

# Why do spies keep surfacing in Sweden?

by Göran Haglund

Even as the espionage trial against Norwegian social democrat and KGB colonel Arne Treholt is still being prepared in Oslo, the shock-wave that hit the Socialist International after Treholt's arrest on Jan. 20 has already subsided. Continuing their unsavory role as vehicles for Soviet policy-implementation in Europe, the Social Democratic Parties of Scandinavia, including that of Norway, have pushed for one suicidal initiative after another for the unilateral disarmament of the West. This comes as no great surprise to anyone who knows the case of Swedish Air Force Col. Stig Wennerstroem, whose long career as Major-General of Soviet military intelligence was abruptly ended by the verdict of life imprisonment passed at his trial in Stockholm on June 12, 1964.

Although Colonel Wennerstroem was not himself a Social Democrat, he was a disarmament adviser to the Swedish Social Democratic government, pioneering a proposal for nuclear-free zones, just as Treholt proposed 20 years later; he was *de facto* protected from discovery by the Social Democratic government, and, according to his own account of the ideological basis for his treason, he felt that he found somebody who spoke the same language only when he met the Social Democratic minister of defense.

## In Moscow and in Washington, D.C.

Wennerstroem admitted having been a Soviet agent for 15 years, since 1948, just before becoming Sweden's new Air Attaché in Moscow. However, his illegal intelligence activities date back to at least 1940, when during a four-month tenure at Sweden's Moscow embassy he functioned as an Nazi asset spying on the Soviets—an activity he continued back in Stockholm, where he cultivated good relations, despite the break up of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, with both Hitler's and Stalin's embassies, particularly Soviet Ambassador Alexandra Kollontai and Air Attaché Col. Nikolai Nikitushev.

For three years, Wennerstroem remained in Moscow as the Swedish Air Attaché. His principal assignment on behalf of the Soviets was to find out about NATO military planning and intelligence activities vis-à-vis the U.S.S.R., and ostensibly to help determine whether a possible military attack against the Soviets would be designed primarily as an air assault, rather than a ground-based invasion.

During 1952-57, Wennerstroem was stationed as Swedish Air Attaché in Washington, D.C., making him at the same time chief of the Swedish Air Force's Procurement

Office in the Swedish embassy. He had access to valuable and highly sensitive information from the U.S. Air Force and defense-related corporations, including detailed blueprints of key items, ranging from aircraft, missiles and targeting devices to radar, radio and micro-electronics. Thus, technological espionage was Wennerstroem's main occupation in the United States.

## Back in Sweden

After his return to Stockholm in June 1957 until his arrest in June 1963, Wennerstroem held key positions in the Swedish defense and foreign ministries. During this period, he also maintained direct relations to members of the Swedish Cabinet.

First, Wennerstroem led the Air Force Section of the Military Bureau of the defense ministry, from where he could reveal the entirety of Sweden's advanced air defense system. Later, the Soviets were especially concerned to ensure that the Swedish air defense represented no obstacle to delivering the nuclear barrage required to fight the U.S. Polaris submarines in their positions off the western coast of Sweden and Norway.

In particular, the Soviets asked Wennerstroem to report any developments pertaining to a shift in Sweden's policy of neutrality, as well as whether Sweden would deploy or produce tactical nuclear arms. It should be noted that Wennerstroem, during his time in the Defense Ministry, was assigned the responsibility of dealing with the Swedish atomic bomb program, the direction of which was at the time subject to heated public controversy.

Second, in 1961, Wennerstroem was transferred to the foreign ministry, assuming a newly created post as military specialist on disarmament questions. The task was to prepare the Swedish government's disarmament proposal to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), after which negotiations were to occur at the March 1962 disarmament talks in Geneva.

While formally directly subordinate only to the foreign minister, Wennerstroem in reality worked under Alva Myrdal, Special Disarmament Ambassador to Geneva. In October 1961, the Swedish proposal was submitted to the UNGA, prominently featuring the Soviet brain-child of nuclear-free zones. During his interrogation, Wennerstroem, who insisted that he had served the cause of peace and détente, admitted that he used his position to influence the Geneva talks in favor of the Soviets.

