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Choosing Futures: Alva Myrdal and the Construction of Swedish Futures Studies, 1967–1972*

Jenny Andersson

Summary: This article discusses the Swedish discourse on futures studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It focuses on the futures discourse of the group appointed by the Prime Minister, Olof Palme, in 1967 under the chairmanship of Alva Myrdal. The Swedish futures discourse focused on futures studies as a democratic means of reform in defence of the Swedish model and "Swedish" values of solidarity and equality, in opposition to an international futurology dominated by the Cold War and dystopic narratives of global disaster. The article suggests that the creation of Swedish futures studies, culminating in a Swedish institute for futures studies, can be seen as a highpoint of postwar planning and the Swedish belief in the possibility of constructing a particularly Swedish future from a particularly Swedish past.

INTRODUCTION

In 1971, the Swedish Prime Minister and leader of the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiska arbetareparti, SAP), Olof Palme, appointed a group chaired by Alva Myrdal – feminist, social policy researcher, ambassador, minister, and eventually, in 1982, Nobel Peace Prize laureate[1] – to study the future. In the early 1970s, Alva Myrdal was well-known through her work on disarmament and world peace, as well as, in the Swedish political context, her radical equality programme for the SAP in 1969. The equality programme was an ambitious attempt to relate social democratic ideology to the critique of the late 1960s and to rethink the

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1. Alva Myrdal, *The Game of Disarmament* (New York, 1976); Yvonne Hirdman, *Alva Myrdal: Något kan man väl alltid göra. Texter 1932–1982* (Stockholm, 2002); Peter Wallensteen, *Alva Myrdal in International Affairs* (Uppsala, 2003).

concept of equality for the future; but it clashed with party ideology and left Alva Myrdal disappointed and embittered with party orthodoxy.[2]

By the late 1960s, the future had become a deeply troubling sphere. The feeling that characterized the 1950s and early 1960s – that one was standing on the threshold of a future soon to be brought about by technological wonder and economic expansion – had evaporated. Progress, particularly in its postwar conceptualization as economic growth, had led to the exhaustion of natural resources, new social problems in a competitive society, and a widening gulf between a developed and a developing world.[3] Technology no longer seemed to offer a better future; technological advances actually made even the worst conceivable scenarios seem like a perfectly logical extension of the present, a conception expressed in metaphors such as "megadeaths", "mutually assured destruction", and "ecocide". These developments shook social democracy's idea of the very process of change. Its postwar perception of change as an evolutionary process towards economic and social progress was replaced by a fear of the unpredictable nature of change. Moreover, the economic, political, and cultural changes of the 1960s challenged the role of social democracy as the agent of change and the carrier of the future. The future seemed to be slipping out of the hands of social reformism. This idea of change as "runaway change" that left both the individual and politics behind was a fundamental element in futures studies and of socialist interest in them.

For Swedish social democracy, interest in the future originated in other issues, specific to Swedish political history and the history of the SAP, particularly the centrality of the welfare state and the concept of a *folkhem*, a "people's home", based on solidarity, equality, and universalism. The means to achieve the people's home were first and foremost planning: *planhushållning* (economic planning), which laid the foundations for a democratic mixed economy with welfare as its primary objective, but also social planning, which during the interwar period expressed itself most clearly in the social engineering of Alva and her husband – economist Gunnar Myrdal. This was the Swedish model that Marquis de Childs described in his famous book of 1932: not Soviet communism, not American capitalism, but a distinct "middle way".[4] Several writers have pointed to how, from its breakthrough in the 1930s, the notion of the people's home was built around a perception of owning the future, of

2. SAP, *Jämlikhet* (Stockholm, 1969); Tim Tilton, *The Political Theory of Swedish Social Democrats: Through the Welfare State to Revolution* (Oxford, 1990).

3. See H.W. Arndt, *Economic Development: The History of an Idea* (Chicago, IL, 1987); Robert Ayres, *Turning Point: The End of the Growth Paradigm* (London, 1998); Eva Friman, *No Limits: The 20th Century Discourse on Economic Growth* (Umeå, 2002).

4. Marquis de Childs, *Sweden, the Middle Way* (New Haven, CT, 1936).

having found that middle way between communism and capitalism, a way that seemed to offer a unique path forward.[5]

This sense of owning the future was a strong element in the concept of the "Swedish model", a concept that gained in popularity in the crisis-ridden 1960s and 1970s as part of the construction of Nordic particularity at the very moment this particularity seemed threatened.[6] Indeed, from the late 1960s the people's home seemed to be increasingly at odds with change. An increasingly volatile international economy, but also the rapidly changing political and cultural circumstances of the 1960s and a threatening world order dominated by the Cold War and the superpowers' struggle for political and cultural hegemony, led to feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty about the capacity of the Swedish model to survive. The Swedish discussion on futures studies began within this discourse of protecting the *folkhem* from a future as a social, political, and cultural other. To this extent, it is tempting to think that, in the Swedish context, futures studies represented both a kind of high point in the Swedish model's particular version of modernity, and a crisis of that modernity, in the same way that futures studies, as interpreted by the Alva Myrdal group, came to embody both an extreme idea of social engineering – the idea of engineering the future in the name of the common good – and a fundamental critique of the objectivity and technocracy at the basis of social planning.[7]

EVIL FUTUROLOGY OR THE WORK OF MAN – DYSTOPIAS AND UTOPIAS OF FUTURES STUDIES

The rise of futures studies – or futurology – as an academic field from the mid 1960s must be placed in the context of other intellectual developments during that decade.[8] The 1960s have often been regarded as an era of utopias.[9] But the utopias of the late 1960s, involving a more equal, a greener, sexually liberated, and peaceful world organized around the subject-individual, went hand in hand with rejections of the failed utopias of modernity, such as the critique of capitalism in Marcuse's *One*

5. Ole Waever, "Nordic Nostalgia, Northern Europe After the Cold War", *International Affairs*, 68 (1992), pp. 77–102; Lars Trägårdh, "Welfare State Nationalism, Sweden and the Spectre of 'Europe'", in Lene Hansen and Ole Weaver (eds), *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States* (London [etc.], 2001).

