

Chapter 2 Before terrorism: Controlling crowds and opinion

Before terrorism became a policy problem, the issue of safeguarding national sovereignty and security from internal, non-military threats was a matter of keeping subversive forces under control. At the same time, the wave of radicalism that swept over most of the industrialized world implied law and order problems. These two rather different policy problems merged to form a platform for counter-terrorism policies, not least because the core of the radical movement overlapped with the subversive elements of society. Here we will see how this development came about and how critical challenges played in.

2.1 Old and new security issues

2.1.1 Counter-subversion: A legacy of Red Scare

In the two first decades following World War II, several Swedish citizens were sentenced for spying for the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1963, a Swedish Air Force Colonel named Stig Wennerström was caught and later sentenced for gross espionage. The so-called Wennerström affair was the theretofore most severe case of espionage in Swedish history (SOU 2002:87). These espionage cases created a fear over Soviet intentions in Sweden and were accompanied by other skirmishes. In 1953, for instance, a Swedish reconnoiter plane was shot down by the Soviet Air Force over the Baltic Sea, the so-called Catalina affair. Also, developments within the Soviet Union and demonstrations of Soviet force

in Eastern Europe contributed to Swedish fear of the Soviet Union and communism. Subversive forces with Soviet connections constituted the overall threat frame for Säpo. "Tracking down Soviet spies was more or less what our business was about," Deputy Director of Säpo Olof Frånstedt remembers of this time (Frånstedt 2003).

Since Wennerström was an officer in the Swedish Armed Forces, the affair had a major influence on vetting job applicants in certain sectors; it was important to map out potential security risks and make sure they were blocked at an early stage when applying for sensitive posts (for the most part within the police or the defense sectors). It was primarily followers of communist parties and other such factions who were subject to this mapping. Carl Persson is supposed to have said that, apart from those who could be believed to run errands for foreign powers, "people who, in a situation of domestic instability, could be feared to lead or actively support attempts to overthrow the society, with or without violence, should be registered" (SOU 2002:87, p. 329).

2.1.2 Radical movements and large-scale manifestations

As the wave of radicalism gathered momentum, one of the most tangible changes seen was the emergence of large-scale manifestations. Throughout the second half of the 1960s, demonstrations against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, as well as pro-FNL and PLO rallies were common. On display during these demonstrations was a clash between the society of rules, laws and institutions – represented in particular by the police – and upholders of the radical movement. The radicals did not necessarily recognize the legal status of governmental authorities and were therefore disinclined to apply for permission to carry out demonstrations. These often ended at the American or Israeli embassies, where flags were burnt. Burning flags and desecrating national symbols was illegal in Sweden and hence something that the police were supposed to take action against.

In June 1966, a large-scale manifestation took place in Stockholm that protested U.S. involvement in Vietnam while showing support for the Vietnamese people. American flags were burnt and riots took place. Police officers on the scene documented the event with cameras; demonstrators were photographed and filmed. Säpo was widely criticized in the media, leading Justice Minister Kling to call a press conference where he clarified Säpo's legal rights to gather information about people who might be involved in subversive activities. The statements were later that year discussed in the second chamber of Parliament (Protocol 1966:38 § 7). The head of Säpo, Vinge (1988: 77-81) maintains that the filming had rather been carried out by local police to collect evidence for legal proceedings related to the crimes that had been committed (burning flags

and organizing a demonstration without permission). Regardless of who documented the event and for what purposes, Säpo did not come out stronger.

From 1968, as “the radical generation” lived up to its name in much of the industrialized world, a few Swedish rioting incidents are worth mentioning in this account. Inspired by the events in Paris in May 1968, Swedish radicals marched to the Opera House in Stockholm, where they tried to break in. When this failed, they instead went to the student union building, which they occupied. For the local police this was a law and order issue. They decided to encircle the building and let people out but not in. The National Police Board sent an observer to the scene and when the local police commander needed someone to inform the legitimate leadership of the student union, the representative from the National Police Board was chosen. The event was heavily covered in the media, and the National Police Board representative also gave a TV interview on the proceedings of the operation. The Stockholm police commissioner considered this an infringement on his territory (Falkenstam 1983: 61-62).

Later the same month, Sweden was supposed to play a Davis Cup tennis match against Rhodesia in Stockholm. Because of the risk for riots, the match was moved to Båstad, some 600 km southwest of Stockholm. The National Police Board sent three observers, which were not warmly embraced by the local police commissioner. Severe riots broke out where the police used water canons to scatter the crowd and the match had to be cancelled. In a report, the National Police Board directed harsh criticism towards the local police for not accepting the expertise that they had offered prior to the match (Ibid.).

For the local police, the large-scale demonstrations implied problems for upholding law and order. For at least some parts of Säpo, radical groups were feared to harbor subversive elements, for which reason they had an interest in closely monitoring these manifestations. Maintaining law and order at large-scale manifestations also exposed problems between the local police – who had formal responsibility for crowd-control within their police districts – and the National Police Board, which monitored the events (SOU 2002:87 p. 291–292). The former felt that the latter interfered in their jurisdiction (Falkenstam 1983: 61-64).

