

## Sweden: The First Year of the One-Chamber Riksdag

Following an existence of slightly more than one hundred years, the bicameral parliamentary system in Sweden came to an end at the turn of the years 1970–1971. In 1866 it had succeeded the Diet of the Four Estates (*Ständsriksdagen*), a body with a history of nearly four hundred years of representing the Nobility, the Clergy, the Burgesses, and the Peasantry, each division having long constituted an equally important section of the legislature. The adoption of the two-chamber system did not, however, imply a general democratization of the community but only the abolition of the over-representation of the Nobility and the Clergy, allowance also being made for the representation of certain groups outside the four estates.

On the introduction of universal suffrage in Sweden in 1921 discussions were held on the subject of a change-over to unicameral representation. The conservatives laid down conditions for the acceptance of the extended suffrage, among other things that the two-chamber system should be retained in order to prevent too sudden upheavals. Not until the end of World War II were serious demands put forward for the abolition of the Upper House of the Swedish Riksdag and the setting up of a legislature directly elected by the people on one and the same occasion. The demand was first raised in Liberal circles, and about 1960 it received the support of a majority of the then sitting Royal Commission on Constitutional Matters. On the other hand it proved impossible to secure complete agreement on the matter of the electoral system for the new one-chamber representation. Certain parties wished to retain some form of time-lag with regard to the implementation of the opinion of the electorate. The Social Democrats, furthermore, did not wish to entirely abandon the association, in terms of electoral technique, between parliamentary and municipal elections consisting in the indirect election of the Upper House by certain municipal bodies.

In March, 1967, the parties reached a compromise. This envisaged a one-chamber Riksdag with 350 members, 310 of whom would be elected proportionally by constituencies, the 40 remaining so-called national mandates to be used to achieve exact proportionality between the distribution of seats and that of votes. A modification in this respect was, however, the setting up of a check against small parties; in order to obtain a national mandate a party must obtain at least 4 per cent of the entire national vote, and in order to represent a constituency a party must secure at least the same or 12 per cent of the votes cast in that constituency. The compromise also contained provisions for a common polling day for the Riksdag and local elections.

The proposed compromise was laid before the Riksdag in the spring of 1968 and passed, despite some criticism of the common polling day. The proposed constitution was definitely adopted the following year.

This reform of the constitution thus disposed of the Swedish two-chamber system. During the first election conducted in accordance with the new system – in September, 1970 – local councils, county councils, and the entire Riksdag were elected simultaneously. In this way the will of the people was given the opportunity of expressing itself, immediately and in a single context, throughout all the representative political institutions. It also meant that from 1970 every election would be a contest for the right to govern. The slightest change in the majority of the electorate would immediately make itself felt in the form of a change of government.

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Table I. The Election of 1970

Party	Percentage of votes	Number of mandates in the new Riksdag
Conservative	11.5	41
Centre	19.9	71
Liberal	16.2	58
Social Democrat	45.3	163
Communist	4.8	17
Others	2.2	—
Total	100.0	350

barrier and thereby win representation in the Riksdag. It could be predicted that if the Communists attained 4.1 per cent the Social Democrats could remain in power since the Communists voted more often with the Social Democrats than with the non-socialist opposition parties, whereas if the Communists secured only 3.9 per cent they would not qualify for representation, with the result that a non-socialist government would assume office.

The Communists won 4.8 per cent of the votes, thereby permitting the Social Democrats to continue to govern, admittedly as a minority government. This fact has been a basic condition for the work of the new Riksdag. In most important divisions of the chamber the Communists have actively supported the Government, which has thereby won. (It would not have been enough if the Communists had abstained from voting, as the non-socialist opposition parties together have more seats in the Riksdag than the Social Democratic Government Party, cf. Table I.) The parliamentary year did not, however, see more than relatively few major controversial issues, among other things because Sweden's national economy has imposed considerable restraint with regard to costly reforms.

Among the matters in which the Government has been defeated as a result of the Communists' voting with the non-socialist opposition parties are mainly to be noted questions affecting the splitting of power between central and regional authorities, in which the Government's centralistic policy has suffered defeat. In certain cases the Government has furthermore been compelled to make compromises in the committees for fear that an anti-Government coalition between the non-socialist opposition and the Communists might be formed over the issue. In a question which attracted much attention — the extension of a power station at Ritsem in the mountains of Lapland — the Government was compelled to take the exceptional step of requesting during a plenary sitting that the matter be referred back to the committee for reconsideration, where a compromise could subsequently be reached with the Communists. In the main the Social Democratic Government has been able, even in the new parliamentary situation, to pursue a consistent policy, which has won support in the Riksdag.