6. Bo Stråth, *Folkhemmet möter Europa* (Stockholm, 1992).

7. *Idem*, "Nordic Modernity: Origins, Trajectories and Prospects", *Thesis Eleven*, 77 (2004).

8. Wendell Bell, *Foundations of Futures Studies: Human Science for a New Era*, vol. 1 (New Brunswick, NJ, 1997).

9. Luisa Passerini, "'Utopia' and Desire", *Thesis Eleven*, February 2002, pp. 11–31; Peter Wagner, "The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics", *Thesis Eleven*, February 2002, pp. 31–46; Giovanni Statera, *Death of a Utopia: The Development and Decline of Student Movements in Europe* (New York, 1975).

Dimensional Man,[10] and with dystopias, such as the alarm clock that triggered the environmentalist movement, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring.*[11] The roots of futures studies lay more in these dystopic narratives of late modernity than in earlier traditions of utopian thinking, more in nightmares of imagined catastrophe than in dreams of a desired future.[12]

In the social sciences, the late 1960s saw a development in which the postwar emphasis on progress and the technical administering of growth and social reform was replaced by an emphasis on risk, and hence with the possibility of predicting and avoiding it. Fundamental to the rise of futurology and futures studies was the belief that prediction was not a product of fantasy but a field of reason. The study of the future was based on the extension of facticity, logic, and rationality into the unobservable domain of the future, making the risks it posed for humanity controllable, or at least manipulable. So the future became a sphere of knowledge, politics, and planning.[13] But the discursive field of the future was full of competing discourses and technologies. The future raised fundamental questions as to the nature of causality, of what constituted a fact, as well as to an issue of such concern in the 1960s: the question of the relationship between politics and knowledge in planning and social reform.[14] Moreover, the future was a field of colonization and permeated by the Cold War.

In the early 1960s, futurology was dominated by the forecasts and prognoses carried out by industrial think tanks and military interests such as the Hudson Institute, an American business think tank, which published *The Year 2000*, and the RAND Corporation, founded after World War II by the US Air Force as a research and development institution. At RAND, the futurologist Herman Kahn developed the scenario technique, a technique used to construct hypothetical military-threat situations, and the Delphi method of forecasting, which utilized expert panel discussions on possible future developments.[15] In Europe, the

10. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London, 1964).
11. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston, MA, [etc.], 1962).
12. In *Futures Past* Koselleck argued that in the Enlightenment the future became a sphere of fantasy, a utopia that could only be reached through imagination. In contrast, the rise of the idea of dystopia in the postwar period coincided with a turn in futures narratives towards narratives of science and rationality, or a narrative of *will* in contrast to earlier narratives of the future as faith, destiny, or teleology. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (London, 1985); Georges Minois, *Histoire de l'avenir* (Paris, 1996); and Bell, *Foundations of Futures Studies*, vol. 2.
13. Bernard Cazes, "Les reflexions prospectives. Un essai de typologie", *Futuribles*, September 1991, pp. 29–40.
14. On the construction of facticity see Mary Poovey, *The History of Modern Fact* (Chicago, IL, 1998). On social science and politics see Peter Wagner, *Sozialwissenschaften und Staat, Frankreich, Italien, Deutschland 1870–1980* (Dordrecht, 1990).
15. Bell, *Foundations of Futures Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 29–38; Herman Kahn and Anthony Wiener, *The Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years* (New York, 1967).

Club of Rome emerged from an OECD symposium on forecasting and planning in 1968. The Club of Rome was an informal network, consisting of representatives of industry but also of leading statesmen. In 1972 it published *The Limits to Growth*, a large-scale computer simulation study conducted by MIT.[16] *The Limits to Growth* argued that the rapid industrial development of the postwar period had come to the end, and that the world was now faced with an end to growth and with the global consequences of industrial expansion: exhausted global resources, pollution, and population decline. The Club of Rome emphasized these problems as the future environment for multinational industry, demanding that OECD countries take on emerging problems at a global level in order to ensure the survival of capitalism through long-term planning.[17]

The politically and intellectually radicalized climate of the late 1960s influenced a critical futurological reaction that took the form of a critique of modernity and of existing futurology. In contrast to the technological or economic basis of futurology, this critique was humanist, rooted in the social sciences, philosophy, and history. Moreover, it contained a strong critique of the prevalent concept of progress and of historicist narratives of change as a linear development over time. Instead, it emphasized the question of choice and change. The technologies and methods of futurology, and its bias towards industrial and military interests, were accused of anti-democratic tendencies, technological determinism, and the unproblematized extrapolation of trends from present conditions. Its dystopic elements were said to create self-fulfilling prophecies and feelings of helplessness by presenting the future as a paved road to destruction.

