

## REVIEWS

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### Olof Petersson, *The Ordinarius: Herbert Tingsten*<sup>1</sup> and *Jörgen Westerståhl*<sup>2</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

Swedish political scientist Olof Petersson has recently published two remarkable biographies, of Herbert Tingsten and Jörgen Westerståhl, two professors who dominated political science in Sweden during the twentieth century.

In 2011, Petersson introduced his biography of Jörgen Westerståhl, *Statsvetaren: Jörgen Westerståhl och demokratins århundrade*, (*Political Scientist Jörgen Westerståhl and the Democratic Century*). In 2013 Petersson presented yet another biography, *Herbert Tingsten, vetenskapsmannen* (*Herbert Tingsten, Scientist*).

Though these well-written books would interest political scientists all over Europe and America, I believe Petersson's analysis of these two men—of Westerståhl in Gothenburg and Tingsten in Stockholm—has a wider bearing on the structure of academia in Sweden, which is definitely more German than Anglo-Saxon, despite the Swedish government's frenetic reform efforts during the 1960s and 1970s. Petersson entices the reader to ask: What does it mean to be a full professor in a completely hierarchical academic structure? The answer: Power.

These two examples of an ordinarius—Tingsten and Westerståhl—are interesting from several perspectives. Petersson's works invite comparisons between the two men's personal lives, (Westerståhl was Tingsten's pupil), their intellectual achievements (Tingsten outdistanced Westerståhl) and their academic influences (Westerståhl was regarded as having reached the top of the ranks in his discipline in Scandinavia, alongside Stein Rokkan in Bergen). Yet when it comes to access to political power, there is no comparison. Tingsten does not begin to compare with Westerståhl. In making my own remarks on these two major volumes in Nordic political science, I argue that the Anglo-Saxon model of professors as a community of equals limits the dysfunctional excesses of the Swedish model of ordinarien.

Petersson's two books differ by content. Petersson's biography of Westerståhl offers a fascinating life story, whereas his book on Tingsten is a penetrating intellectual biography, examining first and foremost Tingsten's main books.

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<sup>1</sup> Petersson, O., 2013. *Herbert Tingsten, Vetenskapsmannen* [Herbert Tingsten, Scientist]. Atlantis Bokförlag.

<sup>2</sup> Petersson, O., 2011. *Statsvetaren: Jörgen Westerståhl och demokratins århundrade* [Political Scientist: Jörgen Westerståhl and the democratic century]. SNS Förlag.

## 1. TINGSTEN (1896-1973): THE PROFESSOR AS MASTER—OF WHAT?

Being professor for only eleven years at Stockholm University College (1935 to 1946), Tingsten was the political analyst as academic professor. Everything he wrote had a political overtone. Tingsten was an intellectual giant, an equilibrist, and a *besserwisser*, whose basic aim was to prevail in intellectual debates on politics and culture. As chief editor of the largest newspaper in Norden, *Dagens Nyheter*, Tingsten authored a mass of articles in the same style he used in his academic publications.

### 1.1 *The Negative Message*

Following his political convictions already laid down in his academic books, he tried endlessly to propagate his political views against his opponents. Chiefly, his opponents were:

- a) **Enemies of democracy:** Tingsten was an acute observer of political events and trends and often grasped the essence of things before anyone else. As a young man in central Europe, he saw democracy win an institutional fight, but he predicted democracy's fragility. Tingsten emphasized that democracy is a political regime, not a social or economic one.
- b) **Fascism:** In response to developments in central Europe, Italy and Spain, Tingsten presented a profound analysis of the fascist mind, linking it to the worship of violence.
- c) **Conservatism:** Tingsten was a member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party until the mid 1940s, participating in its meetings about the party program. He rejected conservatism and wrote a major book analysing conservatism's evolution from Burke onwards, the key idea of which was that conservatism entailed an unwarranted suspicion of reason and of the place of reason in political argument.
- d) **Communism:** Tingsten slowly developed a hatred for communism. When he pursued his *Dagens Nyheter* campaigns against the Soviet Union and left-wing radicalism in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, Tingsten was merely drawing from the conclusions of his two-volume study of the ideas of the Swedish *Arbeiterbewegung*, a study in which he discovered the contradictions of Marxism and the faulty reasoning of continental Europe's great ideologues.

Tingsten wanted to intellectually defeat and even humiliate his opponents and often did so by linking them with the great creators of ideologies or systems of political ideas from the history of political thought. No one could disclose the flaws of these giants better than Tingsten who called his method "*the critique of ideas.*" With almost whatever he produced, social science or propaganda, for Tingsten there was a porous border between *what is* and *what ought to be*.

