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THE MORAL DIPLOMACY OF DECOLONISATION:
SWEDISH RESPONSES TO THE RISING GLOBAL SOUTH,
1950S-1970S

by Carl Marklund

This article revisits the debates on Sweden's possible contribution to the international developmental debates as an exemplary neutral, a developmental model, and an aid donor. While these debates exemplify diplomatic elements and activities, understood metaphorically as the art of negotiating conflicting interests, they also fed into, and informed Swedish positions vis-à-vis the emerging Global South, diplomatic outreach, and foreign policy initiatives on the part of successive Swedish Governments from the 1950s to the 1970s. As such, these positions have only rarely directly impacted upon actual Swedish policy behaviour. But they have over time aggregated into a widely shared and oft-cited understanding of Sweden as "the darling of the Third World". This article seeks to trace the origins, motives, and main themes of this moral diplomacy – directed inwards as well as outwards.

Keywords: decolonisation, Global South, North-South debate, NIEO, Swedish model, moral diplomacy.

Il presente contributo rivisita i dibattiti sul possibile contributo della Svezia ai dibattiti internazionali sullo sviluppo in quanto Paese neutrale paradigmatico, modello di sviluppo e Paese donatore. Se questi dibattiti esemplificano aspetti e attività diplomatici intesi metaforicamente come l'arte di negoziare interessi confliggenti, essi hanno anche alimentato e informato le posizioni svedesi nei confronti dei Paesi emergenti del Sud del mondo, nonché il raggio d'azione della diplomazia e le iniziative di politica estera da parte dei Governi svedesi dagli anni Cinquanta agli anni Settanta. In quanto tali, queste posizioni hanno avuto solo raramente un impatto diretto sulle politiche svedesi, ma nel corso del tempo sono confluite in una visione, ampiamente condivisa e osannata, della Svezia come "beniamina del Terzo mondo". Il presente saggio si prefigge di delineare le origini, le motivazioni e le tematiche principali di questa diplomazia morale – diretta sia verso l'interno che verso l'esterno.

Parole chiave: decolonizzazione, Sud del mondo, dibattito Nord-Sud, NIEO, modello svedese, diplomazia morale.

INTRODUCTION

With a modest beginning in the 1950s and the 1960s, flourishing during the 1970s and 1980s, and reverberating still today, the Scandinavian countries have profiled themselves individually and as a group by supporting the economic and political decolonisation process across the Global South. At its prime in the 1970s, this "Scandinavian internationalism" profile coincided with the rise of the Global South, and the prospect of North-South

tensions overshadowing the East-West Cold War. As part of this wider Scandinavian internationalism, Swedish engagement has primarily been expressed through diplomatic activity in relation to specific conflicts, manifested in voting patterns at the United Nations (UN) on Global North-South issues, and confirmed by Scandinavian development aid, humanitarian action, peacekeeping efforts, and refugee reception, often through the UN system but also through bilateral as well as regional Nordic initiatives (see, e.g.: Ekengren, 1999; Bjereld, Johansson and Molin, 2008; and Berg, Lundberg and Tydén, 2021; for Nordic development aid, see: Engh, 2009; and Odén, 2011; for the UN, see also: Hult, 1974; and Götz, 2011).

This engagement has been closely coordinated with wider UN international agendas, such as the First Development Decade initiatives of the 1950s and 1960s, the New International Economic Order (NIEO) agenda in the early 1970s, and the Disarmament and Development Proposals during the late 1970s (generally, see: Garavini, 2012; Moyn, 2018; and Slobodian, 2018; for Sweden, see: Marklund, 2020). This time span also provides a series of “stress tests” to northern, and not just Scandinavian, solidarity with the perceived interests of “developing countries”, the “poor nations”, the “Third World”, and the “neutral and non-aligned countries”, ideological, economic, and political (on neutrality, see: Kullaa, 2012; Rainio-Niemi, 2014; Bott, Hanhimäki, Schaufelbuehl and Wyss, 2016; and Fischer, Aunesluoma and Makko, 2016). During the latter period, the activities of the so-called “like-minded” – if not always necessarily neutral – western small States and “middle powers”, such as Canada and Ireland as well as the Benelux and the Nordics, received scholarly attention. As their attempts at paving a middle course in North-South relations and at off-setting Cold War bipolarism came “under strain” due to globalisation, they were increasingly theorised as “international reformism” or “realistic internationalism”, but of the past (generally, see: Dolman, 1979; Pratt, 1989; and Helleiner, 1990; for Sweden, see: Dohlman, 1989; Sundelius, 1989; and Södersten, 1989).

The Scandinavian commitment to the political and developmental aspects of decolonisation is well-known and often referred to without much qualification, except for reference to the 1% official development assistance (ODA) goal (Ekengren and Götz, 2013). Moreover, the reputation of the Scandinavians as “norm entrepreneurs” on a series of global issues has been analysed as a commitment to ideals and practices of international solidarity and “humanitarianism” (for norm entrepreneurship, see Ingebritsen, 2002; for humanitarianism, see Marklund, 2016), corresponding to a primarily morally driven internationalisation of the national welfare state, tying in with the wider western welfare ideology of high modernity (for Sweden, see e.g.: Agius, 2006; Engh, 2007; Bergman Rosamond, 2007; and Irwin, 2019; for the West, see Moyn, 2018). But it has also been more critically analysed in terms of “status seeking” through nation branding and soft power, espousing self-identities as a “conscience of the world”, “humanitarian great power”, or even “moral superpower”, eliciting assessments of the Scandinavians as “do-gooders” or “global good Samaritans” operating under a “goodness regime” (Tvedt, 2002; Tvedt, 2003; Dahl, 2006; Brysk, 2009; Engh, 2009; Carvalho and Neumann, 2015; de Bengy Puyvallée and Bjørkdahl, 2021). These two perspectives have resulted in a persistent and this far unresolved academic debate with political overtones on “altruism” and “egotism” or “idealism” and “realism” as the primary drivers of Scandinavian internationalism in relation to the decolonising Global South (Borrington Olesen, Pharo and Paaskesen, 2013; Marklund in de Bengy Puyvallée and Bjørkdahl, 2021; on drivers more generally, see Stokke, 2019).