Work in the new one-chamber Riksdag has been characterized to a considerable extent by the large number of members (350) and intense activity. The work of the chamber has been increasingly concerned with proposals from the Riksdag. The number of Government bills has thereby diminished by 15 per cent compared with 1970. On the other hand, motions (private members' bills) and, above all, questions as well as the time required for the work of the chamber have in all cases markedly increased (Table II).

The new one-chamber Riksdag has thus entailed an increased load of work for the individual member. This is connected in the first place with the relatively large number of members. This increased load of work has reduced the possibilities for members of the Riksdag of keeping in touch with their constituencies as well as with various organizations and professional groups. The more elderly members of the Riksdag in particular

*Table II. Working Load of the New One-Chamber Riksdag in 1971 Compared with That of the Riksdag (Lower House) in 1970*

Number and time consumed (in hours)	1970	1971	Percentage change
Bills	205	174	- 15
Motions	1605	1643	+ 2
Interpellations	129	222	+ 72
Simple Questions	282	410	+ 45
Morning Plenary Sitings	112	119	+ 6
Evening Plenary Sitings	20	32	+ 60
Plenary Hours	430.12	613.27	+ 43
Number of Speeches	4451	5652	+ 27
Number of Replies	924	1439	+ 56
Average Duration of Speeches	4.58	5.28	+ 10

have experienced growing isolation from the world outside the parliament building. Complaints have been heard from the party organizations that the possibilities of calling on the services of members of the Riksdag for annual meetings and local conferences as well as other internal party activities have been reduced in consequence of the scale of activities of the new Riksdag.

All this has led to the voicing of demands for changes in the working procedures of the Riksdag, changes designed to shorten the time required for sittings of the chamber. Proposals have been put forward, for example, for the amendment of the rules for parliamentary debate and for the granting to the Speaker of more authority to conduct debates. Even members who have not been directly called upon should have the right to interrupt the Speaker's List for replies or brief remarks not exceeding two minutes. In the case of lengthy debates the Speaker should have the right to decide which of the remaining members who wish to address the chamber should be given permission to do so (the so-called closure). The Speaker would thus have the possibility of choosing those members who could be assumed to have further factual information or original thoughts to impart. In this way debates in the chamber would gain in interest and excitement and the audience would obtain an increased and more definite benefit from the proceedings.

Discussions have also been held on granting members the right to have certain documents incorporated in the official records of the Riksdag without their being read aloud from the Speaker's Chair. Such a procedure is followed in the Congress of the United States of America, for example. Consideration has also been given to proposals for changes in the arrangements for session periods and to the possibilities of concentrating work to certain weeks.

The most fundamental change that has been discussed is, however, a reduction in the number of members. In a proposal for a new text for the constitution presented in March, 1972, the idea of a reduction to 300 members has been suggested by two dissentients on the committee responsible for drawing up the proposed new constitution. In internal parliamentary debates the idea of reducing the number of members has been linked up with the idea of deputies for Riksdag members. This was first proposed in connection with members of the Government. Those ministers who are members of the Riksdag are at present obliged to be in the parliament building on at least two weekdays out of consideration for the Government's narrow parliamentary majority. It has therefore been in the interest of the Government to support the idea of deputies in the Riksdag in order to free those ministers who are also members from their work in the chamber. The wishes of the Government are challenged by the opposition parties with demands for a general system of deputies, making it possible for every member of the Riksdag to

absent himself from work in the chamber for a certain time for a special purpose. It is likely that in connection with a proposal to introduce deputies into the Riksdag the question of the number of members will arise. The main objection against a reduction in the number of members is the risk that certain parts of the country might thereby be entirely without representation in the Riksdag.

Finally, it should only be emphasized that no change in the basic features of the new Riksdag, as described here, is to be expected during the lifetime of the present chamber, 1971–1973. Not until the election in September 1973, and the following mandate period of the new one-chamber Riksdag will it be possible to ascertain whether the observations expressed as to the parliamentary situation and working conditions in the one-chamber Riksdag prove to be of a persistent nature or not.

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