Two of the chief representatives of this critical futurology were the Norwegian philosopher Johan Galtung, who coined the term "chronological imperialism" for future visions that extended the values of the present into the future, thus colonizing future times through the interests of the present, and the French philosopher Bertrand de Jouvenel. The publication of de Jouvenel's book *L'art de la conjoncture* in 1964 disseminated the terms *futures studies* and *futuribles* as distinctive notions for the critical futures discourse. *Futures* (plural) highlighted the element of choice between alternative future visions.[18] Critical futures studies were based on a particular epistemological argument: conjecture was characterized by universal uncertainty, but not by complete relativity. The art of conjecture was a reflexive uncertainty, what might be termed an art of good guessing, through a systematized analytical process where the postulates and values of the conjectures were also subject to scrutiny.[19]

16. Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth* (New York, 1976).
17. *Ibid.*
18. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *The Art of Conjecture* (New York, 1967).
19. Stephan Schwarz, *Knowledge and Concepts in Futures Studies* (Boulder, CO, 1976).

Futures studies were therefore not just about producing forecasts and prognoses; they also had to tackle the analytical processes through which predictions were made. The *futuribles* were the variables of future developments (such as demography or technology), the components of change, or the "possible descendants of the present".[20]

From the mid 1960s, futures studies became part of most national administrations and an element in the competition between East and West over increasingly sophisticated planning models. In socialist countries, *prognostiks* were made part of economic planning. Rocca describes the fate of the Soviet Forecasting Association.[21] Under Stalin it was grimly repressed; "anyone who attempted to look too far into the future was quite summarily brought back to the present". Under Khrushchev it was encouraged, but rapidly reined in when it produced futures too alternative for the taste of the regime. In Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring inspired the founding of a futurological society in explicit critique of the contemporary scientific and technological revolution. In the West, the French Commissariat du Plan included economic forecasting, and the autonomous activities of de Jouvenel's Association Internationale de Futuribles were supported by the national administration.

This was the context in which the Swedish debate on futures studies began. Swedish planning in the postwar period was dominated by the *Långtidsutredningen*, the economic five-year plan, which was primarily concerned with labour resources and public-sector expenditure. In 1967, the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (Ingenjörsvetenskapsakademin, IVA) suggested creating a Swedish institute for futures studies, in order to widen planning into new fields and increase foresight and predictability. The report had a strong bias towards technological and defence-industry-related interests.[22] It was also immediately criticized. In an article in the social-democratic daily *Aftonbladet*, a professor of mathematics, Lars Ingelstam (later a member of the Alva Myrdal group and eventually the director of the first Secretariat for Futures Studies), argued that futures studies should be based on the public interest. "Public interest" in this sense meant that futures studies should be at the service of the social democratic government, for the long-term creation of a socialist society.[23] Futures studies were eventually addressed in a party report on research in 1975 which stressed the political control

20. Cazes, "Les reflexions prospectives", p. 31.

21. Gordon Rocca, "'A Second Party in our Midst', the History of the Soviet Forecasting Association", *Social Studies of Science*, 11 (1989), pp. 199–247.

22. Ingenjörsvetenskapsakademin, *Ett svenskt institut för framtidsstudier* (Stockholm, 1967).

23. Björn Wittrock, *Möjligheter och gränser. Framtidsstudier i politik och planering* (Stockholm, 1990). In 1971, Ingelstam also wrote a memo called "Socialdemokraterna och framtidsforskningen" (Social Democracy and Futures Research), Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 66f.

over knowledge of the future.[24] But another objection to the IVA report came from Parliament, where the Liberal Party (Folkpartiet) argued that the public interest of futures studies demanded that they be conducted by an autonomous research institute, where they would be independent not only of business interests but also of socialist government planning. A third objection came from the white-collar trade-union federation, the TCO (Tjänstemännens centralorganisation), which accused the IVA report of displaying "meritocratic attitudes", and of allowing scientific expertise to dominate at the expense of democratic interests.[25]

In 1969, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, Olof Palme, the Board of Research (Forskningsberedningen), a body coordinating research in Sweden, concluded that the study of the future was of direct interest to public policy. The study of the future was not the art of "prognosis", a passive and descriptive activity, but a normative activity of "planning", in the interests of the public good.[26] When, on 3 December 1970, he expressed the government's intention to appoint a working group for futures studies, Olof Palme reiterated this outlook on futures studies, seeing them as a tool for national policy choices and based on Swedish values of neutrality, independence, and solidarity. If Sweden did not engage in the study of the future, Palme said, it would be dependent on future visions foreign to Swedish values. The study of the future was to seek a Swedish path between two seemingly existing alternatives of the future.

