

PROFILES FROM SWEDEN: CATEGORY VI

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Category 6 in Sweden is distinguished by a progressive absence of the traditional worker in the sense that David Lockwood classified the ideal type factory worker who would be found in those production industries that were not yet exposed to automation and the thumping heart of which would be an assembly line. This factory pertained to the mass production for mass consumption era. Taylorism was its guiding organisational principle. Swedish industry has tried to rationalize in an American tempo to increase the service share of the post-taylorist firm. Some of the Swedish profiles of this category have been caught up in this whirlpool of change where first the regional-ecological niche industry is rationalized into capital intensive hi-tech and then the traditional industry, which once was a pillar in the welfare state construct, is automated into a labour force of minor proportions. Others are representatives of what we conceive of as a major issue of principle. This concerns the eternal question of women's position in the family and at work and the equally eternal question of equality. We still find that the equality issue is easily stuck away or hidden behind a veil of social/family needs. Our cases testify amply, we feel, to both of these archetypes.

ANTON: He was born in 1951 on an island in the archipelago of Göteborg. This island consists basically of nine clannish families and a number of urban well to do middle class professionals who have moved out from the city centre. The nine original clans descend from the 17th century on this island. They have mostly earned their living through the obvious niche within reach, namely fishing. Some live stock cultivation has also contributed to the household economies. Fishing has remained the mainstay activity for centuries. Anton belonged to one of those original fishing clans.

Up to the early 1970s fishing represented a golden industry. Investments in ships was not overburdening. Competition remained on a restricted level. Boundaries between national fishing fleets were respected. The young men belonging to a family of fishing entrepreneurs could easily become prosperous. The fishing lobby was tough minded and successful from the late 1950s onwards. During the 1960s the young men on the islands used these economic opportunities to establish a modern up to date life and for further studies. Many made other professional careers. Most remained in the fishing business close to their family niche occupations until the bitter end during the late 1970s. In the 1980s only a few could afford to keep a modern fishing fleet, which required investments that an average fisherman could

never present. The family to whom Anton belonged had to abruptly give up the economic activity that had been its *raison d'être* for centuries.

During most of the 1980s Anton was still a strong and vital man with a tremendous capacity to work. Outside of fishing he had no qualifications. He had also reached an age when time was ripe to consider marriage to some young girl residing on the island. But most young women had left because of the declining prospects of this niche industry, which would easily fall within the classification made by Lockwood concerning such British industries as mining, steel production and ship building. Unskilled and unmarried Anton had no option but to seek employment at the Volvo factory in Göteborg.

He started to work there at the age of thirty in the early 1980s. At first he had a job with comparatively many variations due to his proved ability to work much harder than his colleagues. He simply applied the normal tempo from the fishing fleet. After three years, however, the brazen monotony of the assembly work began to take its toll. His right hand arm became worn out. He could not work for more than a year. During the time on sick leave in 1986-7 he felt utterly useless and spent most of his time doing odd trifle jobs helping his relatives on the island. A kind of depression began to take hold of him.

In 1988 he went back to work at the Volvo plant but this time in a less qualified and much less interesting occupation. He was still unmarried feeling that he could not offer any girl on the island the kind of standard the average fishing family had become used to. This partly an escape from the fact that his depression began to show more drastically. Anton got into a vicious circle and was on sick leave for a second time in the early 1990s. Since then he has not managed to rise out of his unemployed, single status and break with the family expectations on an island life. He felt he could not make the big step and move into town without losing his identity.

The incompatible elements ruling and commanding his life are typical of the experience hitting postwar generations in first agriculture then mining and finally ship-building and fishing. Anton could never get the adequate assistance from his big family members of which would be in equal conundrums regarding the existential reorientation of their life conditions. His only chance would be a successful devolvement of economic activities pertaining to his cultural sphere. That is however not within the horizon of his lifetime, yet.

BERTIL: Bertil was born in 1948. He went through ordinary schools for eight years before he started to work. This was normal in his working class circles. To earn money and learn a craft directly was the ultimate ambition for a working class lad of an average working class family from the age of fifteen. Bertil had a qualified mind for technical matters from a practical point of view and gradually also from a theoretical one. He applied his talent to his work as an electrician at the biggest of the world class shipyards in Göteborg.

