9 The Swedish Senate, 1867–1970

From elitist moderniser to democratic subordinate

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Introduction

In January 1867, the new Swedish Parliament, the bicameral *Riksdag*, was established. This system would remain in place for more than one hundred years, until the introduction of the single-chamber Parliament in 1971 (elected in 1970), which is still in use today. During the first half of this period, the upper chamber (*Första kammaren*) was highly influential and central to the political debate. After the democratic breakthrough of 1917–1921, the ‘Senate’ (a term seldom used in Sweden) lost its role and eventually became almost insignificant. It was abolished without protests, strong passions or solemn ceremonies in 1970.

Discussing Sweden’s upper chamber up to the 1920s sheds some light on various important traits of Swedish political history. After some background on how and why the upper chamber was established, three questions will be discussed: 1) In what way did the organisation of the chamber – the veto held by the chamber, the strict rules for eligibility and the social character of its members – affect its power? 2) Which role did this elitist chamber play within the state’s project of modernisation, contrary to the principles of *laissez-faire*? 3) The upper chamber was a product of undemocratic, graduated voting rights – how did its members react to calls for democratisation?

The chamber’s history after 1921 will be mentioned only briefly, in the Epilogue. After the democratic breakthrough of 1917–1921, Sweden’s upper chamber lost its prominent place in the Swedish parliamentary system, even though the two chambers formally remained as equal as they had been since 1867.

Parliamentary reform in the 1860s – a background

In Sweden, reforms of the traditional four-estate *Riksdag* or even a total abolition of the old parliamentary estate system had been discussed since the *coup d’état* by a group of high-ranking officers and civil servants of 1809. During that eventful year, Finland was lost to the Russian tsar, and royal autocracy was replaced by monarchic constitutionalism, regularised in the Instrument of Government, a part of the constitution from 1809. The following year, a new dynasty, Bernadotte, was chosen, but it would take more than fifty years to reach an agreement

on a new parliament system built on the principle of individuality instead of the old corporate estate principle, which had its roots in medieval society. Intensive debates preceded this decision, with the critical moment taking place on 7 December 1865, when the House of Nobility accepted the proposal of a bicameral system (Nilsson 1994; cf. Metcalf 1987).

The four-estate parliament – the nobility, the clergy, the burghers and the peasantry – had emerged from a traditional division of society. Despite these ties to old traditions, social groups that were considered important to society were integrated into the political system to an increasing extent. Foundry owners and city landlords, who had not enjoyed parliamentary representation thus far, were, for example, allowed to sit in the estate of burghers. Through these adjustments of the four-estate *Riksdag*, nearly all well-to-do social groups were represented. The important role of the peasants in Swedish history was illustrated by the estate of the peasantry, consisting of freeholders, the wealthier class of peasants.

The bicameral *Riksdag* was founded during an era of liberalism in the 1850s and 1860s, which also saw the abolition of guilds and the establishment of free trade, local government, rights of inheritance for women and (partial) religious freedom. The leading statesman and architect of the parliamentary reform, Louis De Geer (1818–1896), was prime minister from 1858 to 1870 and from 1875 to 1880, although the term ‘prime minister’ was not used before 1876. Like many of his aristocratic friends, he became a civil servant, even though, unlike them, he was initially relatively poor. His talent, wide circle of contacts and marriage to the wealthy Caroline Wachtmeister helped him advance his career. One should also mention his political companion, Johan August Gripenstedt (1813–1874), who successfully pushed through decisive liberal reforms as the minister of finance, 1856–1866. Gripenstedt had continually represented his aristocratic family in the House of Nobility from 1840 to 1866 and was a member of the lower chamber between 1867 and 1873 (Nilsson 1989).

The liberals strongly supported the parliamentary reform of 1865–1866 (‘the representative reform’), sometimes describing it as a clear democratic victory. In reality, it was a compromise: it served as both a reform and a guarantee for maintaining the existing order. This conservation of the social system was also a prerequisite for De Geer. According to him, no important social group should lose its representation (Ekman 1966). The clergy, however, had lost much of its power, as only a few bishops and priests became members of the *Riksdag* after 1867. Instead, a special forum for deciding ecclesiastical issues was established, known as the ‘council of the church’. Half of the members were laymen; the other half, priests. There were also permanent members, such as bishops. The council was independent of Parliament and could veto proposals on church matters.

