

Captain Julius Mankell's Vision: Arming the People in Struggle for Democracy

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The aim of this presentation is twofold. On the one hand, I will introduce you to the Swedish army Captain Julius Mankell (1828-1897) and his life and lifework. On the other hand, I will use him to illuminate a rather hidden and/or forgotten radical tradition in the political history of Sweden. Because in a wide context, Captain Mankell is interesting as spokesman for a fallen ideological alternative in the political formation process of modern Sweden.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Julius Mankell was a well-known and rather controversial – but also at times important and influential – political character in the public sphere of Sweden. In a most energetic way, he acted as a liberal politician, publicist, creator of public opinion, and as author of several works on military history and military training. At his glorious funeral in Stockholm 1897, which was watched by several thousand spectators, many prominent politicians, high-ranking officers and well-known publicists and officials attended. Hjalmar Branting – the future social democratic Prime Minister of Sweden – emphasized in his speech at the funeral that Julius Mankell “deserved a royal funeral ceremony”.

This man, who was honoured and tributed by both the people and a progressive part of the political elite a cold winter day 1897, was born in Stockholm 1828. He was raised in an intellectual middle-class family home and received a careful upbringing and education. He entered the military high school at nineteen and soon became a regular officer. At this time, the magic year 1848, young sergeant Mankell faced the radical and revolutionary currents which spread throughout Europe and reached Sweden in shape of the ‘March Riots’ [Marsoroligheterna] in Stockholm. He was affected and probably rather excited by what he saw. His sympathy for progressive political ideas gradually grew, and he got engaged in issues such as universal suffrage and the abolition of the death-penalty. This radical political stance troubled his military career and caused conflicts with superior officers.

Contrary to this though, he was considerably more welcomed into the progressive political groups of 1850's Stockholm. Here Julius Mankell took an active part in the dynamic formation process of a provocative public sphere, an ideological melting-pot, in which different socialist,

liberal, radical, revolutionary, republican, utopian and anarchic ideas flourished and intersected. In spite of several disagreements, this divided political climate in mid-nineteenth century Stockholm had a common goal in challenging (what they meant was) an Ancient Regime and a society built on inequities. During the following decades, and especially around the next coming turn of the century (1900), this progressive melting-pot slowly solidified, sorted out and stabilized the modern political categories we know today.

But now back to Julius Mankell. As a highly concrete outcome of these subversive tendencies in the middle of the nineteenth century Stockholm, a widespread and popular Sharpshooters Association [Skarpskytterörelse] was formed in Sweden during the 1860's. Behind this mobilization of nearly fifty thousand armed men (predominantly workers), Julius Mankell stood as a leading and organizing force. Together with a few other intellectual middle-class men, for example the chief editor of the leading liberal newspaper *Aftonbladet* August Sohlman, and the popular author, publicist and politician August Blanche, he constituted the ideological and strategic core of the Sharpshooters Association. This movement may be seen as the first strictly organized labour movement in Sweden, not primarily based on the concept of 'class' or 'class-consciousness', but mainly on the concepts of manliness, 'the people' and populist reasons. To be more concrete; I would argue that the overall aim for this movement was to mobilize 'the people' as a masculine and nationalized political force, not to target any particular social group. At this point you may find a parallel in the history of English radicalism, interpreted in a productive and interesting way by Gareth Stedman Jones (in the classic *Language of class*, "Rethinking Chartism", 1983) and after him for example by Patrick Joyce (*Visions of the people*, 1991; *Democratic subjects*, 1994). The term 'populist reasons' is inspired by the new and fascinating work on populism by Ernesto Laclau in *On Populist Reason* (2005).

Anyway, from a superficial and present point of view, the Sharpshooters Association seems rather harmless. Their lively public activities, such as popular celebrations in memory of national heroes (like Engelbrekt or Garibaldi), shooting competitions, marches and dance festivals, have fooled many observers and historians to dismiss them as funny humbug-reformers. But beyond their popular public plays and ceremonies, there were actually an agenda with extensive political consequences. As in many other European countries, different ideas from the revolutions (1798-1830-1848) transformed into nationalistic visions of an armed and independent 'people' who could challenge the ancient regime and demand reforms, republic and representative democracy. This vision was manifested in the agenda of the Swedish Sharpshooters Association. At this

ideological level, it is possible to see the Sharpshooters' lively activities, rattling their rifles, as a not unimportant reason for the modest reformation of the Swedish constitution 1866, replacing the diet of the four estates with a representative assembly of two chambers.

During this politically turbulent decade in Sweden, the character Julius Mankell became himself a well-known national hero, a 'people's hero' [folkhjälte]. And the Sharpshooters Association became a popular movement, in its full sense, a 'peoples-movement' [folk rörelse]. But the prominent figure of progress and public opinion, 'the friend of the people' [folkvän], Julius Mankell, was also in an intricate way connected to the government, to the symbol of the Ancient Regime, to the monarchy. He was in fact a friend and personal military counsellor to the regents Oscar I (regency 1844-1859) and the warlike Karl XV (regency 1859-1872). In this role he elaborated, classified and detailed military plans on two occasions, 1856 and 1863. Both concerned Swedish attacks on the hated and sworn eastern enemy Russia, mainly aiming to liberate Poland from Russian occupation. Mankell's war-plans were enthusiastically received by the Swedish regents, but finally stopped by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (the first plan) and the French emperor Napoleon III (the second plan).

