PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Prisoners in a Gulag camp building the White Sea Canal. During the Great Terror of 1937 and 1938 an estimated 1,6 million people were arrested, and approximately 700 000 of them executed. The remaining 900 000 were imprisoned in camps, where many of them perished.

PHOTO: RUSSIAN STATE LIBRARY

Some, but far from all, of the Swedes who lived in the USSR during the Great Terror were communists who had emigrated to the USSR to build a new future in "the socialist paradise". USSR propaganda poster from 1937. The text reads "Long live the Soviet constitution!"

RESCUED FROM STALIN'S TERROR

The unknown Swedish operation in the 1930s

by Torbjörn Nilsson

abstract

The author analyses the operation by Swedish diplomats in the Soviet Union during the peak of the Stalinist Terror. Although Swedish communists living in the USSR have been in the spotlight of some journalists and historians, the extent of the different Swedish groups and the complicated diplomatic actions to help them are nearly unknown. Who could be saved? Who disappeared in the Gulag? The context is the Soviet actions against all foreigners in the Great Terror from 1937, forcing them to either become Soviet citizens or immediately leave the country. Comparisons are made with Finnish people in the Soviet Union, a group much harder hit by the terror than the small groups of Swedes.
KEYWORDS: Swedish communists, Gulag, the Great Terror, Soviet Union.

In September 1937 the 40-year-old roadworker Johan Johansson, born in Nordmaling, returned home to the north of Sweden. Four years earlier he and Hildur Viktoria Venström, seamstress, had arrived in Leningrad on the *Proletarii*, a Finnish boat used for passengers, mostly communists, from Sweden and Finland. All of them were to settle in the Soviet Union, the promised land where the working class was said to be in power and a new society was in progress. Uhtua in Karelia became Johan and his wife Hildur's new home.[1]

However, the emigration to the "socialist paradise" ended in disaster. Some of his comrades in the SKP (Swedish Communist Party) on the boat perished in the Great Terror: Ernst Eriksson-Kalla, Soviet citizen since 1937, was executed in 1938, his wife Hilma died in the Gulag in 1941.[2] Others disappeared – maybe they were executed, died in the Gulag, or survived somewhere in the enormous Soviet Union, deported to unknown places far away. Others still, like Johan and Hildur, managed to return to their former homeland, Sweden.

Following years of xenophobic propaganda, in 1937 the Soviet regime launched an attack on all foreign citizens living in the country. Thus, the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs,[3] made official visits to Swedish homes and handed over orders of expulsion. Many had expired passports, were born in Russia, or lived with partners and children who were Soviet citizens. How could they escape the terror?

Decisive for their homecoming were the efforts by the diplomats at the Swedish Legation[4] in Moscow and the Consulate in Leningrad (closed by the Soviet authorities in 1938). Not all of those who wished to go back to Sweden succeeded. How many failed is difficult to say. Those who could not get in contact with the Legation are probably not visible in the archives. The diplomats had no official records of all Swedish citizens in the vast Soviet Union, just lists of the few Swedes who had announced their arrival. The communists on the *Proletarii* and other radical workers in the early 1930s were not interested in the old, capitalist "homeland". They wanted to build the future. Contacts with the Swedish diplomats did not seem necessary.

Theory and analysis

This rescue operation of Swedish citizens during the peak of the Stalinist terror has so far not been scientifically analysed. To understand how this mostly unknown diplomatic operation could be arranged, various factors must be discussed, theoretically and empirically. Aspects of the accessible sources, judicial limits for the diplomats in the Soviet Union and the importance of citizenship are all decisive factors.

The concept of *strategic moral diplomacy* has been used for studies in various fields – international economic aid, aid to

Hilma Eriksson-Kalla with daughters Astrid and Alice in Pongoma, northern Karelia, in 1941. SOURCE: KAA ENEBERG

The Lindberg family was among the group of Swedish citizens who emigrated from Kiruna to the USSR. They lived in what was called "The Swedish house" in Kirovsk (Hibinogorsk) between 1933 and 1935. SOURCE: KAA ENEBERG

refugees and victims of natural catastrophes.[5] The central thesis is that moral issues in international conflicts often are misunderstood. Two sides with different moral thinking fail to form a dialogue. Strict application of moral rules without understanding the moral universe of the other is not a fruitful strategy. This is not the same as relativism, argues political scientist Lyn Boyd-Judson. The term "strategic" tells us that the goal is still to get as much as possible from the opposite side.

In some cases there were different opinions among Swedish diplomats working with distressed individuals in the Soviet Union, compared to the higher civil servants in Stockholm. This links up with the concept *emotions*. Political scientist Christian Reus-Smit argues that "until recently, International Relations scholars have turned a stubborn blind eye to the nature and role of emotions in world politics. Structuralism, materialism, and rationalism have all encouraged this neglect". To sum up: emotions are politically consequential.[6]

"THE RESCUE OPERATION TOOK PLACE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE GREAT TERROR, WHEN THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT ALSO LIMITED THE POSSIBILITIES OF DIPLOMATIC WORK."

IN ANALYSING the rescue operation four questions therefore will be posed: 1) What did the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Legation, the Consulate, and the Centre in Stockholm) know about the Soviet Swedes? Which sources were available in getting the information? 2) What were the legal limits of the diplomatic efforts? How important was the issue of citizenship when discussing cases with the Soviet authorities? 3) Were there any discrepancies – morally or politically – between the Legation/Consulate in one hand and the Ministry in Stockholm in the other? 4) What did the diplomats achieve during this extremely difficult period with massive terror in the Soviet Union?

