

The Swedish Parliamentary System

ERIC
LINDSTRÖM



The Swedish Parliamentary System

*How responsibilities are divided
and decisions are made*

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THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE

The author alone is responsible for
the opinions expressed in this booklet.

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Preface

Through its publication of informational materials in foreign languages, the Swedish Institute endeavors to increase knowledge of Sweden and create an understanding of Swedish society in other countries. The paperback series "Sweden Books" is designed to enable our readers to study in detail some of the issues that are of fundamental importance to Swedish public life.

This book is an introduction to Sweden's parliamentary system, embodied in the Parliament and the Cabinet. The author, Eric Lindström, is the recently retired administrative director of the Swedish Parliament.

How are Swedish members of Parliament elected? How do they work? What are the main functions of the 16 standing committees? How does the Cabinet fit into the governmental system and what is its relationship to Parliament? What are the Cabinet's most important tasks? These are some of the questions Mr. Lindström answers in this clear and eminently readable book. At the back is an index, which will hopefully make this an even more useful reference work.

Nils G Rosenberg
The Swedish Institute

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The Swedish Political System

“Parliament is the principal representative of the people,” according to Sweden’s Instrument of Government. “Parliament enacts the laws, decides on taxes, and determines how the central government’s funds are to be used. Parliament shall examine the government and administration of the country.” Parliament (the Riksdag) does not rule the country, however. This is done by the Cabinet (or government), the country’s highest planning and administrative authority. Under the Swedish parliamentary system, Cabinet Ministers and the policies they pursue must enjoy the confidence of Parliament. The Cabinet is thus entrusted with governing the country on behalf of Parliament and is responsible to Parliament.

In practice, the division of power between Parliament and Cabinet is obviously also related to the parliamentary situation, that is, the number of seats held by the various parties. If the government has the support of a clear majority of M.P.’s, the focus of political power is in the government. The real political decision-making takes place there. But if there is a balance or near-balance between the government and the opposition, the focus of power shifts toward Parliament. This is obviously even more true of a minority government.

A constitutional monarchy with democratic traditions

Constitutionally speaking, Sweden is a monarchy with a King, since 1973 Carl XVI Gustaf, as Head of State. Unlike

one of his predecessors a long time ago, however, he does not have "all-embracing sovereignty." Under the new Instrument of Government enacted by Parliament in 1974, the Head of State performs mainly ceremonial and representative duties. He is the symbol of Swedish national unity. One of his more specific duties is to open the annual session of Parliament. He is the official representative of Sweden in relation to other countries. Foreign ambassadors are thus accredited to him. The letters of accreditation carried by Swedish diplomatic envoys abroad are signed by the Head of State. He also presides at the special Cabinet meetings which take place when there is a change of government as well as at the regular so-called informatory Cabinet meetings, when members of the Cabinet inform him of current matters of state. The King is chairman of the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, i.e. the council elected by the Parliament for consultations between the Cabinet and the Parliament on foreign affairs. He holds the highest military rank. However, the military forces are under the sole command of the Cabinet. At the request of the government, the King receives other Heads of State and undertakes state visits abroad. As a rule, the King is accompanied on these visits by one or two members of the Cabinet who discuss political, economic and cultural issues with representatives of the host country's government. State visits are of great importance for strengthening the official relations with other countries and for the promotion of trade.

The Swedish political system—both at the national and local levels—is democratic. Sweden's democratic traditions stretch far back in time. As early as the Viking Age, during the 9th century A.D., citizens traditionally enjoyed the right of self-determination. They established their own rules for settling disputes about things like stolen horses, as well as for electing their leaders. The first Swedish Parliament—or in any event a precursor to Parliament—was held



Among the many ceremonial duties of Sweden's Head of State are state visits. King Carl Gustaf is seen here in Saudi Arabia with Queen Silvia. (Photo: Per-Olle Stackman/TIOFOTO)

in the year 1435 at Arboga, which today is a little town two hours by car from Stockholm, the capital city. According to historical documents, those attending the Arboga Meeting included bishops and prelates, knights and swains, as well as ordinary people. Sweden was engaged in a struggle to throw off Danish rule, and the people elected the resistance leader and patriot Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson as Commander. Under him, military leaders were appointed province by province.

More meetings of this kind were subsequently held at different places in Sweden. Only after 1600, however, did firm rules evolve as to how Swedish Parliaments should function. It was agreed that their sessions would take place once every three years in the capital.

Parliament consisted of four Estates, the main “special-interest organizations” of that era, representing the nobility, clergy, burghers, and peasants. King Gustav III broke the power of Parliament in a coup d’état in 1772, and for a few decades royal absolutism prevailed. Early in the 19th century, democratic rule was restored through the 1809 Instrument of Government and by means of the Parliament Act approved the following year. Legislative power was divided between King and Parliament. The approval of both was required to pass a law. The power to decide on taxes was vested entirely in Parliament.

The next milestone came in 1866, when a two-Chamber Parliament with annual sessions replaced the old legislature consisting of four Estates. The right to vote in parliamentary elections was far from universal. Suffrage was granted only to those with a certain level of income or wealth. Sweden’s industrial workers thus had virtually no chance to take part in elections. Women still had no voting rights. In 1909, universal male suffrage was introduced. Only in 1921 did women gain the right to vote in elections and be elected to Parliament.

The next major change concerning the legislative power did not come until 1971, when Sweden's one-Chamber Parliament (nowadays with 349 members) had its first meeting. During its 1973/74 session, Parliament approved a new Instrument of Government and a new Parliament Act. The first regular session under this brand-new Constitution opened in 1975.

Parliamentarism, political stability, party programs

As a result of the above-described evolution of Swedish democracy, the principle of parliamentarism has been formally incorporated into the Constitution.

For a long time, essentially since World War I, the same five parties have been represented in Parliament. We can order these parties along a scale from right to left: the Moderate Party (also called the Conservatives), the Center Party, the Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Labor Party, and the Left Party Communists.

The very fact that these five parties have been represented in Parliament for so long is a sign of political stability. Another expression of this fact is that during the 44 years ending in 1976, Sweden had Cabinets consisting of, or strongly dominated by, the Social Democrats.

Since then the political situation has hardly been characterized by stability. From October 1976 to October 1978, Sweden had a non-socialist coalition Government of the Center, Moderate and Liberal parties with a majority of 11 seats in Parliament. When it collapsed, its successor was a Liberal minority Cabinet that could rely on fewer than 40 of the 349 seats in the Chamber. The outcome of the 1979 election was another non-socialist coalition of the Center, Moderate and Liberal parties enjoying a majority of only one seat in Parliament. The Moderates resigned from this

Cabinet in May 1981, leaving the Center and Liberals to form a new minority Cabinet.

After the September 1982 election, the Social Democrats returned to power.

In general terms, the five parties have the following programs (listed largest to smallest, according to number of seats in Parliament):

The *Social Democratic Labor Party* wishes to apply the ideals of democracy to the entire social order and to mutual relations among people, in order to provide every individual with the opportunity to lead a rich, meaningful life. To make this possible to realize, decision-making power concerning production and its distribution must be placed in the hands of all the people. This does not necessarily require government ownership of the means of production, but the party generally favors a large public sector.

The *Moderate Party*, in keeping with its temperate conservative ideology, wishes to build a society based on personal property rights, free enterprise, and more widespread ownership of property. The cultural views and ethical norms of human coexistence should be based on fundamental humanistic views of human dignity, freedom, and social responsibility that have evolved in the Western cultural sphere and that originated from Christianity. The party calls for a reduction in the size of the public sector, while preserving a strong defense system.

The *Center Party* believes that the will of individual people to take initiatives, work, and assume responsibility—as well as to cooperate and show solidarity with others—are the main motive forces of progress. This is best achieved in a decentralized private and cooperative business sector,

where employees are given an opportunity to influence decisions. Originally a farmers' party, the Center has broadened its base in recent decades and includes strong anti-nuclear and environmentalist groups from both rural and urban areas.

The *Liberal Party* defends classic liberal tenets of freedom, justice, and humanity. It is a reform party that stresses equality between men and women, international development cooperation, and a free market economy. Government must not take over all aspects of society, for it will then be totalitarian. It is a question of defending the people against the State and taking the side of the individual against bureaucratic regulation.

The *Left Party Communists* bases its activities on scientific socialism, i.e. Marxist and Leninist revolutionary theory. Their aim is to defeat capitalism and imperialism and achieve a classless society. The party stresses its independence from foreign Communist movements and often supports the Social Democrats on social welfare and economic policy issues.

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Main Tasks of Parliament

— *enacting laws, making decisions on government income and expenditures*

As mentioned previously, according to the Instrument of Government, all public power in Sweden emanates from the people, and Parliament is the principal representative of the people. The main tasks of Parliament are stated as follows: "Parliament enacts laws, decides on (central government) taxes, and determines how the central government's funds are to be used. Parliament examines the government and administration of the country."

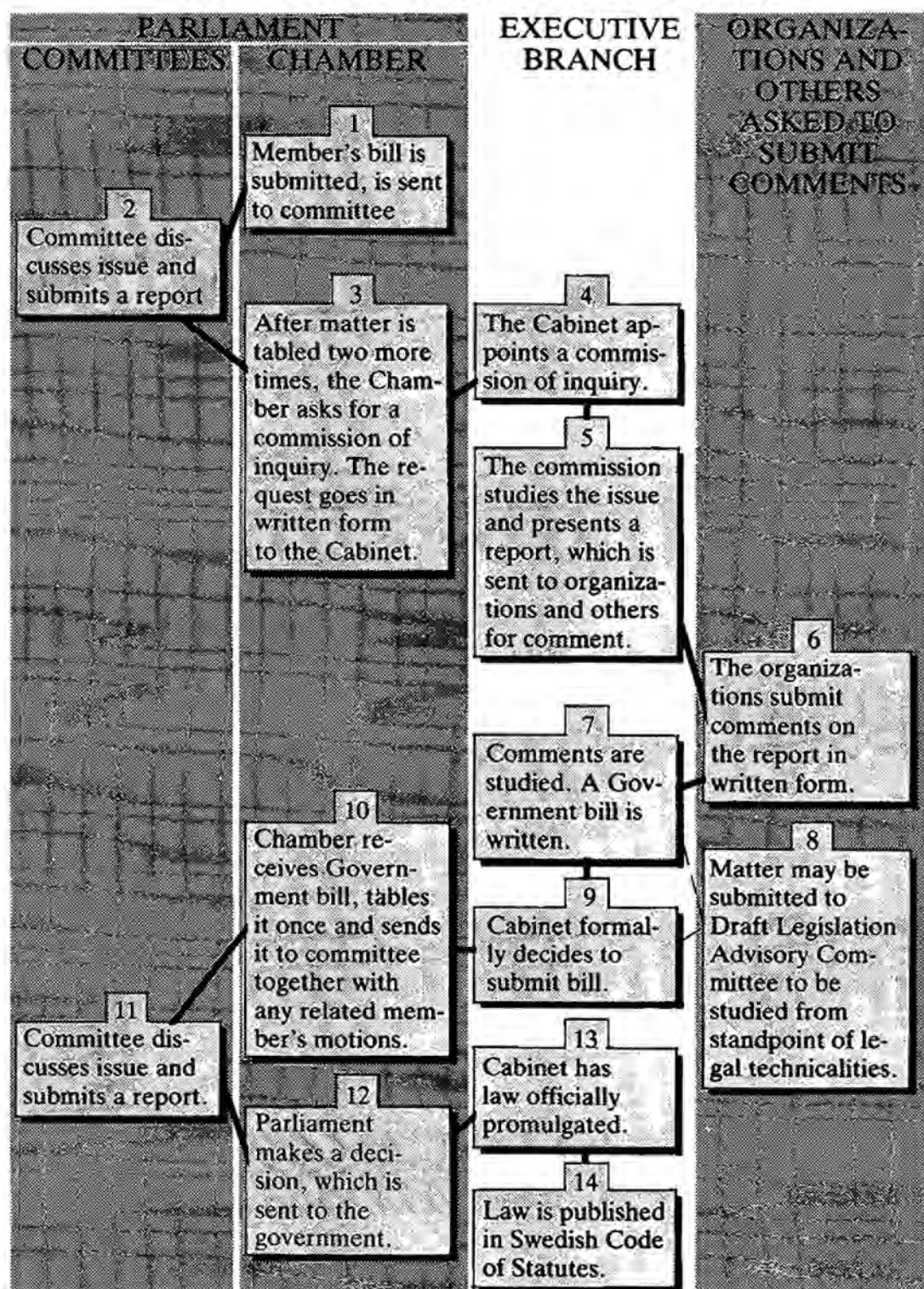
The position of Parliament as the preeminent branch of government is expressed in various ways in the new Constitution. One is the fact that the Speaker of Parliament has taken over from the Head of State the duty of recommending to Parliament the name of a new Prime Minister.

