

WHO KILLED OLOF PALME



By Diana Johnstone

STOCKHOLM

AFTER NEARLY HALF A CENTURY OF SOCIAL Democratic government, Sweden's security police remain firmly in the grip of right-wingers whose notorious hostility to the late Prime Minister Olof Palme makes them prime suspects in his unsolved murder. This fact stands out as possibly the most significant amid the debris of the botched year-long investigation of the Feb. 28, 1986, assassination of Palme, who, among Western European leaders, was the most actively committed to world peace.

The Swedish security police, known as SäPo, are responsible for investigating foreign subversion and keeping tabs on domestic security risks. By all accounts, people in SäPo "hated Palme's guts."

SäPo was supposed to protect the prime minister. But according to knowledgeable sources in Stockholm, SäPo had a file on Palme that was by no means for his protection. Many SäPo officers regarded the prime minister as a security risk who was selling out Sweden to the Soviet bloc.

In his neat apartment in Stockholm, retired SäPo officer Melker Bentler told *In These Times* that right-wing indoctrination in Swedish security police goes back to pro-German feelings in the '30s. At the end of World War II, the pro-German attitude changed to pro-Americanism. The constant factor was viewing Communism as the enemy.

SäPo depends on the CIA for information about Latin America and considers all political refugees potential "terrorists," according to Bentler, who retired in 1980 at age 65 after 27 years with SäPo. "What the CIA says is the word of God. They depend on it 200 percent," he said.

The security police also depend heavily on the West German BND and the Israeli Mossad. During the colonels' dictatorship in Greece, SäPo passed along information on Greek political exiles to the Greek junta's police via the secret services of NATO allies, Bentler recalled.

And although the Swedish Social Democratic government helped the Mozambique liberation movement FRELIMO that led the country to independence from Portuguese colonialism, SäPo regarded FRELIMO as terrorists, he added.

Bentler also said that it was hard to believe that 45 percent of Swedes are Social Democrats, since he had never met any in SäPo. He became isolated as a maverick in the service after his 1978 complaints about illegal wire-tapping became public.

Several years ago, on the occasion of another assassination, Bentler recalled hearing colleagues say they wished someone would do the same to that devil Palme. When Palme was assassinated, Bentler said, his first thought was that it must be some extreme conservative group with help from SäPo.

Hatred of Palme was shared by several

military officers, especially naval officers. Palme was skeptical of the very existence of the "Russian submarine threat," dear to Swedish naval officers in their battle to wrest appropriations from parliament.

Suspicion of Palme within SäPo and the armed forces was fed in the Reagan years from such international networks as the World Anti-Communist League and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's CAUSA, with their military and intelligence agency connections and support from the White House.

Unofficial Reagan administration spokesmen such as strategist Edward Luttwak publicly suggested that Palme was "manipulated by the Russians." In a November 1984 interview with the Danish business magazine *Management*, Luttwak predicted Sweden would let Soviet forces cross Swedish territory to invade Denmark and said if he were a Dane he would consider Olof Palme more dangerous than the Russians.

When Palme was murdered, the investigation was taken over by Stockholm Police Chief Hans Holmer. This was not usual procedure, but then neither was the assassination of a Swedish prime minister. Police often seem to have been rattled by the enormity of it all.

Among the various police agencies working on the Palme murder, special contribution was the "Kurdish track." This is the wild goose chase that mobilized police throughout the crucial first year of the investigation.