The rescue operation took place in the middle of the Great Terror, when the Soviet government also limited the possibilities of diplomatic work.[7] Almost the entire staff of the Legation in Moscow became occupied with helping their fellow countrymen back to Sweden.[8]

Previous studies

The cruel fate of minorities in the Great Terror, especially in the western parts of the Soviet Union, has been studied internationally in recent decades. Less is known of the often tragic fate of foreign nationals, although foreign communists working for the Comintern in Moscow have attracted attention.[9]

Swedish historian Lennart Samuelson and Russian scholars Oleg Ken and Aleksandr Rupasov have observed that in 1937–1938, Swedish diplomats were working under tremendous pressure. The Soviet side denied visas to newly appointed diplomats, disregarded the principle of the inviolability of the diplomatic bag, arrested Soviet citizens who were employed by the Swedish authorities, and disrupted the consular service.[10]

There are still only a few studies of the Swedes living in the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the millennium, journalist Kaa Eneberg published several books on communist emigration, especially from the county of Norrbotten ("Kiruna Swedes").[11] Her studies can be seen as pioneer works, still not surpassed by academic historians. She chiefly described the emigrants and their situation in the Soviet Union, especially in Karelia, also using Soviet archives. The diplomatic efforts were just briefly mentioned. Without diminishing Eneberg's important contributions, this also concealed the magnitude of the citizenship issue when discussing the situation for Swedes in the Soviet Union.

In another study, Anders Gustafson emphasizes that the fate of the Swedes in Karelia was related to the ongoing conflict between the red Finns (former refugees from the civil war in 1918) and the Russians, supported by the Soviet central government/NKVD.[12]

Most studies of Nordic emigration have focused on the oppression against Finns in Karelia.[13] However, not much is known of possible diplomatic efforts. The Finns who had kept their citizenship had to travel to Helsinki to extend their passports. Luckily some of them had American or Canadian passports.[14] The relations between Finland and the Soviet Union were tense, especially due to the landscape of Karelia, a huge border zone divided between the two countries, representing west and east.[15]

Despite the broad similarities between Sweden and Finland, on a scale classifying ethnic groups victimized by the Great Terror, Sweden and Finland should be placed at opposite ends. The Finns were massively subjected to the repression – arrests, deportations, and executions. In just one year, from July 1937 to August 1938, NKVD arrested 9 250 Karelians. 33 per cent of them were Finns, despite their share of the population in Karelia only amounting to 3 per cent. Most of those arrested (83 per cent) were shot.[16]

The national operations in focus

A deeper analysis of the terror mechanisms cannot be presented here. A short summary of the Bolsheviks in power must suffice. Since 1917, Soviet society had been characterized by violence and repression. Originally, researchers into the violence in Soviet history were mainly occupied with enemies like counterrevolutionaries, kulaks, White officers, dissenting socialists, liberals, and former civil servants in the tsarist governments. The brutal collectivization of agriculture from 1929, with hundreds of thousands of victims, has also been analyzed to some degree.

The ethnic character of a considerable part of the regime's deeds was also known, but research has mostly dealt with the deportations of, among others, Germans, Poles, Koreans, Kurds, and Finns. They continued during the war – Germans along the Volga River (1941, 330 000) and the Crimean Tatars in 1944.[17] However, in the last 15–20 years, studies of the ethnic angle have contributed to a clearer picture of the comprehensive terror system.[18] The operations against ethnic groups were built on collective guilt, not even on fabricated accusations of individuals.

Soviet dictator Josef Stalin (center) and Soviet secret-police head Nikolai Yezhov (right) walk near Moscow in 1937, the same year Yezhov signed Order No. 00447, which began the Great Terror.

PHOTO: STATE MUSEUM OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF RUSSIA

The *national operations* were especially severe in relation to minorities living along the borders, but all Soviet citizens of various foreign origins, whether counted in millions or in thousands, could be subjected to the terror. Some had been residents in Russia for centuries, others were refugees from Germany or other dictatorships. Many exiled communists working in the Communist International in Moscow were also among the victims. At the same time the "ordinary" suppression was continued, often mixed with the ethnic terror.[19]

THE PURGES WERE preceded by intensive propaganda campaigns in the state-controlled media. Whole nationalities were accused of spying. It became very dangerous to write letters to foreign countries, or to relatives in the former homeland. Membership of international organisations was extremely suspect. Studying the artificial language of *esperanto*, originally a manifestation of the internationalism of the labor movement, could end in the Gulag, or worse. Likewise, collecting foreign stamps was dangerous.[20]

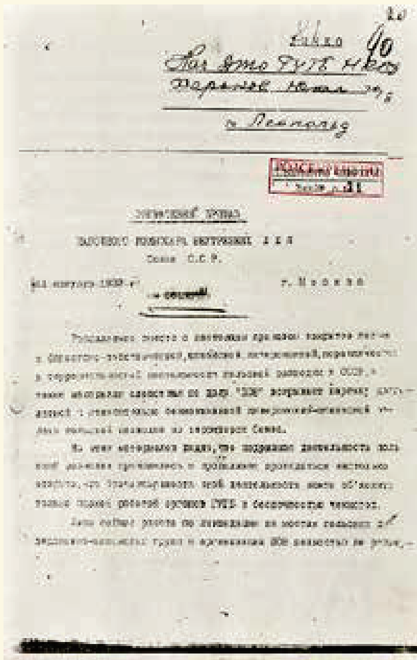
The Great Terror in 1937 began as mass repression of formerly targeted groups accused of anti-Sovietism – members of opposition parties, officers and soldiers of the White armies – but was soon transformed to ethnic cleansing. Step by step, national operations were put into effect. The census of 1937 and the introduction of compulsory passports for domestic travel had already strengthened the control of all individuals. In April 1937, directive 26 of the NKVD was issued. It obliged local operatives "to detect and remove from the USSR all foreign nationals, who in one way or another were suspected of espionage".[21]