While the diversity of Nordic regional security policy arrangements has resulted in a wide range of foreign policy positions among the Nordics if seen over time (as reflected in the flexible concept of “Nordic balance”), their commitment to UN declarations on anti-racism and anti-colonialism, as well as their development aid policies, has allowed for more unity. Indeed, development aid became the object of both governmental, party, and administrative coordination efforts from the mid-1970s and onwards, especially following the end of the Portuguese Colonial War (Sellström, 1999 and 2002; see also Nygren, 2021). At first, pursuant US and general western trends in the 1950s and 1960s, and reflective of the corporatist setup of Scandinavian political economy domestically (Borring Olesen, Pharo and Paaskesen, 2013; Nilsson, 2004), Nordic development aid policies and activities have gradually coalesced into a “Nordic aid model” according to some observers: prioritising “untied” aid on the “conditions of the recipient” to “socially progressive” countries, this model was presented in the 1980s as a counter-model to the emerging World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) consensus on structural reform, but also distinct in its programmatic, albeit imperfect, decoupling of commercial interests from development activities (Stokke, 1989; Usher, 1997; Odén and Wohlgemuth, 2013; see also: Elgström and Delputte, 2016; and Engh, 2021).

Summarising the above scholarship on the Scandinavian-Global South relationship, three key drivers emerge: *a*) creative adaptation to wider US/western agendas; *b*) international extension of the welfare state based upon domestic moral values; and *c*) norm entrepreneurship aiming to mitigate global tensions. One reason for this divergence in interpretation follows from the “compartmentalised” literatures on the development cooperation, diplomatic activities, and commercial relations of the Scandinavian countries in the academic fields of international history and international relations. Today, however, there is a growing interest in the intellectual and cultural aspects of Scandinavian-Global South relations as expressions of public opinion but also state information programmes (for Sweden, see e.g.: Ekengren and Oscarsson, 1999; Öhman, 2008; Diurlin, 2019; and Glover, 2019), mirroring the significance of such factors for our understanding of the dynamics of the global Cold War (Iriye, 1997; Saunders, 1999; Lehmkuhl, 2001; see also Scott-Smith and Lerg, 2017). Similarly, recent studies have identified the role played by Scandinavian businesses and State-owned enterprises in securing access to export markets, import goods, and natural resources in the global value chains of high modernity (Avango, Högselius and Nilsson, 2014; Glover, 2018, and literature cited therein).

With few exceptions however, less attention has this far been directed to these small States’ more strategic economic and political interests in responding to global shifts, such as the decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s (Frühling, 1986; Löden, 1999; Glover, 2019), the political and economic rise of the Global South in the 1970s (Marklund, 2019), and the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. There is thus a need to explore how trade policy, industrial policy, foreign policy, economic policy, and development policy objectives and processes have interacted in shaping the specificities of Scandinavian internationalism and to investigate its relations to other forms of internationalism (cf. Sluga and Clavin, 2017), activities of “like-minded countries” at the UN, as well as attempts at balancing Cold War tensions, and aiming at transcending bipolar global structures in other arenas than the UN, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (for NAM, see Dinkel, 2019; for like-minded countries, see O’Sullivan, 2015).

As there is a growing scholarship on the multi-layered actual relations between the Global South and Sweden, this article by contrast seeks to trace the horizons of expectation

and multi-positionalities of Swedish internationalism in response to the expected rise and assumed problems of the decolonising Global South, as well as its impact upon the world system and hence Sweden. While a systematic study would require analysis of key environments and interfaces for Swedish-Global South relations, the present article is for practical purposes limited to exploring the Swedish debates on the relationship between this small northern country and the so-called “Third World” from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s (for discussions of the concept of “Third World”, see: Tängerstad, 2000; and Kullberg, 2015). In these debates, self-perceptions, ideas, and goals are expressed in terms of specific moral responsibilities, security interests, and developmental models as pinned to Sweden vis-à-vis the decolonising Global South. Here, these tableaux serve to highlight a set of critical junctures where the relationship between one Scandinavian country, Sweden, and the emerging Global South came under particularly intense renegotiation – when the scope of solidarity was put to the test.

SWEDEN HELPS

Post-war Swedish engagement with the interlinked issues of decolonisation and development followed general US and western European trends, implying a modest commitment to UN calls for support to the “new nations”. One of the first concrete proposals for Swedish bilateral aid is the so-called “Mohn Plan”, named after Swedish diplomat Paul Mohn, former aide to Folke Bernadotte in Palestine. Presented in 1952, the plan called for inviting 1,000 young Asians annually to Sweden “to study local government and democracy in action”. According to Mohn, the main reason for casting Sweden in this role vis-à-vis decolonising Asia was the assumption that “the Swede” was “[...] not encumbered with colonial or great power complexes in his [*sic!*] dealings with colored people. His humane disposition and sense of ‘fair play’ has helped to create confidence in ‘Swedishness’ [*det svenska*], which is one of the very few assets in the bankruptcy estate of Western culture [...]” (Mohn cited in Berg, Lundberg, Tydén, 2021, p. 57; Mohn, 1952a and 1952b; for Mohn generally, see Alexanderson, 1961).

The plan was described by relevant stakeholders as unrealistic. At the Central Committee for Swedish Technical Assistance to Less Developed Areas (*Centralkommittén för svenskt tekniskt bistånd till mindre utvecklade områden*, CK), the proposal was met with scepticism, as there was “uncertainty about the relevance of the Swedish model for the situation in Asian countries at this time” (Frühling, 1986, p. 18). Nevertheless, the Mohn Plan received enthusiastic backing from several youth organisations, including the Swedish National Union of Students (*Sveriges Förenade Studentkårer*, SFS) with its then Secretary Olof Palme, and especially among social democratic and liberal youth politicians (Berntson and Persson, 1968, p. 14). While the exchange programmes eventually launched within the framework of the Swedish Institute and directed at the so-called “Third World” would prove much less ambitious than Mohn’s original vision (cf. Åkerlund, 2016), course activities were organised in Sweden by the Fredrika Bremer Association (*Fredrika Bremer Förbundet*, FBF) for women from the Global South at the initiative of FBF Chairperson Hanna Rydh (Gerdov, forthcoming). Administrative, educational, and medical expertise available to Swedish civil society organisations – not the least individual liberal or social democratic women such as Ulla Lindström, Agda Rössel, Alva Myrdal, and Inga Thorsson, as well as women’s associations, such as FBF but also the Swedish

branches of the International Alliance of Women (IAW) and the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) – served as a strategic resource that could not only be put on offer to the emerging development aid activities but also used for engaging directly with stakeholders from the Global South, relying upon internationalist networks and organisations (Gradszkova, Elgán and Kurvinen, forthcoming; see also Wisselgren, 2018).

