

Does a revolutionary party need a security policy?

This article was published in Nya Arbetartidningen – <http://www.nat.nu/typo3/artiklar/article/behoever-ett-revolutionaert-parti-en-saekerhetspolitik/> – on 3 October 1997, as a comment on the book "The Maoists". This book was an attempt by supporters of the revisionist party leadership of the Swedish Communist Party (SKP) to explain why the party gradually fell apart in the years after 1978 and was finally dissolved. The explanation, according to the writers, was security policy!

In the book "The Maoists" (Augustsson/Hansén - Ordfront publishing house), which is based on interviews with about 15 former SKP members, it is stated that "nowadays most people believe that the result /of the security policy/ was the exact opposite, that the security policy gave the movement irreparable damage".

The first question that must be asked is whether or not the bourgeois state, through its security police, monitored the Marxist-Leninist movement from the 1960s onwards, and whether it was right for the latter to try to make monitoring more difficult. Thanks to the work of the Lund Commission and its 1996 report to the Storting ⁱ(1), we now know about the surveillance of the Norwegian left by the Norwegian security police (divided into three branches). From the end of the 1960s to 1981, 20,000 files were compiled on Norwegians, mainly people associated with the Norwegian Marxist-Leninist movement, i.e. the AKP(m-l), the Norwegian equivalent of the SKP. The premise of the surveillance was that the AKP(m-l) was "explicitly revolutionary", as it had enshrined armed revolution in its party program.

The Norwegian security police registered everyone who had any contact with the AKP(m-l). It registered not only the members of the AKP(m-l), the youth union (Rød Ungdom) and the student union, but also the members of the organizations in which the AKP(m-l) was assumed to have great influence, such as the Women's Front, SOLKOM (Solidarity Committee with the People of Vietnam) and so on. Those who subscribed to or contributed to "Klassekampen", the AKP(m-l)'s daily newspaper, visited the AKP(m-l)'s summer camps or were listed on the Red Election Alliance, were registered. Those who ordered a book from an October bookstore, drove someone in a car to a summer camp or were simply married to an AKP(m-l) member were registered. Even children were registered. In 1973, a file was established on an 11-year-old as a "probable participant" in a summer camp. Children who traveled with their parents to Albania were also registered. According to the report, "loose sympathy for the M-L movement" was enough to be registered.

The Norwegian Security Police wiretapped AKP(m-l) party offices and October bookstores throughout Norway. It is not clear from the report whether the security police also conducted room surveillance or infiltration of the AKP(m-l), but this is very likely. In addition, they conducted surveillance of the AKP(m-l), such as summer camps, street sales of newspapers and demonstrations.

The AKP(m-l) in turn applied a strict security policy earlier than the SKP; in fact, when the SKP introduced its security policy, we consulted the Norwegian comrades. To what extent the AKP(m-l)'s security policy was successful is difficult to judge from the Lund Commission

report alone. But in any case, it appears that the security police misjudged the AKP(m-l)'s membership in the early 1970s, which meant that its members disappeared among the crowd of sympathizers. The Norwegian security police seemed unable to identify the secret part of the AKP(m-l) party leadership. Nor did they know the exact date of the 1976 AKP(m-l) congress until it was made public afterwards.

There is no reason whatsoever to assume that the Swedish security police carried out less extensive surveillance of the Marxist-Leninist movement than their Norwegian colleagues. During the IB affair, it was revealed that a provocateur, Gunnar Ekberg, had worked within the KFML and the Palestine Committee, and in 1975 it was revealed that SÄPO was conducting telephone tapping of the SKP's party office, Sköld Peter Matthis and Gunnar Bylin.

Thanks to the Torsten Leander case, we also know today that SÄPO registered Marxist-Leninists under the same conditions as the Norwegian security police. Torsten Leander was dismissed in 1979 from his job as a carpenter at the naval museum in Karlskrona because he was a security risk. I was dismissed the same year as a cleaner at Philips in Järfälla for the same reason, but never pursued the matter further. However, Torsten Leander did, all the way up to the European Court of Human Rights, which examined whether it was reasonable for Leander to be dismissed unheard and on unknown grounds. He lost by four votes to three. However, Leander's file at SÄPO has only recently been opened (under a new law from 1996). The file shows that he was registered solely on the basis of his association with the Marxist-Leninist movement. What is mentioned is his membership in Clarté, his ordering of 8000 flyers for Karlskrona during the 1970 election campaign, his application for membership in KFML and the fact that his car was parked outside the premises in Norrköping where FiB/Kulturfront held its annual meeting in 1976.