Still more brutal was the NKVD order 00439 (July 25, 1937), the German operation, approved of by Stalin four days earlier. At first all Germans in the defence, electricity, chemical and building industries were arrested. Then the suppression was extended to German dominated areas. The Polish operation (NKVD order 00485, August 9, 1937) followed the same pattern. Soon almost all inhabitants of Polish descent were targeted, including friends, family members and children. Approximately 122 000 Germans and 111 000 Poles were executed.[22]

After suppressing these two major ethnic minorities other groups followed: Koreans, Chinese, Latvians, Estonians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Romanians, Iranians, Afghans, Finns, and smaller nationalities. All of them had some settlements where they were in majority. Apart from Gammalsvenskby in Ukraine, there were no districts or villages dominated by Swedish people, and most of the Swedes in Gammalsvenskby had been allowed to move to Sweden in 1929.[23]

By denying the extension of work or residence permits, staying became impossible for foreign citizens. If orders were not obeyed, the foreigners were arrested, risking the Gulag or execu-

"WHOLE NATIONALITIES WERE ACCUSED OF SPYING. IT BECAME VERY DANGEROUS TO WRITE LETTERS TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES, OR TO RELATIVES IN THE FORMER HOMELAND."



The Soviet NKVD Order No. 00485 (left) was an anti-Polish ethnic cleansing campaign issued on August 11, 1937, which laid the foundation for the systematic elimination of the Polish minority in the Soviet Union between 1937 and 1938. Approximately 111 000 Poles were executed by the NKVD. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

tion without trial. The executions were decided by a *troika* – a three-man meeting of the local NKVD chief, the local prosecutor, and the party secretary.[24] Paradoxically the authorities tried to cleanse the country from "dangerous elements" (all foreigners), but in practice it was very difficult to go back to the home country, due to the totalitarian communist system. Lack of foreign exchange, limited possibilities of buying tickets on international trains, and closed communications with relatives and authorities in the homeland worked in the other direction. By NKVD order 00693 (October 10, 1937) all embassies, legations and consulates were classified as spy nests. All Soviet citizens who contacted or visited them were to be arrested.[25]

Executions by quota

The national operations ended in October 1938. But the "ordinary terror"[26] continued, and the NKVD orders were still valid. Number 00447 (July 30, 1937) had extended the terror. Quotas for every district were decided at the central level, meaning that numbers of arrested as well as numbers of executed were settled beforehand. Generally, all the quotas were filled successfully.[27] One could say that this was one of the few examples in the history of the Soviet Union where centralized plans were exceeded.

Citizens of countries not bordering on the Soviet Union – Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Great Britain, etc. – were not made subjects of the extensive ethnic purges. Normally they were ordered to leave the Soviet Union (or change citizenship). However, there are many examples of victims from these countries too.[28] And the severe penalties for ex-Swedish citizens visiting the Legation were still valid. Wives, children, and relatives were also seen as guilty.

One of many Swedes affected was Hilda Maria Kafadshjy, née Jönsson, born in Lund 1886. She arrived in Russia in 1906 and married a Russian citizen who died in 1922. In a letter to the Legation (January 12, 1939) she listed nearly all the common problems: As a foreign citizen she had lost her job at a medical clinic in Tashkent. She had been ordered to leave the Soviet Union in a couple of weeks, or to apply for Soviet citizenship. The only alternative was going home. However, due to rigorous exchange regulations, she could neither bring foreign currency when leaving, nor exchange to Western currencies when travelling. With the Legation's help, she returned to Sweden in 1939.[29]

Karl Albin Ekstedt was born in Baku in 1902. A foreign citizen like his brother Fritz Erhard, he therefore also lost his employment. Their father Fritz [Hjalmar Ossian] Ekstedt had been working at the Nobel factory even after its nationalization by the Soviet authorities. He was now retired, with a small Soviet pension. Without the allowances from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, he would have been living on the knife-edge of survival. The two generations of Ekstedts, including other family members, wanted to go to Sweden as soon as possible. One problem was their Russian/Soviet born wives. As they were married to Swedish citizens they were allowed to settle in Sweden. However, in the Soviet Union they generally were classified as Soviet citizens. As such their chances of getting an exit visa were small. Only by cancellation of their Soviet citizenship would it be possible to leave the country.[30]

Not only "Kiruna Swedes"

Johan and Hildur Johansson and Ernst Eriksson-Kalla represent what is commonly understood of Swedes in the Soviet Union during the 1930s: workers from the north of Sweden, arriving in the 1920s and early 1930s, ideologically tied to the international communist movement. Kafadshjy and the Ekst-

Several Swedish children went to school in Uhtua, Karelia.
SOURCE: KAA ENEBERG

edt family represent something else, and contrary to earlier research, more ordinary Soviet-Swedes. Nearly 700 adults of Swedish origin can be found in the archives, mentioned as inhabitants in the Soviet Union for shorter or longer periods in the 1920s and 1930s.[31] A rough estimation is that only 15–20 per cent of them were organized communists. Some of the workers emigrating to the Soviet Union obviously embraced a more general appreciation of the "Worker's state", without taking an active part in politics. Generally, they are not included in the communist group.