Olof Palme's personal standpoint in the conflict between futurology and futures studies is difficult to assess. He did have contacts with established futurology and the Club of Rome, but he was also involved in attempts to construct a bridge between the competing future visions of East and West through the forecasting activities of small, social democratic, and neutral countries. There is a letter in Alva Myrdal's archive to Olof Palme from the secretary of the Board of Research, Arne Engström, concerning the Club of Rome's "The Predicament of Mankind", suggesting that Aurelio Peccei, founder and first President of the Club of Rome and the Vice-President of Fiat, be invited to Stockholm (as he subsequently was). The letter also mentions Alexander King, another leading figure of the Club of Rome, and ongoing discussions between King and the Austrian leader, Bruno Kreisky, concerning the organization of a futurology institute based on initiatives by small, neutral, and social democratic states.[27] The institute in question is the Institute for Applied Systemic Analysis, which was created in Vienna in 1972, with the aim of

24. SAP, *Socialdemokratisk politik för forskning. Förslag till forskningspolitiskt program* (Stockholm, 1975), pp. 6, 20.
25. Wittrock, *Möjligheter och gränser*, pp. 35, 39.
26. Memo, 3 February 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–1.
27. Engström to Palme, 14 February 1972, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–2.

bridging the differences between the planning doctrines of East and West, and Kreisky was anxious for Olof Palme to participate.[28]

The controversial nature of these contacts and of the Club of Rome in the Swedish context is illustrated in a series of notes in Alva Myrdal's archive from Hans Palmstierna, one of Sweden's first environmentalists. Most of these notes are to Alva's husband, the economist Gunnar Myrdal. In the spring of 1971, Palmstierna wrote to Myrdal about the state of "the so-called future research":

> Dear Gunnar. Sending you a nasty sign of the times. Two gentlemen from this so-called Rome Club showed up at the Board of Research. They come from Boston, where they have established some kind of headquarters. One of them is called Peccei and is the vice president of Fiat. The moral standard is quite clear when you hear him, after two cocktails, say that it would be best if India were freed from people [...] so that other people (white?) could take over. To his mind, accumulated DDT in Indians would be a great solution [...]. Palme should never have let the rabble into the Board of Research. They represent a kind of sophisticated neofascism [...].[29]

And on 5 March 1972, Palmstierna wrote to Myrdal that the Club of Rome, spreading "its doctrine like a plague over Europe", was having an obvious influence on Palme.[30]

However, when Olof Palme appointed the futures studies group on 4 May 1971 he stressed that the role of futures studies was to create an alternative to "evil futurology" and to increase the scope of the democratic small state in a world in which the influence of multinational corporations and the superpowers was growing.[31]

> One must emphasize the obvious risks [...], not only for developing countries but also for small states like Sweden, if the study of the future becomes something of an uncontrolled monopoly for a small number of especially powerful interest groups. Biased future visions, produced in various ways, can in a dangerous way induce a public presumption of predetermined development for nations and peoples, when in reality it is the citizens themselves who can and must decide the future development of society. Our own study of the future, departing from democratic objectives and with pronounced demands for international solidarity, is an important and necessary instrument for us and for the world surrounding us. In this way, the small state can create a public debate as to what our future world should be.[32]

28. Interview with Lars Ingelstam, 20 February 2002.
29. Palmstierna to Myrdal, 13 March 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol.5: 066–2.
30. Palmstierna to Myrdal, 5 March 1972, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–2.
31. Statsrådsberedningen, "Pressmeddelande", 4 May 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5:066–1.
32. *Ibid.*

"Our own study of the future" was not only a question of national survival but also of presenting the world with a Swedish alternative to the "uncontrolled monopoly" exercised over the future. Palme repeated his views a year later in a speech to the German trade union IG Metall in Germany. To Palme, the future was irrevocably the active creation of man. It was up to living generations to choose the forces that would be permitted to create the future: technology, profit, solidarity? No-one could abdicate responsibility for the future by believing blindly either in dystopic prognoses or in the promise of technology. "*Ob sie nun schlecht oder gut ist, so ist die Zukunft doch das Eigene Werk des Menschen*."[33] And for Palme, the fundamental question was, then, not just *what* the future would be, but *whose* future it would be, and in whose interests it would be shaped.

Alva Myrdal was appointed by Palme to chair the group. The other participants were all scholars and experts: Martin Fehrm came from the research bureau of the Swedish military (Försvarets forskningsanstalt) and had been a member of the team that drew up the IVA report in 1969; Marianne Frankenhaeuser was a professor of psychology, Torsten Hägerstrand a professor of geography; Lars Ingelstam was Professor of Mathematics and Planning Theory at the Royal Institute of Technology (he had already been an active spokesman in the debate following the IVA report); and Birgitta Odén was a professor of history at Lund University.[34]

CHOOSING FUTURES

At the first meeting of the group, Alva Myrdal defined the central problem for Swedish futures studies as being that of how a small state could find its own model of the future.[35] America, once the continent of the future and the model of progressive politics for the Myrdals, had become a threat to the future, and the future, Alva Myrdal believed, now lay in the "fundamental" Swedish values of democracy, solidarity, and equality.[36]

> Yesterday [he] gave me a book, *Europe in the Year 2000*, and it says among other things that we should consider the American development since they are twenty years ahead of Europe. I guess this is precisely what we would deny from a Swedish perspective, that they are twenty years ahead of us and that we should

33. "Whether for good or bad, the future is still the product of Man himself." Speech by Palme to IG Metall in Oberhausen, Germany, 11 April 1972, National Archives, Arbetsgruppen för framtidsstudier , vol. 5.

34. There was a seventh member, the economist Ingemar Ståhl, but he never concluded his work for the group.

35. The meeting was recorded and there are transcripts of the tapes in the Labour Movements Archives and the National Archives, Stockholm.

36. The Myrdals travelled to America in the 1930s and wrote enthusiastically on the progressive character of the New Deal.

