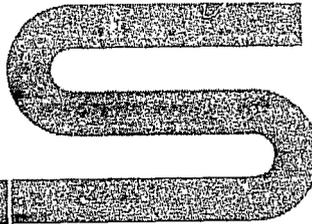


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PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR ENERGY POLICY DECISIONS

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BACKGROUND

Throughout the 1950's and most of the 1960's public opinion and the political parties in Sweden, as well as the press and other mass media, showed only moderate interest in energy policy matters. Towards the end of the 60's, however, public debates occurred now and then, on a local basis and in connection with specific energy projects. On the national level, the first major case of public concern referred to a proposal by the State Power Board to build a chain of hydropower stations in one of the large rivers in the north of Sweden. After at times quite massive campaigns against the project, the government in the beginning of 1970 decided not to let the State Power Board realize these plans. In December 1972 the Swedish parliament further decided that neither the river in question, nor the three other sizeable and still unexploited rivers in the North should be subject to hydropower exploitation.

At about the same time, a growing uneasiness was being demonstrated concerning the expansion of nuclear power. In contrast to the 1960's, when practically no opposition was heard in parliament against the State Power Board's plans and nuclear projects, in 1971 a motion was presented to parliament to open up discussions of energy planning to the political parties. The motion was defeated. Then in 1972 a member of parliament from the Centre Party raised questions about the "moral defensibility" of a nuclear programme that could place difficult burdens on future generations. A moratorium on the construction of new power plants was suggested, but this was rejected. Later in the same year, the Central Power Supply Administration published a study report on the expected development of nuclear power in Sweden up to 1990. This study estimated that 24 nuclear power plants (i.e. a further 13 plants in addition to the ones already approved) would probably be required. The programme was referred to in the government

bill to parliament in the beginning of 1973, when proposals on the State Power Board's investment plans were put forward. The content of this study met with considerable opposition both inside and outside parliament.

The parliament then, after an intense debate on energy policy, decided to accept the government's budget proposals concerning the current Swedish nuclear programme extending through the 1970's. At the same time, however, the parliament adopted a resolution according to which no decisions on the further expansion of nuclear power in Sweden should be taken until a comprehensive account of current developments in the nuclear safety field had been submitted to parliament. Particular concern was expressed regarding the problems of radioactive waste disposal and the guarding of plutonium against unauthorized use.

When these decisions were taken, work had already started within an ad hoc Government Committee on energy forecasting to make an appraisal of the development of demand for electric power and other kinds of energy for the 1980's. Also, an ad hoc committee had started to study the problems of radioactive waste management and another one was studying questions concerning the siting of nuclear stations in urban areas. During 1973 these committees were stepping up their work and a number of other issues were made the subject of studies at the same time, so as to provide an overall picture of current problems in the energy field, the potential for R & D efforts, etc.

Successive reports from the committees as well as anti-nuclear books and pamphlets from the environmental groups helped to maintain the public interest in energy policy matters. The oil market events in the autumn of 1973 and later naturally emphasized the energy question still further.

STUDY CIRCLES

By the end of 1973, the Swedish government decided that a comprehensive energy policy programme for the period 1975 - 1985 should be prepared for submission to parliament in the spring of 1975. In order to broaden the base for such a decision - making process, the government decided to initiate a major project of public education and consultation. A mechanism for such an effort existed in the "study circles", a system of small study groups managed by the adult education associations, which in their turn are linked to the political parties and the major popular organisations (trade unions, temperance groups and religious groups) and financed principally with government funds. The system works on a voluntary basis. Each year the associations prepare and offer a range of seminars, lectures and study groups on different matters, e.g. foreign languages, book-keeping, carpentry or art. The larger associations then distribute their programme catalogues to the general public and arrange for teachers, localities and so on. In other words, most people come into contact with these associations from time to time. The study circles date back to the end of the 19th century as a vehicle for developing political democracy. Study circles generally focus on non-technical issues although some have been related to current policy concerns, e.g. collective bargaining and reforms of the working environment.

The government now decided to invite these associations to take the responsibility for a big education campaign in the energy field. The parliament approved the government's proposal to sponsor energy study circles and appropriated funds for the purpose.

Great care was taken by the government not to interfere in the way in which the education associations and the study circles were carrying out

their task. No pamphlets, reports or other publications were prepared for this purpose by the government or the authorities. The education associations were expected to work out the documentation needed on their own. In order to support them in this effort the Ministry of Industry provided them with a compilation of already available official prints (bills, parliamentary records) and a list of reference literature, including also publications from opposition groups, and the environmental groups.

The Ministry also set up a reference group of scientists from the relevant fields of science and technology (radiation protection, electric power systems, ecology, etc). The education associations were invited to consult, if they wanted to, with this group on matters that arose while they worked out their books and other documentation. Some associations used this service, some did not. There was no link between the reference group's activities and the Ministry or the government.

Funds were also appropriated in order to assist the associations and the circle leaders. They could get economic assistance for their preparation of material (e.g. to hire authors) and also for their information to teachers and other study circle leaders. This support was provided under standardized rules, irrespective of whether the reference group was consulted or not and irrespective of the actual quality and focus of the documentation produced. As a matter of fact, the books, pamphlets and other materials that were used by the various associations differed a lot. They also stressed different matters, although most of them emphasized nuclear energy rather heavily.

Finally, there was an appropriation of government funds for a publicity campaign, encouraging the recruitment of participants to the study circles. The theme of this campaign was, "Learn more, and you will have more influence. Join an energy study circle".