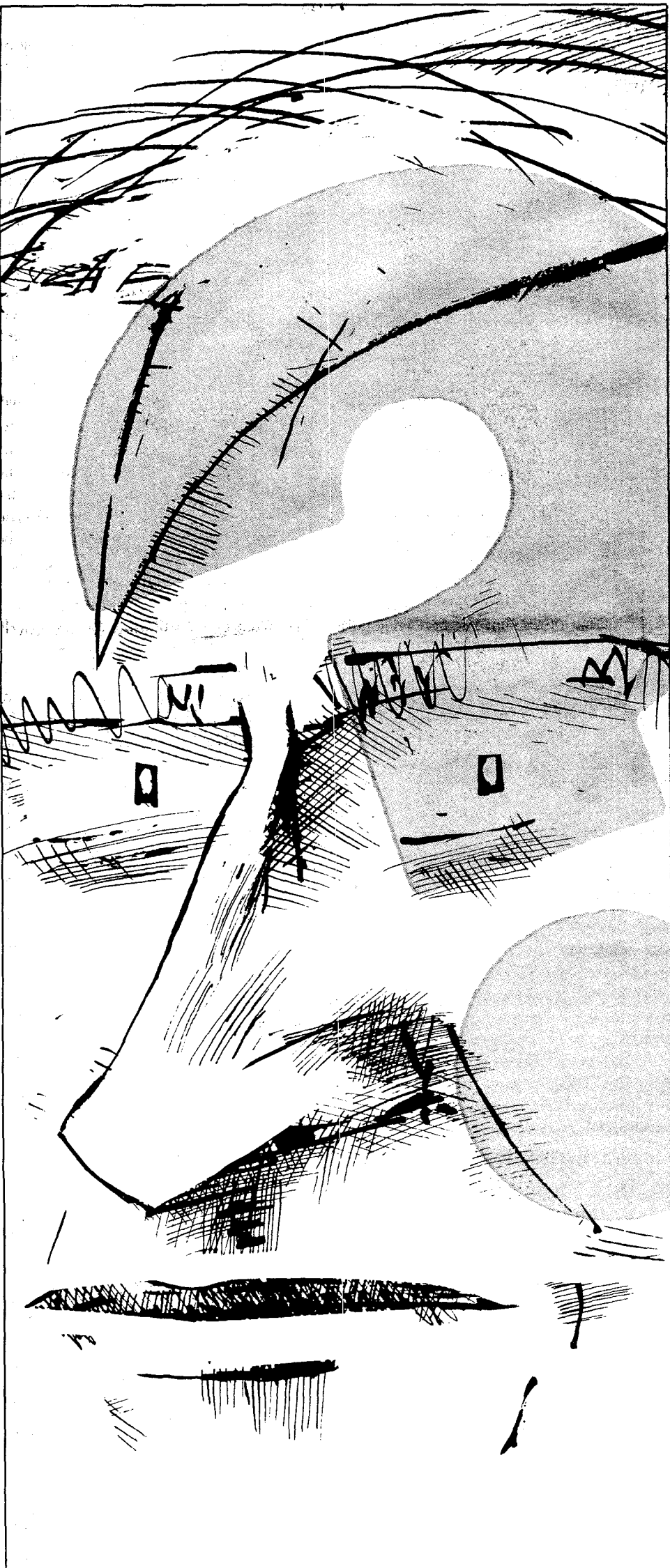
Now a year has passed, snows have melted and fallen again, tracks are covered and memories are blurred. Statistically, only a 10 percent chance remains of solving the case. And this depends mainly on voluntary testimony by someone inside the conspiracy—if there was a conspiracy.

On the wrong track: Holmer has been forced to abandon both the investigation and the special "Palme room" in Stockholm police headquarters where he had coordinated investigations by federal, state and local police forces. His frequent appearances at press conferences, optimistically claiming to be "on the track" of the killers, made him a popular figure here—"Sweden's man of the year," according to Swedish TV.

Holmer projected the image of the tough cop opposing stodgy bureaucrats. In fact, observers note that Holmer was an administrator with no experience as a crime investigator. He was a Social Democrat, and for a while in the '70s had been put in charge of SäPo in one of the Social Democrats' vain attempts to get political control of the security police. By all accounts he was a figurehead.

The police bungled the investigation from the start. Of the two bullets fired by the assassin, one was found six hours later, the other 36 hours later—both by passers-by, not the police.

One suspect, an eccentric 33-year-old rightist who had been associated with Lyndon LaRouche's anti-Palme campaign in Sweden, was arrested last March 17 after wit-



nesses reported seeing him hanging around the neighborhood on the night of the murder. He was released two days later after police made the blunder of showing his photo to a witness about to identify him in a line-up.