> follow their development. [...]. But this is just the terribly dangerous thing about most futures studies conducted so far, that precisely because of their technological focus they shrink the independence of the small state, they tend to reduce the scope of the democratic Man – the things that we consider our fundamental values in this country. Therefore I think that areas like democratic participation, Man as a social creature, the quality of life that the most courageous futures studies speak of, these are issues that we have to deal with. If we are to think ourselves towards [*forska fram*] a future in Sweden which differs from the future that will follow from sailing with all the others – it should be something really grand.[37]

To construct a future of one's own was indeed a rather grand ambition. The protocols of the group's first meeting suggest that its members were rather overwhelmed by the huge ambitions of their task. An indication of the sense that they were changing the course of history is evident in the fact that this first meeting was taped and copies of the tapes placed in the National Archives.

The way to change history, the primary method of the group, was to rethink the future based on social science, rationality, and knowledge. The activities of the group were permeated by the idea that there was such a thing as the good future, and that this demanded a degree of expertise, planning, and moulding. Futures studies were explicitly regarded as a tool for reformism, a tool actively to create and choose the future; "mould[ing] the future rather than letting us be moulded by it".[38] The title of the group's final report in 1972 was significant: *Att välja framtid* [Choosing Futures], thus emphasizing human will and choice.

The emphasis on a sound knowledge base for planning and policy can be put into what has often been described as a rationalist Swedish political-cultural framework, characterized by a strong link between the expertise of social science and the political values of a social democratic movement.[39] But the futures studies group rejected technocratic social engineering. Futures studies were a kind of public good, and producing futures was a public responsibility, but also an activity that demanded a high degree of reflection from the futurists themselves. The group was highly aware of the problem of defining a particular knowledge and of using it in constructing the future; it saw a specific tension between knowledge production and democratic participation. "I am uneasy at the prospect of us sitting here like a select group of top scholars, producing our values and points of view on what the future should consist of", confessed

37. Protocol, 18 May 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–1.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Katrin Fridjonsdottir, "Social Science and the Swedish Model: Sociology at the Service of the Welfare State", in P. Wagner, B. Wittrock, and R.P. Whitley (eds), *Discourses on Society: The Shaping of the Social Science Disciplines* (Cambridge, 1991); Bo Rothstein, *The Social Democratic State* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1996).

the historian Birgitta Odén at the group's first meeting; and Alva Myrdal expressed her concern in the term "future dictators".[40] The fear of technocratic futures studies led the group to question positivism and its "myth" of objectivity as the scientific framework for futures studies.[41] Clearly influenced both by Gunnar Myrdal and the Frankfurt School, they rejected the idea, dominant both in the social sciences and planning in the 1950s and early 1960s, that futures studies, or any planning activity, were value-neutral activities based on a rational process of knowledge accumulation.[42] Prognoses were never neutral, and the hidden values of science, researchers, and planners had to be exposed through public debate. In fact, values were a "cardinal question" in futures studies; one that had to be addressed scientifically.[43]

Rather than defining a particular knowledge about the future, the group's use of rationality took the form of an epistemological critique of existing futurology and the creation of a discourse around the conditions for the Swedish study of the "good" future. The first step towards this future was to deconstruct the future, through an analysis of existing "paralysing" future discourses and their influence on the scope for thinking "freely" about the future.[44]

> Have futures studies been conducted elsewhere in ways that limit our freedom? Are Swedish companies conducting studies that prevent society from embarking on futures studies? Can the futures studies of multinational companies interfere with our scope? What consequences does the planning of foreign governments have on Swedish conditions? Furthermore, the superpowers and their military technology are tremendously influential on both technological and social development. Eventually, there is the possibility that the models that theoretical futures studies are a part of are of such a character that they limit the scope of our imagination and thus constrain our perspective on future alternatives.[45]

To free the Swedish future from the future of others required a number of conditions, political and epistemological.

First, futures studies should deal with real possibilities of change, by studying phenomena that *could* be changed and affected by public decision-making, not with changes supposed to be beyond the scope of politics (such as major climate changes or planetary movements). Similarly, futures studies must not deal with occurrences that could be

40. Protocol, 18 May 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–1.
41. Birgitta Odén, *Planering, värdestruktur och demokratisk participation,* Ds Ju 1972:27 (Stockholm, 1972), pp. 9, 16, 32.
42. Gunnar Myrdal, *Objectivity in Social Research* (New York, 1969).
43. Arbetsgruppen för framtidsstudier, *Att välja framtid,* SOU 1972:59 *(*Stockholm, 1972), p. 12.
44. Myrdal to the members of the futures studies group, 21 August 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–2.
45. Protocol, 18 May 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 066–1.

changed (such as technology) in deterministic ways. The future had to be about active change.

Secondly, futures studies had to be concerned with the possibility of "ordinary people" to influence the future. This required that futures studies generate a realistic public discourse on the future, to show the real limits to the capacity of change: what was possible to change and what was not. They would have to present knowledge and information in such a way that citizens could grasp the difference between alternative futures and the possibility of choice between them. This posed a challenge in several ways. Many decisions having a great impact on the future were taken outside the democratic sphere, in industry and business. A large number of decisions determining the future were taken without reflecting upon their possible consequences and repercussions in another time or another area. Moreover, the issues at stake in modern society were so complicated that citizens could not be expected to grasp the reach and scope of the complexities at hand. The aim of futures studies must therefore be to make the future democratic, by promoting the participation of citizens and highlighting alternatives.