Legal rules, i.e. regulations on the rights and duties of the people and the tasks of public authorities, assume the form of laws and other statutes. The most important legal rules are found in laws. In principle, legal rules imposing obligations on people are supposed to assume the form of laws. Among the main tasks of Parliament is to pass laws. Otherwise, legal rules are decided mainly by the Cabinet.

Another major task of Parliament is to decide about central government income and expenditures. In this way, Parliament has a crucial influence on how the national resources are to be used and distributed.

Every year, Parliament enacts a central government budget. It includes the government's estimated income and

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



One of Parliament's main tasks is to pass laws. Parliamentary approval of a new law is preceded by extensive, exacting work—at Cabinet level, among organizations and others that write comments on commission proposals, and in parliamentary standing committees. (Adapted from Arne Halvarsson, Sveriges Statsskick; En faktasamling)

expenditures for the coming fiscal year (running from July through June). The most important source of government revenues is taxation. Parliament approves taxes in the form of laws. It normally approves expenditures for one fiscal year at a time.

Parliament has a number of examining and monitoring tasks. Every year, the Standing Committee on the Constitution thus examines how Cabinet Ministers have carried out their duties and how the Cabinet has handled its business. An important aspect of this examination is to make sure that the decisions of Parliament have been implemented as intended. In January of every year, the Cabinet submits a special report on what measures have been undertaken as a consequence of parliamentary decisions. In addition, individual members of Parliament may request information from a Minister on matters within his or her field of responsibility, by putting questions or interpellations. The latter are questions on major issues and may lead to a debate in the Chamber. Parliament also has its own agencies for carrying out inspecting and monitoring functions—the Parliamentary Auditors and the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Office.

Finally, Parliament may declare that the Prime Minister or another individual Minister does not enjoy its confidence.

The Swedish One-Chamber Parliament

— *elections to Parliament and within it, party strengths in Parliament*

Sweden has a one-Chamber Parliament with 349 members. The parliamentary election of September 1970 was the first election to the new unicameral Parliament, which assembled in January 1971. At that time, the Chamber had 350 members. In 1976 the number was reduced by one member to 349, in order to avoid a situation where the socialist and non-socialist blocs (Social Democrats and Communists vs. Moderates, Liberals, and Center) would receive exactly the same number of seats in Parliament. This had happened in the 1973 election. (See table on page 26.)

The number of members in Sweden's unicameral Parliament is quite large in relation to its population of 8.3 million people and compared with the parliaments of many other countries. By way of comparison, Finland has a legislature with 200 members representing 4.8 million people; Norway has a Parliament with 155 members in a country of 4.2 million; Denmark's 179 M.P.'s represent 5.1 million people; and Iceland has a Parliament of 60 members representing 235,000 people. Looking outside the Nordic countries, it can be noted that in the United States, with well over 200 million people, Congress has 535 members—435 in the House of Representatives and 100 in the Senate. In Britain, 635 members of the House of Commons represent 56 million citizens. A couple of examples from



A new high-rise suburban district has been built. One of the municipal commissioners, a full-time salaried politician responsible for one or more sectors of municipal operations, makes the dedicatory speech. (Photo: Nils-Johan Norenind/TIOFOTO)

new U.N. member States: Bangladesh with its 90 million people has a National Assembly with 330 members, while Mozambique with 11 million inhabitants has a 210-member legislature.

As mentioned earlier, the Swedish political system is democratic. This applies not only to the national level, but also to the local levels. The first article of the Instrument of Government not only says that the Swedish democracy shall be realized through a parliamentary polity, but also "through local self-government." This local self-government has long traditions, but today it is regulated by a Local Government Act dating from 1977. The country's territory is divided into close on 300 municipalities and 23 counties. These two levels of local government handle their

own affairs. Their largest source of income is direct taxation of individuals and companies.

Among the major tasks of the municipalities are social welfare, education, and water supply. The most important task of the counties is medical care. Decision-making power rests with municipal and county councils, respectively. The members of these councils are elected at the same time as regular parliamentary elections are held, that is, every third year in September.

Elections to Parliament

Elections to Parliament are free, secret, and direct. Proportional representation is used. This means that parties are awarded seats in Parliament in proportion to the number of votes they receive in the election. The electorate does not vote for an individual candidate, as in Britain, the United States, and many other countries. Instead it votes for a party's list of candidates, and these become M.P.'s if they are high enough up on their party's list to be awarded one of the seats it has captured in a particular electoral district or in the form of compensatory seats (see below).

The country is divided into 28 electoral districts (constituencies), mainly contiguous with the counties. These areas, in turn, are divided into election precincts—municipalities or parts of municipalities.

Regular elections take place on the third Sunday in September every three years. On that day, elections to Parliament, the county councils, and the municipal councils are held simultaneously. For each seat won by a party, it appoints a member of Parliament and a substitute for this M.P. Substitutes take the seats of those M.P.'s who have been elected Speaker, who have been appointed members of the Cabinet, or who have been granted a leave of absence lasting at least one month.

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serve in them during the life of that Parliament. The preliminary allotments are made by the Election Committee appointed by Parliament at its first meeting following the national election. All internal elections except those to the Presidium (Speaker's Conference) and to the Election Committee itself are officially carried out by the full Chamber. The Election Committee and the party representatives in the Presidium are selected by the respective party caucuses.

Party strengths in Parliament

As mentioned earlier, Social Democratic rule was interrupted in 1976 and a non-socialist coalition of the Center, Liberal, and Moderate parties formed a new Cabinet. The governing parties enjoyed an 11-seat majority in Parliament. When this coalition fell apart in late 1978, a Liberal minority Cabinet with only 39 seats served out the remaining year of Parliament's term.

Parties in Parliament	1973		1976		1979		1982	
	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats
Moderate Party	14.3	51	15.6	55	20.3	73	24.6	84
Center Party	25.1	90	24.1	86	18.1	64	16.1	56
Liberal Party	9.4	34	11.1	39	10.6	38	6.0	22
Total, non-socialist parties	48.8	175	50.8	180	49.0	175	46.7	162
Social Democratic Party	43.6	156	42.7	152	43.2	154	47.6	168
Left Party Communists	5.3	19	4.8	17	5.6	20	5.7	20
Total, socialist parties	48.8	175	47.5	169	48.8	174	53.3	188

Note: In 1976, the number of seats was cut from 350 to 349 by constitutional amendment, to avoid deadlocks such as that of 1973-76.

In the parliamentary election of 1979, the three non-socialist parties retained their majority but this time only by a single seat. They again formed a tripartite coalition, but it again split in May 1981 and a Liberal-Center minority Cabinet took over.

In the 1982 election, the non-socialist parties lost and the Social Democrats once again formed a Cabinet.

The table above gives the percentage of the total vote received by the five parties in the last four elections and their number of seats in Parliament.

Shifts during the 1970s—women moving forward

If we look at the two party blocs, the socialists (Social Democrats and Communists) and non-socialists (Moderates, Center and Liberals), it is clear that the shifts in their relative strength are not particularly great, with the possible exception of the 1976 election.

Over the dozen years that have passed since the first unicameral Parliament was elected, the Social Democrats have slipped from 163 to 154 seats. The Moderates have been the most successful collectors of new support, increasing from 41 to 73 seats. The big loser over the period is the Liberal Party, which has given up 20 seats.

During the 1970s, the number of female M.P.'s has increased from 49 to 92, or over 26% of all members of Parliament. The party with the highest proportion of female M.P.'s after the 1979 election was the Center, with 31%, whereas the Moderates had the lowest such figure with 22%.

Being a Member of Parliament

— *the job, the pay, pensions, party subsidies, press subsidies*

The job

Sweden's 349 M.P.'s are expected—as elected representatives of the people—to support the political program of the party on whose list they were elected. Being an M.P. is a powerful position of trust which requires extensive knowledge and insight into various social issues. Rapid changes in different fields and the continuous growth of cooperation among countries through international organizations places great demands on individual M.P.'s and makes it necessary for them to specialize in particular subjects.

Study trips within Sweden and abroad, either individually—with or without travel grants from Parliament—or as part of committees and delegations, are becoming an increasingly common feature of the work schedules of M.P.'s. They provide a means for M.P.'s to gather additional information and make contacts. They also gain valuable experience by taking part in Swedish delegations to the U.N., the Nordic Council, the Council of Europe, the Interparliamentary Union, and international conferences.

The largest single elements of an M.P.'s work schedule are committee meetings and the task of studying the extensive parliamentary printed materials, government commission reports, and memoranda. Many M.P.'s devote a relatively large part of their time to giving lectures and writing media articles. Meetings of the Chamber can also be time-consuming, and speeches require careful preparations. Within the walls of the Parliament Building there are also

party caucus meetings, meetings of internal party committees, and private discussions of parliamentary business. The writing of members' bills, questions and interpellations to Cabinet Ministers are also part of an M.P.'s job. Obviously it is important for an M.P. to maintain contact with the constituency he or she represents. This assumes the form of personal discussions with voters and of holding positions in the local party organization, in the municipal or county council, labor unions or professional associations, in volunteer and religious organizations, etc.

The pay

The salary paid to an M.P. is equivalent to that of a relatively well-paid civil servant, currently about 110,000 Swedish kronor per year. The Speaker and Deputy Speakers receive supplements. An M.P. whose principal residence is at a certain distance from Stockholm receives a per diem allowance and funds to compensate for certain extra living costs during the parliamentary session. M.P.'s enjoy free domestic rail and air travel.

Those who have been M.P.'s for at least twelve years and are aged 50 or more when retiring from Parliament receive a pension equivalent to three-fourths of their pay as members. Those who retire after six years receive half this pension. After reaching age 65, these pensions increase.

In international terms, the economic benefits paid to Swedish M.P.'s are modest.

Party subsidies and press subsidies

The central and local governments pay various forms of economic subsidies to the political parties, on grounds that they perform tasks that are fundamental to democracy. National government grants are fixed at certain amounts per seat in Parliament and total about 80 million kronor a



The political parties hold national congresses each year. Center Party chairman Thorbjörn Fälldin, marches at the head of a parade together with the chairman of the Center Youth Organization. Many participants have dressed in the old-fashioned costumes of their home province, a way of emphasizing the Center Party's ties with rural areas. (Photo: Centerns bildarkiv)

year. Local government aid to political parties varies a little from place to place but the total figure is probably more than twice as large as central government support to the parties—about 160 million kronor.

Nearly all newspapers in Sweden have either formal or informal links with political parties and reflect party views on their editorial pages and to some extent in their choice of news and features. Papers close to the non-socialist parties enjoy as much as about three-fourths of circulation; the Social Democrats also have a well-established network of newspapers, but it is much smaller.

Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act was designed to safeguard and promote freedom of opinion. The subsidies



During election campaigns the chairmen of each political party present their programs and meet the voters throughout the country. Here Olof Palme, head of the Social Democratic Party, addresses a campaign meeting in Stockholm. (Photo: Bertil Ericson/Pressens Bild)

paid by the national government to the press reflect this purpose, but may also be regarded as an indirect form of subsidies to the political parties. A postwar wave of newspaper closures is another factor that spurred the government to enact these subsidies. The subsidies assume the form of exemption from the value added tax of about 20%, and low postage rates for all newspapers, plus production grants to individual newspapers, among them those read by fewer than 50% of households in the place of issue. Daily newspapers and the periodical press receive subsidies totaling about 400 million kronor a year. All told, subsidies to the political parties and the press amount to nearly 1,000 million kronor. Press subsidies in Sweden are larger than in most comparable countries.