From then on, Holmer seems to have clutched more and more stubbornly to the "Kurdish track," which SäPo offered on the basis of its years of surveillance of a small group of Kurdish political refugees from Turkey associated with the Marxist-Leninist Workers Party of Kurdistan, or PKK. SäPo has long considered PKK supporters dangerous terrorists. Twice—in June 1984 and again in November 1985—a Kurd was murdered in public by another Kurd. Vengeance against "traitors" to some obscure cause seemed to be the motive. This rude behavior gave the Kurds a bad image in Sweden. If these least welcome of the "black heads"—the term for dark foreign immigrants—turned out to be guilty of killing Palme, the news would be comforting to Swedish self-righteousness. And as the Kurds have no state of their own, no government would be offended.

SäPo had been trying to get the suspected Kurdish "terrorists" expelled from Sweden.

SäPo, Sweden's security police, are firmly in the grip of right-wingers whose notorious hostility to the late Prime Minister Olof Palme makes them prime suspects in his unsolved murder. By all accounts, people in SäPo "hated Palme's guts."

In the summer of 1985 conservative Swedish newspapers had even published stories leaked from SäPo saying that Kurdish terrorists were threatening to kill Palme. So when Palme was assassinated, SäPo already had a potential suspect and files full of information on the Kurds collected from years of wiretaps and surveillance. This set the stage for a frameup that seems to have been averted only by the Swedish judicial system's safeguards of the rights of defendants—even Kurds.

Last December Holmer claimed to be "95 percent sure" of his "main track." But when judicial authorities forced him to produce evidence, he was unable to do so. The Kurdish track collapsed, Holmer was relieved of his responsibility for the investigation and all of the "173 hypotheses" he claimed to have examined were back on equal footing.

Aside from the absence of any direct evidence, the Kurdish track always suffered from a blatant flaw: the absence of a motive. To conservatives it may seem sufficient that the Kurds "are violent"—they are likely to have committed the assassination because that is the sort of thing they do. But to any

politically sophisticated observer, it makes no sense to suspect a Marxist-Leninist group, seeking support for safe political exile in Sweden, of murdering the one leader most sympathetic to Third World causes in the entire Western world.

Pinpointing a motive: Wilhelm Agrell, of the Lund University Peace and Conflict Research Institute, has examined the case on the premise that one can seek a solution from two directions: from technical examination of material evidence and from intellectual analysis of motivation. In an article in Sweden's biggest newspaper, the *Dagens Nyheter*, Agrell recently complained that there had been no systematic study of the "motive line," and then offered one of his own.

When the Kurdish track came up, Agrell told *In These Times*, attempts to establish a motive were dropped in an effort to "find evidence" against the Kurds. Newspapers used material leaked by SäPo to write articles against "dangerous Kurds." Evidence that pointed in other directions was neglected by Holmer and not reported in the media.

Agrell said that after examining international and national motives, he ruled out terrorism as a motive because the murder seemed to be a liquidation. In international terms, the motivation of governments Palme had criticized, such as South Africa and Chile, was not convincing. Yet Agrell said Palme's "enormous unofficial contacts" should still be studied, since he was involved in a lot of things never made public that might provide clues to motivation.

Agrell said he prefers the "national" motive line, however. What made Palme personally controversial in Sweden, Agrell said, was the security policy aspect: the "submarine question" and relations with the Soviet Union. Thus Agrell arrived at what he called the "fatherland" or "patriotic" motive: Palme was assassinated by a group of men in the armed forces and/or security police who believed that by so doing they were saving Sweden from being delivered to the Russians.

Several persons were seen in the vicinity of the crime with walkie-talkies, according to Agrell, and police vehicles were observed nearby that should not have been there. The strange thing, said Agrell, is that the police investigation was not eager to delve into these clues that pointed toward a coordinated, professional plot.

Information on suspected police involvement was available to the Swedish press since last spring, Agrell said, but was not used because editors didn't know what to do with it. Thus journalists were aware of things the public did not know.

In his *Dagens Nyheter* article, Agrell referred to the "oft-cited and oft-denied qualification of Palme as a security risk" by former SäPo chief Per-Gunnar Vinges. Agrell says the best confirmation of his theory is the letter by Vinges that *Dagens Nyheter* printed after his piece ran. In it Vinges denied again that he said that about Palme, but agreed with Agrell's general analysis.