Since the production of persuasive futures was ultimately about the power to change the future, and therefore a possible tool of social conflict, the futures study group also stated that democratic futures studies had a particular responsibility to society's weakest groups. The effects of decisions on the future for the poor, the elderly, the unemployed, and the disabled therefore had to be taken into account. This applied particularly to the very weakest group in society: the unborn. One of the main reasons for futures studies was, the group agreed, that the democratic state had a responsibility to represent the interests of future generations against the interests of the living, since the living did not necessarily act with the interests of the unborn in mind.[46]

VALUES AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

The group's interest in the "cardinal question" of values was not only a matter of critical epistemology, but also of the role of values in the process of change. This originated in the contemporary impression, strongly present in the discussions of the group, that the values – growth and material standards – of the postwar generation had melted into thin air. The problem of rapidly changing value structures led the group to discuss historical method for the (as the historian Odén put it) twofold question of values for futures studies: How did values change, and was it possible to find general patterns behind value change in a way that would permit

46. Arbetsgruppen för framtidsstudier, *Att välja framtid*, pp. 11, 13, Wittrock, *Möjligheter och gränser*.

predictions and generalizations of value change? "Futures studies must take into consideration the fact that different generations have different orders of preference, and that rising expectations and new demands follow every progress. Rapid technological and social changes affect the values of people, but meanwhile the mechanism of value change is only very fragmentarily known."[47]

The issue of values had been increasingly addressed in the 1950s and 1960s within economics and political science, largely in the analysis of preferences behind consumerist behaviour, but also in Arrow's social-choice analysis of preferential systems and of logic in collective decision-making. Odén's conclusion was that none of these perspectives came close to addressing the problem of how to predict value change, but that instead systematic historical analysis might offer a way to find general connections between phenomena such as technological and demographic change and value change, in order to understand what seemed to have been revolutionary changes in values and culture over the past decade. A historical perspective also implied a critical position on the historicist and evolutionary theories of change in the 1960s. Odén was highly critical of the historicist tendency in futurology, as well as of the historical writings of Arnold Toynbee.[48]

But the preoccupation with rapid change also posed a question regarding *continuity*. If everything was changing, what could be counted upon for the future? This question led Odén to search for a historical methodology of distinction between continuity and change, and between stable and fluctuating structures in the process of change. Which value changes were quick and volatile, and which were slower, more stable, more reliable? She came to the slightly disconcerting conclusion that, from a historical perspective, the values that seemed extremely stable to the present were actually volatile. Democracy, for instance, had a relatively short history (just a few hundred years or so), whereas values such as survival and reproduction seemed genuinely stable. From this perspective, the "Swedish" values of neutrality, solidarity, and equality seemed less reliable as cornerstones of the good future.[49]

Behind the interest of the futures studies group in the mechanisms of value change, it is difficult not to see Swedish social democracy's concern from the 1950s onwards with ideas of a value revolution. A core idea of Swedish social democracy in the 1950s and 1960s was the notion of *förväntningarnas missnöje* (literally the "discontentment of expectation"), a metaphor that drew on J.K. Galbraith's notion of a "revolution of rising expectations".[50] *Förväntningarnas missnöje* was a political slogan that

47. Protocol, 18 May 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 066–1.
48. Odén, *Planering, värdestruktur och demokratisk participation*, pp. 18, 37.
49. *Ibid*., p. 28.
50. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York, 1964).

described the ideological problem of growth, which led to new forms of consumption and demands on public goods such as education or health care. Odén linked the problem of changing demands to Maslow's "pyramid" of elementary and sophisticated needs, which challenged politics as the "elementary" values of the postwar generation (values such as employment and consumption) appeared to be replaced by the "sophisticated" demands of the generation of 1968 for a clean environment, equality between the sexes, and solidarity with the Third World.[51]

In Sweden, unlike other European countries, the radicalization of the late 1960s did not tend to take the form of revolutionary movements, but rather of a leftist but reformist critique of the SAP. Nonetheless, it was a critique that, in its radically different idea of the future, took social democracy aback. Alva Myrdal herself pleaded for a radicalized concept of equality at the party congress in 1968, stating that the gap in values between the party and the younger generation had never been wider.[52] Part of this critique, which coexisted with more radical criticisms, such as those by the Vietnam movement FNL or the radical feminist Grupp 8, was channelled to the environmentalist movement.[53] One spectacular event in Swedish political history was the *Almstriden*, the "Battle of the Elm Trees", in 1971: street demonstrations against the felling of trees in the Stockholm park, Kungsträdgården. "Listen to the humming of the elm tree, you who make decisions at city hall and in congress. It may be the future you hear humming there", the journalist Kerstin Anér wrote in words that echo Bob Dylan's song "The Times They Are A-Changin".[54] The environmentalist movement also reverberates in the archives of the Alva Myrdal group. In June 1972, the UN held a conference in Stockholm on "The Human Environment". The conference attracted large sections of the international environmentalist movement, which organized a parallel protest conference – a "pow-wow".[55]

CONTINUOUS WAR! POLLUTION! EXPLOITATION! GLOBAL ECOCIDE! IMPERIALISM!

