"BREAD, PEACE AND SUFFRAGE"

The Role of the Political Left in the Swedish Protest Cycles of 1917-1918
Spring of 1917

• Sweden closed off by the World War – increasing food prices and food shortage.
• Early April – public demands on authorities for more bread cards.
• Positive response from local authorities.
Västervik April 1917

• Västervik 14-16\textsuperscript{th} April:
  – demands
  – demonstrations
  – visitations
  – committee
  – resolution

Spontaneous public demands.
Syndicalists and social democrats forced to react.
Demands on both local and state authorities.
The Västervik Resolution

• The public demands were:
  – immediate and forceful actions by authorities regarding the food question.
  – no taxes for low income wage earners.
  – deals with foreign powers to increase import of food, no further food export.
  – a temporary ban on alcohol.

(popular in its origin, with syndicalist and social democratic influences)
Contestation in April-June 1917

• The protests in Västervik leads to a protest cycle:
  – demands, demonstrations, visitations, plundering, military demonstrations, resolutions
  – Repression by forces of order
  – large scale violent confrontations in Ådalen, Norrköping, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Seskarö.
  – “A revolutionary situation”.


Scale Shift & Object Shift

• The bureaucratic government in crisis – resigns (Hammarskjöld).
• A conservative government in place (Schwartz).
• The 2nd chamber of the parliament debates the food issue on the 21st of April.
• A huge demonstration in outside the parliament.
• A resolution (dominated by the social democrats).
The Stockholm Resolution

• Stockholm 21 April – demands:
  – end the politics of hunger
  – a deal with England
  – end to exports of food
  – More food rations, max price on bread
  – cheaper milk
  – equal suffrage for all men and women
  ... and after a while, 8 hour workday
  (a social democratic takeover of demands)
A Swedish Revolution?

- The importance of the Russian Revolution of March and November 1917.
- The threat of revolution was VERY real from the perspective of the authorities – a revolutionary situation.
- 1\textsuperscript{st} May 1917 – will there be a revolution?
- ...no, social democrats worked hard for it not to be, but increasingly violent confrontations later in May and June.
Institutionalization

- The violence of April, May and June 1917.
  - a revolutionary situation.
- Leading up to the elections of autumn 1917.
  - a liberal and social democratic government (Eden & Branting).
- The non-violence of 1918.
  - actually a worse situation then the spring of 1917.
Contention and Democracy

• The confrontations of 1917 leading up to the compromises of 1918.
  – 8 hour work day, equal suffrage for men and women.
• Important for the inter-war years.
  – not the same extent of right and left wing polarization in Sweden as in many other places of Europe.
  – but...