The Internal Administration of Parliament

— *the Presidium, the Administrative Office*

For constitutional reasons, the administration of Parliament is separate and, in principle, independent from the Cabinet and the agencies under its jurisdiction.

A distinction is usually made between the internal and external administration of Parliament. The internal administration consists of the Presidium, the Chamber staff, the standing committees' staffs (see the chapter on the standing committees, pp. 34–38), and the Administrative Office of Parliament. The external administration of Parliament consists of the parliamentary agencies—the Bank of Sweden, the National Debt Office, the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Office, etc.

In addition, there are a number of decision-making and planning agencies as well as consultative bodies, such as the Election Committee, the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, and the Salary Commission.

The Presidium

The Presidium occupies a pivotal role in the internal administration of Parliament. It discusses ways of furthering good planning in the work of Parliament and may present recommendations to Parliament on the subject. The Presidium may also make recommendations to Parliament based on studies it has commissioned at Parliament's request.

The Presidium consists of the Speaker, the three Deputy

Speakers, a representative of each party caucus in Parliament, the chairmen of the standing committees, and the deputy chairman of the Administrative Board of Parliament.

The Chamber staff (or Secretariat) is responsible for administrative tasks concerning the work of the Chamber, while other aspects of internal administration are the province of the Administrative Office.

The Chamber staff is charged with preparing the meetings of the Chamber and of the Presidium; keeping minutes of Chamber sessions; providing M.P.'s, public agencies, news media, and the public with information on parliamentary business; and keeping statistics on the work of Parliament.

The Administrative Office

The Administrative Office is headed by the Administrative Board, with the Speaker as chairman and with eight other members.

Aside from units that handle administration, premises, and the parliamentary documents, the Administrative Office also includes an information service responsible for supplying the M.P.'s with factual materials. The Administrative Office includes the Library of Parliament. This library is intended for use by Parliament, its delegations and agencies, for the Cabinet Office, and for the national government agencies. It is also open to researchers.

The Standing Committees of Parliament

— *handling Government bills and members' bills*

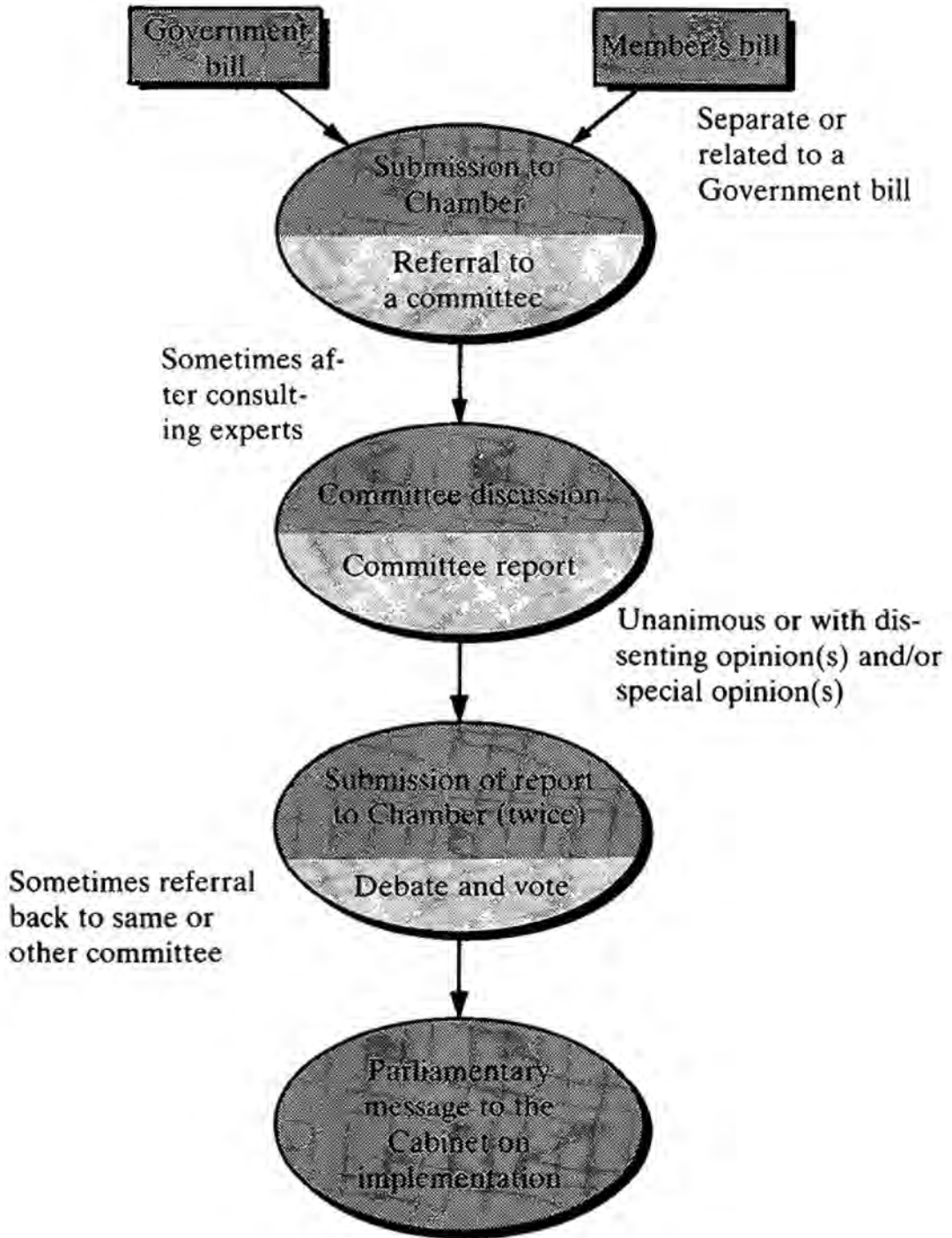
The standing committees are the bodies which examine the bills submitted to Parliament. They traditionally enjoy a strong position. Smoothly functioning committees are a prerequisite for Parliament's ability to handle its work. There are currently 16 standing committees, specializing in different topics. Each committee has 15 members and at least as many deputy members, elected on a proportional basis among the parties. The committees each have their own staff, headed by a chief of staff.

How a bill or recommendation is handled

Practically all items of business (Government and members' bills, recommendations from parliamentary agencies) must be referred to standing committees for discussion. A committee is required to report the results of its deliberations to the Chamber. This system is very important, not least, to the individual members who have presented bills. These M.P.'s thereby receive a guarantee that their proposals will actually be discussed and presented for a decision by the Chamber. A member's bill in the Swedish Parliament, unlike the American Congress, cannot be "killed in committee."

An item of business is referred to a standing committee's

FROM BILL TO STATUTE



staff members, who include lawyers, economists, and social scientists. The staff studies and discusses it in depth. After this, the matter is presented at a meeting of the committee. Following discussion, the committee makes a decision and assigns its secretariat to formulate a draft of the commit-

tee's position. This draft report is presented to the committee after a few weeks for revision. After revision, the report is printed and submitted to the Chamber for subsequent debate. Members of the committee who do not agree with the view of the majority write dissenting opinions, which are attached to the report. A member who does not want to write a dissenting opinion but wishes to emphasize a view or explain why he intends to vote in a particular way may do so in the form of a special opinion, also attached to the report.

The thoroughness with which items of business are examined in committee means that in practice, most of them are decided upon there. The Chamber debate following a committee report provides the parties and M.P.'s with an opportunity to record their views for the public, and perhaps also for future reference.

Specialized committees

All issues within a given subject area, whether they concern appropriations, legislation, or anything else, are in principle supposed to be discussed by the same committee. The committees are divided along lines similar to, but not entirely identical to, the division of ministries.

Initiatives by committees

A standing committee may raise a matter within its field without any related item of business having been referred to it. Such an initiative requires approval by a majority of the committee. Committee initiatives are used only in exceptional cases. One reason for this restrictiveness is that individual M.P.'s are not entitled to respond to them with members' bills.

Committee hearings

The committee often needs to obtain outside viewpoints on a piece of business. This is done by requesting written outside opinions or by holding hearings. A minority of a committee—at least five members—are generally also entitled to request an opinion from a public agency. An agency which has been asked to submit such an opinion is, in principle, required to do so. Ministers may also be invited to a committee to take part in a hearing.

The initiative to hold a hearing can also come from outside a standing committee. If an organization takes the initiative of contacting a committee and is given permission—obviously the committee makes the decision—to present its views and answer questions before the committee or its representatives, it must be prepared for “the other side” to be offered the same opportunity. “Unbiased examination” is an imperative rule of committee work.

These presentations of business to the committees as well as questions and answers are not recorded in their minutes. Committee meetings take place behind closed doors.

Bills to make committee hearings public are frequently proposed. Their proponents argue that opening these hearings to public scrutiny would stimulate and vitalize public discussion and increase general interest in the work of Parliament. So far, however, members' bills on the subject have been defeated. The majority of M.P.'s believes that the work of the standing committees would be slowed down if public hearings became a regular feature of their examination of bills. At the same time, the majority emphasizes the importance of publicizing the facts obtained by the committees. This can be done by having the committees provide detailed information in their reports on the data they have gathered.

Collaboration among committees

It is not uncommon for the subject of a Government or member's bill to fall within the jurisdiction of more than one standing committee. For this reason, there are various ways for two or more committees to examine the bill jointly. Usually they use a system of successive examination. One or more committees submit opinions to the committee that in turn will present its report to the Chamber.

Aside from this, there is naturally informal cooperation among the staffs of the committees and among members of different committees.

Committee reports—recommendations on what decision Parliament should make

At the meetings of each committee, a brief record of their votes is kept. The results of committee deliberations are presented in a report, as mentioned previously.

Stated simply, a committee report includes a presentation of the matter at hand, supplemented by the research material supplied by the committee staff—historical background, statistics, a presentation of official outside opinions, and the like—, the decision of the committee, and finally its “request,” i.e. the committee's recommendation on what decision Parliament should make.

The Standing Committees and Their Specialties

The Committee on the Constitution

shall prepare matters concerning constitutional and general administrative law, matters on financial support to the press or political parties, legislation on radio, television, and films, as well as other questions which concern freedom of speech, the molding of public opinion, and the freedom of religion, other matters concerning Parliament, the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the parliamentary agencies other than the Bank of Sweden, the National Debt Office, and the Parliamentary Auditors, matters concerning the consent of Parliament to prosecute an M.P. or impose limitations on his or her personal liberty, and matters of general importance to local government.

The Committee on Finance

shall prepare matters on monetary, credit, and foreign exchange policies, on the National Debt Office and the Parliamentary Auditors. It shall also prepare matters concerning national statistics, accounts, auditing, and efficiency measures, on government property and public procurement in general, and other administrative economic matters which do not pertain solely to a specific subject. The committee shall also prepare budgetary matters, examine estimates of public revenue, and compile the national budget.

The Committee on Taxation

shall prepare matters concerning tax assessment, collection of taxes, and population registration, as well as matters relating to products containing alcohol.

The Committee on Justice

shall prepare matters which concern the courts, the leasing and rent tribunals, the public prosecution authorities, the police service, and the correctional system, as well as matters pertaining to the Penal Code, the Code of Judicial Procedure, and laws which replace, or are closely associated with, provisions contained in these codes.

The Committee on Laws

shall prepare matters concerning the Marriage Code, the Code on Parenthood and Guardianship, the Inheritance Code, the Commercial Code, the Code of Land Laws and laws which replace, or are related to, provisions contained in these codes, in so far as these matters are not subject to preparation by another committee. It shall also prepare matters which concern legislation on insurance contract law, company law, association law, bills of exchange law, check law, law of tort liability, intellectual property law, debt recovery, bankruptcy, private international law, as well as legislation in other questions of a general private-law nature.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs

shall prepare matters concerning Sweden's relations and agreements with other States and with international organizations, its representation abroad and development assistance to other countries, as well as other questions

concerning foreign trade and international economic cooperation, all in so far as these matters are not subject to preparation by another committee.