As the problem of decolonisation increasingly featured also in Swedish foreign policy debate, Mohn's idea on Sweden's special responsibility, given the "absent colonialism" thesis, gained wider currency. In March 1955, Rolf Edberg, author, diplomat, and social democratic Member of Parliament, underscored "the increasingly pressing demands to lift the neglected peoples [*eftersatta folken*] to a more humane standard of living" as both a risk and opportunity, where "a country like Sweden can make a not insignificant effort". Noting that the "Arabic-Asian bloc" frequently allied in the UN against "colonialism", listening to the arguments voiced by Krishna Menon, "Nehru and other spiritual and political leaders of the new Asia" was considered by Edberg as a possible Swedish investment for the future, but also as an opportunity for a neutral, wealthy country such as Sweden to demonstrate the practical value of democracy towards securing prosperity and justice (Riksdagens protokoll 1955:8, pp. 103-105; for Edberg, see Larsson Heidenblad, 2016a and 2016b).

As noted by May-Britt Öhman (2008, p. 61), such self-understandings of Sweden's prospective role in the context of decolonisation also fed into the action programme "Sverige hjälper – ett handlingsprogram" ("Sweden helps – An action programme") (CK, 1959). While not formally a governmental report, its composition involving business, civil society, and labour market interests added significant import to its findings. While morals and values of compassion provided explicit arguments for Swedish engagement with the decolonising world, due to pressing human needs, the group concluded that Sweden also had natural interest in "supporting the expansion of the world economy", not only for expanding markets, but for alleviating poverty and for mitigating social conflicts in the long run. Countries selected for Swedish development aid should ideally match the competences and interests of Swedish business and technology, such as power plants, electrification, forest management, and ore prospecting, in addition to health care and public education. Commercial and developmental motives coincided, as noted by diplomat Sixten Heppling already in 1953, when he – unsuccessfully, might be added – sought to interest Swedish business in supporting early development aid efforts (Heppling cited in Berntson and Persson, 1968, pp. 12 and 15; Frühling, 1986; SOU, 1991:50; Nilsson, 2004; see also Glover, 2018).

THE AMBULANCE SWEDEN

The idea that small powers had a special international role to play had been a key theme during the League of Nations, which again resurfaced in the emerging Cold War. As the Swedish Armed Forces planned to augment its mobilisable strength of some 0,8 million personnel in 1958 with nuclear weapons as a deterrent in the late 1950s (Agrell, 2002; Jonter, 2016), the book *I stället för atombomb* (1958) written by pacifist author Per Anders Fogelström and student politician Roland Morell – Chairman of the Swedish National Union of Students, a position earlier held by Palme – protested these ambitions at creating a great power military in miniature. The two authors influentially presented the security

policy argument in favour of development aid and “Third World” solidarity on the part of Sweden, which would shape much of the debate during the radical 1960s and 1970s: “Mankind is waging today, every day, a terribly bitter war against hunger and disease, a war that results many times more victims than any major war”, the two authors wrote, noting the inability of a small country such as Sweden in deterring great power aggression in the atomic age. Instead, “we could give up a year’s costs for our own (yet insufficient) protection, we could certainly eradicate malaria, a disease that now claims close to three million lives each year. *A few years later, our action would have saved more people than the entire population of Sweden!*” (Fogelström and Morell, 1958, pp. 67-8).

This solution to Sweden’s security problem would incidentally also serve as a solution to the world’s development problem: “We put our entire defense – people and knowledge, materials and money – at the service of the United Nations for use in underdeveloped countries and in disaster situations anywhere in the world (natural disasters, wars, etc.)” (Fogelström and Morell, 1958, p. 68). In return, the authors imagined that “friendship pacts with a number of countries” would guarantee Swedish “neutrality and inviolability” and that the UN would similarly assure that “our services will be impartially given to the countries that need them most, regardless of the good or bad ‘behavior’ of these countries” (Fogelström and Morell, 1958, p. 69). Envisioning the Swedish military service transformed into a peace service, with training in Sweden followed by four-month service abroad, the Swedish officer corps should be recast as medical and clearing crews, law enforcement officers, interpreters, agricultural machinists, instructors for cultivation, animal husbandry, fishing, crafts, industry, etc., well drillers, firefighters, and dam and construction workers. Moreover, they argued, “[t]he war industry must be adapted to the new requirements. Now tractors and other agricultural machinery, drills, medical instruments and medicines, excavators and fire trucks, work tools of all kinds, books are needed” (Fogelström and Morell, 1958, pp. 70-2).

Concluding, Fogelström and Morell argued that “our defense budget [as spent on relief efforts] will create a good-will that will be completely unique in world history” – by rebranding Sweden as “the ‘ambulance Sweden,’ the country that helps and builds”, “our name would be known everywhere, in all parts of the world, and in all political camps”, effectively commanding global and universal opposition across ideological, economic, and cultural dividing lines, in case Sweden would be attacked (Fogelström and Morell, 1958, pp. 73): “In the long run, our action would also be of great importance for the leveling of racial differences. The colored peoples would find that not all whites want to exploit and oppress them, but that there are also white people who want to help, work side by side” (Fogelström and Morell, 1958, p. 74).

The proposal for “Ambulance Sweden” would reverberate in Swedish public debate during the late 1950s, and gained traction not only from domestic discussions on the future of Swedish security, but also from international exchanges on the role of the UN as well as minor neutral powers for peacekeeping, disarmament, and development, issues that appeared increasingly interlinked in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis (cf. Noel-Baker, 1958; for proposals on a “UN legion”, see Kinloch-Pichat, 2004).