Important to the "patriotic motive," said Agrell, is the timing. Palme was killed a little more than a month before a scheduled state visit to Moscow in early April 1986. Palme had stressed the visit as an important foreign policy move. He intended to end the Swedish-Soviet dispute over Soviet submarine incursions in Swedish waters (see accompanying story). Strong resistance from right-wing parties had forced Palme to postpone the visit several times. Press op-

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Sweden's underwater flying saucers

Every summer brings its quota of Russian submarine sightings in Sweden's peaceful fjords. Sometimes it's a shadow in the depths or a periscope amid the gliding swans. Soviet submarines are Sweden's underwater flying saucers: glimpsed but never caught.

To most people, their elusiveness is proof of their advanced technology and sly intent. To a few, it means they don't exist.

The subject elicits from retired security police Commissioner Melker Bentler (see accompanying story) a skeptical laugh. Russian submarines are "the Swedish equivalent of the Loch Ness monster," he says.

A 1985 book by Ingmar Myhrberg and a prize-winning 95-minute documentary film by Maj. Wechseltmann argue that the Soviet submarine scare is a farce put on by the Swedish navy. This is much too disrespectful a position to be believed by many Swedes.

One Soviet submarine did unquestionably invade Swedish waters. On Nov. 29, 1981, a Soviet U-137 submarine of the "Whiskey" type ran aground in a heavy fog on the southern coast of Sweden. The Russian crew claimed to have gone astray due to a failure of navigational equipment. Swedish military authorities said the Whiskey was a spy ship.

Wechseltmann's film shows that the "spy" sub attracted the attention of local people for miles around with its loud diesel engine that sounded "in trouble" to a marine journalist with an experienced ear. The first Swedish naval officer who saw it took it for a Swedish sub on its way to the scrap heap. The Whiskey is a Russian copy of a 1945 German U-boat, type 21, long since considered totally obsolete by Western navies. But the Russians have a habit of not throwing old military equipment away.

Interviewed by Wechseltmann, Professor Ulrich Gabler of Lubeck—the German designer of more than 100 submarines, including type 21 and half the conventional submarines in the West—called the Whiskey "most unsuitable" for snooping in fjords since it is too high to submerge in the shallow waters and cannot turn around in the narrows. British Adm. Ian McGeoch, a commander of NATO subs in the Eastern Atlantic and editor of *The Naval Review*, said it was "unlikely in the extreme" that the sub was on a spying mission.

The Whiskey could get only dance music on its damaged radio aerial direction finder. The magnetic compass was almost impossible to read because the glass was yellow with age and covered with years of scratches. The Russians said they got lost because their gyro compass didn't work. The Swedes could not verify this because when they came aboard the Russians had taken the gyro compass apart, ostensibly to see what was wrong. The Swedish navy concluded that the

submarine had been caught on a spying mission.

This incident, known as "Whiskey on the rocks," was very damaging to Swedish-Soviet relations.

A year later, in October 1982, the Swedish media, with prodding from the navy, embarked on the great Russian submarine hunt. After presumed submarine sightings in the narrow fjord of Harsfjärden 350 journalists were herded into a press room for a fortnight at the Berga naval base to cover the chase. With nothing to do and nothing to see except Swedish naval vessels and helicopters circling dramatically above the "trapped Soviet submarine," reporters let their imaginations do the work.

Banner headlines announced: "Sub will be netted here"; "Prison camp for crew" "He (with photo) will interrogate Russian sub crew"; "Give up or blow up." Some fancied the plight of the trapped Russians: "A hell below." And best of all, with a vivid drawing of anguished men: "Crew can be driven to suicide."

"Captured!" yelled one tabloid.

But it wasn't.

What happened? How did the utterly trapped submarine, or submarines, escape? How, incidentally, did it stay underwater for 12 days, something Professor Gabler categorically calls impossible for a submarine small enough for such shallow waters? Submersion time for a "mini-sub," such as the Russians were thought to be creeping about in, is 12 hours. After that, it must surface to recharge batteries and oxygen.

However that may be, public alarm at the Russian U-boat invasion enabled naval officers who had been complaining of cutbacks in their equipment to get more money from parliament. The failure to catch a real sub, even with a camera, gave rise to two sorts of rumors. Disrespectful persons like Wechseltmann think the navy lied. On the other hand, according to informed observers, there were rumors in naval circles that "we were forced to let a sub go that was caught because Olof Palme didn't want diplomatic repercussions."