## Who protected Wennerstroem

After Wennerstroem's arrest, a political outcry erupted, demanding to know why and how someone could go on betraying his nation's most vital security interests for so long without suspicion. Making things even worse, it was soon revealed that Wennerstroem had indeed already come under suspicion during World War II, even to the point that his arrest was considered after the Swedish security police in

1943 intercepted a coded radio communication from the German embassy in Stockholm to Berlin mentioning Wennerstroem as a "useful source."

After that incident, Wennerstroem had repeatedly reappeared as a security risk, whose phone and mail had been under surveillance by the Swedish security police again and again during the 20 years preceding his arrest on June 20, 1963. However, each time the security police brought the case to the attention of their superiors in the government, they were rebuked, asked how the integrity of a respected officer could be cast in doubt with such weak evidence, and told in so many words to mind their own business.

Given the long record of suspicion against Wennerstroem, it was indeed hard to escape the conclusion that somebody, somewhere was providing him protection. It was only due to the slow political motion of the summer holiday months that the Erlander government avoided a vote of no confidence. However, two investigations were launched—one preemptively commissioned by the government itself (!) on June 28, 1963, the other conducted by a parliamentary commission, formed only half a year later, on Dec. 13, 1963 as a concession to the opposition.

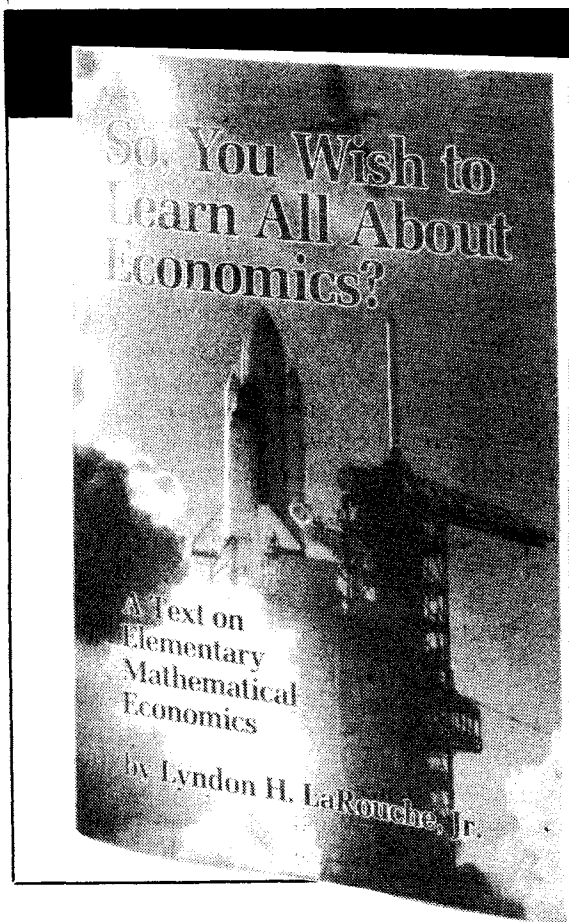
The two investigative reports were both issued in April 1964, but their conclusions were remarkably divergent. The government-appointed commission emphasized the need to protect the personal integrity and legal security of each indi-

vidual and concluded that the skill with which Wennerstroem had been operating, rather than any flaws or mistakes on the part of the government, fully accounted for the delay in action against him. The parliamentary commission, on the contrary, concluded that the government should have taken action against Wennerstroem no later than 1959, and pinpointed both former Foreign Minister Oesten Unden and Defense Minister Sven Andersson as responsible.

The case was referred to the Parliament's Constitutional Committee, which reviews government conduct. At this time, the correlation of forces in the Constitutional Committee between government and opposition meant that the censure vote would produce a stalemate. Then, in compliance with the archaic rules of the Swedish form of government, the disputed issue was settled by lottery!

The lottery-ticket decided that the foreign minister, already retired in 1962, was to be censured, while the defense minister was innocent. In effect, since the worst possible consequence of a censure from the Constitutional Committee is forced resignation, the parliament simply dismissed the case.

Thus, years of high-level socialist protection for Soviet intelligence activity and high treason were scandalously covered up. Worse, an ominous standard was set for what can pass as acceptable government conduct—and recurrently has passed as such ever since.



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