During the latter half of the 1980s what remained of these shipyards and in particular Bertil's employer began to experiment. The likes of Bertil with much practice in the field and a practitioner's eye for the market were offered a safe entrepreneurship within the frame of the firm. Bertil would operate as an electrician, welder or whatever was called for when some client was in need. He would then charge his own rate according to market norms.

Bertil grew up in an archetypical Göteborg working class family who lived in a prototypical working class area with a vernacular of its own. He was as a matter of routine equipped with labour political paraphernalia without bothering too much about the ideological discussion. Out of loyalty to the cause, though, he sided wholeheartedly with socialist manifestations. He bore a culturally determined ironic loathing for the bourgeois press and its readers.

The 1980s brought a new mentality to the formerly radical preserve of the labouring classes in Göteborg. Bertil was strongly tainted by the wind of change favouring a new view of the market and profits among workers. The metal workers had forcibly held back their claims on wage increases for the sake of the solidaristic wage policy. In 1983 their patience broke and the first damaging wedge was rammed into the Swedish welfare state. In this very year Bertil moved with his wife, who worked as an office hand for the metal workers' union, to an elegant row house in an exclusive district of Göteborg.

Bertil had dreaded the move, which was instigated by his socially ambitious wife. They had two daughters almost instantly. To his surprise Bertil found himself well ensconced in this nouveau riche district. He became extremely popular among his neighbours since he was a helpful and skilled handyman. It hardly mattered that his old chums often gave him a "watch-out-mate"-warning. He continued to cultivate his new neighbourly life among bourgeois upstarts. His habitat came to embody most of his self although he never gave in to his wife's well-adjusted xenophobic values.

Towards the midst of the 1990s the severe economic crisis which had devastated the Swedish welfare state began to take its toll at Bertil's firm as well. The mother company had shifted into a conglomerate like character. The services of his small entrepreneurial shop were no longer needed. Nor were his skills elsewhere on the market in the economically depressed Göteborg

region. To put it starkly, he was dumped on the dustheap of the labour market. He was then approaching 50. His prospects of remaining in the affluent row house area without any social or economic cover looked dim indeed. Still this was what he and his wife were clinging to do at all costs.

Bertil began to argue Micawberish that something new would turn up. In the meantime he is busy doing odd jobs in the black economy repairing and constructing implements for his neighbours - doctors, engineers, insurance men etc. Leaving his habitat would mean a defeat and a recognition of a second rate citizen value, belonging to the unfortunate one third of the twothird society, seeing himself as a B-figure among A-men while not being able to discard the 80s values he so readily adopted a decade ago.

Bertil is a prototype of a risk person, who could not do much about the vagaries of the labour market nor control his own situation. He cannot readily compromise with nor give up his newly conquered values which constitute a precondition for his newly acquired identity in the habitat circle or quasi-group. In fact he has no prospects of superseding prevailing conditions. He can only face a situation of gradual erosion, where his present world falls to pieces. This is a development that he envisions that neither his wife nor his neighbourhood will find much tolerance for.

There is a simplified but clear *sense morale* to his fate: Embourgeoisement contains a heavier risk for large sections of the exposed workers in dated niche industries. His journey from a position of initial class alienation with his wealthy habitat to one of accomodation settling in with the fat gods of the 1980s turned out to have a very high price, which easily invites moralisms that might have been well placed thirty to forty years ago (1950s-60s) but today (1990s) are fundamentally out of place.

YLVA: She was born in 1943 on a large island up the west coast. This island contains a small but vital shipyard, one shipping company and some local small time industries in the paper&pulp, steel and canning industries. She was one of four siblings of whom only one was a boy. Early she shows a talent for reading and artistic activities. There is an element of creativity in her and her father which remain unreleased. In her father's case it becomes a life trauma.

She finds comfort and security in the island community however stuffy and hemmed in she realizes life there is. During her early life, i.e. later teens, she takes up various jobs with local employers at first during summer vacations but after school more regularly. She took a less qualified exam giving her a basic training in office work. Her employment at 19 is however of the permanently unskilled kind. At this time her existence is orientated to meet boys. She makes a point of finding someone on whom she may hinge her life and build a new existence around.

When she is twenty she meets her first husband. She is then working as a waitress. He appears to meet her immediate needs. Fairly soon however he turns out to be a lush and violent. They have their first child, a daughter when she is 21. Although Ylva by now is very well aware of her husband's character and the no-future signs which are aglow within her mind she still gives birth to a second child at the age of 22. The year after that she manages to divorce her first husband.