We do not know exactly how many Swedes have been registered on the basis of their connection to the Marxist-Leninist movement. However, we know that 410,000 jobs and assignments were protected in 1989 and that the number of personal checks carried out during the 18 months 1995-1996 was almost 160,000. As late as 1990, Ingemar Bernersson (formerly Eriksson) was forced to resign from the board of Alfredeen-Rako because of his past as an SKP CK-member (1975-1980), even though he also left the SKP in 1980.

Why surveillance?

Why did the security police monitor the Marxist-Leninist movement in Sweden? Naturally, they mapped it out in order to be able to strike at it in a crisis situation. During World War II, a large number of communists were interned in labor camps in Sweden (and Finland) as well as some social democrats and syndicalists who were opposed to regular Swedish support for Finland in the war against the Soviet Union. What would have happened to them if Nazi Germany had attacked and succeeded in occupying Sweden? They would have run a high risk of being handed over to the Germans. In other countries occupied by the Germans during the Second World War, the Gestapo was in many cases able to take over the national security police's register of communists, and in some cases the registers were handed over to them voluntarily. Significantly, the Swedish section of the internationally active Wollweber

League, which engaged in sabotage of Nazi transports, was arrested by the Swedish security police before it had carried out a single act of sabotage in Sweden.

Indonesia and Iran

There are also many international examples of how left-wing movements have been quickly crushed by a reactionary state. For example, in Indonesia, where a very large but legalist communist party was crushed almost "overnight" in 1964, or in Iran after Khomeini's takeover in 1979-1980, when large parts of the Iranian left were quickly wiped out.

So the point is that the bourgeois state and its security police are always monitoring revolutionaries and that a revolutionary movement, if it wants to avoid being crushed in a crisis, must protect itself.

The second reason why SKP introduced a security policy around 1976 was the party's assessment of the world situation, namely that the rivalry between the two superpowers meant that the danger of war increased, that there was a risk of a third world war. This analysis was basically correct until Gorbachev came to power, even if the same analysis later underestimated the importance of the Soviet stalemate in Afghanistan after the 1980 occupation.

It was thus correct for the SKP to introduce a security policy, and in practice the SKP had no security policy at all before. This meant, for example, that the SKP started using cover names, distributing internal material manually, using secure meeting rooms and using the telephone in a more restrictive way.

At the same time, some errors were made, mainly because the security policy was not sufficiently discussed when it was implemented.

A rehearsal

It was not made clear that the security policy was only a rehearsal for possible illegality - the SKP was not already illegal, as it is, for example, legitimate to cut off cross contacts in a party, as the SKP was not banned, nor was the danger of war acute, i.e. a third world war was not immediately imminent. In contrast, the right-wing liquidationist faction, which took power in the party in 1980, stated that "the struggle for peace was the main issue", a serious miscalculation of the world situation, as it meant that domestic class conflicts were subordinate. It also led the same faction to pursue a conciliatory policy towards social democracy, a left-wing reformist policy.

Moreover, security policy was used by the right-wing liquidationist faction to legitimize the introduction of bureaucratic centralism, i.e. internal party debate was stifled or censored. When I was suspended, and later expelled from the SKP in 1979, it was because I had talked politics with a member outside the central committee, which was a violation of the security policy. When I later revealed that two central committee members had had correspondence with a non-member and discussed the situation in SKP, nothing happened, of course. The stifling of the internal party debate was also inspired by Deng Xiaoping's line for the internal

party struggle, namely "Seek the truth from the facts!", the essence of which was that a line should not be debated while it was being tested (and a line can be tested for a long time). The consequence of bureaucratic centralism was of course that the right-wing liquidationist faction could implement its political line in practice unhindered, since the representatives of the Marxist-Leninist line were either purged before the 1980 congress or left the SKP shortly after the congress.