Organisation and character

Joint elections to both chambers were perhaps the most important new element in the Swedish Parliament. The two chambers would be different but equal. They had the same number of representatives in the parliamentary joint committees,

and each chamber could vote against – and stop – legislative proposals. The king could also veto decisions he disliked. Another element of the royal prerogative was the right to appoint the speaker and the deputy speaker in both chambers. Abolition of this right was a recurring demand in the lower chamber after 1867.

As a moderate – or a liberal-conservative – De Geer emphasised the importance of avoiding autocracy and ‘one-sided, hasty decisions’ by the lower chamber and safeguarding ‘the claims of education and capital’. He viewed wealth as a proof of individual capacity and the capability to hold an independent position against economic and political interests. Owing primarily to heavy restrictions on eligibility, the upper chamber, with its 125 members, was composed of estate owners, high officials and financiers. The number of members increased because of population growth, until it was fixed at 150 in 1894 (Nilsson 1969).

Another reason for the aristocratic character of the upper chamber was the voting system. The upper chamber was elected by county councils, which were, in turn, elected by local councils. The local franchise was relatively extensive, compared to the political franchise of the lower chamber (one-fifth of the adult male population). Approximately half of all adult men satisfied the minimum income threshold of 500 *riksdaler*, which was also the level of income at which one had to start paying taxes. This was not a coincidence, as the ruling classes considered that paying taxes marked the line between fully responsible citizens and the more unreliable poor people.

The relatively low income qualification, however, did not give the poor much influence. In the local elections, a graded scale was used, based on income and wealth, although electors had only one vote each in the second round. A very wealthy person could have hundreds of votes; an ordinary farmer, just one or two. Private companies were also allowed to vote in local elections, and towns and rural districts could be compared to joint stock companies. The more property one owned, the more votes one received. Ownership was viewed as synonymous with local economic interests and therefore legitimate local power (Norrlid 1970).

Theoretically, some women could also vote in local elections and, in this way, influence the composition of the county councils that elected the members of the Senate. However, very few women had property of their own because of the civil law that declared married women to be incapacitated. In the cities, some widows continued their deceased husbands’ businesses, but not much is known with regard to whether any of them actually voted.

The rules for eligibility were also highly restrictive, which is another reason that only a few peasants were elected. To be eligible, one had to be at least 35 years old and either possess real estate to a value of 80,000 *riksdaler* or have an income of 4,000 *riksdaler*. In 1866, these restrictions granted eligibility to the upper chamber to only 6,000 men. Another economic obstacle was that members received no salary, as opposed to members of the lower chamber. Even potential candidates among the well-to-do peasants needed a regular income to afford living in Stockholm during the parliamentary sessions.

As mentioned, only slightly more than 20 per cent of the adult men were allowed to vote in the elections for the lower chamber. The demands on income

Table 9.1 Social composition of the Swedish upper chamber 1870–1910

	1870		1890		1910	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Higher civil servants	51	40,5	59	40,7	62	41,3
A) Civil servants of trust*	34	27,0	28	19,3	25	16,7
B) Other civil servants	17	13,5	31	21,4	37	24,6
2 Lower civil servants	-		-	-	-	-
3 Free professions	1	0,8	3	2,1	6	4,0
4 Agrarian sector	46	36,5	49	33,8	42	28,0
5 Trade, industry	28	22,2	34	23,4	40	26,7
Total	126		145		150	

* 'Civil servants of trust' were appointed directly by the king and were expected to be loyal to his proposals, 'voting for the uniform'.

or wealth favoured freeholders but excluded tenants and the lower classes in the countryside. Most workers in the cities were also excluded, at least in the first decades. In 1867, more than 40 per cent of the members of the lower chamber were farmers (freeholders) and 12–13 per cent aristocratic landowners, giving the agrarian sector a majority, although the social and political divisions between the two groups could be sharp. The minority consisted of civil servants and businessmen. The last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century have often been called the heyday of the peasantry in Swedish history (Sköld & Halvarson 1966).

