

Bureaucracy and Policy Formulation in Sweden

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Ad hoc commissions would seem to be indispensable elements in all advanced political systems. Despite the temporary character implied in the designation they have become more or less permanent features in many places and they fulfill specific functions in various political systems. The British Government commonly makes use of Royal Commissions in time of crisis in order to lend an atmosphere of authority and non-partisanship to investigations which must stand above suspicion of being under the influence of the special interests of a particular party or group. Demands for objectivity and public confidence are felt to require that certain inquiries or investigations be divorced from the regular activities of the ministries or cabinet.¹ Royal Commissions in Britain are regarded as representing the interests of the nation as a whole rather than those of any particular party or group.

There have been rare cases where Royal Commissions in Sweden have been assigned tasks similar to the British usage² but the vast majority of the many commissions³ appointed by the Swedish government (at present about 75 every year) carry out quite different tasks. Normally, they constitute a preliminary stage in the formulation of government legislative proposals or proposals for other measures of importance. These commissions gather and present comprehensive reports of conditions and collections of facts and make recommendations for government measures based on these materials.⁴

At the same time of course they can be seen as fulfilling other functions as well. Depending on how members of the commissions are recruited they may serve as useful sources of information for the government in regards to levels of support and demands among various groups for policy decisions in specific questions. They may be used as a means for putting off inconvenient decisions until a future date or they can form the basis for creating consensus or compromises between parties, interest organizations or experts prior to the time the government is forced to adopt an official position.

The unique and highly significant role Royal Commissions play in Swedish political life calls for a more detailed presentation. By what means does the government steer the activities of the commissions? From what groups are commission members recruited? What weight do commission proposals carry in the continuing process of decision? Can we trace significant changes in these respects in recent years?⁵

Unlike conditions in practically all other countries the ministries or government departments in Sweden are relatively small organizations with not more than 100-odd employees, including janitorial and office staff. The explanation for this is that the responsibility for executing policy decisions rests with the central administrative agencies and boards, agencies which enjoy relatively independent status in their relationship to the cabinet and the government departments. With this system of organization the central task of the government departments is to plan for new policies or changes in existing programs, and to serve as a channel and a sounding board for suggestions for changes in policy coming from various groups and organizations in the society. Much more than the Riksdag, the governmental departments are subjected to the pressures of demands and wishes of outside groups for new or altered legislation or other public measures. While the constitutional framework gives the Riksdag the same powers and opportunities enjoyed by Government in initiating and participating in the decisions on legislative proposals, these powers are in fact very seldom employed in the form of initiatives in parliament. The Riksdag has an extremely limited supply of personnel and the in-depth studies which in Sweden are considered necessary prior to every decision on legislation are therefore difficult for the parliament to perform. Therefore only in exceptional cases and with regard to very specialized questions (e.g. parliamentary procedures) does the Riksdag consider itself in possession of sufficient information to justify making a decision on its own initiative. The normal procedure is that if there appears to be a positive response to a matter that has been brought up initially in parliament, the Riksdag requests the Government to investigate the question and return to the Riksdag with a detailed proposal. This means that demands that have been routed through the Riksdag come to be included in the demands from various other sources which are received by the government department in question. Among these suggestions the desires of the Riksdag often – though not always – carry greater political weight than demands from public authorities, organizations and private individuals. In terms of quantity, demands from the public authorities make up the largest group while the wishes of the Riksdag, of the interest organizations and of private individuals each constitute about one-fifth of the total. Besides demands coming from sources outside the departments, the government departments themselves originate an important but numerically modest portion. Exact data on how the flow of policy suggestions is distributed between organizations and other persons is unavailable. One of the reasons for this is that informal contacts on a broad basis exist between the departments and outside persons and these can be the basis of policy suggestions without it being possible to locate the original source. It also happens that a question is brought up by a number of organizations nearly simultaneously and it is more a matter of chance which of them is registered as the originator.