In summer 1960, as the Congo Crisis unfolded – involving peacekeepers from “neutral” countries such as Ethiopia, India, Ireland, and Sweden, operating under a UN mandate –, representatives of the social democratic youth unions gathered in Drammen, demanding the Nordic Council assign significantly greater resources to international aid activities:

The Nordic countries are particularly well placed to make lasting efforts in the service of peace and popular brotherhood. They lack the burden of colonial power, and their efforts are not misunderstood by the indigenous peoples. There is ample evidence of international confidence in the Nordic countries, and the United Nations' decision to extend this to efforts to create peace and a better basis for self-government and democracy in the Congo also underscores the responsibility of the Nordic countries (Nordiska rådet, 1961, p. 585)¹.

Specifically, the Swedish Social Democratic Youth League (*Sveriges socialdemokratiska ungdomsförbund*, SSU) demanded that Nordic aid be concentrated in Congo, directed at issues of education and refugee relief, pursuing the “humanitarian tradition by actively contributing to the solution of the refugee camp problem worldwide” (Nordiska rådet, 1961, p. 585), directly connecting the explicitly moral concerns with the security interests of the small Nordic countries in the bipolar Cold War, turning increasingly global.

THE AID BIBLE

While Swedish security policy continued to follow the traditional “total defence” model throughout the course of the Cold War, arguments akin to Fogelström’s and Morell’s featured frequently in the defence debate. Arguably, the gradual capping of Swedish defence expenditure from the Defence Act of 1968 followed from steep cost runs for military technology. However, the argument that military defence alone would not safeguard against great power aggression and that Cold War-related military oppression in the “Third World” threatened global stability (cf.: Demker, 1996; and Ekengren, 2005) echoed prominently in the bill to Parliament in 1962 (Prop. 1962:100) where the scope of Swedish development aid was authoritatively set in the context of wider Swedish foreign policy objectives.

The bill – also known as the “Aid Bible” (*biståndsbibeln*) – has been extensively studied as the fundament of Swedish development policy, but its connection to stated Swedish neutral foreign policy has not been fully explored yet (see Bjereld, Johansson and Molin, 2008; for a discussion, see Glover, 2016). Noting that development aid aimed at reducing “mistrust and the tension between large and small powers”, the bill, bearing the mark of future Prime Minister Olof Palme, recognised the “right of the small independent states to choose a neutral line” in the conviction that neutral Sweden not only “plays a stabilizing role in northern Europe” but also provides “services that a neutral state such as Sweden can do within the UN”, as exemplified by peacekeeping operations in Suez and Congo (Prop. 1962:100, p. 131). Here, a variety of qualifying characteristics served to underscore a level of commonality, if not explicit community, with the emerging Global South: smallness, independence, exemplarity, progressivism, and peacefulness were all elements that would frequently reverberate in continued Swedish debates on the roles and responsibilities of Sweden vis-à-vis the Global South. These characteristics could certainly be questioned on several accounts but would mostly be accepted as combined factors as well as ideals in Swedish public debate during the 1960s and onwards.

But the bill to Parliament of 1962 also identified two other important reasons for Sweden to take an activist stance on the issue of decolonisation and development: first, trade, and

¹ I gratefully thank Mary Hilson for having brought this statement to my attention (email from Mary Hilson, 7 May 2019).

second, UN balance of power. Noting that free trade is a precondition for “employment and living standards in Sweden”, the bill established that “it is a legitimate and important interest in Swedish foreign policy to create conditions for increased Swedish exports. At the same time, for both economic and political reasons, we are interested in keeping developing countries’ exports to industrialized countries at as high and stable a level as possible” (Prop. 1962:100, p. 132). Furthermore, the bill observed, almost 50 States in Asia and Africa with a total of almost 900 million inhabitants gained national independence by the early 1960s, meaning that “the new states, together with Latin American countries, have a majority in the UN General Assembly” and that it is only “a matter of time before all colonies gain full independence” (Prop. 1962:100, p. 132). Noting that the drive towards political independence is matched by economic interdependence, the bill concluded that, even though Sweden can only make a very modest contribution to the solution of the enormous problems faced by the “developing countries”, it is “precisely our independent foreign policy that gives us special opportunities, but also special obligations, to help ensure that development will be characterized by international solidarity”. Continuing, the bill stated that “to the extent that our contributions to developing countries can strengthen the UN’s prestige, they serve a long-term Swedish interest. There is already a reason here to use the UN and its bodies as far as possible for the Swedish efforts” (Prop. 1962:100, p. 133). International expectations on Swedish progressivism as a direct function of the country’s neutrality (discussion in Glover, 2016, p. 167) were also voiced as the bill stipulated that “it would surely disappoint many of them [the developing countries] if our efforts were markedly less than those of other industrialized countries” (Prop. 1962:100, pp. 131 and 134).

Without direct references to support these statements, it is difficult to assess to what extent this view projected Swedish ambitions or expressed actual “Third World” expectations. Regardless, the bill stated a long-term goal of establishing for Sweden “a special position to be able to work and gain a hearing within the framework of the international aid agencies” and using bilateral projects for acquiring “a special goodwill in the recipient country, which can be of benefit to us in various ways” (Prop. 1962:100, p. 134). Yet, the bill rejected all forms of “political conditions” for extending Swedish development aid, emphasising aid on the “conditions of development” (Marklund in de Bengy Puyvallée and Bjørkdahl, 2021), defined as “higher standard of living, greater security and increased freedom for the entire population” (Prop. 1962:100, p. 135). Another way of interpreting this definition of “aid efficiency” would be “Swedish impact”, although this aspect was not further elaborated in the Bill (Prop. 1962:100, pp. 159-60). This Swedish impact could just as well be imprinted upon international institutions, UN assistance programmes (e.g. the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance [EPTA] and the Special Fund) and other, major donor countries, as upon recipient countries. Moreover, the Swedish Government at the time envisioned a growing competition between western countries, small and large – Israel was often cited – for influence and markets in the decolonising Global South (Prop. 1962:100, p. 160), viewing education as a critical asset in this regard (SOU 1963:34).