Modernisation, state and *laissez-faire*

Paradoxically, in an era of industrialisation, rural forces had been strengthened in the new Parliament. Businessmen and middle-class representatives had played a decisive role in the former estate of the burghers, the estate most receptive to reform. In the new bicameral Parliament, the urban middle-class members were reduced to a minority in both chambers. Farmers largely dominated the lower chamber, and the aristocratic landowners and high civil servants were the backbone of the upper chamber.

The social gap between the two chambers soon devolved into open hostility between the majority of landowners, factory owners and high officials in the upper chamber and the freeholders and middle-class representatives in the lower chamber. Radical or moderate proposals for an extended franchise for the lower chamber and fewer votes for the wealthy in local elections, which, ultimately, determined the character of the upper chamber, were prevented by a majority in the upper chamber. On the other hand, expansion of state activity and public

administration were often vetoed by the lower chamber. The farmers were not *laissez-faire* liberals, but they adopted a suspicious attitude towards bureaucracy and civil servants financed by taxes on the landed property, as was traditional for the peasantry.

The posthumous reputation of the first part of the upper chamber's existence (1867–1921) has been highly negative: it has been described as reactionary and an enemy of progress. Without doubt, the upper chamber defended existing power structures, but in technical, economic and other modernising areas, it succeeded in developing society, faced by an often traditional but more democratically influenced lower chamber. For that purpose, modernising reforms could set aside the liberal principle of a passive state (Nilsson 1994). Swedish historians have mostly stressed the 1860s and 1870s as a period dominated by *laissez-faire* attitudes. A commonly held idea is that state interventionist policy became important only after the issue of tariffs had brought the protectionists to power in 1888 (Nybom & Torstendahl 1989; Kilander 1991).

The concept of modernisation in this chapter is mainly applied to economic and administrative policy and comprises rational organisation, technical development and emphasis on the application of scientific methods. The history of the upper and the lower chambers from the 1860s to the 1880s shows that there is no inevitable correspondence between democracy and modernisation. The senators tried to change society in line with what rationality, technology and science demanded, while preserving old political structures, laws and traditions.

During this period, an interventionist policy was initiated with regard to forests, based mainly on the argument that the state should be allowed to protect vital national interests against exploitation, even if this meant restricting private ownership. As a result, several laws were introduced to guarantee the survival of the forests. Secondly, changes in the water laws showed that property rights were not sacred principles and that they could be restricted when far-reaching economic interests – communications and water transportation – were at stake. Landowners had to accept that their traditional control over waterways adjacent to their property was diminished for the common good. The third example is the National Board of Trade. After the victory of the free-trade policy in the 1850s and 1860s, liberals and anti-bureaucratic farmers insisted on the abolition of this department. When the first bicameral *Riksdag* met in 1867, it was thought that it would be just a matter of time before the National Board of Trade would be abolished, but its enemies never achieved their goal. Instead, the department gradually adopted more modern forms of encouraging trade, communication and industry. The policy of detailed regulations was replaced by comprehensive responsibility for education, technical development, information and patents.

A group of influential members of the upper chamber played a decisive role in all of these debates. Although they were adherents of moderate liberalism and free trade policy, they emphasised the need for state support. As a result, the Swedish state never lost its grip on the economy during this so-called *laissez-faire* period. Instead, state activity simply took on different forms.

Both liberals and conservatives used the state as an instrument in their attempts at national modernisation. From this perspective, the upper chamber, with its more positive attitude towards allotments and government intervention to modernise (as, for example, in the banking system, education and economic legislation) was more progressive than the lower chamber. Most of the opponents to this interventionist policy were not classical liberals. More conspicuous was a group comprising judges who based their resistance on the classical concept of the rule of law and farmers with their old hostility to public authorities, bureaucracy and taxes. In the broad field of economic policy, the upper chamber acted as an engine for modernisation; the lower chamber, as a brake.