Suggestions and requirements which come to the attention of a government department are from time to time reviewed for decision by the Head of the Department (who is a Government minister) together with his closest associates. Is there cause to set in motion the extensive machinery of drafting legislation or should the matter be allowed to rest until demands become more widespread or should the

whole issue be rejected? This is approximately the nature of the problems the department leadership faces when existing suggestions are reviewed. If and when the decision is taken to set in motion an investigation into the background of the matter, unless it is a question of a mere detail, the most common procedure is that a commission of *ad hoc* character is established. The initial decisions from the point of view of the Government and the department is then what sort of direction and control does the Government wish to exercise over the work of the study commission? One can say that the work of the commission is directed primarily by means of how the goals of the investigation, the so-called 'directives', are formulated, although the selection of commission members is also important. Formally, the directives are the statement by the Head of Department concerning the study the commission is being formed to accomplish, made at the occasion of a meeting of the Cabinet. His statement may vary from a few words to ten or twelve closely printed pages containing specific items to be investigated as well as an indication of the general goals to be accomplished. The directives can be "*förutsättningslösa*", that is, entirely free from preconceived notions of acceptable solutions and thus give the commission a broad frame of reference within which to operate, or they can directly indicate one or a few solutions that are to be considered. The formulation of the directives is connected naturally with the extent to which the Government is prepared already at this stage to set limits on the final form the policy will eventually take but it is also a function of who the members of the commission are to be.

The preliminary drafting of the directives is done by a small number of civil servants in close consultation with the Head of Department, who is of course also a member of the Cabinet. As a rule the chief or some high official of the administrative agency most likely to be affected is also given the opportunity to make known the views of his agency in the form of comments to the draft directive or even by taking part in the preparatory work. The drafting of commission directives requires that other Cabinet members are informed and their cooperation sought but it also leads to cooperation among civil servants in various departments. Depending on the character of the issue and its political importance the department head can be expected to take up the matter in a series of highly informal discussions with his Cabinet colleagues at an early stage. These discussions commonly take place at the daily luncheons attended by the ministers. The prime minister is often informed at an early stage as well but one can hardly say that he functions in any regular fashion as a coordinator in these questions. Until the early 1960s the prime minister remained almost completely aloof of the preparation of commission directives, but following the criticism that was directed against the government for lack of central coordination in connection with a case of espionage in 1963 the practical opportunities for the prime minister to gain a view into questions of coordination as well as his interest in doing so have to an extent undergone a change. Nevertheless the true coordinator within the government in all matters of legislative reform is the Minister of Finance and the officials of the Department of Finance. It has long been considered necessary by members of the Government and within the departments that before any

study is instigated, the go-ahead must be obtained from the Minister of Finance. The result of this is that civil servants of the Department of Finance are involved at a very early stage with officials of the concerned department in discussions on planned commissions. Some outside observers have taken notice in recent years of what seems to be increasing Finance Department influence over the planning of legislative reform by other departments. Interviews with ministers and chiefs of affected administrative agencies have not confirmed such a development, however. On the other hand the view has been advanced that during recent years it has become increasingly evident that more and more issues are of such a nature as to require early consideration of their effects from the point of view of the economy and have thus led to closer cooperation between the Department of Finance and the department into whose area of competence the matter falls. And the fact that the mass media have shown interest in the presentation of commission proposals furnishes still another motive for giving early consideration to the guidance commissions to be established are to follow and to impose tighter limits on their frame of reference. The public often tends to regard commission proposals as equivalent to final government positions; exceedingly ambitious commission proposals have thus led to exaggerated expectations which in turn create political pressure on the Government. Both of these circumstances have had the result that not only the Department of Finance but the other departments as well have become increasingly interested in tightening control over the work of the study commissions.

At the same time as the commission directives are being prepared in the department, preliminary consideration is given to the personal composition of the commission. Would a purely official commission composed of administrative officials be suitable or should arrangements be made to include members of the government party and other parties represented in the Riksdag? Should the interest organizations be given representation and if so, which ones? The choice of the chairman and members of the commissions formally takes place in connection with the official government decision on the commission directives but unlike the latter it is not the object of a decision by the entire Cabinet.

