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# ROYAL ASSEMBLIES IN SCANDINAVIA AND WESTERN EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Knut Helle

In the 12th-14th centuries larger royal assemblies were summoned in all the three Scandinavian kingdoms as instruments for consultation and consent in political matters of outstanding importance, especially national legislation and acts and decisions concerning the succession to the throne. The Scandinavian assemblies in more than one way corresponded to the contemporary pattern of European parliaments and were obviously influenced by it. Chronologically, they belonged to the period when the originally feudal councils of Western Europe developed into more representative bodies, in theory as well as in practice, increasingly characterized by the term parlamentum, which was also used in Scandinavia. The Danish and Swedish assemblies remained purely aristocratic bodies with no regular attendance of others than prelates and magnates. In Norway there was also an attempt to add to the ecclesiastical and lay aristocracy a

national representation of freemen from local districts of varying order.

The most fundamental difference between Scandinavian royal assemblies and Western European parliaments is that the former did never reach the stage of more permanent political institutions. They did not in the late middle ages develop into a system of general estates, as was the case on the continent, or a unique institution like the English Parliament with its two houses. Geographical conditions go a long way to explain that larger central assemblies did never become thoroughly institutionalized in Scandinavia. It also lies near at hand to stress that constitutional and governmental development in Scandinavia in the assembly period did never reach the stage when it was natural to confer upon the assemblies the function of consenting to extraordinary royal taxation. Nor was there attributed to Scandinavian assemblies any extensive and regular judicial function.

When the need for a more regular consultative and sanctioning national body had to be met in Scandinavia in the later middle ages, parliaments or estates were not resorted to. Another solution was more practical and desirable both for crown and aristocracy: to develop the originally con-

sultative and executive royal council, consilium regis, into a representative and sanctioning body as well - the council of the realm, consilium regni.

## SWEDEN - A COUNTRY IN TRANSFORMATION

Staffan Helmfrid

The most characteristic feature of Sweden today is change. Until now, the Swedish experience of the consequences of high development - the country entering the post-industrial stage - has been unique in Europe as an example of full urbanization in a thinly populated, vast territory.

During the post-war period, urbanization changed from a pattern of local concentration to one of nationwide migration, centred mainly on the Stockholm area, but also to some extent on Göteborg and Malmö. For a normal year, the net gain of the migration as regards Stockholm has been well over 20,000 people, and this caused radical changes in the population pattern. The fact that the movement has been selective as to age structure and level of education has caused far more social change than the numbers would indicate. On the one hand, vast areas of the country are being depopulated, left with an aged population with less than average