The important modernising reforms initiated by members of the upper chamber contradict the traditional view of the party system in the chamber's first decades as being rather loose, poorly organised and lacking in solidarity. Indeed, the parties in the upper chamber consisted of small groups, but they were strongly organised around a network of well-established members seeking to gain support from the mass of unorganised and independent members. The parties were primarily represented in only one of the chambers, although the Farmers' Party (*Lantmannapartiet*), the strongest group in the lower chamber, had a branch in the upper chamber as well (Nilsson 1994).

During the first years, the lower chamber was divided between a majority of loyal supporters of the moderate liberal government and a conservative minority, many of them actively opposing the new political system. More and more, the closely connected issues of national defence and the tax system became the most significant dividing lines for different existing and newly established groups or parties. The question was whether the upper chamber should work to strike a compromise with the farmers or not. There was contact between some of the senators and the farmers in the lower chamber, while the small contingent of farmers in the upper chamber had increased at the same time.

After a compromise agreement in 1885, the debate about free trade or protectionism took over as formative issue for the party system. Cooperation between groups in different chambers further increased because of the tariff conflict. Protectionists in both chambers formed what can be seen as an 'early-modern' right wing – in favour of tariffs, loyal to royal power, resistant to franchise reform and champions of military strength. Another favourite issue was hostility towards Norwegian radicals who were looking to abolish the personal union between the two countries, which had been established in 1814. This conservative and nationalist right-wing group controlled the upper chamber, but had supporters in the lower chamber as well. One can reverse all the standpoints just mentioned to get the political programme of their antagonists: liberals and farmers ('the left'), who held a majority in the lower chamber.

This was the beginning of a new era with modern parties, which were also organised outside the *Riksdag*. Now, the upper chamber was dominated by a majority of pronounced nationalists, protectionists and enemies of voting reforms. To some extent, the period of modernisation had ended.

The conservative fortress and democracy

When voting rights became the dominant political issue after 1900, the upper chamber could still use Acts of Parliament to stop every reform proposal it disliked. However, developments in 1909 (extended male suffrage) and 1917–1921 (parliamentary government, the abolition of the graded voting rights in local elections and women's suffrage) established democracy. The conservative upper chamber had given up its resistance. The primary reasons for this acquiescence were the revolutionary events in Russia and Germany. Revolutionary groups and social unrest were also potential threats in Sweden, promoted by syndicalists and left-wing dissidents from the Social Democrat Party. A democratic constitution seemed to be necessary to ensure continued calm, which is why it was supported by influential industrial leaders and, at last, by the king and the Anglo-Saxon-oriented crown prince. The upper chamber survived the turbulent years after the First World War, but it lost its significance.

Voices in favour of reforming the franchise after 1867 were few and far between in the lower chamber and almost non-existent in the upper chamber. The Farmers' Party was worried about the potential power of the increasing multitudes of tenants, agricultural workers and servants. For the freeholders, the real injustice was dominance by the elites in the upper chamber, preventing all political reforms that reduced their power.

For a long time, the conservative resistance to voting rights was grounded in the belief that voting was not a universal right. This was clearly expressed in 1896 by upper chamber protectionist Teofron Sæve (1892–1910):

Franchise is a mandate, not a right given to all sorts of people; it is a mission that the state gives to individuals who are qualified to fulfil the mission, and it is definitely not a right that belongs to a person just because he is born or citizen of a society.

(Vallinder 1966, pp. 25–26)

However, after the turn of the century, expanded male suffrage was increasingly seen as inevitable, even by many conservative men (women were not allowed in the party before 1913). A modest reform was thought to satisfy middle groups of the peasantry and weaken the increasing demands for democracy. From that perspective, the main question became the introduction of conservative guarantees that were necessary to have the reform approved by the upper chamber. Another difficulty was the graded system of the election of the upper chamber, which made it a conservative stronghold against everything that threatened the traditional formation of society. The system was modified in 1909 but not abolished until 1918.

