

Correspondence

Sweden Inc.

To the Editors: I have read with great interest the article by R.H. Weber, "Sweden Inc., The Total Institution" (*Worldview*, March).

It is a reminder of how difficult it is to interpret any political situation. Weber confuses me. He argues against what he labels "corporatism" and sees as "fascism with a human face." But at the end I have no idea what his alternatives would be. He seems to have the traditional *laissez-faire* capitalism with its emphasis on the individual's rights and opportunities as his point of departure, but he borrows almost all his criticisms from Swedish Marxist-Leninists of various brands. By avoiding any discussion of alternatives and by identifying his own ideological/political position and by selecting sources and arguments he has been able to present a picture which is partly true but which most Swedes would reject for many reasons. And he has (possibly) furthered the arguments both of the extreme right and the extreme left....

It would be tempting to discuss the article paragraph by paragraph in order to rectify some of Weber's slanted interpretations and correct some wrong and misleading information, but that would require a lengthy analysis of Sweden. Let me mention, however, that the paragraph on the Church is totally incorrect. You become a church member by baptism (95 per cent are baptized), only church members pay Church tax in the proper sense (but all pay for civil register and cemeteries), and foreigners are encouraged, and even financially supported, when organizing their own religious communities.

Sweden has a long tradition of cooperation, negotiation, and peaceful settlement, and I would agree with Weber that there is a real "Big Brother danger" in Sweden. Political debate shows no real alternatives to the present system, and through agreement over the heads of people most prob-

lems are settled. There has been much trading between the Social Democrats and the opposition these last two years when the balance in Parliament happened to be 175 and 175. Some of us fear a future determined by technocratic and political pragmatism into which people are gradually bribed through social security and by the high standard of living.

But one must not forget that Sweden has a very old and deep-seated democratic tradition on all levels and that the people are highly educated and travel the world more than most people. Sweden is certainly provincial and self-centered in many ways, but compared to the American Midwest we seem to live in the midst of the world! The Swedes are politically alert and informed, but still there is lurking danger that they would opt for security and conformity rather than for upheaval and individualism if that was the choice. The talk about "the new totalitarianism" must not be written off completely, but if there is anything to it the problems are shared with all developed countries conscious of the need for national as well as international justice.

There are limits to freedoms in every responsible society. In Sweden these limits are determined by the vast majority of people with access to more political and other information than almost any other people in the world. And most people are rather satisfied with the results of the political deals. It is also comparatively easy (for better or for worse) to create an opinion which leads to political decisions. The Vietnam movement was one example, and the concern for the environment another. In recent weeks a popular mass movement has stopped the expansion of the nuclear power plants until we know more about the negative side effects. In this sense Sweden is certainly more democratic than most other countries. The country is too small for the politicians to afford neglecting any sizable opinion, but this unfortunately also could mean that the population is small enough to be manipulated by the media.

Is this kind of society a model for the industrialized world or the Third World? What does the computeriza-

tion, the technocratic and very sophisticated processes of planning, the international economic interdependencies, the popular demand for social security, and the direct or indirect control of media mean to democracy in all our societies? Sweden may be ahead of many others and therefore worth looking at. It may also be ahead in this sense, that people have awakened to the risk and have actively involved themselves in throwing the lot of this rich country in with the exploited and oppressed ones.

Sweden Inc. is a more dynamic society than Weber thinks, with its problems no doubt, but precisely because of this a tremendous challenge for an experiment in mission to the world of tomorrow.

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To the Editors: Richard Weber's recent article on Sweden, "Sweden Inc.," is an unfair hatchet job devoid of any perspective. It is particularly uncalled for in a publication which purports to heal the wounds of an embittered world.

The world is looking for answers to rampant rancor and callousness, and while the Swedes may gild the lily in some of their public utterances, they do in their daily life what the rest of us talk about. Not the least of Sweden's accomplishments, in my view, is the attainment of the egalitarian goal of a mere 30 per cent gap between the highest and lowest paid worker. In a society with the highest standard of living in the industrialized world, this is no mean feat.

It would be tempting for the Swedes to retreat into their affluent shell, but instead they are in the forefront of every international effort to heal the world's wounds. The Swedes contribute more of their gross national product percentage-wise than does any other industrial nation. Surely they deserve a footnote in your magazine for this worthy ambition. Weber implies that the Swedes are insufferably dull and controlled because of their social democratic government. They are, I object to say, a vital and literate

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