

Abstract

Hans Abenius, *Det självpåtagna uppdraget. En undersökning av medborgarprojektet kring tidningen Östgötha Correspondenten 1840-1870*. Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg 50 (Göteborg 2007), 357 pages. Written in Swedish with an English Summary (*The Self-Assigned Mission. A study of the citizenship project around the Swedish newspaper Östgötha Correspondenten 1840-1870*). ISBN 91 88614 66 2; ISSN 1100-6781.

This dissertation deals with a period in Swedish history stretching from 1840 to 1870, which is usually referred to as “the emergence of liberal politics”. During this time, a number of reforms were enacted, which would change Swedish society, and thus were preceded by intensive discussions between different political interests.

An important forum for these discussions was the press, another one the voluntary associations. In this dissertation these two vehicles of change are studied in a local context. The starting point is taken in the activities intended to mould public opinion conducted between 1840 and 1870 by *Östgötha Correspondenten*, a liberal newspaper in the provincial town of Linköping, and five associations: *Östgöta Reform Society*, *Linköping bildung-society*, *Östergötlands Society for the corrections of convicts*, *Linköping's voluntary sharpshooter association* and the attempt to bring about *Östergötlands Enskilda Förlagsbank*. By doing this in a social network perspective – focusing on the links between the editor Carl Fredrik Ridderstad, and the people who met in the nexus between *Östgötha Correspondenten* and the different associations – as well as relating to research concerning citizenship, a picture emerges of a political project, which evolved around the individual – the citizen.

The dissertation investigates how this project took shape and what it contained. Additionally, the dissertation relates to a perspective of 19th century Swedish political history proposed by Torbjörn Nilsson where the main scope is on the question of what groups were behind the emergence of liberal politics. Here, Nilsson argues that society was changed from top down. Even if the network contained several tradesmen and craftsmen, they were a clear minority. The core members were instead landowners, officers, public officials, clergymen and well-to-do farmers, and they could all, in some sense, be said to belong to the elite in the emerging middle class.

Taken as a whole, all this makes it possible to establish the network's activities in a broader social context. Here, it is noted, with the support of earlier research, that the period 1800-1870 which includes the years of the Liberal breakthrough, has at times been somewhat unfairly treated when events and processes in the 19th century are placed in a larger context. Instead, interest has focused on the years between 1870 and 1920. The result has been a weakening of the ties going back in time. This can be seen most clearly when comparisons are made between the type of associations focused on here and the popular movements that began to take shape in the 1870s.

The dissertation presents a hypothesis that it is possible to establish a clearer link between the work carried out by the associations and the late 19th century popular movements. The aim is to investigate the attempts to bring about a change in citizenship, which, during the period 1840-1870, were based on the intersection between *Östgötha Correspondenten* and the local associations and to discuss, based on historical context of these attempts, these activities in relation to the modernisation of Swedish society.

Key words: Liberal provincial press, voluntary associations, citizenship, emergence of liberal politics, middle class elite, social network, Östergötland, Linköping.