The 1926 Soviet census had registered 2 495 Swedes living in the country. By "Swedes" the statistical surveys meant persons with Swedish as their mother tongue.[32] Accordingly, many from Kiruna were classified as Finns, and Finland-Swedish people in Finland as Swedes. However, most of this population left the country in a couple of years or became Soviet citizens. In the latter cases, all contacts with the Swedish authorities often came to an end. Apart from the immigration of Swedes around 1930, the small Swedish population probably vanished in the vast crowd of Russians/Soviet peoples.

A THOROUGH ANALYSIS of all relevant volumes in the Swedish Riksarkivet makes it possible to present a more comprehensive view. The Swedish population can be divided in at least six different groups. However, the exact numbers of the various groups are uncertain. More important is the existence of different groups of Swedes, and the circumstances that affected each group respectively.

1. *The communists*, generally called the "Kiruna Swedes", although not all of them came from Kiruna or the county of Norrbotten. Not all of them were party members, but at least 105–110 organized communists can be found in the material. Many of them came to live in Uhtua in the north of Karelia, as many Finns did, building a road to Kem on the White Sea.[33]
2. The *engineers* (45–50). Some of them were born to Swedish parents in Russia or had emigrated to the Soviet Union in the 1920s when technical specialists from various countries were recruited to the growing industry. Probably their enthusiasm for the Soviet system was weaker.
3. Besides the engineers, various occupations by *Russian born* men and women who kept their Swedish passports are represented: sewer, filer, instrument maker, housepainter, clerk, actress, foreman and many others.
4. *Widows* of deceased Swedish men, or divorcées, constituted a group with special problems. At least 20 of them are represented in the material. It seems that especially Russian-born women lived under difficult conditions. There were also widows born in Sweden who sometimes received help from relatives in Sweden or allowances from the Swedish authorities. 10–12 women regularly received such economic support from Stockholm. Due to deaths or returns to Sweden, in 1938 the group had been reduced to 5–6.[34]
5. The *Swedes in Baku* (Ekstedt and other families) can be classified as a special group. The families mostly consisted of a male Swedish-born worker in the former Nobel factory and a woman born in Russia who was a Soviet citizen, as well as the children.
6. Some of the emigrants (at least 65) became *Soviet citizens*, due to loyalty to communism, some social benefits, or by persuasion or pressure. Not surprisingly, most of them had been

members of the SKP. (Membership of the Soviet party, CPSU, demanded Soviet citizenship).

IN ADDITION TO these groups an unknown number of Swedes who had been Russian citizens before 1917 or became Soviet citizens in the 1920s probably lived in the country. More seldom they maintained contacts with the Swedish authorities or distant relatives in Sweden.

By showing the different groups of Swedes in the Soviet Union, different in background, living conditions and political connections, the difficult task for the diplomats becomes more visible. All Swedish citizens had the same legal rights: Russian-born widows without any knowledge of Swedish, as well as immigrants from the 1930s; individuals of Swedish descent in several generations, as well as enthusiastic communists fulfilling their dreams of the future in sharp contrast to what they called "capitalist oppression" in their homeland.

Nationality lists

An important discovery by the author is the lists of Swedish nationals kept by the Legation and the Consulate respectively. Names and personal information were entered when someone reported on arrival in the Soviet Union or contacted the Swedish authorities while already living in the country. These nationality lists ("Nationalitetsmatriklar") were continuously filled with current notes, more and more concerning the wishes of traveling "home" to Sweden, although some of them had never been in Sweden or had any knowledge of the language.

Originally, in the 1920s, the lists only contained 10–15 names each, a very small proportion of the Swedes in the country.[35] Due to the arrival of the Kiruna Swedes around 1930 the lists were expanded. However, the many new names in 1937–1938 were not the result of additional Swedish immigrants, but of the growing hardship for all foreign nationals. The Leningrad list in 1938–1939 contained 94 adults, the Moscow list 209.

In the nationality lists following columns were used: Registration number – date of registration – surname and all first names – profession – date of birth – place of birth – civil status – year leaving Sweden – last residence in Sweden – residence in the Soviet Union – date of issue of Swedish passport – remarks. The last column is especially useful for the historian, with sometimes detailed remarks on citizenship, passport, children, return to Sweden or death. Arrests, sentences or deportations are also noted, given the seemingly ordinary bureaucratic lists a sense of the oppression that affected not only the small groups of Swedes, but millions of people.

These lists came to be the most important tools for the diplomats. With the basic information, various lists of the most urgent cases also were made.[36] After World War II with all turmoil in the Soviet Union the old usage of nationality lists seems to have come to an end. Instead, more informal lists of disappeared Swedes or citizens still trying to get permission to leave the Soviet Union were used.

The nationality lists clearly demonstrate the importance of citizenship and more will be said of that later. That Swedes who

Прибытие в Москву министра иностранных дел Швеции г-на Сандлера

The article in *Pravde* July 9, 1937 portraits Rickard Sandler favorable when arriving to Moskva, "Прибытие в Москву министра иностранных дел Швеции господина Сандлера" [Sweden's Foreign Minister comes to Moscva].

Eric Gyllenstierna (left) was minister at the Legation in Moscow up to January 1938, when Wilhelm Winther (right) took over.

Information about Swedes in the USSR can be found in the Incoming diary (Inkommande diarium) from the Swedish Legation in Moscow, 1938.

SOURCE: RIKSARKIVET STOCKHOLM

had been Soviet citizens still remained on the lists is important for our understanding of the diplomatic work. Ex-citizens could apply for renewal of Swedish citizenship, although the chances of gaining permission to give up Soviet citizenship were small. However, for the diplomats, Swedish nationals of different kinds as well as ex-citizens were all included in their diplomatic duties, although the latter group was difficult to help, due to the Soviet legal system.