The choice of chairman for the commission is nearly always made early in the preparation of the directives. It is not uncommon that the intended chairman is given the opportunity to discuss early drafts of the directives with the department. The number of persons who could conceivably come under consideration for the post of chairman of a commission is unlikely in any particular case to exceed ten or so. The limited number of possible candidates for the chairmanship is related to the great importance the job is accorded. As a rule the chairman has a dominating influence over the work of the commission and the commission's chances of gaining a hearing for its proposals depends to a great extent on the authority the chairman can lend to the position the commission adopts. Among the essential requirements if the chairman is to lead the commission to a result which carries influence is that he possess the formal skills needed to lead negotiations between various interested parties and that he possess thorough knowledge and experience of Swedish public administration.

An analysis of the recruitment of commission chairmen confirms the statements of interviewed officials on the motives behind selection.

Table I. Sources of Committee Chairmen in per cent

	Cabinet ministers	Permanent under-secretaries	Administrative agency chiefs	Other officials	Members of Parliament	Oth- ers
1905-14	2	-	39	30	20	8
1915-24	2	0,7	25	42	14	16
1925-34	1	1	38	28	25	7
1935-44	1	7	33	35	13	11
1945-54	1	4	37	29	16	12
1955-67	1	6	28	52	6	7
1955-60	2	5	29	51	6	7
1961-67	1	6	26	52	7	8

In a few cases Cabinet ministers have functioned as commission chairmen; as a rule these have been cases of great political significance. The same applies to the somewhat greater number of cases in which department under-secretaries have led commissions. In either case the result is that the department is able to exercise considerable influence over the work of the commission and contact is maintained throughout. At the same time it can be taken for granted that the principal conclusions of the forthcoming commissions proposals have been approved by the government at an early stage. As Table I reveals, the heads of administrative agencies and other officials in the civil service (including a small number of judges) comprise the group from which commission chairmen are as a rule enlisted. A certain shift is discernable in later years from administrative agency heads to officials somewhat further down in the hierarchy of the administration. At the same time the proportion of chairmen recruited from among members of the Riksdag and persons outside of the civil service has declined considerably. This may be an expression of tighter control by the government departments. The Swedish administrative system which provides tenure for civil servants and at the same time makes the government departments the deciding authority for promotions to higher position has the effect that administrative chiefs to a greater extent than officials in lower grades can be expected to adopt independent stands irrespective of the desires of the departments. The decreasing portion of parliamentarians and representatives for groups and interests outside of the bureaucracy is also evidence of increased control from the Government and the departments.

Recruitment of Commission Members

A major principle in the composition of commissions is that the number of members ought to be strictly limited. This is chiefly due to the general experience that work

on a commission having a membership approaching ten or more tends to be less efficient. In recent decades this fact has led to the appointing of many one-man commissions. Commissions of one mean that a single person is given the responsibility of presenting the background material as well as proposals for government measures, but the investigator normally has secretaries at his disposal as well as experts on various aspects of the matter under consideration. The experts are usually drawn from the government administration but one can also find many examples of representatives from interest organizations and parties in the 'expert' category. But neither secretaries nor experts in these investigations – nor in other commissions – have the formal right to take part in decisions concerning the position finally adopted by the investigator or commission. The pattern of development during the past two decades with respect to the number of members on study commissions can be seen in the distribution figures for different sized groupings given in Table II.

Table II. Number of Commission Members in per cent

Year	One-man	2 – 4	5 – 7	8 or more
1945–54	24	31	33	12
1955–60	36	30	22	12
1961–67	33	23	29	14

Taking into account that commissions of one were relatively rare before 1950 the trend since the beginning of that decade can be said to have been first towards a concentration on smaller commissions followed by a return to relatively larger ones during the 1960s.

The practical desirability of keeping the number of members low must often be weighed against demands from organizations, parties and interest groups for representation. It may also be that the increasingly technical nature of modern society requires the aid of relatively more specialists from the public administrative agencies. The various interest organizations are primarily interested in being represented on commissions whose activities will affect their own interests. In official communications to the Government, in private letters and in conversations with responsible officials in the departments, the desire to be represented on commissions is, constantly expressed.

The conflicting goals of a low number and demands for broad representation on study commissions lead the responsible officials in the departments to endeavor to appoint commissioners who combine in one and the same person several representative qualities. Thus a parliamentarian may be chosen who can at the same time represent an organization's and perhaps a certain region's special interests or perhaps a representative for some national organization who also represents different associated trade unions and perhaps some service organization as well. These tendencies to combine various group interests in one representative lead in turn to the situation that a relatively limited number of individuals within the political parties and the interest organizations who are able to represent several interests are tapped for many

commission appointments. Thus a record of commission appointments is a factor in the growth of a rather limited elite in the parties, in parliament and in the organizations.