SWEDEN IN THE “RICH MAN’S CLUB”

In many ways, 1965 proved a decisive year for Swedish opinion on the emerging Global South, not only through the reorganisation of Swedish development aid administration,

including the establishment of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Notably, the Swedish Social Democratic Party's dedicated its *Rådslag 65* on the topic of "Vår insats för u-länderna" ("Our effort for the developing countries", Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti, Landsorganisationen i Sverige, 1965). Minister without portfolio Olof Palme's famous speech at the Congress of the Swedish Association of Christian Social Democrats (*Sveriges kristna socialdemokraters förbund*, commonly known as *Broderskapsrörelsen*, "the Brotherhood Movement") in Gävle on 30 July 1965 outlined Sweden's responsibilities to the decolonising countries, and has often been presented as initiating a new era in Swedish-Global South relations. While its importance shall not be underestimated, Palme's speech should also be read in the context of the intense press debate on the proposals for a Swedish "peace corps" in direct emulation of the US precedent, growing New Left criticism of Swedish development aid as covert "neo-imperialism" (Marklund in de Bengy Puyvallée and Björkdahl, 2021), and alarm reports on Swedish business exploits in South Africa, South America, and Liberia (see discussion in Glover, 2019). Above all, it followed from critical references to the discrepancy between Swedish declared aims and Swedish actual support of the decolonised countries.

The unaccustomed self-identity due to Sweden's new membership in the world's "Rich Man's Club" (discussion in Glover, 2016, p. 166 ff.) figured prominently in the press debate during the summer of 1965. In the ensuing debate in Sweden's main daily "Dagens Nyheter", actuary Stig Karlander (1965a and 1965b) attempted to quantify Sweden's moral responsibility. Karlander noted that a distribution of the earth's population among rich and poor means that there are "two developing nationals (*u-ländare*) for each of us in the rich part of the world". This term, *u-ländare*, is difficult to translate, and appears to have had a relatively short life in Swedish public debate, but fulfilled an important role in the mid-1960s Swedish discussions on the emerging "Third World". By mathematical logic, Sweden should be responsible for 15 million "developing nationals", Karlander adding that, given its high standard of living, Sweden should in fact be "responsible for perhaps even 20 or 25 million people". However, even if appropriate funds were to be channelled to this end, Karlander concluded that these funds would merely manage to maintain, not improve, the situation. He therefore suggested that all Swedish development aid should be concentrated upon family planning and population control, in fact a priority of Swedish development policy (Berg, 2009).

Karlander's political arithmetic provoked critical response in the Swedish press. Not for its mathematical modelling of Swedish moral responsibility, but for his conclusion in favour of family planning. Derided as inhumane, cynical, unreasonable, and impossible in the newspapers (Sontag, 1965a, 1965b, and 1965c), it in fact held a central position in contemporary Swedish development policy. Nevertheless, the summer press debate reverberated positively in the international and foreign policy debate in the Riksdag in November 1965: Member of Parliament for the liberal People's Party (*Folkpartiet*) Joel Sörenson presented his vision of Sweden's responsibility towards the "Third World" – possibly the first time this term was used in the Swedish Riksdag – noting "[w]e are quite far from true responsibility and true compassion" as long as Sweden does not meet Karlander's demand (Riksdagens protokoll 1965:33, pp. 80-1). At the Swedish launch of Gunnar Myrdal's magistral three-volume work *Asian Drama* (1968) at the Swedish Economic Association in April 1968, Karlander unleashed his biopolitical arithmetic against those who held that Sweden's primary role would be to simply trade with, and invest in the developing countries, as argued by Myrdal. In his polemic with Myrdal, Karlander

argued that Sweden, due to being “among the countries in the ‘rich man’s club’ in the industrialized countries”, thus upping the ante of Swedish responsibility: “Say we take on not two but three ‘developing nationals’. Then 8 million Swedes would be responsible for approximately 25 million ‘developing nationals’ in 1966-1968” (Nationalekonomiska föreningen, 1968, pp. 71-2).

In these exchanges on the idealised roles and responsibilities of Sweden in relation to the emerging Global South during the 1950s and 1960s, there is a persistent concern with limited resources, sceptical publics, and moral economy in relation to expected returns – whether economic or reputational. These exchanges evidence a sometimes probing, but often self-confident understanding of a special relationship on the part of Sweden vis-à-vis the decolonising “Third World”. The notion of a Swedish special relationship in both diplomatic initiatives, parliamentary exchanges, public debate, and academia temporally preceded and possibly even conditioned the later and more active engagement with the so-called “Third World” flourishing during the 1970s and 1980s, as manifested in the growing aid budgets from 1968 and onwards (Ekengren and Götz, 2013), the intensified, if clandestine, support to national liberation movements in southern Africa and south-eastern Asia beginning in 1969, and – importantly – the diplomatically enthusiastic, but in practice cautious, response of the Swedish foreign policy establishment to successive UN agendas and conferences on women, population, food, and environment. While economic relations would later develop into the main problem of this relationship, the emergence of this idea of a special relationship was forged at a time of profound unity on the possibility or even necessity of transitioning from development aid (*utvecklingsbistånd*) to a more comprehensive, programmatic Swedish developmental policy (*utvecklingspolitik*) towards the decolonising countries.

By explicitly addressing the tension between development and environment, Olof Palme’s and the Swedish Government’s initiative to the 1972 UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm underscored the interconnectivity of ecological and economic – and hence also political and social – problems between as well as within countries, rich and poor alike. Two interrelated economic and political events added urgency to this question, propelling it to the centre of Swedish public debate for the next decade (cf.: Linnér and Selin, 2013; Sörlin, 2021; Larsson Heidenblad, 2021; and Paglia, 2021): first, in October 1973, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) proclaimed an oil embargo in response to certain western countries’ support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War (Yergin, 2008; Garavini, 2015, pp. 79-92). Second, the oil crisis added traction to the joint demands of the newly independent countries for more equitable terms of trade between North and South, first expressed through the activities of the Group of 77 (G77) within the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and later by NAM.

The Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in May 1974 (cf.: Gilman, 2015, pp. 1-16; Bockman, 2015, pp. 109-28; McFarland, 2015, pp. 217-33; Franczak, 2018, pp. 447-64; Moyn, 2018; and Andersson, 2018, pp. 315-44). Reflecting the dependency theory, the NIEO agenda viewed trade as a driver of development, and specified industrial relocation, reduced tariffs, increased development aid, intensified technology transfers, and better control of commodity prices and transnational corporations as necessary measures for a more equitable global market. North-South tension eclipsed East-West tension, framing ecological and economic risks as a kind of ideology, but also as a normative target for political action towards global justice and management of future natural resources –

and human rights-based conflicts between North and South (Murphy, 1984; Bhagwati, 1977; Ogle, 2014, pp. 211-34).

In response to the calls for NIEO, several Swedish studies, reports, and analyses were commissioned by various semi-public foundations and research institutes on “the problem of survival for small developed States” in view of future ecological and economic problems. Drawing upon a set of such studies, the impact of the NIEO agenda/ideology as brought in by the Global South upon the imagined scope of Swedish international solidarity can be assessed (see also Riksdagens protokoll 1974:43). Swedish voices in the development and environment debate – e.g. Georg Borgström (1971), Ernst Michanek (1971), Gunnar Myrdal (1970), and Inga Thorsson (1971 and 1972) (see also Åström, 1972, pp. 2-5; for a discussion, see Larsson Heidenblad, 2021) – tended to agree with the so-called “Founex Report”, noting that global environmental degradation raised the issue of a more equal distribution of growth, and use of natural resources between North and South.

In preparation for the upcoming Special Session at the UN General Assembly, the Uppsala-based Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation commissioned a report on the need of “another development” in Sweden itself, against the backdrop of NIEO. The result – entitled *How Much is Lagom? Sweden as a Case in the Quest for Appropriate Development* – aimed to analyse “how Sweden might reorient itself if it were to take seriously its obligations to share global resources in equity with other people and to conform with the ideal of perceiving the world as a whole” (Bäckstrand and Ingelstam, 1975; Swedish translations republished in 1975, 1977, 1979, and 1980). The authors of the report, Göran Bäckstrand and Lars Ingelstam, proposed five caps on consumption: *a*) maximum consumption levels on meat; *b*) maximum levels of oil consumption; *c*) more economical use of buildings; *d*) greater durability of consumer goods; and *e*) no privately owned automobiles (interview with Bäckstrand and Ingelstam, 15 December 2020; see also: Allard, Lindholm, 1976; Utredningen om en handlingsplan för hållbar konsumtion, 2005; Holmberg, 2017; and Marklund, 2019). The impact of these measures upon the global resource balance and global poverty would be minor, but Bäckstrand and Ingelstam underscored that the “value in a rich country taking some note of its own declarations” could suggest an example or a model of a “sustainable way of life” to other developing countries as well. Similar assessments were voiced as the Swedish Riksdag hosted a symposium in April 1975, discussing how Sweden should ideally respond to the UN conferences on population and food in relation to the calls for NIEO (Sekretariatet för framtidsstudier, Statsrådsberedningen, 1975).

SWEDEN IN THE WORLD SOCIETY

In response to the global shifts caused by the rise of the Global South and especially the dramatic consequences of the oil crisis, several futurology projects were initiated at the Secretariat for Future Studies in 1975 (for this agency, see: Arbetsgruppen för framtidsforskning, 1972; and Andersson, 2006). These projects were tasked with analysing the preconditions for energy supply, resource supply, working life, as well as the prospective status for “Sweden in the world society”. The latter study offered a first meta-analysis of Palme’s take on Swedish active foreign policy (for this, see: Elgström, 1982; Lödén; 1999; Brommesson, 2007; and Bjereld, Johansson and Molin, 2008). Palme’s brand of active foreign policy was presented as an explicit “small state doctrine” (Huldt, 1976, pp. 130-1; Kleberg, 1977, pp. 67-87; Säkerhetspolitiska utredningen, 2002, pp. 447-51). According

to this analysis, under the editorship of Bo Huldt, the balance of terror resulted in overall East-West détente, which could be viewed as positive. Palme, however, had, according to the authors, identified the risk of a superpower “duopol”, controlling the affairs of the small States across the world, thus infringing upon national sovereignty, violating national liberation, and stalling development (Huldt, 1980, p. 88 ff). Here, there was a community of interest between all small countries, whether in the First World or in the “Third World”, as the argument went (Berntson, Persson, 1968; Stokke, 1978).

This perceived community of interest motivated Sweden’s support for NIEO. In a speech in Piteå in August 1974 often considered as the public launch of the small state doctrine, Palme explicitly referred to the NIEO agenda as an example of such small state solidarity, while urging his audiences to consider the reach of such solidarity by asking rhetorically: “Is the world’s rich minority prepared to make sacrifices, to give up any of its privileges and positions of power?” (ARAB, Olof Palme’s Archive). During the autumn of 1974, the interconnection between the small state doctrine and the NIEO agenda was further underscored by Palme in numerous interviews and speeches in conjunction with his travels to the Netherlands and Canada, and – most symbolically – his statements in conjunction with his November 1974 visit to Algeria’s leader Houari Boumediene, Secretary General of NAM, and a prominent exponent for the NIEO agenda (ARAB, Olof Palme’s Archive). Francophone *tiers-mondiste* press hailed Stockholm as the capital of solidarity, in reference to Palme’s and Sweden’s contributions to the Stockholm conference in 1972, and Algiers as the capital of non-alignment, in recognition of Boumediene’s and Algeria’s efforts vis-à-vis NIEO (Mørkved Hellenes and Marklund, 2018). Subsequently, Swedish support of the NIEO agenda was officially pronounced in the Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs in 1975 (Utrikesdepartementet, 1976, p. 22; Stokke, 1978; Jerneck, 1990, pp. 121-42).

Confirming the centrality of this commitment on the part of Swedish social democracy, an entry on the NIEO was also included in the new party programme of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, adopted at the Party Congress in September 1975. Characterising both capitalism and communism as suffering from a “one-sided focus on economic growth and an ultimately unsustainable waste of natural resources”, the party programme specified that domestic growth needs to be subjected to “planned management under public control” while “international cooperation must focus on providing a new and fair world economic order. The inevitable perspective is worldwide scarcity management [*knapphetsushållning*]” (Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti, 1975). The question of fusing economic and ecological concerns paralleled the issue of aligning Swedish domestic and international policies, as underscored by Palme speaking at the UN General Assembly in November 1975 (ARAB, Olof Palme’s Archive).