The Committee on Defense

shall prepare matters concerning military defense, civil defense, psychological defense, economic defense, non-combatant service, and economic benefits to military conscripts, as well as matters concerning coordination within the total defense system.

The Committee on Social Insurance

shall prepare matters concerning national insurance and occupational injuries insurance, as well as matters concerning financial aid to students.

The Committee on Social Affairs

shall prepare matters concerning child and youth welfare, care of the elderly, welfare and treatment of alcoholics, public assistance, family allowances, occupational safety, working hours, vacations, health and medical services, care of the disabled, rehabilitation, and other social welfare matters.

The Committee on Cultural Affairs

shall prepare matters concerning culture in general as well as popular education; youth activities and international cultural cooperation, as well as sport and open-air activities. It shall also prepare questions concerning ecclesiastical affairs and matters concerning radio and television in so far as these matters are not subject to preparation by the Committee on the Constitution.

The Committee on Education

shall prepare matters concerning higher education and research, the school system, the training of teachers, and adult education.

The Committee on Transport and Communications

shall prepare matters concerning railways, postal services, telegraph services, telephone services, roads, road traffic, shipping, civil aviation, and meteorological services.

The Committee on Agriculture

shall prepare matters concerning agriculture, forestry, horticulture, game shooting, fishing, and water rights. It shall also prepare matters on nature conservation and other matters concerning environmental management which are not subject to preparation by another committee.

The Committee on Industry

shall prepare matters concerning general guidelines for industrial policy, related research questions and matters concerning industry and handicraft, commerce, state-owned enterprises, consumer questions, price conditions and restrictive trade practices in trade and industry, the banking and stock exchange system, and commercial insurance activities.

The Committee on the Labor Market

shall prepare matters concerning the labor market, regional development, compulsory service, employment contract

law, unemployment insurance, working conditions and terms of employment in public service, Swedish citizenship, and the status of aliens.

The Committee on Physical Planning and Local Government

shall prepare matters concerning housing policy, rent control, city and country planning, building construction, physical planning, expropriation, real estate matters, land surveying, county administration including local taxation authorities and the executory authorities, statistics, fire services, and the administrative division of Sweden, as well as local government questions which are not subject to preparation by the Committee on the Constitution.

Other Parliamentary Committees, Councils, Commissions, and Societies

In addition to its internal and external administrative bodies, Parliament has numerous other advisory, decision-making, and volunteer bodies. Some of the most important are described below.

The *Election Committee of Parliament* is responsible for proposing candidates and otherwise preparing the elections of M.P.'s to the standing committees and other bodies. Each party caucus which is represented in Parliament occupies one seat. In addition, ten seats are distributed proportionally among those parties. The members whose names each party caucus has submitted to the Speaker are appointed to the Election Committee.

The *Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs* is the organization through which Parliament and Cabinet cooperate in this field.

This cooperation takes place in two forms. The Cabinet is responsible for keeping the council continuously informed of the international situation, and it is obliged to consult the council on important foreign affairs issues. The council, which consists of the Speaker and nine other M.P.'s, meets when summoned by the Cabinet. Its chairman is the Head of State or, in his absence, the Prime Minister.

The *Salary Commission* consists of 17 M.P.'s. It advises the designated Cabinet member on matters concerning collective bargaining agreements with central government employees. On behalf of Parliament, it approves agreements on employment and pay conditions within Parliament and its agencies.

The *Appeals Board* is the body to which it is possible to appeal the decisions of parliamentary administrative organizations or agencies. The board consists of a chairman, who must be a judge or former judge, plus four M.P.'s. The chairman may not be an M.P.

The *War Commission* takes over the functions of Parliament if Sweden is at war or in immediate danger of war. The Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs decides if this is the case.

The War Commission consists of the Speaker as chairman plus 50 M.P.'s.

The *Parliamentary Ombudsman Commission* is responsible for preparing the election of the Parliamentary Ombudsman and his deputies. The commission is appointed by the Committee on the Constitution and consists of six members of this committee.

It should be added that Parliament also selects Sweden's delegation to the Council of Europe, the Board of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Fund, and the 18 M.P.'s entitled to take part in the annual general meetings of the government enterprise holding company, Statsföretag AB.

Voluntary organizations within Parliament. Aside from the above-mentioned formal committees and councils, there are a number of volunteer clubs within Parliament. Among these, for instance, are two clubs for total abstainers and

two for religious Christians. Other clubs include two that have come into existence in recent years. The first is RIFO, a forum for contacts between M.P.'s and scientific researchers, which sponsors lectures, discussions, and study trips on current issues. Another club, SPN, was formed at the suggestion of the Federation of Swedish Industries. Modeled on Britain's "Industry and Parliament Trust Limited," its aim is to further greater mutual understanding between politicians and business, among other things by giving M.P.'s a chance to do one-week or two-week "traineeships" at various companies.

The External Administration of Parliament

— *parliamentary agencies*

The *Bank of Sweden*, as the country's central bank, is responsible for issuing bank notes, administering Sweden's gold and foreign currency reserves, functioning as a bank for the central government and the country's banking system, and influencing the credit market through its monetary policy. The Bank of Sweden fixes the country's official discount rate.

Its actual administration is handled by the Board of Governors of the Bank of Sweden, which consists of seven members. The chairman is appointed by the Cabinet, the other members by Parliament.

The *National Debt Office* is headed by seven National Debt Commissioners. Members of the Cabinet may not serve as Commissioners. The main task of the National Debt Office is to handle the central government's borrowing and administer the national debt. It borrows money in various forms, including interest-bearing bonds, premium bonds, savings bonds, private placements, call money, and treasury bills.

The *Parliamentary Ombudsmen* keep an eye on how public agencies enforce laws and other statutes. Their responsibilities also include working toward the elimination of shortcomings in legislation and furthering uniform and proper law enforcement. The Ombudsmen also receive complaints

from the public about the way civil servants have performed their work. Anyone can lodge such a complaint. A person does not have to be legally competent or a Swedish citizen to be helped by a Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsmen are elected for terms of four years. Their periods in office thus do not coincide with the term of M.P.'s. The election of the Ombudsman and his (at present four) deputies is prepared by the Parliamentary Ombudsman Delegation.

The *Parliamentary Auditors* are entrusted with examining central government operations. They are not, however, entitled to examine the affairs of state-owned corporations, unless Parliament gives them permission to do so. In particular, the Auditors are supposed to examine the actual effects of government spending and the suitability of the organizational systems and working methods that government agencies employ. There are 12 Parliamentary Auditors.

The *Swedish Delegation to the Nordic Council*. The Council is an agency for international cooperation among the Parliaments and Cabinets of the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). It has advisory functions and can also raise new issues at its own initiative. The Swedish Delegation to the Nordic Council has 18 members.

The Timetable of Parliament

— *annual rhythm, weekly schedule*

Annual session

The regular session of Parliament usually begins each October and runs through the following spring. It is supposed to end no later than May 31, but if there are strong reasons, it may be prolonged until no later than June 15. In practice, the session tends to run for at least one week into June.

General debates

The annual rhythm of parliamentary work is punctuated by general debates.

The first of these is a general policy debate at the end of October or the beginning of November. This debate is based on the Cabinet's declaration of policy, presented by the Prime Minister early in October when the session opens.

The next general policy debate takes place at the beginning of February. By that time, Parliament has had time to study the Government Budget Bill submitted in mid-January, and the general period for introducing members' bills has run out. With the Budget Bill as its starting point, this debate touches on all major national political and economic issues—labor market policy, energy questions, taxes, medical care, the schools, and so on.

After the Committee on Finance has presented its report on the Government's Economic Policy Statement (submitted along with the Budget Bill in mid-January) it is time for



One of the duties of the Head of State is to open the annual session of Parliament each October. Here King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia are being led by Speaker Ingemund Bengtsson through the Chamber lobby to the Assembly Hall, where the opening ceremony will take place. (Svenski Pressfoto)

an economic policy debate at the end of February or the beginning of March.

At the end of March or the beginning of April, there is a foreign, trade, and currency policy debate. The Foreign Minister generally begins the debate by reading the Cabinet's declaration of Swedish foreign policy.

After this, at the end of April or the beginning of May, comes the so-called *décharge* debate on the question of whether Parliament should approve the Cabinet minutes. This debate is based on a report by the Committee on the Constitution, which has examined the way Cabinet Ministers have performed their duties and the way Cabinet business has been handled. In a sense, this debate and its outcome can be compared with a corporation's annual general meeting, which votes on whether to discharge the board of directors from personal liability for the year under review.

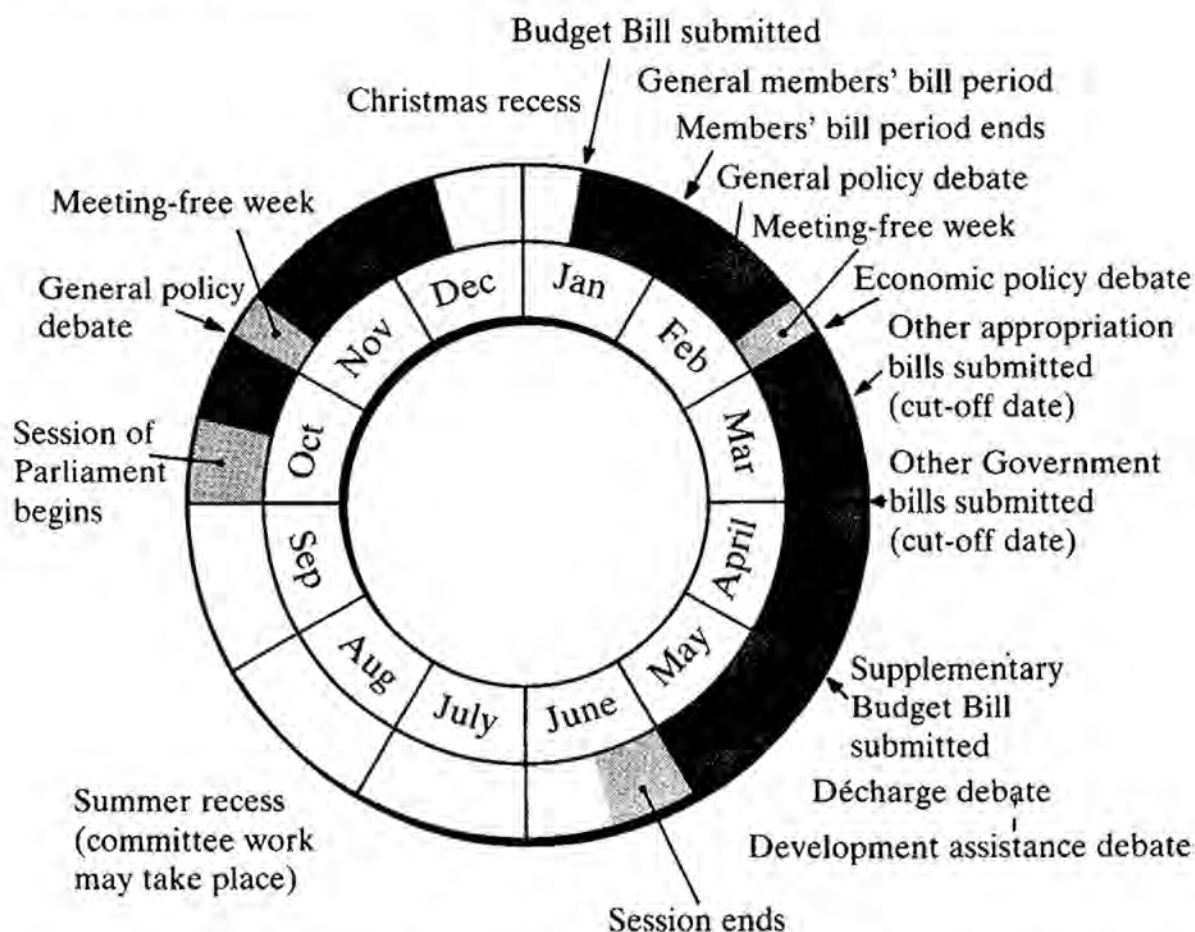
If we wish, we can also include the development assistance debate among these general debates. It is held after the Committee on Foreign Affairs has issued its report concerning Sweden's appropriations for development assistance abroad, and it usually takes place in the spring.