Women's suffrage was a subordinated issue in the beginning of the century, at least in parliament. Outside parliament, important women's organisations were established, consisting of Social Democratic, liberal and conservative activists (Rönnbäck 2004; Florin 2006). Left-wing parties – Social Democrats and liberals – included demands for women's suffrage in their political programmes but

were more hesitant with regard to fighting for male and women voting rights at the same time. There were still questions about whether women – if given the right – were prepared to vote. Maybe they would vote for the conservatives. There were also tactical questions. As long as the upper chamber had a conservative majority, any reform could be voted down. Accordingly, some wondered whether it was more practical to first secure voting rights for men and then use the increased power on the left to secure votes for women.

In 1902, landowner Erik Gustaf Boström became prime minister, a position he already had held from 1891 to 1900. During a parliamentary session in 1904, he presented a proposal on male suffrage and proportional elections for the lower chamber. At the same time, the restrictions were extensive – bankruptcy, unpaid taxes, dependency on benefits and the failure to report for compulsory military service all disqualified men from voting. Proportional elections were disliked by left-wing parties; therefore, the proposal was voted down by the lower chamber. In the following year, a similar proposal met the same destiny. The principle of universal (male) franchise had been established, but what did that mean?

For the first government (1905–1906) of the liberal Karl Staaff, universal male suffrage was at the top of the agenda. His proposal of voting rights and majority elections passed through the lower chamber without problem. Not surprisingly, though, it was voted down by the upper chamber. The alternative preferred by the senators included a cautious reform of local elections – a reduction of the maximum of an individual's votes. At least the upper chamber had accepted a small change to the election system, a cautious reform of the graded scale – which liberals and farmer had disliked so intensely. Staaff did not mention this problem in the government's proposal, which seems puzzling. But his radical, British-inspired parliamentary view gave the power to the democratic lower chamber. Its counterpart should not be reformed, because it would only postpone full democracy. Instead, the upper chamber should be set aside, weakening into insignificance (Stjernquist 1996; Esaiasson 2010).

Franchise by the conservative government

After Staaff's failure to realise his programme, conservative leader Arvid Lindman became prime minister. It seems like a paradox that the (male) franchise (in reality, 20 per cent of adult men were disqualified by unpaid taxes, etc.) was introduced in 1909 by a conservative government, rather than by democratic heroes Karl Staaff and the Social Democratic leader Hjalmar Branting (1860–1925). A century later, this conservative reform (alongside the relegation of the graded scale to local elections) was used by politicians from the liberal-conservative *Moderata samlingspartiet* as evidence for the party's democratic traditions. However, this statement is misleading (Nilsson 2011).

At a closer look, the mystery disappears. It was easier – or rather less difficult – for a leading conservative, a pragmatic politician like Lindman with his position and authority, to get a positive result in the *Riksdag*. The decisive factor was his capacity for presenting a proposal that could satisfy the moderate groups and at

the same time avoid opposition from the more conservative ones. Universal male franchise was supplemented by a reform of the local elections and the aforementioned restrictions that excluded 20 per cent of the potential male electorate. The proportional method would be used in elections for both chambers. For Lindman, it was better to take the initiative and realise a moderate franchise system than to find himself forced to accept a more radical system later. An expanded male franchise, with restrictions, was not as threatening as it had been before (Stjernquist 1996; Lewin 2010; Nilsson 2004). The reform of 1907–1909 reduced the exclusive character of the upper chamber and increased the prospects for the left parties. Yet the chamber kept its role as a conservative stronghold. Radical or moderate proposals would be voted down until full democratisation, 1917–1921.

When Karl Staaff became prime minister for the second time in 1911, the first proposal in the Swedish *Riksdag* on women's enfranchisement and eligibility was presented. A large majority in the lower chamber voted yes (140–66), but the upper chamber – appointed in accordance with the new rules – maintained its opposition, although by a smaller margin than before (86–58). Voting rights for women subsequently disappeared from the parliamentary arena between 1913 and 1917. The struggle for parliamentary government and the party truce during the First World War became obstacles.