The diplomats and their sources

After WW I, the Swedish foreign ministry had been considerably strengthened. In 1924 the Legation in Moscow was opened, illustrating the Swedish recognition of the young Soviet state. A consulate in Leningrad also started its work.

Eric Gyllenstierna was minister at the Legation in Moscow up to January 1938, when Wilhelm Winther took over. Both were career diplomats, with many years of experience in other countries. Equally important was the press attaché Nils Lindh.[37] He had been correspondent of the Swedish daily the *Social-Democrat* in Russia 1917–1920, had a complete mastery of Russian and could occasionally supplement his diplomatic reports with extensive analyses of the political situation. He had learnt how to find important facts even in the state-controlled Soviet press. Lindh's competence was especially useful when Swedish foreign minister Rickard Sandler visited the Soviet Union in 1937. In 1938 he was promoted to councillor of the Legation. Two secretaries of the Legation, one military attaché, one clerk and some local employees (chauffeur, kitchen staff) also worked at the Legation.

In Stockholm the Foreign ministry was headed by the Social Democrat Rickard Sandler, up to December 1939 when a broad four-party government replaced the Social Democratic/Agrarian coalition. Other civil servants of importance for the Soviet relations were Erik Boheman, under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, Östén Undén, professor and expert in international law, Hans Gustaf Beck-Friis, head of the political department and Gösta Engzell, councillor of foreign affairs and head of the legal department. Later Magnus Hallenborg took over the legal department.[38]

Government instructions stated that diplomats abroad had three duties: [39]

> **The head of the Legation and the Consul should in each field of action respectively, protect Swedish interests, promote its trade and industry, and give *assistance to Swedish citizens* (the author's italics).**

Formally read, the instruction could be interpreted to mean that helping *former* citizens was not parts of their duties. However, it has already been pointed out that the Swedes they tried to help included both citizens and former citizens.

HOW DID THE SWEDISH diplomats get the information necessary for their work? The value of the nationality lists was totally dependent on the quality of the information received.

- *Letters from Swedes* in the vast Soviet Empire were important, but too often frightened Swedish citizens contacted the legation/consulate only when their expulsion date was near. Ex-citizens were not allowed to visit any Swedish authority, and sending letters were also dangerous.
- *Homecoming Swedes* could sometimes give information on neighbors or friends in the Soviet Union. However, the repression of recent years had increased the isolation and the fear of dangerous contacts with so-called suspected people. Another problem was that some of the returnees could have acted as informers, maybe as a price to pay for getting their exit visa. Who was a victim? Who was a perpetrator? In the politicized milieu, silence seemed to be the natural strategy for the returning Swedes.
- *Relatives or friends in Sweden* frequently applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, requesting enquires about missing people in the Soviet Union.
- In 1931–1932 the *local government in Kiruna* granted allowances to 31 unemployed workers, ready to emigrate to the Soviet Union. A document confirming the employment was requested. That made the emigration of maybe 50–60 individuals possible.[40]
- Contacts with *other diplomats* in Moscow could be useful. Reports to Stockholm were written on persecuted Iranians, Turks, Greeks, Germans, and French people.[41] Finnish diplomats reported how a group of Finnish citizens they had taken care of were arrested just outside the Legation. Another group were nearly caught when taking a short ride in a car outside the diplomatic yard. These episodes illustrate that foreign citizenship could not prevent the NKVD from arresting anybody – probably more so for the Finnish people.[42]
- The *Narkomindel*, formally NKID (The People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs), informed the Swedish Legation about Swedes who had become Soviet citizens. Information on arrested Swedish citizens was also given to some extent.

"The prison of the peoples"[43]

Extension of passports was a routine matter for Swedish diplomats. The amount of this kind of activity expanded noticeably in 1937–1938. The main reason was the Soviet law that individuals living in the country without a valid foreign passport and other documents were classified as Soviet citizens.[44] In the law of 1931, *Instructions on Entry and Exit from the USSR*, Soviet citizens could only be permitted to travel abroad in *exceptional cases*.[45] In other words: Not observing that your passport had run out could make your Swedish citizenship invalid. As a citizen of the Soviet Union, you were not allowed to visit any foreign legation, embassy, or consulate. And the chances of returning to your homeland were small.

Besides invalid passports, ex-citizens' desire to resume Swedish citizenship became a problematic issue for the diplomats. Ex-citizens could not regain Swedish citizenship simply by announcing that they wished to become Swedish again. An application had to be approved by the Swedish authorities. In the late 1930s, this procedure was facilitated. To make it easier to get new passports the Legation was permitted to issue provisional pass-

ports, but still on condition of documents verifying that Soviet citizenship had been cancelled. That was the problem.

By Swedish law, Russian-born wives or widows of Swedish men were seen as Swedish due to the husband's nationality. However, by Soviet law normally their citizenship had to be dissolved before an exit visa could be issued. That was arranged rather often, sometimes even during the Great Terror in 1937–1938. If dissolution was denied, the Swedish diplomats had only limited chances to help them.

The wives had no problem getting permission to stay in Sweden. Visiting Sweden with a Soviet passport was also possible. *Entry* visas were issued accordingly. But *exit* visas were also needed. Entering in Sweden became easier for the Swedes but getting out of the Soviet Union more difficult.

The diplomats at work

By a closer examination of a couple of cases, the diplomatic work will be scrutinized. Although some of them look similar, the differences are helpful in grasping why some Swedes could return home, while others were not so lucky. This chapter will focus on themes mentioned earlier: In which cases were the diplomatic efforts successful? How could they act when Swedes had become Soviet citizens? Were there any discrepancies – morally or politically – between the Legation/Consulate and the Ministry in Stockholm?