Petersson gives a brilliant recap of Tingsten's books and of his rebuttals to his critiques—but Petersson fails to mention a major rejection of Tingsten's work. Economic historian Kurt Samuelson saw clear weaknesses in Tingsten's conception of an ideology as merely a set of falsifiable hypotheses (Samuelson, 1973). No doubt, Tingsten was a master of finding errors, disclosing mistakes, and pointing out lacunas in the political thought of the great masters of political philosophy and the history of ideas. Tingsten even went so far as to state that political

ideologies were fundamentally statements about reality and thus falsifiable, as these basic statements were not value premises, neither moral convictions nor material self-interests. Very questionable indeed!

Tingsten became illustrious around 1940 when his major studies of the ideological development of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) were published by the second wing of the *Arbeiterbewegung*, the central trade union organization, *Landsorganisationen* (LO)! Tingsten's work was hardly what the socialists in power since 1932 had expected, namely a frontal attack against the strong Marxist element in the SAP's party programs. Tingsten used the distinction between the long-run perspective (revolution) and the short-run perspective (parliamentary democracy) to claim that the ideology of the SAP contained a major contradiction, and that it was time for the SAP to scrap their long-run perspective. In doing so, Tingsten emphasized Bernstein's basic message from 1899, ". . . turn social reform from a means of the class struggle into its final aim." The only Social Democrat to uphold the long-run perspective was Ernst Wigforss, Sweden's so-called last socialist.

The best chapter in Petersson's volume on Tingsten deals with Tingsten's own theory about mature democracies in Western Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), namely with his hypothesis about the "end of ideologies." Here, Petersson draws upon his profound knowledge about Swedish politics after the Second World War to make a balanced assessment of the pros and cons of Tingsten's own message.

"Democracy can only survive when the ideologies die," Tingsten proclaimed, which led to a large public debate that included, among other politicians, Prime Minister Tage Erlander and Olof Palme. The *New Left* rejected Tingsten's proclamation outright, pointing to the Paris events and student uproars. Tingsten had combined two of his most essential ideas, namely: 1) that the ideologies from the French revolution had been criticized and falsified—they consisted of flawed theories, not values; and 2) a democratic system of government can only survive if the central political parties *share* a conviction about the ends and means of democracy—a set of meta-beliefs.

After he left his professorship at Stockholm University Tingsten lived as a man of letters and as a public intellectual; he kept publishing up until he went blind. Petersson mentions that Swedish philosopher Ingemar Hedenius, famous due to his virulent attacks on Christian theology and Paulus, designated Tingsten's distinction between the short-run and long-run perspectives in the ideological development of Swedish Social Democracy as his most prominent achievement from a scientific point of view. This is hardly accurate, as the strategic tension between these two concepts was much debated in the Marxist circles in Western and central Europe. In Sweden, only Wigforss kept dreaming of the idea long-term idea socialist society—of a *foeretag utan aegare*, firms without owners.

Now, Tingsten's main scientific achievement is no doubt his pronounced and very original early thesis about the end of ideology, presented internationally in 1955. His argument has the following structure:

- (1) Ideologies were all created in the wake of the French RevOlution
- (2) Ideologies are essentially systems of theoretical propositions about the future, the good, and the right for mankind

- (3) Ideologies contain grave intellectual errors
- (4) Ideologies are actually dying and will die out soon.

Tingsten's conclusion seems highly logical, as nobody would cherish incorrect ideas. Yet, his concluding prediction was shocking in 1955.

The first three assumptions though are too restrictive for critical scrutiny. Samuelson (who was grossly underestimated in Swedish academia) successfully attacked Tingsten's second assumption by making the case for ideologies including values *or subjective evaluations* in Uppsala School's Haegerstroem's terminology. Furthermore, Tingsten's first assumption appears arbitrary. Today we have great ideological debates between environmentalists and cornucopians as well as between neo-liberalism and liberal egalitarianism.

Tingsten died before the emergence of the great debates among liberal egalitarians (Rawls, Dworkin, Barry) and among neo-liberals (Nozick, Chicago School). These debates largely focused on real equality versus liberty. Ideological confrontation may not need the old faulty masters of the nineteenth century! And this dominant political debate today includes both theories and values!

Petersson finishes his masterful biography with an overview of Tingsten's foreign contacts. Like Westerståhl, he did not participate much in international conferences. However, he is mentioned in the colloquium on *The End of Ideology* in 1955 with Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell.

### 1.2 *The Positive Argument*

It is true that Tingsten changed his political position several times, but a core focus evolved in both his research and his politics—namely the neo-liberalism of the Mont Pelerin Society, of which he was a founding member in 1947. He was attracted by its civilisation creeds: individualism, anti-authoritarianism, and market economics. In 1944, Tingsten replaced socialism with libertarianism, as the famous Swedish economist Ingemar Stahl did in the 1970s. By then, Tingsten had turned into a pure political propagandist, proclaiming: Sweden must enter NATO—there is no *third* position; Sweden must have nuclear weapons; Sweden must seek allies in the West to stand strong against Stalin; the welfare state must be shrunk; only a republic is a true democratic regime; and the state and religion must be separated.