Weekly rhythm of work in the Chamber

A "normal" week of work in the Chamber looks something like this:

Monday, 11 a.m.—4 p.m. at the latest.	Replies by Ministers to interpellations and meeting for submission (tabling) of bills, reports, etc.
Tuesday, 3 p.m.—6 p.m. at the latest.	Question time, replies to interpellations, and submission of bills, reports, etc.
Wednesday, 10 a.m.—6 p.m. at the latest.	Working meeting.
Continued 7:30 p.m.—midnight at the latest if necessary in order to avoid a working meeting on Friday.	

THE PARLIAMENTARY YEAR



The annual session of Parliament begins in early October and ends in late May or early June. The annual rhythm of parliamentary work is punctuated by general debates.

Thursday, noon—6 p.m. at the latest.
Continued 7:30 p.m.—midnight at the latest if it otherwise—despite an evening meeting on Wednesday—would be necessary to hold a working meeting on Friday.

Friday 9 a.m.—4 p.m. at the latest. If a working meeting must, as an exceptional matter, take place on a Friday, it is adjourned no later than 2 p.m.

Question time, working meeting, and replies to interpellations.

Replies to interpellations and submission of bills, reports, etc.

Meeting-free weeks

Aside from their customary Christmas and New Year break and Easter break from the work of Parliament, M.P.'s have two meeting-free weeks each year. One is at the end of October or the beginning of November, the other at the end of February or the beginning of March.

Parliamentary Bills

— *Government bills and members' bills*

Items of business to be dealt with by Parliament may assume the form of Government bills, members' bills, and recommendations and reports from parliamentary bodies. The latter two are of minor interest here. The bulk of Parliament's workload consists of Government bills.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Budget Bill—the Cabinet's program of action

The Budget Bill, submitted to Parliament each January 10, is the Cabinet's most important program of action for the coming fiscal year, which runs from July 1 to June 30. It is an important starting point for the work of Parliament.

The actual Budget Bill consists of the Cabinet's proposed central government budget, i.e. a specification of projected revenues and expenditures for the coming fiscal year.

Appendices to the Budget Bill, currently numbering 26, present a detailed account of the Cabinet's economic policies and of the revenue and expenditure items included in the government budget.

Appendix One, the Economic Policy Statement, contains the Cabinet's assessment of the economic situation and presents its economic policy guidelines. A special sub-appendix to the Economic Policy Statement presents the so-called national budget. This contains a summary of Sweden's economic situation and outlook, plus a detailed

area-by-area survey of developments in Swedish foreign trade, production, investment, as well as the labor market, public-sector activities, the credit market, and the economic situation of Swedish consumers.

Appendix Two contains a detailed presentation of the budget policy and the spending program. It also provides a report on the revenue side of the budget. The revenue estimate of the National Accounting and Audit Bureau is presented as a sub-appendix.

Appendix Three deals with various issues of interest both to the government budget and the civil service.

The subsequent appendices provide ministry-by-ministry accounts of expenditure programs and requests for individual appropriation items.

The Budget Bill is the product of an exhaustive and—toward the end—hectic process. The budgeting process begins about one and a half years before the beginning of the fiscal year for which requests for appropriations are made. The first step is for the relevant local authorities to submit their appropriation requests to regional authorities. The latter thereby obtain background information for their requests for appropriations. In the next phase, central government agencies enter the picture. Each such agency compiles budget requests for its entire field of operations and forwards these no later than September 1 to the ministry under whose jurisdiction the agency falls. After this, the budgeting task continues in each respective ministry. The recommendations of the ministries are compiled by the Ministry of Finance.

This ministry weighs appropriation requests against available funds and against the assessments of the economic situation provided by the Ministry of Finance and the National Institute of Economic Research.

The subsequent budgeting task, which takes place until the end of November, consists mainly of negotiations be-

tween the specialized ministries and the Ministry of the Budget.

At the beginning of December, this phase is supposed to be completed. The statistics and tables in the Budget Bill can then be made final.

The Supplementary Budget Bill

The Cabinet's budget work is carried to completion when it presents its Supplementary Budget Bill. This bill contains recommendations for final adjustments in the central government budget. It must be submitted to Parliament before the end of April. The Supplementary Budget Bill also contains a new estimate of revenues from the National Accounting and Audit Bureau, a revised national budget, a revised Economic Policy Statement, and a medium-term budget.

Other Government bills

Other Government bills concerning appropriations for the following fiscal year must be submitted to Parliament no later than March 10.

Government bills that do not have budgetary implications, such as proposed amendments to existing laws, must be submitted no later than March 31.

MEMBERS' BILLS

Independent members' bills

Members of Parliament have a chance to introduce members' bills on practically any issue during a 15-day period in January, following the submission of the Budget Bill. This is called the general members' bill period. During this

period, the number of bills submitted by members is generally about 2,000.

The most important members' bills introduced during the 15-day period are the alternatives to the Government Budget Bill presented by the opposition parties.

Any members' bill can be sponsored (signed) by one or more M.P.'s. So-called party bills are sponsored by an entire party caucus. Multi-party bills are signed by members of more than one party.

Follow-up members' bills

Within 15 days after submission of any Government bill or any recommendation or report from a parliamentary body, members' bills relating to them may be introduced.

Members' bills related to "major events"

If a major event occurs that could not have been foreseen or provided for during the general members' bill period, M.P.'s have the right to submit members' bills on the subject. At least ten M.P.'s must co-sponsor such a bill. The definition of "major event" has been interpreted in a very restrictive manner.

Parliament at Work

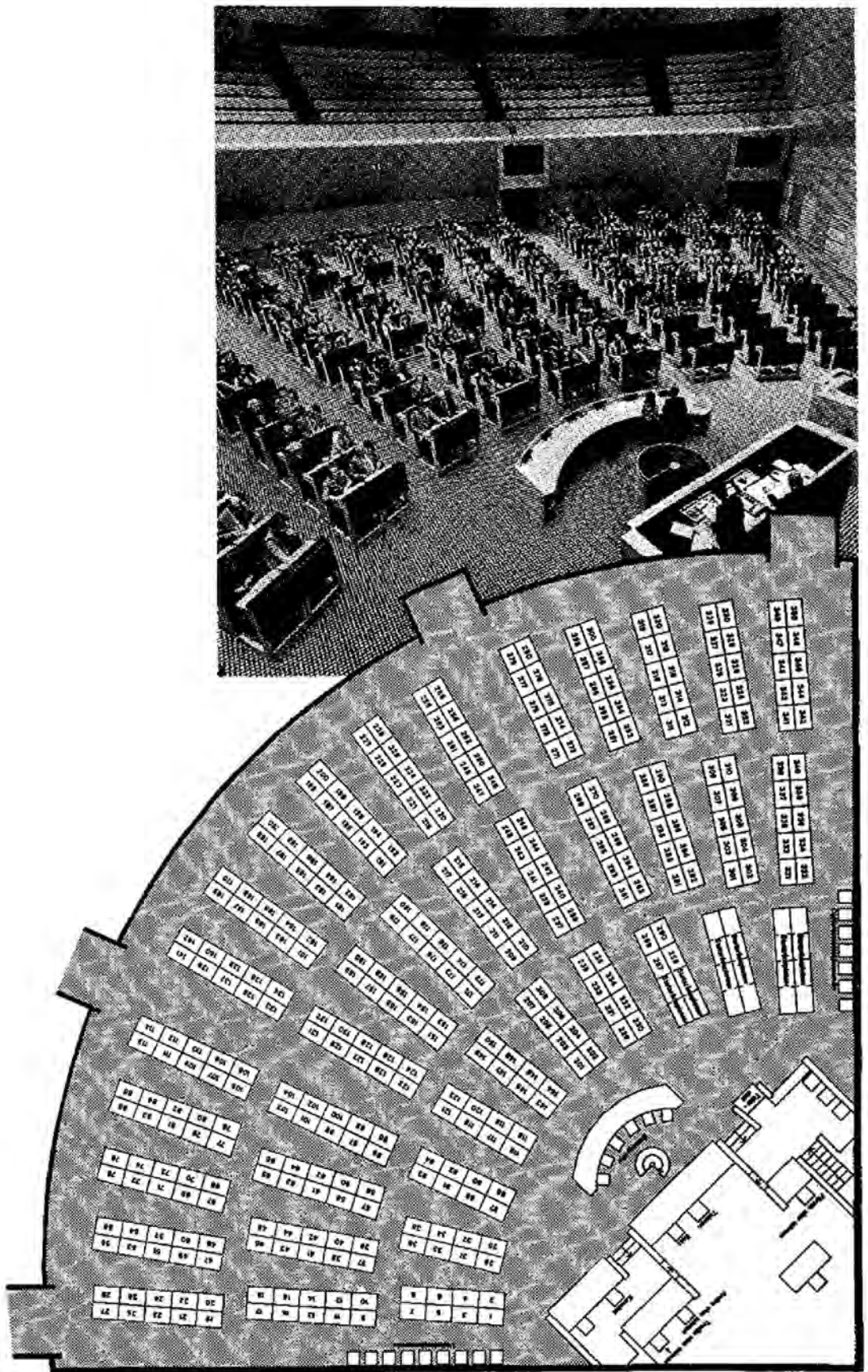
— *Parliament and Cabinet in close combat*

In the preceding chapter, the most important working materials of Parliament have been described: Government and members' bills. But in addition, there are other engines that set the machinery of Parliament in motion—the above-mentioned general policy debates, questions, and interpellations.

In other words, the work of Parliament provides M.P.'s with a great deal of space for declarations and statements of opinion on general policy issues. They have continuous opportunities to become acquainted with the attitudes of the Cabinet and of individual Ministers toward current issues, what steps the Cabinet intends to take in response to events, and the like. The sources of this information are major general policy debates and the system of questions and interpellations to Ministers. The latter system gives Parliament a means of monitoring the Cabinet and may also be used as a political weapon.

Debates spanning the entire political field

General policy debates take place both in the fall and spring, as mentioned previously. These debates span the entire political field and are customarily divided into different topics, for example general policy, economics, industrial and commercial policy, labor market and regional development policy, overseas development assistance issues, educational and cultural affairs, and other special



The Chamber in session, with the Speaker's podium closest to the camera. The 349 M.P.'s are seated according to the districts they represent, not according to party membership. (Photo: Nils-Johan Noren lind/TIOFOTO)

issues. The decision to allow the Chamber to debate issues not related to other current business is made by the Speaker after consultations with the members of the Presidium appointed by the party caucuses. Such a debate may be limited to covering a particular subject or may be divided into parts by subjects.

Questions to Ministers

A distinction is made between questions and interpellations. Originally, the purpose of questions was to obtain information and that of interpellations was to monitor a Minister's performance (see next section). Nowadays there is not this clear line between the two options. According to the regulations in the Parliament Act, an M.P. may direct a question or interpellation to a Minister concerning any matter that falls within that Minister's field of responsibility.

According to the Parliament Act, a question must have a specific content. It may be furnished with a short introductory explanation. When the question is answered, only the M.P. who has asked it and the Minister who answers it may take part. Question debates also carry time limits. When a question is being answered, the first speech from each side may not exceed three minutes, the second speech may last up to two minutes, and subsequent speeches no more than one minute.

The question system is designed to enable the questioner to obtain quick information on a particular matter. The question is ordinarily answered the week after it is submitted.

In recent years, the number of questions submitted by M.P.'s to Cabinet members has averaged about 500 per annual session.