She goes on with odd unskilled occupations as long as she is in the state of single motherhood. She gets some assistance from her family, but not nearly enough since her sisters have left the island and her brother is still single and uninterested in helping her out with nursing. Her father is getting progressively frustrated for not realizing what he considers to be his actual calling: writing lyrics and performing songs with the aid of an instrument. He takes increasingly to the bottle. Her mother is unskilled but has a knack with sewing for which she may get certain orders from local circles. Her father dies prematurely due to his drinking. Her mother goes on to be the central figure in the family but has little authority with the children. Ylva herself has a comparative weakness for the bottle which she manages to tame for the sake of her infant children.

Eventually Ylva leaves the island and finds an apartment in the large industrial city on the west coast. She has a need of and meets several new men most whom turn out to be dipsomaniacs if not always violent. She begins to think that either she attracts that kind or she is marked by fate. She begins evening courses and takes a full Abitur. She begins to recognize her inner calling for higher studies since she took her A-level with both grace and ease. But her social situations remains shaky. She is steadily looking for men since she has the feeling that her situation may never become adequate until she meets up with a suitable partner.

She becomes a secretary in a medical office. This job is not safe but as long as the municipal economy is good she does not have to fear any undue redundancy. She finally marries again but also this time her husband turns out to be a disappointment due to his carelessness as he shares with all other blokes who have come in her way. She begins to feel that her life may end in this fashion without the ideal being fulfilled.

She has a son with her new husband while her daughters are reaching early adulthood. The son becomes maladjusted and a grave problem from early on. In his teens he begins to mix with extremists of both left and right. It is the latter, i.e. neo-fascism that for some time has the stronger hold of him. Drugs are inevitably present in the every day reality of her son. She becomes redundant in 1992 at almost fifty and it seems difficult for her to get back. She tries several courses to keep up hope and the spirit but most of all to meet

like-minded women. She gets no assistance from her husband with her son, who after some very difficult may have come out on the other side not too severely scathed.

She writes poetry and paints canvasses for which she has a talent but how great would take many risky years to find out. She is meanwhile walking on the social edge. She is a fighter but she is inhibited by the fate of her son whose existence remains shaky. She feels lonely and faced with a permanent unemployment at the same time as she is fully aware of her brightness and unfulfilled talent. Her trajectories have concerned finding some husband for the realization of her talents perhaps in particular her artistic inclinations. But she realizes that she has failed and must come to her senses if she is to survive.

JENS: He was born in 1952 in an at that time well to do region in central Sweden. His father and grandfathers had alternated as farm hands and small farmers. The family had lived within a specific rural district in the vicinity of a municipality with burgeoning industries. When rural occupations failed to satisfy the needs or supplements were called for these industries which invariably were related to the agrarian economy opened up opportunities for assembly line jobs.

An important and interesting observation during the 1970s was that when the very drastic restructuring of the agricultural sector during the 1950s and then 1960s had left even fairly large family farms in an economic pinch the heads of rural families could be seen working side by side on the assembly line in some motor plant or can factory in order to supplement the strained household economy whether they had an upper class and prosperous background or were from very poor stock. In the early 1980s it was estimated by a state investigation that on the average about 75% of farmers' income was derived from outside agriculture. It had a notably alleviating effect upon rural stratification and class tensions on the countryside.

Jens left school at the age of fifteen. He started to work immediately, which allowed him to accumulate money to settle down with a wife in the region where he had grown up. He married in 1978 to a girl from a different province altogether whom he had met when he worked for a mobile construction company in the mid 1970s. She soon managed to get a fairly steady but unskilled job in a super market, where she has remained up to now. She has the more practical approach to family strategies, while Jens is more given to romantic ideals in relation to nature. They have two daughters in their early teens.

Jens had never any problem in finding employment even though he often leapfrogged from one employer to another private as well as public

ones. In spite of embracing a very leftist ideology in the 1970s he found certain private employers light years better than the publicly owned he had encountered. But his political radicalism was on a different level altogether. He never let politics become a main issue. Instead he focussed his life upon his family with two daughters born during the early 1980s and upon hunting, which is a universe unto itself in those regions, and general sports such as football and icehockey in particular.