In the 1920s and early 1930s, in several cases the Swedish diplomats could assist their citizens in different ways. Some of them were able to return to Sweden thanks to the help from the Legation and the Consulate.[46] More difficult, or rather impossible, was helping people sentenced by courts, either for political or other crimes.

AN EARLIER (1930–1931) successful case is that of the Swedish citizen Yngve Rosell. He was employed by a chemical trust and had been arrested for alleged economic sabotage. That was a common accusation when the first five-year plan met various obstacles. Managers and other executives became obvious scapegoats. The party's plans could not just be wrong. In the end, Rosell was released and sent home to Sweden.[47]

"ENTERING IN SWEDEN BECAME EASIER FOR THE SWEDES BUT GETTING OUT OF THE SOVIET UNION MORE DIFFICULT."

Michael (Michail) Harteveld, born in Kiev, was accused of counterrevolutionary activities and sentenced to ten years in prison by a military court in 1936. As he was a Swedish citizen, the Legation was informed of his arrest. His father, music professor Wilhelm Harteveld, tried with the help of Swedish diplomats to assist Michael, but to no avail. Considering the serious charge, maybe the diplomatic efforts at least saved him from the death penalty: a penalty increasingly used in the following years.[48] Information on the imprisoned Michael is sparse in the material. A memorandum in 1939 mentions that a friend of his had reported that Michael was alive, but this was difficult to corroborate. In 1956 he was still on the list of dis-

PHOTO: DU VET ATT DU ÄR FRÅN MORA/FACEBOOK.COM

WWW.PORTRATTFYND.SE

Chicago born engineer Ben Georg Kvelms and his Swedish born wife Selma Teresia were arrested in 1938 after applying to leave the Soviet Union, accused of counterrevolutionary activities. After several intents, minister Winther managed to get them out of the country in 1939. Ben Georg Kvelms later became successful in the field of wood gas, a trade that he had learned during his years in the USSR.

appeared Swedes in the Soviet Union.[49] The Memorial data base, however, states that he died in Vorkuta-Gulag in 1942.[50]

Equal rights or tactical behaviour?

Ben Georg Kvelms and his wife Selma Teresia recur many times in the records. His background was international: He was born in Chicago in 1896 to parents of German nationality originally from Russia. Kvelms became a naturalized Swedish citizen. The reason for that is not to be found in the material, but like his wife he had a valid Swedish passport.

After deciding to leave the Soviet Union, in the summer of 1937 the couple obtained their Soviet exit visa. However, before leaving the Soviet Union Kvelms was arrested (February 17, 1938), and some weeks later his wife (March 7, 1938).[51] That was the start of a long process. The Soviet authorities maintained that Kvelms already had confessed their deeds: counterrevolutionary activities.

Knowing that children of arrested "enemies of the people" usually were sent to orphanages with military discipline and poor standards, the Legation decided to find the daughter, 12-year-old Margot, and send her to Sweden. After some trouble the Soviet authorities issued an exit visa for her. She left the Soviet Union in May 1938. In February 1939, after ten written official requests and 25 oral demarches from the diplomats, her parents at last were released and could reunite with their daughter in Sweden.[52]

Minister Winther seemed very proud of himself when later relating the success,[53] and that was without doubt a happy end-

ing. But the Kvelms' case also illustrates the norm of secrecy. Generally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs kept the homecoming Swedes hidden from publicity. The diplomats were convinced that publicity could complicate further actions. The press and Swedish Broadcasting did not use what nowadays is called "investigative journalism". Winther let the press know that reports on the case were not welcomed. That was also explained to the Kvelms themselves.[54] All that resulted in a nearly total lack of media reports on what was going on with Swedes in the Soviet Union. This strict policy of silence did not end here. Four years later, in a letter to Ben Kvelms, Magnus Hallenborg, head of the law department, explained that publishing their experiences in Soviet Russia was not in the interest of the country.[55]

The politically motivated secretiveness in the communist milieu in Kiruna, the weak media cover and the tactical secretiveness of the Ministry contributed to the silence that remained for many years.

ANOTHER ASPECT of the Kvelms case touches the fate of two women, Rika Gawatin and Käthe Güssfeldt-Svensson. Both were Jewish, born in Germany, active communists – and Swedish citizens. Gawatin arrived in the Soviet Union in 1933, as she had received a Swedish passport when she married Leopold Gawatin. In 1936 Gawatin was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison (April 4, 1938). Six months later, Güssfeldt-Svensson was also arrested. During a visit to Stockholm, she had married a young student/journalist, Gustaf Svensson.[56] However, he did not follow her to the Soviet Union and very little is mentioned of him in the records that for many years registered the two women in various lists of disappeared or imprisoned Swedes.

The Narkomindel maintained that their links to Sweden were shallow. The marriages were called "camouflage", and therefore the Swedish authorities had no right to engage in the cases. Hallenborg himself used the word "camouflage", when meeting Winther (April 9, 1938). This is one of the few examples of disputes on who the Swedish diplomats should help. Hallenborg argued that in some cases (Kvelms, Gawatin and Güssfeldt-Svensson) it was wiser "to keep a more passive attitude". The Legation should use strong words and activities only when Swedish-born individuals were arrested and unjustly treated. In these cases, stronger support from the Ministry in Stockholm and the Swedish opinion probably could be expected, Hallenborg maintained.[57]

Principally this was a divergence from the rule of law – the equal rights of all citizens. Neither Gyllenstierna nor Winther accepted Hallenborg's view. Gyllenstierna declared to the Soviet authorities that both women were Swedish citizens, therefore Sweden had the full right to act. Camouflage or not was not an issue. The diplomats working in the field seem to have been more influenced by personal feelings. This could be seen as an example of the concept of *emotions*, but mixed with the concept of rule of law.