Interpellations—permit open debates

A question is thus a matter involving only the questioner and the appropriate Minister. An interpellation is often a different matter. Sometimes the purpose of an interpellation is to start a debate on a politically weighty issue. According to the Parliament Act, an interpellation should be specific in content and include a statement of motives. It should only be submitted on issues of great general interest. Other M.P.'s besides the person submitting the interpellation may take part in the debate. The same applies to other Cabinet Ministers besides the one who replies to the interpellation. An interpellation debate, unlike a question debate, is not subject to any time limits. It may consequently last for a long time.

The ministries put a great deal of work into the reply a Minister will read. For this reason, it sometimes takes a rather long time from the date the interpellation is submitted until it is brought up for debate. But it may not take too long. A Minister who has not replied to an interpellation within four weeks after receiving it must give Parliament an oral explanation as to why the reply will not be forthcoming or will be delayed.

In recent years, M.P.'s have submitted nearly 200 interpellations per annual session.

Parliament Makes a Decision

—*acclamation, voting, special rules*

Most decisions by Parliament are made by acclamation, i.e. without a vote. Acclamation means that, in principle, Parliament is unanimous. If a vote is requested, the members are summoned to the Chamber by means of voting bells in the Parliament building. An M.P. votes by standing up. If the outcome is unclear, the Speaker himself recommends a vote count. Otherwise a count takes place if any M.P. requests it. Members vote for or against a proposal by pushing an electronic Yes or No button located on their desks. They can also abstain from voting by pushing the button marked Abstain. The result of the vote appears in different-colored lights on a display board above the Speaker's podium. It is also recorded photographically.

To win approval, a proposal usually requires the support of a simple majority, i.e. more than half of the votes (note: not of all M.P.'s). In case of a tie between Yes and No votes, the matter is decided by drawing lots.

In special cases, other kinds of majority or techniques are required. A few examples:

— Constitutional laws can be passed or amended only if Parliament approves them twice in identical form. The second decision may come only after an intervening parliamentary election, and it must await the assembling of the new Parliament.

— The Parliament Act. Its main regulations may either be amended in the same way as the Constitution—i.e. two

decisions with an intervening parliamentary election—or through approval by three-fourths of M.P.'s voting and more than half of all M.P.'s. Supplementary regulations may be changed in the same way as laws in general, i.e. by an ordinary majority.

— Election of a Prime Minister. A negative technique is used, by which a proposed candidate is approved unless a majority of all M.P.'s (not of those voting) vote No. The reason why the express approval of a majority of M.P.'s is not required is that this might prolong the process of forming a Cabinet and make it more difficult. See also the chapter *Forming a Cabinet* (pp. 89–93).

— A motion for a declaration of no confidence against a Prime Minister must be sponsored by at least one tenth of all M.P.'s to be put to a vote. A declaration of no confidence requires approval by more than half of all M.P.'s (not of those voting).

— A decision to remove a member's immunity from legal action, based on his statements or actions while performing his parliamentary duties, requires approval by five-sixths of the M.P.'s voting.

— When M.P.'s are unable to attend a vote for special reasons, the balance between Yes and No votes on an issue can be maintained by pairing. The absent M.P. is paired with a member on the other side of the issue who also wants to be absent or who agrees to abstain from voting. Pairing is organized by members of each party caucus designated to perform this function.

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Parliament and the Public

— *service to the mass media, the schools, and the public*

Parliament wishes to provide the public with full and correct information about what happens there, what decisions are made, and what they mean to individual citizens. It is not difficult to follow the work of Parliament. The Chamber meetings are open to the public and all parliamentary documents are public. The press has good opportunities to report from Parliament.

The members

The members of Parliament are, of course, important personal sources and recipients of information. They stay in touch with their constituents and others in many ways, most commonly through personal contacts and letters. As officeholders in the local party organization, in municipal and county councils, in labor unions and professional associations, in business organizations, in volunteer and other associations, they become aware of problems and opinions, and they provide others with information on national political issues.

Service to the mass media

The Chamber has a press gallery with room for more than 40 people, and next to it are offices for the parliamentary journalists who follow the work of Parliament on a daily



When Parliament changed from a two-Chamber to a one-Chamber system, it moved from the old Parliament Building to a temporary Parliament Building in the heart of downtown Stockholm, in order to gain access to a sufficiently large session hall. The square just outside it—Sergels torg—is used practically every day for demonstrations and manifestations of various kinds. (Photo: Cecilia Borggård/MIRA)

basis. Those news agencies and newspapers with permanent correspondents have their own work rooms. There are about 15 such rooms. They are equipped with telephones and closed-circuit broadcasts that enable correspondents to follow debates in the Chamber from their own desks. There are also a few rooms available for visiting journalists. Parliamentary documents are distributed free of charge to those who have work rooms, as well as to visiting journalists.

The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation occupies a lot of space. Aside from work rooms for its commentators, Swedish Television has its own editing room and studio. Radio reporters and staff have a studio and a control room.

Press photographers have special camera locations from which they can follow the proceedings in the Chamber.

Parliamentary journalists are kept informed in various ways of the work taking place in Parliament. Once a week, they gather for a briefing that includes a presentation of the items of business that will be dealt with in the Chamber during the coming week.

For a number of years, Parliament has maintained an information service, consisting of a press secretary and an information assistant. The press secretary's task is to provide various services to newspapers and magazines that have no regular parliamentary coverage. He or she mainly carries out assignments for individual publications, putting them in touch with the right people, sending them material, and answering questions. The press secretary keeps the mass media informed of what will happen in the Chamber. A weekly list of Chamber business is mailed every Monday to all of Sweden's daily newspapers, local radio stations, news agencies, and a large number of specialized publications.

Twice a year, Parliament sponsors a two-day course for copy editors and reporters on the theme of "Parliamentary



After more than ten years at Sergels torg, Parliament is moving back to its old, renovated and restored building on the tiny isle of Helgeandsholmen, right next to Stockholm's Old Town. In the foreground, soldiers marching past the building to the Royal Palace for the Changing of the Guard. (Photo: TIOFOTO)

Material and the Mass Media.” The course is designed to provide a basic knowledge of Parliament and its work.

Questions from the public

As mentioned above, an information assistant works together with the press secretary. The information assistant answers questions from the public about Parliament and its work. The bulk of these questions come by telephone, but there are also written queries. In most cases they can be answered directly or after a brief inquiry. In special cases, the information assistant refers callers directly to the organization within Parliament or elsewhere which is directly involved. A great deal of effort is made to ensure that those who call will either receive a direct answer or a correct referral.

The meeting times of Parliament are advertised daily in four Stockholm newspapers. Quite recently, a special telephone service was added. Known as “Parliament today,” it is a recorded message, reached via a special phone number, which provides information on what items of business will be debated during the day, what questions and interpellations will be answered, etc.

Parliament and the schools

Parliament has a special school service with a full-time coordinator. The school service aims its activities both at teachers and pupils. For teachers, these consist mainly of different kinds of advanced training courses. The service sponsors a few courses a year, mainly for teachers of social sciences in grades 7–9 of the comprehensive school, and at upper secondary levels.

The service compiles packages of teaching materials and

information. Pupils can use them individually, in groups, or in teacher-supervised instruction.

Every year, about 20,000 school pupils are also given tours of the Parliament Building, and receive information on the work of Parliament from M.P.'s and from the guides who work for the school service itself.

Guided tours for the public

On Saturdays and Sundays and during the summer recess, guided tours of the Parliament Building are available to the public. Visitors are briefed on the work of Parliament and are given a chance to become familiar with the rooms where it takes place.

Clubs and organizations can take advantage of the same service by contacting the director of the guide service.

Public gallery

The best place to follow the general debates, question times, and interpellation debates in Parliament is in the public gallery. It is open to visitors when the Chamber is meeting. In the foyer outside the public gallery, visitors receive a diagram showing where all the M.P.'s sit, a list of business at hand, list of speakers, and other information which may be of interest.

Public Attitudes Toward Politicians

— *credibility gaps, disdain for politicians?*

In recent years, quite a lot has been said and written about public attitudes toward politicians. People have spoken of “a crisis for politicians,” “credibility gaps,” even “disdain for politicians.” The Swedish Board for Psychological Defense Planning carries out regular nationwide public opinion surveys, among other things concerning public attitudes toward parties and politicians. The two following tables show the findings of one of these polls, known as “Opinion 82.”

Year	“You can never depend on the fact that any of the parties intend to keep their promises.”			
	Entirely or largely agree %	Entirely or largely disagree %	Don't know %	Balance opinion* %
1968	61	35	4	-26
1973	63	32	5	-31
1976	66	30	4	-36
1978	71	24	4	-47
1979	70	25	5	-45
1980	72	23	5	-49
1981	71	25	4	-46
1982	71	25	5	-46

Year	"Those who sit in Parliament and make the decisions don't pay much attention to what ordinary people feel and think."			
	Entirely or largely agree %	Entirely or largely disagree %	Don't know %	Balance of opinion* %
1968	46	48	6	+2
1973	53	41	6	-12
1976	58	37	5	-21
1978	59	35	7	-24
1979	55	35	9	-20
1980	64	30	6	-34
1981	63	32	5	-31
1982	55	39	7	-16

* The percentage who disagree with the quoted statement minus the percentage who agree

The above two tables speak for themselves. An attempt was made within the framework of the same study to calculate the distribution of the population in terms of degrees of trust for parties and politicians in 1980. The report summarizes:

Fifteen percent of the population have a high degree of trust for parties and politicians, whereas 38% report a very low degree of trust. The latter attitude is particularly common among the youngest age group, 18-24 years (45%), rural people (46%), and blue-collar workers (45%). This distrust is least widespread among the most highly educated people (28%).

Compared with the preceding year, the proportion expressing the strongest degree of distrust toward parties and politicians grew markedly—from 26% in 1979 to 38% in 1980. The 1979 reversal in this trend toward growing distrust has thus not continued, but on the contrary has been replaced by a marked growth in the amount of distrust.

Among sympathizers of the various political parties, the degree of distrust varied in 1980 more than previously. Very low trust for parties and politicians is thus most common among supporters of the Conservatives and Communists (40%), and least common among Liberal supporters (22%). Among the latter, a very high degree of trust is also the most common (33%).

Contacts with Parliament and Cabinet

— *lobbying, Swedish style*

Different interest groups take varying advantage of their chances to talk face to face with Cabinet Ministers, M.P.'s, standing committees of Parliament, party executive councils, and so forth. Representatives of business, local government, and the unions are not the only ones to pay visits to these decision-makers. Volunteer organizations formed to monitor environmental and other issues are also on the alert. Examples are organizations opposed to painful animal experiments and the diversion of wild rivers to generate power.

Petitions are not uncommon. Formal visits to Ministers and standing committees are a more or less daily phenomenon.

It is also common for companies and organizations to invite "their" standing committee to a discussion on current problems in their economic sector or organization. Sometimes party delegations are invited one by one to this type of presentation, and sometimes a limited number of M.P.'s from each of the parties.



Formal visits by interest groups to Cabinet Ministers have become less formal and more imaginative. Here, a visit to the Minister of Industry by singers and musicians from a theatrical troupe who want to save the ship-yards in southern Sweden that are threatened with closure. (Photo: Pressens Bild)

Printed Sources of Information

— *parliamentary documents, indexes by subject and person, report on commissions of inquiry*

Parliamentary documents include the minutes of Parliament; Government bills (including the Budget Bill); letters, recommendations, and reports from various parliamentary bodies; members' bills; standing committee reports and opinions; letters of instruction from Parliament; and indexes. In addition, there are "quick minutes" of parliamentary debates. The quick minutes, which include texts of Chamber speeches and a record of votes, are aimed at providing rapid information on what has happened in the Chamber. It is available in printed form the day after each Chamber meeting.

Furthermore, there are a number of other Swedish-language printed sources which may be worth mentioning:

Parliamentary magazine. "From Parliament and the Ministries" is published 40 times a year. It contains summaries of major Government bills, Cabinet instructions to commissions of inquiry, reports, members' bills, interpellations, and the like. Chamber debates on major items of business are reported. As a rule there is information on newly published editions of the Swedish Code of Statutes and on current central government publications.