Embassies, in particular the American, were popular terminal points for radical manifestations, where flags were burnt and other national symbols were insulted. FNL groups made it a habit to join traditional socialist May 1st demonstrations, from which they either broke off to gather in front of an embassy, or desecrated flags in their own procession. The National Police Board observed that the organizers of these manifestations did not do much to prevent such things from taking place (RPS 1969).

2.2 Säpo, IB and the Law on Personnel Monitoring

In order to uncover subversive elements, the state police and from 1965 Säpo registered individuals whom they for some reason found suspicious. These registrations were not related to ongoing investigations and were therefore not meant to lead to indictments, being instead of a general search nature. Often it was a matter of monitoring, and if possible preventing, recruiting efforts by foreign powers' intelligence services (Vinge 1988). But the net was cast wide and encircled many people associated with political extremism, particularly those to the left of the Social Democrats.

A second use of the register was for so-called "personnel control" purposes. Before employing a person in a sensitive national security post, the employer contacted Säpo to see if that person was registered. If so, the employer then assessed whether the annotation had any bearing on the position in question. A limited law on personnel control existed during World War II, but was extended by royal decree in 1961 to also apply to non-military personnel who could then be controlled by their respective company or authority (SOU 2002:87, p. 282).

In 1965, Parliament instituted a law on registration, which made it lawful for the police – both local and Säpo – to create files on people whom they found suspicious, or likely to commit subversive crimes. Parliament passed the law without controversy (see Protocol 1966:38 § 7).

On 13 December 1966 the issue of monitoring citizens was taken up in a parliamentary interpellation with justice minister Herman Kling. This was a direct consequence of riots that had broken out during a Vietnam demonstration earlier that year, or rather as a consequence of a memo that the justice minister wrote in defense of the police after the incident (Protocol 1966:38 § 7). Communist party leader Hermansson wanted to know if Säpo registered people on the basis of their opinion and if the rumors that 300,000 people were registered were true. Kling answered that the grounds for registering people was, and needed to be, secret and that the numbers were irrelevant, since those who informed Säpo of suspicious people or activities were also registered (Ibid.); he deferred further discussions on the topic until the committee set up after the Wennerström affair had presented its report.

The committee presented its report in January 1968 (SOU 1968:4). They found no reason to regulate what information Säpo could register. They however suggested that the regulations for providing employers with information from individuals' Säpo files should be re-evaluated and that the principles for registering individuals should be more open. Influential actors such as the

Justice Ombudsman and the Attorney General backed the committee's report (SOU 2002:87 p. 289).

The Cabinet declared that it would go a step further than the committee regarding registration issues. In June 1969, the Cabinet passed a Law on Personnel Monitoring, according to which registration based solely on political opinion was prohibited; more concrete suspicions of criminal activities needed to be present (SFS 1969:446).

At the same time, the Cabinet gave classified instructions to Säpo (HT 15) specifying that membership of an organization or expressions of opinion were insufficient grounds for registration. However, people who by their actions could be suspected to undermine the rule of law or Sweden's sovereignty should be registered. Example of such actions could be active participation in an organization with revolutionary ambitions.

In December 1970, Säpo and the National Police Board redrafted HT 15, with the new instructions (HT 16) entering into effect on 1 January 1971. Regarding the prohibition on registration based on political opinion:

It is however well known that certain political extremist parties advocate objectives that aim at subverting the democratic society by violent means. The risk is obvious that people who are members or sympathizers of such groups are prepared to participate in anti-social activities. Such persons must therefore be controlled by the security service (SOU 2002:87 p. 310).⁷

Apart from Säpo, the military intelligence service also kept files on potentially subversive elements, primarily abroad. From 1958, one military intelligence section (the so-called B-office) also started registering Swedish citizens and events. The B-office moved out from the defense premises and in 1965 merged with another section. The new organization was called IB (Information Bureau), one part of which gathered information on Swedish citizens whom they suspected could engage in subversive activities such as sabotage. IB was too secret to publicly exist, and worked under the auspices of the Supreme Commander. The existence of IB was also known within the Cabinet and Säpo leadership (SOU 2002:87 p. 528–561).

After the Law on Personnel Monitoring was instituted, the Cabinet decided in September 1969 that IB's domestic activities would cease to exist; Säpo alone would be responsible for domestic surveillance on individuals. The domestic

⁷ The instructions mentioned five revolutionary, four anarchistic, seven Trotskyite, three Nazi organizations, and one organization based on refusal to do one's military service, that the National Police Board assessed were representing such subversive opinions (SOU 2002:87 p. 310–311).

activities of IB were however restarted in 1971, under whose initiative it is still unclear to this day (SOU 2002:87 p. 535–536).

The Law on Personnel Monitoring was a policy innovation insofar as it implied new intended goals, which went further than what the Wennerström affair committee had recommended. It also implied new program means for Säpo and to an even greater degree for IB, which was deprived of its domestic surveillance function. The secret existence of IB, however, and the fact that it resumed its domestic activities in 1971 – together with the secret instructions to Säpo – certainly leads to questions about what actually changed during this period and why.