The procedure used to name commission members varies depending on whether it is a person from the government service or from one of the political parties or organizations who is to be appointed. Civil servants are appointed either directly by the Head of Department or after consultations with agency heads about suitable candidates. Party representatives from the party in power are named by the Head of Department normally after discussions with the prime minister or other fellow ministers. Representatives for the opposition parties are usually appointed in such a way that the Head of Department informs the party leader or party first secretary in question that the party is invited to submit a name. The leadership of the party parliamentary group (caucus) then discusses whom the party's candidate shall be and when their nomination is made the department appoints that person without exception. The large labor market organizations are usually permitted in similar fashion to choose their own representatives but smaller organizations are sometimes asked to submit several candidates among whom the department then chooses. The pattern of recruitment of commissioners from the three major categories *bureaucracy*, *parliament*, and *organizations* is shown in Table III. So as to provide a basis for comparison the total number of study commissions appointed as well as the number and proportion including any degree of Riksdag representation is given.

Table III. Recruitment of Commissioners

Year	No. of Commissions			Sources of Commissioners			
	Total	Riksdag representation	%	No. of Commissioners	% Riksdagsmen	% Civil servants	% Organizations
1905-14	403	191	47	1579	27	51	21
1915-24	504	237	47	2083	27	47	26
1925-34	452	214	47	1690	32	43	25
1935-44	618	279	45	2560	23	47	30
1945-54	752	353	47	3306	25	41	34
1955-67	989	264	27	3651	19	60	20
1955-60	470	142	30	1662	22	59	19
1961-67	519	122	24	1989	18	60	22

The number of commissions appointed has been fairly constant during the past three decades at about 75 per annum. In the earlier part of the century the number was on the average somewhat lower with a successive rise until the mid-1940s. The portion of commissions appointed in which members of parliament – one or more – were included was for the 50-year period 1905–1954 an almost constant 47%. The last thirteen years from 1955–1967 have witnessed a sharp change in this respect. The proportion of commissions with one or more Riksdagsmen included has dropped

to 27% and the trend during the 1960s points to a continued drop in parliamentary representation. In 1967 only 23% of the commissions appointed that year included members of parliament.

A partial explanation for this may lie in the endeavors of the departments to keep the number of members at a minimum which have led to a number of one-man commissions or small commissions of from two to four members which are staffed entirely with experts from the bureaucracy. This fact can not provide the whole explanation however since the 1960s has shown a trend towards larger commissions while simultaneously the proportion of parliamentarians has further diminished.

During conservative caretaker governments in the early years of the century the enlistment of members for commission assignments was dominated by civil servants from the administration. This bureaucratic dominance met with hard criticism from Liberal and Social Democratic quarters. The great importance of the studies and their influence on policy formulation by the government required, according to the critics, that parliamentarians and laymen be given increased representation that could serve as a counterbalance to the administration experts. Conservatives tended to see in this criticism an expression of what they referred to as the "cult of incompetence". Under periods of Liberal and later Social Democratic government a clear shift in recruitment practices took place. The number of commissioners enlisted from parliament as well as representatives from the increasingly consolidated interest organizations rose sharply. Most marked was the infusion of parliamentarians during the weak governments of the period 1920–1932. Commissions composed of parliament members often performed the function then of laying the groundwork for temporary majority coalitions to ensure subsequent passage of the resultant legislation. They gained in this way a measure of authority that the governments found it difficult to ignore and often bound the parties in the Riksdag to abide by agreements their representatives had arrived at in commission. The principle also became more and more accepted during this period that the Riksdag ought to refrain from making declarations or decisions on matters that were under consideration by a study commission. Simultaneously another practice won acceptance that required that not only the government party but even the opposition parties be represented on all important commissions.