However, for Julius Mankell the devotion to take an active part in a war for independence was strong. He felt, as he wrote in a letter 1863, a yearning to "at least once fight the Russians and feel their bullets whistle". In the summer of 1863 he realised this eagerness. With an air of mystery and the under-cover identity "Malborg", he left Sweden after secret blessings from the regent Karl XV. Incognito, he travelled to south-east Poland and took part in the combats between Polish freedom fighters and Russian occupation troops. Despite the fact that this project resulted in total failure (Mankell was hunted by Cossacks and taken prisoner by the Austrian army), he was welcomed as a hero when he returned home in the autumn, accompanied by his first wife, the young Polish woman Maria Cochen. While Mankell's spectacular war-expedition attracted attention and admiration in the popular reform-movement, it was highly controversial and troublesome for the Swedish State authority. From diplomatic and foreign policy view, it was an embarrassment that Mankell, an officer in the Swedish army, took active part in the conflict between Russia and Poland. The Government was forced to hush the whole story up, to 'put the lid on'.

Nevertheless, Mankell had strengthened his position as an esteemed and popular advocate of the public opinion. Towards the end of the 1860's, and throughout the following decades, he

continued this line of work. His political engagement kept on and he insisted firmly upon radical democratic reforms, both as a long standing member of the parliament, and in a wide range of extra-parliamentary activities as publicist and founder of several radical associations in Stockholm (in which a part of the ideological heritage from the Sharpshooters Association survived). At the same time, he cultivated his competence in military strategy and military history; he translated into Swedish the works of famous Prussian military scientist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) and he became one of the most hard-working military historians ever in Sweden. (Some of his works are today still in use by genealogists.)

In the 1890's Julius Mankell was fairly aged but still up in arms against the ruling elite and societal inequities. He now became a leader and unifying force of the national Swedish Suffrage Association [Sveriges allmänna rösträttsförbund]. This movement tried to integrate a wide ideological spectrum of left-wing activists, accordingly both liberal and socialist demands, for suffrage reforms and democracy. On the one hand, these suffragists were rather successful in mobilizing approximately one hundred thousand active members, organizing the national 'peoples parliaments' of 1893 and 1896 and in managing a massive propaganda machine producing different publications in huge editions. But on the other hand, this movement was from the beginning weakened by ideological conflicts. Their activities were continuously opposed and counteracted by the State authority and conservative groups, and any concrete political outcomes of their efforts are hard to find. However, in my PhD-project I emphasize the wide consequences of (and meanings within) the Swedish Suffrage Association popular and somehow populist propaganda, which works to construct the discursive concept 'democracy'. Even if there was no immediate political result from their strives, I argue there was a significant discursive impact in the long run.

As head of the Suffrage Association, Mankell in 1895 made serious efforts to again realize one of his key-concepts by trying to achieve an arming of the Swedish suffragists, in accordance with the nationalistic and radical ideas from 1848. According to him, "a revival of the sharpshooter's movement", could in a fruitful way support democratic reforms and particularly bring forward the political position of 'the people'. But this time, his ideas were not welcomed. They were condemned as obsolete and decidedly not modern by the majority of reformist left-wing social liberals. The Suffrage Association was heading another way and in 1902 it reorganized into a national liberal association (Frisinnade landsföreningen), an embryo of the liberal party of today (Folkpartiet liberalerna). Julius Mankell was then ideologically abandoned. Less than a year after

his last sharpshooting effort, he passed away from complications after a serious stroke. At the funeral his name was honoured and tributed, but soon wrapped in historical shadows.

So, to sum up; what is to be learned from this? My analyses of Mankell's texts and speeches uncover a firm and radical ideology, characterized by nationalistic, republican and libertarian ideas. His way of political thinking was based on a view of history and society as fraught with conflicts. Furthermore, his passion for weapons and "war as the continuation of politics", is striking. In short; I am arguing that it is possible to follow the tracks from a rather specific radical tradition through Julius Mankell's lifework. Certainly his radicalism was inspired by the ideological climate of 1848 around Europe, by the freedom fighter icon Giuseppe Garibaldi, and by the Polish war of independence against Russia during the 1850's and 1860's. And certainly, this radical tradition appears as a significant political force in the pre-history of modern Sweden.

Nevertheless, Julius Mankell and his radical tradition have become marginalized outsiders within the great narratives of modern Sweden. Their significance is blurred. Why? Julius Mankell himself was an outsider already in his own lifetime – a contradictory and odd character. Despite being well-known in his own time, he is rather invisible in both historiography and the political debate in Sweden during the twentieth century. His radical, warlike and at times influential ideology might not be considered an outsider, but definitely as a forgotten chapter in Swedish political history.

There might be many reasons for this, but one is perhaps to be found in the hegemonic historiography of the Swedish social democratic party. According to this, there has never been any radicalism in Swedish history except the socialist version, and perhaps also a rural and medieval version manifested by troublemaker Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson(!). But there may be another reason too, which can be found in the essence of the reformist liberal democracy of the twentieth century. The modern democracy's striving for national conformity and peaceful (not armed!) mutual understanding between citizens, are of course not an exclusively Swedish or social democratic phenomenon. In most modern (social liberal) nation-states the historiography and the political structures are nationalized and homogenized. In other words; intellectual oppression of political outsiders (especially the warlike ones) are essential to keep up the democratic imaginary (Joyce 1994).