Jens still holds a deferential attitude to employers but his view of the ruling classes is far more permeated by an instrumental approach to what is good for himself. His wife has had some influence upon his ability to combine a will to individual freedom for which he has a great craving and a firmly rooted position in working life. Jens was recently unemployed for two years in a row. He thought he might enjoy this freedom doing other things around the house and the forest. To his surprise he felt progressively more depressed, worthless and excluded from society for every day. Then he got a job again with a big local employer as an unskilled storage worker. He felt very good since he did not mind the lack of challenge in the job, which as a matter of compensation offered a number of new social relations. Then during the late spring of 1998 he lost job also due to technical rationalisations. Now on the dole without the same sanguine attitude as before he and his family are definitely at risk due to his mental stage.

RAGNHILD: She was born in 1938 in the old child birth clinic in Gothenburg. She was the oldest of three sisters. The other two were born in 1940 and 1941. It meant that the three sisters from the start were quite close being born during difficult times. The fact that their mother, who was only 19 when she gave birth to Ragnhild, turned increasingly mentally ill only cemented the loyalty between the sisters, who up to this day always visit their mother together.

Her father, who was born in 1909, was a salesman of a more elementary kind. Her paternal grandfather was a bricklayer while her maternal grandfather was a traindriver, which was a physically demanding work in those days. Her father always had a great relation with Ragnhild and her sisters - they were daddy's girls - since the mother, who was born in 1919 and worked in a textile factory, fairly soon and at an early age showed signs of mental illness. Her mother seemed to blame her three daughters for her condition. Relations with her mother very difficult and strained and Ragnhild got most of the wrap. In her childhood the family lived in a modest working class to petit bourgeois district with a WC that they shared with other families and still basically wood stove for heating and energy. Her parents had come to live in Gothenburg more or less by accident since her father had roots in

Stockholm and her mother came from the Province of Värmland in upper central Sweden. A geographical maladjustment on the part of her mother contributed to her illness. The family moved in the 1940s to a district called Sunyards, which was a specially subsidised habitat for working class families with at least three kids. Sunyard district were distributed a little here and there in Gothenburg at that time and became the symbol of a new kind of working class district with which the more well to do bourgeois district kids always waged severe feuds.

Ragnhild went eight years at elementary school. Her marks were not good enough to enter higher grades. She was a dyslectic, which hampered her studies. So were her sisters and her own son, who was born in 1962. At the age of 14 Ragnhild started to work in a chocolate factory together with a friend. When her friend was sacked a couple of years later Ragnhild left too. Factory work depended on good social contacts. She was sixteen when she took up office work as a general office hand. She later made the observation that factory work had been much more fair and just, in fact democratic, since you knew what salary you would get and the tasks were given and you could always improve your situation by petitioning and trade union politicking; whereas office work belonged to the service sector where salaries were not fixed nor were tasks. It has later been scientifically established that industry is a much more rewarding and democratically beneficial sector compared to the tertiary sector, which is subject to a free for all.

At the age of 14 she first met her boyfriend Eskil who was then 18. They were engaged in 1956 when she was 18 and they got married in 1959. He was a mechanic with interests in electrical matters. In 1966 they moved to a house of their own, a long time dream on the part of both of them. In 1962 they had a son and in 1966 a daughter. Both of their children are married with two children of their own. The family has stuck together in a good hearted fashion where everyone has assisted the other. This is why Ragnhild has gone politically from socialism to Christian Democracy for the sake of family cohesion and to the Liberal Party since her husband started a small firm of his own in the electrical branch. Her son is working full time with her husband continuing it. She has herself assisted with bookkeeping. She is a woman of order.

Her beloved father died in 1993. Before that he acquired Alzheimers disease, so he had been gone for a while in family life. Her husband who is now 64 is still going on with the family firm but he has since some time become very ill in azbestos poisoning and stomach troubles due the medicine he is taking against the poisoning. Ragnhild herself became unemployed in 1993 at the age of 55 and she has remained so. She is assisting with the firm bookkeeping and she is in control of the household economy. The risk she

and her tightly knit family is exposed to concerns the vulnerability of her husband's health and her own no-prospects on the labour market. They feel squeezed between the exploitation of big capital which has exploited her on and off in temporary jobs and the the services of the firm more continuously on the one hand and on the other by the Social Democrats who they feel is very mean against small entrepreneurship. In this way she and her family represent a new kind of petit bourgeois category with firm labour and socialist roots. It may explain why for instance 50% of the metal workers in Sweden today are voting for the Conservative Party, while Sweden has never had any sizeable group of Tory workers like England always had. Ragnhild is in short a representative of a new highly vulnerable but socially cohesive group with a new political profile.