Maj. Wechseltmann is sure that Palme didn't believe the submarine incursion stories. "He knew the Russians and the Swedish military too well," she told *In These Times*. Palme had begun his career in military intelligence and was certainly harder to fool than many other political leaders.

Yet it would be politically impossible for any Swedish leader to publicly contradict the official military version. Palme was planning to settle the troublesome submarine dispute, which had poisoned Soviet-Swedish relations, in talks with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachov during his planned state visit to Moscow in April 1986. What solution he had in mind remains part of the Palme mystery. —D.J.

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Sun sets on Reagan's fondest dream

Last week, as the ship was sinking, Arturo Cruz got off. This symbolic blow to Ronald Reagan's passionate obsession was followed the next day by a 230-196 vote in the House of Representatives to delay sending the remaining \$40 million of \$105 million in aid to the contras for six months.

This, too, was a symbolic act—even if the Senate joins the House on this bill, the president's veto of it won't be overridden. But it was also a clear signal that the jig is up. Ronald Reagan came to office promising to bring back the glory days of empire. But at least for him and his neo-conservative clique, this script does not have a happy ending. Reagan can play at being Teddy Roosevelt, but unlike T.R., Reagan has a big mouth but a small stick.

Administration fury over their inability to crush what they see as a small band of impoverished Nicaraguans comes from frustration at being unable to do what past administrations did openly in the teens and '20s, and covertly in the post-World War II years. Calvin Coolidge, in 1927, was also accused of conducting a "private war" in Nicaragua in support then of an unpopular puppet regime.

Like Reagan, Coolidge insisted that we were "not making war on Nicaragua any more than a policeman on the street is making war on passers-by." We were simply keeping order in our back yard.

And then, too, the Coolidge administration accused Mexico of acting as the Soviet Union's "catpaw" in Nicaragua. "The Bolshevik leaders," Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg told Congress, "have had very definite ideas with respect to the role that Mexico and Latin America are to play in their general program of world revolution." Their plan, Kellogg argued, was to use Mexico and Nicaragua "as a base for activity against the United States."

Like Reagan, however, Kellogg presented no evidence to back up his claim, so a Congress then more independent and less intimidated by official anti-Communism refused to support administration policy. This didn't faze Coolidge, who sent his own emissary, former Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, backed up by 2,500 Marines, to Nicaragua to "clean up that mess"—which, of course, Stimson did.

The bad news: All of this took place when Ronald Reagan was already in his late teens. But how things have changed, both for better and for worse. Those pesky little Latinos are no longer so easy to push around, supported as they are by a world-wide upsurge of

movements for self-determination and independence. And the American people are no longer as unconcerned about other peoples' sovereignty or as blindly supportive of overseas military intervention.

For us, though not for the administration, that's the good side. The bad side is that leaders of both major parties and a majority of Congress now share Coolidge and Reagan's Cold War views. That's what makes the vote against contra aid something less than we would like it to be.

There are some members of Congress whose opposition to contra aid is based on the principle that Nicaragua, like all Third World nations, has the right to determine its own fate, even if that's not good for General Motors. But most share the view of *New York Times* editor A.M. Rosenthal, who wrote recently that if the contras could clean up their act, "unite militarily, choose a coherent political leadership and become strong enough either to fight effectively or negotiate effectively," then it would be OK for us to overthrow the Sandinista regime.

During the House debate on last week's bill to postpone contra aid, leading Democrats used narrow, technical arguments in support of their positions. "It is wrong in our democratic country for our president to begin his war for democracy by keeping it a secret from the American people," said Rep. Richard A. Gephardt (D-MO), a presidential candidate. And Rep. David E. Bonior (D-MI), who managed the debate for the Democrats, insisted that "the full extent of corruption in the contra program" had to be exposed "before we can consider sending another dime to the contras."

More of the same: Given that some 62 percent of the American people oppose contra aid, these statements hardly reflect strong principled opposition. Whether or not the level of corruption in the contra program is exposed, the American people are likely now to remain strongly opposed to further aid. So the contras are a lost cause.

But what about a future Democratic administration? Clearly, we can't assume that the Democratic leadership, anymore than the Republican, would refrain from covert or overt intervention in the internal affairs of Third World nations, even though that rhetorical principle is mouthed by both parties.