September survey included 1924 interviews of which 687 were conducted during the first two days of the interview period. The three other quarterly surveys during 1976 included 18,670 respondents altogether.

[11]I wish to thank Ronney Henningsson for making these data available for me. The sample size in this mail survey was 700.

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