Later, in a letter to Boheman (December 2, 1938), Winther emphasized the importance of harsh words and behavior when discussing the cases with the Narkomindel. The same discussion can be found regarding British victims and whether their political antecedents would influence diplomatic concern.[58]

From diplomacy to the world of Kafka

Despite the Soviet dictatorship, continuing repression, and widespread bureaucracy, some kind of mutually satisfactory diplomatic relations existed between the Legation and the Soviet side. The Swedish diplomats were on speaking terms with the high civil servants responsible for Swedish affairs, especially Besjanov, head of the Balto-Scandinavian department in the Narkomindel. Another important person was Potemkin, deputy head of the Commissariat of foreign affairs. Both were soon to be replaced.

"DESPITE THE SOVIET DICTATORSHIP, CONTINUING REPRESSION, AND WIDESPREAD BUREAUCRACY, SOME KIND OF MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS EXISTED BETWEEN THE LEGATION AND THE SOVIET SIDE."

THIS KIND OF UNDERSTANDING – opposite points of departure creating congruent views on a solution – is what the concept *strategic moral diplomacy* refers to. Without doubt the Narkomindel and the Swedish diplomats represented different positions and interests. However, in this situation both were in favour of getting as many Swedes as possible out of the Soviet Russia. The communist state tried to cleanse the country of nearly all foreign nationals. The Swedish diplomats tried to save as many compatriots as possible from repression or starvation. The Swedes were not welcome any longer, but as a country not bordering on the Soviet Union and without substantial settlements in border areas, the Swedish inhabitants escaped being labelled spies and enemies to the Soviet state. Furthermore, very few Swedes held high positions in the government or in the Comintern. Earlier successful careers in the system increased the risk of being a victim of the same system in the 1930s.

Winther was upset when he informed Boheman of the situation in 1938. Thousands of innocent people had been arrested (He could have written millions). However, comparing with the citizens of other states "we have so far got off lightly". Obviously, the Soviet authorities generally chose expulsion instead of arrests, Winther added.[59] However, step by step the diplomatic work became more difficult. In the spring of 1938, all consulates of Germany, Italy, Great Britain, Afghanistan, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden were closed. The United States

were permitted to keep their consulates, Japan had to close five of its nine and Poland kept two consulates.[60]

IN A REPORT TO STOCKHOLM (November 16, 1938) Lindh stated that civil rights matters had become increasingly difficult to handle. The Narkomindel had declared that former Swedish citizens should contact the Soviet authorities, like all other Soviet citizens. Previously, Lindh explained, various cases had been benevolently received. Such cases had not been seen as interference in Soviet affairs. From now on, the Narkomindel even refused to receive a note or listen to an oral message. Questions were not answered, currents matters were sent to other parts of the department, and then back again, recalling the experiences of Josef K in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* rather than Weber's rational bureaucracy. The strategic moral diplomacy that had benefited both sides was not working anymore. Lindh maintained that surely the NKVD prevented tendencies to softness in the Narkomindel.[61]

The extension of the terror had wiped out diplomatic flexibility. Gyllenstierna and Winther had sometimes been allowed to meet the foreign minister, the veteran diplomat Maxim Litvinov.[62] Now however, his position was weakened and in 1939 he was to be replaced by Molotov. And then came the outbreak of World War II. Some cases were still under investigation by the Swedish diplomats, but continuous work could not be initiated again before the end of the war in 1945.

The diplomatic actions — a conclusion

What can be said of the diplomatic efforts? Some Swedes were executed, others sent to the Gulag where most of them perished, and quite a few disappeared, at least from the diplomat's sight. So -accordingly a failure? That would be an unfair judgement.

Approximately 700 (adults) Swedes are mentioned in the archives as living in Russia/the Soviet Union for shorter or longer periods between 1920 and 1940. This is a minimum number. Many surely lived without contact with Swedish authorities, with or without Swedish passports. Swedish citizens returning to – or arriving for the first time in – Sweden roughly amount to 270–280. Again, many other may have returned without notice of the Swedish authorities. And not all the Swedes needed any help, especially in the 1920s. However, when the terror escalated, many more Swedish people, citizens or ex-citizens, tried to leave the Soviet Union. And in these cases, diplomatic help could make the difference between life and death.

The journalist Kaa Eneberg mentions critically in an article that the Swedish authorities were "helpless" when they received great many letters or other entreaties for help.[63] Probably she was influenced by letters in the archives from the 1930s, and maybe later accounts from relatives. Many in Sweden were disappointed when relatives or friends were not found or could not be rescued. Especially the Kiruna Swedes, the most dedicated communists, became victims of repression. One reason is that they had changed to Soviet citizenship to a larger extent. Thus, the Swedish diplomats had no formal right to intervene.

This can be illustrated by a document in the Legation archive (dated December 28, 1938).[64] The list contains ex-Swedes that wanted to resume their Swedish citizenships and return to Sweden. What happened to the persons on the list?