Aside from these diplomatic initiatives, also more pragmatic forms of global outreach were extended to the Global South from Sweden during this time. Partially as an emergency response to the oil crisis, and partially as a more long-term trade policy aimed at diversifying capital markets, energy supply, and foreign trade, the Government took an active stance in negotiating bilateral agreements with several developing “progressive” countries (Hveem, 1989, pp. 265-80; Pratt and Södersten, 1989; Kiljunen, 1989; Sellström, 2002, p. 656) – typically transfers of technology for oil (Ahlander and Kjellén, 1976, p. 24 ff.) – as well as setting up various mechanisms for closer cooperation between development and industry (Industribiståndsutredningen, 1972; Stokke, 1978). From 1970 to 1975, Swedish exports to developing countries increased from 9% to 12.6% of total exports

while Swedish industrial aid grew from 2% to 20% of total aid budget, a not insignificant reorientation of national resources as Swedish development aid that year reached the Swedish Government's target of allocating 1% of GDP to development aid, as set in 1968 (1977 års industribiståndsutredning, 1977, p. 9; see also Götz and Ekengren, 2013, pp. 21-49).

SWEDEN IN A NIEO

The disproportionate growth of Swedish aid above trade signals the significance attached to Global North-South issues by the Swedish social democratic Government but should not be taken to indicate a lack of interest in Swedish commercial outreach to the Global South in these years. However, this outreach was also a sensitive issue, as it could on the one hand be construed in terms of small state solidarity through trade and technology transfers, but as neo-imperialism or semi-colonialism on the other. In the elections of 1976, the Swedish Social Democratic Party lost to a center-right coalition led by the Centre Party, largely due to the ability of the latter to capture popular concerns with nuclear power and to tap into "post-materialist values" (Pettersson, 1977; Inglehart, 1977). Regarding international development and environment, the new Government generally tended to follow Palme's line, albeit somewhat less articulated, indicating the centrality of the small state doctrine at the time (Huldt, 1980, p. 88). While the negotiations on NIEO continued inconclusively at the Conference on International Economic Cooperation (CIEC) and within UNCTAD, a steady flow of motions and interpellations in Parliament – as well as exchanges between Minister of Foreign Affairs Karin Söder and Olof Palme, in opposition but fundamentally agreed on NIEO – vouch for the continued relevance of NIEO as an important reference object in Swedish political debate (Sekretariatet för framtidsstudier, 1979, Appendix 3; see also: Riksdagens protokoll, 1975/76:35; and Riksdagens protokoll, 1977/78:96-97). The new party programmes of the Centre Party (Centerpartiet, 1981) and the People's Party (Folkpartiet, 1982) explicitly underlined Sweden's commitment to NIEO. Both parties emphasised that NIEO would require substantial changes in Swedish economic policies and lifestyle choices. While challenging, this would provide new economic and social opportunities, given the global economic downturn, both parties held.

By 1977, the pressures of oil crisis, and the rise of the Global South in the shape of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), NIEO, as well as the newly industrialised countries (NICs), combined with post-materialism, recession, and stagflation in the West, continued to add renewed urgency to the matters under study in the "Sweden in the world society" futurology project. In recognition of this fact, as well as of the explicit support of the NIEO as voiced by successive Swedish Governments, the Directorate of the Secretariat for Future Studies earmarked a large proportion of its resources for a three-year project on "Sweden in a New International Economic Order" to be launched in 1978. The task of the Secretariat for Future Studies was to provide "a review of the demands and proposals put forward by the developing countries and of international future studies with a similar focus" as well as "a discussion of the effects of the New International Economic Order on Sweden and the demands which such an order can make on Swedish policy" (Sekretariatet för framtidsstudier, 1979, Appendix 3, p. 3).

Noting that an active foreign policy and "a concerted policy towards the developing countries" could not any longer be confined to development policy and UN policy (e.g.

disarmament and environment), the project was to study how Swedish domestic policy fields – e.g. trade, exchange, agriculture, industry, science, and defence – could be reoriented in line with NIEO (Biståndspolitiska utredningen, 1977). As its starting point, however, the futures study also noted two serious weaknesses in the NIEO agenda, which had become evident as the CIEC and UNCTAD negotiations in Paris and Nairobi had reached an impasse in 1977. On the one hand, the “Third World front”, which had been united in 1974, had by now splintered into OPEC, NIC, and least developed countries (LDCs), with different interests and diverging views on whether aid, trade, or self-reliance would be preferable. On the other hand, the futures study cited Gunnar Myrdal’s 1975 statement – “The blunt truth is that without rather radical changes in the consumption patterns in the rich countries, any pious talk about a new world economic order is humbug” (Myrdal, 1975).

Despite this panning by one of Sweden’s foremost experts on development issues and so-called “world problems”, the second phase of the project invited four civil society organisations – Labour Movement’s International Centre (*Arbetarrörelsens internationella centrum*, AIC, formed in 1978, and reorganised in 1992 as the Olof Palme International Center), Ecumenical Developing Country Week (*Ekumeniska u-veckan*), The Future in Our Hands (*Framtiden i våra händer*), and the Centre for Business and Policy Studies (*Studieförbundet Näringsliv och samhälle*, SNS) – to present their views of Sweden in a NIEO.

Except the report prepared by SNS, written by economist Marian Radetzki, and representing the business interests of Sweden, the reports were the result of joint working groups, and generally positive or even enthusiastic on the prospects of adapting Swedish society to NIEO. Radetzki noted the interest of Swedish business in “internationalising” its activities, its growing awareness of the importance of environment in general and in North-South commercial contacts, and its embrace of the “trade not aid” focus of the early NIEO proposals. But the report also voiced the business circles’ scepticism concerning the “self-reliance” track of the later NIEO negotiations and serious concerns over NIC competition, natural resources, energy supply, and de-growth if Swedish economy and society was to be scaled down in the interest of environmental preservation and global solidarity (Radetzki, 1980; for less positive assessments, see: Möller, 1976; Berg, 1976; and Lundgren, 1977; for critical views, see: Brundenius, 1980; Hermele and Larsson, 1977; and Brundenius *et al.*, 1980).