As an outspoken atheist, Tingsten strongly supported his close friend (Uppsala University philosophy professor) Ingemar Hedenius's, attack on the church and Christianity. Tingsten was also extremely negative towards the Soviet Regime and Stalin, he even succeeded in taking Gunnar Myrdal out of the government for his Soviet sympathies. It seems to me that Petersson does not fully realize how ideological Tingsten's commitment was to neo-liberalism, or to Hayekianism; he anticipated much of what was to come in the 1980s (Hayek, Kirzner, Buchanan). Why could neo-liberalism not be critiqued with the approach used in the negative argument above? Is Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944) really so good as Tingsten believed?

Yet, Tingsten was a man of contradictions, despite his ambition to disclose the mistakes of the greats: Smith, Bentham, Burke, Marx, de Maistre, Tolstoy, and Hegel among others. When the big political issue in post-war politics surfaced in Sweden—the *Allman Tjanstepension* (ATP)

pension question—Tingsten turned around for a final time, he abandoned his liberal stance and *Dagens Nyheter*, advocating the state solution of the socialists—not a road to serfdom? As a matter of fact, the ATP reform that consolidated the power in government for the socialists for almost twenty years has not turned out to be an economic success.

In his youth, Tingsten mastered much of political science. It was only after he had chosen his newspaper career that he focused exclusively upon the analysis of ideas. Thus, Tingsten made very interesting contributions to electoral enquiry and the study of constitutional law. After leaving *Dagens Nyheter*, Tingsten lived long enough to understand that he had understood little about the political attraction of the “great faulty thinkers,” or of the emotions and values of systems of political ideas. The 1960s corrected Tingsten and he saw radical socialism and anti-Americanism coming back in Sweden, and at *Dagens Nyheter*. Perhaps it is fair to conclude that today Tingsten is *less* out of tune with politics than he was in the 1960s as Sweden is now considering a NATO alliance and emphasizes allocation instead of redistribution.

What is stunning in Tingsten’s academic achievement is the speed with which he perceived how political events would combine to form major changes. He anticipated not only Popper, Berlin, and Avineri but also neo-liberalism—though his impatience and nervousness precluded profundity. One of Tingsten’s best acts was his fiercely attack against the government’s expulsion of war refugees from the Baltic States to Russia. His socialist opponent and Minister of Finance, the ideologue Ernst Wigforss, supported this shameful act; this decision to send the Baltics refugees back to Russia often resulted in tragedy as gulags awaited these people from the countries Sweden had once ruled. While Tingsten was an ordinarius in spirit with his arrogant and dominating demeanour, Westerståhl was an ordinarius in action. Westerståhl and his associates alone almost constituted a think tank.

## 2. JÖRGEN WESTERSTÅHL (1916-2006): THE PROFESSOR AS A RESEARCH ENTREPRENEUR

A Swedish ordinarius is not only the representative of a discipline at the university, but an ordinarius may act as an administrative officer in charge of all personnel and contracts. Ordinarien have less teaching duties than other professors as they often concentrate their instruction on PhD guidance. This provides ample time for taking various duties inside or outside academia. Often, ordinarien participate in research bodies or research councils to procure money for the department or for themselves. Ordinarien have a very strong influence over the selection of other ordinarien, including their successors.

This hierarchical system originated in the period of the elite model university which typically had one chair, surrounded by assistants and clerks, in each discipline. When Swedish higher education was adapted to a mass model university, the role of ordinarius was maintained though modified slightly into the central role in a large department with many scholars, research personnel, and clerks. The socialist government no doubt wanted to limit the power of the ordinarien, but despite many top-down reforms, the government failed utterly in this regard. The transformation from elite to mass higher education changed the universities and colleges in all but one aspect, the prevailing prerogatives of the ordinarien. The Swedish full

professor combined two roles—that of a single representative of a discipline with the head of a department. The full professor became a large-scale entrepreneur managing research contracts in the millions with contract responsibilities for between fifty and up to one-hundred individuals on the department staff. No one personifies this transformation of Swedish academic departments more than Westerståhl. Westerståhl built up the now dominant political science establishment in Gothenburg, anchoring almost everything in politics.

Westerståhl worked under Tingsten for a time as his assistant when Tingsten did electoral enquiry work. Coming from the larger family of Hjalmar Branting—the first Socialist premier, Westerståhl had a social democratic identity that he never abandoned. Teaching political thought from Tingsten's approach, Westerståhl was somewhat unoriginal until he set out on his own and explored in great detail the virtues of empiricism and how data collection could be combined with the enormous intelligence needs of the growing welfare state and of the expanding ministries and agencies' thirst for knowledge.