Ekeskog, Agnes	Resumed Swedish citizenship 1938. Unknown fate
Eriksson, Hilma G,	Labour camp, died 1941
Hansson, Per Olof Adolf	Died in the war
Heikkinen, Eino (wife deceased)	Sweden 1940.[65]
Holma, Isak Einar	Returned to Sweden in 1938, very emaciated.
Holma, Laila Maria (wife)	Sweden 1938
Hult-Eskola, Nanna	Labour camp, Sweden 1975, later back to USSR
Hägglund, Olof	Investigations fruitless
Jaako, Karl Oskar,	Sweden 1940
Jaako, Selma (wife)	Sweden 1940
Johansson, Hanna	Sweden 1939
Johansson, Bertil (son)	Sweden 1939
Keskitalo, Valdemar	Evacuated 1941, unknown fate
Kopylova, Maria	Move to Sweden in 1939 cancelled. Unknown fate.
Krikortz, Hans	Executed, possibly Soviet citizen.
Krikortz, Svea (wife)	Possibly stayed in the USSR as Soviet citizen.
Lehtinen, Elina	Case 1939. Unknown fate.
Lindberg, Rut Ingeborg	Divorced. Remarried Soviet citizen. Stayed in the USSR.
Markstedt, Yngve Emanuel	Killed in the war?
Markstedt, Oskar	Sweden 1938
Miller, Axel	Sweden in the 1950s, after ten years in the Gulag.
Miller, Irja	Sweden in the 1950s
Niemi, Bodolf	Remained in the USSR, survived the war
Nyström, Bror	Sweden 1939, sentenced for Soviet espionage
Olsson, Oscar	Disappeared during or after the war
Pohjanen, Johan Kristian	Received Swedish passport in 1939, but disappeared
Remusjeva, Signe	Ex-husband B Niemi. Remarried arrested Soviet citizen
Sandels, Axel	Naturalized Swedish citizen. Sweden 1935
Sandels, Tatjana (wife)	Russian-born. Executed

Regarding the difficulties of getting ex-citizens home and the increasing terror, twelve returning ex-citizens could be seen as a good result. At the same time those executed, those who perished in the Gulag, and the many disappeared persons are testimonies of a totalitarian system. Just two cases of executions and one death in the Gulag in the list may seem positive. However, people known to have been executed did not belong on this kind of working list that was meant to find and help countrymen. By looking at other documents, a more extended list of Swedish victims could be made, although with many question marks.

HOWEVER, THE PURPOSE of this study is not to find all Swedish victims of the Soviet terror in the 1930s. Rather, it aims to analyze what Swedish diplomats did in helping citizens scared of execution, arrest, deportation, or other penalties.

Surprisingly, a kind of diplomatic understanding between the Legation and the Narkomindel survived in the early stages of the Great Terror. The Swedish group was not characterized as hostile, at least compared with many other ethnic groups. When almost all foreigners were ordered to leave the Soviet Union, generally the Swedes were expelled – not executed.

Swedish citizens with a valid passport had better chances of returning to Sweden. But as we have seen, arrests and executions also happened to them. The communist emigrants to the Soviet Union, the Kiruna Swedes, were harder hit by the repression, mostly due to the transition to Soviet citizenship, thereby making themselves subject to the Soviet system. Still, the lack of high positions in the Soviet party or the government, or in the Comintern, to some degree reduced the risk of being arrested. The diplomatic work was successful many times, but of course not always. As illustrated in the above list, the fate of many Swedes is unknown. The coming war, in particular, destroyed all traces of them.

Besides the efforts per se, the strict following of the rule of law by the Swedish side is impressive. All Swedes, including communists who were Soviet citizens, were to be helped. Not even a probable camouflage marriage prevented the diplomats from arguing for their citizens when discussing the cases with the Narkomindel.

FINALLY, AS ALREADY implied, the relatively small number of Swedish victims does not support an interpretation of a less repressive system. Repressions against all ethnic groups, whether Swedish citizens or ex-citizens, are equally dreadful from a human perspective. The Swedish victims were a very small part of the terror system that took place during those years, or rather since the Bolsheviks took power in 1917. By active diplomacy, and due to specific circumstances, many were rescued from the repression. At the same time there were also many victims. A preliminary count gives a figure of at least 100 Swedish victims of different categories. That number includes executed Swedish citizens or ex-citizens, those who died in camps, survivors of prison sentences, arrested wives of Swedish men with dual citizenship, those who disappeared or were deported under difficult circumstances and children of arrested parents sent to orphanages.

When the totalitarian Soviet Union attacked all foreigners, the detested capitalist system at home turned out to be a rescuing haven for many former emigrants to the communist system. That is also part of the conclusion. ■

Torbjörn Nilsson is a Professor Emeritus in History at the Institute of Contemporary History, Södertörn University.

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60 Indragning utländska konsulat i Sovjetunionen [Withdrawal of foreign consulates in the Soviet Union] 8.2 1938. Diarier över PM. II. Övrigt. P 2 Er. UD:s arkiv, RA (Arninge)

61 Lindh to UD I Stockholm, 16/11 1938. F1g:28 Beskickningsarkiv Moskva, UD:s arkiv, RA (Arninge)

62 Winther had met Litvinov during the NF-conference in Geneva 1939. In February 1939 Winther sent a letter to Litvinov.

63 Kaa Eneberg, "Recruitment of Swedish Immigrants to Soviet Karelia", in *Karelian Exodus. Finnish Communities in North America and Soviet Karelia during the Depression Era,* eds. Ronald Harpelle et. al,, (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 2004), 189–200.

64 F1f:111 1938–1956. 28/12 1938. P-dossierer. Beskickningsarkiv, 1918–1939 Moskva. UD:s arkiv, RA (Arninge).

65 A Finn with the same name was executed on September 21 1938. He had received an entry visa to Sweden but was arrested before the trip.