> Forced by the intensified discussion of the conditions of life on our limited planet, the UN is planning a huge conference on the human environment to be held in Stockholm, Sweden [...]. While the politicians merely pass endless

51. Odén, *Planering, värdestruktur och demokratisk participation*.
52. SAP, *Jämlikhet*.
53. Kjell Östberg, *1968. Då allt var i rörelse* (Stockholm, 2002), Christina Florin and Bengt Nilsson, *Something in the Nature of a Bloodless Revolution* (Umeå, 2002).
54. "Lyss till den almens sus, ni som sitter i stadshus och konselj. Det är kanske framtiden, som susar där"; *Veckojournalen*, 18 May 1971, Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 0661. The song goes "Come senators, congressmen, Please heed the call [...]"; Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin" (1964).
55. The term *pow-wow* is a Native American term referring to a meeting of elders.

> resolutions, we the people have an alternative: we are acting, struggling to create a new way of life. We are having a POW-WOW! POW-WOW is ACTION – direct actions, demonstrations, parades, street theatre, exhibitions, leaflets, bulletins, films, underground comic strips [...] just whatever your thing is to help in the struggle to create a new way of life. [...]. Copy this letter and pass it on to as many friends and groups as possible. We need thousands of contacts around the world to make POW-WOW everywhere! [...]. All power to the Red Indians! WE'RE ALL RED INDIANS. POW-WOW![56]

"Pow-wow" was Red Indians, action, and another world. The world of politics was endless resolutions and an exhausted planet. "Pow-wow" was an obvious metaphor of a paradise lost, a "back to the future", with its call for a return to the Red Indians' harmony with nature and to the absence of both hierarchy and bureaucracy in decision making around the camp fire. Rapid value change was a challenge to reformism and planning. Behind Odén's question on the mechanisms behind value change lurked another question, never explicitly discussed, probably since it pinpointed the dilemma of a democratically chosen and pluralistic, but still collectively "good", future: what values were desired for the future, and how could such desired value changes be protected against other futures?

THE ELEMENTARY PARTICLE OF THE FUTURE AND THE LIMITS OF CHANGE

The discussions of the psychologist Marianne Frankenhaeuser, the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, and the engineer Martin Fehrm mirrored another of the major issues of the late 1960s and early 1970s: the problems of the consequences of industrial growth and of a mode of development where economic and technological progress seemed to threaten the existence and well-being of mankind. This concerned the very concept of progress. What was progress? Was it economic growth and GDP, or human welfare and wellbeing? Was the industrial society, with its demands on human adaptation to economic values and technological change, really the good society?

This discussion mirrored the international debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the qualitative aspects of growth and welfare. In 1971 the OECD published a report that went so far as to question the concept of growth as the guiding star of international economic planning and suggested that it be replaced with the concept of "welfare" or "quality of life".[57] From the late 1960s on, international economic and social planning became increasingly preoccupied with measuring qualitative welfare factors, with so-called social indicators, and with surveys of living

56. In Labour Movements Archives, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5: 0661.
57. OECD, *The Brooks Report* (Paris, 1971).

conditions as measures of progress supplementary to quantitative economic growth. Pioneering work on social indicators had been carried out in Sweden by the Committee on Low Income, the Låginkomstutredningen. This committee became a source of great ideological turmoil for Swedish social democrats as it disclosed the existence of modern poverty in the would-be social paradise of the *folkhem*, and it was highly influential in the leftist critique against the SAP.[58]

The resonance of this ongoing reconceptualization of "growth" as the hegemonic definition of progress was central especially to the work of Frankenhaeuser and Hägerstrand. Their aim was to place the human being and its limits at the centre of the future. Man himself was, as Hägerstrand wrote, "the elementary particle" of society, the smallest denominator of change, and its physical, social, and psychological limits were therefore also the limits to change. In *Om en konsistent*, Hägerstrand designed what he called a "time budget", an alternative to the economic budget in national planning. The core idea of the time budget was that the life cycle of human beings was the constant in the process of change. A person only had a certain amount of time to dispose of, and was physically capable of being in only one place at one time. People not only had to work; they also had to devote parts of their life to rest, to the care of children, domestic work, and other things in life. Most of these things were not productive in the conventional economic sense, but they were essential to both the individual person and to the existence of society. These time factors were constants in change. To plan society with a view to the constant expansion of economic productivity was therefore an anomaly, which meant that the "particle" itself was constantly stretched and pulled to its limits. Rather than planning on the basis of such an elastic concept as economic expansion, the fixed entity of human time should be placed at the centre of planning. Aggregate time – the whole of the added life cycles of individuals living in society – was the fundamental resource, and time had real – physical and cognitive – limits that could not be exceeded without serious social consequences.[59]

Similar ideas about the individual as the limit of change, and about man's capacity to deal with change, were expressed in Frankenhaeuser's work. To her, the contemporary debate on quality of life was a reaction against "competition society": a society based on economic values, where individuals were constantly forced to adapt to rapidly changing technological and economic structures. Though she was very critical of the

58. Jenny Andersson, *Mellan tillväxt och trygghet* (Uppsala, 2003), forthcoming as *Between Growth and Security* (Manchester, 2006).

