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Anarchism in Sweden

Gabriel Kuhn

2009

A defining moment for the anarchist movement in Sweden was a 1908 split within the Socialdemokratiska Arbetarparti, the country's social democratic party. When Hinke Bergegren (1861–1936), widely regarded as Sweden's most influential early anarchist (he later turned to Bolshevism), and other radicals were excluded, most members of the party's original youth organization, Ungsocialisterna (Young Socialists), distanced themselves from the social democratic leadership and formed Ungsocialistiska Partiet (Young Socialist Party), an anti-parliamentarian organization with strong anarchist leanings. In 1910 followed the foundation of the predominantly anarchosyndicalist workers' federation Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation (Central Organization of Sweden's Workers) (SAC). Among the organization's earliest supporters was German anarchosyndicalist Augustin Souchy (1892–1984), who lived in Swedish exile during World War I. In the 1920s SAC counted almost 40,000 members. Meanwhile, the famed Sweden-born International Workers of the World (IWW) agitator and songwriter Joe Hill (born Joel Emmanuel Hägglund, 1879) was executed in the US in 1915.

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Retrieved on 22nd November 2021 from onlinelibrary.wiley.com

Published in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

The radicalization of broad segments of the workers' movement also had significant influence on the workers' journal *Brand*, founded with a relatively broad ideological outlook in 1898. In the 1910s it began to turn into a more explicitly anarchist journal and has remained a focal point of the anarchist movement since. Today, it publishes four issues a year. Two of its former editors, Albert Jensen (1879–1957) and Nisse Lätt (1907–88), count among Sweden's most important anarchist activists and authors.

While Ungsocialistiska Partiet changed its name to Anarkistiska Propagandaförbundet (Anarchist Propaganda Association) in 1934 and finally dissolved as an organization in the 1960s, SAC continues to exist. Its current membership stands at around 6,500 and it still publishes the journal *Arbetaren* (*The Worker*), founded in 1922. Relative to its size, SAC retains a noticeable influence on Swedish politics. In 1999 SAC member Björn Söderberg (1958–99) was killed by right-wing extremists after leading a campaign against workplace and union infiltration by members of extreme right-wing organizations.

In the 1960s anarchism was rekindled in the context of the decade's social protest movements. While several attempts at nationwide anarchist organizing during the following decades were short-lived or unsuccessful, an anarchist counterculture grew. In the 1970s many communes inspired by anarchist ideals emerged. Anarchafeminist groups and, towards the end of the decade, the punk movement also became increasingly influential. In the 1980s the German autonomous movement had a major impact on Sweden's anarchist scene and several anarchist squats were established. In the 1990s many Swedish anarchists embraced radical ecological and animal rights causes. In 1993 Syndikalistiska Ungdomsförbundet (Syndicalist Youth Federation) was founded, a syndicalist youth organization with a strong anarchosyndicalist outlook that collaborates closely with SAC. Many anarchists today are also active in the infoshop scene, chapters of the Anti-Fascist Action network, and the activist collectives Motkraft and Yelah.

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