With the exception of the World War Two years – when the number of military investigations with a disproportion of military officials was large – the proportion of civil servants on commission assignments from the 1920s until 1955 hardly exceeded 40%. Here too the past 13 years have witnessed a strong swing back towards a dominant position for commissions drawn from the administration and successively fewer parliamentarians and representatives for the various organizations. The characteristic relationship for the 1960s with 60% civil servants and only 18% members of parliament can only be compared to a few short periods of conservative caretaker governments prior to the introduction of parliamentarianism in 1917. A detailed analysis shows that even the large labor market organizations have suffered a rather great loss of representation. Their share of commissioners in the 1960s has only been two-thirds of what it was during the 1940s and fifties.

The strong reduction in Riksdag representation on commission assignments leads one to ask whether the relative distribution of commission posts to the government party and the opposition parties respectively has undergone a change. Is the reduced share of commission posts assigned to parliamentarians an indication that the government has been endeavoring to control the commissions by limiting representation to its own party members? In other words has the Social Democratic government during the past ten years reduced the relative influence of the opposition? Table IV shows the proportion of commission assignments by party in relation to the parties' power position in the Riksdag. The deviation between the percentages thus indicates the degree of over- or under-representation for each party during this period.

Table IV. Political Parties' Representation on Study Commissions and in the Riksdag

Party	1955-1960			1961-1967		
	% on commissions	% in Riksdag	% deviation	% on commissions	% in Riksdag	% deviation
Soc. D	42	49	-7	42	50	-8
Lib.	20	21	-1	20	18	+2
Cent.	21	14	+7	21	14	+7
Cons.	17	14	+3	17	16	+1
Comm.	0	2	-2	0	2	-2
	100	100	±0	100	100	±0

As the Table shows the distribution of commission assignments among the parties in the latter half of the 1950s and in the years 1961-1967 was exactly the same despite the shifts that had occurred in the parties' relative strength in the Riksdag. The Social Democratic government party and the Communists are those which above all are under-represented. The Communists have not been given commission assignments at all since the end of the 1940s. The non-socialist opposition parties and in particular the Center Party are clearly favored. Despite the fact that the bourgeois parties have the whole time been in the minority in the Riksdag, they have throughout the period had a majority of the commission posts. A comparison with the 1930s and 1940s shows almost exactly the same picture. The largest party, the Social Democrats, have throughout had a smaller proportion of commission assignments than their parliamentary strength would justify. It is thus impossible to find evidence in the distribution of commission assignments to support the allegation that the government or the governing party has increased its control over commission activities. It would be more correct to say that the party of the government has become even more under-represented than before. The distribution of commission assignments among the political parties must not be interpreted as indicating that the opposition parties have had a majority position on the important commissions that were recruited solely from parliamentarians, however. Study commissions of this type have been characterized in recent years more than before by equal representation for the government and the opposition parties. This was the case for instance in

the most recent defense study and on two different commissions for the drafting of a new constitution. In two of these three commissions the chairmanship was held by highly-placed civil servants with political connections with the government party.

Reduced parliamentary representation is perhaps best seen as a structural change in the composition of commissions of the second order of importance. These traditionally contained, in addition to the officials drawn from the bureaucracy, a representative for the government party. Nowadays these commissions are to a far greater extent pure expert commissions. These structural changes naturally carry with them after-effects. The information the members of the Riksdag have on legislative reform studies in progress is lessened and this in turn leads to increased influence for the bureaucracy in the formulation of policy. No change has been evident in the attitude of the Riksdag not to comment upon matters under consideration before a commission or to anticipate commission findings by early decisions. The increasing complexity of social reform measures makes it more obvious than ever that the Riksdag is unable to come to a decision on its own before a commission study has been accomplished by the departments and the findings presented. Given the authoritativeness of commission studies and proposals in the Swedish decision-making process, changes in the recruitment of personnel for commission posts can be seen as an indication of a strongly enhanced position of influence for the bureaucracy, especially in those areas of policy formulation that do not attract the most intense attention of the political parties.

Another effect of the reduced number of parliamentarians as well as representatives for different kinds of organizations is that the departments receive less information about the demands made on the political system. The public debate in recent years seems to an extent to show increased symptoms of stress between the political system and its environment. The activities of students at Swedish universities, for instance, have been directed in strong opposition to what is regarded as bureaucratic educational reforms without contact with student or teacher opinion.