The first government, including Social Democrats, was appointed in the autumn of 1917, with a liberal prime minister, Nils Edén. The upper chamber still resisted women's suffrage and dissolution of the graded scale that guaranteed a conservative majority in the upper chamber. The latter issue was most controversial. Women's suffrage was now seen by some conservatives as positive and they expected stronger sympathies for conservative ideas among women. There are no secure figures of female turnout at elections, in some way confirming conservative statements on politically uninterested women. In the first election, 47 per cent participated (62 per cent of men). In 1928, the figures were 63 per cent and 73 per cent respectively. More challenging was the democratisation or even the dissolution of the upper chamber. Liberals and Social Democrats (already the largest party in the lower chamber) would dominate both chambers. The conservatives' only chance was to get acceptance for minority guarantees and restrictions of voting rights that would affect poorer people most, such as age restrictions (minimising the role of the younger, presumably radical voters) and disqualification of all persons depending on welfare or with unpaid taxes (in this period, this usually meant poorer people). Another proposal was a slower implementation of the reform, avoiding the electorate doubling in size in one fell swoop.

Democratic breakthrough, 1918–1921

During the ordinary parliamentary session in the spring of 1918, a proposal from the leftist government on democratisation of the upper chamber and women's suffrage was once again stopped by the upper chamber. It would be the social upheavals in the final phase of World War I that at last opened the upper chamber up to democratic reforms (Stjernquist 1996; Andræ 1998; Nilsson 2005; Olsson 2000).

An extraordinary parliamentary session was summoned to sit in December 1918. The salaries of the civil servants had been greatly reduced because of wartime inflation war and had to be raised by the *Riksdag*. The collapse of Germany and the end of the war in November led to widespread social protests. Radical socialists wanted to proclaim a socialist state, inspired by the Bolshevik coup in Russia in 1917. In Finland, Hungary and the Baltic states, revolutionary uprisings had also occurred in 1918. Conservatives, liberals and the majority of the Social Democrats were worried that Sweden, too, would be subjected to social disturbances and revolutionary upheaval. Military preparations were made to meet riots and the trade unions were mobilised for a peaceful transition. Most likely, some of the Social Democratic leaders thought they could control the labour movement and used the threatening revolutionaries as an argument for democratic reform.

Conservatives in the upper chamber were subjected to strong pressure to yield to democratic reform. Especially important were the attitudes of business leaders (Söderpalm 1969). Archbishop Nathan Söderblom also requested conservatives to accept full democracy. The king (Gustaf V) tended to the same view, as did the crown prince, Gustav Adolf, who married to British princess. He was seen to be more amenable to British democratic traditions. The fear of a more radical development and the need for stability forced these groups to support reform. Some businessmen had sympathies for the liberal party and Branting and the union leaders had long shown themselves to be in favour of a lawful policy, avoiding revolutionary attempts and militant trade union actions.

The rapid development of riots and revolutions in Europe put democracy on the parliamentary agenda, although a formal decision on women's suffrage could not be made, just an agreement to schedule decisions for the coming years. Political suffrage, contrary to local suffrage, formed part of the constitution, and a change required a vote by an ordinary parliamentary session (1919), an election (1920) and then a new vote in the *Riksdag* (1921). The first parliamentary election on women's suffrage therefore was held in the autumn of the same year.

However, a real breakthrough for a democratic system had already been made in 1918, when both chambers accepted the democratisation of local elections (one person, one vote) on December 17. The rules concerning the upper chamber were approved in the lower chamber by a great majority (167–12). Only the left-wing Social Democratic party voted against them, advocating a more radical solution, including transitioning to a republic. In the upper chamber, the proposal was approved without a vote, which should not be interpreted as a total acceptance of democracy.

Some franchise restrictions were kept in the new system, such as bankruptcy, dependency on poor relief and unfilled compulsory military service. These qualifications would be abolished step by step and can be seen as guarantees that the conservatives demanded for accepting the democratic proposal. The voting age for the lower chamber was raised to 23 – for the county councils (that appointed the senators), it was raised to 27. The term of office in the upper chamber was extended from six to eight years, and the demands on eligibility (e.g. a voting

age of 35) were still more restricted than those of the lower chamber. All of these rules can be seen as conservative guarantees. Their effect, however, was limited, and they failed to prevent the left-wing parties (Social Democrats and liberals) from taking a dominant position. More decisive were the deteriorating relations between these two parties, resulting in weak governments for a decade.