Subject index. One source of information and guidance that contains complete documentation of the work of Parlia-

ment is the subject index. Its main section lists all items of business on which Parliament has come to a decision, as well as the interpellations and questions answered during an annual session.

Index of persons. The index of persons reports each member's bills, interpellations, questions, and speeches.

Directory of members and committees. Every year, Parliament publishes a directory of its members and standing committees.

There is a constituency-by-constituency list of all members including full name, date of birth, constituency address, Stockholm address, assignments in standing committees and other parliamentary agencies, number of years in Parliament, and party membership.

Index of members' bills. To enable M.P.'s in particular as quickly as possible to locate and keep track of the numerous members' bills that have been submitted during the general members' bill period, a continuously updated index is maintained, stating the headings of each bill, the main sponsors, the party membership of these sponsors, and which standing committee it has been referred to.

Report on commissions of inquiry. As part of its preparations for writing Government bills, the Cabinet appoints commissions of inquiry, which conduct research and present recommendations. Information on all the commissions of inquiry currently at work can be found in a report compiled by the Ministry of Justice. It is submitted to Parliament in January at the same time as the Budget Bill.

The report is divided into two parts. Part I contains data on the membership of each commission, its address and

telephone number, a report on its work during the period covered, expenditures, and an index.

Part II contains the Cabinet's instructions and supplementary instructions to each commission. They are arranged ministry by ministry, just as the commissions are arranged in Part I. Under each ministry, they are arranged according to the dates of the Cabinet's decisions.

Yearbook of Parliament. The function of the yearbook is to provide a brief, general review of Parliament and its work. Aside from general information on Parliament and its bodies, the yearbook contains a report on Government bills and members' bills which have been approved or resulted in dissenting opinions in standing committees. There is also a brief summary of some of the most important interpellation debates and an exhaustive appendix on the budget, including tables.

The Main Tasks of the Cabinet

— *planning, taking initiatives, implementing*

According to the Constitution, the Cabinet's task is to "rule" the country.

The Cabinet is, of course, entitled to make its own decisions on a number of important matters. But of greater significance is the role the Cabinet assumes in the work of Parliament. This is because to a large extent it is the Cabinet which prepares the matters decided upon by Parliament, and it is the Cabinet which is responsible for putting these decisions into practice.

It is thus possible to say that "ruling" the country means that the Cabinet plans, takes initiatives, and implements decisions.

The Cabinet has its own staff to help it, but it also makes use of commissions of inquiry. The latter may include M.P.'s from different parties, representatives of special-interest organizations, and experts.

The Cabinet provides instructions to each commission on its assignment. These instructions state the aims and the general framework of its research work, which is on a one-time basis.

The commission carries out this research and then presents its recommendations in a report published in a series of public commission studies, the Swedish Government Official Reports. The report is sent for the written comments of government agencies, special-interest organizations, and other relevant bodies. The Cabinet, taking due

account of these comments, uses the commission report as the cornerstone of its own recommendations to Parliament, which assume the form of a Government bill.

The commission system and the procedure of submitting commission reports for written comments are a crucial element of the Swedish political decision-making process.

The Cabinet is entitled to issue detailed ordinances on how a law passed by Parliament should be enforced. But these are not the only legal rules that Cabinet decides on. It may also receive permission or "authorization" from Parliament to issue independent ordinances on particular subjects listed in the Instrument of Government, such as economic activities, preservation of nature and the environment, education, and traffic.

Furthermore, it is the Cabinet which issues and publishes not only ordinances, but also the laws, i.e. it has them published in the Swedish Code of Statutes. Only then do they become binding on the public and on government agencies.

The Cabinet makes sure that parliamentary decisions on appropriations for various purposes are carried out. This is primarily done by means of messages dispatched by the Cabinet to the agencies that are to spend the central government's money.

The Cabinet relies on administrative authorities to help it govern the country. They include central government agencies, county administrations, and others. The agencies—among them the National Labor Market Board, National Tax Board, and National Board of Universities and Colleges—are each under the jurisdiction of a ministry, and each one has the whole country as its area of operations. The agencies have an independent position vis-à-vis the Cabinet. Their activities are governed by laws. But a decision by an agency may be referred to the Cabinet for a ruling if anyone lodges an appeal of this decision. This is

the fundamental principle of the Swedish system of independent government agencies.

The Cabinet itself also performs quite a few administrative functions, such as appointing people to high-level posts. It can also grant pardons to people who have received penal sentences.

A number of other administrative tasks rest with the Cabinet. It must grant permission before certain activities (such as operation of an industrial plant that pollutes the environment) may begin.

Finally, the Cabinet is in charge of Sweden's foreign policy. It cooperates with Parliament in this field through the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs. The Cabinet is also in charge of the Swedish defense system.

The Government Chancery

— *the Cabinet Office, ministries*

The Cabinet Office

The Government chancery consists of the Cabinet Office and the ministries. The Cabinet Office is divided into the Prime Minister's office, the office of the Minister Without Portfolio, and the legal department. The Minister Without Portfolio in the Cabinet Office is the Deputy Prime Minister. The Cabinet Office is primarily a coordinating body. Aside from its coordinating functions, the work of the Cabinet Office is strongly influenced by the dual role of the Prime Minister as the leader of the Cabinet policy-making process and as the main spokesman of the Cabinet. The legal department of the Cabinet Office examines the draft versions of Government bills, opinions by the Draft Legislation Advisory Committee, statutes, instructions to commissions of inquiry, etc. This examination is undertaken mainly from a legal and formalistic standpoint. It is also an examination of facts, aimed at achieving uniformity and consistency, and at avoiding errors. Also attached to the Cabinet Office is an expert who works on delegating decision-making power in administrative matters from the Cabinet to the government agencies subordinate to it. The Cabinet Office employs language experts whose job is to achieve simplification of language used in public documents. In addition there is a press secretary whose task is to disseminate news from the Cabinet and make the arrangements for press conferences held by the Cabinet or the Prime Minister. The Minister Without Portfolio has special



After discussion within each respective ministry, the Cabinet makes the formal decision on each item of business at its weekly meeting. Another way for Ministers to discuss business at hand and to exchange other information is the daily Cabinet lunch meeting. (Photo: Kenneth Larsson)

responsibility for coordinating the Cabinet's research policy. The Cabinet Office also includes the Swedish Government Research Advisory Board, which deals with long-term national research policy.

Ministries

The number of ministries is currently 12. The work of each ministry is headed by a Minister. The Minister's closest aide is an Under-Secretary of State, whose primary responsibilities are planning and coordination. As a rule, each ministry has two other chief aides, the Permanent Secretary and the Chief Legal Officer. The Permanent Secretary is

mainly concerned with making sure administrative tasks are properly handled, while the Chief Legal Officer is responsible for draft versions of laws and ordinances.

The Under-Secretaries of State, special experts, and information secretaries of the ministries are usually political appointees. Other civil servants are permanent employees.

The information secretaries in the ministries are each directly subordinate to a Minister. Their tasks include maintaining contact with the mass media, but also obtaining background data and documents for the Ministers' public speeches and the like.

At Cabinet meetings, the Minister in charge of a particular ministry reports on matters under his or her jurisdiction. The Prime Minister may, however, decide that an item of business—or group of items—should be reported upon by a Cabinet Minister other than the one in charge of the appropriate ministry. This makes it possible to distribute the Cabinet's work load in a smooth fashion among the Ministers, without changing the jurisdictions of the ministries.

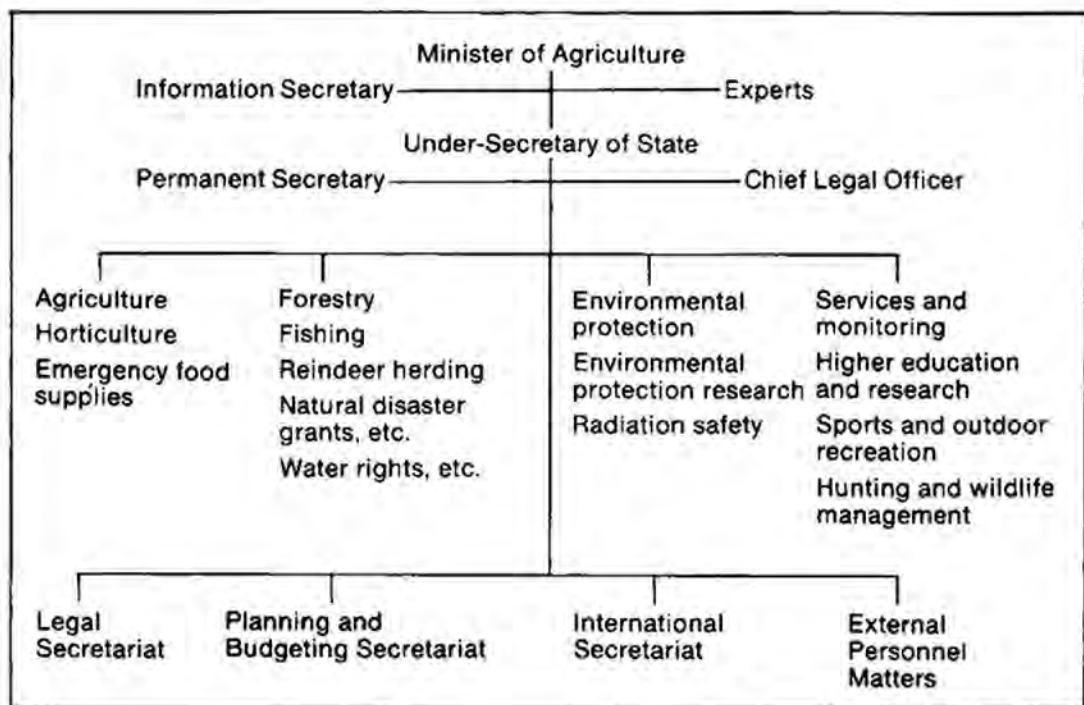
A Minister who has been assigned tasks on this basis is not only responsible for these areas in the internal work of the Cabinet, but is also required to reply to questions and interpellations on these matters in Parliament.

Another variation is to appoint outside experts to handle particular matters within a ministry. Without holding the official rank of Minister, these experts are often popularly referred to as such—for example the "Minister of sports" or the "Minister of small business."

Distribution of tasks

The distribution of tasks among ministries is largely as follows:

Distribution of tasks in the Ministry of Agriculture



Agriculture

Agriculture and forestry
 Products hazardous to health and the environment
 Food control
 Protection of natural resources
 Sports

Defense

The total defense system
 Fire safety

Education and Cultural Affairs

Cultural affairs
 Schools
 Radio and television
 International cultural cooperation

Finance

Economic policy guidelines
 Budgets
 Taxes
 Domestic trade
 Consumer affairs

Foreign Affairs	Foreign relations Foreign trade Assistance to developing countries Disarmament issues
Health and Social Affairs	Child and youth care Welfare and treatment of alcoholics National insurance system Public health and medical care
Housing	Residential construction Construction industry National physical planning
Industry	Industrial policy Energy supplies Technological research and development Regional development policy
Justice	The courts The police Correctional treatment Public order and safety Freedom of the press
Labor	Occupational safety Unemployment insurance system Immigration
Public Administration	Civil service employment County administrations Municipalities and county councils
Transport and Communications	Roads Aviation Railways Shipping Postal services Telecommunications

Decision-Making in the Cabinet

— *weekly meetings, lunch meetings*

Decisions by the Cabinet are made collectively by the Ministers at Cabinet meetings. These meetings take place on Thursdays. They are formal gatherings for the purpose of recording decisions. Generally speaking, there are no discussions at these meetings, which is understandable given the fact that the Cabinet may handle 30,000 pieces of business per year. There are no voting rules for Cabinet decisions. Divergent opinions are supposed to be noted in the minutes kept at Cabinet meetings.

The real decision-making takes place at weekly meetings held at each ministry. The relevant ministry officials present their respective pieces of business to the Minister in charge, and in reality the latter decides the matter alone. Some items of business must nevertheless be prepared jointly by two or more ministries and Ministers, among other things so that various decisions will follow a uniform political line. The Prime Minister, through the Cabinet Office, is ultimately responsible for such coordination. Major, important issues such as Government bills are discussed by the whole Cabinet in informal meetings chaired by the Prime Minister.