It is also possible to see in the "bureaucratization" of study commissions a sign that the Social Democratic government has entered a period of less sweeping political reform. Following a decade of broad social reform legislation stretching from the end of World War Two to the mid-1950s when a relatively large number of new policy programs were introduced, Swedish politics has entered a period characterized more by efforts to work out the technical and administrative details of the new legislation than plans for radically new programs. Decisions already taken on changes in a number of areas of social life require for their accomplishment such a large portion of available resources that attention must be concentrated on the fulfilling of these programs before new sweeping policy lines can be considered.

The Study Commissions at Work

Some of the major features of how the study commissions actually go about their

work ought to be shown as they make an interesting contribution to the total picture of Swedish political culture. The form and tempo of commission works is determined to a large extent by the commissions themselves and therefore vary greatly. The chairman and commission members carry out their commission assignments in addition to their ordinary duties and therefore it is unrealistic to expect that they will be able to devote more than a couple of days per month to the assignment. The secretaries and other staff members on the other hand are commonly full-time employees. Secretaries are recruited almost without exception from among junior civil servants and about half of them have degrees in law from the universities. This fact reflects quite accurately the pattern of recruitment of personnel into public administration. Legal training, often in combination with a period of service in the courts, has traditionally been considered the most suitable education for a career in the central public administration. In recent years the recruitment of new personnel has increasingly come to be directed to university graduates with training in the social sciences, which in turn is reflected in the recruitment of commission secretaries. Not a few commission secretaries are at the same time employees of the Department that appointed the commission. About every fifth study commission has a civil servant from a government Department as secretary, which naturally contributes to a lively flow of information between the commission and the Department.

The secretary, either by himself or together with outside experts, performs the investigations and writes the reports which form the basis of the commission's discussions and conclusions. Commission reports thus tend to contain a considerable number of research studies of central importance on Swedish social development. It often happens that research scholars are able to carry out very significant studies within the framework of commission activities. As an example, Dag Hammarskjöld's Ph. D. dissertation is found as an appendix to a commission report and was written by Hammarskjöld in his capacity as commission secretary. Another appendix to the same report was written by Gunnar Myrdal. These are not isolated examples but rather characteristic of the type of highly qualified research studies which form the basis of the work of study commissions.

The commission itself meets as a rule once a month, perhaps a couple of days in a row so as to be able to penetrate and discuss in depth the reports that have been prepared by the secretariat and expert staff. Instructions are given for the continued work of the secretariat. The chairman of course keeps in constant touch with the work as it progresses. The fact that the commission chairman and his fellow commissioners perform their commission tasks in addition to their ordinary duties in the administration, parliament or organizations as well as the tradition that commission reports shall be based upon comprehensive and in-depth studies of relevant problems leads to the situation that commissions regularly take their time in presenting their final reports. It is not uncommon that commissions can be active four or five years before they make their proposals. The Constitutional Commission of 1954 which presented its draft proposal for a new constitution in 1963 is not the only example of a commission dealing with a major political issue which has seen fit to take a good deal of time for its work. The average length of time taken for commission studies

is about two and one half years but in recent years there has been a tendency to take even longer.

One of the essential functions commissions perform is to bring about compromise or consensus through confidential negotiations between various organizations, interests, parties and experts. In order that the commissions are to be able to fulfill this function and so the negotiations can be removed as far as possible from the situation where the individual commissioners need to take into account considerations of personal prestige, the principle has been developed and made part of tradition that all publicity on negotiations and results of different stages of the progress of work is strictly ruled out until the final report is made. Experience has demonstrated that most politicians, organizational representatives or civil servants are only prepared to offer and accept compromises if they are certain that their statements will remain within the circle of persons who are bound by similar reasons for discretion. It has therefore become an unwritten law for study commissions that nothing leaks out in the way of negotiating positions, concessions or statements. This does not prevent, naturally, that indiscretions occur at times and these normally receive great publicity and can create serious difficulties for the continued work of the commission. The mass media are of course very interested in being able to present information on how political parties and groups operate and what an anticipated commission proposal is likely to contain.