The AIC report reiterated support from the Swedish Social Democratic Party for the values underpinning the NIEO agenda, but as a representative of the broad labour movement, including the trade unions, it also warned of the momentous consequences not only to Swedish business and industry welfare state. In response, it suggested that Swedish society could possibly be divided into an open, competition-oriented sector and a protected, publicly supported sector to ensure the combination economic growth, global solidarity, and post-materialist values. Theoretically, such a division could be supported by increased exports, self-reliance, tax in kind from communal small-scale production, and bilateral agreements with certain developing countries in the interest of solidarity. The report made clear however that this kind of developing country policy should not detract resources from the development aid budget (*Arbetarrörelsens internationella centrum*, 1981; see also discussion in Link, 1982, pp. 113-23).

The ecumenical report, representing the religious communities of Sweden, turned the problem upside down, asking: “Can the world afford Sweden?” Turning the question back

at the Swedes, the authors of the ecumenical report argued that taking the calls for NIEO seriously would also require the Swedes to consider – and rethink – their “ecological footprint” and to adjust accordingly in the interest of “the outer limits of the planet”. Just as in the *Lagom* debate discussed above, the demands of NIEO were rather regarded as an opportunity to enact necessary changes in Swedish society, troubled anomie, bureaucracy, and capitalism (Grenholm, 1980). A rather similar perspective was presented in the report provided by the organisation The Future in Our Hands, as a representative of the growing alternative movement in Sweden. In its report, the organisation sketched an ecpolitical programme for Sweden, implying an adaptation to the self-reliance discourses increasingly popular among representatives of the LCDs, and inspired by Norwegian author and left-wing politician Hartvig Sætra’s (1972) “ecological socialism” or “populism”. Such self-reliance would be strategic, decoupling Sweden from much of the Western economic exchange except for technology, while increasing trade with the LDCs, the authors of the report assured (Gustafsson *et al.*, 1981; see also discussion in Link, 1982, p. 172 ff.).

Summarising the state of the debate on NIEO in 1979, journalist Göran Rosenberg (1979) of social democratic daily *Aftonbladet* noted that the futures debate had essentially reached an impasse, strung in between an impossible “choice” between self-reliance *or* free trade, development *or* environment. By the time of delivery of the final report of the futures study on Sweden in a NIEO in 1982, not only the hope and fears of NIEO had faded: the very idea that a country could have a “choice” appeared decidedly less credible. Instead, international interdependence spelled a need to adapt to global trends. Nevertheless, the organising principles of the NIEO debate still reverberated in Swedish politico-scientific knowledge production and “opinion formation”, long after NIEO had ceased to be a reference object of internationalism. Now, however, the notion of choice pertained less to Sweden’s *foreign policy*. Rather, it was fundamentally concerned with the introspective issue of how Swedish *domestic policy* should be reformed to better prepare Swedish economy and society for the inevitable increasing global competition between countries and trading blocks, a competition which the NIEO debates had acknowledged but explicitly turned against.

CONCLUSION

The vicissitudes of returning Cold War tension, energy crisis, stagflation, and post-industrial society had not only brought NIEO off the charts even in Swedish foreign policy and internationalism at the beginning of the 1980s – the lost decade of development, but it had also brought it into the introspective visions of Swedish policy planners and public debate. Here, however, the NIEO debate reverberated long after the NIEO had ceased to be a global agenda option. In the Swedish NIEO debate, two distinct and previously conflicting views on Sweden’s role in a globalising world increasingly converged: global solidarity through small-scale low tech aiming at a future reorientation of Swedish society and at the production of “democratic goods” intended for export to, or co-production with the Global South – in accordance with the “anti-growth” school identified already in the *Lagom* debate in 1975 (Hultman, 2015) – could now be conceptually combined with a competitive national strategy through large-scale high tech and industrial restructuring on the basis of existing Swedish economy and technology for the booming NIC markets, more in line with the “growth” school. For example, while the final report of the futures study

Energy and Society still posited a radical dichotomy between “Nuclear Sweden” and “Solar Sweden”, primarily for heuristic rather than political reasons or planning purposes, several other studies around the same time probed the possibility of mixing low tech and high tech (Lönroth, Johansson and Steen, 1978; Boston Consulting Group, 1978; Kihlman, 1979; on the Swedish drive for space technology, see Wormbs and Källstrand, 2007). The former line of thinking served as a motive for Swedish engagement with mega conferences and *ad hoc* UN meetings, while the latter would ensure that Sweden had something to put up on offer regarding concrete, science-laden, and technology-oriented issues such as climate, disarmament, environment, food, habitat, oceans, population, space, and nuclear winter as an avenue of influence and internationalism for smaller States (Svedin, 1979, pp. 48-51; for a similar argument, see Huldt, 1976, p. 135).

While ethical elements have played a prominent role in all of these exchanges on the ideal relationship between Sweden and the decolonising Global South, it is also evident from this study that these discussions have explicitly combined demands for *global* solidarity – evidently widely held in Swedish public opinion at the time, and embraced by successive Swedish Governments both left and right – with *national* goals of economic and political self-determination in Sweden itself: Swedish active foreign policy and small state solidarity during the Cold War has been primarily understood as catering to traditional “humane internationalism” and novel New Left sensibilities (Etzemüller, 2005; Cronqvist *et al.*, 2008; Ekman Jørgensen, 2008, pp. 326-38; Östberg, 2008, pp. 339-62; Ekengren, 2011, pp. 117-34; Makko, 2012, pp. 68-97; Åselius, 2016, pp. 113-35) as well as – but less commonly – as a realist adaptation to the geopolitical landscape of bipolar tension (Huldt, 1976). As such, the study of Swedish “Third World solidarity” has thus far primarily focused upon the externally oriented activities such as development aid, diplomacy, disarmament, humanitarian action, and support for national liberation, usually within the framework of the UN system. But this solidarity – whether primarily idealist or realist in character – has also been shaped by the fusing of national policies and international agendas, necessitating a mode of balancing internal and external demands for Swedish moral diplomacy vis-à-vis the decolonising Global South.

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