

## Summaries

*Kaido Jaanson*

### **Aleksander Kesküla and Sweden 1914–1918**

THE ESTONIAN ALEKSANDER KESKÜLA was at the end of 1914 the first to call the attention of Imperial Germany to Vladimir Lenin. He was in Sweden, although intermittently, during the First World War from the autumn of 1914 to the autumn of 1918, establishing contacts among the Swedish activists. Besides observing Lenin's organisation he also saw bringing Sweden in the war in the Baltic gubernias as the aim of his activities there. The Baltic Sea was central in Kesküla's ideas. According to his approach three cultural areas – Northern, Central and Western Europe – collided in this region. As a result of the German occupation at the beginning of the 13th century, Estonia, which had initially belonged to the North, had been forcefully taken into the alien Central European cultural area. It had regained its place in the North in the 16th and 17th centuries and fallen under the oppression of the even more alien Eastern European (Russian) civilisation. Kesküla thought that Estonia should secede from Russia and restore its place in the increasingly unified North.

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*Bengt Åhsberg*

## Swedish–German student relations, 1932–1939

THIS ESSAY FOCUSES ON THE SWEDISH NATIONAL UNION of Students (Sveriges förenade studentkårer, SFS) and its relations to the German student world after the National Socialists took over the leadership of the German student organizations.

For half a century, various spheres of Swedish society had been subject to German influence. This German influence was particularly great in research and education. The German language was wholly dominant in higher education, and study trips by students of the various university subjects mainly went to Germany. These strong ties with Germany were retained in the years between the wars. Good and active relations with the German student world were therefore a matter of course for Swedish students.

Did this attitude change after the Nazis came to power? Some idea of this can be obtained by following the actions of the SFS, looking at the membership of that body in the international student organization, the International Student Service (ISS), where relations to German students involved complications, and also by studying relations between the SFS and the German student organization Deutsche Studentenschaft (D.St.), which already had a Nazi leadership in 1931, that is, two years before *die Machtübernahme*. Judging by the findings of this study, there is nothing to suggest that the Swedish attitude had changed. Although there was criticism of the German actions in connection with the schism between the Nazi-dominated German ISS committee and the ISS – a schism occasioned by the murder of the German student politician Friedrich Beck – the Swedes were anxious that the committee should be founded so that the Germans could once again take part in international student cooperation, so the SFS undertook to mediate in the conflict. It would have been difficult to imagine international student cooperation without German participation, in view of the heavy orientation of the Swedish students' foreign contacts to Germany. The role of mediator was not new for the SFS. In the 1920s, when Sweden was a member of the international student organization Confédération Internationale des Étudiants (CIE), also known as the Student International, the Swedish student body had seen it as its task to mediate between the former enemy countries of the First World War and to get international student cooperation to involve German students, who had been excluded since the foundation of the CIE. Working for reconciliation was a feature shared by other Swedish organizations and

activities concerned with international cooperation. This applied particularly to the field of research and education.

Since the SFS was founded, the organization has tried to avoid taking political stances, in keeping with what has been known since the 1950s as the “student as such” principle. Adherence to this principle led the SFS to leave the CIE as a consequence of the political disputes in that organization. The “student as such” principle also guided the international actions of the SFS in the 1930s. In the discussions of the governing body, the necessity of removing politics from international student cooperation was emphasized.

Relations with German students were also characterized by efforts to stick to this principle, but it involved difficulties, since the Nazi-governed German student organizations’ ambitions to forge contacts with students in the Nordic countries had a political motive. It was part of a campaign engineered by the government to influence opinion in favour of the new Nazi order. Although the governing body of the SFS was aware of the risk of being exploited by Nazi propaganda, they still wanted to maintain and develop the traditional cultural contacts with Germany. At the same time, they stressed their apolitical stance. Exchange with Germany was to be detached from political considerations.