Even though the commission abides strictly by the principle of avoiding publicity, the members keep their respective parent organizations informed on the progress of the work. The Department keeps itself informed in various ways, normally the chairman and/or the secretary is in contact with the leadership in the Department and keeps them informed about the main trends of the commission work. Alternatively, a member who represents the party in power may serve as a channel for mutual communication between the commission and the Department. As a rule the Departments leave the commissions relatively at liberty once the directives have been given, but if in some particular case it is feared that a commission is in the process of getting off the track and that it is proceeding contrary to the wishes of the Department, it is possible to intervene. New or complementary directives might be furnished the commission or its membership might be augmented with a few new commissioners who can be expected to be more sympathetic to the wishes of the Government.

Commissioners who represent the parties of the opposition or interest organizations also keep their respective leaderships informed about developments in the commission's work. The Riksdag representation of a particular party may meet in caucus to discuss what stand its commission representative ought to adopt and the same is true for representatives for other groups. It is however quite rare that either a political party or other interest group directly instructs its representative to take a particular stand. Instead, these discussions are seen as a type of information provided the representative about the views of his organization on a particular issue.

Thus, the formulation of policy does not take place in a completely closed circle made up of commissioners and commission secretariat, but outwardly very little is visible of the activities of the parties, organizations, Departments and other official

bodies that surround and influence at least the politically critical commissions. It may seem strange that vitally important discussions between the political parties, interest organizations and government in a democratic system are carried on behind closed doors and out of the view of the public. By the time the public debate gets started – in connection with the publication of the commission report – consensus has often been reached on essential points. About three-fourths of all commissions – including those with Riksdag representation – manage to present unanimous proposals and these are therefore extremely important for later decisions by the Riksdag and Cabinet. It must remain an open question, however, whether in the long run it is the tradition of cooperation in commission work which has created the conditions for a high degree of consensus among the various political persuasions on the main lines of development for Swedish politics or rather the relatively small differences of opinion among the political parties which have made possible cooperative commission work.

So as not to give the impression that the formulation of public policy in Sweden takes place without the benefit of public debate and observation of the decision-making processes, it should be added that commission reports are public property and are distributed to a large number of authorities and organizations. Government authorities are required – by the constitution – to comment upon the report in an official communication to the Government and the organizations are also given the opportunity to offer criticism or register their concurrence with the proposals before the Government makes its formal proposition to the Riksdag. These opportunities for public authorities and interest organization to make their views known on forthcoming Government legislative proposals are widely taken advantage of, which means besides the material contained in the reports the Government is provided with yet another source of information regarding the reactions of various groups in the society to planned measures. These documents – like all other documents on file with Swedish public authorities – are fully accessible for citizens and reporters from the mass media and as a rule serve as the factual basis for the ensuing public debate.

This system with its time-consuming commission deliberations, collection of statements on the reports (the so-called *remiss* procedure), and drafting of the Riksdag proposition in the Departments, all prior to the consideration of the proposition in the parliament, has the effect that changes in public policy of any particular importance normally take many years before they can be put into effect. One advantage this long procedure can be said to have is that bringing the public authorities and bureaucracy into the process during the planning stage means that when the decision is finally taken, the authorities are usually prepared to translate the new policy into practical measures without delay.

NOTES

¹ Hanser, C. J.: *Guide to Decision: The Royal Commission* (New York: The Bedminster Press, 1965).

² The most recent example is the 1963 investigation of the actions of the Government and

individual ministers in the case of the exposure of a high-ranking military officer with duties in the Foreign Ministry as a foreign agent.

³ The most common Swedish denomination for this type of *ad hoc* body is *kommitte*. In this report, however, the term 'commission' has been used so as to avoid confusing them with committees of parliament.

⁴ Commission proposals and deliberations are published in the series *Statens Offentliga Utredningar* (SOU). This series, comprising nearly 3000 volumes since 1920, makes up a valuable documentation of the development of Swedish society. See the detailed presentation by Lars Foyer, p. 183, below.

⁵ The studies upon which the following is based consist primarily of interviews with persons on all levels within the government Departments, with commission members, members of parliament and representatives for some of the larger interest organizations. The interviews were performed partly in 1955 and to an extent in 1967 by the author and for a special study of the Department of Education by Björn von Sydow.