In the book "The Maoists", several interviewees criticize the introduction of cover names and make a big deal of the fact that some members or journalists, who had been tipped off by former members, were able to reveal the identity behind certain pseudonyms. This shows that the interviewees do not understand why aliases were used and probably did not understand when the aliases were introduced. Cover names are used to protect those who are not yet known to the security police, not to protect those who are already known! When the security policy was introduced, the SKP cadre consisted of three categories from a security point of view:

- Those who had appeared on KFML/SKP election lists, contributed to the movement's publications or otherwise openly appeared as party members. These were of course already registered by SÄPO.
- Members who had not openly appeared as members, but who had sold Gnistan (The Spark), subscribed to the various newspapers of the Marxist-Leninist movement, participated in demonstrations arranged by KFML/SKP and related organizations, ordered books or political material from the party or its bookstores, or participated in summer camps. The vast majority of these were certainly also registered, but at the same time difficult to distinguish from sympathizers.
- A small group of members who were not known at all in any of these contexts, very few of whom were actually secret members.

The cover names were intended to make it more difficult to identify group 2 as party members and to expand group 3.

It is completely pointless to point out, as is done by the authors themselves and Roland Pettersson, that SÄPO and probably most SKP members knew who was hiding behind the cover names "Arvid Lansman", "Greger Bogården", "Per Carlén" etc., since these were leading cadres in SKP, which were already known to SÄPO. If, on the other hand, a member who had never before participated in the debate appeared in it for the first time under an assumed name, how could SÄPO identify him? Of course, the real names of Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky were also known by both Bolshevik party members and the Tsar's security police. Note that they went down in history under their cover names!

Precondition for free debate

Cover names are in fact a prerequisite for a revolutionary party to be able to conduct a free debate while pursuing a security policy. It makes it difficult for the security police to identify lesser-known or new members. Cover names were routine in the Bolshevik Party until the October Revolution, but it never prevented free debate.

The authors also claim that cover names "changed the personality" - "one writes more cheeky, meaner, perhaps even funnier?". This is absurd. It would mean that every author in the history of the world who has written under a pseudonym, and there are quite a few, would have had a change in personality. It is possible that some writers in Gnistan took liberties, especially if they didn't have to expect a backlash, since the editors could reject rebuttals. But until the turn of the year 1977-1978, the internal party debate was completely free, and any lapse in the internal party debate would have been met with counterattacks. The conditions for debate were the same for everyone.

When Vanna Beckman talks about "all the flashing lights" and letters "sent poste restante", she is talking about local shenanigans in Borlänge. There were no central directives advocating the use of these techniques.

Those who try to explain the demise of the SKP with the introduction of the security policy do not know what they are talking about. The security policy had no consequences for external mass work and propaganda work. It was not the case that the party members suddenly went underground, or acted under an alias, when they sold the Spark or did mass work. I can only comment on the period until 1980, as I was expelled in 1979. The decline and destruction of the SKP was entirely due to the political line, the right-wing liquidationist line, which had complete hegemony from the 1980 congress onwards. By contrast, the right-wing liquidators used security policy to prevent an open struggle of opinion and thereby crush the left-wing opposition.

The same people, such as the interviewees Roland Pettersson and Vanna Beckman, who used security policy against the party left, now claim that security policy led to the demise of the SKP. And why? Because they do not want to take any responsibility for their own political line, which was doomed to lead to the disappearance of SKP from the political arena. Or they still don't understand what they supported.

SKP exposed

However, it naturally became less and less relevant for SÄPO to monitor SKP after the 1980 congress, since SKP was in practice no longer a revolutionary party. Already in 1981, "Opinion", which was published by Timbro, a member of SAFⁱⁱ, stated in the publication "SKP avslöjat - Sveriges Kommunistiska Partis hemliga dokument berättar om enhetsfronter och strejkspolitik" ("SKP revealed – Communist Party of Sweden's secret documents reveal united fronts and strike policy") that SKP(m-l), which had been formed by the left opposition in SKP, was the potentially more dangerous organization.

When former SKP members in "The Maoists" blame security policy for SKP's failure, it is just as much an expression of not understanding what revolutionary politics is, and if you don't understand this today, it is probably because you have realized that you were never really a revolutionary, not even in the 1970s. Why should someone who is not, or was not, a revolutionary actually be monitored by SÄPO? Isn't that unfair?

Per-Åke Lindblom

ⁱ Stortinget – the Norwegian Parliament

ⁱⁱ The Swedish Employers' Association