It could be argued, however, that the exchange with Germany’s students, which was mainly channelled via the Nazi-led German student organizations, whose political aims were obvious, in itself involved taking a political stance. The Swedes failed to realize or chose to ignore the fact that anyone who tries to act apolitically in relations with another party which is acting politically ends up taking up a political stance by, as in this case, promoting continued relations of friendship with the German students. The SFS refused to see the evil that was going on in Germany. Neither the Night of Broken Glass in November 1938 nor the elimination of the Czechoslovak state in March 1939 occasioned any comments. Recurrent features expressed by the SFS governing body as regards the view of the new German order, and characterizing relations with the Nazi-led German student organizations, were understanding and acceptance. A search through the sources has failed to reveal any statements condemning the cult of violence, the brutality, the insane racial ideas, and other repulsive elements in the Nazi ideology. Certain statements indicate that this ideology was viewed as being just as valid as other political outlooks, a matter on which individuals were free to form a personal opinion.

The understanding and acceptance were certainly connected to the decades long German influence on various spheres of Swedish society.

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This applied not least to research and education. Germany was a much-admired model in the scholarly disciplines. The coming to power of the Nazis entailed problems, however. Jarl Torbacke has used the expression “the problem of cultural affinity” to shed light on this. Being pro-German and feeling cultural affinity to Germany did not mean being a Nazi supporter, but the dividing line was blurred. As Gunnar Richardson says, there was a “rather wide grey area”. Mistrust of parliamentary democracy in the upper and middle classes, to which the students belonged, was probably also significant in this context. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the work of the SFS changed. International contacts were, in principle, severed. Instead, Nordic issues increased in importance.

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The neutral country nowhere

Images and pictures of the Second World War and the Swedish Utopia

WHEN LOOKING AT PICTURES PRESENTED in newspapers, weekly magazines, history books and schoolbooks, three categories are to be found. The first contains traumatic pictures, which have become well known in Sweden but which are not specifically related to a Swedish context. Among these, we have found numerous examples of a tendency to transport suffering to a universal level: Jewish concentration camps inmates and German POWs are sometimes juxtaposed in such a way as to suggest that they were all victims of an existentially human evil *per se*.

The second category consists of pictures depicting traumatic events that have occurred in a Swedish context. However, most of these pictures are not nearly as widespread as those in the other categories.

Finally, the third category contains pictures which have become typical illustrations of the Swedish war experience. A recurrent motif is Swedish soldiers on guard and in full control, safeguarding the Swedish neutrality. Since Sweden was spared the war, some motifs became different than in other countries that were not spared. For Swedes, living in a time of war became synonymous with driving producer-gas cars, drinking substitute coffee and trying to cope with the rationing. As during the First World War, Sweden got an opportunity to prove its greatness with humanitarian aid, for example by taking care of Finnish war-children. Another recurrent theme is that of political co-operation above class differences. There was consensus among all non-extreme parties about the main goal: to keep Sweden outside the war. That is why we can see the leading political representatives of the 1940s united under the parole "Liberty is the best thing...". It is motifs from this third category that have dominated representations of the Second World War in Sweden after 1945.

Thus, the dominant official image of the Swedish war experiences mostly showed a nation happily secluded from the horrors of both World War I and World War II. This image is in surprising detail consistent with the classic description of a perfect society in Thomas More's *Utopia*.

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*Peter Thaler***Austrian Soldiers – German Army  
Austrian Identity and the Second World War**

FOR MUCH OF THE POST-WAR ERA, the wartime identity of the Austrians was seen as clearly demarcated from the general German pattern. In recent years, however, the historical image presented in post-war historiography has come under increasing scrutiny. Following the election of Kurt Waldheim to the Austrian presidency, in particular, international observers began to suggest that Austrian interpretations of the country's wartime history had not always backed up their firm conclusions with equally persuasive empirical evidence.

To assess the relative commitment to the German national state and its war effort, this study contrasts the conduct of German military personnel from Germany proper, from Austria, and from select regions outside Germany that had come under German control during the war, such as Alsace and Luxembourg. The similarities and contrasts in military conduct that can be discerned between these groups represent valuable indicators of relative commitment to the German nation-state and its war effort.