59. Torsten Hägerstrand, *Om en konsistent, individorienterad samhällsbeskrivning för framtidsstudier*, Ds Ju 1972:25 (Stockholm, 1972). See also Hägerstrand's memo of 29 December 1971, Alva Myrdal's archive, vol. 5:066 g. The time budget drew upon a school of thought called time geography, which identifies the cognitive and physical reach of the individual as an organizing parameter of society's organization of time and space.

dystopic narratives of a work like Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*,[60] she argued that it was clear from the behavioural sciences that there was a limit to the capacity of the human psyche to deal with change. Exposure to over- or understimulation, in the form of information overload or mechanical work, caused stress disorders and feelings of helplessness. She argued that long-term planning had to take into account knowledge from the behavioural sciences in order to understand and plan for such human reactions to change.[61]

A third problem was the question of technology and the relationship between technological change and social change. When was technology a good, and when did good technology become an evil? The group argued that modern technological change differed from historical technological change in the sense that it was so rapid that, unlike historical innovations, it was not gradually embedded and socially accepted. Rather, it led to a confrontation between technology and human-value systems. Futures studies had to address the connection between innovation and values. Technological assessment was about assessing the social and human aspects of technology and emphasizing the moment of choice between technological innovations that brought with them a certain "path-driven" development, such as massive investments in infrastructure or specialized technology, investments that would determine policy choices for a long time.[62]

CONSTRUCTING A SWEDISH FUTURE FROM A SWEDISH PAST: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The group presented its final report, *Att välja framtid*, to Olof Palme on 25 August 1972. As a result of the report, a Secretariat for Futures Studies was set up within the Council of Ministers. Lars Ingelstam became its director. In its first few years, the Secretariat worked on four futures areas: working life, energy supply, resources and growth, and Sweden's place in the world order. In the aftermath of the oil crises, the energy question became the central future question, and in 1978 the Secretariat, by then an autonomous research institute, published a report *Sol eller Uran* (Sun or Uranium?),[63] which attracted much attention. The report discussed the long-term effects of developing new energy technologies. In the mid-1980s a similar study dealt with the big future issue of that time, the organization of health care.[64] In recent years, the institute's focus has been on the future of the

60. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London, 1970).
61. Marianne Frankenhaeuser, *Synpunkter på forskning om människan i framtiden*, Ds Ju 1972:24 (Stockholm, 1972).
62. Hägerstrand, *Om en konsistent*.
63. Måns Lönnroth, *Solar versus Nuclear: Choosing Energy Futures* (Oxford, 1980).
64. Mårten Lagergren, *Time to Care* (Oxford, 1982).

Swedish welfare state in the face of the challenges posed by demographic pressure and the problems of financial sustainability. The institute has also taken on a number of historians, thus strengthening the link between the history of the Swedish model and its future.[65]

The future constructed by the Alva Myrdal group was firmly rooted in the past achievements of the *folkhem*. In that respect it was a future vision strikingly different from the utopias in the history of socialist thought, which placed the future in the future of socialism.[66] To the Alva Myrdal group, the future was in the past: in the safeguarding of the Swedish model as the "good" alternative in an "evil" world. As much as they tried to stay clear of both utopic and dystopic future visions, their utopia took the form of this middle way between the equally threatening dystopias of the superpowers.

The problem facing the Alva Myrdal group was how to create the good future. But in the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s creating the good future was a difficult enterprise. The belief in positivism, science, technology, and rational planning which informed earlier socialist utopic conceptions was, in the debates within the Alva Myrdal group, replaced by the emphasis on democratic pluralism and the recognition of the infinitely contested nature of the good future. This created a paradox in the group's insistence on the existence of the common good, on the one hand, and their difficulty in defining what this constituted and what means were acceptable to achieve it. In a way this dilemma illustrates how, in their claim to extend the horizon of social reformism into that unreachable continent of the future, futures studies themselves seem indicative both of a crisis of modernity and enlightenment rationale, and of its high point.

The planning optimism of the early 1970s disappeared with the economic crisis of that decade and the ideological critique of the welfare state in the 1980s. Somewhere along the line, the belief in the Swedish model evaporated. Today, the future seems to be elsewhere – in the Dutch Miracle or the Celtic Tiger[67] – while the *folkhem* is stuck in history. Along with this resituating of the future from "us" to "them", the *folkhem* has become something of a paradise lost. Evoked in contemporary political discourse, it is a deeply contradictory image of historical achievement which serves both as a guiding star for a specifically Swedish future and as an inherently nostalgic and backwards-looking reference to a glorious past. Indeed, the nostalgia of a lost future is often referred to by observers of the sceptic attitudes of the Nordic countries towards a future in the form of European integration.[68]

65. Christina Florin and Torbjörn Lundqvist, *Historia och framtider* (Stockholm, 2003).
66. See Peter Beilharz, *Labour's Utopias* (London, 1993); Keith Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists* (London, 1982).
67. These were the models for the future discussed in a parliamentary report on how to "turn around" the Swedish welfare state in 2002. *Hur gör man?* Ds 1999:37 (Stockholm, 1999).
68. Waever, "Nordic Nostalgia".

In the rear-view mirror, the future discourse of the Alva Myrdal group therefore seems utterly utopic, both in its confidence that the *folkhem* was in fact the future, and in the belief in its capacity to create alternatives even, as in the call for time budgets to be drawn up, to hegemonic conceptions such as growth and, through rational planning, make them the foundations of a different future. Utopic, in this sense, is best understood as a future past, a road not taken and a series of possibilities never explored. Indeed, many of the key concerns of the Alva Myrdal group – their epistemological critique of futurology, their insistence on the scope of politics and democratic choice in creating the future, and their fundamental questioning of the notion of progress – are issues that now seem firmly located in the history of ideas of the 1960s and 1970s and very far from contemporary political discourses on accelerating change and the urgency of technological, economic, and social modernization. As a window to a future past, the history of the Alva Myrdal group might serve to restore a fragment of utopian thinking to questions that are still essential to our future.