The study circles worked for a very concentrated, short period of time. Most of them were finished by the end of the year 1974.

Parallel to this education programme the government undertook some complementary education initiatives. The first one was directed towards the professional informers of the press and other mass media. Initial information to this group was felt to be a necessary requisite in order to support public education (a) through as good and reliable technical facts as possible in these media, and (b) by establishing contact between the journalists and the scientists, investigators, and others who were active in committees, ministries etc. In order to provide this, four journalist seminars were arranged by the Ministry of Industry at four different places in the country in the beginning of 1974.

Here, too, great care had to be taken not to impose any opinions or qualitative assessments on the audience. At the seminars, therefore, the representatives from the ministries, the committees, etc, gave descriptions of what they were currently working on, when their reports were going to appear and whom to contact for more information. Technical descriptions were also given, e.g. of the different stages of the nuclear fuel cycle, the different formal steps and procedures when the site for a big power plant is decided upon, the main components of the Swedish emergency fuel storage programme, etc.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Another information activity which the government undertook was to arrange for public hearings on matters of energy policy. Partly as a consequence of a number of published committee reports during the summer and

autumn of 1974, the energy debate became progressively more intense but also more irreconcilable. In order to stimulate a more factual and objective debate, the government through its Energy Council opened public hearings in front of an audience comprising more than 100 representatives each time from activist groups, adult education associations and universities as well as from the power industry, the public authorities etc. Among others, all the opponent groups known from the general energy policy debate were invited. In this way, half the audience represented lay interests, and the other half experts and specialists. Hearings in November 1974 were devoted to the specific problems of nuclear power, and in December 1974 to the short-term conservation prospects in different sectors of energy consumption and to the short-term supply prospects other than nuclear. Hearings in January 1975 dealt with the long-term perspectives of energy policy.

EFFECTS BY THE STUDY PROGRAM

As has been noted already, the Swedish adult education associations are closely linked to the political parties and to other popular movements. For instance, the Social Democratic Party, the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Swedish Co-operative Union and Wholesale Society are the predominant member organisations of the largest of these associations. Through the discussions in the study circles and the reports from the circles and the associations back to the parties, the opinions of the participants were forwarded to the politicians. This clearly influenced the positions finally taken by the Social Democratic Party when formulating the government's energy policy bill in March 1975, as well as the positions taken by the opposition parties in parliament.

It is very difficult to evaluate what effect this education and information campaign had on the people who took part. The reports from the study groups themselves suggested continued and sometimes enhanced uncertainty and confusion. Surveys made after the study campaign was completed confirmed this impression. This should, however, probably be regarded as a sign of greater awareness of the complexity of these questions, and therefore as an achievement, not a failure.

Another question in this context is: did the education effort reach the groups of people who were most in need of knowledge, or did it reach the already well-educated, well-informed, politically active groups? Evaluations made so far suggest that the majority of the 80 000 people who directly participated in the study circles belonged to the more well-informed and politically interested. But a much larger and more diversified group of people was reached indirectly through the current discussions at jobs, in homes etc in which the participants of the circles took part.

Until now, November 1976, only the immediate results and evaluations of the education campaign have been studied. A fundamental question is, however, to what extent the shift of political power in Sweden in September 1976 - after more than forty years of Social Democratic government - was a result of this public education for energy policy decisions. Indisputably, the energy debate already in 1973 and 1974 involved a range of general policy issues together with the energy problems.

There was a marked shift in the public's interest from energy production problems to questions of energy for social and economic development, the problems of large scale technology, and our relations to the developing countries. The ever increasing demand for energy was questioned, together with the philosophy of ever increasing economic welfare. This broader political approach was obvious in the work of the energy study circles. Indis-

putably, also, the nuclear power question was a key issue in the political debate immediately before the 1976 elections. But both pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear parties gained (and lost) votes. There will undoubtedly be in depth studies of these elections and the shifts that resulted in a new majority in parliament, but to date no such studies are available.

The public education campaign was an ad hoc measure. No provisions have been made by the government or by parliament to continue or institutionalize it. The philosophy has been that, in the long run, it must be the responsibility of the democratic society's ordinary educational system to provide its citizens with all the knowledge and information they need in order to be involved in the decision-making processes.

After the end of the education campaign some proposals have been put forward for a continuous governmental action, for instance to appropriate funds to support alternative energy studies by non-parliamentary or other "external" groups, or to set up an energy information service in order to enhance the knowledge of the general public concerning these often very complicated technical issues. No such action has been decided upon as yet, however.

On the other hand, initiatives have been taken by for instance the adult education associations. Several of these met with so much interest from the public during the education campaign that they have continued to offer circles and study programmes in energy matters as a part of their normal activities. There are also examples of initiatives taken by the press and other mass media, e.g. series of newspaper articles and radio or television programmes of a more or less educational kind.

These activities are naturally dependent upon the status of the energy question as a hot political issue. The published intentions of the new Swedish government, however, imply that energy will be in the focus of public interest for at least another couple of years. Among other things, the government has stated that if public opinion concerning the future Swedish energy policy, including the use of nuclear power, turns out to be very divided, a referendum might be necessary. It is obvious that a referendum on such issues would require a whole range of information and education efforts. It must be the responsibility of the government to guarantee that such efforts are made and that all necessary aspects are fully and correctly covered. It is of course too early to say what information and education strategy would be chosen in such a case. Experience from the 1974 campaign shows, however, that the effort is well worth taking, that a suitable mechanism is at hand, and that considerable response from the public can be expected.