Another way for the Cabinet to prepare itself for decisions while exchanging information is the joint Cabinet lunches, held every day under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, and ordinarily called lunch meetings.

Forming a Cabinet

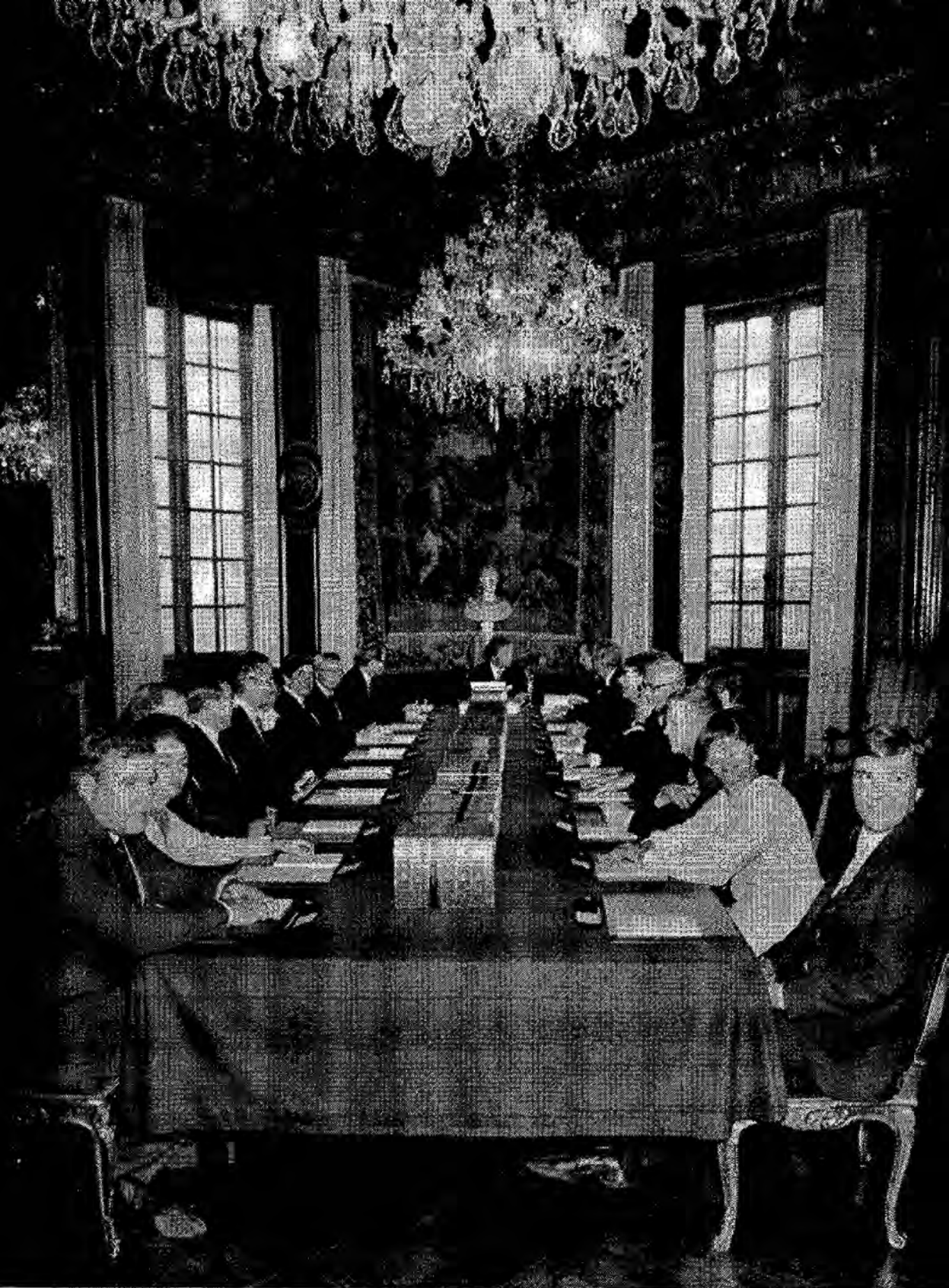
— *dismissal, caretaker government, election of a Prime Minister*

A Cabinet may be brought down by losing an election or through a parliamentary declaration of no confidence. It may also resign of its own accord.

If a parliamentary election gives a party or bloc of parties a majority of seats in the Chamber, there are generally no problems connected with appointing a Prime Minister to head the Cabinet. In the former case the head of the victorious party will become Prime Minister; in the latter case it will probably be the head of the largest party in the victorious bloc. But there are other alternatives, too. For example, a coalition Cabinet may split apart, and it may then be necessary to form a minority Cabinet. Regardless of the reasons for a change of Cabinet, Parliament elects the Prime Minister. The latter, in turn, appoints the other members of the Cabinet.

The procedure for changing or forming a Cabinet is as follows:

The head of the Cabinet submits a written request to the Speaker of Parliament to be dismissed from the post of Prime Minister. The next step in the formal procedure is that the Speaker informs the Prime Minister and other Ministers in writing that he has dismissed them. This is because if the Speaker dismisses the Prime Minister, he must also dismiss the other Ministers. In his letter, he reminds all of them of a statute which says that Cabinet Ministers are to remain at their posts until a new Cabinet



A special meeting of the King-in-Council is held at the Royal Palace in Stockholm when a Cabinet takes office. In the photo, King Carl XVI Gustaf presides over such a meeting with the new Social Democrat Cabinet in October 1982. (Photo: Ingvar Karmhed/Svenskt Pressfoto)

takes office. A Cabinet that remains in office after its members have been dismissed is usually called a caretaker government.

Election of a Prime Minister

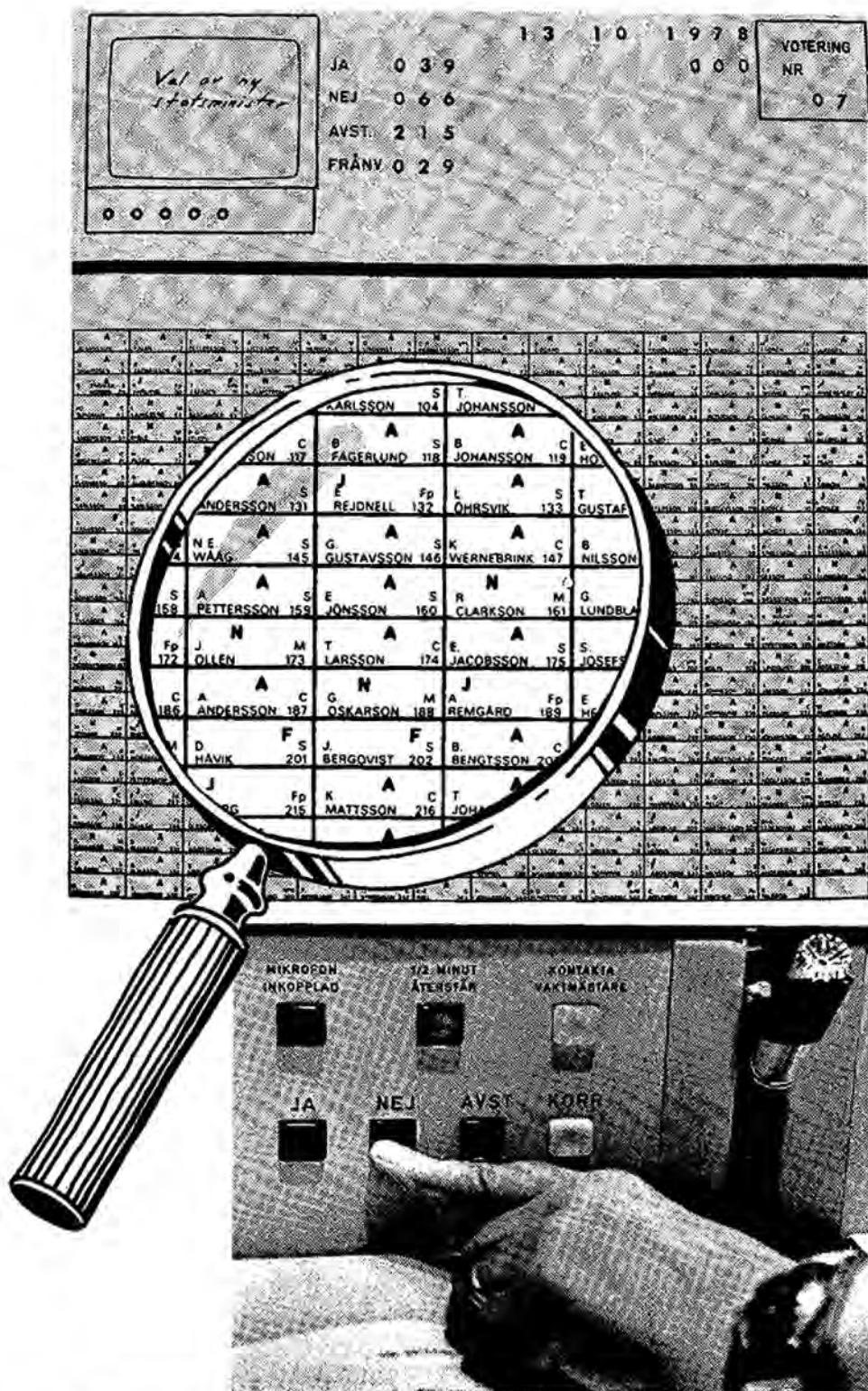
After consulting with representatives of the parties in Parliament and deliberating with the Deputy Speakers, the Speaker recommends a Prime Minister to Parliament. If more than half of all M.P.'s vote against this recommendation, it is defeated. Otherwise it is approved. If Parliament rejects the Speaker's recommendation, the procedure is repeated. If Parliament rejects the Speaker's recommendations four times, the procedure is interrupted and may be resumed only after an election to Parliament. If no regular election is scheduled within three months, an extra election is arranged during this period.

After Parliament has approved a proposed Prime Minister, the latter is required to present the Ministers appointed by him as soon as possible. The change of Cabinet takes place at a special meeting of the Cabinet in the presence of the Head of State or, if he is unable to attend, in the presence of the Speaker.

The Prime Minister's letter of appointment is issued by the Speaker on behalf of Parliament.

As indicated earlier, Sweden has had different types of Cabinets in recent years. When the non-socialist Cabinet (Center, Moderates, and Liberals) collapsed in late 1978, the Speaker's deliberations with various groups led him to the conclusion that the only solution was to form a one-party Liberal Cabinet.

The above-described procedure for electing a Prime Minister means in practice that if a majority of Parliament abstains from voting, a minority—no matter how tiny—can elect a Prime Minister. The abstentions may be regarded as



The results of a vote using the voting machine are summarized automatically and registered photographically. The photographic "minutes" indicate how each M.P. voted, which ones abstained, and which were absent. In the vote shown here, no fewer than 215 M.P.'s abstained when Parliament chose a new Prime Minister in 1978. This is possible under the special rules described in the chapter on Forming a Cabinet. (Photo: Nils-Johan Noren-lind/TIOFOTO)

passive support, as silent approval of the proposed new Prime Minister. In the 1978 election of the Liberal Party chairman as Prime Minister, the Liberal M.P.'s obviously voted Yes. The Communists and Moderates voted No. The Social Democrats and Center Party M.P.'s abstained from voting, and the outcome was:

Yes	39
No	66
Abstaining	215
Absent	29

After the 1979 general election, another three-party majority Cabinet of the non-socialist parties took office. This Cabinet fell apart in 1981 because the Moderates withdrew. When the Speaker recommended that the chairman of the Center party be elected Prime Minister in a Cabinet consisting of Center Party and Liberal Party members, M.P.'s from the latter two parties obviously voted Yes. The Social Democrats and Communists voted No. The Moderates abstained. The outcome was:

Yes	102
No	174
Abstaining	62
Absent	11

Parliament had thus accepted the Speaker's proposal as to the Prime Minister.

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