Westerståhl re-educated himself around 1950 when he went to the US to pick up the tools of survey research and the spirit of behaviourism, there he spent time with the leading researchers of the 1950s. This was something new, something other than criticizing Hegel with Tingsten's method of the critique of ideas. Westerståhl transferred the new methods in social science to his department in Gothenburg and started to take on huge data projects from various funding sources. Thus, electoral research, newspaper studies, and enquiries into government agencies were initiated on a long-term basis by Westerståhl and his brilliant new staff. Petersson knows all about this Gothenburg revolution, Petersson was one of its new scholars moving Swedish political science forward in the scientific world and endorsing behaviourism. The list of studies emerging from the constantly swelling Gothenburg institutes of politics and administration testifies to Westerståhl's capacity and skill. Several PhD candidates guided by Westerståhl are now professors who continue to pursue his empiricist ideal within now institutionalized research programs such as electoral studies. As a matter of fact, Westerståhl became an almost recurrent figure in mass media; his large scale studies of objectivity, his neutrality, and the informative content of his contributions to news media drew much interest. The general public, newspapers, radio broadcasters, and television producers read his conclusions over the years.

Yet, Westerståhl became so successful in attracting funds for new research and so esteemed by the social democratic government for his capacity to conduct applied research that he somehow forgot his limitations. When this happened, none other than Tingsten was there to point out to these limitations in a most forceful manner that seriously hurt Westerståhl's reputation. This occurred around 1960, when Tingsten was still vigorous enough to conduct a scientific attack of great amplitude. Westerståhl had accepted the responsibility of giving Sweden a new and updated constitution, as the famous 1809 dispensation was considered obsolete. But Westerståhl did not take the task with the seriousness required to become the reformer of the Swedish state. Perhaps it was just another contract to him? In any case, after Westerståhl had presented his proposal, Tingsten entered the scene with a booklet, *Should the Role of the King be Reinforced?* Tingsten's assessment that Westerståhl had failed miserably in rewriting the 1809 constitution was a shock to all, not least to Westerståhl himself.

This time, the government listened to Tingsten in spite of his socialist attacks launched from *Dagens Nyheter*. To redo Westerståhl's failed job of rewriting the 1809 constitution, a new committee, headed by the best Swedish expert on constitutional law, ordinarius Nils Stiernquist. Stiernquist succeeded in transforming a constitutional monarchy into a real republican dispensation, headed by a completely powerless national symbol: the king. Why did Westerståhl accept this assignment? Late professor Par-Erik Back, another ordinarius once told me that Westerståhl had written an unpublished analysis of Hans Kelsen's legal theory, adding that it was a masterpiece, inspired by the legal realism of Uppsala genius, philosopher Axel Hagerstrom. I have never seen it, but Westerståhl's constitutional outline for Sweden was not inspired by Kelsen's 1920 constitution for Austria—pure republicanism of course.

Westerståhl's personality was different from Tingsten's. Unlike Tingsten, he was rather timid or shy and attuned to details. He concentrated all of his efforts on empirical research, often on applied empirical research. By participating in the efforts after the Second World War, he came to know all of the key scholars in political science in Europe and in American election studies. However, he was to present a second great disappointment when he failed to support the Norwegian genius Stein Rokkan for a professorship at the national university in Oslo. Westerståhl knew Rokkan well from international conferences, but he forced him to go to Bergen University, which Rokkan made world famous for political science—sad for Oslo!

## CONCLUSION

The Swedish ordinarius is a most prestigious figure who can speak truth to power. But, ordinarien can also conduct their own self-seeking agendas, as ordinarius Bo Rothstein did. It could be argued that this institution should be abolished entirely and that Sweden should move to the Anglo-Saxon model of professors as a community of equals with a rotating department chair. The most dismal aspect of the ordinarius's role is the compulsory duty to write evaluations of ordinarien candidates. As these evaluations are published in the journal *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, they provide a golden opportunity for crushing critiques and the settling of old scores. This practice, *sakkunnigutlatande* (expert statement), exists only in Swedish academia as an officially published document within political science. When an ordinarius opening comes up, then the only relevant question is: Who will the three experts be? It becomes a true game with lots of manoeuvring nationwide!

Petersson has done a great service to Swedish political science, not only by conducting a huge power investigation in the 1980s, but also by writing these two portraits of two dominant personalities. Tingsten wrote several books on the history of political thought at the highest international level, while Westerståhl concentrated on empire building in Gothenburg. The extraordinary influence they wielded upon Swedish society stemmed from the ordinarius position, a relic from the time when Sweden belonged under German culture and university ideals.

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