Epilogue

From a parliamentary (and Western) view, the nineteenth century can be described as an era of bicameralism (Nilsson 1994; Miller 1968; Azéma & Winock 1972; Elwitt 1975). In many countries, absolutism or different forms of estate systems were replaced by two-chamber systems, different in form but sharing a common purpose: to guarantee the power of the important groups of factory owners and financiers, civil servants and more flexible landowners, both against the reactionary forces of the *ancien régime* and the calls for democracy from the underprivileged classes. At least in Sweden, the bicameral system largely succeeded in modernising society and meeting the demands set by intensified international economic competition. In Sweden, then, bicameralism can be seen as a transitional system between royal power and modern democracy. Needless to say, this perspective was not shared by the individuals involved in nineteenth-century politics.

The social tensions in the Swedish *Riksdag* largely correspond with the situation in Denmark, where the landowners in the upper chamber (*Landsting*) clashed with the farmers and urban radicals in the lower chamber (*Folketing*) (cf. Christiansen, this volume; Skjæveland, this volume). In contrast to Denmark, the Swedish system contained a mechanism for solving conflicts between the chambers on budgetary issues. Therefore, no political standstill could occur like the one in Denmark, which led conservative Prime Minister J.B.S. Estrup (in power between 1875 and 1894) to initiate emergency financial laws as a response to the resistance against the budget in the lower chamber (Fink 1986).

In the beginning, the French Senate was considered to be a conservative branch of government; however, in 1884, the lifelong mandates were abolished because of democratic demands. The Senate became a stronghold for moderate republican views. Following a monarchical constitution, though, moderate liberals in Sweden could be inspired by the French system, with a senate that encouraged deep reflection and common sense and defended the nation against the unreliable masses on the one hand and the reactionary aristocracy on the other.

The establishment of the two-chamber system with an elitist – or aristocratic – upper chamber can be viewed in the perspective of nineteenth-century European political history. Bicameralism was a transitional system between absolutism and modern democracy, at least when seen through the lens of posterity. These constitutional changes did not occur at the same time across Western Europe, but political developments from absolutism to democracy shared similar traits. In Sweden, this alleged conservative bulwark contributed to the modernisation of Swedish society up until the 1880s while remaining conservative in political respects.

The democratic breakthrough in the beginning of the twentieth century was more simultaneous, occurring during a period of fifteen to twenty years across various countries, gradually reducing the power of the Swedish upper chamber. The new democratic system in Sweden, introduced in 1921, soon made the two chambers politically identical. Variations in eligibility and term of office were too weak to challenge the strong party loyalty that was characteristic of Swedish political culture. In the 1950s and 1960s, it mainly worked to preserve the Social Democratic majority in votes in which both chambers participated. The system favoured big parties, and Social Democratic victories in the 1940s were decisive up to the 1960s because of indirect elections and long terms of office.

As early as the 1950s, claims for abolishing the upper chamber were raised – not for being undemocratic but for lacking a real function in the democratic system. Traditionally, the ideas of rationality and symmetry have been important in Sweden. Today, a 32 per cent share of the vote corresponds to exactly the same share of mandates. A unicameral *Riksdag* was introduced in 1970, and a couple of years later, a new constitution replaced the version drafted in 1809. The last session of the upper chamber was discretely concluded on 16 December 1970. The event was mentioned in the press, but very briefly. As a whole, the Senate disappeared quietly (cf. Nergelius, this volume). In a modern political system, a senate was seen as unnecessary, a relic from a distant past.

The further destiny of senates does not show any clear pattern. Some have survived, while others have been abolished (Denmark 1953, Sweden 1970). With the exception of federal states, the senates lack a strong position, at least in comparison with their position in the nineteenth century. Although, now and then, the need for a more careful and maybe less party-oriented parliamentary chamber is wanted. However, it seems that profound political changes must occur before a senate will be used once more in Swedish politics.

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